

Interviews with Refugees and Migrants



Interview#: 7

Name: Kasim

Age: 28

Country of origin: Myanmar (Rohingya)

Current location: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Names and identified characteristics are changed, but the story is real.
The interview was conducted in 2020.

Hello, I am working with the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC). This interview is to find out about the experiences of Rohingya refugees in Kuala Lumpur. If you are from Rohingya community residing in Kuala Lumpur, aged 18 or over, and have arrived in Malaysia for less than 2 years, we would like to invite you to participate! If you agree to participate, we will ask questions about your migration journey, working and living condition, security concerns and plans, among other topics. We will use the information collected to report to NGOs and other actors, so that they can develop interventions adapted to the real needs of refugee and migrant communities in Malaysia.



Participation in this project is entirely voluntary and does not provide access to assistance programs or any form of compensation. Our interview will be strictly confidential and anonymous: we will not ask you for personal data during the call.

Many thanks!

How long have you been a refugee in Kuala Lumpur?



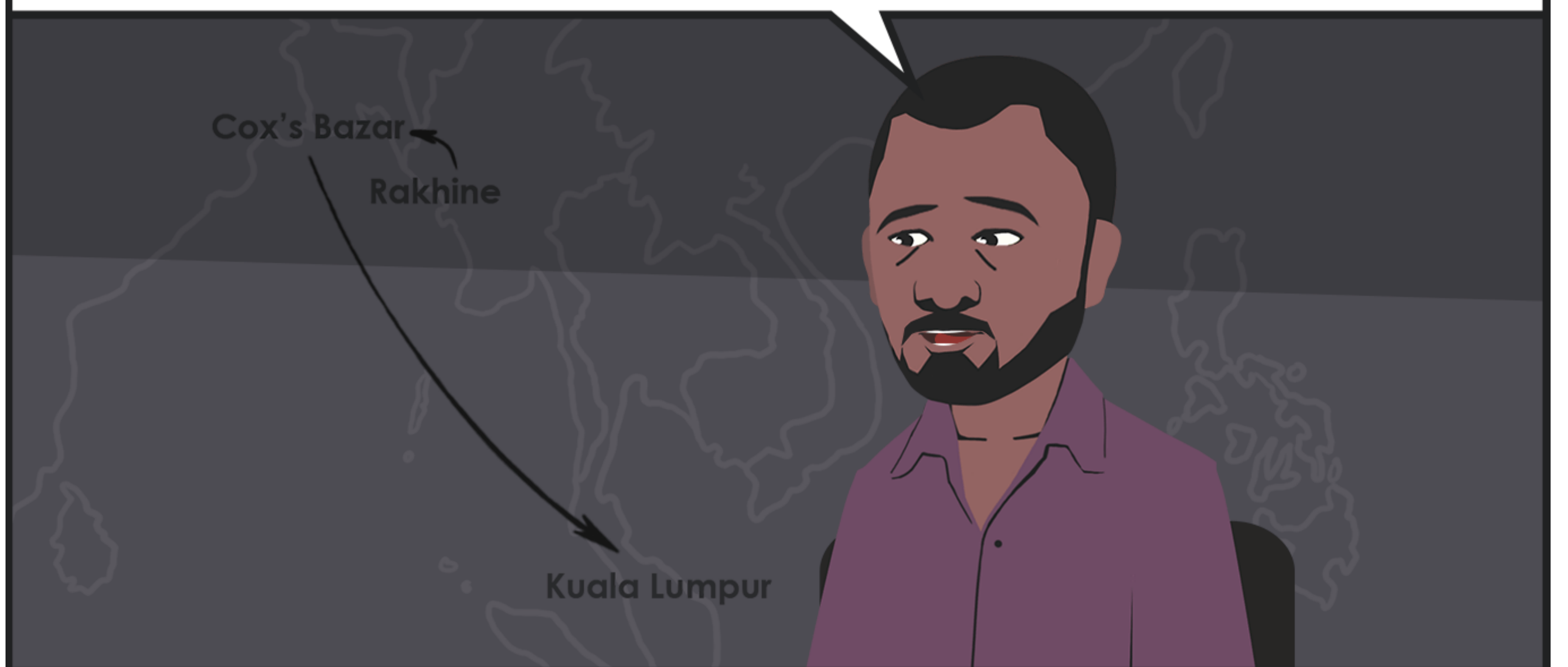
I came to Malaysia in early 2019 and have been living in Kuala Lumpur for one year. One of my relatives came here before me.



