

# Regional Policy Dialogue 1: Africa | Event Readback

July 30, 2025 | 2:00 PM (EAT) / 4:30 PM (IST) / 11:00 AM (GMT) | Online

## Context

Massive technological frontiers and sectors such as artificial intelligence (AI) and social media are built on the labour of a growing, scattered, and oftentimes hidden workforce of data workers and content moderators. These workers build the backbone of technological advancements by helping large language models (LLMs) respond in [less harmful ways](#), tagging [images for computer vision](#) development, and [eliminating](#) harmful and illegal user content from online platforms. Data workers and content moderators form the hidden digital supply chain for the continued usability and safety of tech products and services, while facing harsh and unfair working conditions. In line with the commitment to advancing decent work around the globe, as much as other businesses, tech companies must run supply chains that respect labor rights and dignity for the workers who provide the data, assistance, and moderation behind their products.

In recent years, Africa's data work and content moderation sector has seen an increase in [advocacy](#) and [collectivisation](#) from labour, [court cases](#) seeking redressal from companies, and research into [business practices](#) and [precarity](#). As data work and content moderation grow, and as such work's labour issues enter policy and research circles, collaborative discussions on problems and possible solutions for these sectors become critical.

To add to the growing body of insights and calls to action on data work and content moderation, Aapti Institute and GIZ GmbH [convened](#) a series of regional policy dialogues (RPDs). The RPDs are an attempt at bringing different stakeholders involved in the issues of data work and content moderation together to talk about how to make this labour market safer and fairer.

## Participants

The first RPD focused on the experiences of African countries with data work and content moderation. A variety of stakeholders joined us in exploring the conditions of data workers and content moderators, the algorithmic control they have to work alongside, and the matter of creating accountability in complex transnational relationships between companies. Diverse stakeholders, including data workers, academics, members of government, content moderators, and labour unions, contributed valuable insights from their respective domains. Some of the stakeholders in attendance included members of the Kenyan government, the Data Labelers Association, Tech Worker Community Africa, KICTANet, Siasa Place, Fairwork, and Superrr Lab.

## Key takeaways

Through our discussion, we introduced several observations on data work and content moderation labour arrangements, and thought of ways forward. Key themes explored during this dialogue included the working conditions of data workers and content moderators, the algorithmic management of workers, and the governance of transnational data supply chains for AI development.

Following are some of the most important learnings stemming from the discussion:

## Seeking data for AI:

1. Business process outsourcing (BPO) firms manage the money lead firms pay, and can control worker compensation. It is possible for a lead firm to expect people to be paid a certain level of compensation, but for the BPO to set a different rate for workers.
2. Certain roles in the industry expose workers to disturbing and harmful content. Companies need to provide measures that help address the toxic effects of such work. Their efforts should not be limited to individualized services like therapy, but also pursue wider and more context-sensitive options. For example, provisions like the freedom of association can be a part of assisting with workers' mental health.
3. Within Africa, existing regulations for labour and employment do not speak to "newer" labor arrangements like data work and content moderation. The phenomenon of people working for multiple entities also complicates the situation. Governments need to listen to workers' demands and develop measures that pursue proper labour conditions in sectors like data work and content moderation.

**Algorithmic management of workers:** How technology monitors, evaluates, and directs data workers and content moderators

1. Workers operate under considerable scrutiny through technology. Such technologies supervise workers, authenticate the people using a device, and even initiate remote shutdowns on workers. Tracking can involve methods like taking video recordings of people as they work, or using video to ensure that it is the worker who is completing tasks.
2. Companies need data from workers not only for supervision and evaluation, but also as part of the business' data production for lead firm clients. Workers have to take pictures and videos as part of their taskloads.
3. While companies use technology to supervise people, they often fail to provide adequate disclosures and transparency to workers. Such gaps can leave workers unaware of how their devices are used and how they are observed and measured. At the very least, workers need to be properly notified of the tracking and evaluations conducted by company-related technology.
4. Many workers lack awareness of their labour rights. There is a need for developing means of spreading such information, such as integrating labour rights into school curriculums.

**Transnational governance of AI supply chains:** Labour interventions for cross-country relationships

1. Compliance remains a significant challenge within international supply chains. While compliance mechanisms may look good on paper, they often fail to translate into effective on-the-ground implementation, leaving the working conditions of the labor force unchanged.

- a. It is crucial for multilateral organizations, such as the ILO, to establish and enforce standards aimed at ensuring decent work along AI supply chains. This is particularly important in regions like Africa, which receives a substantial amount of outsourced tech work.
2. While the Data Protection Act of Kenya (2019) acts as a benchmark for data governance, there are no guidelines on monitoring how companies use and train data across borders. The African Union can benefit from an approach similar to that of the EU in terms of integrating regulations to standardise policy and implementation across the region.
3. Due diligence is a good place to start in terms of compliance, and all data work companies should be mandated to conduct regular audits of their practice to discover any potential violations.

## Reflecting on the data work and content moderation ecosystem

Data workers and content moderators perform functions that can make or break large, valuable sectors like AI, social media, and internet-based services. They fulfil their roles while dealing with a number of risks and harms, ranging from low pay to occupational hazards. As they work, they are watched, measured and evaluated by opaque and intrusive technologies that are difficult to contest. These work arrangements do not always face local regulatory requirements, and can be difficult to intervene in, due to the transnational commercial relationships between service providers and foreign “lead firms.”

These problematic ways of earning pose risks to the future of work, potentially affecting workers’ physical health, mental well-being, and economic stability across global labour markets. It is important for workers, policymakers, and industry leaders to address the current practices of organizing data work and content moderation, which often operate in precarious, opaque, and cross-border arrangements. From enforcing labour regulations and instituting regional policies to pursuing measures that empower workers to face and question management technologies, the time to act on AI’s labour costs is now.