

# observant

INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY \_\_\_\_\_ VOLUME 46 / SEPTEMBER 11, 2025 / Nr2

## PEDALLING FILLS THE PIGGY BANK

Cycle more than  
5 kilometers a day  
to work?  
From 2027,  
you'll get  
compensated

**P. 5**



### FLASHBACK TO 1982

For just 8 guilders  
employees' children  
could attend the  
university daycare

**P. 2**

### INTENSE IMAGES AND HAUNTING SOUNDS

Anyone visiting the  
PROTEST exhibition  
needs a moment to  
recover

**P. 3**

### STUDENT AND REFUGEE

"Studying is my lifeline  
— in other ways, things  
are not going so well"

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*Photo editing: Simone Golob*



## editorial

## Out of your comfort zone

While reading the Saturday edition of *De Volkskrant*, my eye fell on an essay about student associations. It mentioned Barend Last's latest book, *The Art of Hazing*. Barend used to work at this university and wrote a few columns for *Observant*. I snapped a photo of the page and sent it to my work email as a reminder – perhaps we could use it for a story in our own paper. I read on: about the link between football headers and brain damage, and about the decline of religion. Maybe there's a neuropsychologist at UM who could comment on football headers? And what about faith among students in Maastricht? Another note to self.

As a journalist, you never switch off, whether you're leafing through another newspaper or cycling through the city. It keeps you sharp and curious. And sometimes, it makes you take a giant step out of your comfort zone. I remember the death of a UM law student, more than ten years ago. She had been killed by her mother in their family home. As she was about to become secretary of her faculty's study association, I asked two board members, friends of hers, if they would speak to us. I found it very difficult to approach them, but we wanted to tell her story and capture who she was.

Then there was the murder of a secretary at what is now the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in her office on Kapoenstraat, killed by the man she was divorcing. The editor reporting on the story at the time (1996) was accused of sensationalism, unworthy of a university newspaper. But the article was measured in tone – and surely it would have been odd if we hadn't written about it at all? Pursuing stories like that is part of the job, even when you feel conflicted as a person and have to push through hesitation.

Nourhan Attallah is one of five students from Gaza who have received a scholarship to study at this university. At the end of August, she was evacuated from Gaza with her younger sister and brother. Dutch media reported widely on the story last week, focusing first and foremost on the fact that Nourhan's little sister has a global following on social media. From what we've read, a few journalists tried and failed to speak to her. The question came up at *Observant* as well – what would be the best way to reach out to these students? It would have been fitting to interview one of them for Peter Doorackers' article on refugee students this week. But it didn't feel right. They've just fled a war zone, leaving family behind, and are finding their feet in a new country, at a new university, in a whirlwind of impressions and emotions. Insiders have told us they need time and space. The last thing they need is journalists.

Wendy Degens

The editor-in-chief gives a look behind the scenes at the editorial office.



## series the times they are (not) a changin'

### The university nursery: “Ideal opportunity to enable women to work”



Photo: archive Observant

## 1982 and Later

In the early 1980s, the Executive Board of the State University of Limburg (RL) asked staff if there was any demand for childcare. The answer was obvious: of course there was. “It was an ideal opportunity to enable women to participate fully in work or further study”, reported *Observant* in 1982. A nursery, with sixteen places available, was set up in Nieuwenhof, then home to the Faculty of Law (now home to University College Maastricht).

Working parents could leave their toddlers in safe hands for just over 8 guilders – around €3.60 – per half-day; students paid only 3.75 guilders. To keep costs down, the place was run by volunteers. “Most were mothers or wives of employees who wanted something to do. Later, women on benefits also joined through the volunteer centre.”

According to the archives, the Executive Board's support of the project was less a luxury than a necessity. Local nurseries were full and only accepted the most urgent cases.

