

PERSPECTIVES

Everyday Life in Refuge

By

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Perspectives - Everyday Life in Refuge

© Mette Lind Kusk, Line Høj Høstrup and Hugo Lind

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About the Graphic Novel

In short, this graphic novel is about starting a new life after fleeing your home country and finding refuge in another. More specifically, it is about the way Denmark welcomes refugees through the UN resettlement programme as seen from the perspective of young people with firsthand experience of forced migration. The graphic novel follows two young fictional characters - Esther and Simon - as they make their way from a refugee camp in Rwanda to their first days, months and years upon resettlement in Denmark. Seven young people with refugee background have contributed to creating the stories based on their own diverse and varied experiences and perspectives: being resettled is rarely an unambiguously positive or negative experience, but many things at once.

The concept of 'refugees' can be abstract and complex to explain. In the news and media, refugees are often reduced to statistics and talked about in the context of 'refugee flows' or 'migrant crises'. The debate is often polarised, differences between 'us' and 'them' can seem enormous, and people's stories behind the numbers can be overlooked and forgotten. With this book, we want to make it possible to gain insight into themes related to forced migration based on the real-life experiences of real people. We hope that by focusing on empathy and kindness in the search of a deeper understanding, we can help overcome the dehumanisation of people who have had to flee their home country. With this, we also hope that the graphic novel will serve as a reminder of all the things that we have in common despite our different backgrounds and challenges.

You can read more about the background and the team behind the graphic novel, as well as the reason for choosing the graphic novel format at the back of the book. There you will also find links to in-depth information about refugees as well as an afterword by the Red Cross.

Mette

THE REFUGEE CAMP



This story is about Esther and Simon, who live in Mahama refugee camp in Rwanda.

Esther is thirteen years old and has lived in the camp since her family fled Burundi three years ago.

Simon's family fled the Democratic Republic of Congo seventeen years ago and has never been able to return. Fifteen-year-old Simon has therefore lived in the camp his entire life.

Mahama. Refugee camp in eastern Rwanda

READY,
SIMON?

HER BOR
ESTHER

HER BOR
SIMON

TANZANIA

RWANDA



200M





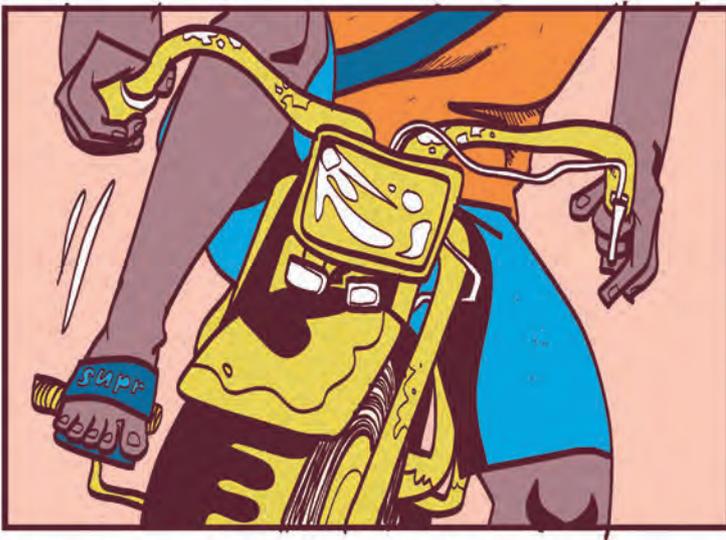


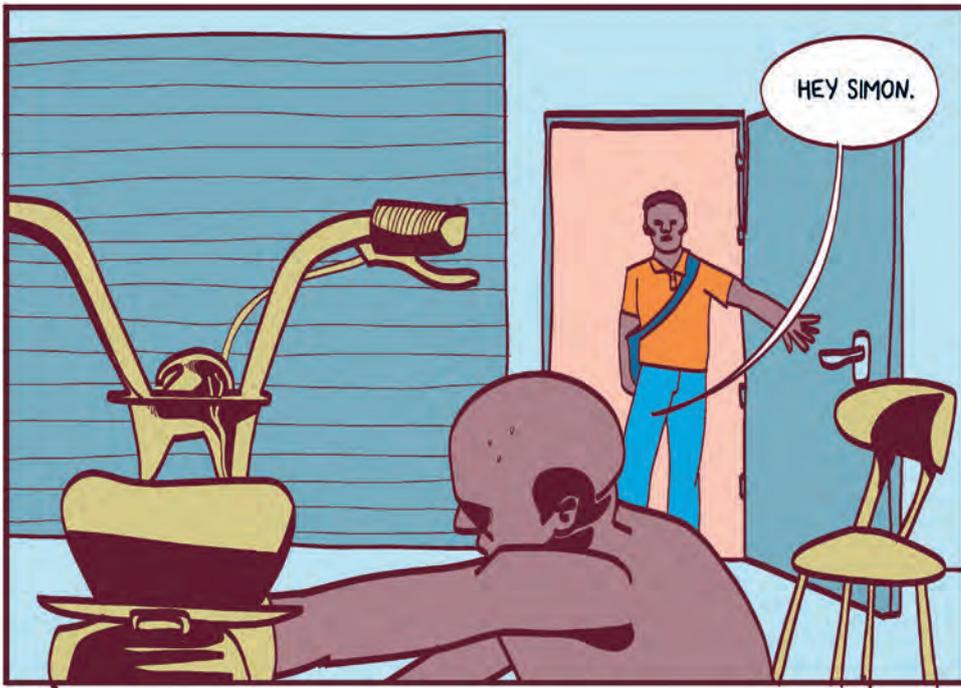




Saturday morning







*20.000 RWF (Rwandan Francs) is about 107 DKK.



÷ 20.000,-
RWF



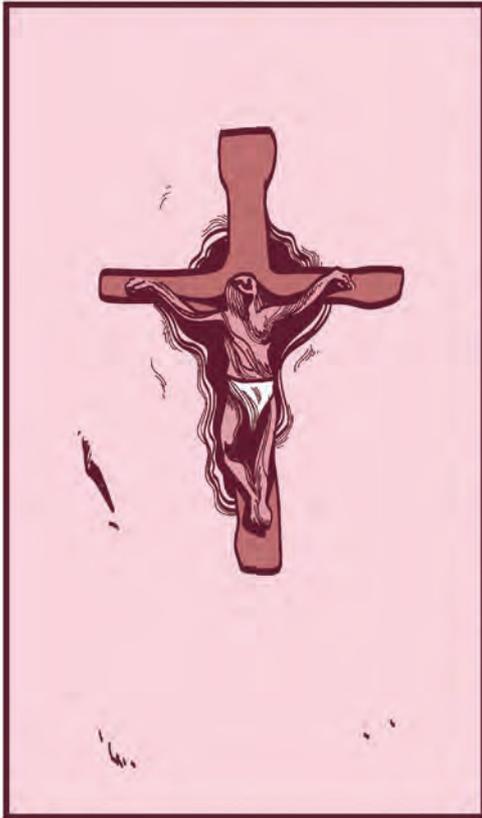
*TATE is the nickname for grandmother in the Kinyarwanda language.



CAN YOU FIND OTHER WORK?

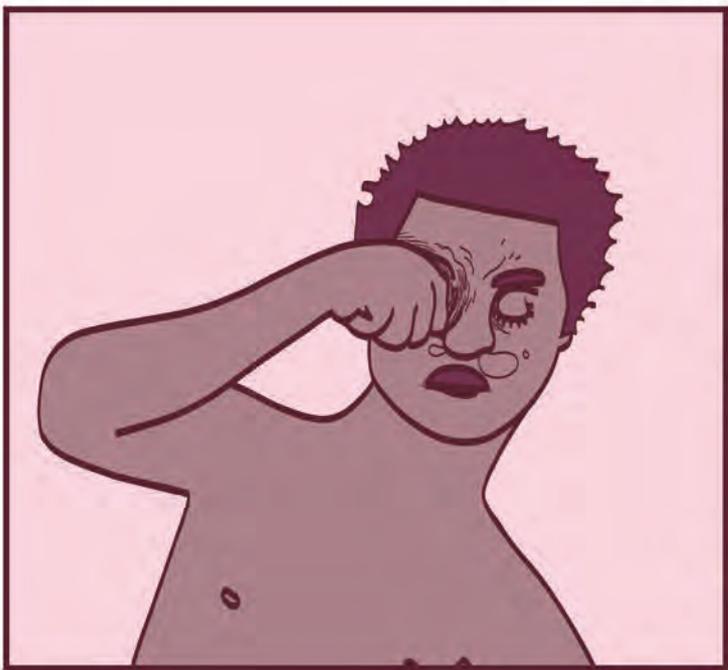


GOD WILLING...



UWI HAS LENT ME A BIKE FOR THE WEEK. I CAN DRIVE AROUND AND ASK TOMORROW.

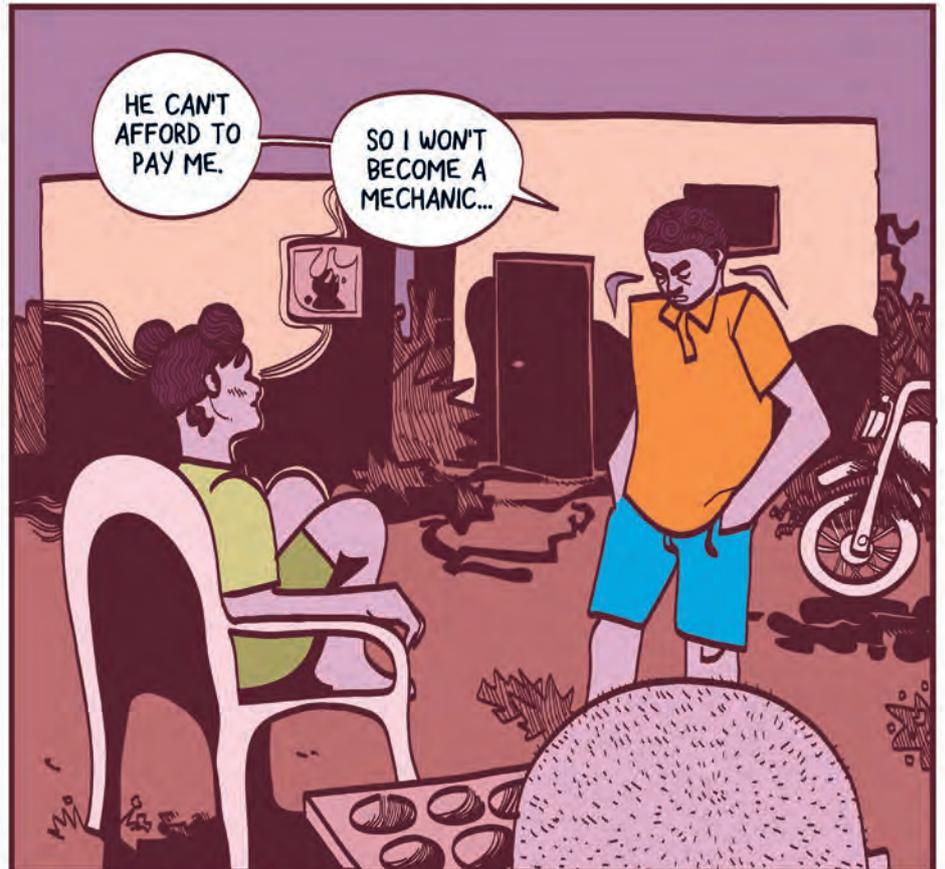
STOP TALKING...

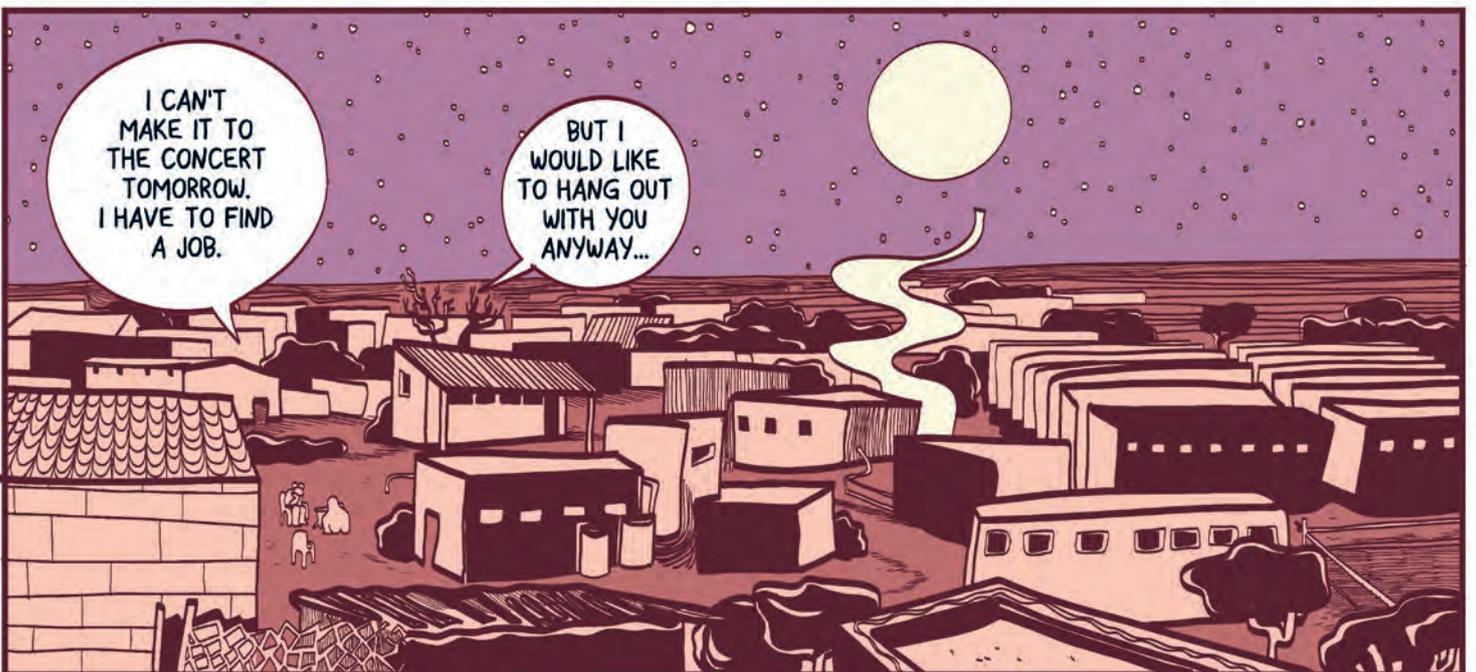


SORRY, SWEETIE. GO BACK TO SLEEP.



