

Hello, I'm Manouska Molema.
I'm vice-mayor at the municipality of Groningen.

What you have here is 'The story of Hasan & Sherin'.
It's a comic book. It tells the story of Hasan and Sherin
through text and pictures. Hasan and Sherin have already been
in the Netherlands for a few years now. They live in Groningen
and work at the municipality. They've had to do a lot to get
this far. In this book, they tell you everything about their
experiences with the integration process. I'm so proud of Hasan
and Sherin and of what they've achieved! I hope this comic
helps you and inspires you to integrate as quickly
as possible in our beautiful municipality.

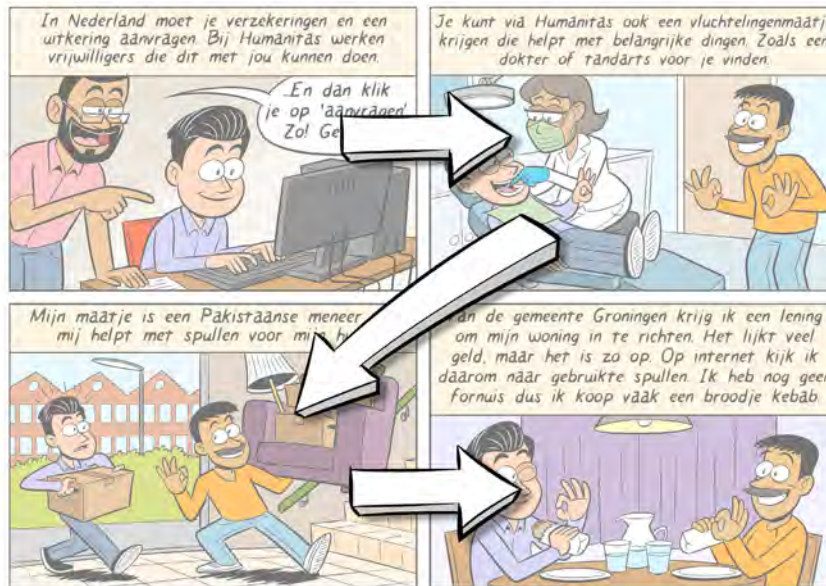
On behalf of the municipality, I wish you
good luck and lots of fun in Groningen! The
municipality is there for all residents, so that
includes you. You are most welcome, so feel free
to contact us if you have questions, need help
with anything or have good ideas.

Welcome to Groningen!



*Hello, dear reader! This is a comic book: a story told mainly in pictures.
Maybe you've read a comic before? If not, here's a quick explanation!*

*In most Western countries, people read from left to right.
They do that with comic books too! You start each page at the top
left picture. You read the top text first. Then you read the texts
from top to bottom. Here's an example.*



That is how you read a comic! Happy reading!

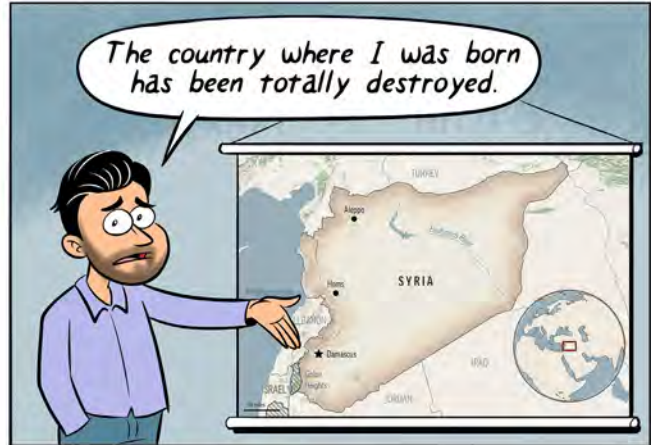
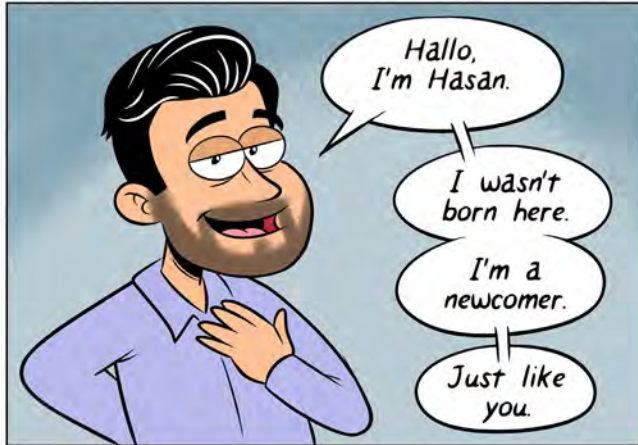
THE
STORY

