

— • *Dortmund, Germany* • —

Strong and independent



A documentary photo-novel
With Valentina and Clara



30
ZONE

Café Stern Blau

BALKAN
GRILL & BÄCKEREI

KIOSK

KIOSK & TRINKHALLE

Bar 77

CORONA
TEST RAPID
Centrul de testare: Fara inregistrare
Test gratuit

CORONA
БЪРЗО
тест център: Без регистрация
безплатен



The large industrial city of Dortmund in the Ruhr region has experienced relocation. Traditional factories have been replaced by logistics and biomedical services.



Going back to the grandparents' generation, more than 40% of the 585,000 inhabitants of this city have a “history of immigration”, compared to 20% on average in Germany.



Polish, Italians, Turks and, after the fall of the Wall, people from Eastern Europe came to work here. Industry and coal mining. Today, the majority of immigrants are Bulgarians and Romanians, some of them Roma.



The Nordstadt district is the place where immigrants arrive in the city. It accounts for 10% of Dortmund's inhabitants and can be seen as a segregated district due to its multinational majority.



Stefen, from the Grünbau organisation, who is accompanying us, quotes a famous phrase in Germany: “We wanted workers, but it was humans who came”. In other words, people who stay, who do not leave as advertised after ten years of work.

400,000 workers leave their jobs each year in Germany. The country needs immigrants to maintain its economic level. The Roma come to work, they experience the same prejudices as other historical immigrants, but they will stay.





Valentina was born in Germany, as was her father. Her grandparents, Roma from Serbia, came to work here in the 1970s. Her mother is also Roma, from Kosovo.




Graduated from the University of Dortmund in social work for the poor, migrants and refugees, she has been working for the past five years with young girls and families from the Bulgarian and Romanian Roma community.

I remember all my personal struggles to impose my choices.



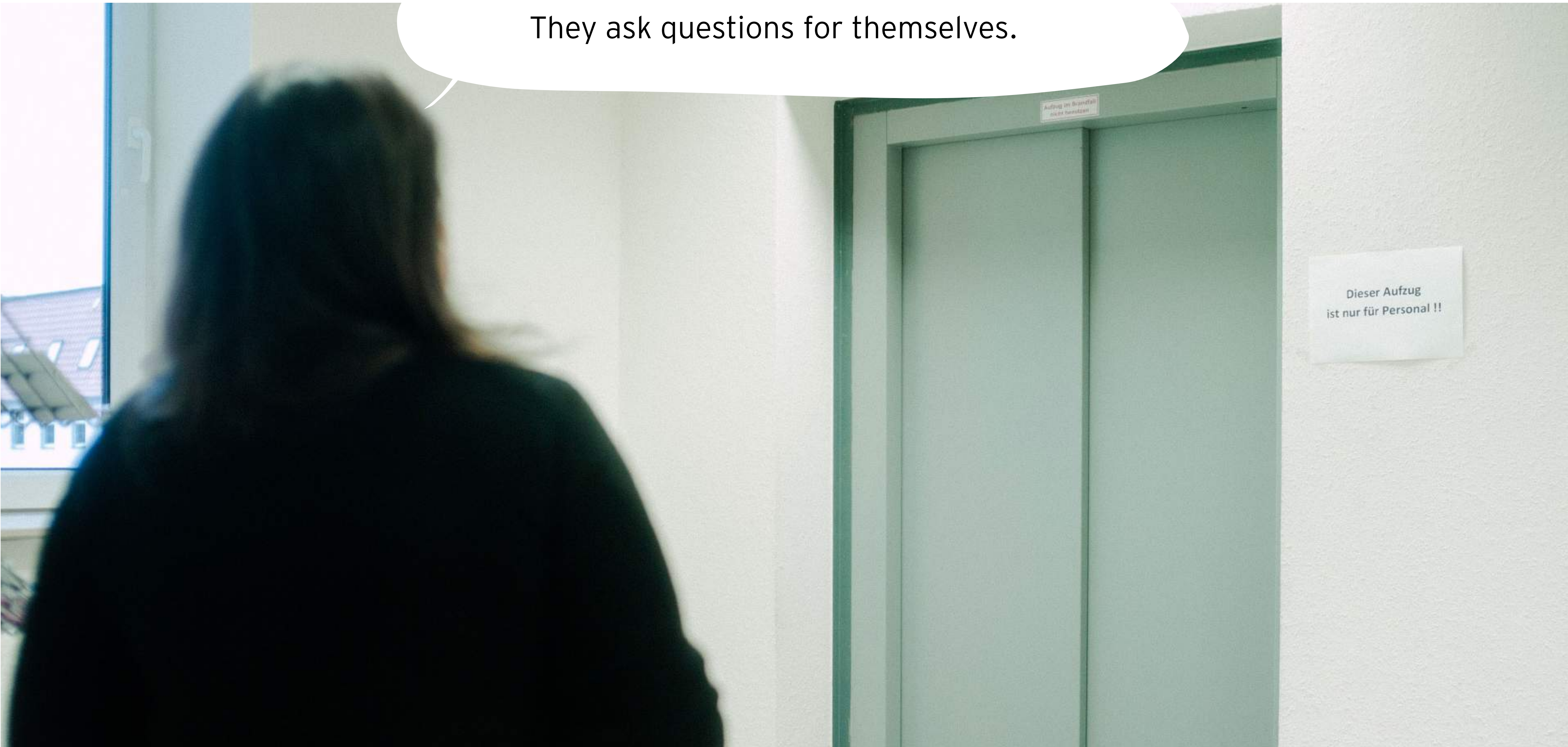
Valentina is employed, she is not married and has no children at the moment, she drives her car: she defines herself as an independent woman.