I'M GONNA GO VISIT ESTHER



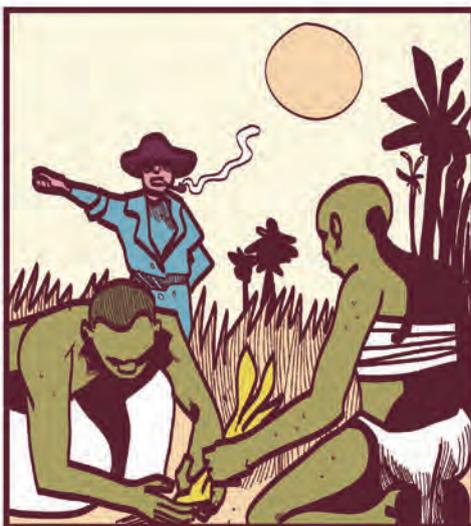




Esther and Simon are just two out of more than 100,000 refugees living in camps in Rwanda. Simon's family fled the Democratic Republic of Congo during the Second Congo War in 1998-2003. They have never been able to return home due to ongoing unrest. Fifteen-year-old Simon has therefore grown up in the refugee camp. Esther and her family fled unrest in neighboring Burundi three years earlier.



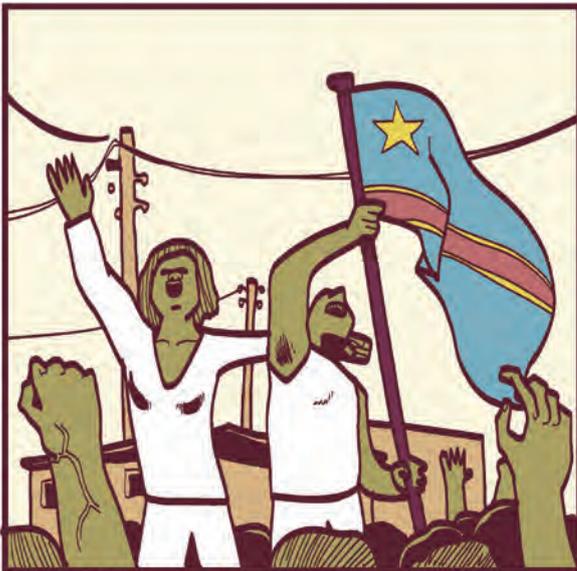
In both DR Congo and Burundi, the problems can be traced back to the colonial era, when Western colonists took over areas by force and violence.



The Europeans took the fertile areas for themselves and relocated the locals, depending on where they needed labor. Among others, people from Rwanda were relocated to plantations in Congo.



Land is important. People all over the world depend heavily on land to survive and feed their families. That is why disputes over land rights so often lead to conflict.



When DR Congo gained independence in 1960 and Burundi in 1962, it was unclear who had rights to which areas of land.



Is it the people who have lived in the area for the past several decades? Or is it those who lived off the land before the colonial power displaced them?



The colonial powers also made ethnicity a more important factor than it had previously been. By giving power and land to some ethnic groups rather than others, the colonial powers created conflicts between groups. Local politicians in both countries have continued to use ethnicity when trying to get people to vote for them.



In 1996-2003, all this led to the so-called Congo wars, in which more than 3.3 million Congolese lost their lives. More than a million Congolese are living as refugees in neighboring countries.



In Burundi, internal power struggles between different ethnic groups culminated in 1993 in a civil war that lasted 12 years and cost 300,000 lives, while 700,000 fled to neighboring countries.

Today, local unrest, political persecution, and lack of land make it impossible for the more than 100,000 refugees living in Rwanda to return home. But how do you create a future when you are stuck in the present?





One week later...

Mahama is the largest of five refugee camps in Rwanda, with 60,000 inhabitants.



The purpose of the camps is to offer temporary asylum and other assistance to refugees. They are run by UNHCR, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.



Every year, a limited number of refugees are offered resettlement in a third UN country, such as Denmark. These are refugees who cannot return to their respective home countries due to persecution. This group is called quota refugees.

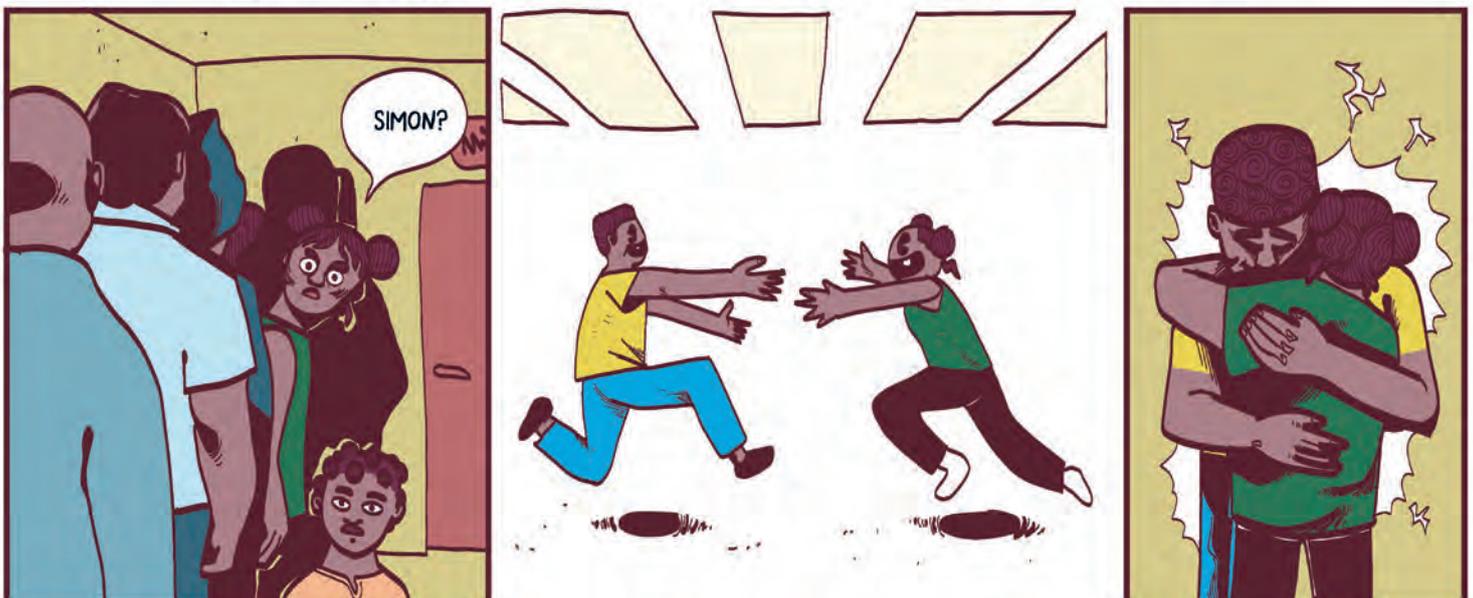




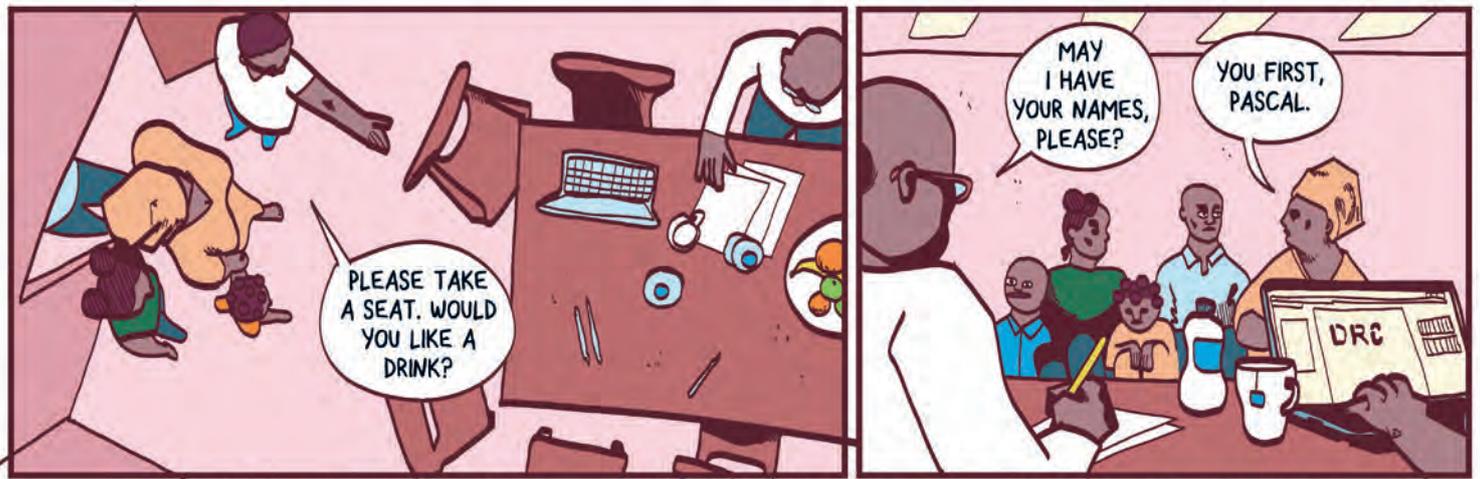
Every year, politicians decide how many quota refugees Denmark will accept. The "quota" is the number of refugees Denmark commits to resettling. In 2023, Denmark accepted 200 quota refugees.



Denmark also decides which types of refugees are offered resettlement. Currently, it is mainly women with children and without a male network who are granted protection in Denmark. They are considered to be at greater risk of gender-based violence, sexual violence, and other forms of exploitation.



What all refugees have in common is that they are people in extremely vulnerable positions.



Based on Denmark's criteria, UNHCR recommends refugees for resettlement. The Danish Immigration Service and DRC (Danish Refugee Council) interview refugees who have been nominated to come to Denmark.



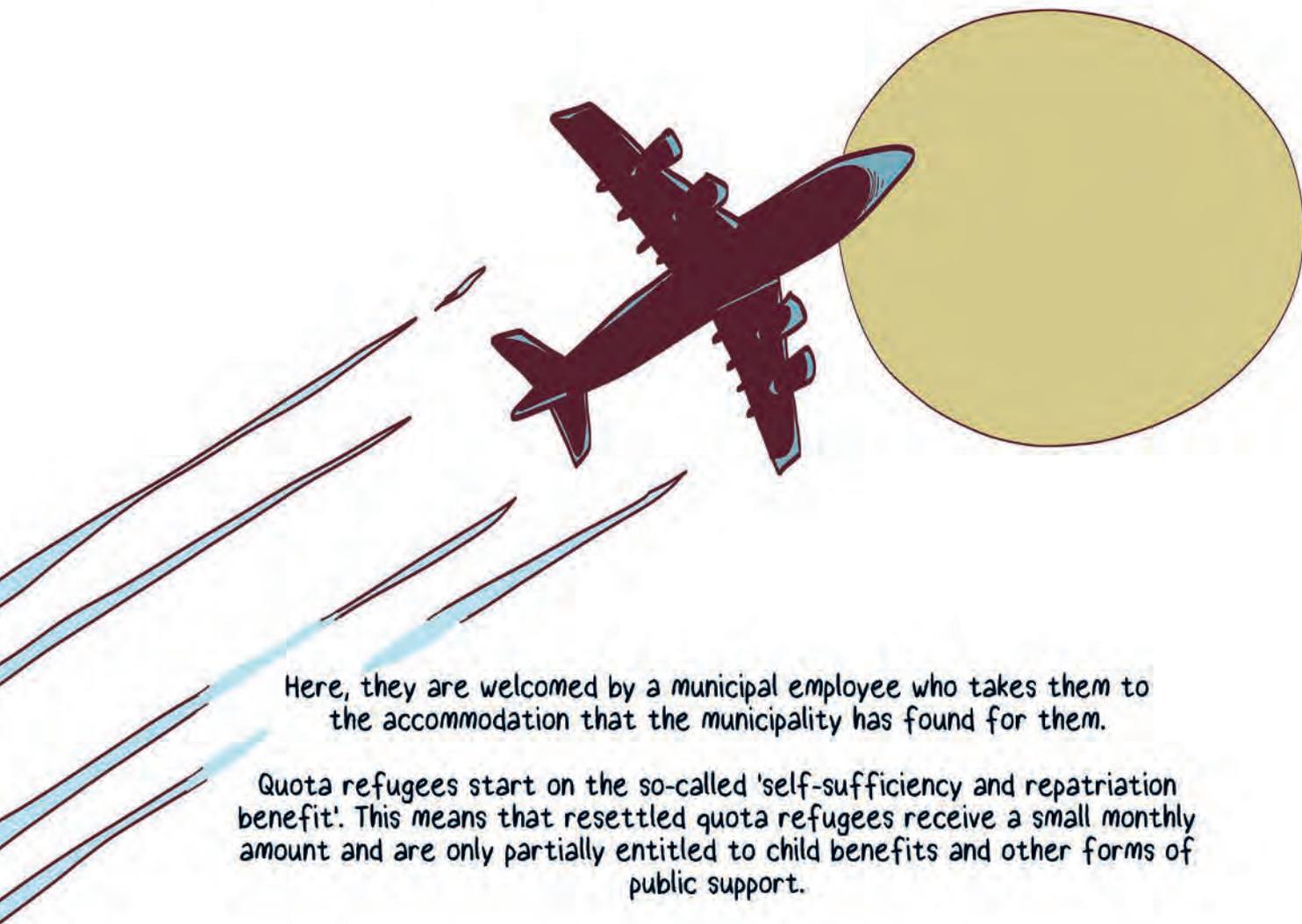
Quota refugees also participate in a course about Denmark and undergo a health examination.