OF

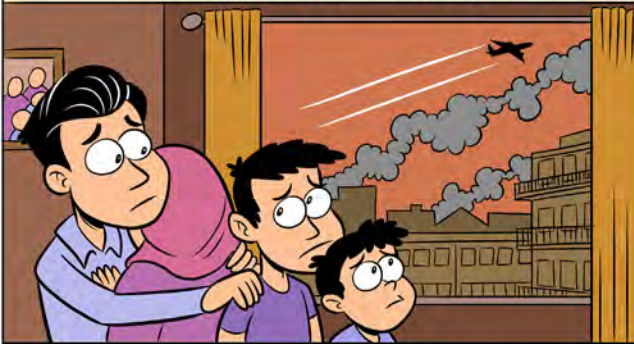
HASAN &

SHERIN

ILLUSTRATED BY JAN-WILLEM SPAKMAN



We had to leave our country in 2012. As quickly as possible. My father went first. He could still get on a flight.



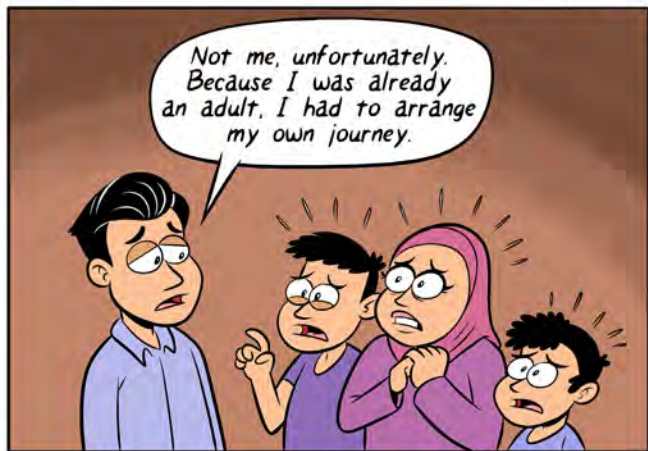
My mum, brothers and I found a safe place to stay. Once my dad arrived in the Netherlands he applied for 'family reunification'.

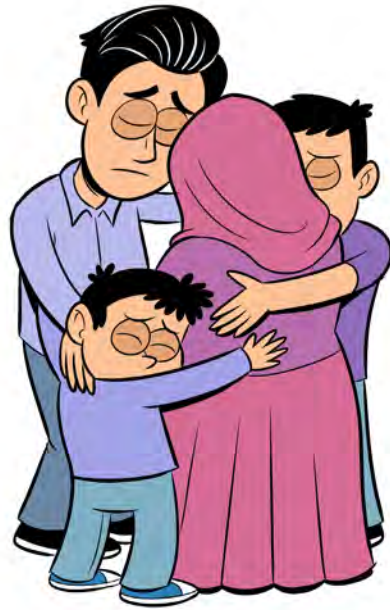


We had an anxious 9-month wait for a message. Finally, he called with good news! My mum and brothers could go to him!

