



Call for papers: Decolonial comparative law and the informal/formal economy

5-6 May 2027 in Douala (Cameroon)

Paper submission deadline: 1 September 2026

Decisions: 1 November 2026

Call available in Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic, English, and French here:

<https://www.mpipriv.de/decolonial>

The exclusion of *the many* from access to, and the benefits of, means of production and resources has long been a colonial enterprise. Today, around 60% of the world's labour force works in the informal economy. In legal terms, informality often translates into insecure social and economic rights – in short, precarity. At the same time, legal instruments designed to secure transactions, access to capital, and property are typically associated with the formal economy. Yet across Global South – or Global Majority – contexts, and increasingly in the Global North, participation in the formal economy does not guarantee stable economic rights.

This is paralleled by an exclusion of the informal economy within comparative law scholarship, which either ignores informality altogether or views it merely as a problem to be solved by law modelled after Global North law. This imbalance has limited the documentation of alternative legal instruments for human economies. Coloniality continues to sustain a narrow reading of how Global South and Indigenous societies structure their economic lives, including when they choose not to practise “economy” in a conventional sense. Acknowledging the heterogeneity of the informal economy requires attention to everyday legalities across both informal and formal work.

This workshop is not only interested in papers recommending or problematising formalisation initiatives. The main focus of the workshop is to take the informal economy seriously as a space of legality as such, in the context of legal pluralism. We are looking for attempts to document, compare, and assess legal approaches – in formal and informal law – to the informal economy and the intersections between formal and informal economic life. We welcome papers analysing how informal workers mobilise, transform, ignore, or reject state and non-state legal instruments in their economic lives, and examining how formal institutions engage with the informal sector.

This call forms part of the **Decolonial Comparative Law** workshop series. Following workshops dedicated to methodology (Witwatersrand 2020), precolonial law (Oxford 2022), and property (Brasília 2024), this fourth workshop will examine decolonial comparative approaches to the informal and formal economy.

Potential topics include, but are not limited to:

- Informal cross-border trade, including commerce conducted by groups transcending state borders, regardless of their legality under state law.
- Local and digital currencies created or used for noncolonial purposes.
- Indigenous and customary economies, including their own value systems, exchange practices, and non-colonial monetary forms.
- Ecofeminist, pastoralist, rural, and intentional communities (e.g. Auroville in India) as well as precolonial or other traditional modes of value creation (irrespective of the effective ancestry of the practice).



- Labour rights in informal work, including economic dependence within and beyond the employer–employee relationship, dispute resolution practices, and collective organisation (e.g., trade unions, associations, cooperatives).
- Microlending, alternative securities, and property rights as mechanisms for accessing capital.
- Legal (mis)recognition of informal workers.
- Migration and the (in)formal economy.
- Globalisation and the informal labour serving the global supply chain.
- Digital businesses, platform-based livelihoods (e.g. TikTok influencers, delivery and domestic workers hired online) and (in)formality.
- State constraints on local economic sovereignty, including the spatial distribution and regulation of formal and informal economic activities.
- Blurred lines between formal and informal economies: workers operating in both settings (e.g. civil servants' side jobs; or 'hustlers', 'débrouillards', and 'rebuscadores').

If your research does not fit into any of these themes, we still encourage you to submit a proposal. In general, we invite papers that analyse and destabilise coloniality by examining, comparatively, the economic and legal imaginaries through which communities (typically, but not necessarily, in the Global South) define, practise, or decline to practise an economy beyond (or in spite of) coloniality.

REVIEW CRITERIA

Preference will be given to papers that (i) are comparative, (ii) describe economic activities beyond their informality, (iii) avoid using or directly problematise the language of the state and coloniality, (iv) engage directly with existing scholarly literature, citing especially South-based authors and activists and being mindful of race, class, and gender. Co-authorship is welcome; South/South comparison is encouraged; and the mobilisation of extra-legal methods is appreciated.

Authors are strongly encouraged to draw on the bibliographies found on the [Decolonial Comparative Law Project](#) website, as well as the bibliographies provided by [Diversifying and Decolonising Economics \(D-Econ\)](#).

Please submit your paper to our [secure Cloud](#): (i) as an attachment using the [template](#) provided on the Decolonial Comparative Law Project website; (ii) in any language; (iii) in no more than 5,000 words; (iv) by **1 September 2026**.

PEER REVIEW

The peer review advisory board is interdisciplinary and multilingual. The board includes Kamala Sankaran (National Law School of India University), Jonathan Bashi Rudahindwa (School of Oriental and African Studies), Luis Eslava (University of La Trobe), and Dina Waked (SciencesPo).

ACCEPTED PAPERS

Authors of accepted papers will be invited to submit revised versions for the workshop. Papers written in languages other than English will be professionally translated. Papers will be circulated prior to the workshop; authors will **not** formally present their papers at the event. Following peer review, the papers will be published in an edited volume or special journal issue.



TIMELINE

18 March 2026 – Information meetings (2 time zones)
1 September 2026 – Draft paper due
1 November 2026 – Acceptance or rejection communicated
14 February 2027 – Revised draft due
5–6 May 2027 – Onsite workshop discussion
September 2027 – Informal peer-led writing workshop
10 January 2028 – Final paper due for publication in 2028

CO-ORGANISERS

This fourth workshop is co-organised by the DeCoLa Project and the Africa Centre of Expertise at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law (MPIPriv) in Hamburg and the Fondation Afric'Avenir in Douala. The Hamburg team is composed of Ralf Michaels, Passainte Ragab and Kwamou Eva Feukeu, who is also head of the Africa Centre of Expertise. The Fondation Afric'Avenir was founded by Prince Kum'a Ndumbe III. He and his team will be thematically supported by an organising committee composed of Alfred Ngando (Laboratoire d'histoire du droit et des coutumes du Cameroun – Yaoundé University-Soa II) and Isidore Léopold Miendjiem (University of Dschang).

PRACTICALITIES

LOCATION: Fondation Afric'Avenir in Douala (Cameroon).

FUNDING: The MPI will be providing funding for international participation. The organisers expect to offer three nights of accommodation in Douala and travel reimbursement for authors of accepted papers.

PROGRAM: The workshop will include interdisciplinary panels, artistic interventions, and peer-led writing workshops. Translation services will be provided. The workshop will be followed by an *Epupa* school (course during the rainy season) hosted on 10-12 May 2027.

MEET & GREET: Two online information sessions will be held on 18 March 2026, one at 10:00 GMT and one at 16:00 GMT.

CONTACT: decolonial@mpipriv.de