

• *Slobozia, Romania* •

Becoming an example



A documentary photo novel

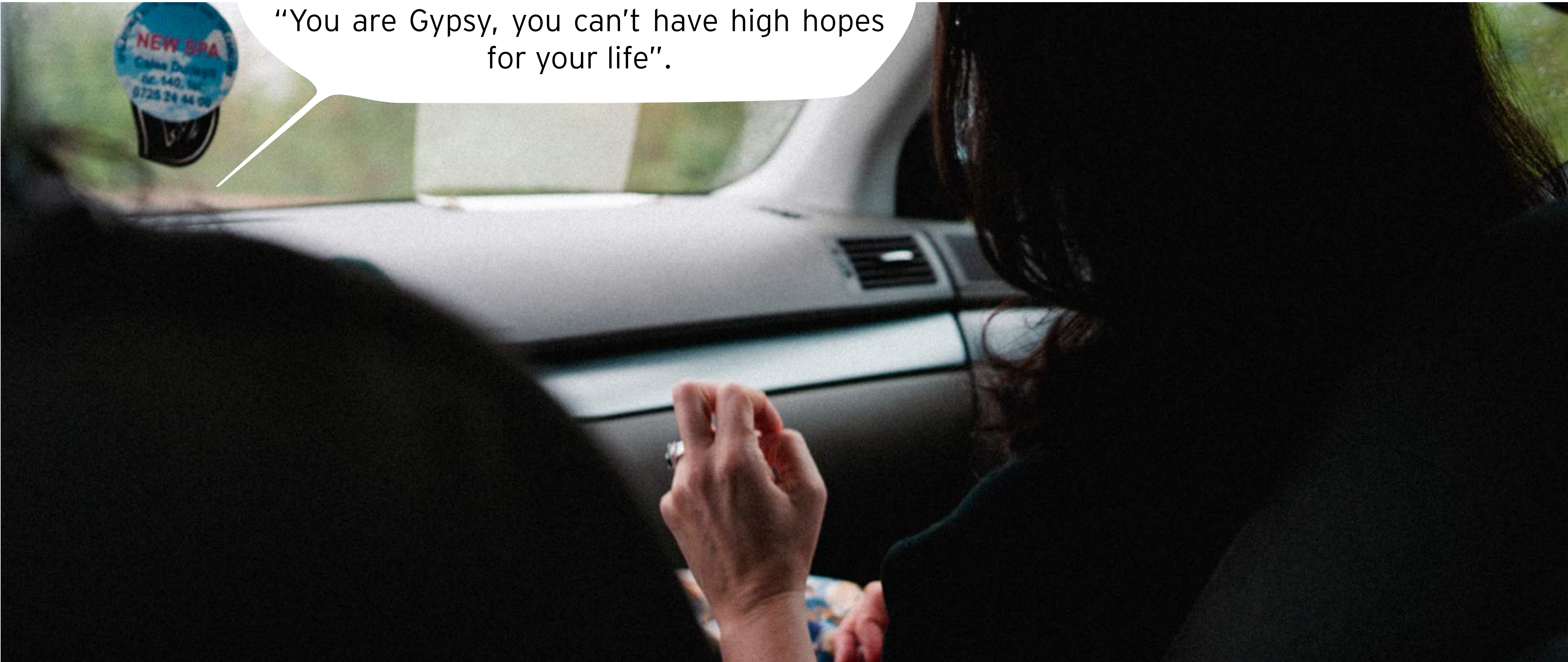
With Florica, Alexandra, Adriana and Luiza





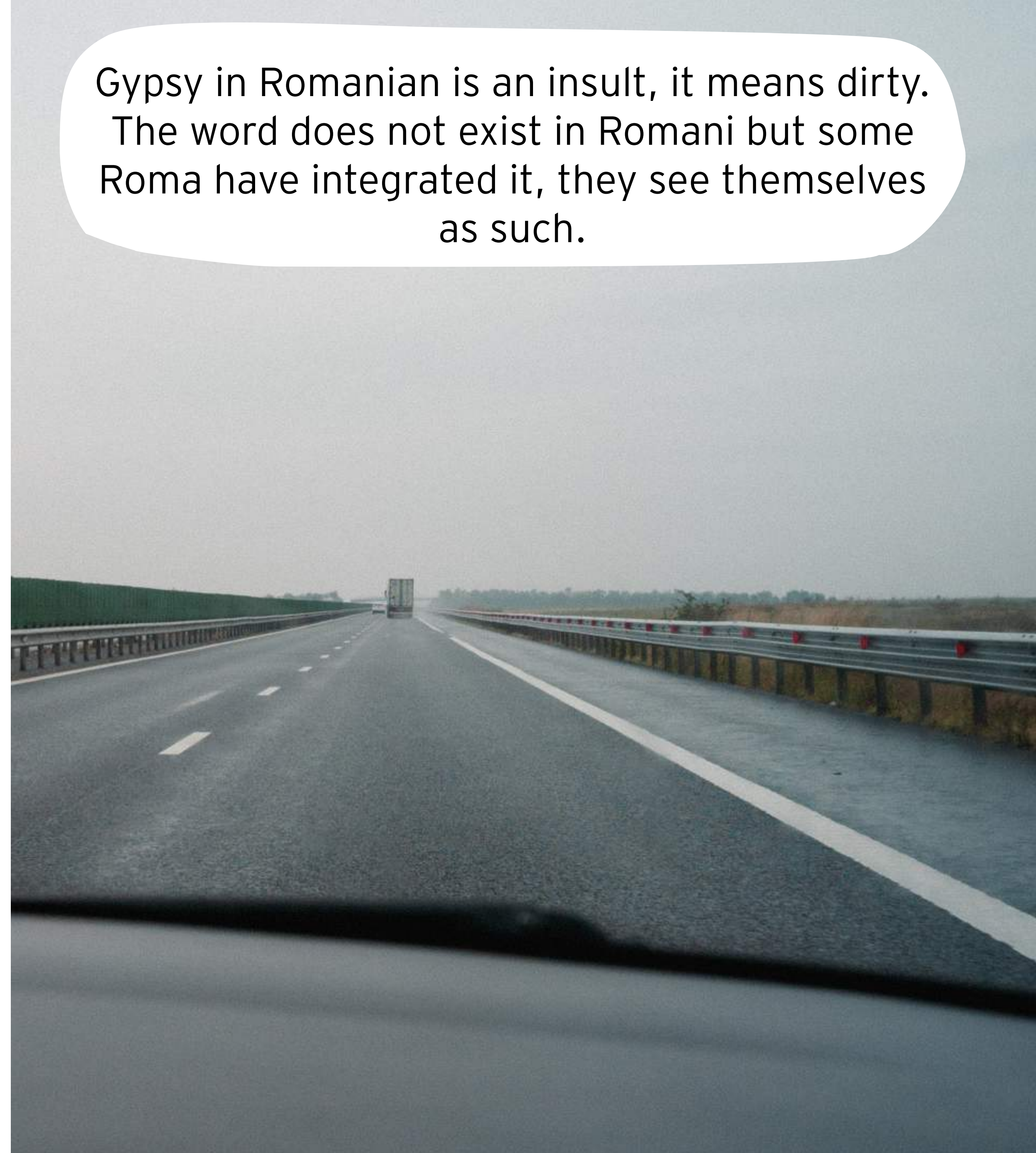
We leave Bucharest with Luiza and Lavinia from the Roma Education Fund. We are in the midst of an epidemic, with 400 people dying every day from Covid.

Before I was 21, I didn't know anything about Roma history. My grandfather used to tell me: "You are Gypsy, you can't have high hopes for your life".





Gypsy in Romanian is an insult, it means dirty. The word does not exist in Romani but some Roma have integrated it, they see themselves as such.









Wide avenues, boulevards, motorway and national road through the Romanian agricultural plains: 120 kilometres in a straight line to Slobozia and the Roma district of Bora. Luiza lives in Bucharest, she is Roma and is preparing a thesis in anthropology on the representation of Roma in cinema. Lavinia is not Roma, they work together.

When I joined a Roma association
and learned about history, it was a revelation.



I used to think that we were bad,
that the Roma had done something wrong.



There is an expression: "She's Roma but she's successful". Why do we say "but"?

I had to deal with discrimination and low self-esteem,
fighting to be equal to others.



The discussion with Luiza is fascinating. She reminds us that the Roma were slaves and serfs in Romania for 500 years, until the abolition in 1856. A history that is not taught in school.

Her organization, as well as other Roma organizations, are heavily influenced by African Americans' civil rights struggles. She has chosen to work on the image of Roma in film because she does not recognize herself in either negative or positive Roma exoticism.

How are you today?



Nobody is sick at home?





Everyone calls Florica
“Dona Alecu”, Mrs Alecu”.
I’m going to call her “The
Tornado”.



These mothers think that school is important, not everyone in the community is like that.

I am very grateful for this young woman who comes in the morning and evening. Thank her!