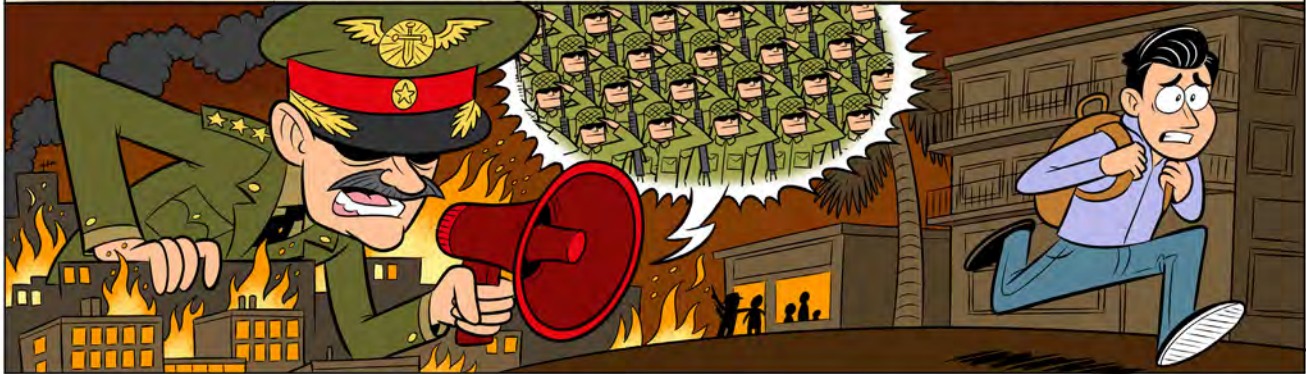


Not me, unfortunately. Because I was already an adult, I had to arrange my own journey.





The leader of my country wanted all adult males to join the army. I didn't want that. I don't want to kill people. They could be your friends or neighbours. I left in the night.



The journey was dangerous. I kept looking back but had to move forward. I ran for my life. Fast, faster! I stopped to catch my breath. Didn't move, didn't make a sound, and then I ran on.



I felt like a child running from a mad dog.



In a neighbouring country, I paid a lot of money to get in a truck.



I wasn't the only one.



*We sat there, afraid and silent, in the dark.
It took some 3 days.*



*Something changed in me on that journey.
I was no longer Hasan. I was a refugee.*

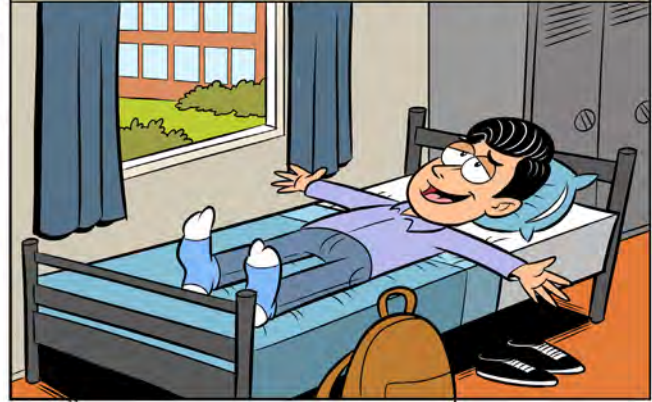




In the Netherlands, I applied for asylum at the application centre in Ter Apel.



I was finally able to relax.



And I saw my parents and brothers again!

The first months in the Netherlands, I lived in an asylum centre.
They call it an AZC. My AZC was in Ter Apel.



It was very crowded at the AZC. So many refugees from so many different countries.



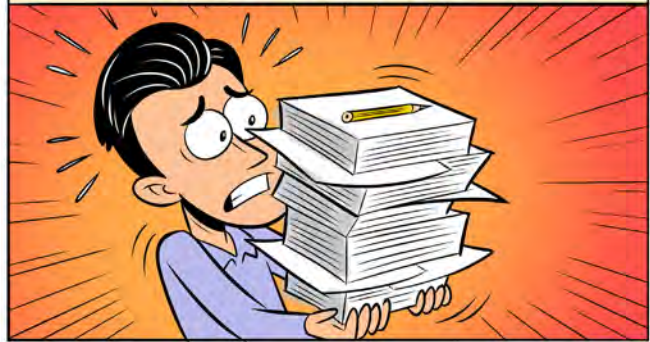
You could hear people talking all the time.
I heard my own language a lot. And my story.