From the outset, the university nursery was meant to move into the main RL building on Tongersestraat. For unknown reasons, that plan was dropped, and the municipality stepped in, offering space in the former nursery of the Ravelijn Community Centre. The childcare centre (including for children of Maastricht Academic Hospital) was aptly named “t Ravelijntje”. Later, it moved again to Louis Looyenstraat near Wilhelmina Bridge. The childcare centre may have opened, but it was never plain sailing. *Observant* ran story after story about

long waiting lists, tight budgets and cramped premises. Demands for more financial support from the Executive Board never really went away. It was a win-win for the institutions, argued Sjeff Wintgens, head of the Education Office of Health Sciences and chair of the RL/azM Childcare Association, in October 1988. “Investing in childcare is also in their own interests.” Staff, particularly women, would be less likely to quit their jobs, he reasoned.

In 1990, the university nursery merged with the Juliana childcare centre after the municipality decided to work with a single provider, prompted by new childcare benefits regulations. From then on, it was no longer exclusively for university and hospital staff families. Still, for years the university continued ‘to purchase’ childcare places at what later became MIK Tailor-made Childcare. Was the idea of a UM nursery 2.0 ever raised again? Yes, in 2019, when UM became the first university in the Netherlands to be awarded a “family-friendly” certificate by the German consultancy firm Beruf und Familie (the certificate, valid for three years, was never renewed; HR and the Student Services Centre took over various initiatives to support students and staff with caring responsibilities).

### It was never plain sailing for the nursery: long waiting lists, tight budgets

The possibility of launching a UM nursery was explored, but it's all very complicated, explains Netty Bekkers of the Diversity & Inclusivity Office, then involved with the family-friendly project. “Childcare is a business, and is in many ways at odds with an educational institution.”

Wendy Degens

This is a series about 50 years UM. On 11 September 1975, the Dutch House of Representatives unanimously gave the official go-ahead for the Rijksuniversiteit Limburg in Maastricht. We delve into our own *Observant* archives: what remarkable, funny, important, or curious news items will we find?

# Evacuated from a war zone, now starting university in Maastricht

Maastricht University has awarded scholarships to five students from Gaza. The initiative came from staff members and student organisations “who care deeply about the Palestinian people and want to do more to help from a humanitarian point of view”, says the university spokesperson. The students were evacuated with assistance from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As part of its global engagement strategy, Maastricht University offers scholarships to students from outside the European Union, providing opportunities to those who might otherwise be unable to study due to war or other extreme circumstances in their home countries. To date, the university has awarded seventy scholarships, including the five now granted to students from Gaza. Recipients are invited to pursue a bachelor's or master's degree in Maastricht, with the option to extend their studies by an additional year if necessary. Tuition fees are covered, as are housing and living expenses. The university also ensured that the students could purchase essentials as soon as they arrived in the Netherlands. “They weren't able to take anything with them when they left”, says university spokesperson Koen Augustijn.

The scholarships were set up by the Executive Board and the Student Services Centre (SSC), but the idea came from a small group of staff and students. All are reluctant to share their story. A senior SSC staff member who wishes to remain anonymous explains that normally, scholarship recipients make their own way to the Netherlands after UM has arranged their visas. This was not an option for the students from Gaza, so the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was asked to step in. On how the five students were selected, she explains, “The university received a number of applications through advocates [she prefers not to disclose details for confidentiality reasons]. From those, a selection was made.”

The group that left Gaza on Wednesday 27 August with assistance from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs included more than just the five students. Thirteen people were evacuated in total, including a researcher and a journalist. One student, Nourhan Attallah, brought her younger brother and sister on the flight. Their father died last year, as reported by *RTL Nieuws*, and their mother was reportedly denied permission to accompany them. According to the SSC staff member, strict rules apply to scholarships – they are only for students, not their family members. In

this case, however, Nourhan's siblings were allowed to come because she is their legal guardian. The university will not pay for the two younger siblings' living expenses; these are covered by the guardian.