When did you arrive and where did you come from?



I left Myanmar in 2017 after the violence happened in Rakhine state. After that, I moved to Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, and then to Malaysia. I was not looking for a job and I didn't know anyone other than my relative here.



In general, how would you describe migration [dynamics/patterns] in Kuala Lumpur?



In Kuala Lumpur, there are a lot of migrants, and people from many different countries. Most of them need to work to afford living here.



I don't know the actual number of Rohingya refugees in Kuala Lumpur, but there are many of us in my area. I think my area (Ampang) is the most common location for refugees in KL.



I also have a friend who moved here from Rakhine state in Myanmar, who was eventually resettled to Canada, and I wish I could be resettled too. I never heard about anyone who left Kuala Lumpur to return to Myanmar or Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. Instead, people continue to arrive here from those two places.



Do you observe much separation between local residents and migrant communities or between different migrant communities?



Many refugees and migrants live in my area, and a smaller portion of local Malaysians are there too. Malaysians used to communicate well with us here.



However, after the Covid19- lockdown, they have become afraid and don't want to talk to us. I think something happened to their mind, and they don't like foreigners anymore.

How do refugees and migrants choose where to live? (What are the factors that impact where refugees and migrants settle in a certain neighborhood/part of the city?)

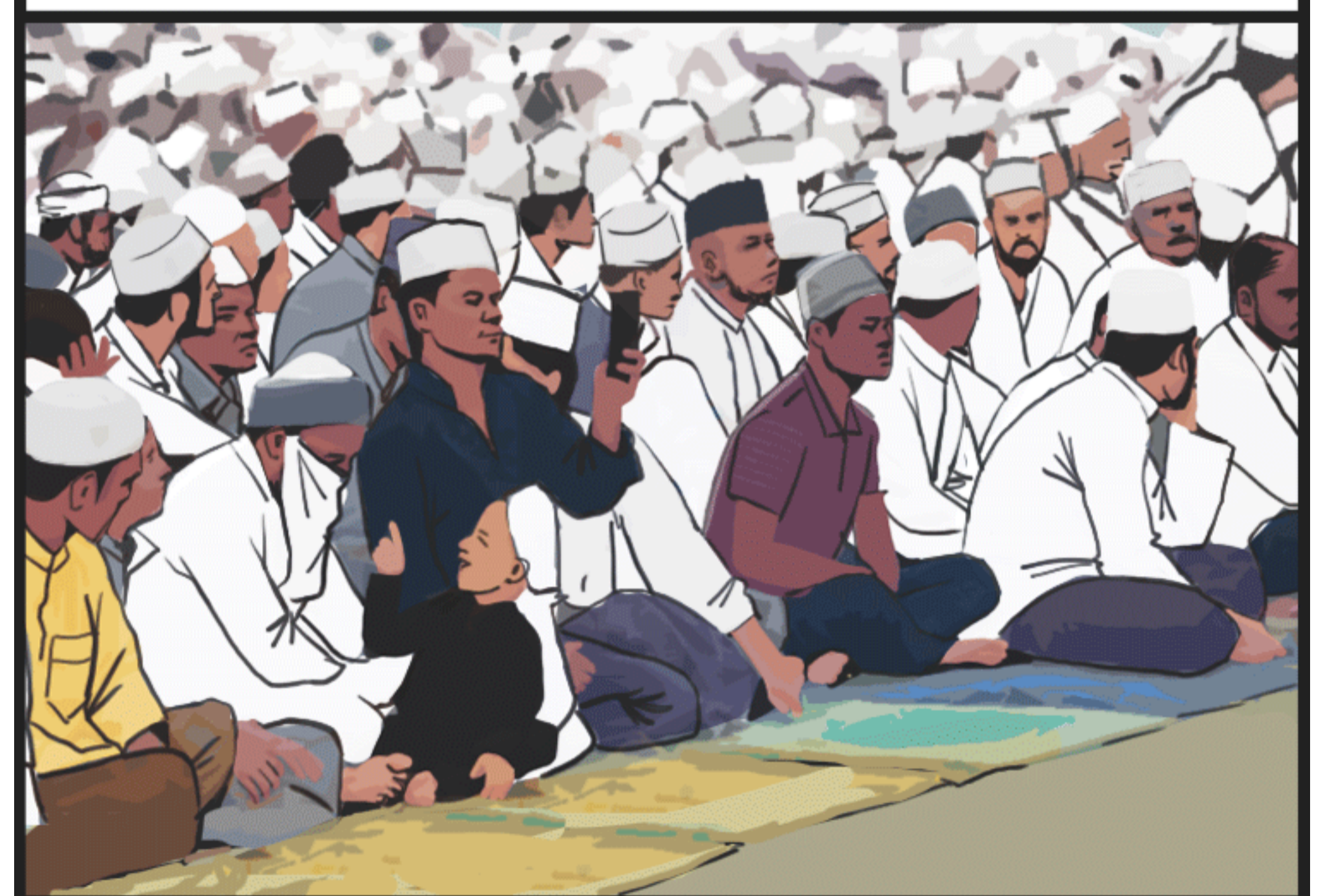


In my opinion, Rohingya people moved here not because of work, but since many came here before them, including their relatives, and so we have grown an entire community here.



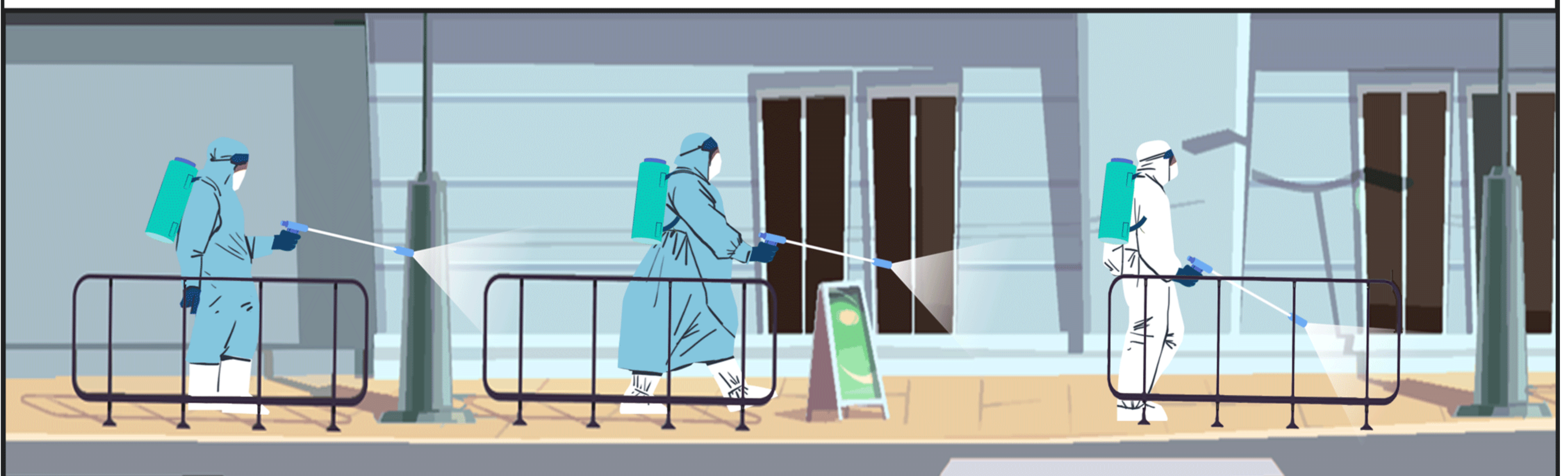
It's better than living in separate areas. We find it easier and less fearful when we have our community.

We spend time with our own people and it makes us feel happy and reminds us of our home country.



We are also living quite well with other ethnicities. For instance, we live peacefully with Bangladeshis.

When I arrived, my relative paid rent for one month, and then I had to start to work to sustain myself. Work was going quite well and I paid for everything myself. After the lockdown, because people are afraid of getting Covid - 19, I couldn't work or pay the rent. Hopefully, I will work again and be able to pay off all my debt.



Why do you come to Kuala Lumpur? What was your expectation before moving here?



Before moving here, I had no expectation of what it would be, but my relatives are here, so I came.

Now I have a job at construction sites, mainly cleaning the roads.



What are the good things about this city that make you want to stay?