Life starts with papers. You don't exist until your name is registered somewhere. Then you're someone.



I received papers from the IND. I had to fill them in. The IND? Is that like the CIA or FBI? I don't know.



The men and women at the IND do look like people from a secret service. With smart suits and ties.



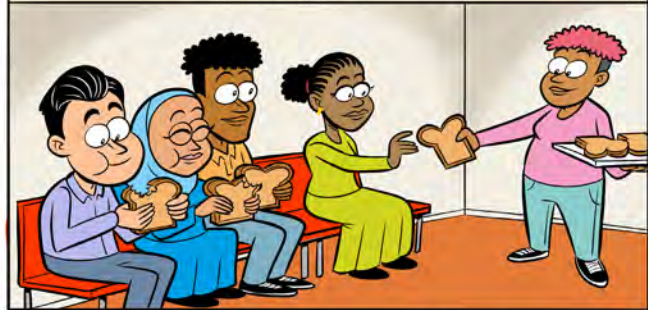
But no, the IND is short for: Immigration and Naturalisation Department. The IND decides whether you get to stay in the Netherlands.



I filled in the papers. Someone told me I had to wait for an interview.



I was hungry. It made me think of my country. There, you eat a hot meal at lunchtime. Someone from the IND handed me a cheese sandwich.



The woman also pointed to a machine in the corner. I chose chocolate milk.



My first experience of Dutch culture tasted great!



Applying for asylum took a really long time.
So many people want a residence permit.
What can you do? Roam around the AZC?



Then suddenly, the letter arrived!
It was a 'positive decision'. That meant
I could stay in the Netherlands!



I 'jump a hole in the sky!
That's Dutch for being really happy.
I was sure everything would be different now.



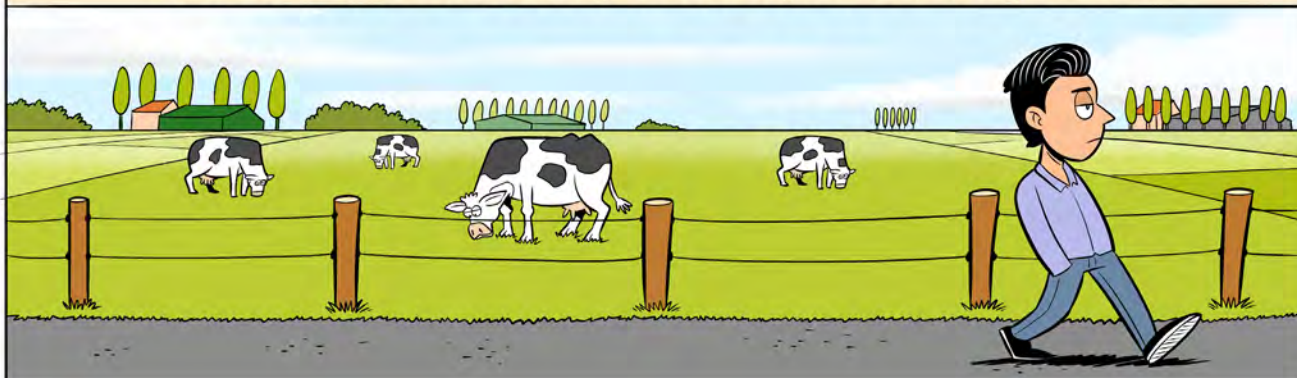
I was first relocated to a different asylum centre. It was also in the province of Groningen. In a city called 'Delfzijl'.



I could look out across the water. I could see cargo ships and, in the distance, Germany.



Here, I had to wait for a house of my own. That can take a long time. The Netherlands is small and there isn't much housing available. A year's wait is very common.