What happens when these students finish their degrees and their scholarships end? Will they have to return to their home country, even if it remains unsafe? According to the SSC senior staff member, this will not be the case. Alternative solutions will need to be found. One option could be applying for asylum.

Dutch media widely reported last week on the arrival of eleven-year-old Renad, Nourhan Attallah's sister. Nourhan is enrolling at the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences. Renad is a vlogger followed by millions worldwide on TikTok and Instagram, posting cooking videos featuring recipes made from the scarce ingredients still available in the war zone. She is also a youth ambassador for the Canadian relief organisation Human Concern International.

Wendy Degens



## No rearview mirror

“

The new academic year is here. Lecture halls fill. Slides return. We talk about growth again, at least at the business school. Sustainable growth. Responsible growth. The kind that fits into tidy models and glossy slides. This summer I got schooled. Nine weeks in Southeast Asia with my family. One full month in Vietnam. There, growth is not theory. Vietnam's economy roared ahead with 7.5 percent GDP growth in the first half of 2025, the fastest in 15 years. In the same period the Netherlands managed about one percent.

Cranes crowd the skyline. Hotels rise from rice fields. Islands expand. Motorbikes swarm under new highways. Tourist numbers jumped more than 30 percent compared to last summer.

The economy breathes. Full throttle. No brakes. No rearview mirror.

That “no mirror” is more than a metaphor. In Vietnam, when leaving for something new, you do not look back. At New Year people leave a house without turning their head. To look back is to invite bad luck or hesitation. The past is respected through ancestors, but progress means forward only.

The contrasts are sharp. Resorts beside tin shacks. Garbage on beaches. Plastic in rivers. From a Western eye it looks broken. Yet talk to people: they smile, haggle you into surrender, point proudly at half-built towers, and show photos of children even more proud. And above it all the red flag waves. Hammer and sickle as the symbol of a communist state. Yet, capitalism ruling in the streets. Equally absurd and unstoppable.

Back in Maastricht growth is a polite anecdote. Our boom years are bedtime stories told by older colleagues. We discuss progress as if it were a careful puzzle.

But if you come from nothing, growth is not a puzzle. Growth is survival. Growth is hope. And maybe that is what we in business schools should remember. Sustainable growth makes sense when you already have plenty.

And maybe also this: looking forward applies to us too. Yet every September I see professors dusting off ten-year-old syllabi, running the same assignments, defending outdated methods with “AI isn't smart enough.” In research, we still hand out pen-and-paper surveys while ignoring technologies like eye tracking or biometrics. Growth means adapting teaching and research, even when noisy, even when it costs effort. Our students, and our science, deserve a university that practices what it preaches: forward-looking, growth-oriented, and unafraid to leave the rearview mirror behind.

”

Jonas Heller, assistant professor Marketing and director SBE DEXLab

## PROTEST exhibition at former Stercollege, now home to FASoS

# A stone through the window, smoke in the air and shouts of protesters



Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

An older man in a white suit hurls a stone through the window of a derelict factory. His wife, waiting in the car, smiles with quiet satisfaction. Soon, others follow – mostly men, smashing the panes with gleeful expressions.

The video was filmed in Liverpool in 2010. Former employees of Europleasure Interna-

tional Ltd – once strikers and occupiers at this former textile factory – were invited by Spanish artist Cristina Lucas to smash the windows of the abandoned building where they had lost their jobs in the 1970s. The work is “a remembrance of activism against capitalism”, reads the accompanying text. It's on show in one of 22 rooms on the second and third floors of the

former Stercollege building as part of PROTEST, an exhibition opening this Saturday organised by Viewmaster Projects. The former Stercollege building on Grote Gracht is owned by Maastricht University. Its ground and first floors are home to the Faculty

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## series sing, fight, cry, pray, laugh, work and admire



Niklas Wenzel (1998,  
Frankfurt, Germany)

\ PhD candidate at the  
Institute for Education  
of the Faculty of Health,  
Medicine and Life sciences