They are granted temporary residence permits and are told where to live.

In Denmark, quota refugees are placed throughout the country, typically one to two families per municipality.

Simon is going to Aalborg and Esther to Ikast.



Here, they are welcomed by a municipal employee who takes them to the accommodation that the municipality has found for them.

Quota refugees start on the so-called 'self-sufficiency and repatriation benefit'. This means that resettled quota refugees receive a small monthly amount and are only partially entitled to child benefits and other forms of public support.

FACT BOX

UN's Resettlement Programme

The UN resettlement programme is an international programme allowing some of the world's most vulnerable refugees to be resettled in a country with more attainable security. Refugees are usually resettled from countries that have received large numbers of refugees and are unable to offer lasting solutions for them.

In 2024, the United States, Canada, Germany and Australia received the largest numbers of refugees through the UN programme. According to UN estimates, in 2023 less than 5% of refugees in need of resettlement were offered resettlement*.

*Source: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/unhcr-2025-global-refugee-resettlement-needs-spike-almost-3-million>

THE ARRIVAL

THIS IS THE PLACE.

Simon's family has been picked up at the airport by a municipal worker and an interpreter and driven to their new apartment in Aalborg.

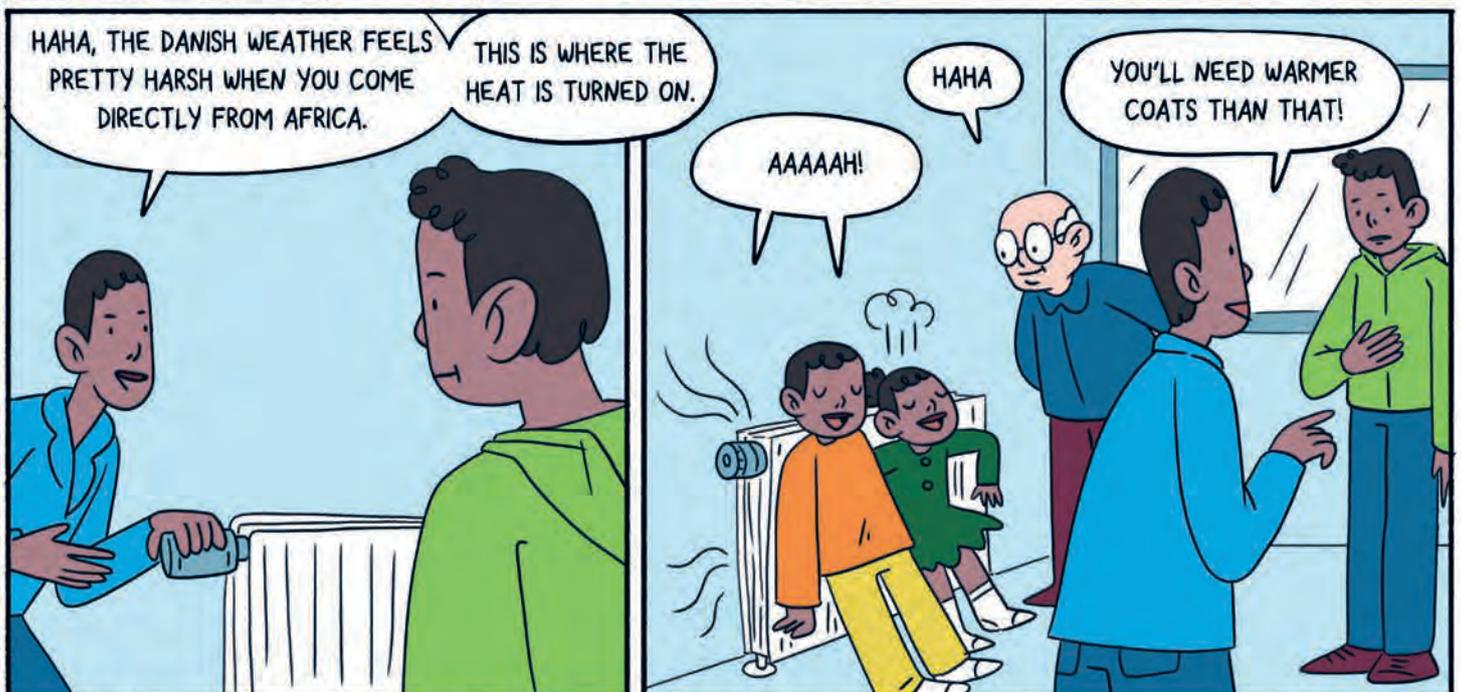
STUÐAJB DAFBUVBÆK ABØJ
VIZDÆV FØGAJDHUMTY FUBAD?

JOHAN JUST HAS TO
FIND THE KEY.

CLICK!

STÆDFUJL ØHSJAV

WELCOME!



*UGALI IS A PORRIDGE MADE FROM CORN FLOUR.

Esther's family has been placed in Ikast, as the Danish Immigration Service distributes refugees across the country's various municipalities.



THAT LOOKS NICE, DOESN'T IT?

SO WHAT? WE REALLY NEED A TV!



AND I MISS MY FRIENDS...

... AND TATE!*

SO DO I...



BUT THE LADY FROM THE MUNICIPALITY PROMISED TO BRING A PHONE FOR US WHEN SHE COMES BACK.

AND THEN WE'LL CALL TATE!



KNOCK KNOCK

WHO COULD THAT BE?



HI!
I'M MARCEL.



I COME FROM THE LOCAL CONGOLESE NETWORK TO WELCOME YOU TO IKAST.

OH, HOW WONDERFUL, A FELLOW COUNTRYMAN!

*GRANDMOTHER



IT'S GREAT TO HAVE ANOTHER ADULT TO TALK TO AGAIN!

HAVE YOU SETTLED IN?



WE'VE ONLY BEEN HERE A FEW DAYS, BUT THE KIDS HAVE JUST BEEN HANGING OUT IN THE APARTMENT.

IT'S WAAAAAY TOO COLD TO GO OUTSIDE!



IF YOU LIKE, I CAN INTRODUCE YOU TO THE ADVENTIST CHURCH? THERE ARE MANY AFRICAN FAMILIES WHO ATTEND.

THAT WOULD BE WONDERFUL!



LOVELY DINNER!

PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF THERE IS ANYTHING ELSE I CAN HELP YOU WITH!



THANK YOU, BUT YOU'VE ALREADY DONE SO MUCH!

MOM...

WHAT?



I'M STARTING SCHOOL SOON...

...AND I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE CLEAN CLOTHES...

RIGHT...



UM, THIS IS A LITTLE EMBARRASSING... BUT COULD YOU SHOW ME HOW THE WASHING MACHINE WORKS?



In Aalborg...



DAFDØJH LIAWY HAQIU JK

HERE YOU CAN BUY CHEAP WINTER JACKETS.

DANISH KRONER = RWANDA FRANC = ???



THE MULTI BAZAR IS A GREAT GROCERY SHOP.



LOOK, WE'RE NOT THE ONLY AFRICANS!

AAAAH, THEY HAVE ISOMBE* HERE!

MOOOOMMY! I WANT A FANTA EXOTIC!!



DAFG ÆSG STØR SP ERSJ SDIZ KÆFH FJØ ZAF ER GRO

JOHAN IS SAYING GOODBYE. HE WILL BE BACK ON MONDAY TO SHOW THE CHILDREN THEIR NEW SCHOOL.



SRGYRE ERSJ SADZ KAFH ZAWR FJØZEF ER GREGG

HE IS ASKING IF YOU HAVE A PHONE WHERE YOU CAN CALL HIM?

NO...

WE WILL TRY TO FIND YOU A PHONE THEN.



SO THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE OUR HOME NOW?

DON'T WORRY. WITH TIME IT WILL BE...

*ISOMBE IS A STEW MADE FROM THE LEAVES OF THE CASSAVA PLANT.

FACT BOX

Resettlement to Denmark of Refugees through the UN

Since 1979, Denmark has worked with the UN to receive refugees from camps around the world. During the 1989-2015 period, Denmark received around 500 people through the resettlement programme a year. In 2015, the then Minister for Immigration and Integration, Inger Støjberg (Liberal Party of Denmark), put a stop to this practice. Since 2018, the incumbent Minister for Immigration and Integration has been mandated to decide how many refugees Denmark should receive under the UN resettlement programme. In 2016-2018 Denmark did not receive any refugees through the UN programme. In 2019, Denmark received approximately 30 refugees in need of special health treatment. In comparison, Norway had an annual quota of 3,000, which was reduced to 1,000 in 2024, and Sweden had a quota of 5,000, which since 2023 has been reduced to 900*. In 2020, Denmark agreed to a quota of 200 refugees annually - primarily single women with children from DR Congo and Burundi who have lived in refugee camps in Rwanda. This is the group of people that the Reorienting Integration research project has followed for a period of time.

*Source: UNHCR (2024) Sweden Fact Sheet, UNHCR (2024) Norway Fact Sheet.

A NEW SCHOOL

Esther has been in Denmark for a week, and today is her first day of school. Esther has been looking forward to this day, but is also very nervous and could hardly sleep last night.

DET HER ER ESTHER. SHE IS FROM RWANDA OR EH... CONGO, RIGHT?

HAI!

I HOPE THEY WILL BE MY NEW BEST FRIENDS...



YOU CAN SIT NEXT TO ANASTASIA. HUN ER FRA UKRAINE.

SHE LOOKS NICE...

HEJ!



HEJ ESTHER! GÅR DET GODT?

I... EH... JAG ER 14 ÅR GAMMEL.



EHM, OK? HVOR LÆNGE HAR DU VÆRET I DANMARK?



I... EH... SORRY?

TALER DU IKKE DANSK?

I'M SORRY... EH... LITTLE DANISH...

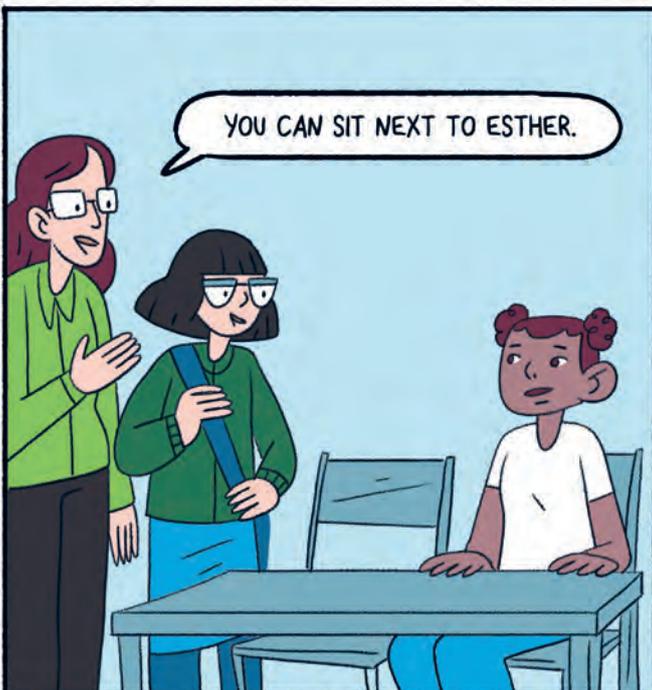


OH, OK...







