

Visa categories in platform labour: The working-holiday visas fuelling Berlin's gig economy

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Abstract

According to studies from around the world, place-based platform work is predominantly carried out by migrants and racialized workers. With only one exception, however, platform research has not systematically incorporated the role of visa and immigration regimes in its analyses. This study, therefore, takes the working-holiday visa—a visa category prominent among platform workers in Europe—as a starting point for exploring platform workers' migratory projects. The study draws on 20 narrative interviews conducted in Chile, Argentina, and Germany in 2022. The multi-site research design followed the trajectories of prospective working holidaymakers from their pre-departure plans at home to the realities of subsistence once they arrived in Europe. The interviews shed light on the process of becoming a platform worker and highlight the importance of diaspora networks, without which most of the research participants would not have engaged in platform work. This presentation thus seeks to speak to larger questions related to the accessibility of platform work and whether algorithmic management and automated labour processes really lead to a heterogeneous workforce by eliminating language barriers, as prior research has suggested.

Biography

Barbara Orth is a PhD candidate at the Department of Geography at Freie Universität Berlin. Her doctoral research explores how immigration policies and the fast growth of platform-mediated jobs, such as food delivery, ride hailing, and care work, are intertwined. Before joining the university, she conducted research on queer support structures in Berlin's labour market and labour market access for refugees and asylum seekers. Barbara has several years of professional experience in the non-profit sector working with migrants, and she holds a BA in International Relations from the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom and an MSc in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies from the University of Oxford.