\ Relationship status:  
in a relationship with Lena

\ Lives in Maastricht

Photo: Joey Roberts

“If I won the lottery tomorrow,  
I’d start a company”

**Describe your perfect Sunday.** I wake up early, around six, and start the day with breakfast in bed while watching a sitcom together. Then it’s time for a walk, after which I work on one of my side projects, like my newsletter. My research focuses on how we can help students make the most of their time at university while also becoming well-functioning adults. I went through a big transformation myself during my student years, from someone who didn’t know what he wanted to do with his life to someone with focus and direction. That’s what I hope to pass on to students through my research. I share practical tips in my newsletter. We round the day off by watching F1 together. I used to think it was just cars going round in circles, but Lena – who knows a lot about F1 – showed me there is much more to it.

**The best advice I ever received was:** When I was younger, if my mother wanted me to try something new and I didn’t feel like it, she’d say, “Just try it once. If you don’t enjoy it, you can quit.” It taught me not to judge something before I’ve experienced it myself. And she was usually right – I often did enjoy it. I ended up doing ten years of taekwondo and still play the guitar today.

**City or village?** Village. I grew up in Frankfurt, and I’d have said city if you’d asked me before I moved to Maastricht. But living in a smaller town has made me realise I love the relative quiet and spending more time outdoors. It’s the little things, like people greeting each other in the street, that make a place feel like home.

**I can’t wait to have children.** True. The only thing we’re unsure about is whether we’d like two or three children – we’ll see when the time comes. I love the energy children bring into your life. My cousin has two daughters, and playing with them is just the best. I also find it incredible that women can literally bring a new human being into the world, and that you then have both the privilege and the responsibility to prepare that child for a meaningful life as best you can.

**Favourite music?** Classic rock from the sixties and seventies – The Rolling Stones, The Who, Led Zeppelin. No matter how often I hear their songs, they still move me. I was in two bands in secondary school, playing classic and some more modern rock. Here in Maastricht, I used to go to open mic nights at Café De Pieter. Some conservatory students would kick things off, then invite others to join in after a few songs. Sadly, it didn’t survive the pandemic.

**I tell my mother everything.** No. Someone once said in this series, “I can tell her anything, but she doesn’t need to know everything.” I couldn’t put it better myself. But it’s wonderful to know that both she and my father are always there for me if things go sideways.

**Would you rather be rich or famous?** Rich. Being famous must be awful. Money isn’t everything, of course, but it does give you the freedom to invest in cool things. If I won the lottery tomorrow, I’d start a company. In psychology, there’s currently a lot of interest in the network

approach, where therapists use questionnaires to create a personal network of symptoms for each client as a basis for treatment. That approach could be applied more broadly. People might have the same goal, but the path to achieving it looks different for everyone. Take someone struggling to stick to an exercise routine: I’d love to develop an app that asks you questions over three weeks, then analyses your answers to identify where you’re going wrong and offer personalised advice.

**What were you like as a child?** Very energetic – my teachers even thought I might have ADHD. Cheerful, most of the time. But I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life; I was interested in lots of things. After taking a gap year, I narrowed it down to three options: architecture, music school or psychology. I spoke with people in each field. Ironically, I decided against music school because my guitar teacher told me I’d probably end up teaching – only for me to end up working at the Institute for Education. I eventually settled on psychology.

**The best and worst thing about doing a PhD.** The best thing is how much freedom you have, and the worst is that it’s still not quite enough. I like bringing different disciplines together, but a PhD project needs a clear focus, otherwise it’ll descend into chaos.

**Is there life after death?** That’s a tough one. I believe there’s something, simply because people across the world have tried to capture it in words and make sense of it through religion, for example. I’m not sure about your soul going to heaven or that you’re reincarnated into another body. But I do think there’s something – some kind of phenomenon so profound it’s beyond our understanding, but which we can intuitively sense.