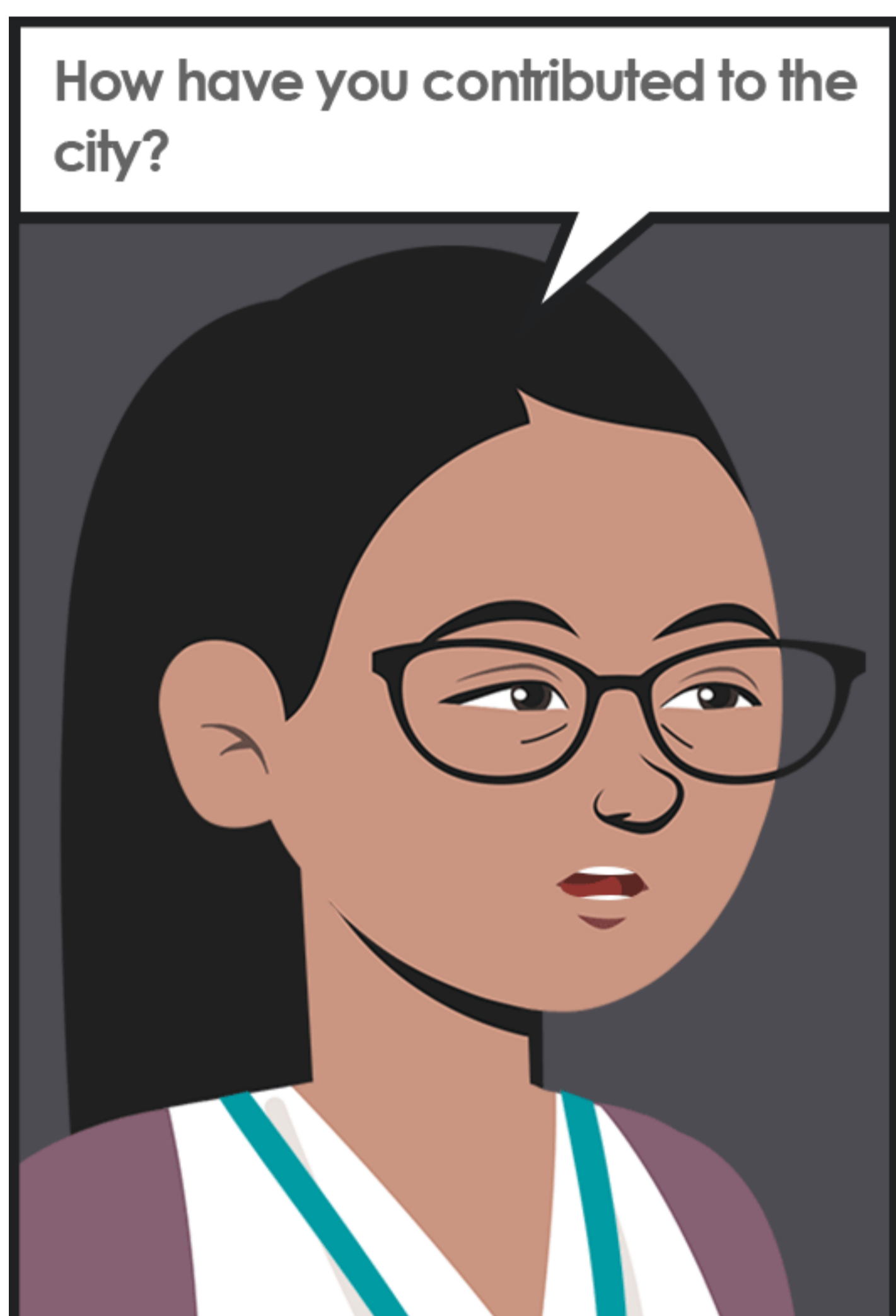


Kuala Lumpur is a nice place and it has many beautiful sites. I never saw such a place in Rakhine state.


I feel good about living here.



How have you contributed to the city?



I think migrants and refugees, including myself, are helping Kuala Lumpur to develop. At the construction sites, there are so many migrants doing different types of work. We construct buildings and bridges.



It's also migrants who keep the city beautiful as we cut the grass and clean the city. I think my people contribute to the city a lot.

Do you have any friends/ family members from your home country that are planning to come to Kuala Lumpur?



