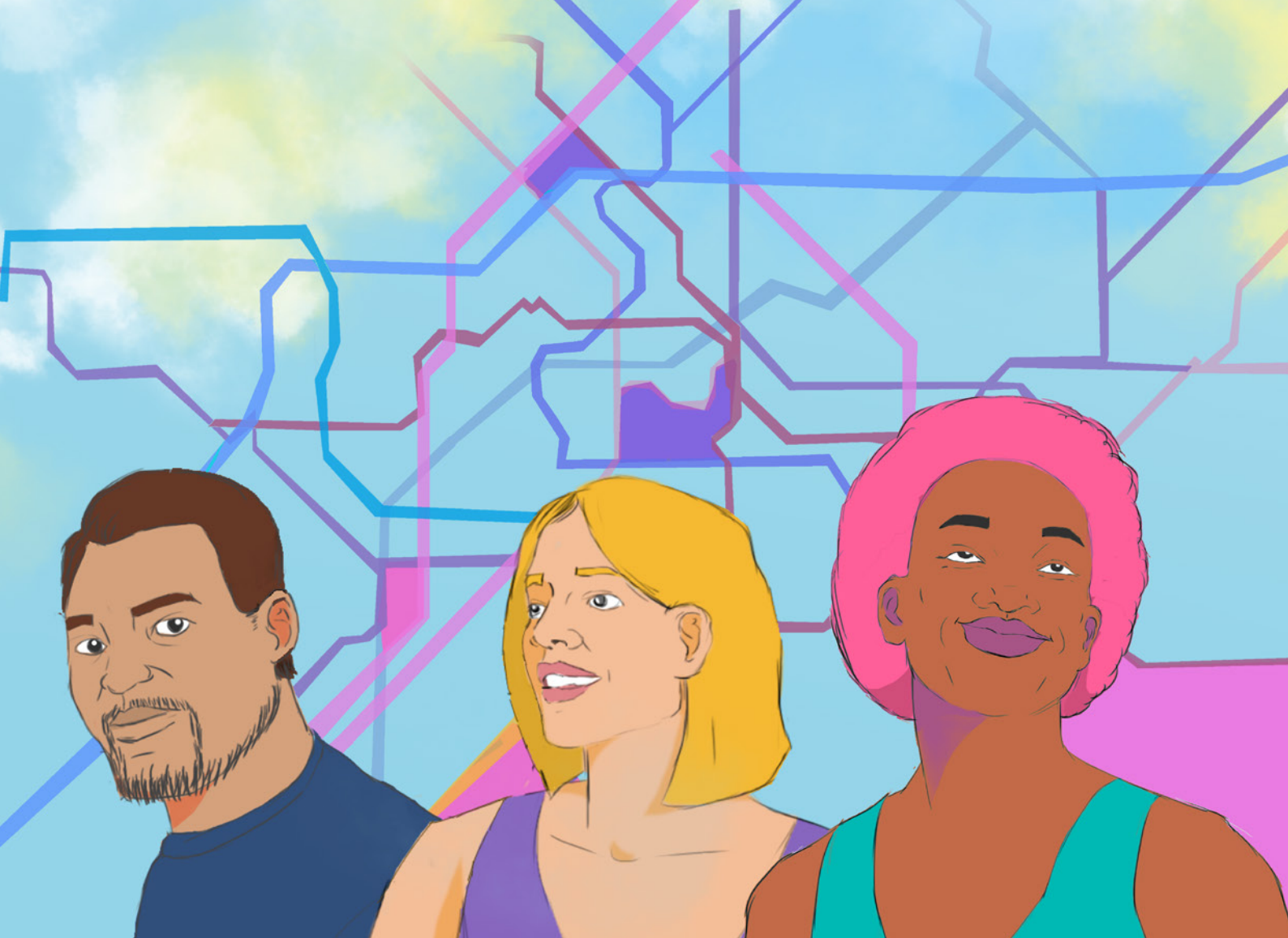
Martin
Roth
Initiative

What comes after relocation?
A comic about safe return and its alternatives

Artwork by
Charity Atukunda & Dianah Bwengye



This is a comic for people from civil society – **artists, activists, journalists, human rights defenders, and others** – who decided to temporarily leave their home country due to threats and persecution. Some readers might already be participants in programs that facilitate temporary international relocation or shelter. These programs provide support to civil society actors who undergo relocation for months or years because they have been surveilled, censored, or even violently attacked.

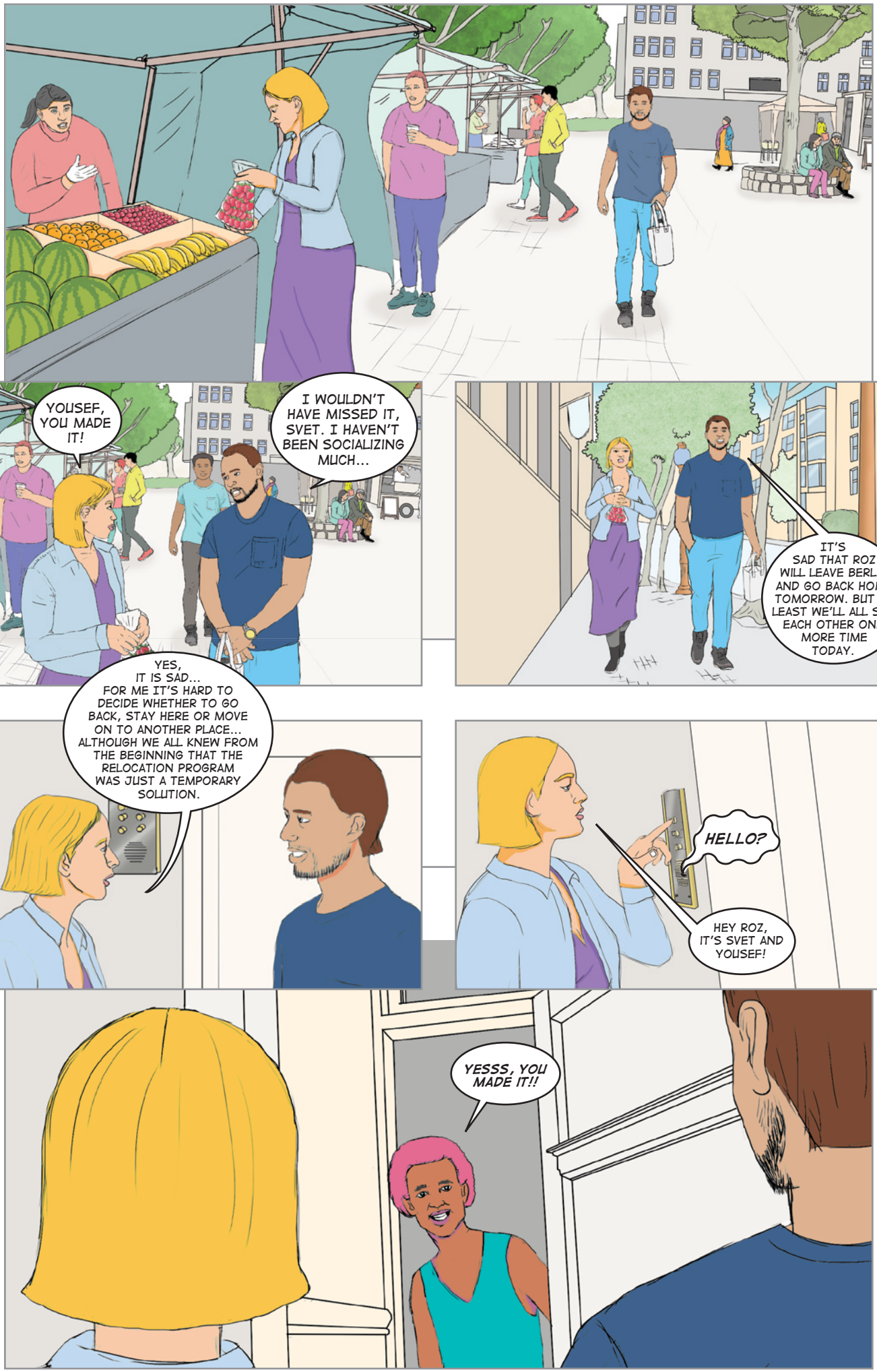
However, the duration of these relocation programs is always limited. Participants often struggle with the **question of what comes after the end of their funded relocation period.** Some consider it a possibility to return to their places of origin or other place of previous residence (in this comic, referred to as "home country"). But often the threat which made them leave has not (yet) disappeared. Many consider staying in their place of relocation to work or study, moving to a third country, or applying for another funding program or for other protection mechanisms. Unfortunately, in reality, the choices are often limited, and the decision-making process can be emotionally challenging.