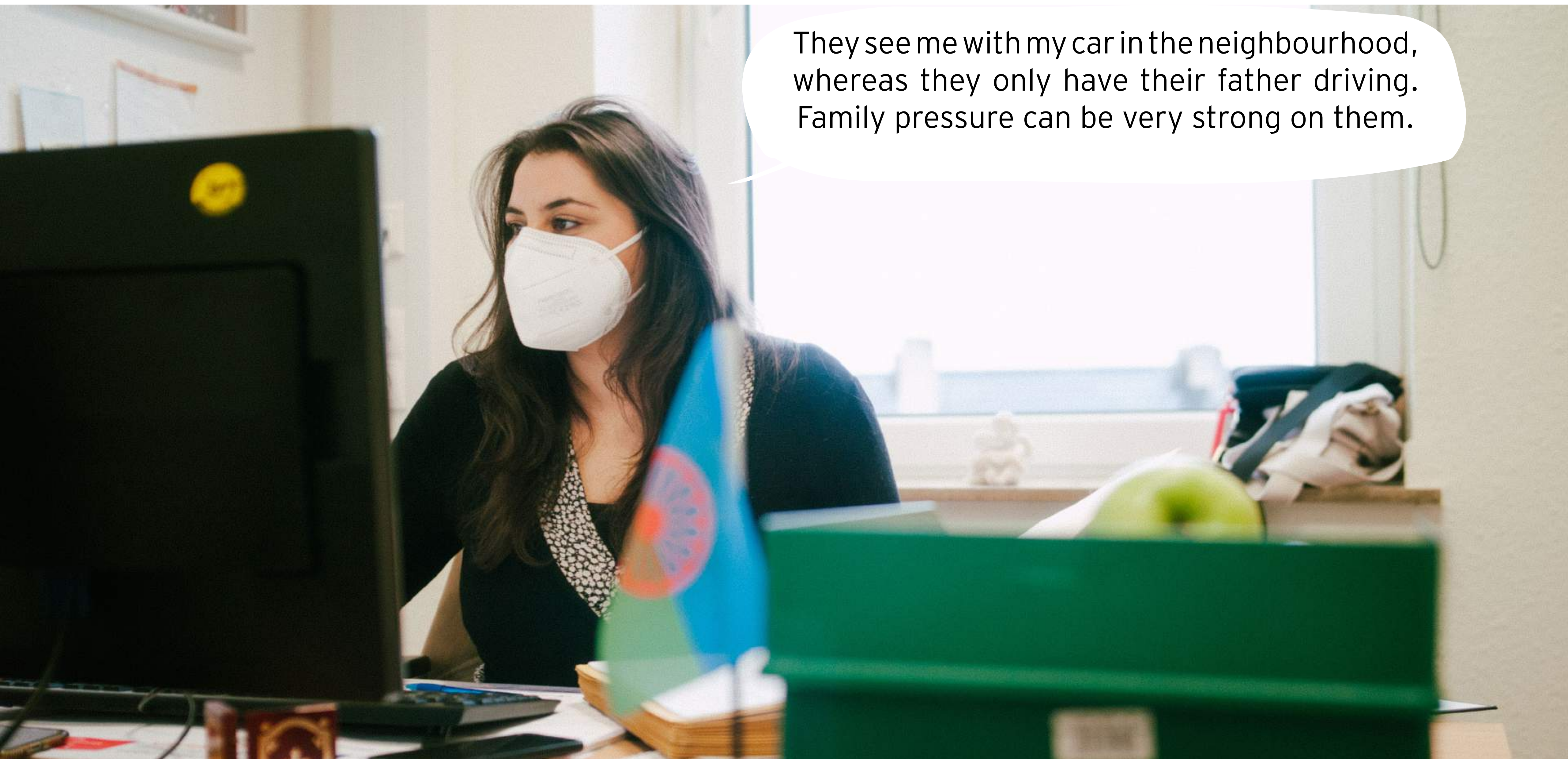
How do young Roma girls see you?

A photograph of a man and a woman in a kitchen. The man, on the left, has grey hair and is wearing a dark green jacket and a light blue surgical mask. He is gesturing with his right hand. The woman, on the right, has long dark hair and is wearing a black top and a long grey patterned skirt, along with a white surgical mask. They are standing in front of light-colored wooden kitchen cabinets. A built-in oven and microwave are visible on the left. On the counter, there is a coffee machine, a bottle, and some bags. A framed picture of vegetables hangs on the wall to the left. Two speech bubbles are overlaid on the image.

They see me as a Gadjo, it's unimaginable for them that I'm Roma and that I live like that. It shocks them, but it's a good shock in a way.

They ask questions for themselves.





They see me with my car in the neighbourhood, whereas they only have their father driving. Family pressure can be very strong on them.

I tell them why I went to school and university. I tell them that they can be strong and independent women. They open up to me more because I am Roma. Maybe also I address them in a different way.