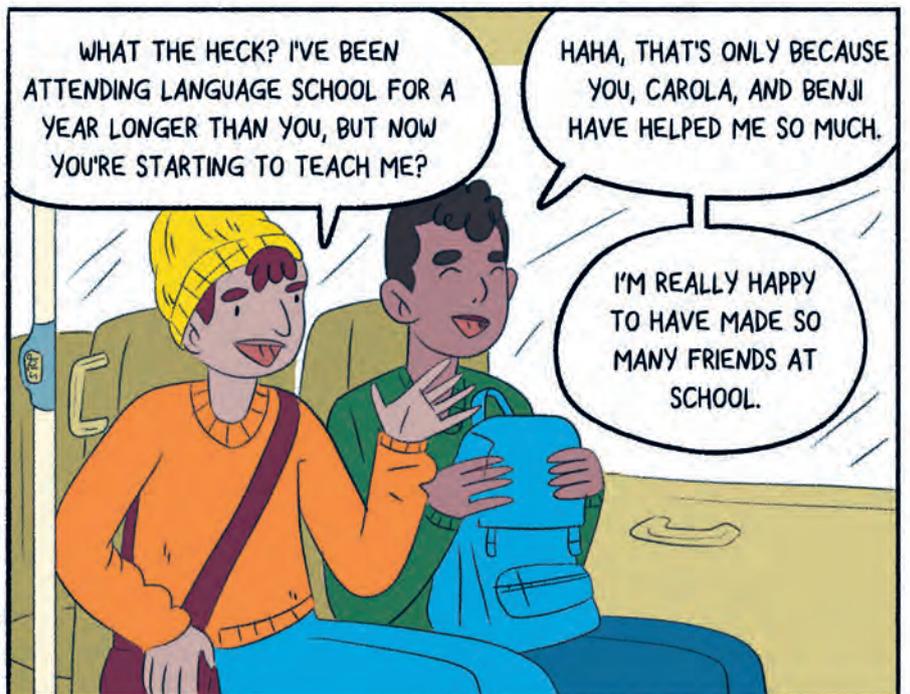
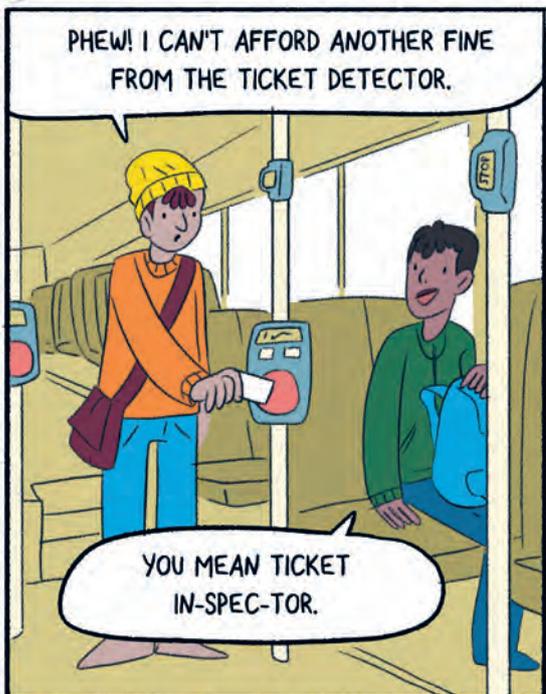
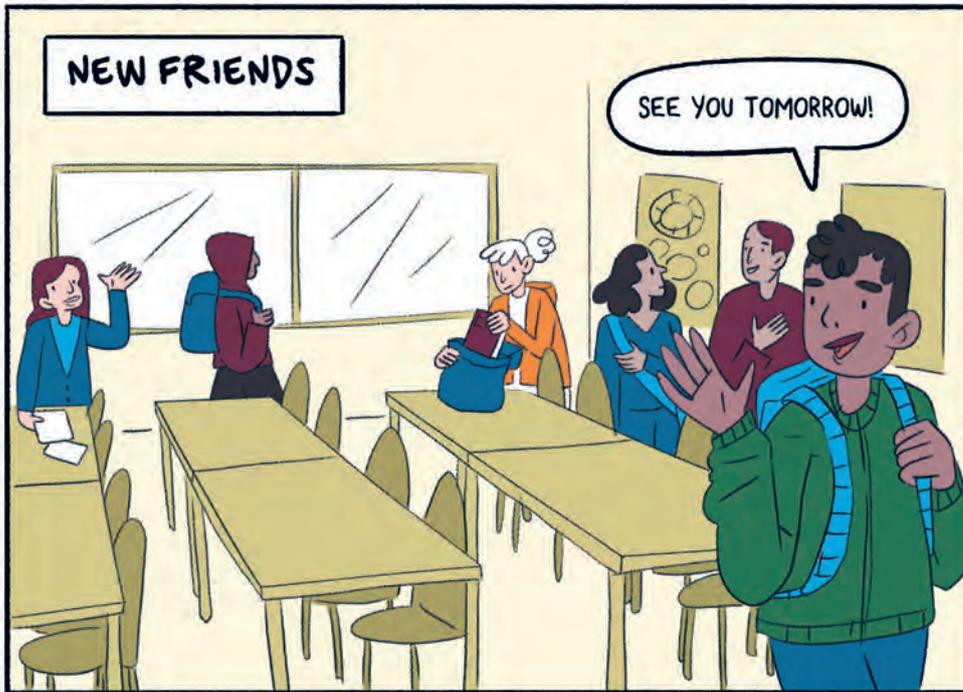




FACT BOX

Schooling

In refugee camps in Rwanda, all children are offered schooling. However, opportunities for higher education are limited. Following their resettlement to Denmark, the children must also start school as quickly as possible. The youngest children go to nursery and kindergarten, while initially the older children usually attend special reception classes for children who need to learn Danish. Reception classes are typically hosted by municipal primary/lower secondary schools. As the children learn the language, they transition into regular classes. The schooling available to young people, like Esther and Simon, varies from one municipality to another. Some municipalities run language schools especially for young people. In other municipalities, young people start in special reception classes at the local primary/lower secondary school. Regardless, many young people find it difficult to learn enough Danish to keep up in class, and for many getting to know their Danish classmates is also difficult. In fact, recess can be particularly difficult times during the first few weeks if you cannot speak Danish or English with your new classmates. How would you survive the first few weeks at a new school where no one spoke your language?





DO YOU HAVE MANY DANISH FRIENDS?



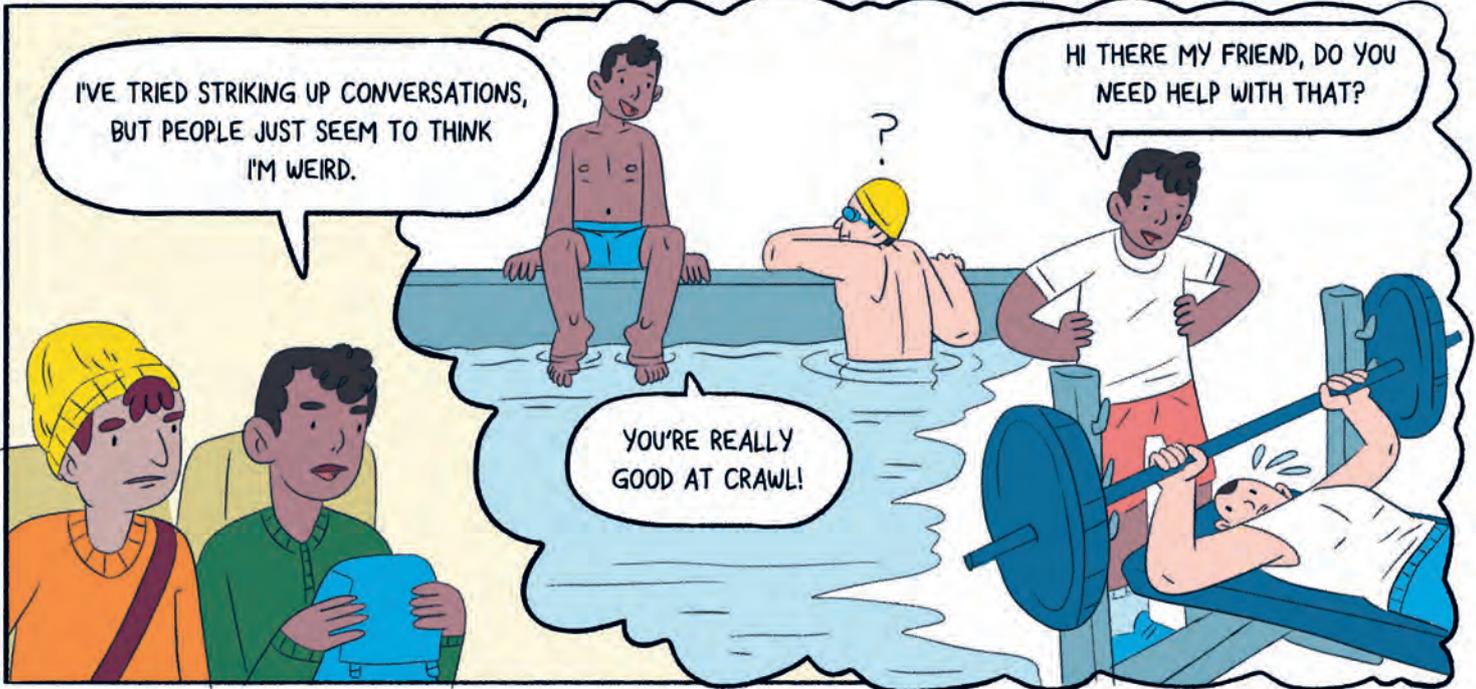
SURE, A FEW... WHY?

IT JUST FEELS STRANGE TO HAVE LIVED IN DENMARK FOR MORE THAN A YEAR BUT I STILL ONLY HAVE OTHER FOREIGN FRIENDS.



WHAT IS WRONG WITH THAT?

NOTHING, BUT DANISH FRIENDS COULD TEACH ME MORE ABOUT THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AND STUFF LIKE THAT...



I'VE TRIED STRIKING UP CONVERSATIONS, BUT PEOPLE JUST SEEM TO THINK I'M WEIRD.

HI THERE MY FRIEND, DO YOU NEED HELP WITH THAT?

YOU'RE REALLY GOOD AT CRAWL!



HAHAHA! SIMON, MY MAN!

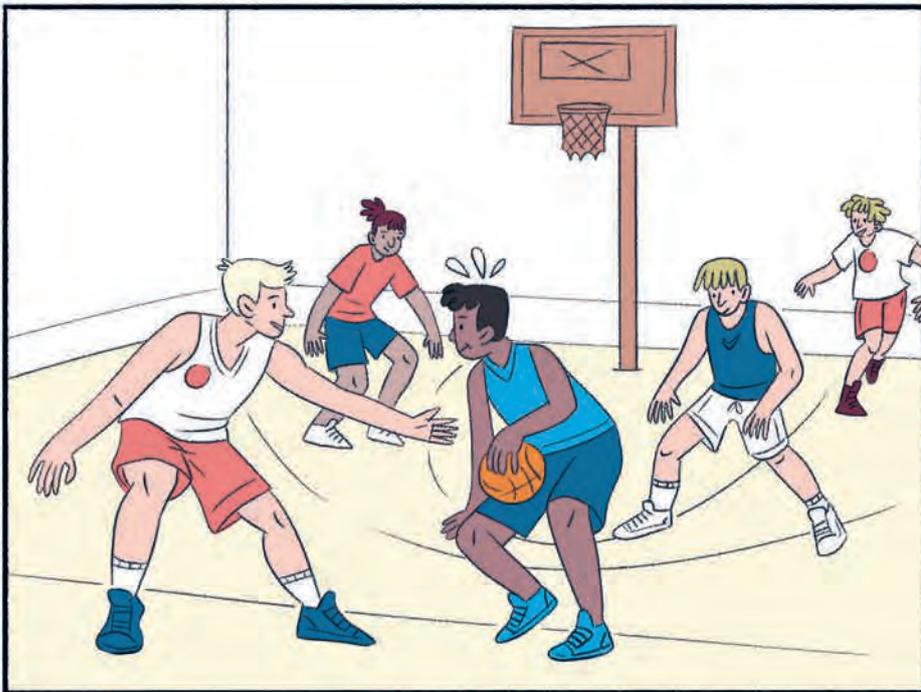
DANES ARE SUPER INTROVERTED.

THEY DON'T LIKE TALKING TO RANDOM PEOPLE IN THE STREET, LIKE WE DO.

THEN WHAT DO I DO?



COME WITH ME TO BASKETBALL, THAT'S A BUNCH GREAT GUYS!







FACT BOX

Relationships and Networks

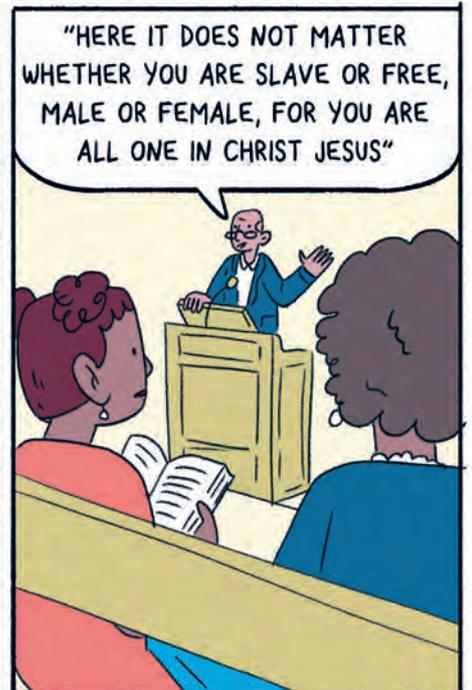
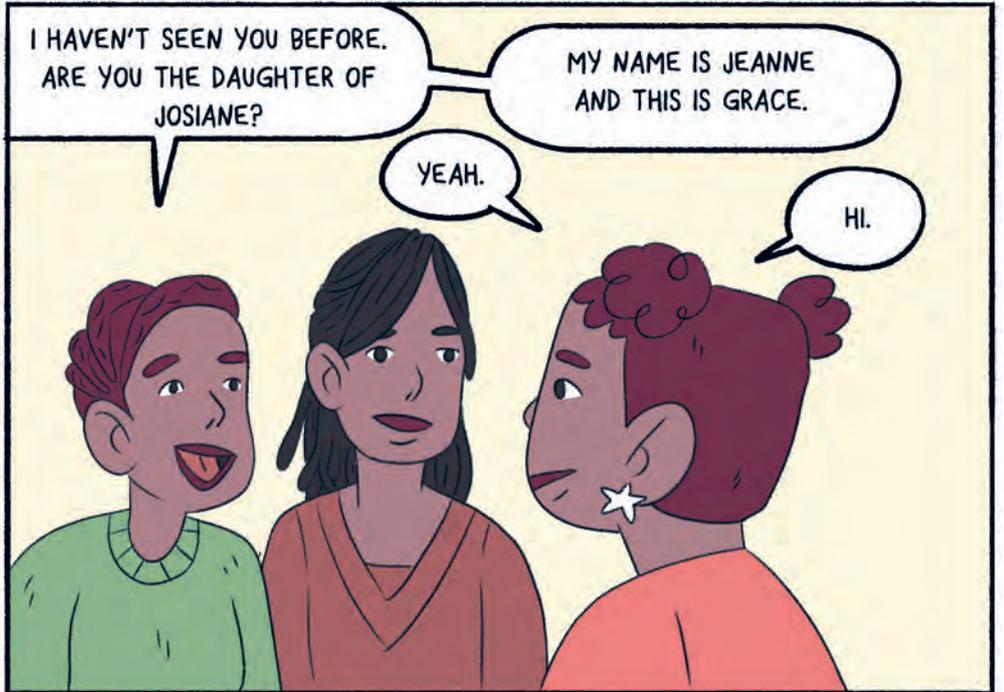
When families are resettled, it is only with their immediate family, which means, for example, that an adult woman is resettled with her children. In some cases, the woman may be accompanied by her mother and/or sister. Resettled families are provided with housing all over Denmark, but even if they know others who have been resettled to Denmark, they often end up living far away from each other. This means that families lose their networks from Rwanda. Therefore, it is important for many young people to create a new network in Denmark. Both to make new friends to hang out with, but also to be able to practise their Danish and learn how all kinds of things work in Denmark.