In Slobozia, Florica Alecu is the headmistress of the school in Bora, a so-called mixed neighbourhood because it has as many Roma families as non-Roma families. She is a mentor for the Roma Education Fund.



Supported by the Soros Foundation and the Danish company Velux in Romania, Slovakia and Hungary, the organisation sets up mentoring programmes for young Roma students, about 200 in three years, to become teachers.





A mentor is a role model who works with the mentee to develop themselves. They help them to gain confidence and support, and act as a link to the training school. Florica is Roma, she is an example in the neighbourhood because of her background and her personality, she is a central figure so that young Roma who have become teachers can in turn be emancipating examples.

If I wasn't always active
like this, I would stop
because of the stress.



I started as a mediator, then I was a teacher
and now I am a director. There are many
things to do for the community.



When I was young, I wanted to be different,
to have better living conditions. Our
family was poor.



My brother became an officer in
the army, he also became a famous
writer. He was my mentor, my role
model.



Florica wants non-Roma parents to send their children here because of the quality of education. She is against segregation, she prefers mixed classes. Out of 180 children, 60 identify themselves as Roma.



School drop-out is our big problem. Children lack role models. As for me, over time I realised that I was a strong woman.

I even got married to a Romanian, for contrast!

But when my daughter was born, before I even saw her, I asked if she had black skin! I knew she would be discriminated because of her dark skin.

Later I told her that she had to be nicer than the others because she was a Gypsy.



When I ask Florica if the issue of low self-esteem is related to the negative image of Roma in society, she replies: ‘I think I don’t want to believe it’. And Luiza, who is translating the conversation, tells me as an aside: ‘Mrs Alecu is not answering your question. The link is obvious, otherwise why did she ask the midwife if her daughter was black?’



The city of Slobozia has 100,000 inhabitants and the district of Bora, located on the outskirts like the vast majority of Roma districts in Romania, has 10,000.

According to Florica's deputy, 50% of Roma people in Bora work in businesses, shops and services, and 50% are day labourers in agriculture. She does not describe it as a poor neighbourhood.







Now my daughter is a fighter. She is going to be a soldier, like her uncle. I am proud of her.

We rush off with Florica to the pedagogical high school where the mentoring programme has enabled nine girls from Slobozia to become teachers this year. We go to meet the headmistress, Adriana, and the teachers.

Still on break ?



Thank you for receiving us
despite the epidemic, it's nice.





LICEUL PEDAGOGIC

"Matei Basarab"



MATEI BASARAB
Domnitorul Țării Românești

CELUL PERIODIC AL ELEMENTELOR

ul atomic → 1

Pauling → 1,1

Simbolul → H

Latinoasă → 1,008

Temperatură °C → -259,34

configurația electronică → 1s¹

numărul de oxidare → 1

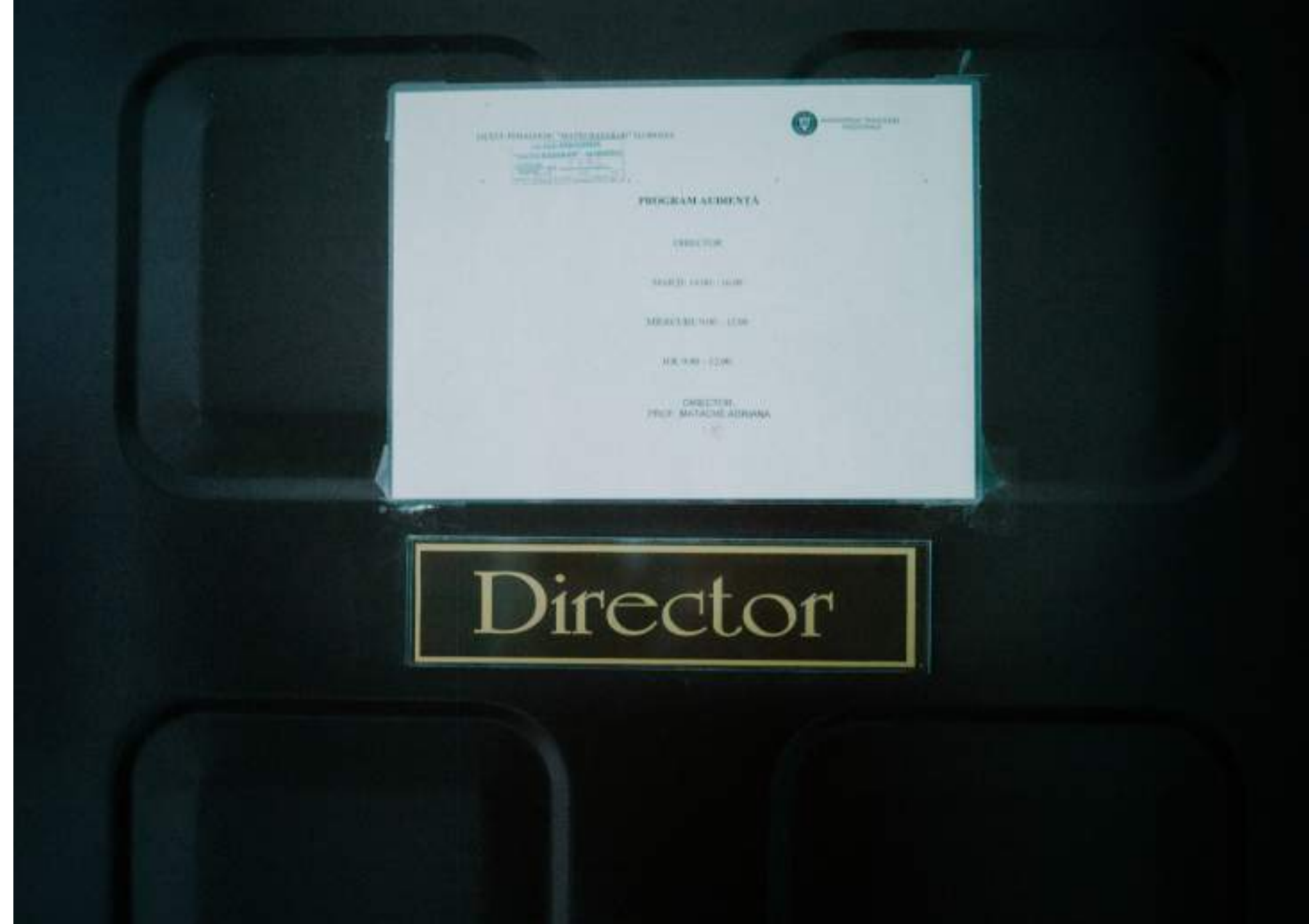
masa atomică → 1,008


denumirea elementului → HIDROGEN

raza atomului Å → 0,79

6 (VI B)	7 (VII B)	8 (VIII B)	9 (VIII A)	10 (VIII B)	11 (I B)
24 1,8 Cr 51,99 CROM	25 1,5 Mn 54,94 MANGAN	26 1,8 Fe 55,85 FIER	27 1,9 Co 58,93 COBALT	28 1,8 Ni 58,81 NICHEL	29 1,9 Cu 63,54 CUPRU
1,857	1,85	1,79	1,72	1,67	1,62
42	43	44	45	46	47

6 (VI B)	7 (VII B)	8 (VIII B)	9 (VIII A)	10 (VIII B)	11 (I B)
24 $[Ar] 4s^1 3d^5$ 1,8 Cr 51,99 CROM	25 $[Ar] 4s^2 3d^5$ 1,5 Mn 54,94 MANGAN	26 $[Ar] 4s^2 3d^6$ 1,8 Fe 55,85 FIER	27 $[Ar] 4s^2 3d^7$ 1,9 Co 58,93 COBALT	28 $[Ar] 4s^2 3d^8$ 1,8 Ni 58,81 NICHEL	29 $[Ar] 4s^1 3d^{10}$ 1,9 Cu 63,54 CUPRU
1857	1855	1244	179	1536	172
1495	167	1453	162	1083,4	
42	43	44	45	46	47



A woman with long brown hair, wearing glasses and a light blue surgical mask, is seated at a desk. She is looking down with her hands clasped. In the background, another person wearing a mask and a blue surgical cap is visible, working at a desk with a laptop. A speech bubble originates from the woman, containing the text: "I grew up with my Roma neighbours, I played with them, I don't see them as different people."