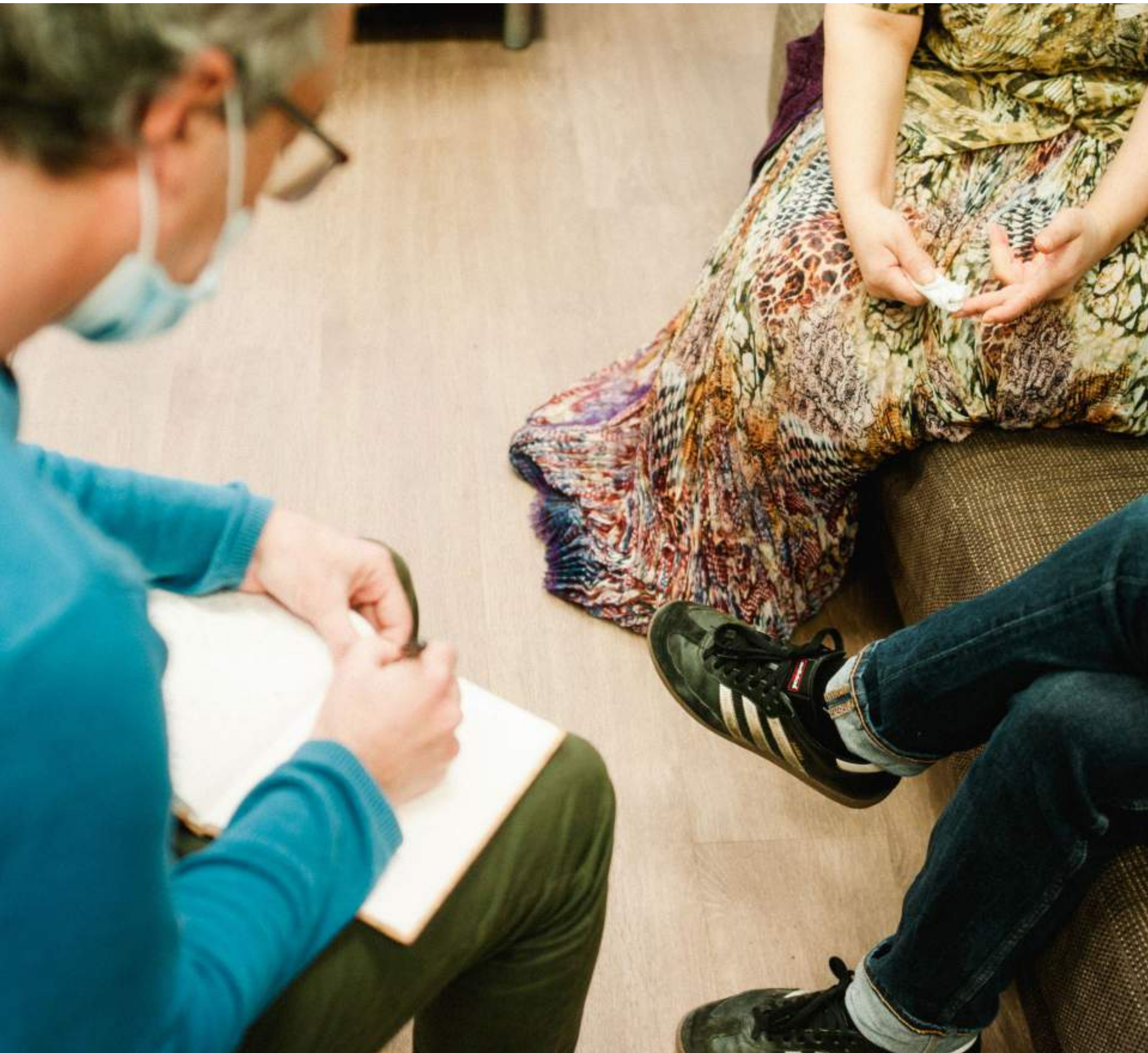
Germans tell them, "This is Germany, the rules are different."

me, I ask them: what do you want and what do you feel as a woman?



Valentina says that the girls say to the German social workers: “Yes, you understand me, but...”. When they talk to Valentina, the ‘but’ is not the same. She knows what they are going through.





You won't see Clara's face. Her husband and son have convinced her not to put herself on display like this, with images of her going who knows where.



I asked her at our first meeting what she wanted to talk about. She helps Roma families on a voluntary basis and she answered: integration.

Clara comes from Romania, from the Gabor community, the Roma who “have kept the tradition the most” she says. She lived in Germany as a child for six years with her parents, then left. She thought she would never return. Long afterwards, when she was struggling to live in a village with her carpenter husband, they decided to “try their luck.

The German language soon came back to him. After several years of housing problems, the family's situation has stabilised. Their son works as a carpenter in a company and has set up his own business. Clara founded a sewing and textile design association with other Roma women. They called it Amen Juvlja Mondial, *We are all women of the world*.

At the beginning it was very hard, we had a bad reception from the Germans.

We are less discriminated against than in Romania, but they looked at us as if we were not civilised, whereas the lack of education is a problem of poverty.



Germans need to see that we can integrate and we need to open our eyes to this society.

Germans don't feel they have nothing when they are born, like us Roma.