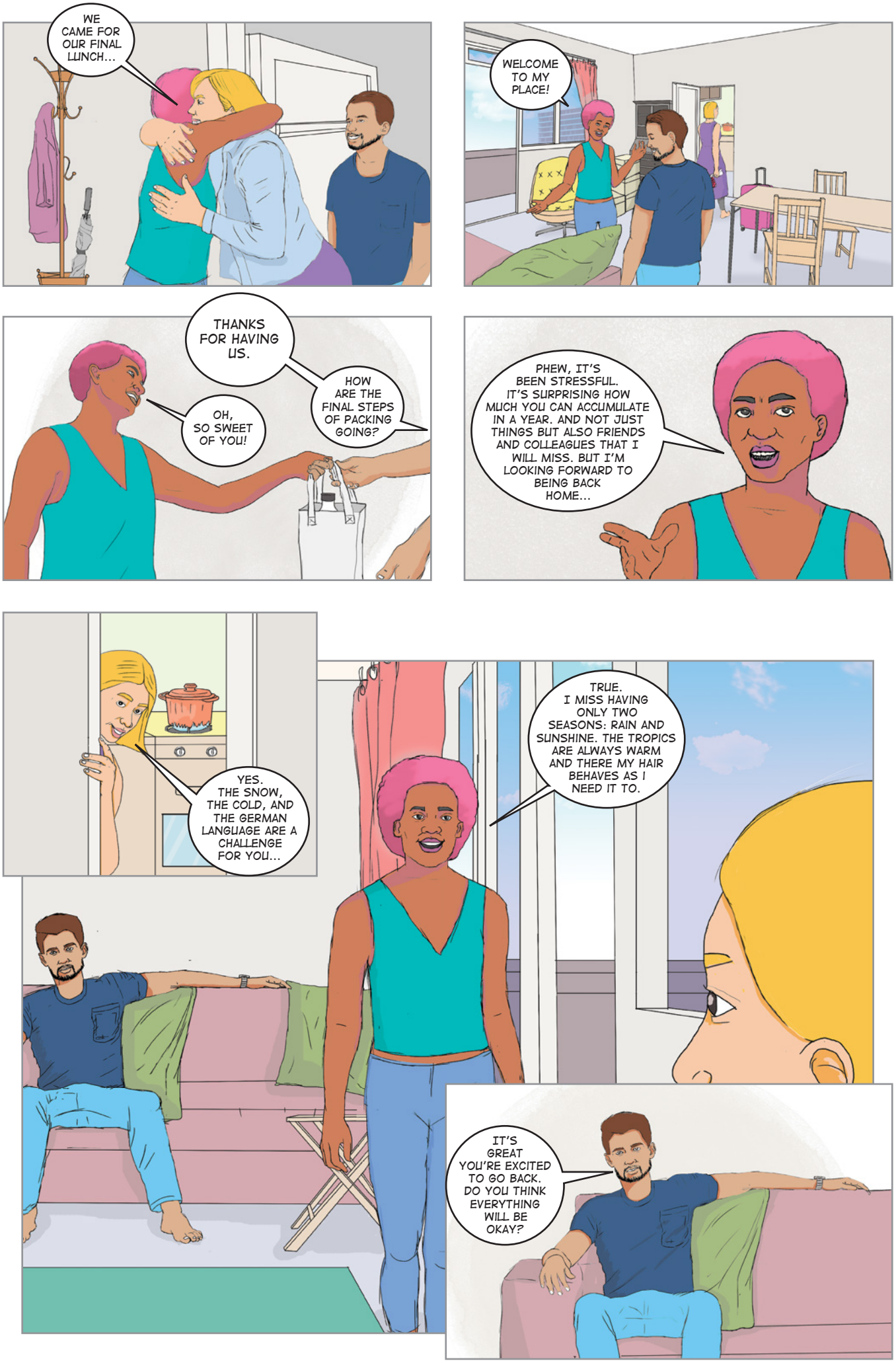
This comic aims to raise awareness for the importance and complexity of the question, "What comes after relocation?". It is meant to be an **initial guide to those who want to start thinking or talking about this question.** In the following story, three relocated people meet in Berlin: the activist Svetlana, the artist Roz, and the journalist Yousef. They all had to leave their countries due to continuing restrictions to their work and personal freedom. But there are differences between them: their professions, the situations in their home countries, their personal lives and identities, and their preferences and dreams for the future.

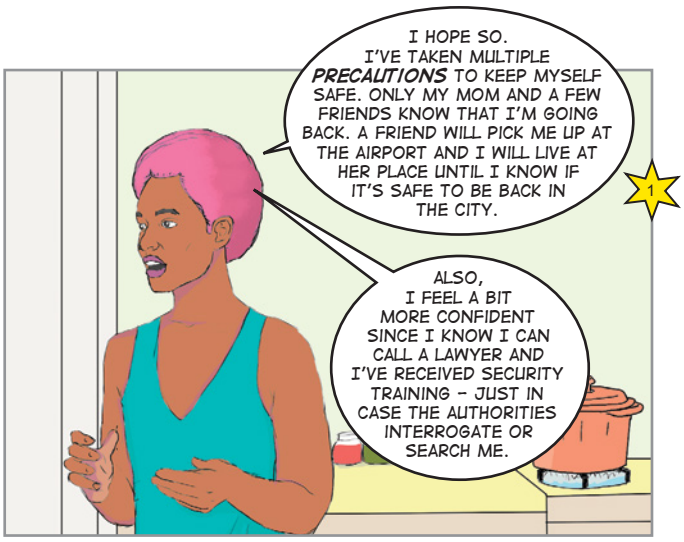
These three stories represent only a few of the diverse individual contexts, scenarios, and uncertainties that relocation participants might face. While Roz has already decided to go back home, Svet is unsure and is in the middle of a complex decision-making process. Yousef, by contrast, already knows that he will not go back and is looking for alternatives. The comic leads the reader through an exchange among the three, mentioning **some of the options they are considering and the tools that help(ed) them in the preparation and planning process.**

The most important of these **key words, concepts, and tools** are briefly explained in the "glossary" at the end of this publication. You can find them **with the help of numbered star icons.** Most of this information is based on a report published by the Martin Roth-Initiative – a Berlin-based relocation program for artists and cultural workers ("The Challenges of Safe Return: Supporting Civil Society Actors After Temporary Relocation" by Stanley Seiden, 2020; accessible here: **www.doi.org/10.17901/AKBP1.10.2020**).

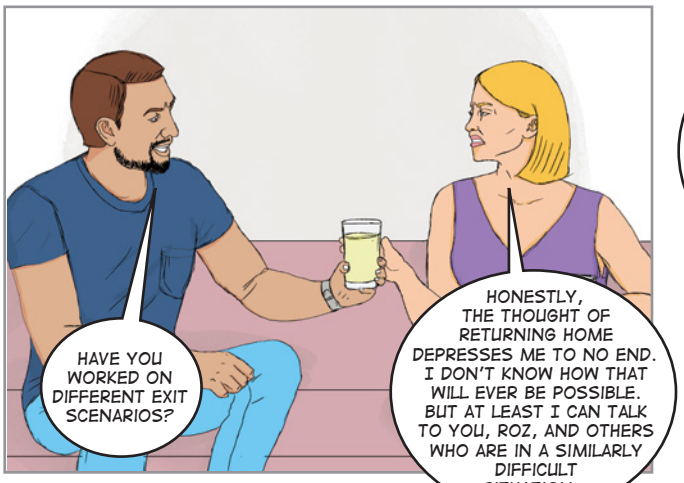
It's impossible to predict the future or make plans without staying flexible – particularly given the political, personal, or work-related uncertainties of life both in repressive and relocation contexts. But thinking about possible exit scenarios and regularly updating them – with the support of others – can help relocated persons **make informed decisions regarding their next steps.**


YOUSEF, YOU MADE IT!
I WOULDN'T HAVE MISSED IT, SVET. I HAVEN'T BEEN SOCIALIZING MUCH...
IT'S SAD THAT ROZ WILL LEAVE BERLIN AND GO BACK HOME TOMORROW. BUT AT LEAST WE'LL ALL SEE EACH OTHER ONE MORE TIME TODAY.
YES, IT IS SAD... FOR ME IT'S HARD TO DECIDE WHETHER TO GO BACK, STAY HERE OR MOVE ON TO ANOTHER PLACE... ALTHOUGH WE ALL KNEW FROM THE BEGINNING THAT THE RELOCATION PROGRAM WAS JUST A TEMPORARY SOLUTION.
HELLO?
HEY ROZ, IT'S SVET AND YOUSEF!
YESSS, YOU MADE IT!!

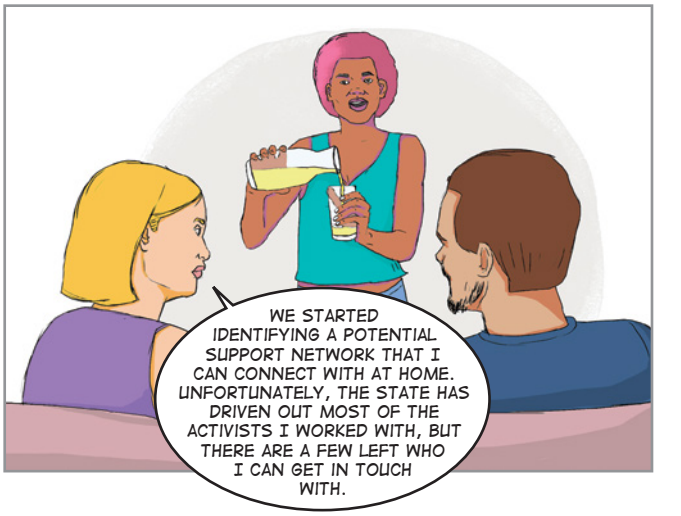

WE CAME FOR OUR FINAL LUNCH...
WELCOME TO MY PLACE!
THANKS FOR HAVING US.
OH, SO SWEET OF YOU!
HOW ARE THE FINAL STEPS OF PACKING GOING?
PHEW, IT'S BEEN STRESSFUL. IT'S SURPRISING HOW MUCH YOU CAN ACCUMULATE IN A YEAR. AND NOT JUST THINGS BUT ALSO FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES THAT I WILL MISS. BUT I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO BEING BACK HOME...
YES. THE SNOW, THE COLD, AND THE GERMAN LANGUAGE ARE A CHALLENGE FOR YOU...
TRUE. I MISS HAVING ONLY TWO SEASONS: RAIN AND SUNSHINE. THE TROPICS ARE ALWAYS WARM AND THERE MY HAIR BEHAVES AS I NEED IT TO.
IT'S GREAT YOU'RE EXCITED TO GO BACK. DO YOU THINK EVERYTHING WILL BE OKAY?