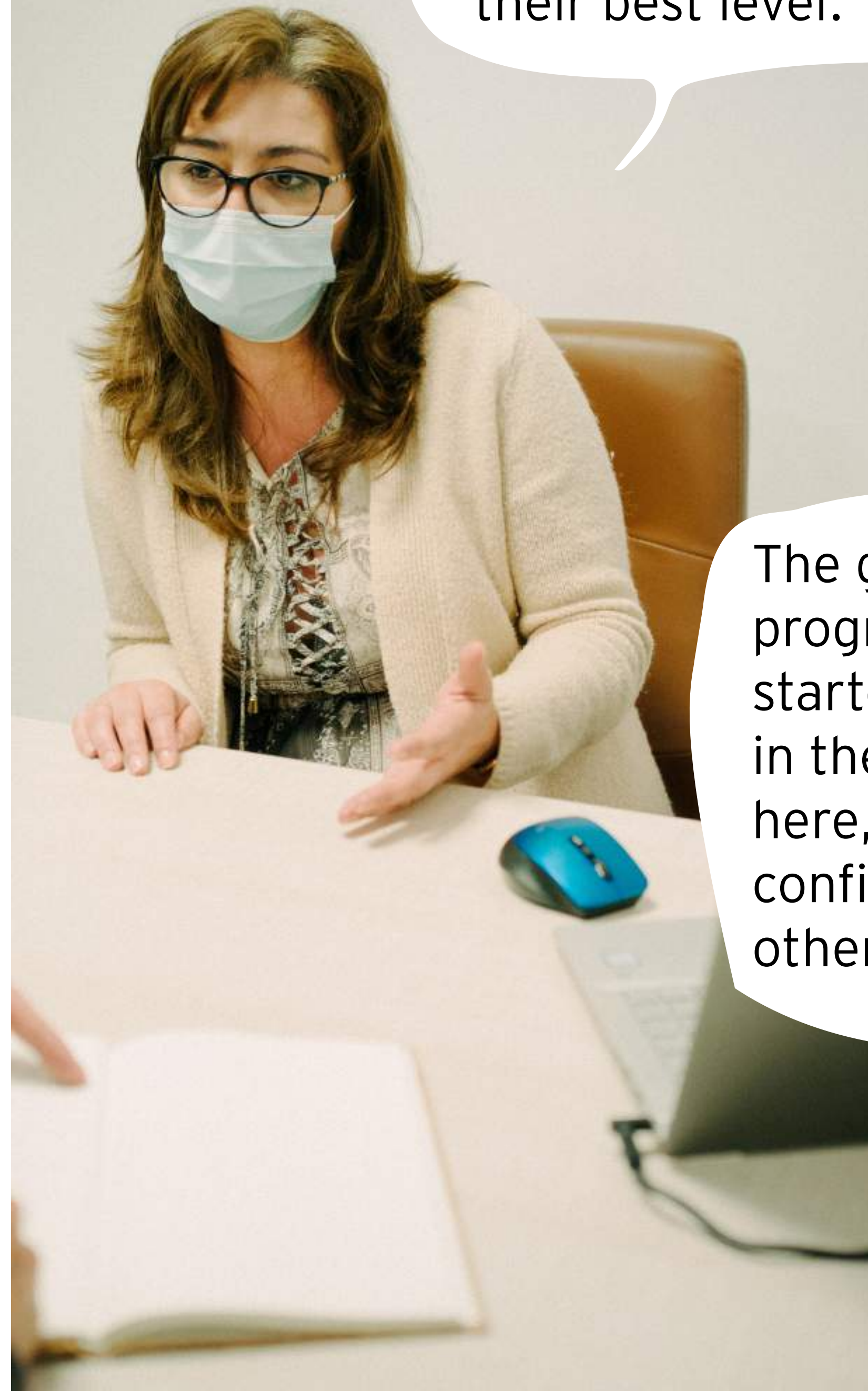
I grew up with my Roma neighbours, I played with them, I don't see them as different people.

I don't even know if
"different" is the right word.

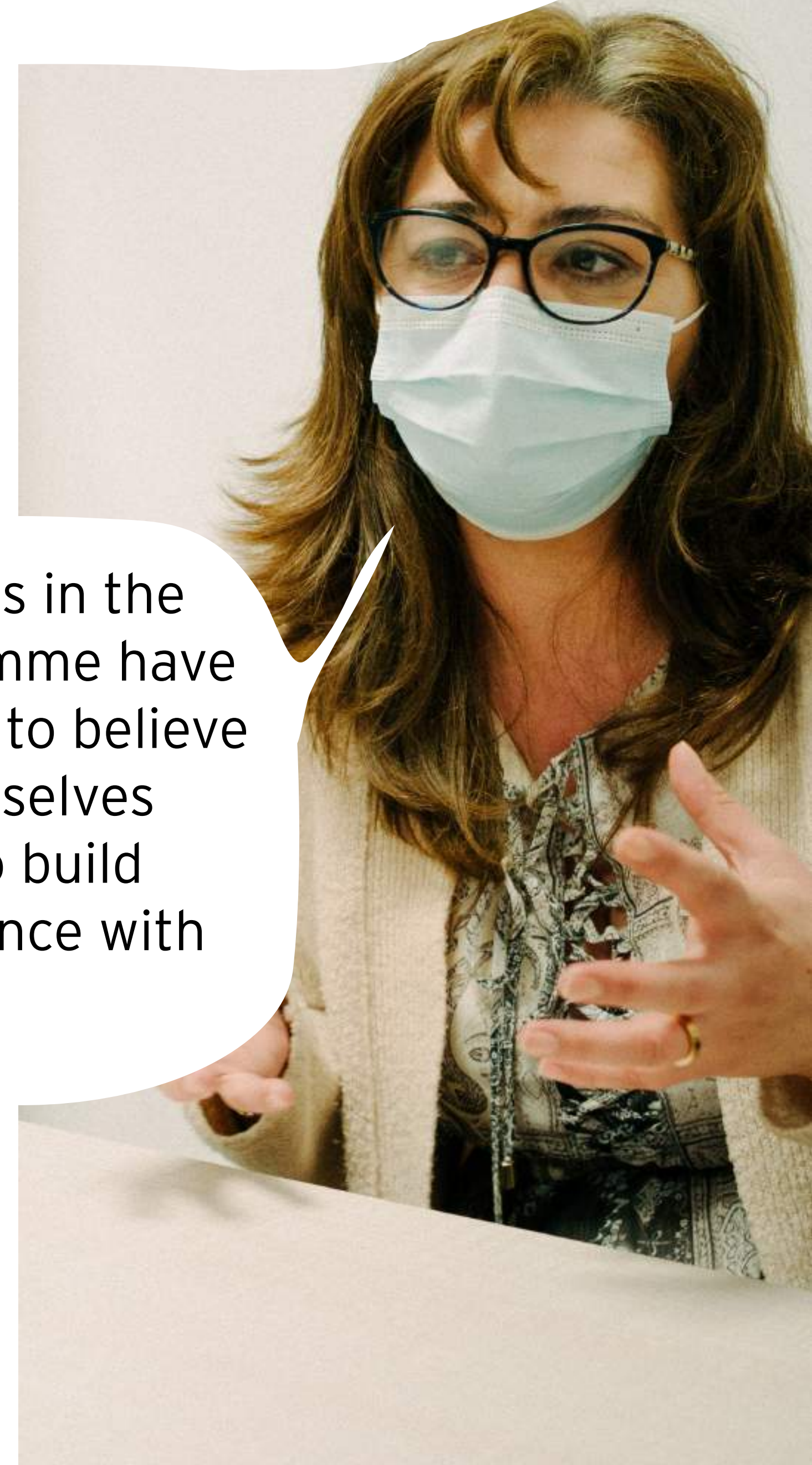
Education can
save and give
better lives.



We are fighting to bring every student to
their best level.



The girls in the
programme have
started to believe
in themselves
here, to build
confidence with
others.



The fact that Florica is Roma was important to them. She gives better advice than I do.