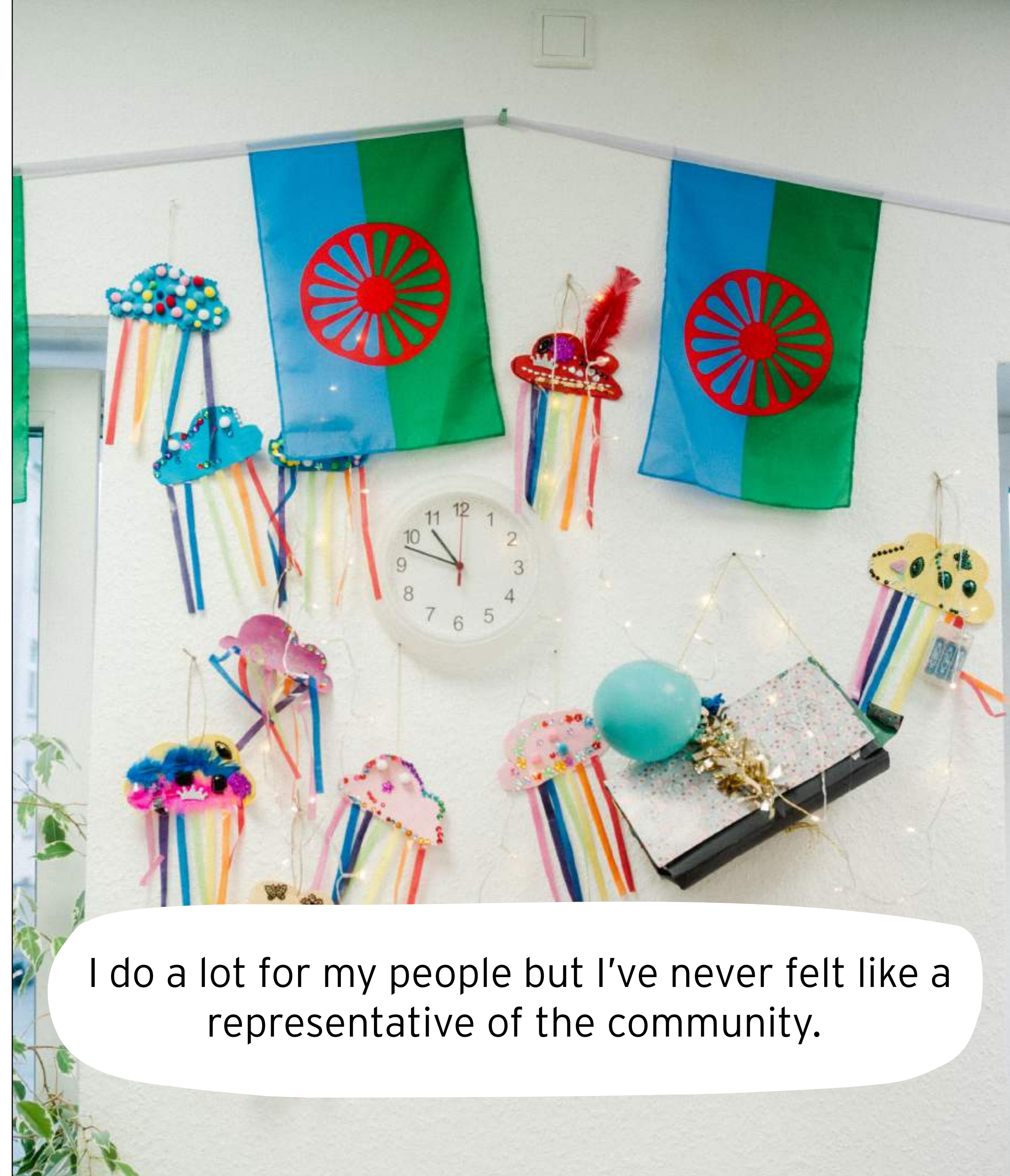
Knowing the language is very important,
it's the first step. How can you live in a
country without speaking the language?
We all hope to get a job.

I remember my past, I know that you need help when you arrive.
When I support families, it stabilises them, they feel better.



After three or four years, they start to integrate, to live and to feel human again.



