

Review of: "Forget the cake: let them work. Conflicting narratives towards work, health and the plight of asylum seekers in the UK"

Lana Van Niekerk¹

¹ University of Stellenbosch

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The article provides a critique of government policy disallowing asylum seekers to engage in meaningful work while waiting for the outcome of their application to stay in the UK. The issue raised is relevant on a global scale.

Overall impressions:

The article contains some well-argued points with references to support and contextualise the points made. However, it also contains emotive statements that are not supported by results/findings or references that support the argument being made. Because these statements are important, and the issues raised are significant, it would add value to ensure clear and supported arguments throughout.

The absence of voices of asylum seekers is perhaps the most important aspect to focus on. Reasons for not including asylum seekers as participants (perhaps even as co-authors) are not clear; particularly when it is shown that the author has a long-standing relationship with the facility and asylum seekers within it. Granted - a valid reason for not including asylum seekers as participants might have prevented such participation – if so, it would be prudent to share the reason in the article. In the absence a clear reason, it seems curious that strong advocacy for a group of competent people does not include their voices.

The abstract provides sources that will be drawn on (personal experience and observation; government policy announcements; contemporaneous comment in journal articles and popular media) – this creates the opportunity to use excerpts from these (formatted and referenced to make these clearly identifiable) in the construction of arguments. This will add greatly to the clarity and impact of the article.

A clear structure, with an introduction that informs the reader of such structure, will greatly assist the reader, and enhance the clarity of the argument made. At this time, most of the manuscript reads like an Introduction. The type of information provided in the Conclusion is very similar to the information provided in the Introduction. Consider a structure for the article with Introduction; Case Example; Conclusion; Recommendations.

Specific points:

The flow of the article can be improved. It currently reads like a collection of important (emotive) points made that, when

read together, critiques notions about work, worklessness, management and management of asylum seekers. The facts about TB and policy on screening does not currently contribute to the flow of the article.

Some aspects of the article remain vague, for example the sentence *"This shift in arrival patterns has made for a more visible phenomenon that has garnered a massive increase in media and political attention, but has also been weaponised to vilify people seeking asylum by this 'illegal' route."* If the reader is not familiar with the nature/type/significance of 'shift in arrival patterns', it is also not clear what 'has made for a more visible phenomenon that has garnered a massive increase in media and political attention' and 'also been weaponised'.

Readers who do not live in the United Kingdom might find the article difficult to follow for three reasons. Policy and legislative issues that are play a key role in construction of the arguments (for example the 'sanctions imposed' or 'uplift to Universal credit') are not defined, explained, or referenced (to provide a source for readers who might want to familiarise themselves). Abbreviations are used without introducing the terms these refer to, and without providing a source (for example 'The UK's gig economy'). Lastly, colloquial terms that might be understood in the UK might not be understood by readers outside the UK (for example 'culturally shy work force', 'anti-social hours' or 'Work, like Easter, is a moveable feast'.

Some of the arguments made reveal an inherent contradiction, for example reference to the poignant story of Jurgis Rudkus illustrates the converse of the statement in second sentence of the paragraph (that immigrants become stakeholders through hard work).

Writing Style:

Consider shortening long sentences for ease of reading and better clarity. Also add sources for readers who are not familiar with the information you present to obtain more information. [One example is: The recent removal of the temporary £20.00 a week uplift to Universal Credit (introduced during the coronavirus lockdowns), in a country which already has the least generous unemployment benefits in North West Europe, as well as the worst poverty levels, and is one of the most unequal countries in the developed world, has served to increase widespread dependency on food banks, and for many has led to the brutal 'heat or eat', despite 40% (2 million) of UC claimants being in work.]

When offering a critique (as the article does) a balanced perspective is more powerful in delivering the message than a one-sided one. The article will benefit from inclusion of reasons for policy reforms that are being critiqued. Opposing views should best take the form of peer-reviewed sources. Credibility of a critique is enhanced by presenting all sides of an argument to the reader; it lays the foundation for a convincing argument.

Ensure that all points raised in the abstract are followed through on. In the first sentence the article promises to describe how current UK policy affects two vulnerable groups, yet the article focusses almost exclusively on asylum seekers (leaving 'those on state benefits' out).