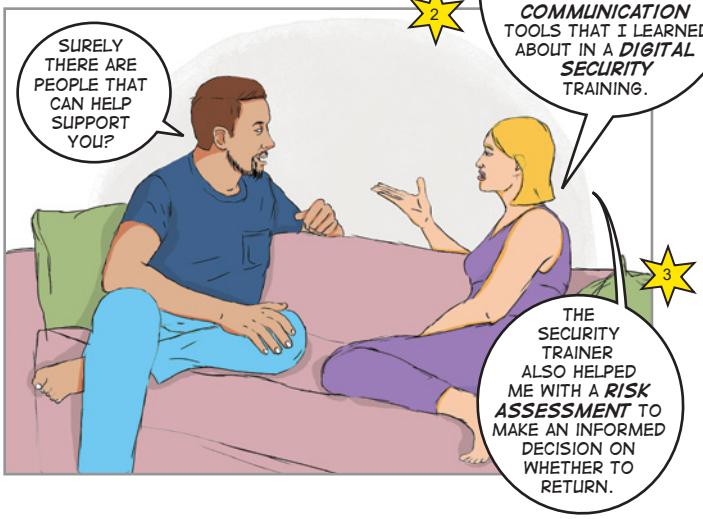

I HOPE SO. I'VE TAKEN MULTIPLE ***PRECAUTIONS*** TO KEEP MYSELF SAFE. ONLY MY MOM AND A FEW FRIENDS KNOW THAT I'M GOING BACK. A FRIEND WILL PICK ME UP AT THE AIRPORT AND I WILL LIVE AT HER PLACE UNTIL I KNOW IF IT'S SAFE TO BE BACK IN THE CITY.
1
ALSO, I FEEL A BIT MORE CONFIDENT SINCE I KNOW I CAN CALL A LAWYER AND I'VE RECEIVED SECURITY TRAINING – JUST IN CASE THE AUTHORITIES INTERROGATE OR SEARCH ME.

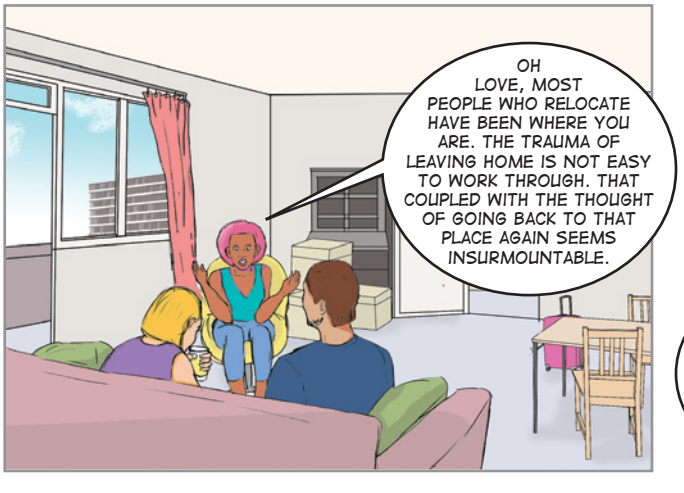
BUT SVET, LET ME HEAR HOW YOU ARE, TOO: HOW WAS YOUR MEETING WITH THE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION THAT'S HOSTING YOU?
OH, IT WAS FINE... BUT I JUST FEEL OVERWHELMED.

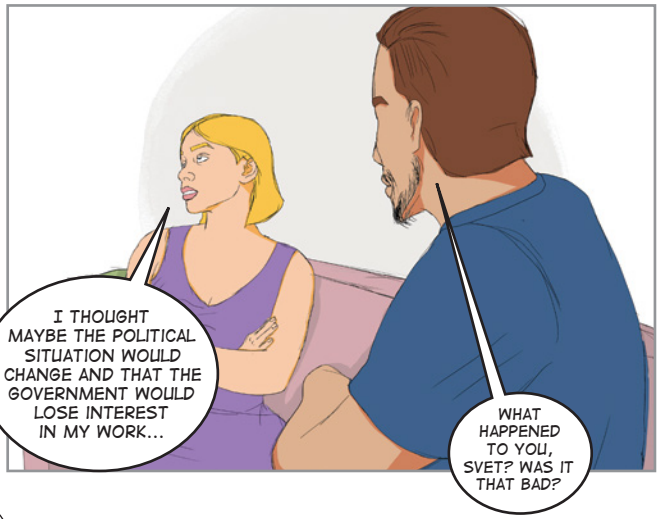

HAVE YOU WORKED ON DIFFERENT EXIT SCENARIOS?
HONESTLY, THE THOUGHT OF RETURNING HOME DEPRESSES ME TO NO END. I DON'T KNOW HOW THAT WILL EVER BE POSSIBLE. BUT AT LEAST I CAN TALK TO YOU, ROZ, AND OTHERS WHO ARE IN A SIMILARLY DIFFICULT SITUATION...

I WAS SHOCKED WHEN MY COLLEAGUE FROM THE HOST ORGANIZATION FIRST MENTIONED THE TOPIC OF RETURN BECAUSE I'D WANTED TO AVOID IT. BUT THEN WE BEGAN TO HAVE REGULAR CONVERSATIONS.
I HAVE A FEW FRIENDS WHO I STILL TALK TO. THEY KEEP ME INFORMED OF THE SITUATION AT HOME. WE USE ***SECURE COMMUNICATION*** TOOLS THAT I LEARNED ABOUT IN A ***DIGITAL SECURITY*** TRAINING.


WE STARTED IDENTIFYING A POTENTIAL SUPPORT NETWORK THAT I CAN CONNECT WITH AT HOME. UNFORTUNATELY, THE STATE HAS DRIVEN OUT MOST OF THE ACTIVISTS I WORKED WITH, BUT THERE ARE A FEW LEFT WHO I CAN GET IN TOUCH WITH.


2
SURELY THERE ARE PEOPLE THAT CAN HELP SUPPORT YOU?
3
THE SECURITY TRAINER ALSO HELPED ME WITH A ***RISK ASSESSMENT*** TO MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION ON WHETHER TO RETURN.


OH LOVE, MOST PEOPLE WHO RELOCATE HAVE BEEN WHERE YOU ARE. THE TRAUMA OF LEAVING HOME IS NOT EASY TO WORK THROUGH. THAT COUPLED WITH THE THOUGHT OF GOING BACK TO THAT PLACE AGAIN SEEMS INSURMOUNTABLE.


I THOUGHT MAYBE THE POLITICAL SITUATION WOULD CHANGE AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD LOSE INTEREST IN MY WORK...
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, SVET? WAS IT THAT BAD?

I KNEW BEING A WRITER AND ACTIVIST WAS NOT GOING TO BE EASY IN MY COUNTRY. BUT I DID NOT THINK THAT I WAS GOING TO FACE THE TYPE OF VIOLENCE THAT CAME MY WAY... SOME ARTICLES THAT I WROTE THAT WERE CRITICAL OF THE CENSORSHIP EXPERIENCED BY JOURNALISTS, ACTIVISTS, AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS STARTED GAINING TRACTION ONLINE AND THAT MADE ME VERY VISIBLE.

I'D ALREADY BEEN WORKING WITH WOMEN'S GROUPS ON CREATING SAFE SPACES IN THE CITY WHEN THE PRO-STATE TABLOIDS RELEASED STORIES EXPOSING MY PERSONAL LIFE. MANY OF THE PEOPLE I WAS WORKING WITH ISOLATED THEMSELVES FROM ME IN FEAR THAT THEY'D BE EXPOSED TOO. THEY FOUND WAYS OF PRESSURING MEDIA OUTLETS NOT TO PUBLISH ANYTHING I WROTE.

IT WAS WHEN THE PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT STARTED THAT I ACTUALLY BEGAN TO FEAR FOR MY SAFETY. RANDOM MEN WOULD FOLLOW ME DOWN THE STREET. I GOT DEATH THREATS. MY PARTNER BROKE UP WITH ME BECAUSE IT WAS JUST TOO MUCH.

THIS FEAR IS STILL HAUNTING ME, ALTHOUGH I KNOW THAT I'M PHYSICALLY SAFE AT THE MOMENT. BUT AT LEAST I COULD TALK ABOUT THIS WITH A ***COUNSELLOR***, WHO'S PAID BY THE RELOCATION PROGRAM...

