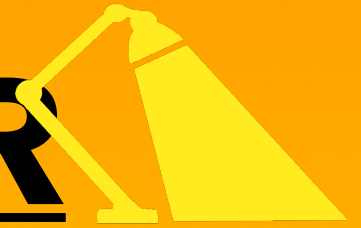


PPE Encounters

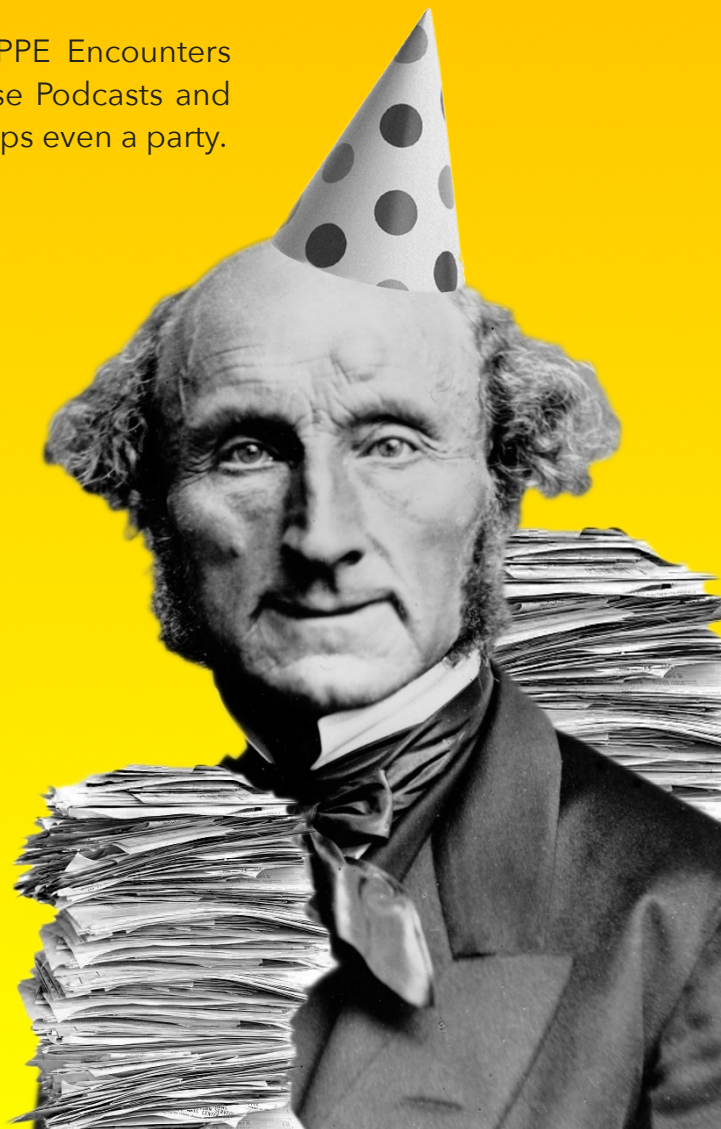
# NEWSLETTER



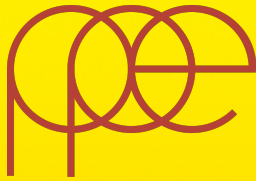
OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2022

Welcome to the first PPE Newsletter of the 2022-2023 academic year, brought to you by **PPE Encounters**. By asking for contributions from all members of the PPE programme that we cherish so dearly, we aim to make this a newsletter *of the people, by the people, for the people*. Ha.

Besides from the Newsletter PPE Encounters will also during the year release Podcasts and host speaker events, and perhaps even a party.



# NOVEMBER CALENDAR



## KALLIOPPE EVENTS

### **01/11: Humanities Halloween party**

*Location: Club Ahknaton*

*Starts at 22:00*

Scary costumes, drinks, and the opportunity to finally talk to real philosophy students. Get your tickets for €7.5 on Kallioppe's website: <https://www.kallioppe.com/store/p/halloween-party-tickets>

### **02/11: Halloween movie night**

*Location: JSM 4th floor*

*Starts at 19:00*

As chosen by popular vote, the film screened will be Stanley Kubrick's classic "The Shining". Snacks and drinks will be provided.