What do you think you would need help with if you had to live in the Mahama camp in Rwanda with your immediate family?











FACT BOX

Religion

Most of the families resettled to Denmark since 2021 are Christians from different denominations like Pentecostalism, Seventh-day Adventism, Catholicism etc. Many have therefore been used to and prioritised going to church, even while living in the UN camps in Rwanda.

After coming to Denmark, many families have become members of the local church and attend services regularly. The churches offer families a space where they can find peace, connect with a community and practise well-known traditions, and hymns are often sung in Danish and Kinyarwanda.

If you were to move to a completely new place, which daily routines or traditions would you like to keep up?

PREJUDICES

SIMON IS NOW ATTENDING A FOLK HIGH SCHOOL AND ENJOYS SPENDING HIS DAYS WITH SPORT, CRAFTS, AND CHOIR.

HEY HOW FOR JUTLANDIA HUN KOMMER SOM KALDET TIL SLAGET

HJEMME ER JÆGEREN HJEMVENDT FRA JAGT OG SØMANDEN HJEMVENDT FRA HAVET



WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THAT SONG ABOUT THE SHIP?

JUTLANDIA. IT WAS CREATED BY A GUY NAMED KIM LARSEN.

KIM LARSEN?

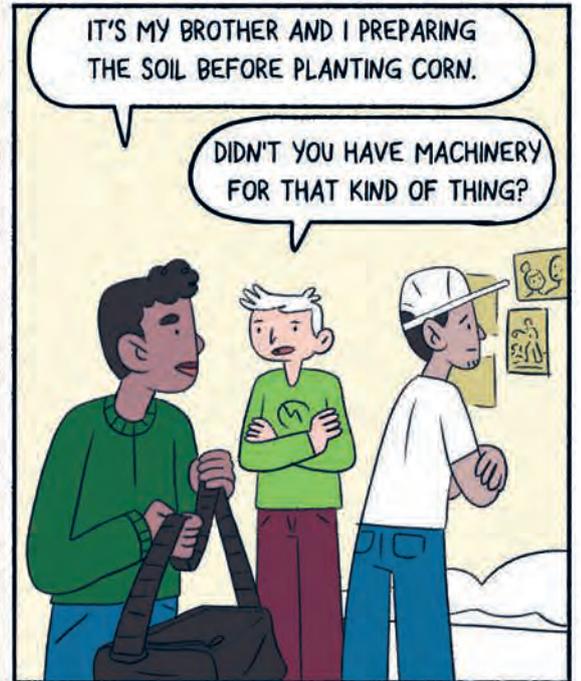
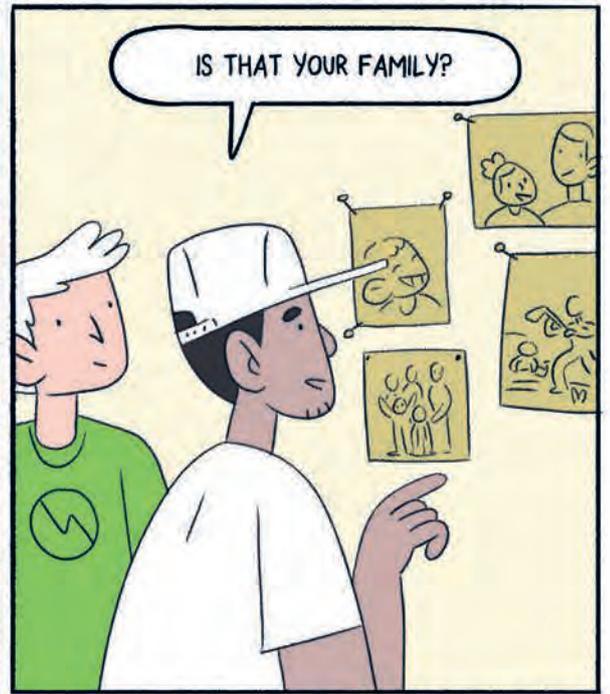
YOU GOTTA KNOW KIM LARSEN, MAN! HE IS LIKE SUPER ESSENTIAL TO DANISH CULTURE!

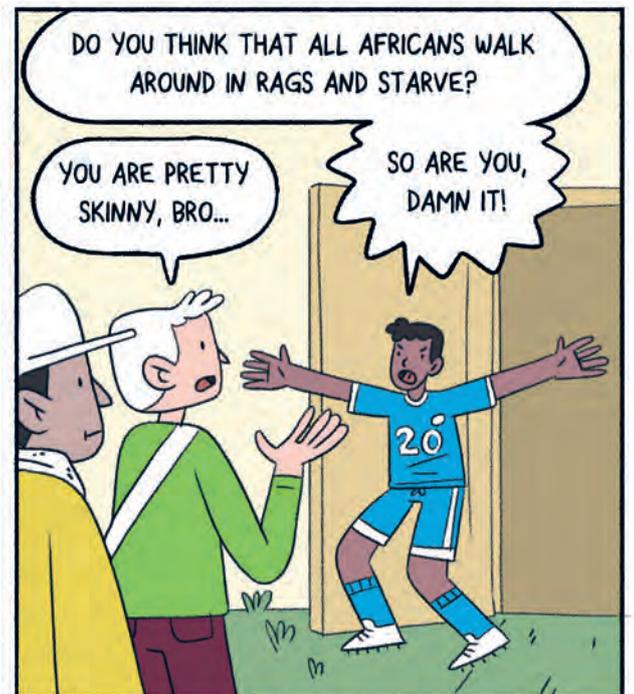
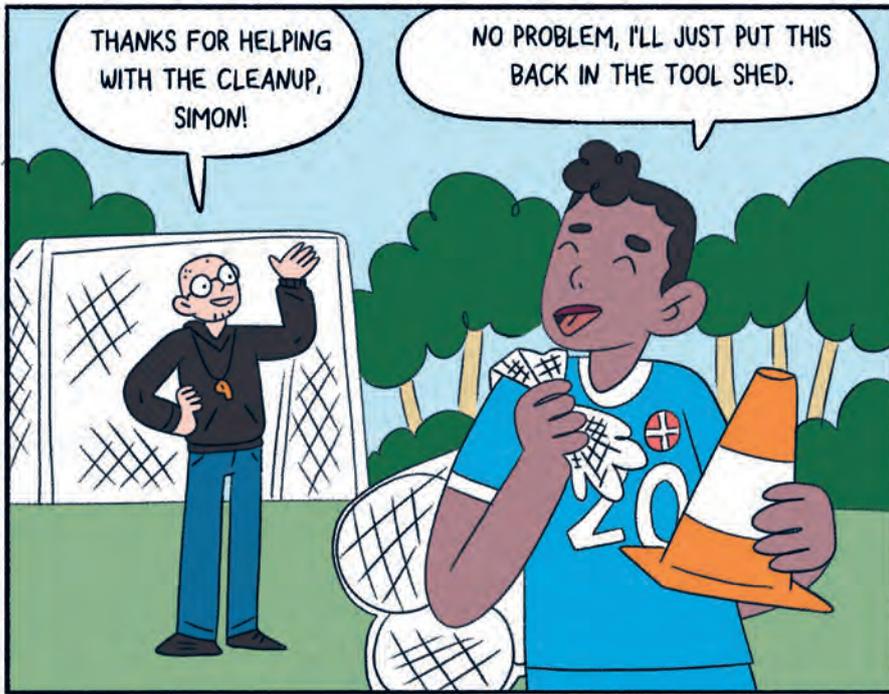


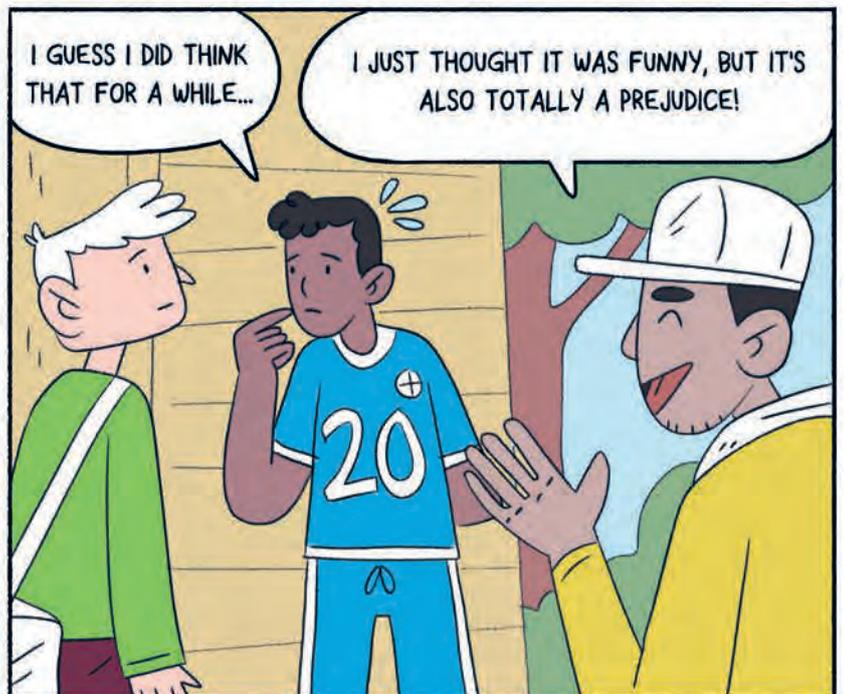
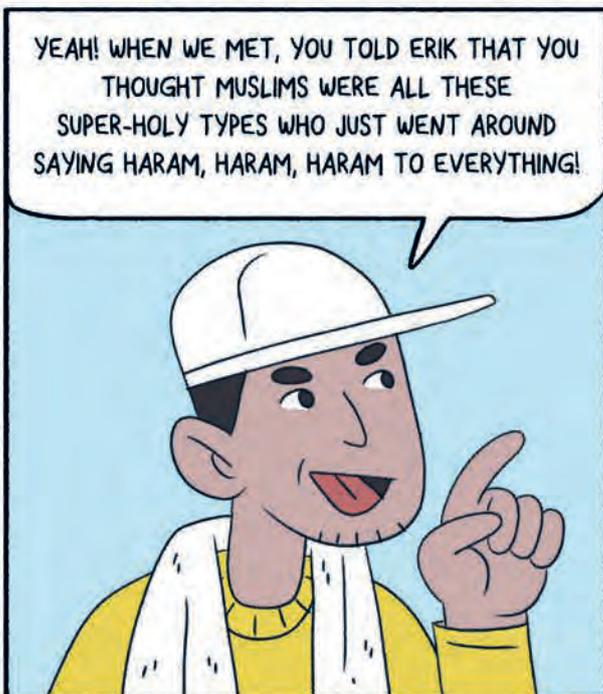
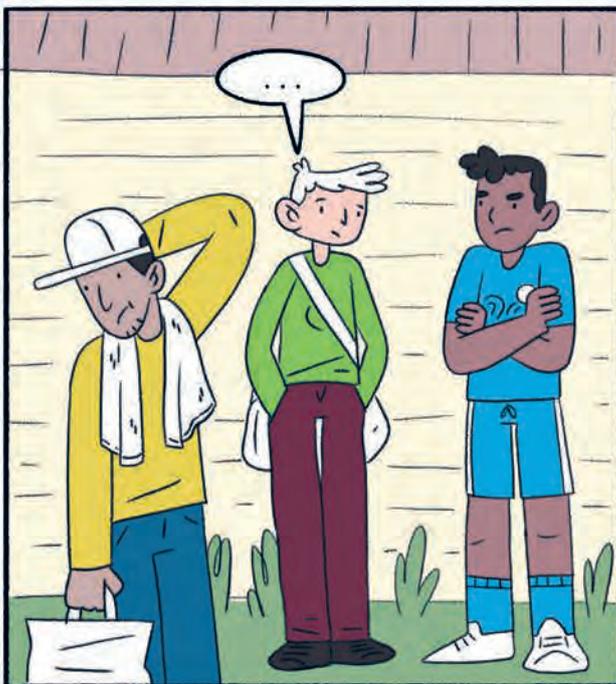
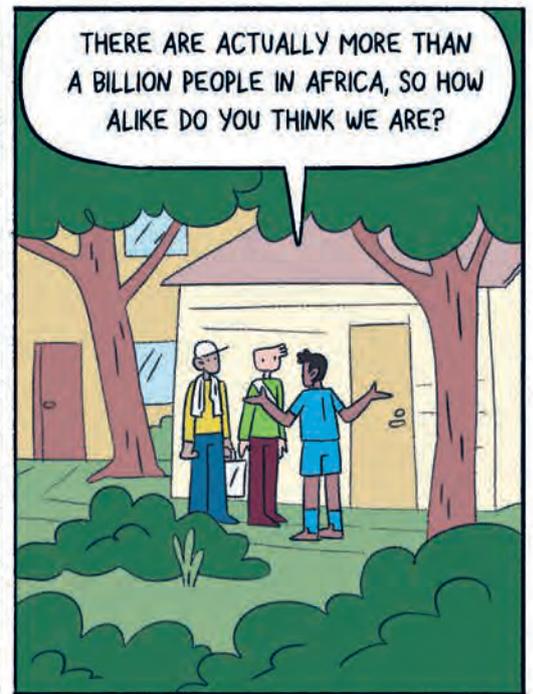
OK. KIM LARSEN, I'LL WRITE THAT DOWN FOR LATER...