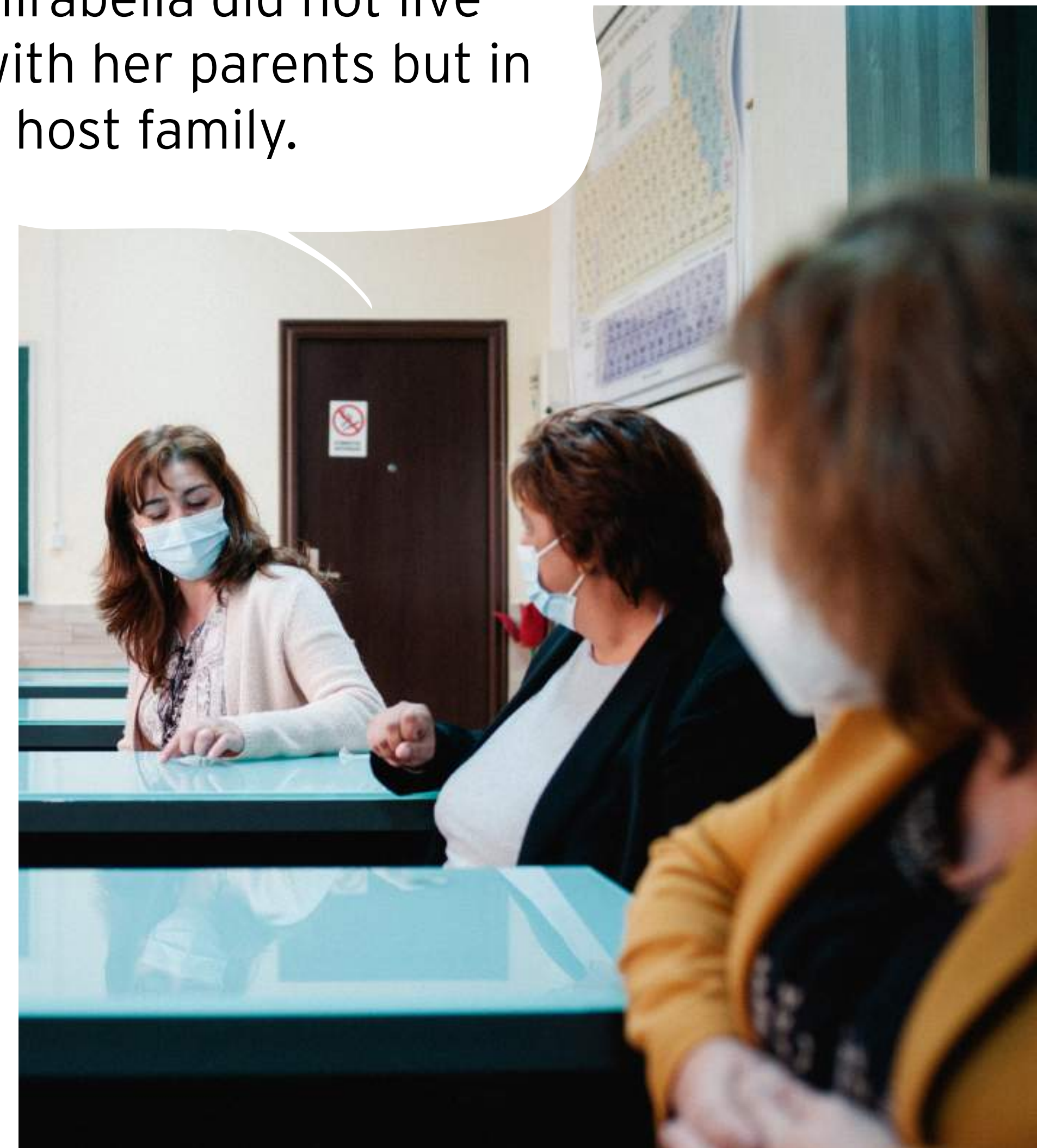
She does everything with her heart, it's essential to help like that.

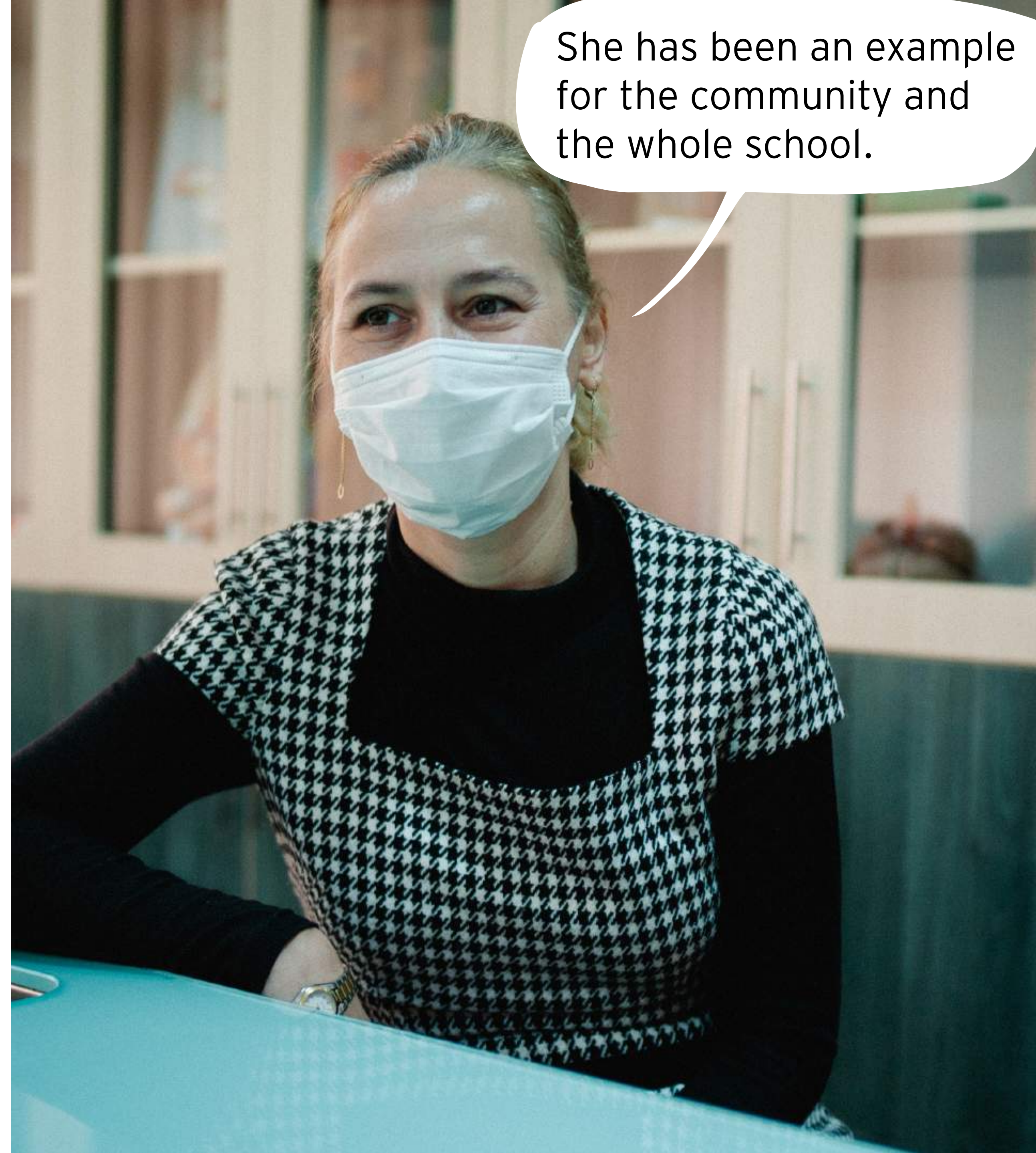


In the programme, Florica is in contact with Adriana, the teachers, the young people and the families. Two tutor teachers, Alicia and Adriana, helped the students in maths and language.



Mirabella did not live with her parents but in a host family.





I had to convince her to take a chance with the programme and come here.

I am happy for her.



At this school, about 60 students are trained each year to become teachers, including 4-6 Roma students outside the Velux programme. Adriana tells me that those who come here are the students who have done best in their high schools. The mentoring programme turns this logic on its head and gives other students a chance.

The girls' results are good, it worked well for them.



They will come back to the community to teach the children.



I hope they will give what
they have received to
others.



I think they have
assumed their
identity, they
are not ashamed
anymore.

It's also your character, you
manage everyone well!



I know, I've
heard that
before...

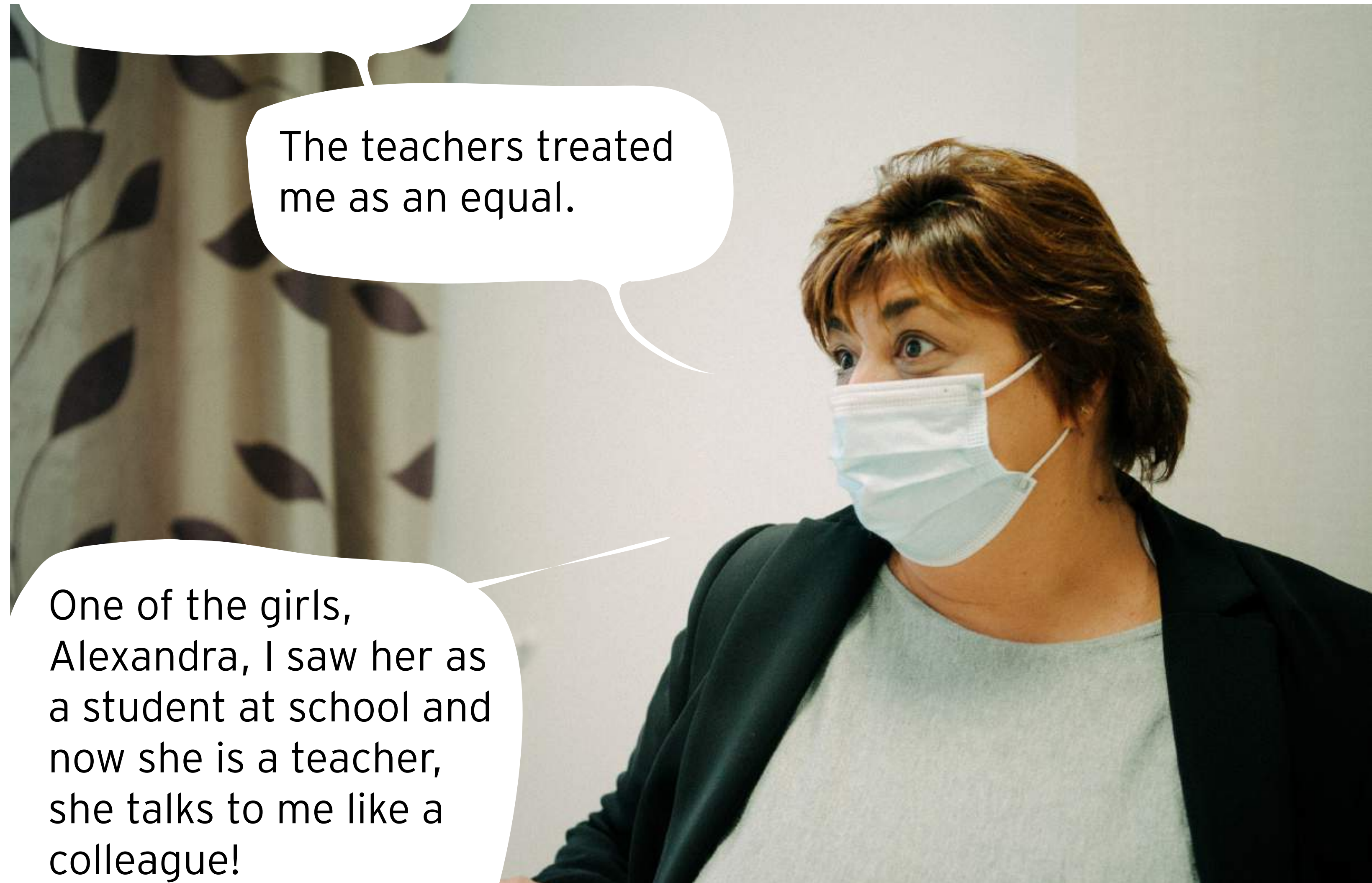
Some non-Roma students
even asked for the mentoring
programme for them...