*..... and more events to come. For updates, follow Kallioppe on instagram or read Arthur's weekly overview on Canvas.*



## GENERAL AMSTERDAM EVENTS

### **02-04/11: Cinemania**

€6 for cinema tickets in many Amsterdam theatres, such as Pathé and Rialto, these 3 days. If you have not yet been able to afford a visit to Tuschinski, this is the time to go.

### **05/11: Museumnacht**

Night at the museum! 50 of Amsterdam's largest museums stay open till 02:00 and organise lots of different activities, music and food. Perhaps not as many alive dinosaurs as one would have hoped, but getting your face neon painted at the Rijksmuseum at midnight also sounds pretty cool. Tickets always sell out, so go get them now:

<https://museumnacht.amsterdam/home>

### **09-20/11: International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA)**

Perhaps the largest documentary film festival in the world. Lots of PPE relevant films on the agenda. Programme and tickets can be found at <https://www.idfa.nl/en/>

# What Taylor Swift can teach us about the Climate Crisis

By Arthur Vuister

I was once sat in my philosophy seminar whilst we were covering the topic of Hume and causality. The explanation from my seminar teacher went something a little like this: "Hume believes that causality occurs when one thing, inextricably and in all observed cases leads to another thing happening; imagine it like this: when you think of Arthur, you almost instantly and involuntarily think of Taylor Swift." Needless to say, this is not the first time that I've been the biggest Taylor Swift fan in the room. So how come I also get to call myself an environmentalist?

By now, you've all probably read the headlines about celebrity private jet usage and especially one popstar from Nashville. The story was broken by a digital public relations team of the sustainability marketing firm, Yard, and the analysis is largely based on a Twitter account that tracks celebrity private jet usage. The analysis showed that Swift had flown over 170 times between January and July of this year, including a number of very short flights.

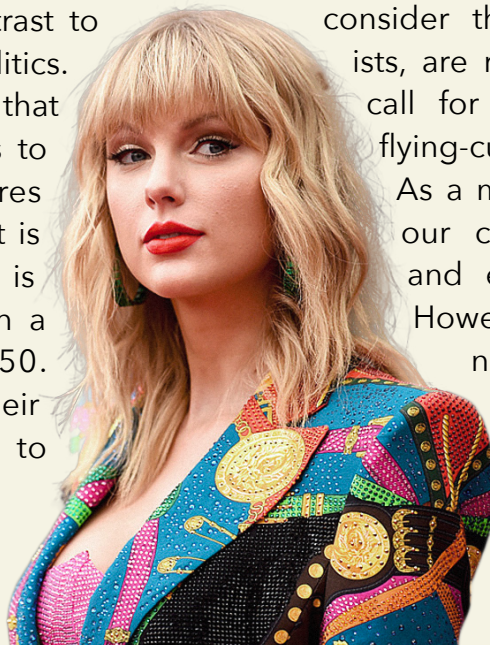
Putting the credibility of the accusations aside, the actions of Swift are obviously damaging in the fight against climate change and stand in stark contrast to her otherwise progressive politics. Even when taking into account that many of the flights were leases to other well-known public figures and not done by Swift herself, it is clear that this level of flying is fundamentally incompatible with a carbon-neutral earth by 2050. Celebrities should be using their wealth, power and influence to



make trains a viable alternative for short-distance travel. This should be the case both for those people who currently fly simply because it is the most affordable but also for celebrities who, understandably, require an enhanced level of privacy when they travel.

Defending the artists who you love and support against valid criticisms, such as these, helps no one. As a fan, you force yourself into a totally unreasonable echo chamber where you can no longer engage with people who you disagree with. Importantly, it also does a disservice to the artists that you claim to love. Over the last years, many well-known public figures have spoken about the negative effects of fame, that can leave them feeling dehumanised. Swift herself has spoken about this numerous times. It is crucial to realise that idolisation contributes to this problem. Once you adore someone to such a degree that, in your eyes, they can do no wrong, you cease to see the person who you look up to as human.