IT'S REALLY COOL THAT WE SING SO MUCH. I LOVE LEARNING ALL THOSE DANISH SONGS.











YOU'RE COMPLETELY RIGHT. I'M SORRY, ISAM...

SO AM I, SIMON.



I GUESS WE SHOULD ALL BE CAREFUL WITH GENERALIZATIONS. EVEN WHEN THEY ARE NOT A SIGN OF ILL WILL...



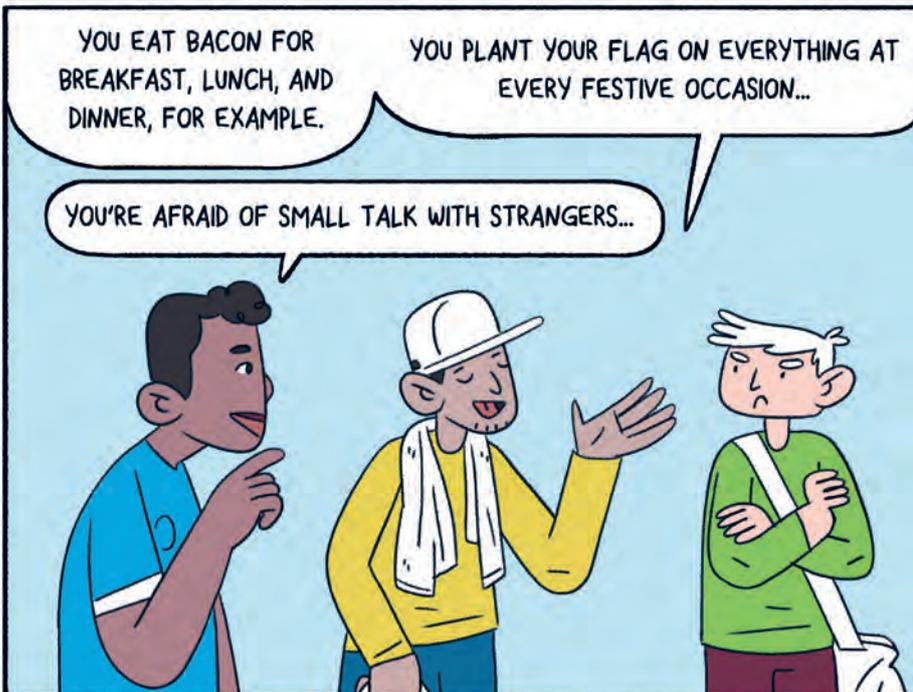
WHAT ABOUT ME? DID YOU HAVE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ME?



I DON'T THINK ANY OF MY PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE DANES HAVE BEEN DISPROVED...

HAHA!

WHAT?



YOU EAT BACON FOR BREAKFAST, LUNCH, AND DINNER, FOR EXAMPLE.

YOU PLANT YOUR FLAG ON EVERYTHING AT EVERY FESTIVE OCCASION...

YOU'RE AFRAID OF SMALL TALK WITH STRANGERS...



STOP BEING SUCH ASSHOLES!

HAHAHAHA!

FACT BOX

Prejudices

After their resettlement to Denmark, many young people are met with an expectation that they are different. Some find that their new classmates think that they behave in a certain way or have lived a certain way, just because they come from an African country. Such prejudices can make life difficult even if they are not necessarily a sign of ill will.

Perhaps you have had experiences of being treated in a prejudiced way yourself. How can you handle it in a good way? And how can you become more aware of your own prejudices?





UGH, EVERYTHING I OWN IS OLD AND CRUMMY!

IT'S EMBARRASSING TO BE THE ONLY ONE IN CLASS WITH A RUSTY BIKE AND SECOND-HAND CLOTHES...



YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR THE HELPFUL PEOPLE FROM CHURCH WHO GOT YOU ALL THOSE THINGS!



GRATEFUL? IT'S JUST A PILE OF OLD CRAP!

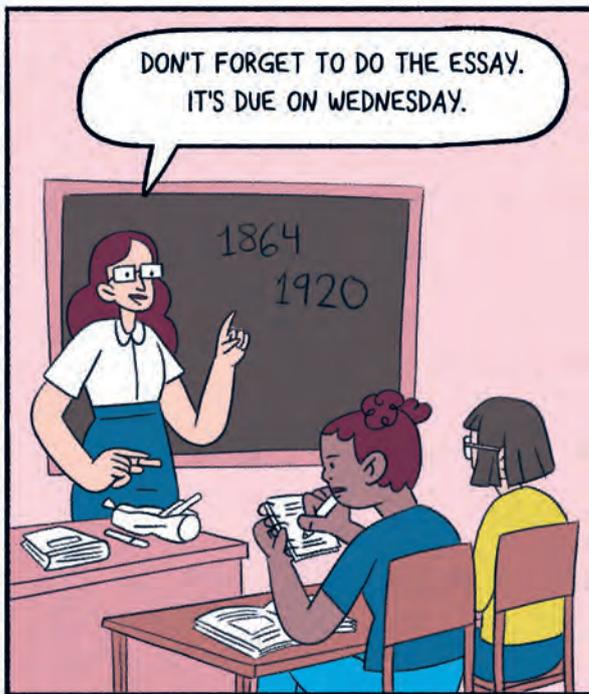


ESTHER! WHAT KIND OF LANGUAGE IS THAT!?



WHAT ABOUT MY HAIR?





DON'T FORGET TO DO THE ESSAY.
IT'S DUE ON WEDNESDAY.



SEE YOU
MONDAY.

EHM, HANNE? CAN I ASK
YOU SOMETHING?

SURE, ESTHER.



HOW DO YOU FIND
A PART-TIME JOB?

WELL... FIRST, YOU FIGURE OUT WHAT KIND
OF JOB YOU WANT, AND THEN YOU WRITE A
JOB APPLICATION EXPLAINING WHY YOU
WOULD BE GOOD AT THAT JOB.



I JUST WANT A JOB TO EARN
SOME MONEY.

IT'S NOT LIKE I HAVE
ANYTHING TO DO IN THE
AFTERNOON ANYWAY...



THERE'S OFTEN JOBS IN THE
SUPERMARKETS, BUT IS THERE
SOMETHING YOU'RE GOOD AT?

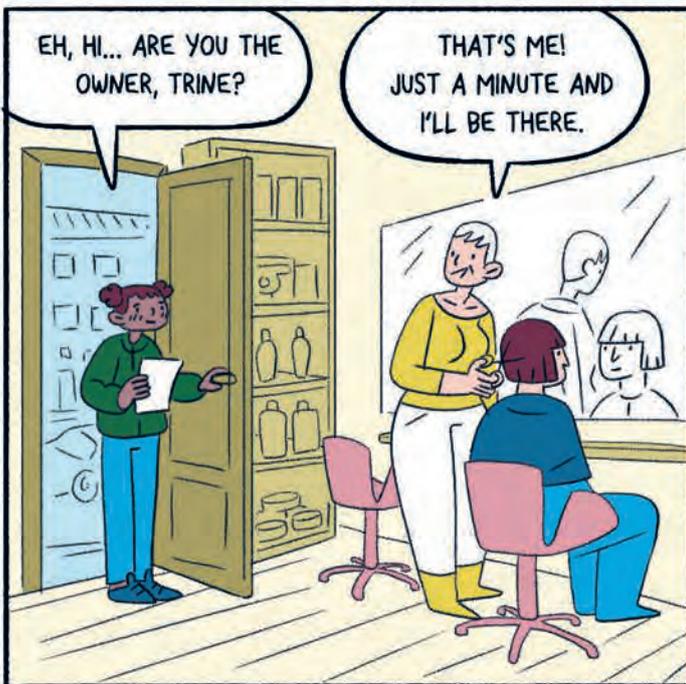
I LIKE TO DO HAIR!
AND I CAN MAKE REALLY
BEAUTIFUL NAILS!



THAT'S A GOOD PLACE TO START.



A WEEK LATER...



EH, HI... ARE YOU THE OWNER, TRINE?

THAT'S ME! JUST A MINUTE AND I'LL BE THERE.



IF YOU WANT A HAIR BRAID, MY FRIEND MIRIAM IS MUCH BETTER AT IT THAN I AM.

UM... NO... MY NAME IS ESTHER. MY TEACHER HANNE SAID YOU MIGHT NEED AN ASSISTANT?

OH YEAH, HANNE DID MENTION YOU!



UNFORTUNATELY, I DON'T REALLY NEED SOMEONE TO DO BRAIDS OR... "FILM TIKTOK VIDEOS"...



OH... OK...



I HOPE YOU'LL FIND SOMETHING ELSE.

THANKS.



FACT BOX

Financial Conditions After Resettlement to Denmark

Say Esther's family had been resettled to Denmark in January 2025, the family's finances would look like this:

Single mother with three children under the age of 18: DKK 13,557 before tax per month.

In addition, Esther's brother is entitled to benefits in his own right: DKK 2,925 (adult living at home, non-provider).

In July 2025, a new social security reform came into force, and if Esther's family had been resettled to Denmark after this date, the family's finances* would have looked like this:

- Cash benefits (minimum amount): DKK 6,789
- Child allowance: DKK 2,784
- Supplement for single parent provider: DKK 1,638
- Leisure supplement (tax-free but requires documentation): DKK 112.50 per child (up to three children)

Total: DKK 11,548,50 before tax per month.

In addition, Esther's brother is entitled to benefits in his own right: DKK 2,925 before tax (adult living at home, non-provider).

Child and youth benefits (child benefit) are awarded according to an accrual principle. After six months in Denmark, Esther's mother would be entitled to 8.3% of what a Danish parent receives in child and youth benefits. Only after six years would she be entitled to the same amount as a Danish parent.

What do you think your family's daily life would look like if you had to get by on what Esther's family receives a month?

*Source: Styrelsen for Arbejdsmarked og Rekruttering (STAR): <https://star.dk/implementering/nyt-kontanthjaelpssystem-inklusive-ny-arbejdspligt/om-ny-ydelsesstruktur-i-kontanthjaelpssystemet-mv>

THE FUTURE

HI TATE! CAN YOU SEE ME?

YES, SIMON - THE CONNECTION IS GREAT!

HOW DID THE EXAM GO?

GREAT! I HAVE PASSED ALL MY DANISH TESTS, SO NOW I CAN FINALLY APPLY FOR THE MECHANIC TRAINING PROGRAM!



AND I'VE GOT A GOOD JOB IN THE LOCAL SUPERMARKET.

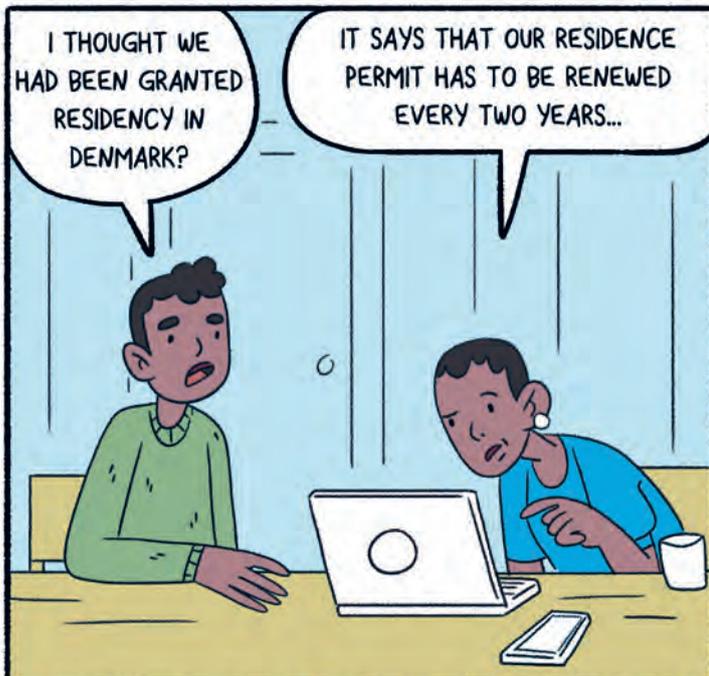
THERE'S A LOT OF YOUNG PEOPLE, AND THEY ARE REALLY NICE.

THAT'S GREAT, SWEETIE!

HUH?

BIB!











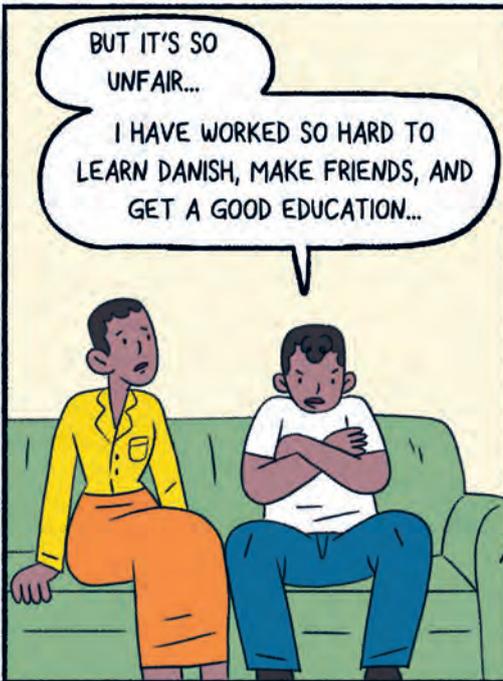
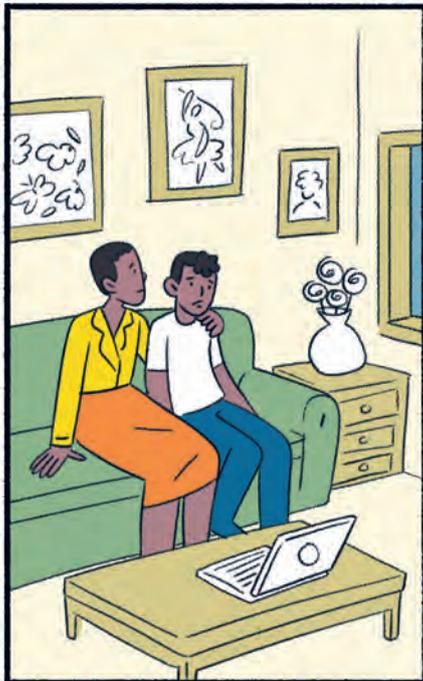
SIMON... LIFE HASN'T BEEN EASY FOR US...