**In ten years...** I’ll be a father, and have a job that involves both research and practice. Translating research findings into everyday life is what I enjoy most. We might still be living in Maastricht, but I’d like my children to grow up close to family, which is difficult when you’re 300 kilometres away. And I want to be in a position to care for my parents if they need me.

Cleo Freriks

Weekly personal interview with a student or employee

New mobility policy: “We won’t be charging commercial rates like Q-Park”

# Cyclists to be rewarded, motorists to pay up

Employees who cycle to work will receive a commuting mileage allowance, while employees who drive to work will have to pay to park on university premises from 2027 onwards. The underlying message of Maastricht University’s new sustainable mobility policy is clear – reward and discourage, “a mix of stick and carrot”.



Photo editing: Simone Golob

Let’s start with the stick, for employees who drive to work. Motorists will continue to receive a commuting mileage allowance, but free parking outside university buildings will come to an end. Project leader Cyriel Heuts can’t share exact numbers yet, but: “We definitely won’t be charging commercial rates like Q-Park. You won’t suddenly find yourself paying €12.50 per day. No, absolutely not.” Parking rates will also be linked to commuting distance: the farther you live from the university, the lower your rate.

## Cycling allowance

And then there’s the carrot, for employees who cycle to work. With sustainability as its guiding principle, the En Route project group asked itself how best to motivate staff to swap the car for a bike. One answer is a commuting mileage allowance for cyclists. It won’t amount to a fortune, but it could make for a nice little bonus. Without specifying numbers, Heuts says that anyone cycling more than five kilometres will benefit. While some institutions and companies reimburse their

employees on a cents-per-kilometre basis, UM will likely introduce a tiered system with a fixed allowance for 5 to 10 kilometres and a higher allowance for 11 to 15 kilometres, and so on. The greater the distance, the higher the reward.

Buying a new bike will also become more attractive. At present, UM contributes €340 towards a purchase once every three years. This will rise to €750 once every five years. “Bikes last longer than three years, so that too ties in with our sustainability goals”, Heuts points out. Reimbursement for travel expenses by public transport will remain unchanged: train and bus tickets will continue to be fully reimbursed.

## Bus route

Why keep the mileage allowance for motorists at all if the goal is sustainable travel? “We agreed not to scrap it. We want to reward and discourage rather than reward and punish. Sustainability matters, but we mustn’t lose sight of good employment practice. There are plenty of people who would like to cycle or take the train but simply can’t do without a car –

*“Plenty of people simple can’t do without a car”*

parents with children to drop off, employees with mobility impairments, those who don’t live near a station or convenient bus route and would face a 90-minute commute by public transport. They can’t very well give up driving to work.”

Flexibility is another goal. “We want people to have more freedom in their commuting choices.” Think taking the train one day and cycling to work the next. “At the moment, you can’t get a parking space if you’re on the UM Bicycle Scheme and the other way around. That just doesn’t work.” Claiming travel expenses will also be made easier. “We’ll be introducing a mobility app.”

The new policy, expected to take effect in January 2027, will require investment in facilities, says Heuts. “In addition to the mobility app, we’ll introduce a new system to make parking easier. Bicycle parking spaces will also be renewed and expanded.”

## Sensitive issue

In 2018, yet another parking proposal was rejected by the University Council and the Local Consultative Body, consisting of the Executive Board and trade union representatives. Questioning why employees should have to pay for parking, they sent the project group back to the drawing board. This time, Heuts has managed to get the proposal past the representative bodies – though not without difficulty, he admits. Around half of UM staff drive to work, and the idea of paid parking remains a sensitive issue.



*Motaz Daw*

## Refugee and student in Maastricht

Finally safe:  
“Studying here  
is a lifeline”

## Amongst the thousands of students who started at Maastricht University on 1 September, there are 101 refugees from various countries. They have fled for different reasons, including homophobia and political repression. “They labelled me a ‘terrorist’.”