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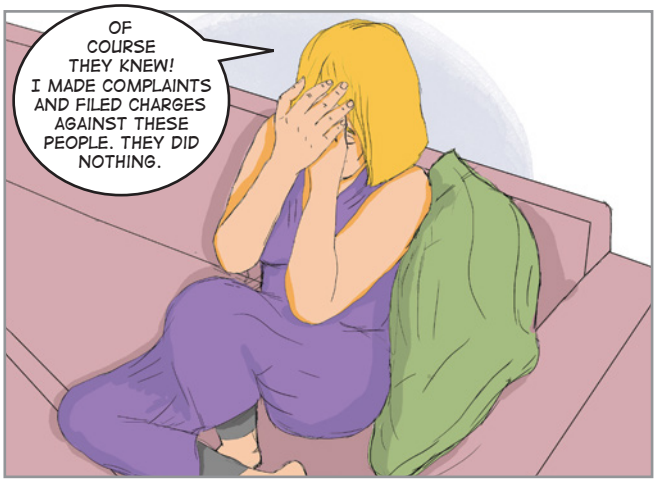
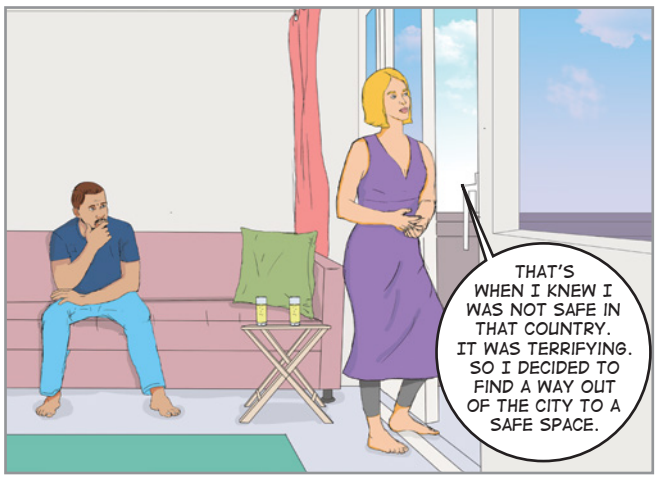
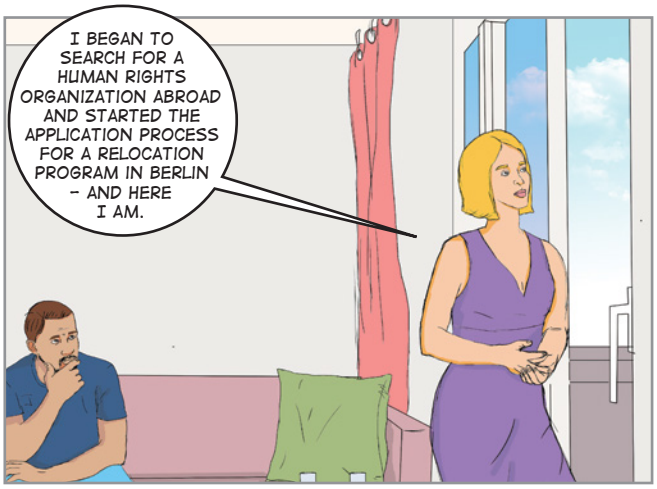
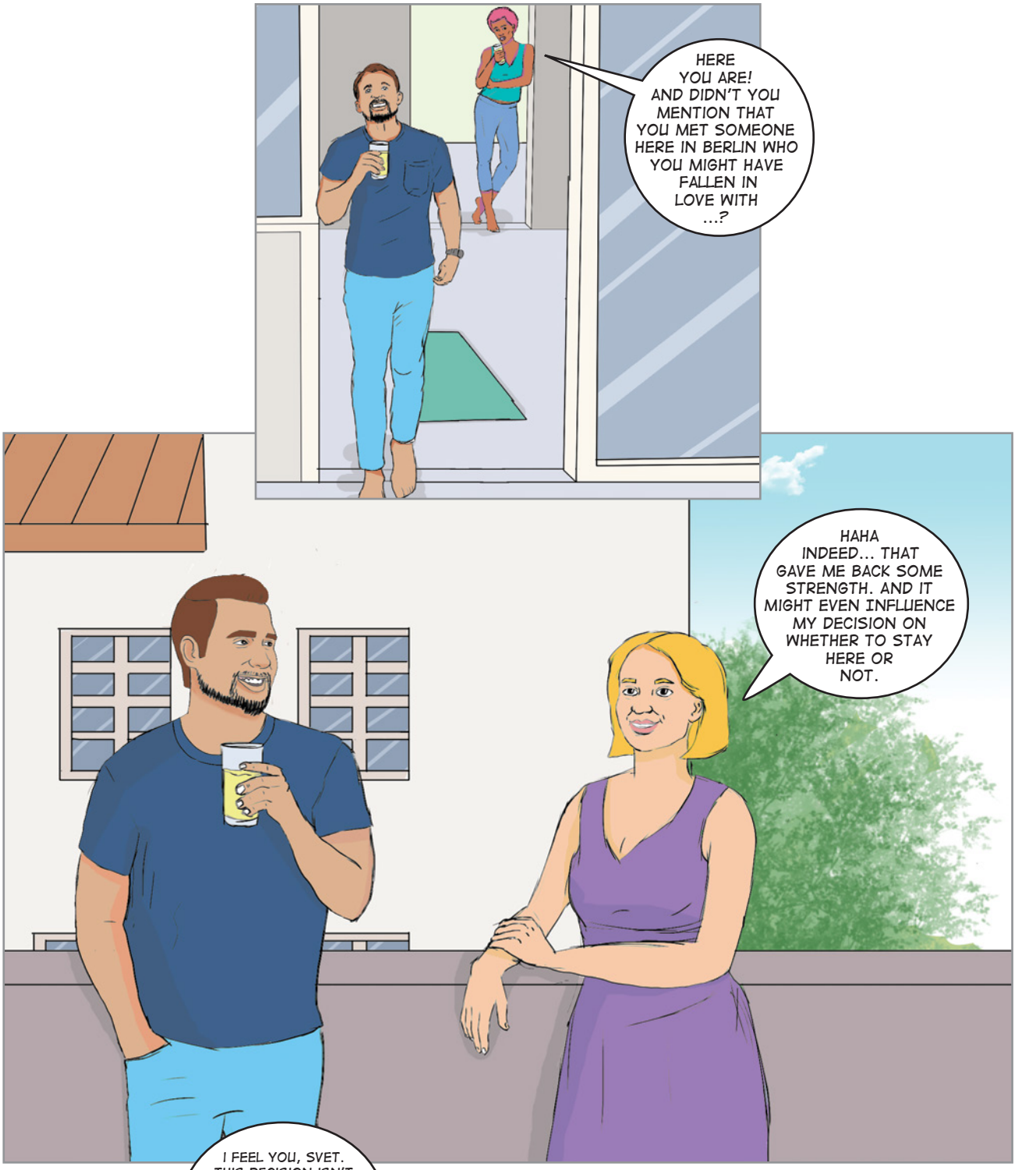
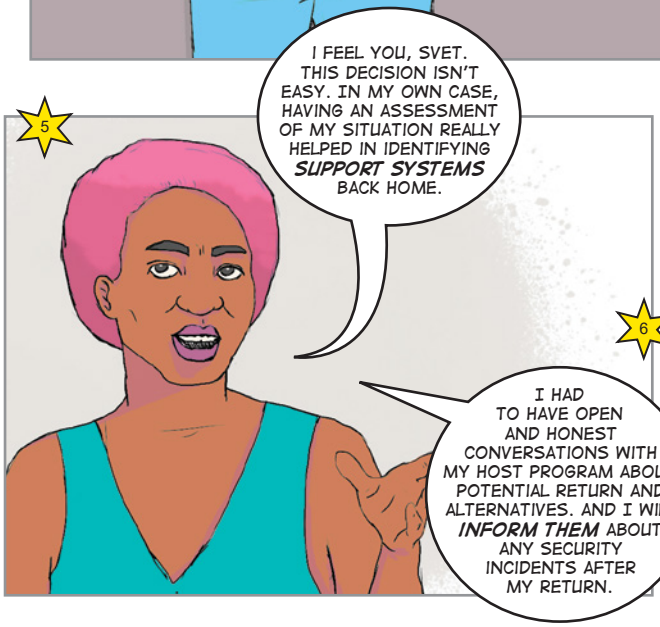
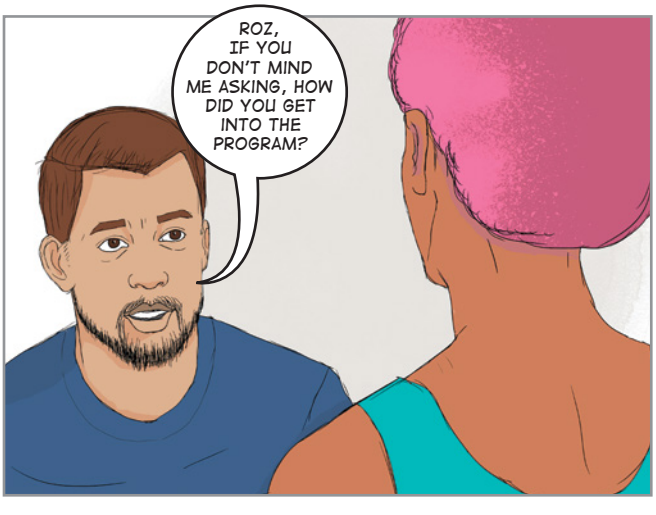







HERE YOU ARE! AND DIDN'T YOU MENTION THAT YOU MET SOMEONE HERE IN BERLIN WHO YOU MIGHT HAVE FALLEN IN LOVE WITH ...?
HAHA INDEED... THAT GAVE ME BACK SOME STRENGTH. AND IT MIGHT EVEN INFLUENCE MY DECISION ON WHETHER TO STAY HERE OR NOT.


5
I FEEL YOU, SVET. THIS DECISION ISN'T EASY. IN MY OWN CASE, HAVING AN ASSESSMENT OF MY SITUATION REALLY HELPED IN IDENTIFYING ***SUPPORT SYSTEMS*** BACK HOME.
6
I HAD TO HAVE OPEN AND HONEST CONVERSATIONS WITH MY HOST PROGRAM ABOUT POTENTIAL RETURN AND ALTERNATIVES. AND I WILL ***INFORM THEM*** ABOUT ANY SECURITY INCIDENTS AFTER MY RETURN.


ROZ, IF YOU DON'T MIND ME ASKING, HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE PROGRAM?