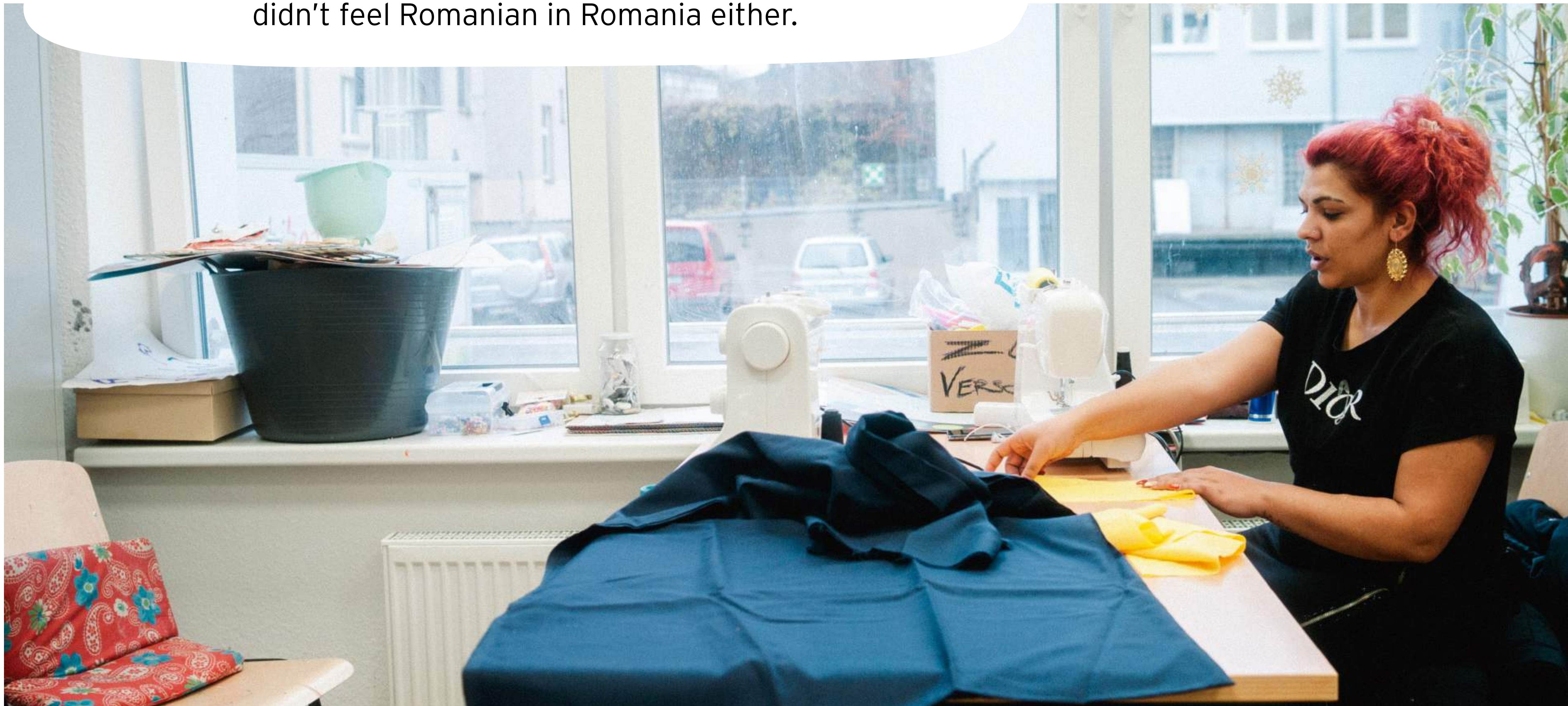


I do a lot for my people but I've never felt like a representative of the community.

We haven't applied for nationality yet. We'd like to become Germans,
but it's complicated with the papers.



I respect this nation and this civilisation but I don't feel German. I
didn't feel Romanian in Romania either.



I have always felt like a Roma woman.





You're French, you'll
always be French. I'm
Roma, it's the same
for me.