Therefore, fans of Taylor Swift who also consider themselves environmentalists, are right to criticise Swift and call for the abolition of casual-flying-culture among celebrities. As a movement, this establishes our credibility around climate and especially climate justice. However, it is not just Swift who needs to recognise that her lifestyle is fundamentally incompatible with a



greener future. I have often heard it argued that your individual behaviour is free from environmental criticism because an individual's emissions pale in comparison to those of large corporations and nation states. However, the same is true of Taylor Swift's emissions. While her carbon output is undoubtedly many times greater than the average American, reducing it close to zero would still have no noticeable impact on the climate. Yet, Swift is not, and should not, be free of criticism.

This does not mean that everyone should be free to unreservedly scrutinise and criticise each other's actions. Instead, each one of us should look inwardly at ourselves and ask if we are living in a way that is compatible with a climate crisis. When all of us recognise our responsibility for cutting our own carbon emissions alongside campaigning for local, national, and international solutions to climate change, it just might, forever and always, save the planet.

## Call to Attention - A poem

*Anonymous submission*

***The imbecile  
constructs cages  
for everyone he knows,  
while the sage  
(who has to duck his head  
whenever the moon glows)  
keeps dispensing keys  
all night long  
to the beautiful, rowdy,  
prison gang.  
- Hafiz***

*Us Lot turns quite rowdy and obscene.  
When a professor gets on our nerves,  
while not saying what our work deserves;  
will there be any help from the dean?*

*We are young, but so is the College.  
Heaps of money paid to JSM...  
Need help from the professors? Chase 'em!  
We are not heard demanding knowledge.*

*Let us be heard, and let us help you.  
Assuming best intents and efforts,  
the administration: a mess of sorts;  
will they pick up this poetic cue?  
- Anonymous PPE Student*

### **Explanatory note**

It has been months and the same comment gets repeated time and time again. Staff, students, and eventually reaching the student's parents via voiced concerns all recite that the administration is a mess. While there is ground to be gained on the notion of being a young college no visible effort seems to be put forward addressing such issues. Course content overlaps in between courses, exams start either too late

or are not set up properly with Computers turning off halfway through, and other things too many to name still keep occurring.

*Perhaps* this poetic concern might show our growing concern.

*Perhaps* it'll be our key to a better education, my fellow prison gang!

*Perhaps* perhaps yet probably nothing will come out of it.

## **Polarization - Our dearest danger**

By Carolina Torrinha

For quite some time we have been hearing about this big word: Polarization.

Immediately, we can reason about what it means: in the political sense, it means having political attitudes that diverge away from the center, close to the two polos right or left wing. But we can take it further from the political sense, we can see polos everywhere we look and in every way, we think, when we talk about sexual orientation, when we talk about race, when we talk about our own society. Polarization is everywhere as it is in fact *"the division into two sharply contrasting groups or sets of opinions or beliefs"*, according to the Oxford Dictionary.

Polarization is so rooted in our world that we have become accustomed to this way of thinking. Five decades ago, when a human being looked at a television, he could only see two colors; now we can see multiple, but we still look at the world as black or white. Let us think about it; we grow up reading about villains and heroes, wicked witches and beautiful princesses, wolves and pink pigs. It is only logical that if trained that way our brain gets accustomed to reason between two polos; to look for answers between those. How many times do we wind up, when watching a movie or a tv show, searching for some kind of bad person to give a reason to the plot? Why are thriller books so easy to read? Because you know who is the chaser and who is the runner. We feel more comfortable in this line of thinking because it is familiar; it is logical. One of the first questions I got asked in the beginning of this school year was "Are you left- or right wing?". My brain's immediate response was to try to put everything I believe in in one box by measuring every ideal and political factor. It is easier to look at some as a right-wing person instead

of as a right-libertarian, and it is easier to think of yourself that way: in a polarized way.

We can see why it is our dearest way of thinking, but at the same time history has shown us why it is also the dangerous way. Let us look at the Cold War, for example. The world was quite literally divided in two polos, democrats and communists, and because of that, time froze in the imminence of a nuclear warfare. It took the shattering of a country, the Soviet Union, into 15 sovereign states, for it to end; it took the break of one of the polos for the age of terror to end. Polarization is the easy way of looking at the world. It is most often the way politicians want us to look, as it is easier to defend an idea when all you have to do is make the only alternative seem worse. The best political speech is the one that can move masses and these are easily moved when vulnerable and when looking for the other end of the scope, "the better one", as the only way out.