I APPLIED IN TANDEM WITH A GERMAN ARTS AND CULTURE ORGANIZATION THAT OPERATES IN MY HOME COUNTRY. WE WROTE A JOINT PROJECT PROPOSAL FOR THE PROGRAM. THEY HAD PREVIOUSLY HIRED ME TO CURATE AND COORDINATE SOME OF THEIR ARTS PROGRAMS.
YOU WERE A CURATOR BACK THEN?
I STILL AM! I HAVE PLANS TO OPEN A GALLERY BACK HOME. IT'S ALWAYS BEEN MY DREAM.
NOW WITH EVERYTHING I'VE LEARNED FROM WORKING WITH ARTS INSTITUTES AND THE CONNECTIONS I'VE MADE, I CAN FINALLY GET THAT OFF THE GROUND! I'M REALLY EXCITED ABOUT THAT!
THAT'S SO EXCITING, ROZ!
RIGHT!? ALSO SO MUCH HAS BEEN HAPPENING IN THE ART SCENE THERE. I CAN'T WAIT TO BE PART OF IT AGAIN!
7
SVET SAID YOU RAN A QUEER ARTS COLLECTIVE WHERE YOU LIVED. HOW DID YOU MANAGE THAT IN SUCH A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT?
IT WAS SO MUCH FUN DOING IT WITH MY FRIENDS. I WANT TO START THAT UP AGAIN, ACTUALLY...

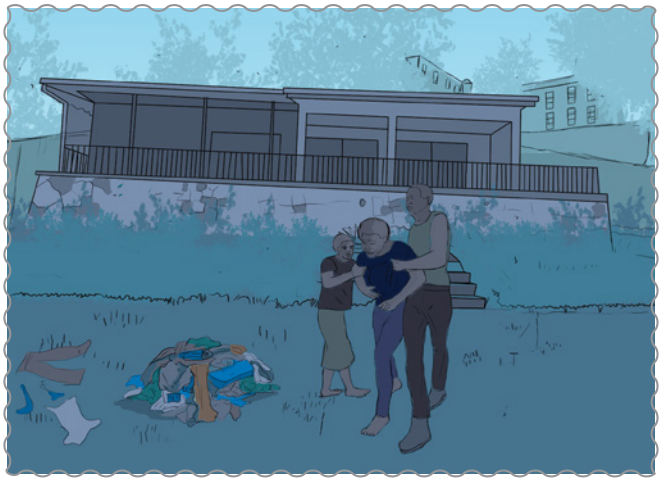
WHEN WE STARTED IT WAS COMPLETELY UNDERGROUND. IT WAS RISKY BUT WE NEEDED SPACES FOR US TO FEEL SAFE, CONTINUE OUR WORK AND MAKE ART. IT'S HOW WE STAYED TOGETHER WHEN PEOPLE HAD NOWHERE ELSE TO GO.

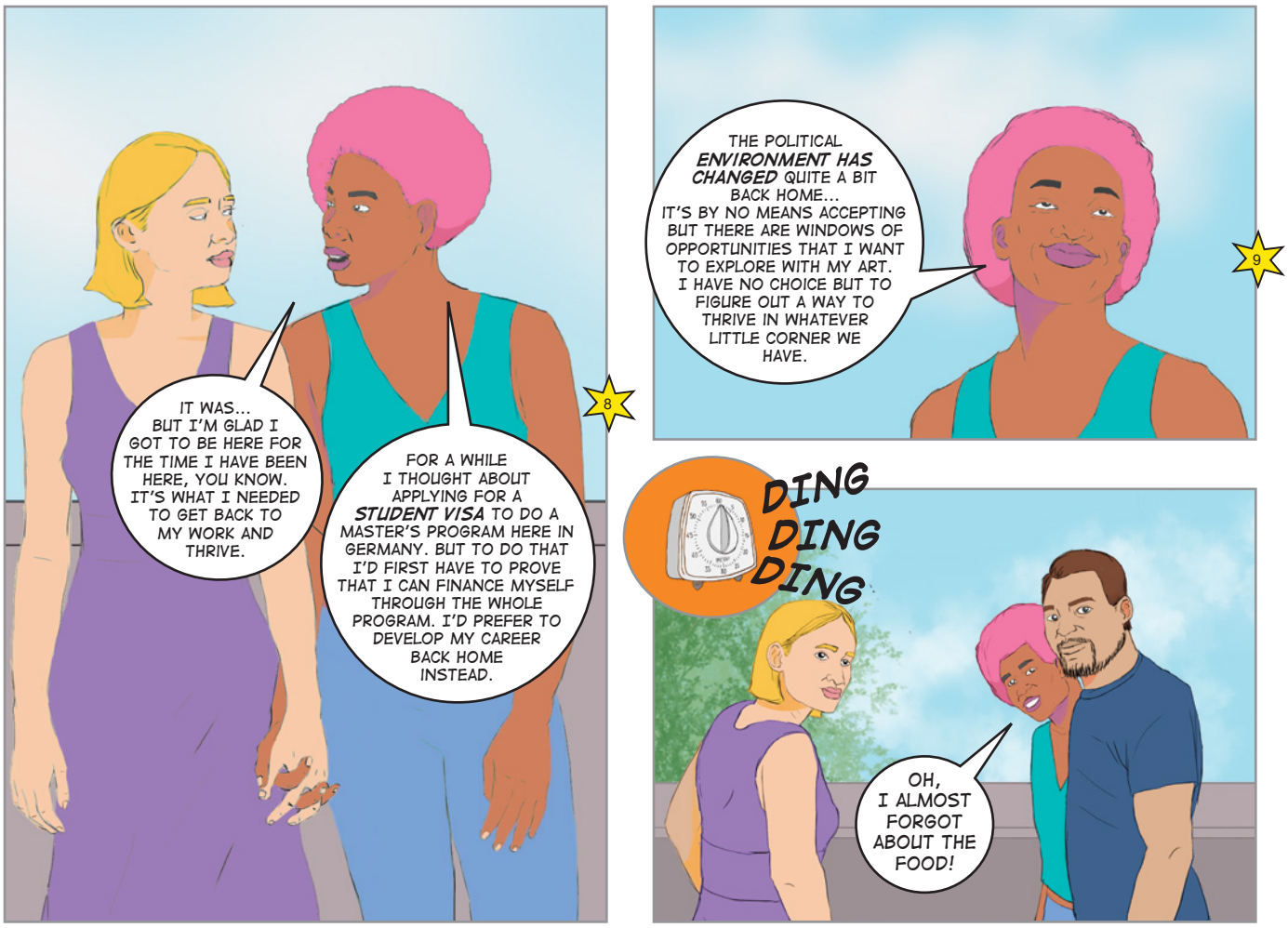
DURING THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS THERE WAS A LOT OF SURVEILLANCE OF THE QUEER COMMUNITY. WE OFTEN BECAME SCAPEGOATS TO DIVERT ATTENTION FROM OTHER SOCIAL ISSUES.

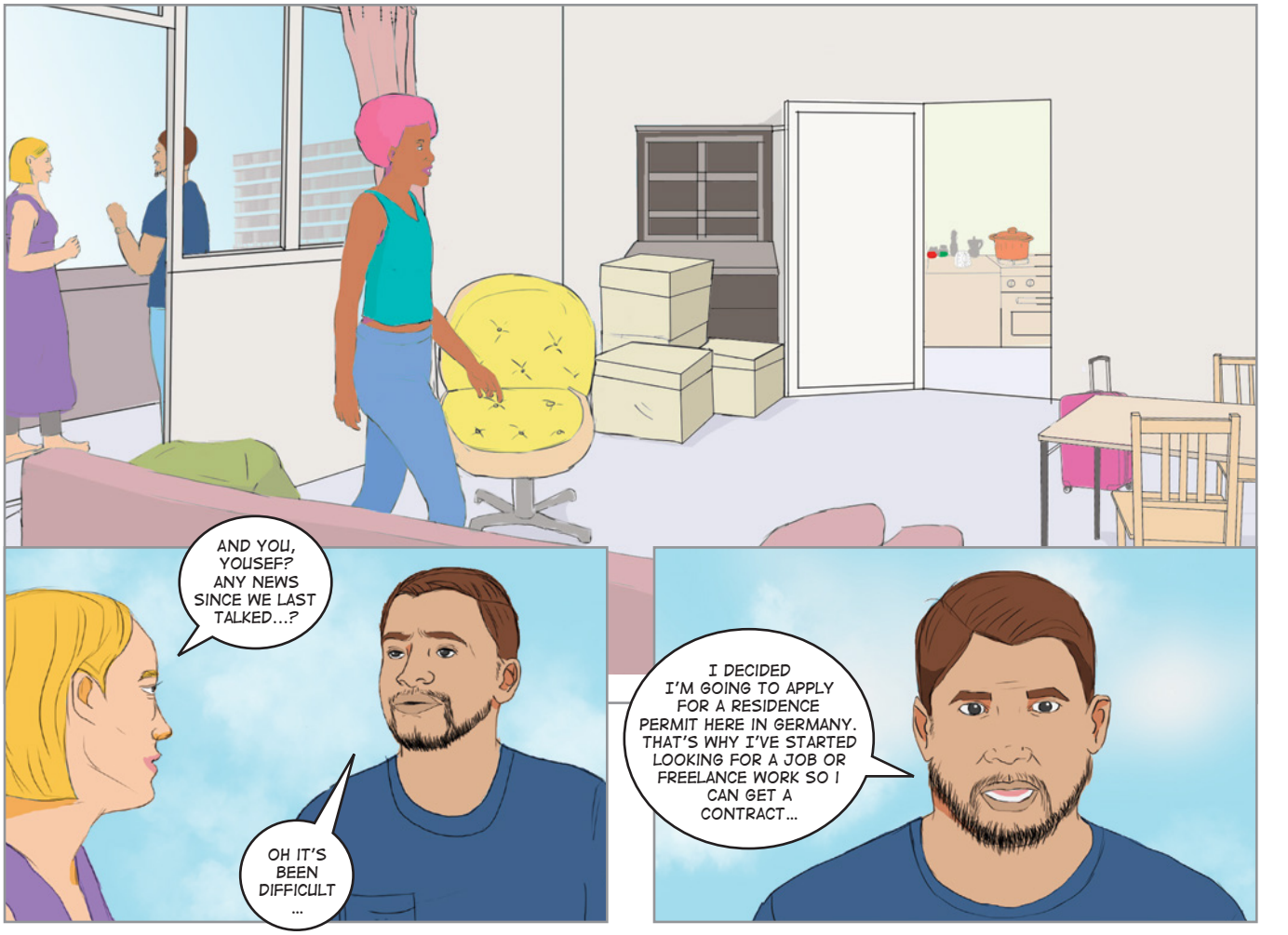
THEN MY LANDLORD FOUND OUT THAT I HAD PEOPLE LIVING AND WORKING AT MY PLACE. THE NEIGHBORS COMPLAINED BECAUSE VISIBLY QUEER PEOPLE WERE AROUND THE APARTMENT. THE POLICE SHOWED UP ONE DAY AND ROUNDED EVERYONE UP. IT WAS HORRIBLE... WE WERE RELEASED ON BAIL PAID BY A CIVIL RIGHTS ORGANIZATION.