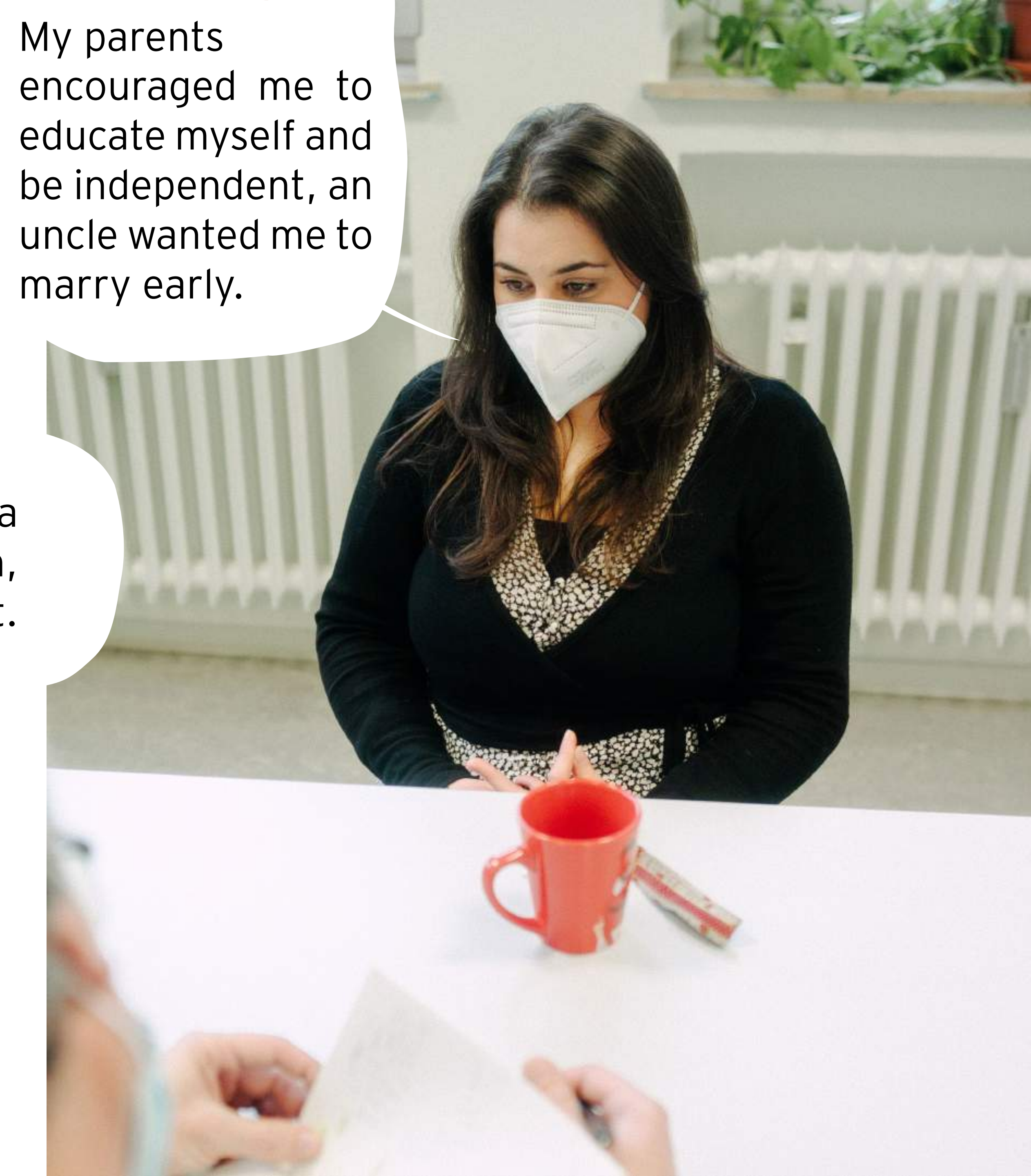


I always make the
difference between
nation and culture.


By virtue of stereotypes and thought reflexes, a part of the population still denies the immigrant's capacity to integrate. And then time and generations pass, the first violence is forgotten. With the Roma, in most countries, time does not pass, the judgement remains the same, even for those who have been there for centuries. This is finally what I wanted to talk about with Valentina.



I was born here. When I was a child, I saw myself as German, but I was considered a migrant.



My parents encouraged me to educate myself and be independent, an uncle wanted me to marry early.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white face mask and a black top with a patterned neckline, is seated at a white table. She is gesturing with both hands while speaking. In front of her is a red mug with a cartoon face. To her left, the back of an older man with grey hair, wearing a teal sweater, is visible. They are in a room with a window in the background showing a brick building, and two potted plants on a shelf. A white radiator is visible on the left.

There are external stereotypes and stereotypes among the Roma themselves. I am Roma, I have the Roma culture but not in the traditional sense.

Every Roma community is different, these communities don't necessarily relate to each other. And they are all individuals.



My great-grandfather sold horses in Serbia and I work
for the integration of migrants and Roma in Germany.



Actually, today I am a German Serbian Roma.



And I like it!





Inclusion is more difficult for those with dark skin and those who wear traditional clothes. They are identified as migrants.



A white skin avoids discrimination, the person is not suspected of being Roma. It's like in their countries of origin. The Roma know this, they have learned to keep their identity under wraps.



Why is inclusion difficult? Discrimination has been so strong for generations that people have integrated it. I also was told: "Don't say you're Roma!"



Later I decided to say it, to assume it.



Imagine that we meet in the street, Clara in her traditional clothes, and me. If I say that I am a social worker, I will be the synthesis of integration.

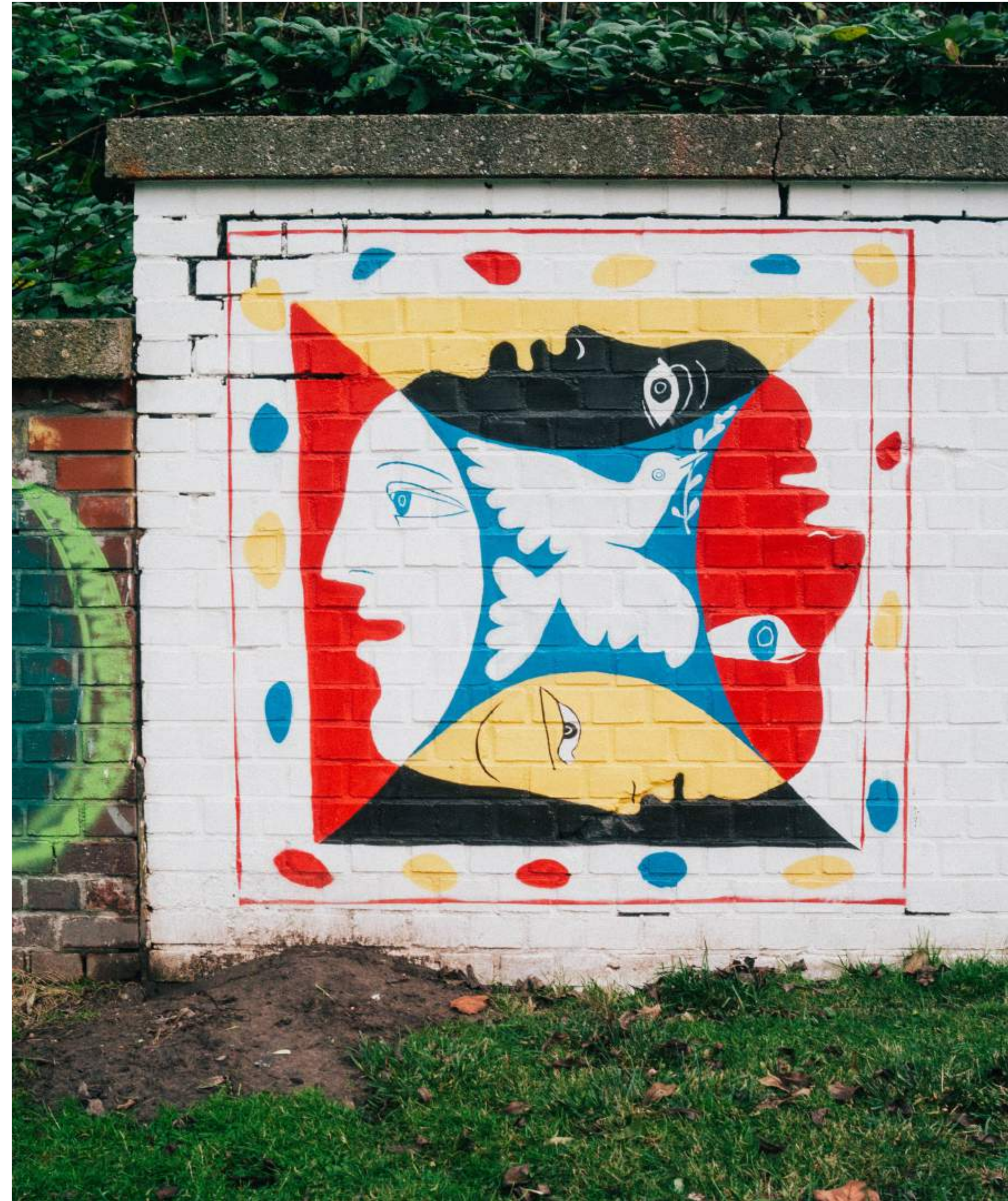
Not her, and yet she is integrated.