Text: PETER DOORAKKERS Photos: ELLEN OOSTERHOF

Surely, most refugee students at Maastricht are Syrian or Ukrainian, right? No, laughed Luc den Akker, central contact for refugees at UM. The largest group, 27 students, actually fled from Turkey. “A country that also supplies ordinary students,” he acknowledged. “Most Turkish refugee students therefore prefer not to advertise their refugee status. They’re afraid of the long arm of President Erdogan.”

For 25-year-old Burak Demirci, who has just started his Master’s in Labor and Organizational Psychology, this is not the case. Yes, he is careful about sharing his story – “I don’t want people to judge me as a refugee” – but he will respond to anyone who asks: “I have nothing to hide.” He came to the Netherlands in 2023 to join his father. He has since also been joined by his mother, brother and sister. “My family was in trouble with the government,” he explained, in a tone that suggests understatement.

His parents are followers of Fethullah Gülen, the Muslim cleric who was accused by Erdogan of organising the failed coup in 2016. That was never proven; nevertheless, the lives of ‘Gülenists’ have been much harder as a result. “My parents were labelled terrorists and they both lost their jobs as teachers. My father did nothing wrong, but was in prison for nine months and sentenced to a further nine years once he was released.” Personally, Demirci is not a follower of Gülen, but he also experienced hostility. “They labelled me a ‘terrorist’, too, and if I had stayed, I would likely have been arrested as well. I also stood no chance of finding employment in Turkey. There is no future there for me and my family.”

Instead, he is forging one in the Netherlands. In Maastricht, where he was drawn to the international nature of the university and the “broad scope of the Master’s”, and in the hope that he can help refugees down the line. “They have to find a job here, but that isn’t always possible. Sometimes, people who were academics in their own country have to work in a factory instead, that’s quite a change. I want to set up programmes that would help ease the transition to a life here.”

Demirci is glad of the help that he receives. After all, Turkey is not part of the European Economic Area (EEA), which means that students from there have to pay institutional tuition fees. Depending on the programme, that can cost up to 25 thousand euros a year. “I could never have afforded that,” he said.

“But when I indicated that I was a refugee, it turned out I was eligible for lower fees.” Van den Akker explains that is government policy: the university receives funding for students with recognised refugee status, which means they pay the same tuition fees as students from the EEA (2601 euros in this academic year). “I was also allowed to follow the pre-academic training for free [a programme that teaches new students about problem-based learning],” said Demirci, “and Luc helped me find accommodation in Maastricht.”

Motaz Daw is also grateful. Originally from Libya, he has only been in the Netherlands since December 2024. Although his asylum application is still ongoing, he started his Bachelor’s in Computer Science on 1 September. He was forced to abandon his degree in Information Technology at the University of Tripoli because of the civil war that ravaged

his homeland until 2020. “I am 28 now and I don’t want to wait anymore,” he said in a coffee bar at the Faculty of Science and Engineering – he had just finished his first study groups.

Daw was also awarded a scholarship to participate in the pre-academic training. According to the law, people such as Daw, whose asylum applications are still being processed, should be paying institutional tuition fees, but UM has opted for a concession for these students: they also pay the lower fees. And that’s a good thing, said Daw with a sigh of relief, as even finding enough money just for the lower fee was hard enough. Without refugee status, he is unable to apply for student loans, “and my application for a grant from the [student refugee fund] UAF was rejected because my Dutch isn’t good enough yet. In the end, I was able to raise enough money for my first year through a crowdfunding campaign on GoFundMe – I