I felt welcomed
here.

The teachers treated
me as an equal.

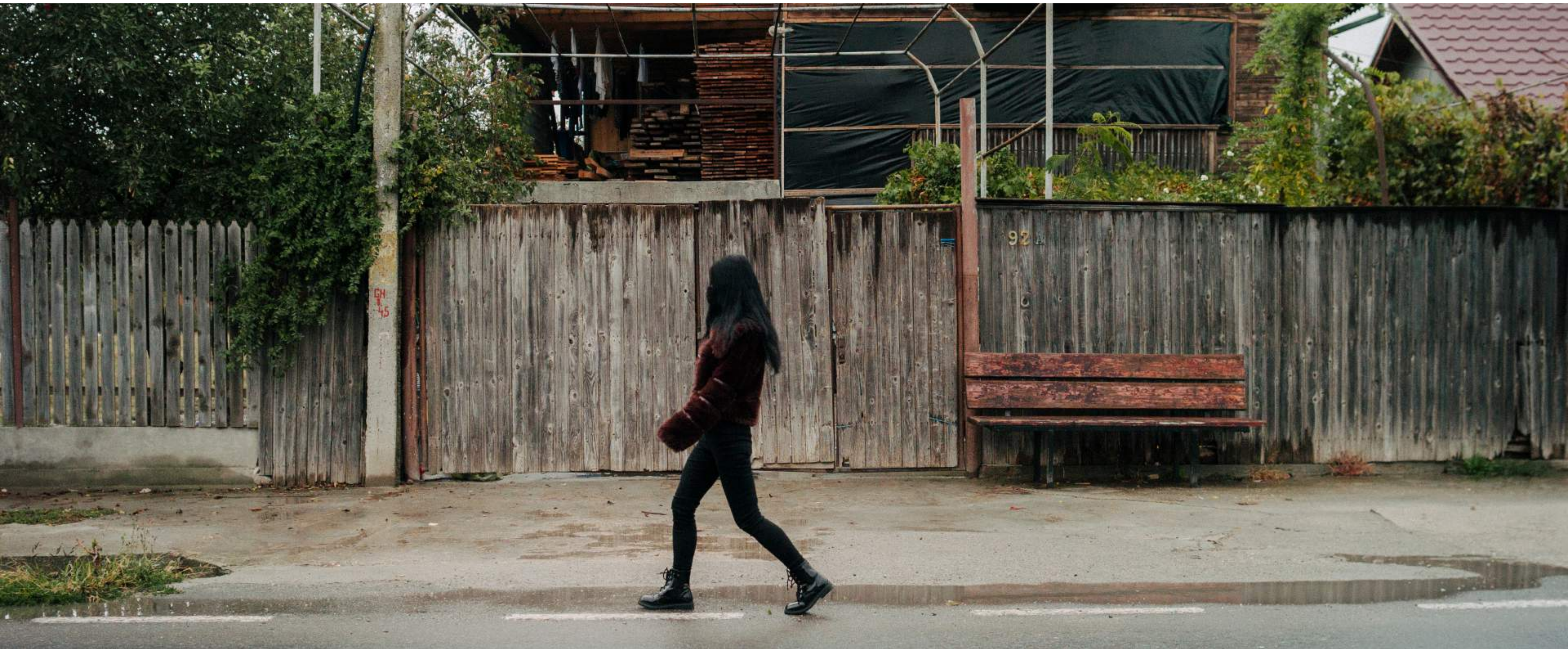
One of the girls,
Alexandra, I saw her as
a student at school and
now she is a teacher,
she talks to me like a
colleague!





Alexandra was born in Bora and went to school in Florica. She likes to quote the teacher who inspired her as a child, Elisabeth, a role model for her. Alexandra starts teaching this year in a school in another part of Slobozia where there are few Roma children. The other teachers see her simply as a colleague, which surprises her and still makes her feel uncomfortable.









We are becoming film actresses...How are you?



I'm still stressed in class.



Come in, we'll talk later after your interview. Your mum is here too.



When I was little, my friends in the neighbourhood thought I couldn't become a teacher. They didn't trust themselves.



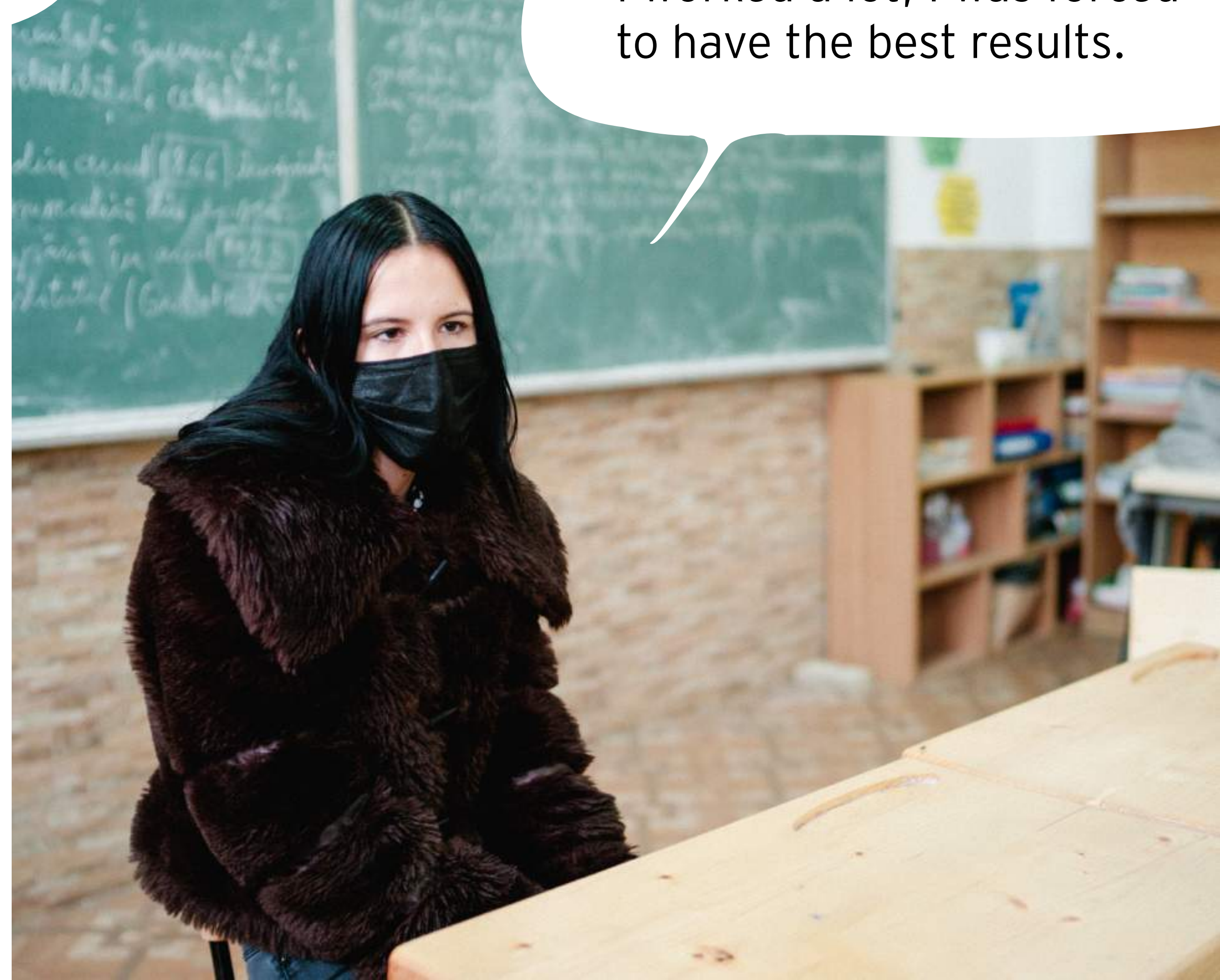
I believed in it, my mother always supported me. She also studied.