Stereotypes about Roma, Travellers etc., are very old. They will say that I am an exception and the others are bad examples.



I always have to prove that I am a good person, like all migrants. Germans don't have to do that. Sometimes I don't have the strength.



We have to learn about stereotypes at school so that we don't reproduce them. Especially here with the history of the Roma and Jewish genocide.

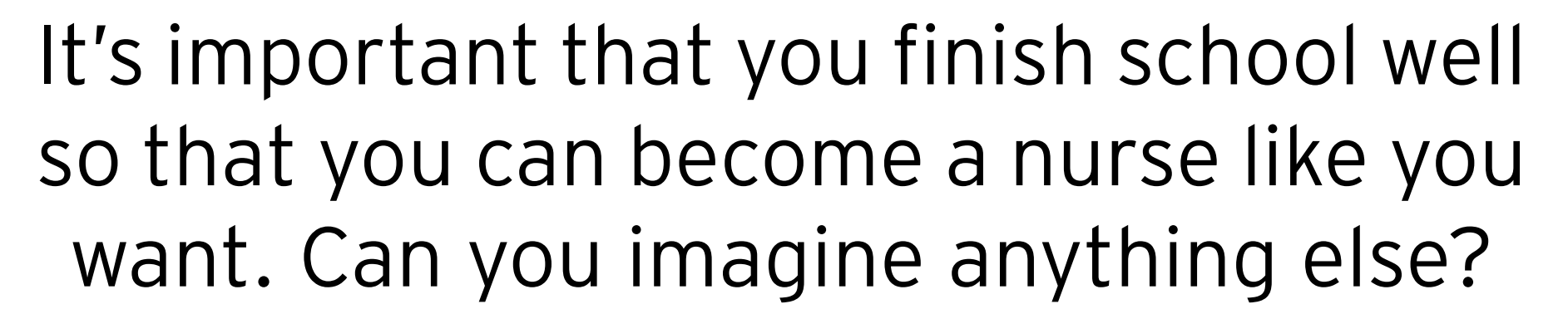


Monument to the Sinti and Roma of Dortmund who were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on 9 March 1943.



We walk for a long time through the streets of Nordstadt, which are often empty as soon as we leave the shopping street. The Covid, the cold. One evening we have a drink in the historic quarter, which was not destroyed by the bombs of the Second World War. Only one avenue separates it from Nordstadt. The faces of the district's diverse origins are no longer there, the social classes are no longer the same. It is not unpleasant, but the border is clear.

We have a final meeting with Valentina, who is leaving her job for a position in a city near Dortmund, where she will continue to work with people who arrive from elsewhere. She sees again the girls she has been following for several years, one of whom is about to turn 17.



A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a white pen, poised to write on a spiral-bound notebook. The person is wearing a blue denim jacket. The notebook is open, showing a page with faint, handwritten notes in blue ink. The scene is set on a light-colored wooden desk. In the lower-left foreground, a small green and white card with the word 'School' is partially visible. A white speech bubble with a tail pointing to the person's head contains the text: 'It's you who have to choose. You have the capacities.'

It's you who have to choose. You have the capacities.

Valentina is a shy girl from a religious, evangelical Christian family. She is not permitted to leave the school grounds, to have contact with boys, to dance, or to sing anything other than religious songs.

A person is sitting at a wooden desk, their hands clasped together. They are wearing a black and white checkered shirt. On the desk, there are several sheets of paper, some of which are lined. A yellow pen is visible on the desk. In the background, there is a blurred image of a person's face. A white speech bubble with a black outline is positioned above the person's hands, containing the text: "The fact that Valentina is a young woman and Roma is important."

The fact that Valentina is a young woman and Roma is important.

Valentina tells me that her parents are afraid. They can't cope with the reality here, the inside and outside don't match. She tries to tell them to deal with it.



His parents isolate themselves because God does not want the vaccine. This creates disparities between their children and other children who are unable to see their friends outside of school.

It's true that many women get married
at 17 and have children.