However, the scope is always full of possibilities. That is precisely the danger of polarization in our world. It narrows our views, our ways of thinking, it makes us easily manipulated, because it is quite easy to paint villains and heroes in every story. It is much harder to see complex human beings in one, but that is how our world is. Each policy is complex and full of layers and has a wide range of consequences to it, you cannot see the diminish of taxes as an automatic rise in your wallet, neither as the incoming of immigrants in your country as a rise in criminality. The world is not black and white, neither should political speeches and views be.

# Skeleton government: The call of Colijn

By Ray Polman

Spooky season is here again. Even in the Netherlands autumn is no longer merely the time of year when your bike slips on wet leaves, or where your diet consists mostly of *pepernoten*, but also the season of Halloween. Companies will try to sell you their same old products (but now spookier or with pumpkin spice!) and at month's end the slutty [anything] and minimal effort costumes will come out of the woodwork to get doused in cheap beer at a Halloween-party near you. But while Halloween is benign and quite fun, here I'd like to discuss an actually scary convention that our national pastime of *Amerikaatje spelen* (play-pretending to be America) has delivered us: a small government.

Recently Dutch politicians and pundits posited to instate mandatory energy saving measures for industry in response to the soaring gas and energy prices. It was quickly discovered however, that similar regulations had already been put into law in 1993, which however haven't been enforced as the responsible agencies simply lacked the manpower<sup>[1]</sup>. At the same time the school year has started on Zoom for many Dutch elementary school students, not because of covid outbreaks but because of a lack of teachers<sup>[2]</sup>. The national police can't afford to investigate petty crime with their current personnel numbers (Free bike anyone?). And thousands of additional municipal officials are needed to produce the requisite licenses for building projects desperately needed to cool the overheated housing market<sup>[3]</sup>. And the most heinous recent example of the delights of small government is the *kinderopvangtoeslagschandaal* (childcare benefits scandal) where tens of thousands of

Dutch parents were falsely accused of fraud driving them into financial ruin. How did we get here?

Like most western countries the Netherlands viewed the economic turmoil of the seventies as a sign of Keynesian economics' failure and in response embraced a new economic theory. Under this theory, already being put to practice by Thatcher and Raegan, government was seen as a necessary evil to be made as small as possible. Thus government industries were swiftly privatized, taxes lowered and regulations relaxed: economic prosperity ensued. At least, kinda sorta. Until some years after the turn of the millennium GDP boomed and recessions like those of the seventies and early eighties weren't seen again. The new model was so successful that a paradigm shift had occurred, epitomized by the fact that even the traditionally left-wing political parties that finally returned to power in the nineties broadly did so on platforms endorsing neoliberal economics. Even though inequality was on the rise again, neoliberalism at least undisputedly effected massive economic growth overall, and doesn't a rising tide lift all boats? The so-called Third Way politicians of this period (Clinton, Blair, Schröder, in NL: Wim Kok) thought so. They described themselves as simply being pragmatic; they were unencumbered by ideology and free to enact whichever policies were best for society i.e. progressive policy on social-cultural issues and for the economy tried and true neoliberalism.

Furthermore, in the Netherlands neo-liberalism neatly fits into our Calvinist-influenced culture. Dutch people won't hesitate to send you a *tikkie* for the €0,50 of coffee you had at their place and this might be the only country where people take their flooring with them when they move house<sup>[4]</sup> as frugality is the highest virtue in Dutch society. And the reason that neoliberalism is

'neo' of course, is because it is simply the revamped version of pre-Keynesian liberal economics, whose foremost champion was Dutch prime minister Hendrikus Colijn. In the thirties Colijn managed to keep the Netherlands in the Great Depression when other countries had been out for years, by simply refusing to increase government spending or to abandon the gold standard<sup>[5]</sup>. This Herbert Hoover-esque stint surprisingly led the Dutch electorate to reelect Colijn's government multiple times during this period, in what has to be one of the most bizarre bouts of public cognitive dissonance in history, as other countries like the US under FDR had already proved how to recover from the Great Depression. This is to say that support for (neo)liberal economic policy can (especially in the Netherlands) be ideological instead of purely practical.