One day, a letter arrived for me. From DUO.

What is DUO?
And what does this letter say?

I don't understand any of it.

I don't speak a word of Dutch!



That evening, I called a friend I used to share a room with at the AZC in Ter Apel.

I've received a letter.

I can tell you what it says.



It says you're 'inburgeringsplichtig'. That means you have to follow an integration programme.

It says that you can borrow money. To pay for a Dutch course!

And you can already get started with that at the AZC!



That was great news! I didn't want to sit around doing nothing while waiting for a house.



I wanted to build a life in the Netherlands. And I could already start doing that at the AZC!
I wanted to 'shout it from the rooftops!' - That's Dutch for: I can't wait to tell everyone!



People, start learning the Dutch language and culture while you're still at the AZC!

I learned my first Dutch words on the language course at the AZC. I will never forget them. They were the words for green and grass.



The third word was 'achtentachtig' (88). The Dutch g-sound in this word is similar to a sound in Arabic. So luckily, I could already pronounce it properly.



My father said: 'Language is the key to all the doors in the Netherlands.'



In summer, 9 months after the letter from DUO, I received another important message. My case manager at the AZC came to see me.



I received an invitation from Humanitas for an interview about a house.



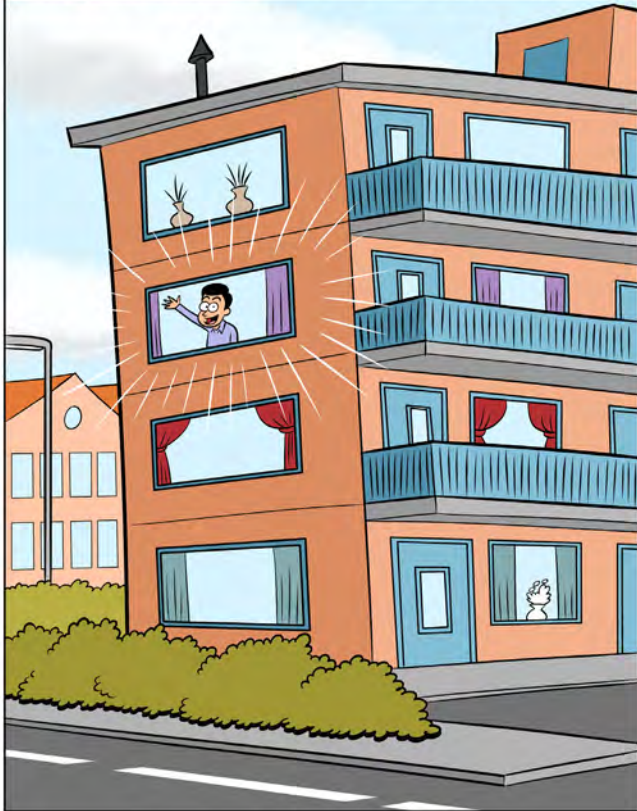
The available houses appear on woningnet.nl. It's rather nerve-wracking.



And then one morning...



I was going to get an apartment of 40 square metres. That may seem quite small, but I was so happy! It had 2 separate rooms and a kitchen!



In the Netherlands, you have to apply for insurance and benefits. There are volunteers working at Humanitas who can do this with you.



Humanitas can also offer you a refugee buddy to help with important things. Such as finding a doctor or dentist.



My buddy was a guy from Pakistan and he helped me get things for my house.



The municipality of Groningen also gave me a loan to furnish my new home. It seemed like a lot of money, but it was easily spent. That's why I looked for used items on the internet. For a while, I didn't have a stove, so I often bought kebabs.



Then I got an invitation from the municipality of Groningen to talk about benefits. They would also help me pay my bills. That's known as financial support.



I also had an appointment with Thuisin050. That's the municipality of Groningen department that helped me with the integration process. I started looking for schooling or work, together with my contact.