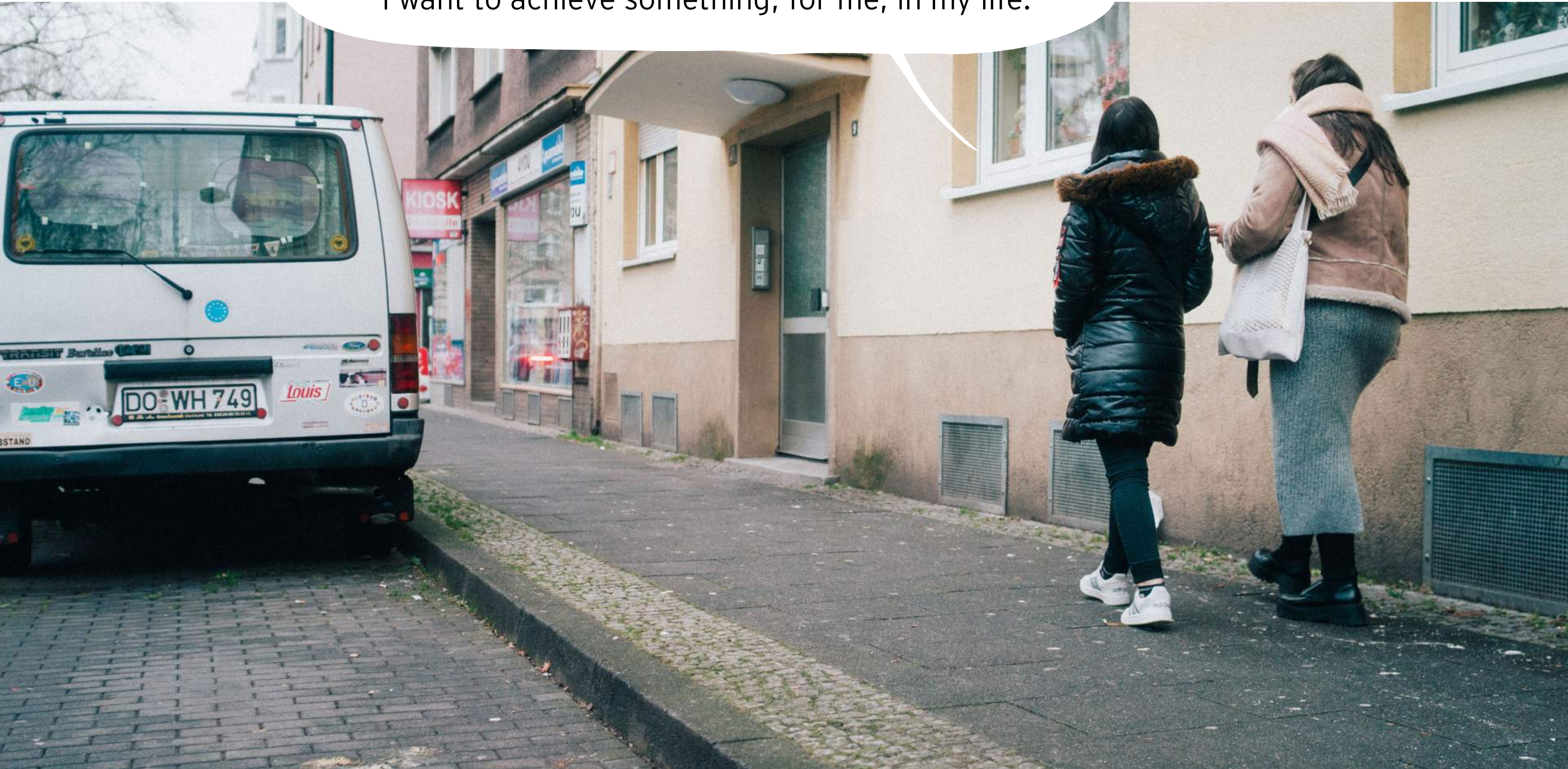




This minor girl did not want her face to be recognized.



I want to achieve something, for me, in my life.









Clara



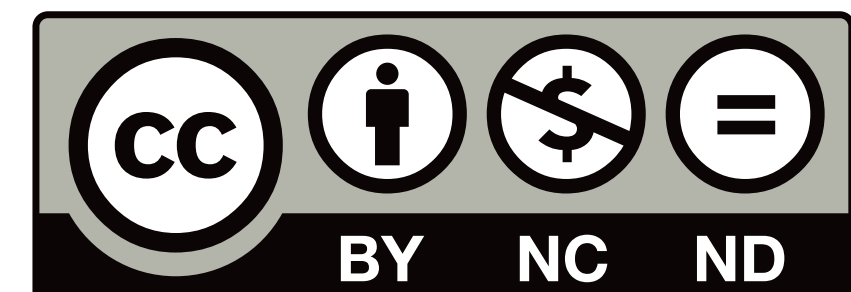
Valentina

Photo-Novel by ECRI (European Cooperation For Roma Inclusion)
project partners:

- Le LABA: Christophe Dabitch (text), with the assistance of David Bross (photography) and Thierry Lafollie (graphics).
- City of Bègles, Agence Place, GrünBau gGmbH, University of Plovdiv, Association Youth Club Roma Stolipinovo, Association Future, Roma Education Fund, Parada Foundation.



Cofinancé par le
programme Erasmus+
de l'Union européenne



The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not imply any endorsement of its contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