This was glaringly revealed in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. When the American housing bubble burst and its ripple effects had economically seismic effects all over the globe, causing an even bigger crisis than the stagflation of the late seventies that killed Keynesianism, it was clear for all to see that the system had dramatically failed and it had to be drastically altered. So the politicians who were elected on platforms promising hope and change naturally: didn't make changes to the system.

At this point, neoliberal thought held such sway over people that the reaction to the biggest economic downturn since the Great Depression wasn't to change course but to

simply double down. Instead of increasing government spending to bail out unemployed people and small businesses or exploiting the opportunities the crisis offered to create a more foolproof system, the banks who were the proximate cause of this mess in the first place were bailed out while everyone else got the brunt of the economic damage dished up to them through an austere diet of budget cuts. Anecdotally, the first memories I have of watching the news are 1. that one Iraqi guy throwing a shoe at George W. Bush and 2. Dutch politicians talking about how we needed more *bezuinigingen* (budget cuts, austerity). And the Dutch government did again take the cake in this regard. When in 2012 the financial crisis was finally coming to an end, the freshly elected government coalition decided it was high time for an ode to Colijn in the form of even more austerity. These were sold to us under the guise of the *participatiemaatschappij* (society in which you have to actively participate), fully in line with neoliberal thought on poor people (they're just lazy). And it worked: the 2012 government ended its run in 2017 with a steadily increasing GDP and having attained, the holy grail of neoliberalism, a reliable budget surplus. The flipside: more key sectors were now privatized (why you can't find an affordable apartment in Amsterdam), the public sector had its budgets slashed even further (why the university didn't tell you it was that hard to find an apartment in Amsterdam) and inequality soared as many poor people with legitimate reasons for not being able to 'participate' couldn't make ends meet with their reduced welfare benefits. Even people who are perfectly willing and able to put in hard work were now struggling financially as labor market reforms gave rise to weaker contracts and the gig economy. But perhaps the most hallucinant part of this episode in governance is that the recovery from the financial crisis had actually been prolonged by these measures, which



the Dutch government was warned about multiple times by economists and the IMF<sup>[6]</sup>. The only way one can support policy that demonstrably doesn't work is by subscribing to a worldview that says that policy simply has to work. Hence, the supposed post-ideological technocrats of neoliberalism turned out to be dirty little ideologues, just like the rest of us.

And the most crucial mistake this government made, that has come back to bite them now that the neoliberal-paradigm is slowly fading, was literally fulfilling the ideal of small government by decimating the staff of national government agencies and ministries, dividing their tasks between private entities and underfunded local governments or just automating them. Which (finally) brings us back to the current day. Where like Colijn in the thirties, the leading neoliberal party in the Netherlands keeps getting reelected despite demonstrably making all the wrong choices, to the point where the current government's biggest challenges are trying to solve the problems the previous governments under the same leadership had caused<sup>[7]</sup>.

The gist of this article is not only that neoliberal ideology is stupid and dangerous, there's been written plenty about that (*Listen liberal, Capital in the 21st century, Doughnut economics* to name a few), but also that it has hijacked our systems to the point that (at least the Dutch) government is bereft of all muscle to seriously enforce ambitious policy, leaving us a skeletal government de facto barely able to execute minimal measures as it will take years before it is bulked up enough to be effective once again, further reinforcing the neoliberal self-fulfilling prophecy of government being inherently inept. Something else to take away is that being too ideological is never a good idea. Neoliberalism did work decently well in a crisis that Keynesianism couldn't solve, but treating it as the new exclusive modus

operandi was a mistake that led to terrible outcomes. When the next successful economic theory comes around it is paramount to keep critiquing and improving it, lest we repeat this cycle once again. The message thus is to resist the call of Colijn and not double down again on small government, but hold out for the neo-Keynesian times that we'll reach after we've persevered through these scary times. Until then, on behalf of the Dutch government, happy Halloween.