Integrating starts with the language. That's why I had language lessons at a school. There are also language cafes, where you can practise your Dutch with other refugees.



If you want to study in the Netherlands, you can do a link year. There, you learn how the Dutch education system works.



I wanted to study law. But then I saw all those thick study books and difficult words. I didn't want that.



I decided to do voluntary work at Humanitas to start with. That was good for my language. And I made friends there, too.



I helped people who had gone through the same things as me. I then realised that I wanted to devote myself to this work.



I needed to follow a study programme. I chose the MBO programme Social Work. I also had to do an internship, to gain work experience. I did that with the WIJ team. I learned so much there. I helped people who had questions about money, benefits, illness or childcare. I really felt at home there.

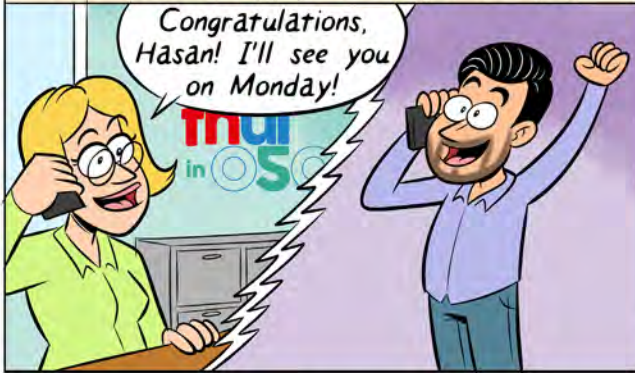


My second internship was at Thuisin050, the municipality of Groningen department for status holders. I could share my experiences with other refugees there. I was now on the other side of the table, helping people with their integration process.



A job vacancy came up.
I decided to apply and I got the job!

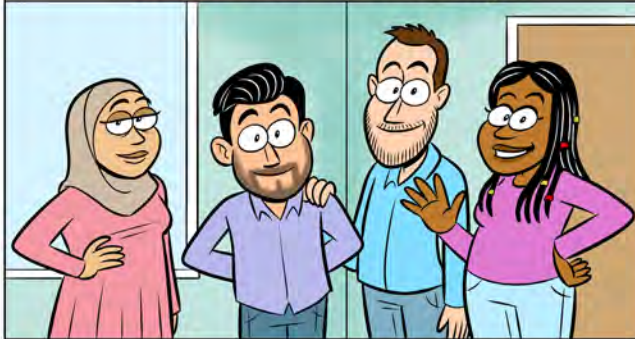
Congratulations,
Hasan! I'll see you
on Monday!



Suddenly, I was a civil servant.
That's someone from the government and that
is quite special. In my home country, that's
not a position you achieve easily.



I joined a team with various colleagues from
different countries. I'm not the only one who
has left their home country.



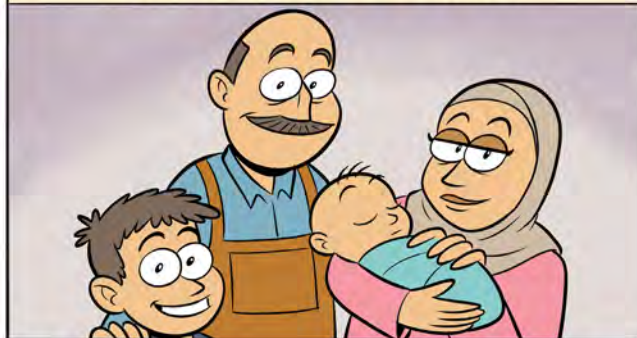
A colleague of mine also went through the
integration process. And she uses that in her work.
We call someone like that a key figure. Someone
who creates a bridge between two cultures.



Hello. I'm Sherin and I like to help people find their way in the Netherlands. I was born and raised in Egypt.