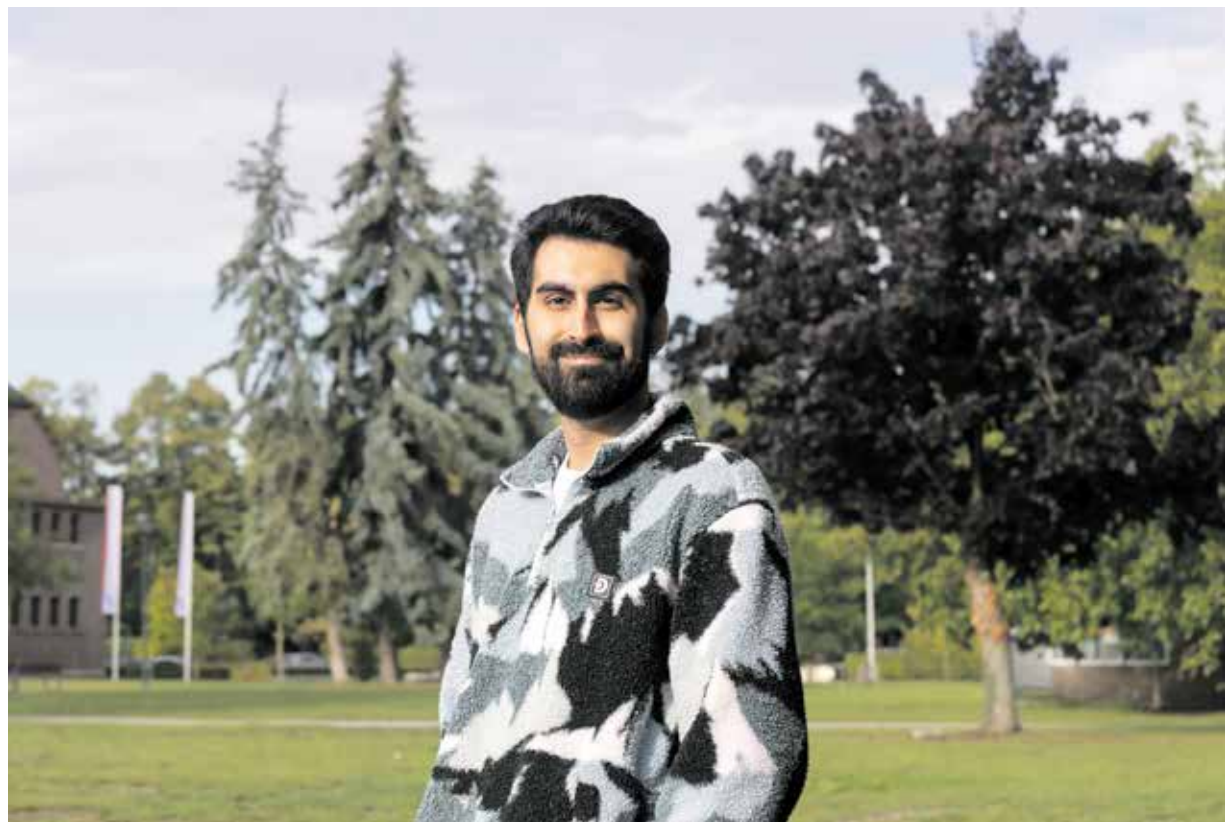
am able to study thanks to friends and friends of friends.”

Daw said his main reason to flee was his own family. “In my family, children were physically and mentally abused. On top of that, I am gay and my whole life, I have had to hide who I am. If I had told them back home, I think they would have killed me. When I left for the Netherlands, I simply told them that I was going there for an internship. I was relieved once I was finally in the aeroplane. After I landed, it did take a few days to truly appreciate that I was in the Netherlands.”

While he does feel safe at the asylum centre in Maastricht, where he is staying in the section for LGBTQIA+ people, Daw is not yet entirely at ease. “I have nightmares that members of my family are looking for me, and loud noises, the sudden slam of a door, for example, make me jump. It takes time for things like that to change and I am getting help for that, too.

There is always a chance that they will reject my application, which increases the stress even more.” Same-sex relationships are criminalized in Libya, with penalties of up to five years in prison, while armed militias target LGBTQIA+ people. “ISIS in Libya has even carried out public executions of men accused of homosexuality”, Daw added.