It was hard at the Pedagogical Institute. I was not welcomed by everyone.



I worked a lot, I was forced to have the best results.



Florica was always there,
right to the end. She still
advises me today.



It is important that she is
Roma. I feel close to her, she
knows everything about our
life here.



I want to pass on
something to Roma
children: to have
ambition, to never
give up.





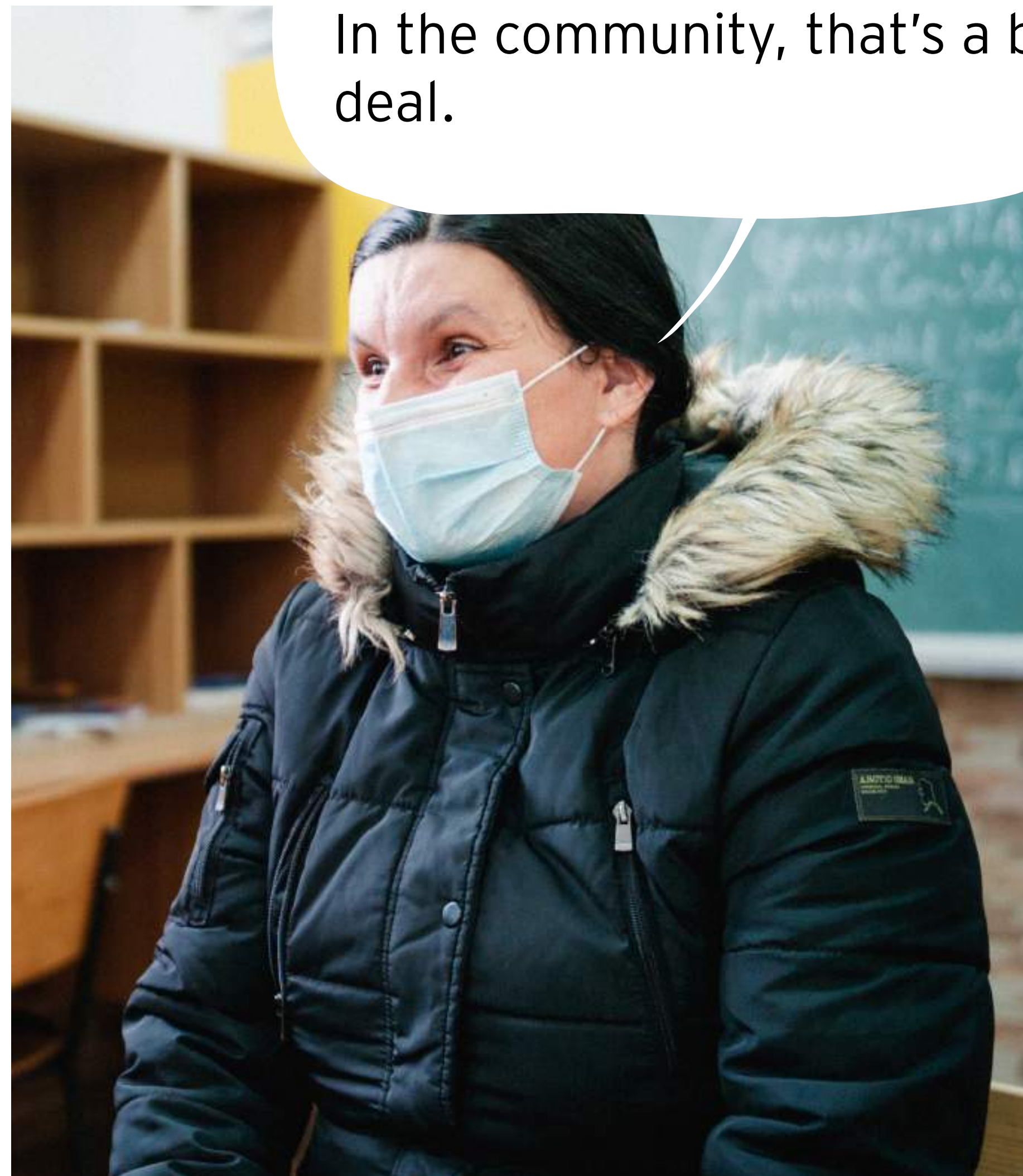
Julia, Alexandra's mother, comes to sit in her place in the classroom. She studied economics at university but then chose to look after her children.



I always encouraged Alexandra, she was very shy. Florica had a lot of positive influence on her.



I'm so happy she's a teacher! Her daddy is also very proud. In the community, that's a big deal.



We don't have this problem of self-esteem in our family, but it can be a model for children who don't believe in themselves.



I think you know Arsène. These are the diplomas of the children in the neighbourhood.



I got my first salary, I gave
half of it to my parents.



Bravo! Tell me how your first
meeting with the parents
went.





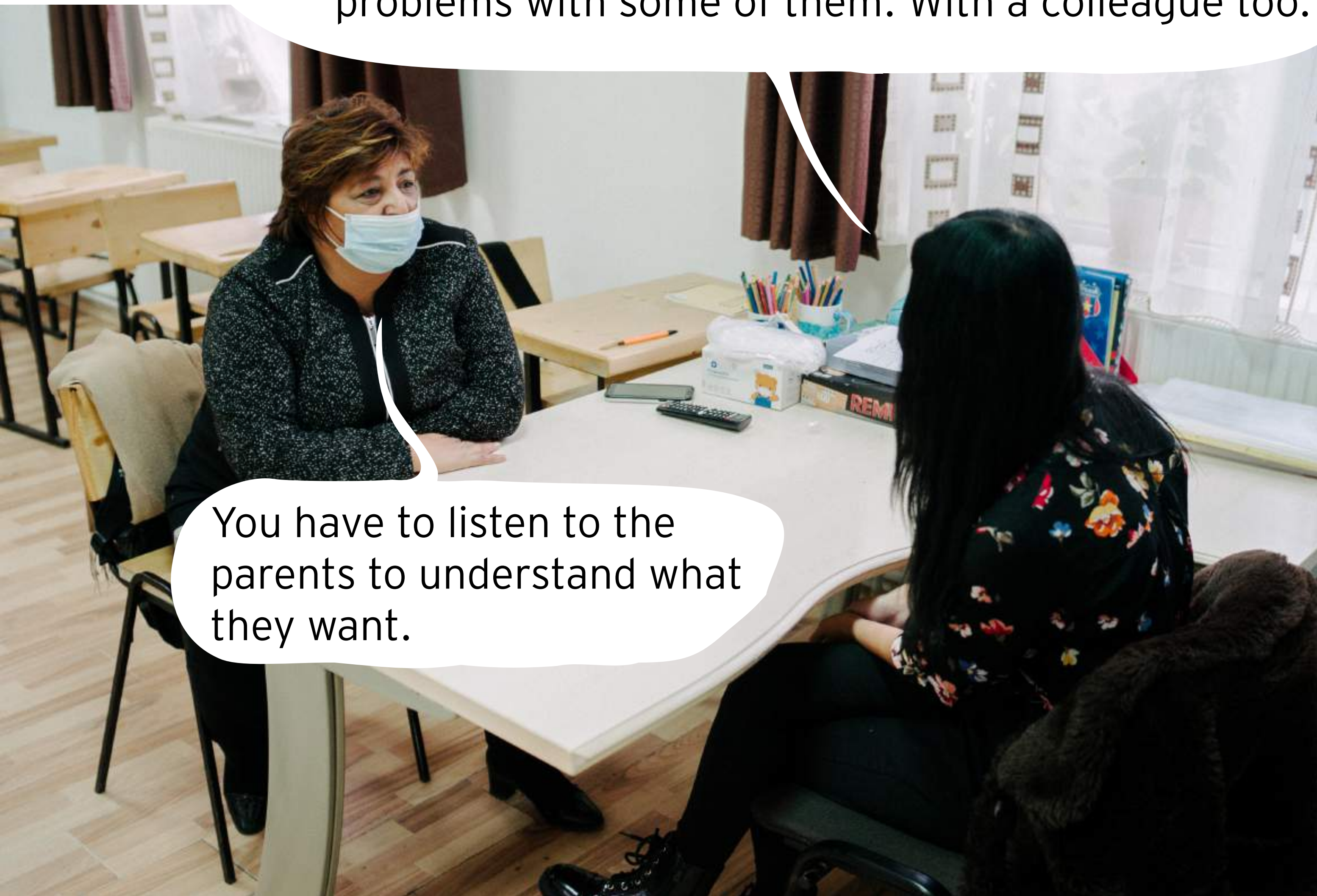
Look at these kids, this is Alexandra, she was a student here and now she is a teacher!