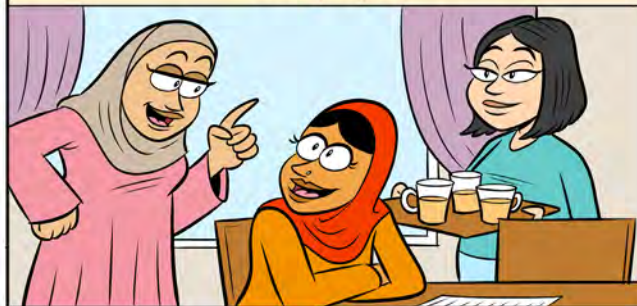
I studied there and worked as a social worker. I also married there. I'm now a mother of two sons.



I followed my husband to the Netherlands in 2003. I needed to integrate and learn the language. It wasn't easy for me in the Netherlands at first. But I did my best. I was often lonely because my husband had to work a lot.



I decided to do something that would make me happy. That's why I started doing voluntary work. It's a great way to connect with people.



I did that at Multicultureel Vrouwencentrum Jasmijn. This is a place where women from other countries can learn new things. I got to know other women who had been in the Netherlands for longer. You can do lots of things there. Learn to swim and cycle, and as well as handy work. They can also help you find work. And much more.



Doing voluntary work expanded my knowledge and network. But the most important thing is that it improved my language and knowledge of the Netherlands!



Many newcomers feel lonely. By telling my story, I can inspire and connect them.

I received the 'Strong Woman Award' for my voluntary work at Jasmijn. That's an award celebrating my efforts. I was so proud of that!



I then decided to do a study programme. I did the 'Intercultural Parenting Coach' programme. My coach at the municipality helped me register.



There, I trained to become an experience expert or key figure. That's someone who helps people from other countries. They come from another country themselves, but have experience in the new country.



I needed to follow two internships during the programme. At Jasmijn and at a school.



Once I'd finished my studies, a vacancy came up at Thuisin050. That's the municipality of Groningen department for people who need to follow the integration process.

It was a great match for me. Because I'd also been through the integration process and knew a lot from working at Jasmijn.



*I got the job! My first real job!
It made me so happy!*



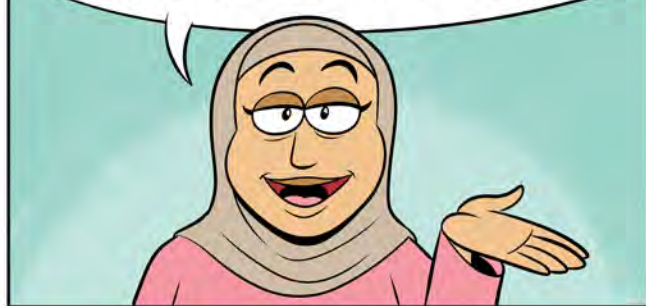
I love helping people. As a key figure, I go along to interviews that coaches have with people who are going through the integration process.



My Arabic background and language helps people to trust me. I'm able to make people understand things that the coaches sometimes can't.



It's the best job in the world. I can show people who are new here that you can achieve so much. You just need to do your best and not be afraid to learn new things.

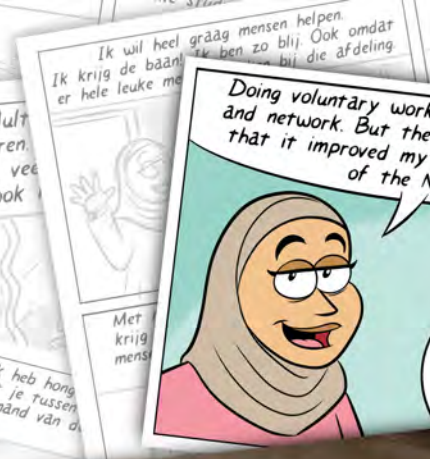


This was our story. Integrating isn't always easy. But if we can do it, you can too. There are people who really want to help you. Hopefully, you'll quickly feel at home.

Welcome in the Netherlands!



The End



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Based on the story of Hāsan Maghārba & Sherin Abdelrahim

If you'd like more information about Thuisin050, scan de QR-code!



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