Being able to study is a blessing, he said quietly, it helps to forget his troubles for a while. “It keeps me going, it’s a lifeline, because everything else isn’t so good right now.”



Burak Demirci

### What does UM do for refugees?

There are 101 refugee students at Maastricht University this academic year. The largest groups are from Turkey (27), Ukraine (23) and Syria (18). Last week, it was revealed that there are also five students from Gaza at Maastricht – they are in the Netherlands on a student visa and

were granted a scholarship by the university (see page 3). Still, helping refugees “doesn’t automatically mean financial aid”, said Luc van den Akker. “Mostly, it means helping them on their way, introducing them to the right people or organisations both at the university and outside. So that they can solve their problems themselves.” What that means has been laid out in an actual policy document since the end of 2024. “Before, it was all rather informal,” said Van den Akker. “But we wanted to put down on paper what we do and

what we want. It helps with the Executive Board, too, although they are usually very accommodating.”

For example, think about helping someone with admission to the university, that requires a secondary school certificate. “If someone were to have lost that while fleeing, there are procedures that must be followed. Those are not easy. I can help someone by showing them a way in.” There are also special language courses at the Language Centre, separate from the ‘ordinary’ courses for students. And yes,

the document does say that there may be “occasional and limited” financial aid, for example, if someone doesn’t have enough money for a language course.

It also lists plans for the future: they would like to help refugees beyond the university by offering positions for work experience. “Of course, we will first help our students, that’s our core business. But the university is also one of the biggest employers in South Limburg. We could help a lot of people with placements like that.”

# “Art can make these events visceral”

Continued from page 3

of Arts and Social Sciences. The two upper floors are empty, awaiting renovation – an ideal setting for an exhibition, or so curator Bart van den Boom must have thought. The videos, often projected across the full width of the old classrooms, were created by

artists from around the world. Visitors will see Hong Kong’s protests against China, the Troubles in Ireland, Black Lives Matter in the United States, pro-Palestinian demonstrations and protests against lignite mining in Germany. The theme is clear: the struggle for racial and gender equality, freedom and human rights, and the fight against war, vio-

lence, corruption and climate change. Some of the videos are staged, like the former employees throwing stones in Liverpool. A video showing fully veiled women in Kabul protesting against the Taliban turns out to be real footage shot by an Afghan filmmaker during the US occupation. “It’s bizarre”, says Van den Boom. “Since the US withdrawal, it has become utterly impossible for women to protest there at all.” There’s also a compilation of online news clips, and an AI-generated video.

In most rooms, the images are intense and the sound overwhelming. “We want to show how art can make these events visceral, something you can actually feel”, says Van den Boom. “It’s a completely different experience from watching TV at home or scrolling on your phone.”

Van den Boom, who previously curated *No Access* – a Viewmaster Projects exhibition on immigration at the former NATO headquarters in Cannerberg, named one of the five best exhibitions of 2022 by *NRC* – even advises *Observant* to explore the third floor alone. The shouts of hooligans and other protesters echoing through the otherwise empty rooms create an eerie atmosphere. The exit is a little tricky to find, but if you follow the green lights along the corridors, you’ll eventually emerge on Grote Gracht – in need of a deep breath.

Riki Janssen

*PROTEST* runs from 13 September to 16 November 2025, Thursday to Sunday, 12.00 - 4.30 pm, at Grote Gracht 76, Maastricht. Tickets are €9. <https://www.viewmaster-projects.com>

The former **Stercollege building** is owned by Maastricht University. Its ground and first floors are home to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The two upper floors are empty, awaiting renovation. According to a Facility Services staff member, this is unusual; vacancy rates in UM buildings are low.

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**Agenda academic ceremonies**

Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

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\*Medewerkers van UM kunnen een volledig overzicht van interne- en externe vacatures vinden door in te loggen op SuccessFactors via Umployee.

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