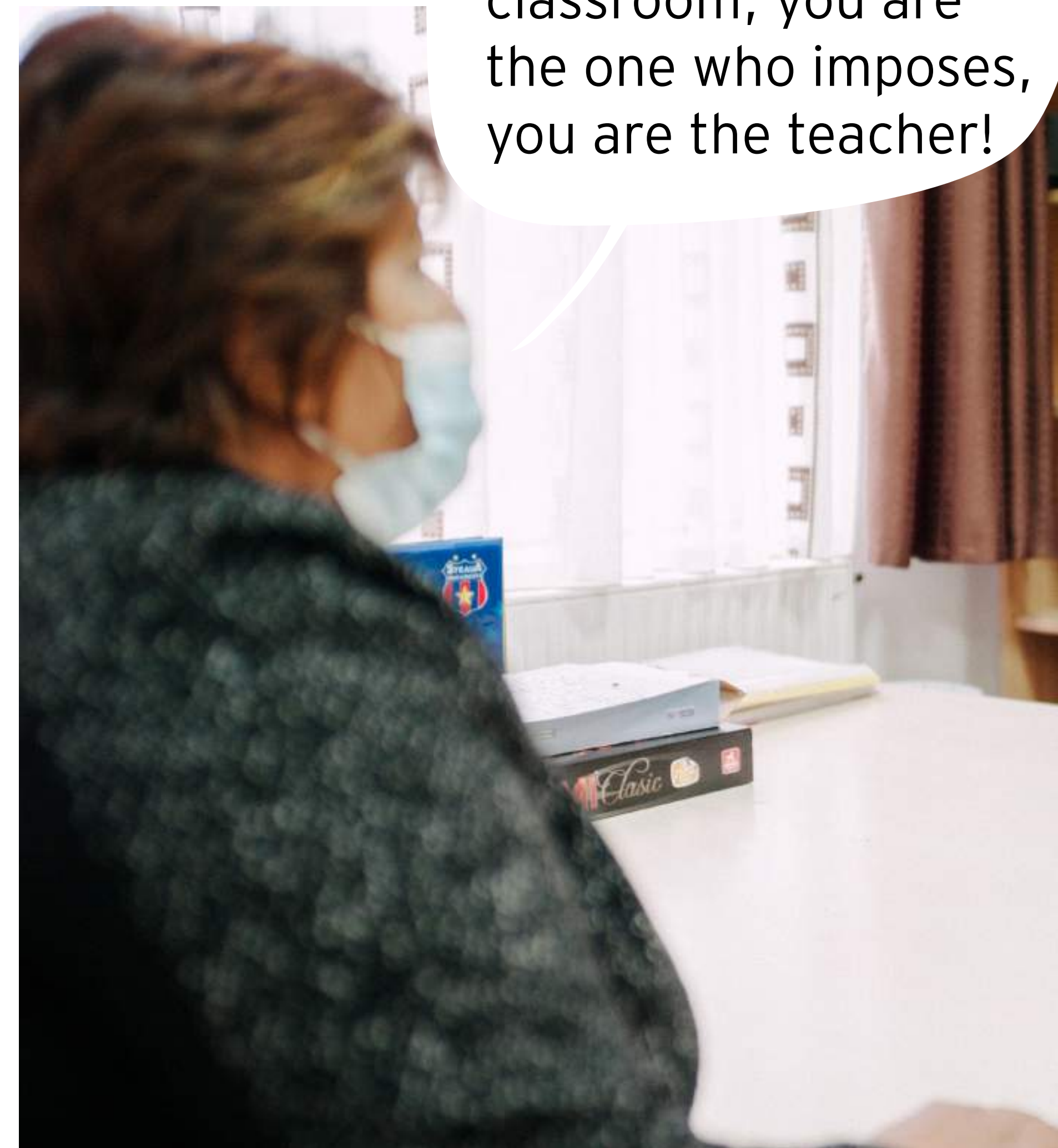
It's hard work with parents, they want to decide for us at school.



The parents know I'm Roma, I told them from the beginning. They recognise me anyway. I had problems with some of them. With a colleague too.



They can impose at home but in the classroom, you are the one who imposes, you are the teacher!



only have one little Roma girl in my class, she was immediately marginalised. I try to help her.



It is important for her to see a Roma teacher.

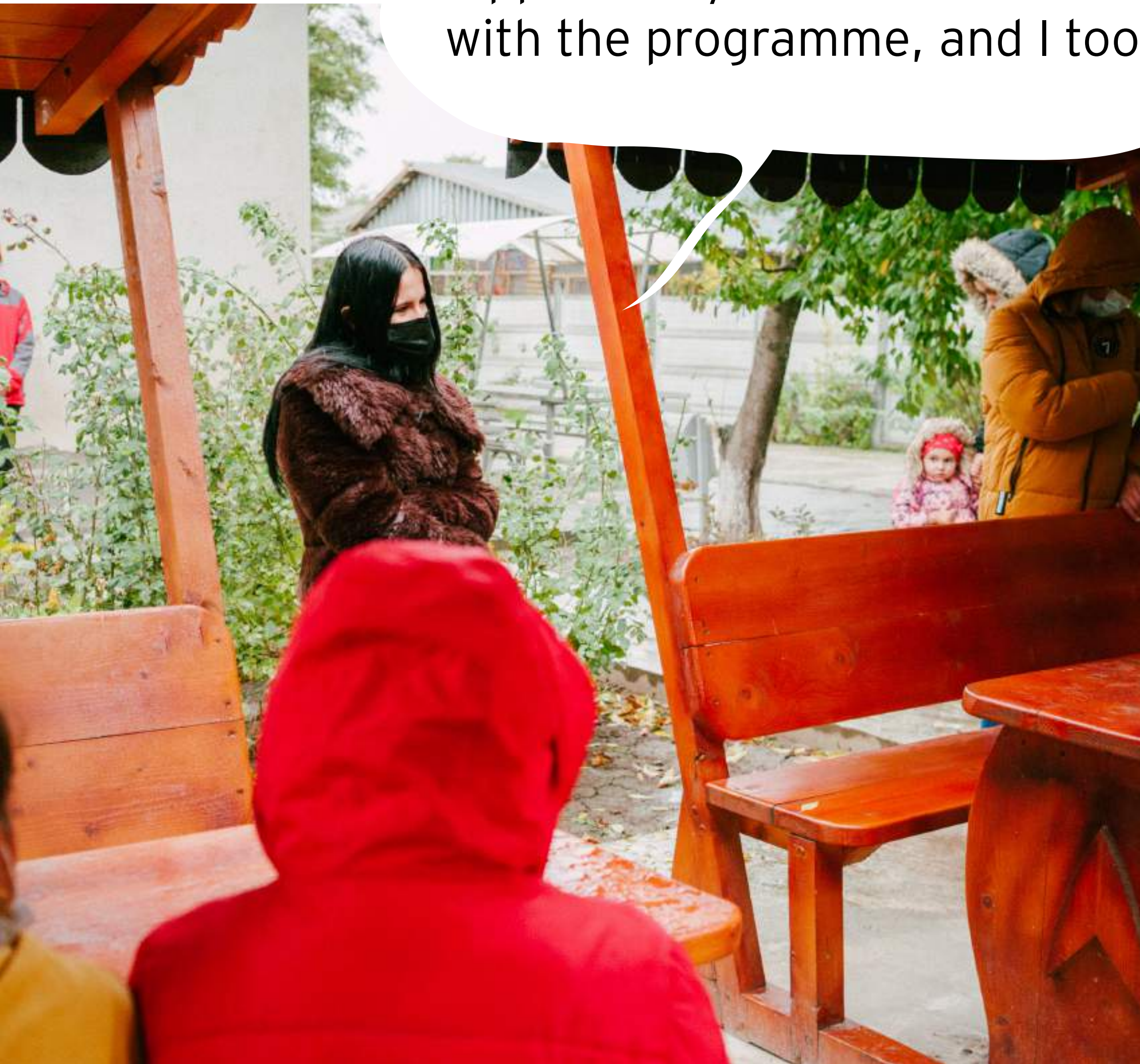


Yes, I was well received, I like teaching. I still feel strange sometimes but I want to stay.