I WAS THROWN OUT OF MY APARTMENT THAT DAY AND THE NEIGHBORS ROUGHED ME UP. I KNEW I HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO RUN. I COULDN'T GO TO MY FAMILY. THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN HARASSED TOO.

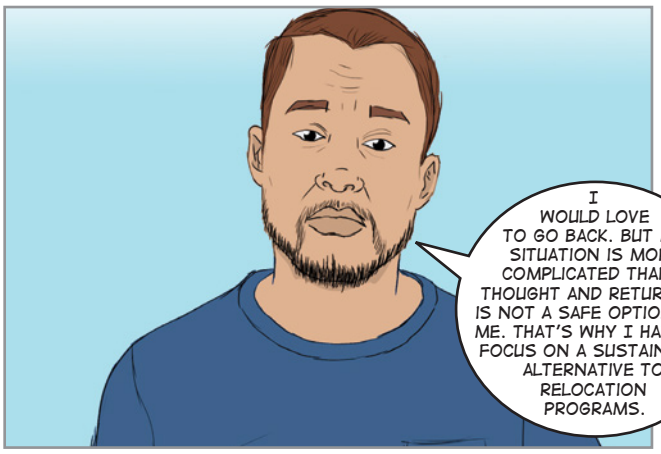
SO I REACHED OUT TO A SMALL QUEER ORGANIZATION FOR SHELTER. THEN THE ARTS ORGANIZATION I WAS WORKING WITH HELPED ME GET INTO THE PROGRAM.




IT WAS... BUT I'M GLAD I GOT TO BE HERE FOR THE TIME I HAVE BEEN HERE, YOU KNOW. IT'S WHAT I NEEDED TO GET BACK TO MY WORK AND THRIVE.
FOR A WHILE I THOUGHT ABOUT APPLYING FOR A ***STUDENT VISA*** TO DO A MASTER'S PROGRAM HERE IN GERMANY. BUT TO DO THAT I'D FIRST HAVE TO PROVE THAT I CAN FINANCE MYSELF THROUGH THE WHOLE PROGRAM. I'D PREFER TO DEVELOP MY CAREER BACK HOME INSTEAD.
8
THE POLITICAL ***ENVIRONMENT HAS CHANGED*** QUITE A BIT BACK HOME... IT'S BY NO MEANS ACCEPTING BUT THERE ARE WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITIES THAT I WANT TO EXPLORE WITH MY ART. I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO FIGURE OUT A WAY TO THRIVE IN WHATEVER LITTLE CORNER WE HAVE.
9
DING DING DING
OH, I ALMOST FORGOT ABOUT THE FOOD!


AND YOU, YOUSEF? ANY NEWS SINCE WE LAST TALKED...?
OH IT'S BEEN DIFFICULT ...
I DECIDED I'M GOING TO APPLY FOR A RESIDENCE PERMIT HERE IN GERMANY. THAT'S WHY I'VE STARTED LOOKING FOR A JOB OR FREELANCE WORK SO I CAN GET A CONTRACT...

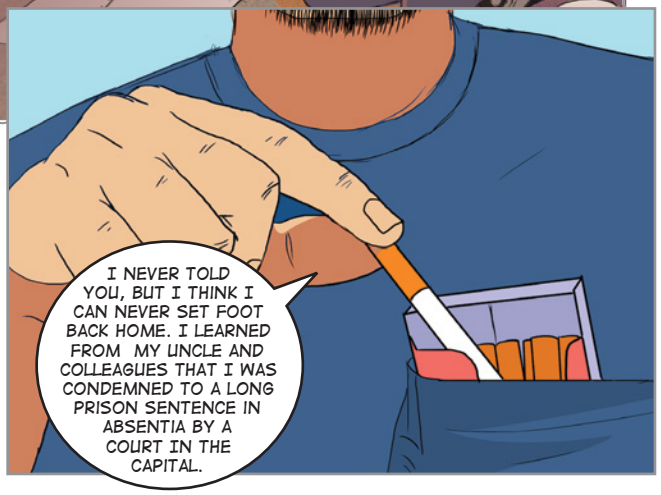
YOU THINK YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO RETURN HOME?


I WOULD LOVE TO GO BACK. BUT MY SITUATION IS MORE COMPLICATED THAN I THOUGHT AND RETURNING IS NOT A SAFE OPTION FOR ME. THAT'S WHY I HAVE TO FOCUS ON A SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE TO RELOCATION PROGRAMS.

AS YOU KNOW, I'VE SPENT MOST OF MY CAREER AS AN ONLINE JOURNALIST, TRYING TO TELL THE WORLD WHAT WAS GOING ON IN MY COUNTRY.

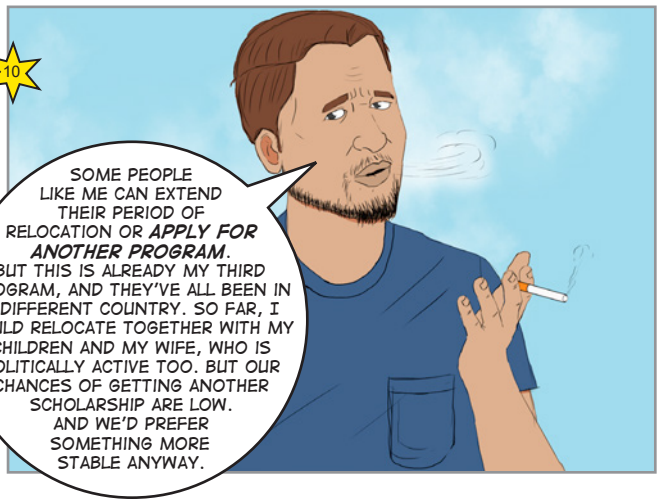
I BECAME INCREDIBLY PARANOID THAT I WAS BEING SURVEILLED. THEN I FOUND OUT THAT I WAS. STRANGERS BROKE INTO MY APARTMENT AT NIGHT TO STEAL DOCUMENTS. THE STATE FROZE ALL MY ACCOUNTS AT ONE POINT. I WAS LABELED AN ENEMY OF MY COUNTRY.

I WAS COVERING A LOT OF THE VIOLENCE THAT WAS HAPPENING AND POSTING IT ONLINE. I WAS VERY CRITICAL OF THE STATE AND THE SECTARIAN TENSIONS THAT THEY WERE FANNING. IT MADE ME A TARGET.


I NEVER TOLD YOU, BUT I THINK I CAN NEVER SET FOOT BACK HOME. I LEARNED FROM MY UNCLE AND COLLEAGUES THAT I WAS CONDEMNED TO A LONG PRISON SENTENCE IN ABSENTIA BY A COURT IN THE CAPITAL.

DO YOU THINK THAT THE REGIME WILL CHANGE AT SOME POINT? NOTHING STAYS THE SAME, YOUSEF ....

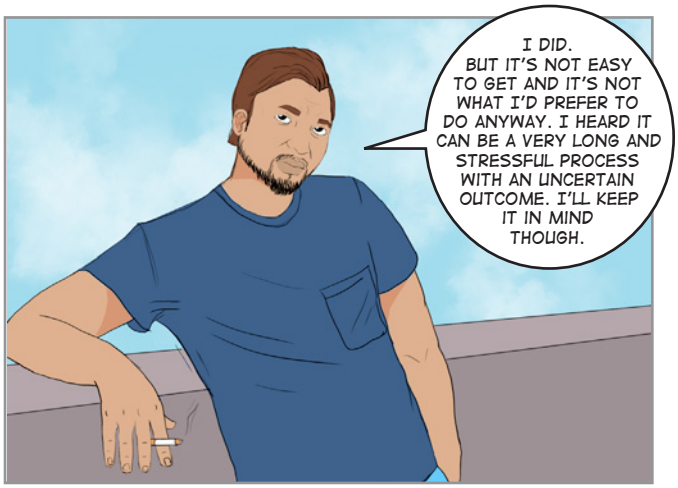
THIS KIND OF OPPRESSION HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR DECADES... I'M EXHAUSTED BY IT ALL. I NEED TO NOT FEAR FOR MY LIFE ANYMORE.


10
SOME PEOPLE LIKE ME CAN EXTEND THEIR PERIOD OF RELOCATION OR ***APPLY FOR ANOTHER PROGRAM***. BUT THIS IS ALREADY MY THIRD PROGRAM, AND THEY'VE ALL BEEN IN A DIFFERENT COUNTRY. SO FAR, I COULD RELOCATE TOGETHER WITH MY CHILDREN AND MY WIFE, WHO IS POLITICALLY ACTIVE TOO. BUT OUR CHANCES OF GETTING ANOTHER SCHOLARSHIP ARE LOW. AND WE'D PREFER SOMETHING MORE STABLE ANYWAY.