**Sources:**

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2. <https://nos.nl/artikel/2441619-basisscholen-gaan-lerarentekort-creatief-te-lijf-aan-begin-schooljaar>
3. <https://www.binnenlandsbestuur.nl/cariere/vooral-tekort-aan-ambtenaren-remt-woningbouw>
4. <https://www.resource-online.nl/index.php/2019/05/23/typical-dutch-bring-your-own-floor/?lang=en>
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## How to deal with bad world news

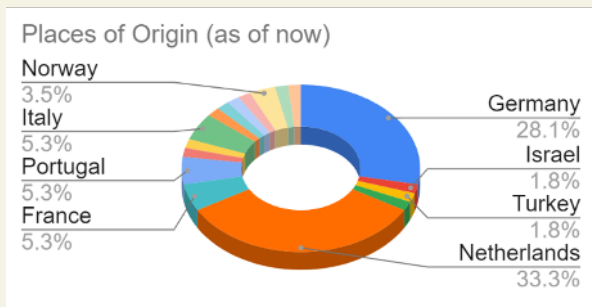
By Nele Fasshauer

1. Limit your news intake. Do you really need push notifications?
2. Sometimes it might help to switch the scope of your news sources - when German news upset me too much (because of the gas crisis etc.) I just switch to international news, for example BBC worldnews or The Daily. Somehow hearing about crises on the other side of the world does not emotionally affect me as much as news from home.
3. Remember that news tend to focus on the negative things - maybe the state of the world is not as bad as is sometimes portrayed.
4. Remember that for most of human time, we had it much worse than (even right) now. It makes you appreciate the good things more.
5. Take care of your mental health. Get enough sunlight, keep in contact with your loved ones, exercise, and try not to fall into a social media/news-rabbithole.



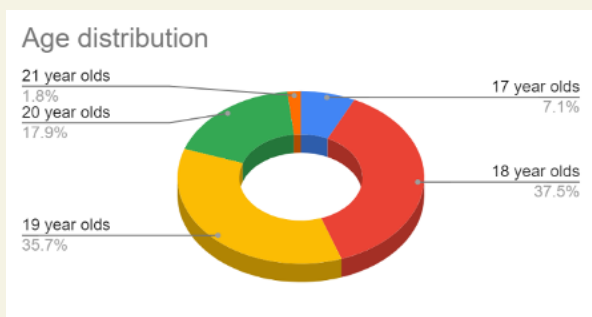
## Fresher's statistics

Ever wondered where the new PPE students come from? Or how their dietary preferences are? We collected some fun statistics about the first year students. As for now, 57 of the 87 students of the first year have filled it out, so if you haven't, feel free to do it now.

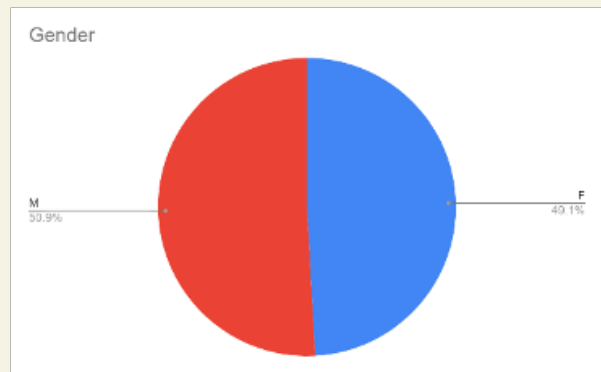


There are a lot of Germans in the program, don't you think? After the Germans and the Dutchies, the next most common nationalities are Portuguese, French and Italian. Very European-centered.

Another interesting observation is that most first year students are either 18 or 19 years old. 26 out of the 57 surveyed students graduated this school year, meaning that a majority took at least one gap year.



As for their whereabouts, 43 % of PPE first year students come from the capital of their home country, being way above any country's average (for comparison, in Germany it is 5%, in the Netherlands 14%, and in France 19%). A solid 7 first year students come from Berlin only. Maybe one is more likely to move to another capital if they already come from one?



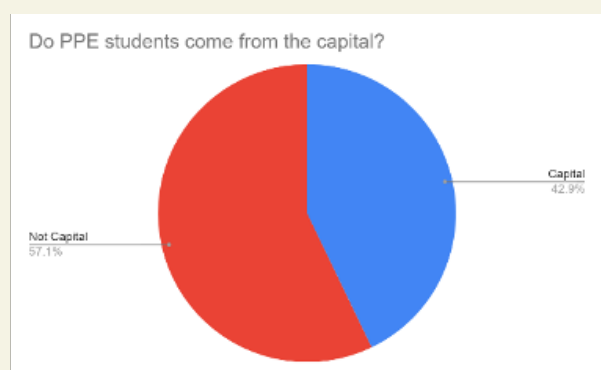
The gender ratio is almost perfectly 50/50, which seems a bit too good to just be a coincidence...