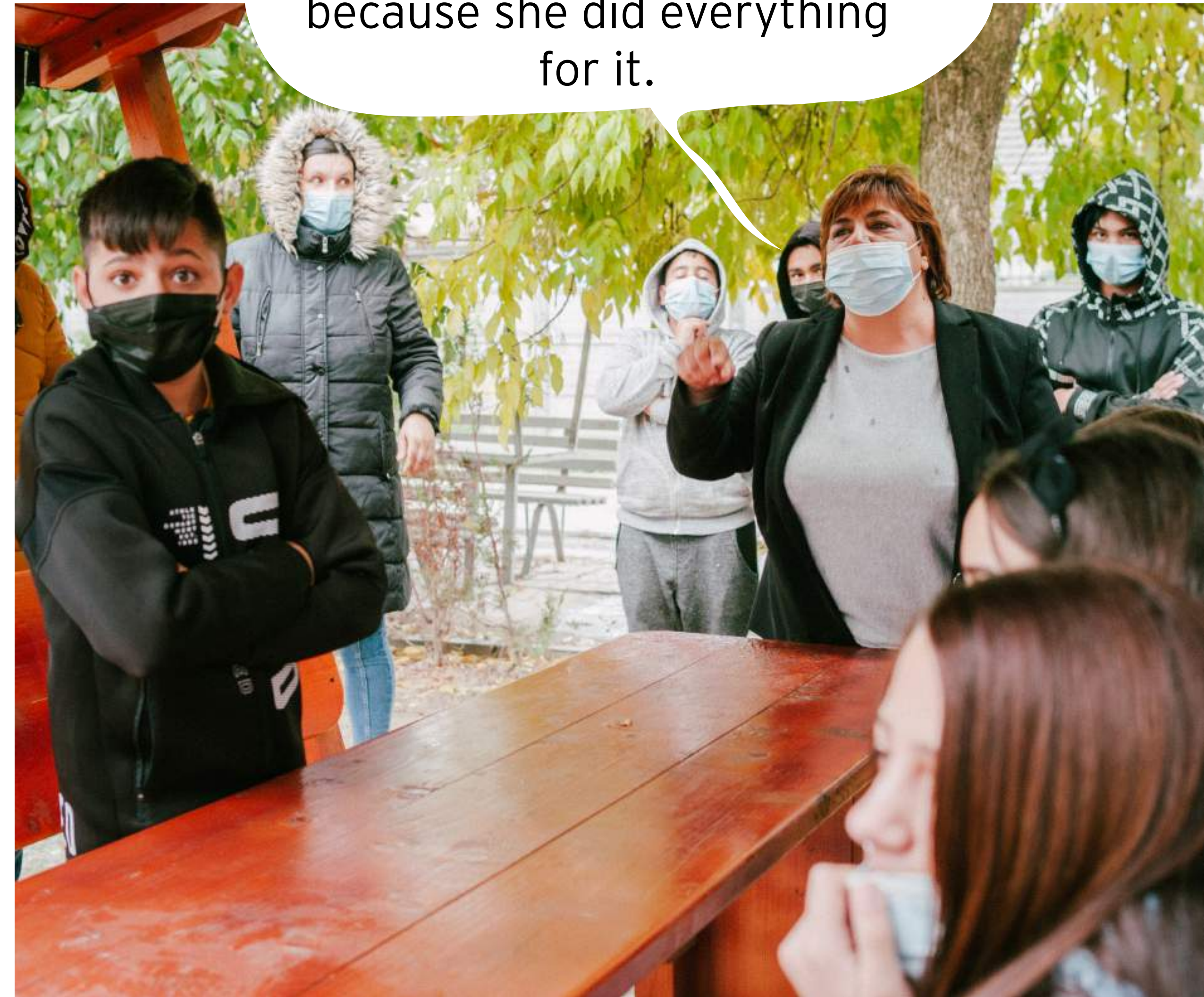


Florica is full of empathy and energy. She has to speak loudly, do a lot to convince. She has the feeling that it will never be enough. She takes us outside where she has organised for us a small meeting between the Roma children of the school and Alexandra. The meeting is non-formal but the idea is always the same: to set an example, to show models, to affirm that something is possible and that the future is not closed.

I learned here, like you. I had the opportunity to become a teacher with the programme, and I took it.



Alexandra succeeded because she did everything for it.



Do you have any questions?



Some applause for Alexandra! Keep going to school all of you and don't stop!

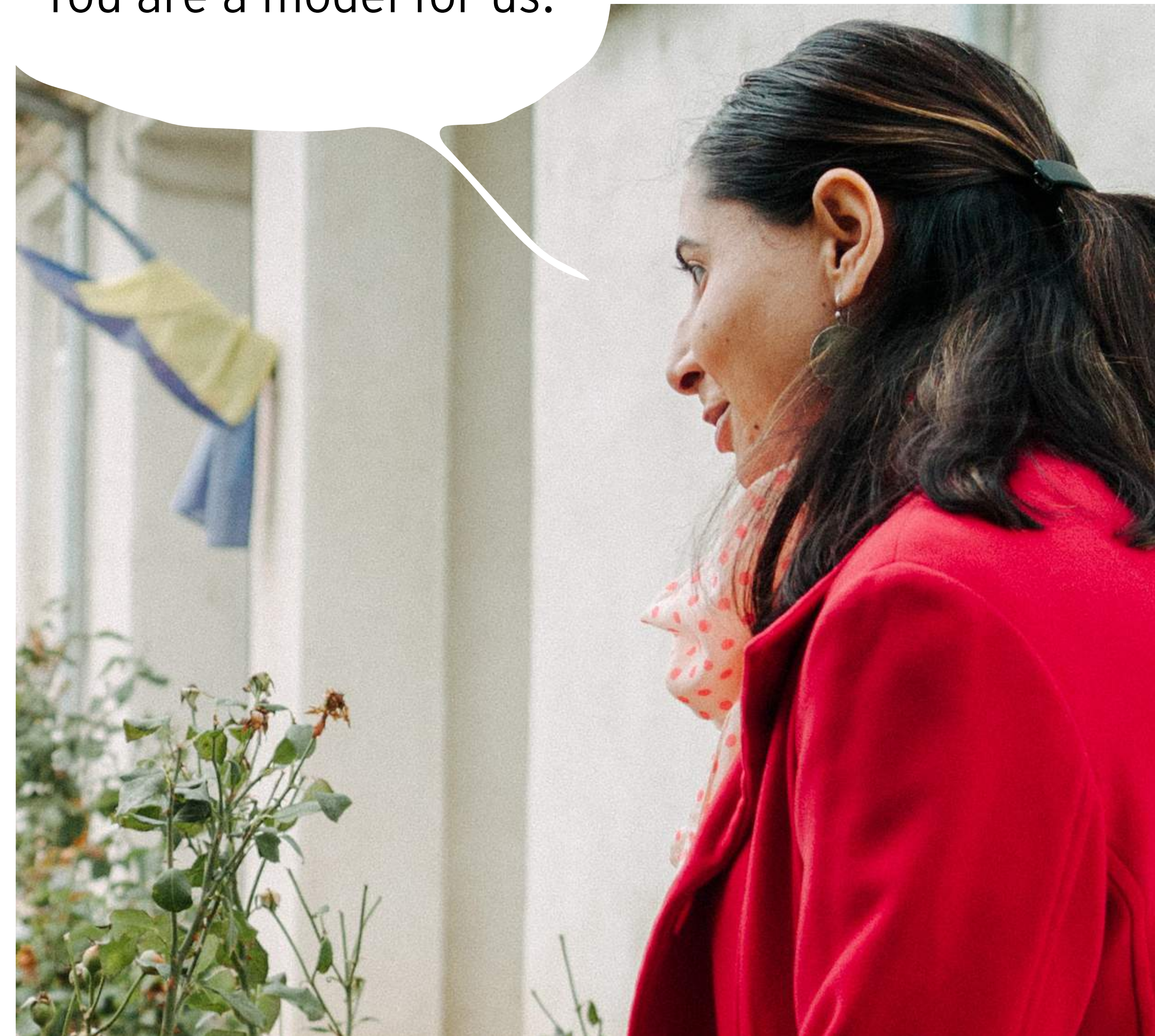


Alexandra modestly tells us that she doesn't see herself as a role model, but she is proud of her success when she is in front of the children. She hopes to inspire them.

I really thank you for what you are
doing in the programme.



You are a model for us.



You are cute Luiza. Maybe I
would have liked to have this as
a child.







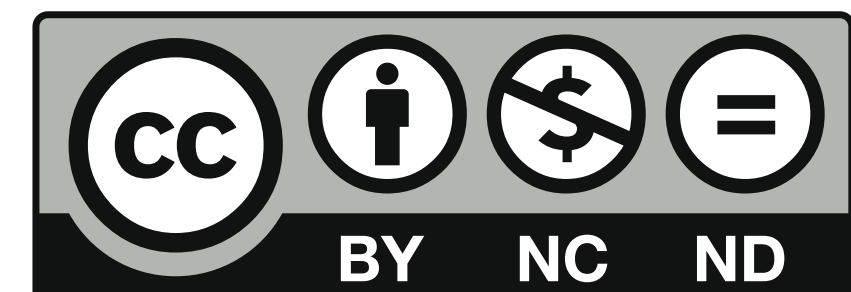
Photo-Novel documentary by ECRI partners (European Cooperation
For Roma Inclusion):

Le LABA: Christophe Dabitch (text), with the assistance of David
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- Ville de Bègles, Agence Place, GrünBau gGmbH, Université de
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