THAT'S TOTALLY UNDERSTANDABLE. DO YOU THINK THAT YOU'LL EVER GO BACK?

NO... THAT'S WHY IT WOULD BE BEST TO GET A PERMANENT RESIDENCE PERMIT HERE IN GERMANY. BUT I MIGHT ONLY BE ELIGIBLE TO APPLY IN A COUPLE OF YEARS. UNTIL THEN I WANT TO CONTINUE MY WORK WITH THE HELP OF THE NETWORKS I'VE ESTABLISHED IN AND OUTSIDE OF THE DIASPORA, AND TO POLISH MY GERMAN SKILLS.

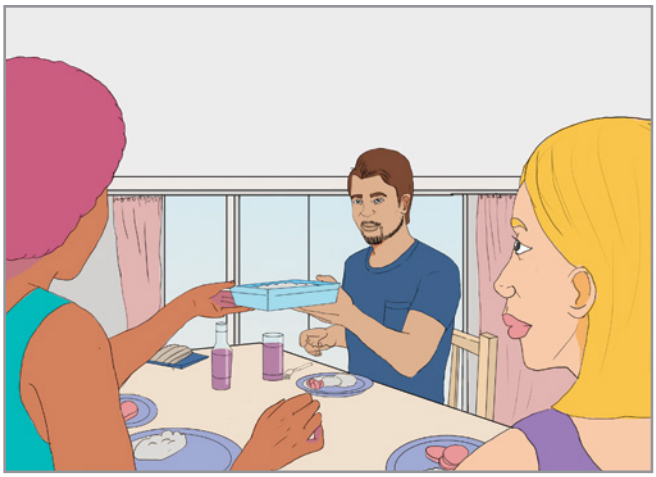
AND DID YOU THINK ABOUT ***APPLYING FOR ASYLUM***, GIVEN THE SITUATION IN YOUR HOME COUNTRY?
11


I DID. BUT IT'S NOT EASY TO GET AND IT'S NOT WHAT I'D PREFER TO DO ANYWAY. I HEARD IT CAN BE A VERY LONG AND STRESSFUL PROCESS WITH AN UNCERTAIN OUTCOME. I'LL KEEP IT IN MIND THOUGH.

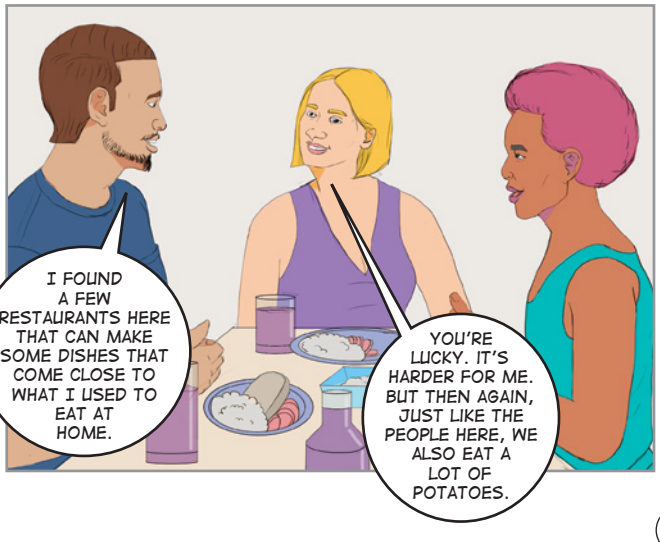
I HOPE THAT YOUR WIFE AND YOU WILL FIND WORK AND GET A MORE STABLE STATUS SOON.

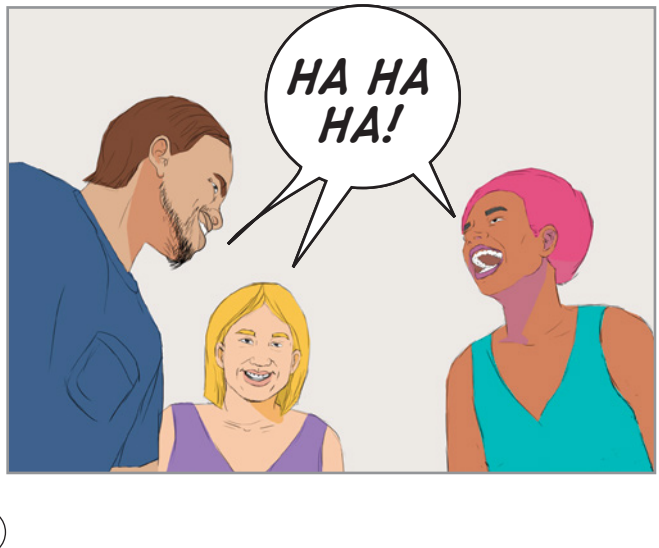
SORRY, I CAN'T TALK ABOUT THIS ANYMORE.

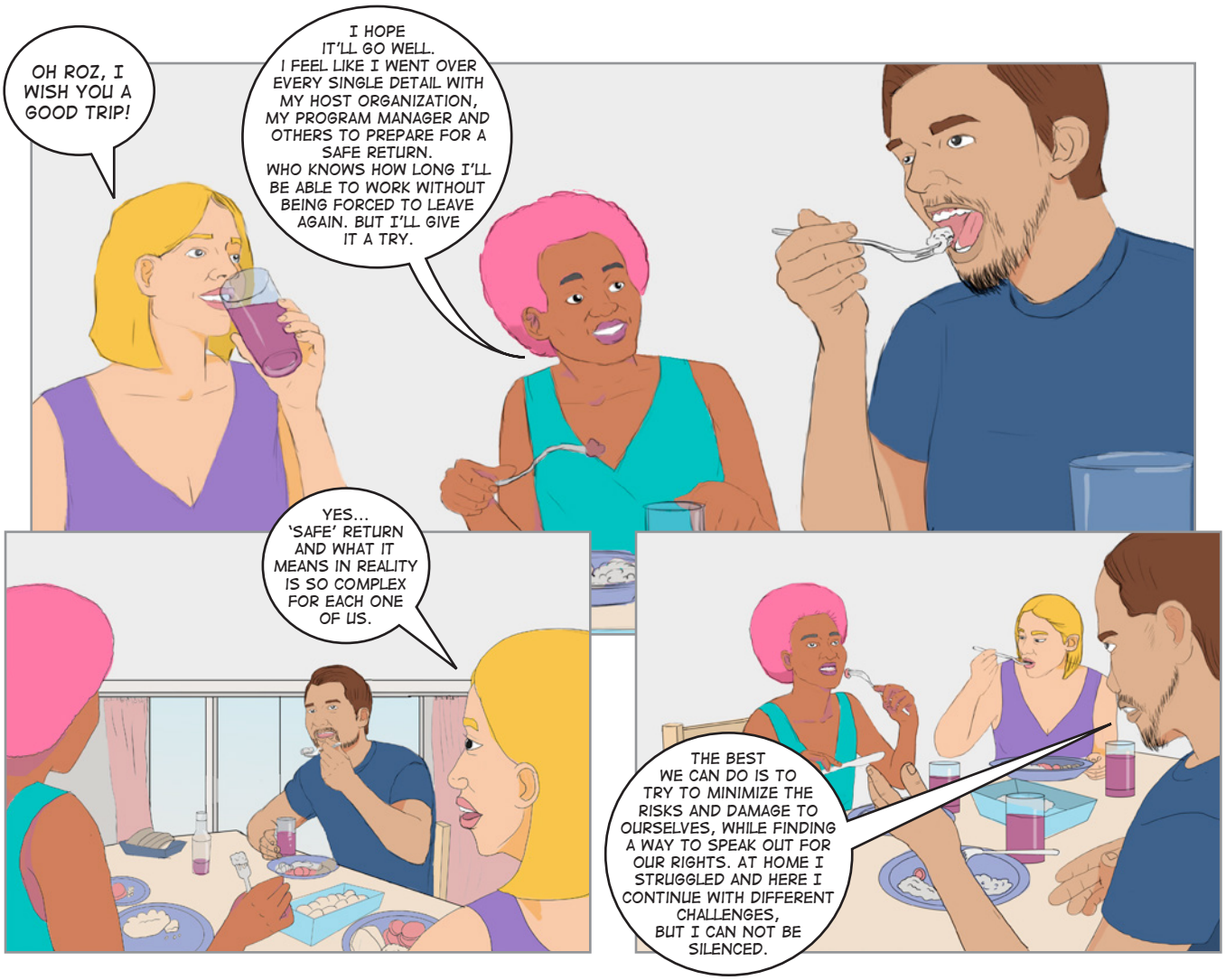
LET'S EAT!



GUYS, I CAN'T WAIT TO EAT A PROPER MANGO OR PINEAPPLE WHEN I GET HOME. I LOVE CHEESE AND BREAD BUT I MISS THE TASTE OF HOME.


I FOUND A FEW RESTAURANTS HERE THAT CAN MAKE SOME DISHES THAT COME CLOSE TO WHAT I USED TO EAT AT HOME.
YOU'RE LUCKY. IT'S HARDER FOR ME. BUT THEN AGAIN, JUST LIKE THE PEOPLE HERE, WE ALSO EAT A LOT OF POTATOES.


HA HA HA!