Another fun statistic, the average height of the freshers is 176 cm (mixed genders). It is only slightly under the Dutch average, which is 177 cm tall, but remember, the Dutch are literally the tallest nation in the world (followed by Montenegro, Estonia and Denmark, if anyone is interested). By comparison, the German average is 173 cm and the Portuguese average is 168 cm.

Only 8 students report being vegetarian, only one is vegan, 10 are flexitarian and three of the students eat "normal". Aha.

13 students report any kind of religious tendencies, with the rest being divided into agnostics and atheists.

We hope you had as much fun as we with the statistics and are a bit more enlightened about what defines the first year students.





Danish Minister of Foreign affairs Mattias Tesfaye (left); Danish Minister for development cooperation Flemming Møller Mortensen (middle); Rwandan Minister of State Prof. Manasseh Nshuti (right). Source: Rwanda Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation. April 2021.

## Danish ticket to Rwanda?

By Gertrud Sparre-Ulrich

Tuesday, November 1<sup>st</sup>, is the day of the Danish parliamentary election. As one would expect, the hot topics include the energy crises, climate change, health care, and, as always, Immigration. But for this election the topic of immigration revolves around a specific case: Should Denmark, one of the most privileged countries in the world, should open a center for asylum seekers in Rwanda? This does not just mean a place where people near Rwanda can seek refuge. No, it also implies sending people who are waiting for their asylum application in Denmark, to be put on a plane to Rwanda and relocated here until the Danish authorities have looked at their case. The United Kingdom is in the process of doing the same thing.

Denmark has already signed a declaration with Rwanda stating their ambitions for this system. What is most surprising to me is that this is an initiative driven by the Social Democratic Party (*Socialdemokratiet*), who

has been running the government since last election in 2019. According to their official website they “... want to create a more just and humane asylum system by establishing a reception centre outside of Europe, and instead accept more UN quota refugees in Denmark”. In addition, the Social Democratic prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, stated that their vision is to have zero asylum-seeking applications in the future. Of course, the Social Democrats are not alone in this Rwanda-project, as the usual suspects on the far right also think this is a brilliant idea. These parties even want to make sure that in case the Danish authorities approve your asylum application, you will be granted permission to stay in Rwanda and not Denmark.

What arguably makes this system more “just and humane” is that it should encourage fewer people to take the risky journey across the Mediterranean and give people who cannot afford that very journey a possibility for asylum seeking. Surely, it might be the case that fewer people leave on a boat and less privileged people have another option,

yet what we are doing is to send them to a country where there is no such thing as free media, freedom of expression, religious freedom, and overall, a very loose approach to human rights. Looking at the Freedom House index, which all you PPEople love, Rwanda scores just 22/100 points when it comes to “freedom”, compared to Denmark’s 97/100. This is better than Somalia’s 7/100 points, but Rwanda is still not considered free.

Another issue is that of burden sharing. This system exports and externalizes the processes of asylum off from Danish land. Danish authorities will still do some of the actual paperwork, but all other tasks will be handled by a country which already has its own things to deal with. This way of shifting the burden and sending people to a country

with limited freedom, might also conflict with the 1951 UN Refugee convention, which Denmark has ratified. Surely, the Social Democratic Party intend to increase the amount of UN quota refugees to “compensate” in case the Rwanda plan is carried out. But here we are talking increasing the numbers from just 200 asylum seekers in 2021 to a few hundred more. Still far less than most, if not all, other European countries.

Fortunately, other Danish parties in parliament find the Rwanda-plan as absurd as I do and stated that they will never enter a government coalition where the goal is to go any further with this plan. Whether these parties will stick to their principles once offered some nice minister positions, we will see after the up-coming election.

*That was it for now. Thank you to everyone who contributed with their work!*

**Questions, comments, or suggestions on how to improve the newsletter?**

Contact us on [ppeencounters@gmail.com](mailto:ppeencounters@gmail.com) or Instagram @ppe\_encounters

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