BUT NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, RICH OR POOR, YOU LIVE IN UNCERTAINTY AND CAN'T KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE WILL BRING.



- AND IT'S VERY FRIGHTENING TO REALIZE THAT THERE ARE THINGS IN LIFE WE CANNOT CONTROL.



BUT IT'S SO UNFAIR... I HAVE WORKED SO HARD TO LEARN DANISH, MAKE FRIENDS, AND GET A GOOD EDUCATION...



...AND WE DON'T EVEN KNOW IF WE'LL BE ALLOWED TO STAY!



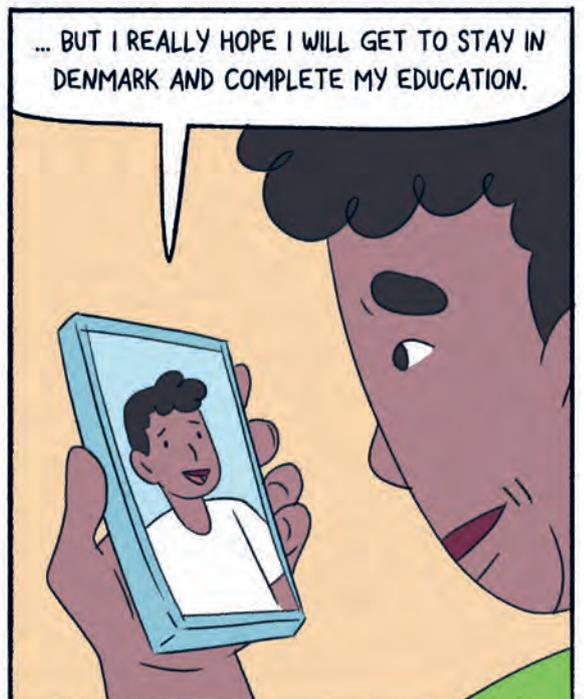
NO... BUT YOUR HARD WORK WILL PAY OFF IN SOME WAY...



AND EVEN THOUGH YOUR GRANDMOTHER MISSES YOU, SHE IS ALSO VERY PROUD OF YOU!
AND SO AM I!



THANKS MOM!



FACT BOX

Residence Permit

Families who are resettled to Denmark are only granted temporary residence, even though the UN recommends that governments grant permanent residence. After eight years, it is possible to apply for a permanent residence permit if you meet a number of conditions. This means that resettled families must apply to renew their residence permit every two years. Although they are unlikely to be denied a new residence permit, the process can lead to both confusion and uncertainty about their future in Denmark.

Why do you think Denmark grants temporary residence to quota refugees despite the UN's recommendation?



WELCOME EVERYONE!

MY NAME IS METTE KUSK. SOME OF YOU ALREADY KNOW ME, AS I OR SOME OF MY COLLEAGUES FROM THE UNIVERSITY HAVE VISITED YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES AND CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF MOVING TO DENMARK.



AND HERE ARE OUR TWO ILLUSTRATORS LINE HØSTRUP AND HUGO LIND.



ERIC IS HERE AS AN INTERPRETER, AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING YOU FIND DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND OR EXPLAIN, YOU CAN JUST ASK HIM IN KINYARWANDA.



WE HAVE INVITED YOU BECAUSE WE WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A SERIES OF SHORT COMICS ABOUT A YOUNG PERSON MOVING TO DENMARK FROM A REFUGEE CAMP IN RWANDA...

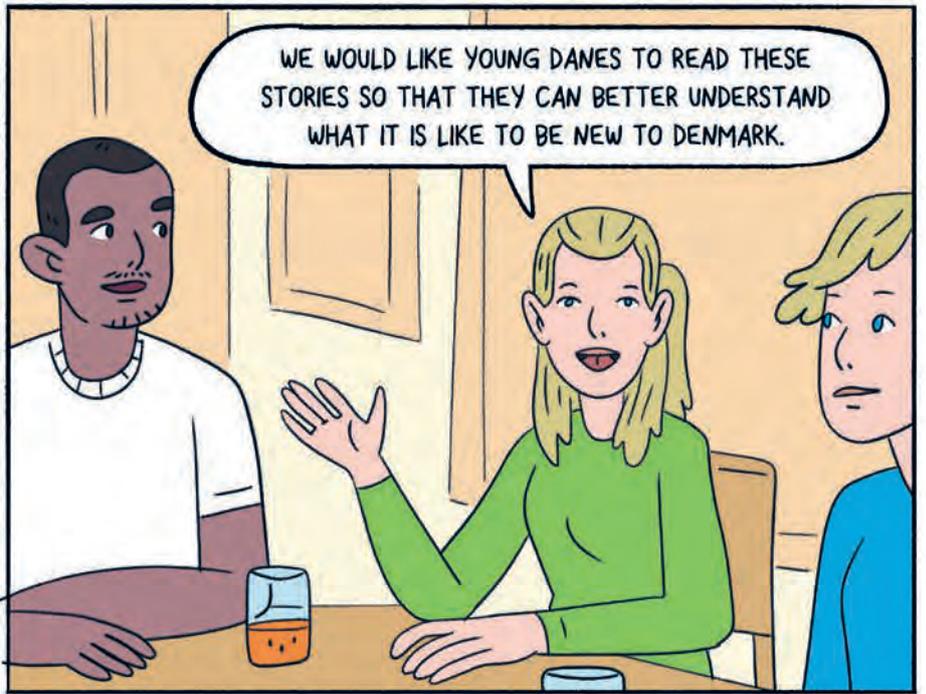


AND WE NEED YOUR HELP WITH THE STORIES BECAUSE YOU GUYS KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE.

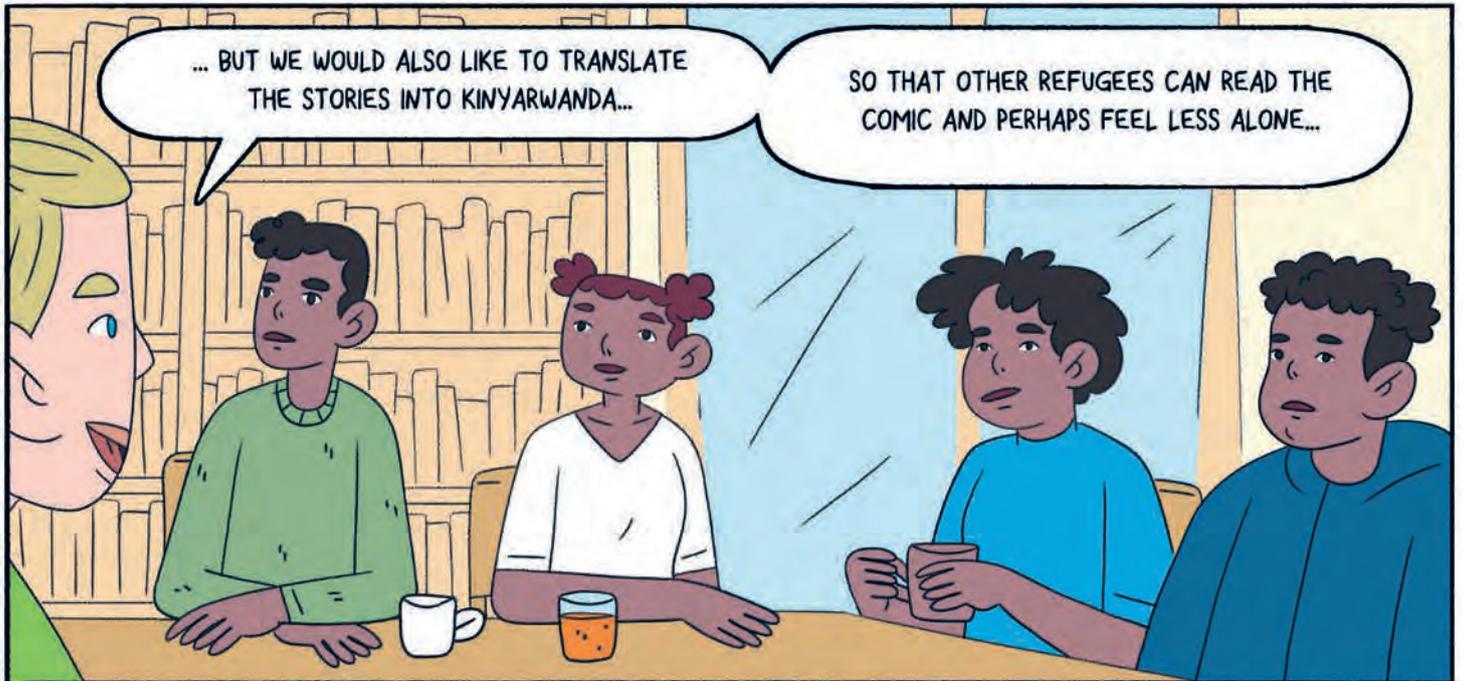




WHO WILL READ THESE STORIES?

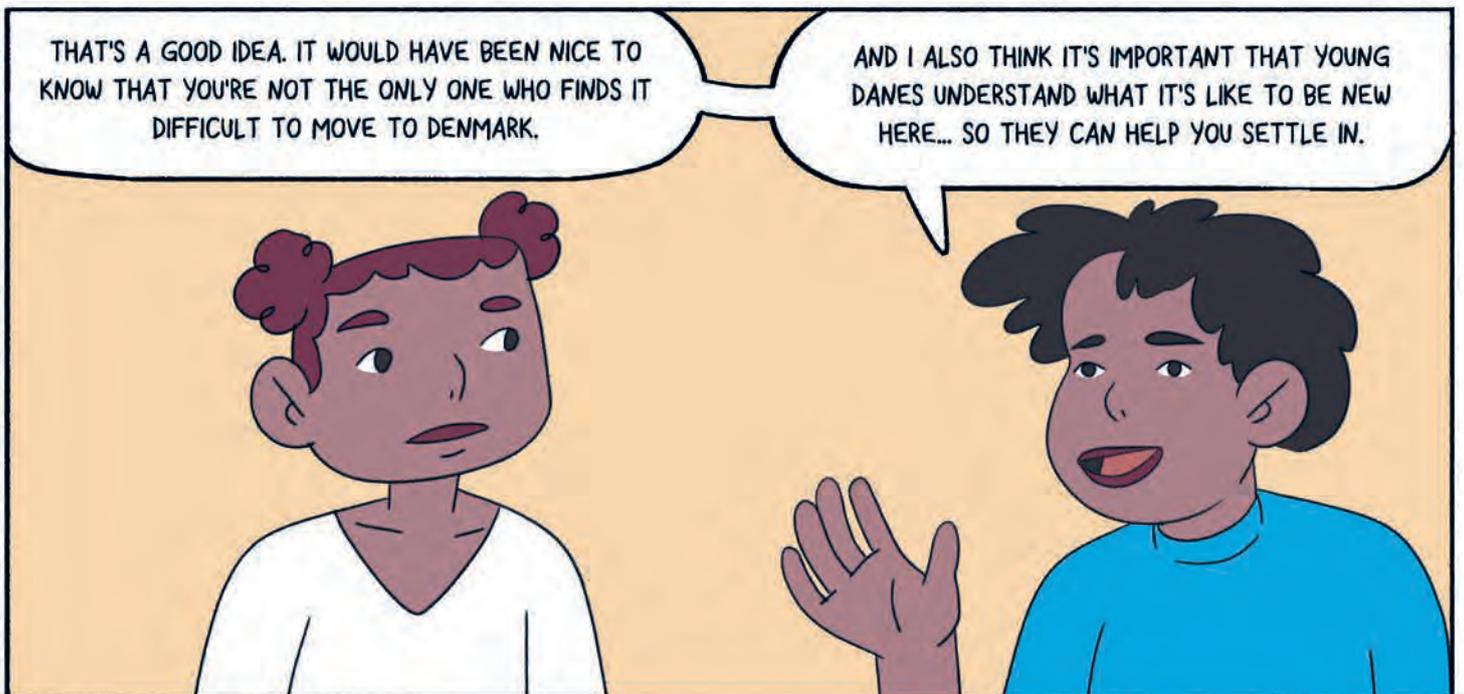


WE WOULD LIKE YOUNG DANES TO READ THESE STORIES SO THAT THEY CAN BETTER UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE NEW TO DENMARK.



... BUT WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO TRANSLATE THE STORIES INTO KINYARWANDA...

SO THAT OTHER REFUGEES CAN READ THE COMIC AND PERHAPS FEEL LESS ALONE...



THAT'S A GOOD IDEA. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN NICE TO KNOW THAT YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO FINDS IT DIFFICULT TO MOVE TO DENMARK.

AND I ALSO THINK IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOUNG DANES UNDERSTAND WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE NEW HERE... SO THEY CAN HELP YOU SETTLE IN.

WHAT WAS GOOD ABOUT STARTING SCHOOL IN DK?

WHAT WAS DIFFICULT ABOUT STARTING SCHOOL IN DK?

THE GOOD THING IS THAT THE OTHER STUDENTS MADE ME FEEL WELCOME.

THE FUNNY THING IS THAT ALREADY AFTER A MONTH, I'M LEARNING TO SPEAK DANISH AND HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH MY FRIENDS IN DANISH.

I WAS THE ONLY AFRICAN IN THE WHOLE CLASS. SOMETIMES I CRIED.

IT WAS PRETTY BAD BECAUSE I WAS NEW, I DIDN'T KNOW ANYONE, I WAS ALONE.