OH ROZ, I WISH YOU A GOOD TRIP!
I HOPE IT'LL GO WELL. I FEEL LIKE I WENT OVER EVERY SINGLE DETAIL WITH MY HOST ORGANIZATION, MY PROGRAM MANAGER AND OTHERS TO PREPARE FOR A SAFE RETURN. WHO KNOWS HOW LONG I'LL BE ABLE TO WORK WITHOUT BEING FORCED TO LEAVE AGAIN. BUT I'LL GIVE IT A TRY.
YES... 'SAFE' RETURN AND WHAT IT MEANS IN REALITY IS SO COMPLEX FOR EACH ONE OF US.
THE BEST WE CAN DO IS TO TRY TO MINIMIZE THE RISKS AND DAMAGE TO OURSELVES, WHILE FINDING A WAY TO SPEAK OUT FOR OUR RIGHTS. AT HOME I STRUGGLED AND HERE I CONTINUE WITH DIFFERENT CHALLENGES, BUT I CAN NOT BE SILENCED.

RIGHT! I HOPE WE KEEP IN TOUCH AND SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN – WHEREVER WE MIGHT BE!
THE END

Glossary

Below is an explanation of some of the key words around decision-making, preparing, and planning next steps following a period of international relocation. The key words are ordered chronologically, according to when they are mentioned in the comic (see star icons). For further information and individual guidance, it is advisable to consult with support organizations and local host programs.

Logistics for a safe return

- Once relocated persons have decided to return to their home country (or other country of previous residence), they need to plan **logistics** for a safe return. The necessity of **protection measures** depends on the individual context of each person and the results of their risk assessment [see 3].
- Risks caused by potential **travel challenges** can be mitigated by, for instance, preparing for critical questions by the border authorities, having on hand a contact for **legal support**, as well as arranging in advance a trusted pick-up upon arrival and a place to stay.
- **Advice and trainings** on appropriate measures – and developing contingency plans in case of security incidents – are sponsored by many relocation programs or other support mechanisms.

See also "The Challenges of Safe Return": Chapter 3.2 and 3.3

Digital safety & secure communication

- Acquiring digital security skills is crucial to **minimizing risk**, both during relocation abroad and after a potential return. The extent of precaution necessary varies and depends on the results of one's individual risk assessment [see 3].
- Digital security trainings and manuals **raise awareness** of safety gaps in our everyday and work-related behavior, including the use of mobile phones, tablets, computers, and other technical devices.
- Also recommended are **tools to protect digital devices** and to prevent personal and professional **communication** from being surveilled or hacked (e.g. through secure apps and passwords). Those who need or wish for public visibility might also want to incorporate **social media** profile maintenance into their digital security planning.

See also "The Challenges of Safe Return": pp. 40-41 and Chapter 3.3.

Risk assessment & development of protection measures

• Risk assessment is a common tool employed by people and organizations working in **contexts of threat.** A continuous analysis of one's personal risks and the situation in one's home country may help determine the best course of action following relocation.

• This usually includes a) the systematic identification of potential threats, b) the estimation of their likelihood to materialize, and c) their potential impact and severity. **Analyzing risks** contributes to an understanding of how **urgent** it is to develop capacities to be less vulnerable to them, and to learn about preventive measures.

• The result can be a **security plan or protocol** that includes concrete steps to follow as well as possible reactive measures for (self)protection in case the identified risks materialize. This may enhance one's **feeling of preparedness** and agency in case of a challenging situation.

• There exist organizations and manuals which provide **professional assistance** in conducting individual risk assessments and developing appropriate measures.

See also "The Challenges of Safe Return": Chapter 3.3

Wellbeing, psychosocial support & emotional preparation

• Activists, artists, journalists, or other civil society actors are no superhumans. It is completely natural to **experience stress and anxiety** under the difficult circumstances of relocation.

• Emotional stress may increase towards the end of the relocation stay, caused by worries about the future, the need for planning, or the prospective of leaving (again). Wellbeing and **health support** should play a key role in the decision-making process and (emotional) preparation for future scenarios. Wellbeing practices are more sustainable if maintained beyond the relocation stay.

• Many individuals might want support when they feel overwhelmed and exhausted, or have other **wellbeing needs**, including physical health. Some even experience burnout, anxiety, or depression, or suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder(s) or trauma. They can get support, ranging from medical treatments, counselling, psychotherapy, or other culturally appropriate healing practices toward emotional care through trusted social relationships and personal networks.

• Most relocation programs financially support such measures and facilitate contacts with professional providers.

Mapping of actors & support networks in the home country

• For those who plan to return home or have not yet decided, it is helpful to have an overview of people or organizations who could provide support after arrival, and to contact them even before departure. This **potential support network** may include pre-existing contacts and potential new allies. They may range from trusted friends, family, and colleagues to local and international NGOs, other trusted peer organizations, or foreign embassies.

• The identified "watch points" may also **provide information** and updates on the political development and security situation, and can therefore act as resources for ongoing situation monitoring [see 9].

• In addition to identifying allies, **actor-mapping and analysis** may also help assess if there are still people or organizations that are potential threats [see 3], or if there have been positive changes.

See also "The Challenges of Safe Return": Chapter 3.4 and 3.1

Post-return monitoring & follow-up

• After the period of relocation has ended, it might be beneficial for returned persons to **keep in touch** with their former host organization, the relocation program, or other contacts in the support network abroad. Checking in upon return and **updating** them about any potential incidents in the country of return can contribute to effective information-sharing within the support network, as well as a better analysis of the required support measures.

• However, the capacity of host programs to follow up with former participants is limited, due to constraints of time and resources. Therefore, many host programs are unable to provide substantial support after the period of relocation has ended. An open and honest **exchange about expectations** and the scope of post-return support can help prevent frustration and disappointment.

See also "The Challenges of Safe Return": Chapter 4.3

Reintegration preparation

• The broader objective of many relocation programs is the empowerment of artists, journalists, and activists (and their movements) beyond the support period. Preparing for **safe reintegration** is therefore key for those who have decided to return to their home country (or other place of previous residence). However, some returnees face **challenges** in arriving at their previous surrounding, re-establishing personal ties, or finding steady employment and income.

• Sustainable reintegration can be prepared with the help of networking, targeted skill-building and capacity development (e.g. professional qualification, security trainings) [see 2], thorough mapping of support networks or risk assessment [see 5 and 3], as well as wellbeing practices and mental preparation for potential challenges [see 4].

• It is helpful especially for participants who might face threats upon return to **connect** with legal support services (e.g. in case of pending judicial charges), request post-return safety measures or financial support, if available, and maintain psychosocial wellbeing practices (e.g. local or online counselling).

See also "The Challenges of Safe Return": Chapter 4

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Residence permits, work and student visa

• Applying for a residence permit, work visa, or student visa is an option for some individuals who **plan to either stay** where they relocated to, or to **move on to another country**. The pre-requisites for getting residence permits beyond the period of relocation vary widely and depend on national visa regulations as well as the nationality and professional qualifications of the applicant.

• In most countries, foreign nationals are eligible to apply for a **permanent residence permit** after several years of residency. In Germany, for instance, one of the key pre-requisites for **work visas** is to either have an employment contract (for a certain time period) or proof of one's ability to cover living expenses supplemented by freelance work. For those who intend to enroll in an institution of higher learning, proof of admission to a specific university and of financial income or savings is mandatory to acquire a **student visa.**

• Either way, relocated persons are encouraged to **get case and country-specific advice**. Acquiring local language skills and establishing professional networks may be an asset for visa applications.

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Situation & security monitoring

• During a period of relocation, decision-making processes may be facilitated by monitoring the conditions for return in one's home country. This includes any changes in the prevalence of conflict, violence, or oppression in the community of the relocated person.

• Observations may be made on the general level of **political developments** in that country (e.g. improvements in the national legislation) or on the personal level in **one's direct environment** (e.g. fewer security incidents in one's neighborhood or fewer threats made against former colleagues). Situation monitoring is closely related to risk assessment tools [see 3].

• Sources for **obtaining relevant information** range from local or international organizations to (trusted) media reports and personal contacts, including private or professional networks. **Keeping in touch** with trusted contacts at home not only allows for the delivery of important information but also makes the reintegration process smoother in the case of eventual return [see 7].

See also "The Challenges of Safe Return": Chapter 3.2

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Repeated relocation

• When the end of a funded relocation period approaches, and return is not (yet) a safe option, participants might think about **extending their stay** in the same program (if possible), or apply for another one.

• Most temporary programs have a strictly defined maximum period of support and can therefore not offer multiple extensions.

• If it is infeasible or impossible to stay in the host country, **options for onward movement** should be explored. Depending on one's profession, country of origin, and preferred country of destination (e.g. based on language skills, personal or professional networks), there might be other programs that can support relocation to another country.

• Some relocation programs **facilitate contact** and have established cooperation with other initiatives to exchange information and make application procedures smoother. However, case referrals are commonly not within program mandates, and the capacities of program staff is often limited.

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Asylum & refugee protection

• Some relocated persons cannot go back to their home country because they are politically persecuted or face the risk of inhumane treatment, torture, or even death. Therefore, they may be entitled to an international **protection residence title** and may consider applying.

• According to the international 1951 Refugee Convention (and the Protocol of 1967), refugees are persons who are **persecuted due to their identity or convictions**, and who are in need of protection in another country. While the Refugee Convention outlines the rights of refugees and the obligations of states to protect them in general terms, the question of who exactly is entitled to asylum and under which conditions varies from country to country.

• **Local refugee and migration advice centers** help assess the chances of success of an application and can explain the limitations of a refugee status. It is advisable to consult with them as early as possible since application processes can be long and have an uncertain outcome.

• Individuals who are suffering from the consequences of persecution or flight can get professional support for their psychosocial and physical **wellbeing** [see 4].

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Comics are powerful at articulating complex topics, polarizing ideas, and making sense of circumstances in which language is limited. Dianah Bwengye is able to turn a story into imagery and invite the readers on a visual journey that allows them to explore and experience the world of the characters. She has a bachelor's degree in art and industrial design from Kyambogo University, Uganda. She has more than 11 years of experience in illustration and graphic design.

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