I LOVE MY FOLK HIGHSCHOOL. THEY TALK TO ALL OF US AND WE PLAY MANY DIFFERENT GAMES.

IT WAS FUN TO LEARN TO SPEAK DANISH, BUT I COULDN'T ALWAYS UNDERSTAND. SOMETIMES I ENDED UP LAUGHING.

IT WASN'T FUN. IT WAS A BIT HARSH. IT BOTHERED ME TO SEE THEM ALL LOVING EACH OTHER.

NO STUDENTS TALKED TO ME. I TRIED TALKING TO ONE, BUT IT'S DIFFICULT WHEN YOU DON'T EVEN SPEAK ENGLISH.

I FOUND IT VERY DIFFICULT TO MAKE FRIENDS...

... AND I STILL FEEL REALLY LONELY SOMETIMES.

I GUESS I'VE BEEN LUCKY TO MEET SO MANY NICE PEOPLE...

BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, I FIND IT HARD THAT THE FUTURE IS SO UNCERTAIN FOR US.



I DON'T THINK IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO GET MARRIED AND HAVE CHILDREN IF I STILL DON'T HAVE CITIZENSHIP.

MARRIED? DO YOU HAVE A LITTLE GIRLFRIEND, SIMON?

NO! I JUST MEANT IN THEORY...

HAHAHA!



IT TAKES A LOT TO MAKE A NEW HOME AND LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE...



YOU HAVE TO REACH OUT TO FIND NEW FRIENDS AND A NEW NETWORK, AND IT TAKES COURAGE TO ASK OTHERS FOR HELP WHEN LIFE IS DIFFICULT...



...BUT YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE IN YOUR DREAMS, EVEN IF THE FUTURE IS UNCERTAIN.



FACT BOX

Representation and Co-creation

Seven young people aged 15-22 years have helped create the stories about Esther and Simon based on their own experiences of coming to Denmark through the UN's resettlement programme. The voices and experiences of young people are thus featured in the graphic novel without them having to reveal their own identity. The process of gaining knowledge by creating something together with others is called 'co-creation'. Working with research and co-creation, knowledge arises through collaboration, and as a researcher, you do not have the exclusive right to decide how something should be communicated. Those who are subjects of the research also have a say in it.

Afterword: How You Can Help Refugees in Denmark

By Creative Director Morten Schwarz Lausten, Red Cross

The Red Cross engages with refugees from the time they arrive at the border, seeking asylum and protection in Denmark. Refugees, including quota refugees, who are granted a residence permit in Denmark must start creating a new life in the local community to which they move. The personal meeting between refugees and Danes can make a decisive difference to integration.

The graphic novel 'Perspectives. Life after fleeing' helps convey and explain the difficult situation of refugees, even if they have been granted a residence permit in Denmark. Refugees must learn a new language and new cultural codes, create a whole new network and find a new way of life.

The Red Cross has a long tradition of partnering with creative industries. These partnerships create awareness of our causes and areas of activity. But artistic presentations also provide readers with a language to talk openly about refugees, while at the same time giving refugees a voice. The graphic novel format combines text and images, making complex topics - such as the plight of quota refugees - more accessible and understandable to a wider, perhaps younger audience. The artistic and creative format of the graphic novel appeals to both emotions and intellect. It leads to a deeper level of reflection and understanding.

At the Red Cross we know that refugees who form friendships with Danes thrive better. They learn Danish faster, settle into the local community better and find it easier to develop a network. In many towns and cities, the Red Cross therefore offers opportunities for networking, socialising and practical support for newly arrived refugees.

You can also help refugees who have come to Denmark:
<https://www.rodekors.dk/bliv-frivillig/asyl-og-integration>



RØDE
KORS

Background of the Graphic Novel: Research on Reception of Refugees through the UN

The characters, situations and stories in the graphic novel are based on knowledge gathered during the research project Reorienting Integration (2022-2026), which is supported by the Velux Foundation. The project is a collaboration between Aarhus University, DRC Danish Refugee Council (Centre for Vulnerable Refugees), the Danish Centre for Social Science Research (VIVE), resettled families and selected municipalities. An advisory group with members from, for example, the Red Cross has made regular contributions to the project. The production of this graphic novel is supported by the Carlsberg Mindelegat.

In the project, a group of anthropologists from Aarhus University follow the reception of the approximately 200 quota refugees coming to Denmark every year. We follow them from when they arrive at their new homes and throughout their various efforts to build a life in their new home municipality and local community. As anthropologists, we are particularly interested in gaining insight into the experiences of families that are resettled to Denmark: what are their feelings about arriving in Denmark and their possibilities for creating a good life? Whereas there is a lot of political focus on quantifiable parameters linked to people categorised as refugees, such as employment, education and social interventions, as anthropologists we are more concerned with looking qualitatively at how families experience their new life compared to their past experiences and their dreams for the future. In this way, we shed new light on migration and the plight of resettled refugees. At the same time, we are interested in possible ways of involving the families as partners in the production of knowledge, and ways of voicing their perspectives, which is what the creation of the graphic novel is also about.

The Team and the Process Behind the Graphic Novel

The work on the graphic novel kicked off with a workshop in March 2024. Seven young people who had come to Denmark since 2021 via the UN's resettlement programme participated in a creative storytelling workshop. The workshop was organised by anthropologist Mette Lind Kusk and illustrator Line Høj Høstrup. At the workshop, the participants developed the characters and themes of the graphic novel together, based on their own experiences of coming to Denmark. Combined with knowledge from ethnographic fieldwork and the further development of narratives and visuals, the graphic novel came into being.

The young participants are not named for the sake of anonymity, but they deserve to be introduced: The three women and four men are between 15 and 22 years old and originally from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. After living in a refugee camp in Rwanda for a number of years they all came to Denmark in the years 2021-2022.

Having all lived in refugee camps in Rwanda, they have a lot in common, but they are also very different young people: for some, arriving in Denmark has meant joining new communities and new

opportunities for fulfilling their dreams, while others have experienced great loneliness, isolation and loss. Some have quickly made new friends and learned Danish, while others are still struggling. Some worry about what their lives will be like in the future, others are very excited and looking forward to all the things they want to try and do.

The stories about Esther and Simon have been developed during the storytelling workshop and in subsequent dialogues with the young people. For example, one of the young people provided very valuable input for a story about who Simon can get help from when in need of repairing his bike. During the workshop, one of the young people pointed out that it was not really help to repair his bike that Simon needed. Simon's experience doing workshop repairs meant he already knew how to fix it. But what he does not know is where to get hold of the right spare parts or the right tools in Denmark. That is what he needs help with. The example shows how the young people's input has added different perspectives to the stories: You do not lose all your skills or all your knowledge through being resettled. But it takes time to build networks and the specific knowledge about life in Denmark that enables you to put your skills and knowledge to use.

The result of the co-creation process is a graphic novel blending different voices, experiences and lines together in two fictional characters: Simon from Burundi and Esther from DR Congo. Hugo Lind, a student at Viborg School of Animation, has together with one of the young co-creators created the initial framework narrative, which takes place in a refugee camp in Rwanda. The other eight stories take place over Simon and Esther's first two years in Denmark, based on the experiences of the young participants.

Blending so many different voices to create just two characters has been a difficult exercise, and it has been impossible to fit everything in. The graphic novel should therefore not be seen as an exhaustive representation of the young people's experiences. On the contrary, it should be seen as a condensation of experiences that can take up time and energy for young people having to navigate a whole new life.

Why the Graphic Novel Format?

Creating a graphic novel has served a dual purpose. Firstly, the graphic novel format makes it possible to convey the experiences of young people to a wider audience without exposing them or forcing them to come forward. Their positions and perspectives can be voiced without revealing their identity. When working with young people in vulnerable positions, this is important for ethical reasons. Secondly, the graphic novel format is visually accessible both to the young people themselves and to a wider audience that may not know a great deal in advance about the challenges that young people may face following their resettlement. Using evocative images and not very many words, a graphic novel can convey experiential knowledge and touch readers in a special way. Through words, images and the use of colour, knowledge, feelings, thoughts and sensuous everyday experiences are blended. The graphic novel is research-based in that it is based on the real-life experiences of real people. Within anthropology, 'graphic anthropology' is a growing field*, which focuses on communicating ethnographic knowledge in visual formats. This graphic novel is a contribution to this field.

Find more Facts

The Danish Refugee Council has prepared a booklet (in Danish) with facts about the UN Refugee Convention, Denmark's adherence to the UN conventions and more:

<https://integration.drc.ngo/bliv-klogere/nyheder/nyt-haefte-25-sporagsmal-og-svar-om-flygtninge/>



Find other teaching resources with a focus on refugees: The Red Cross has produced a variety of teaching resources (in Danish) focusing on refugees and migration and tailored to different year levels, which can be accessed here:

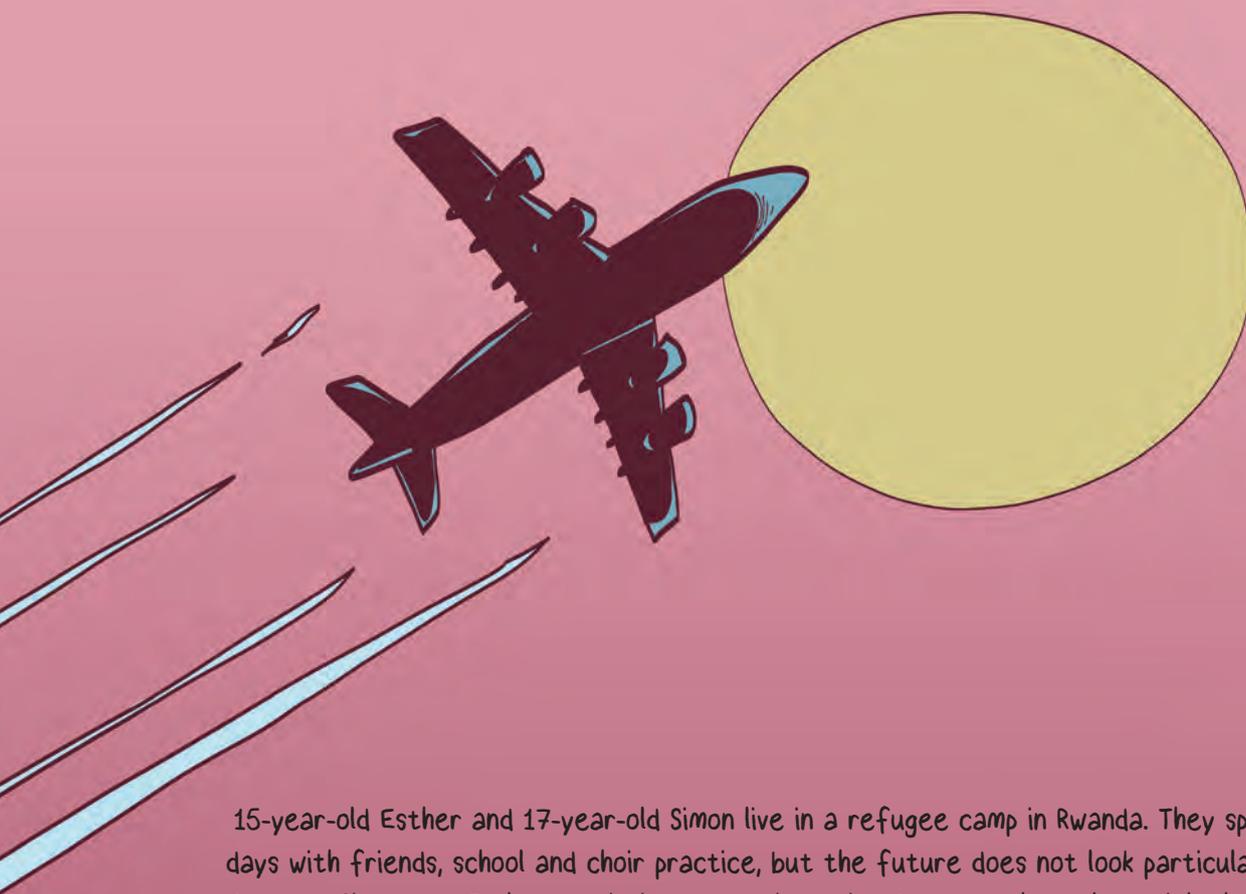
https://shop.rodekors.dk/collections/skoleshop?filter.p.product_type=Flygtninge



Thanks

We would like to thank Carlsbergs Mindelegat for supporting the production of this graphic novel. Also a big thank-you to the young people who have generously shared their experiences from a period of their lives marked by great upheaval and vulnerability. Thanks to the municipal employees who put us in touch with the young people and to all the people in our network who have taken the time to engage with us during the creation of the graphic novel. Special thanks to Mikkel Rytter for all his comments on our ideas and drafts. Also a big thank-you to the Red Cross School Service for the afterword. We would also like to thank the Velux Foundation for supporting practice-based research on refugees in Denmark.

*See, for example, Causey, A. 2017. *Drawn to See: Drawing as an Ethnographic Method*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press; Dix, B. & Pollock, L. (2019), Vanni. *A Family's Struggle through the Sri Lankan Conflict*. *New Internationalist*; Hamdy, S. (2017) *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution*. University of Toronto Press.



15-year-old Esther and 17-year-old Simon live in a refugee camp in Rwanda. They spend their days with friends, school and choir practice, but the future does not look particularly bright. One day, Simon and Esther are invited to an interview because they, along with their closest family, have been given the opportunity to be resettled to Denmark via the UN...

In this research-based graphic novel, nine short stories follow Esther and Simon from when they leave the refugee camp in Rwanda and during the first weeks, months and years after their resettlement in Denmark. Themes such as loneliness, friendships, prejudices and dreams for the future are illuminated through Simon and Esther's experiences.

Seven newly resettled young people with Congolese and Burundian backgrounds helped develop the characters and stories together with two illustrators and an anthropologist.



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