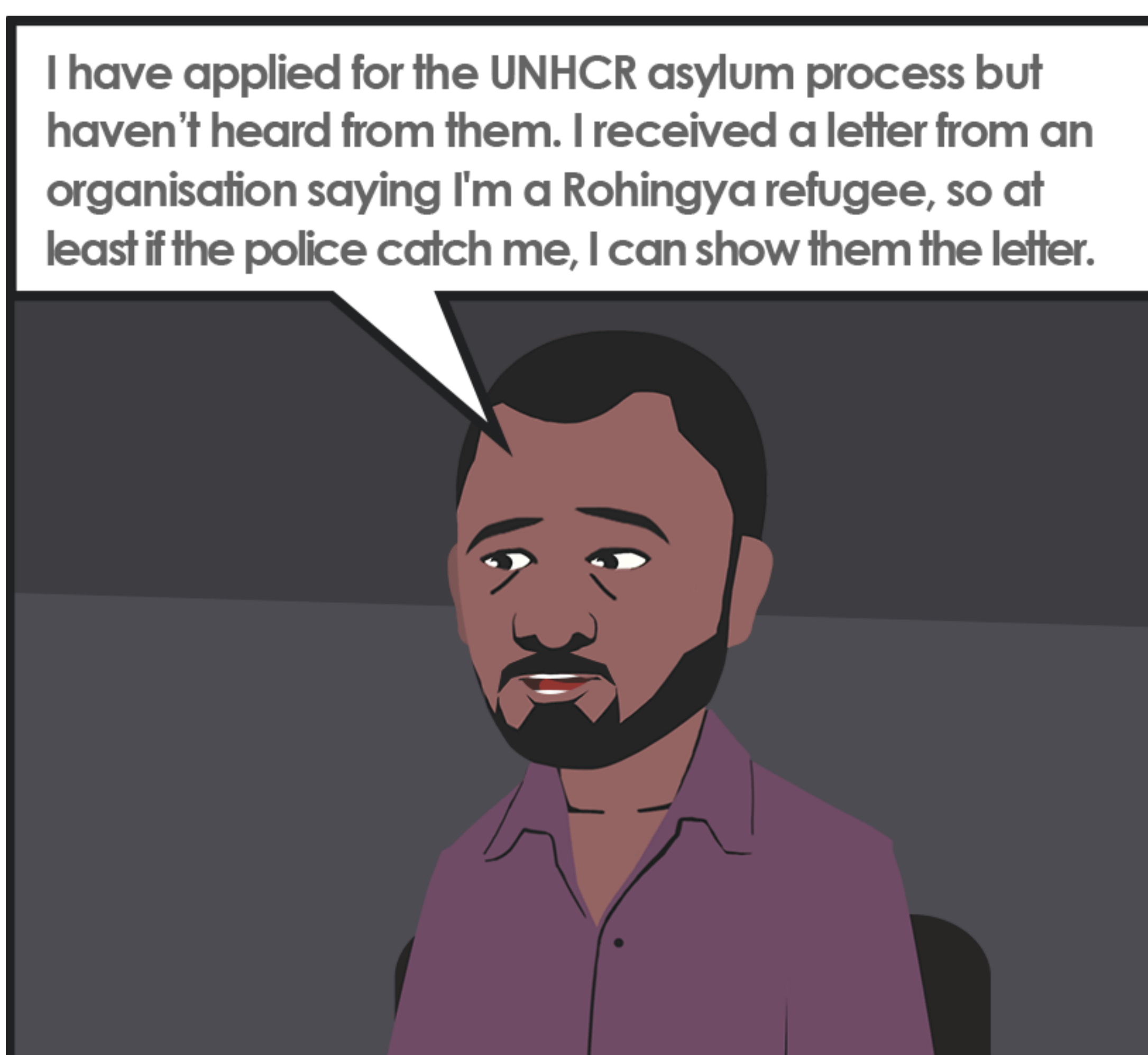
Some relatives of mine were expected to come to Kuala Lumpur before Covid-19. But now with the current situation, they will not come anymore.




Do you have documents that allow you to stay in this city?



I have applied for the UNHCR asylum process but haven't heard from them. I received a letter from an organisation saying I'm a Rohingya refugee, so at least if the police catch me, I can show them the letter.



Still, it doesn't mean that I'm safe. Rohingya refugees here are often mistaken with Bangladeshi migrants, so if they don't know otherwise, they will deport me to Bangladesh.



What are some concerns you have recently?

An illustration of a woman with dark hair, glasses, and a purple cardigan over a white shirt. She is wearing a teal lanyard with a badge. She is looking towards the right.

I have been scared since Covid-19 and know of people who caught the virus. It also scares me to risk being arrested by the authority, so I go out much less.

An illustration of a man with a beard and a purple shirt, looking slightly to the left.

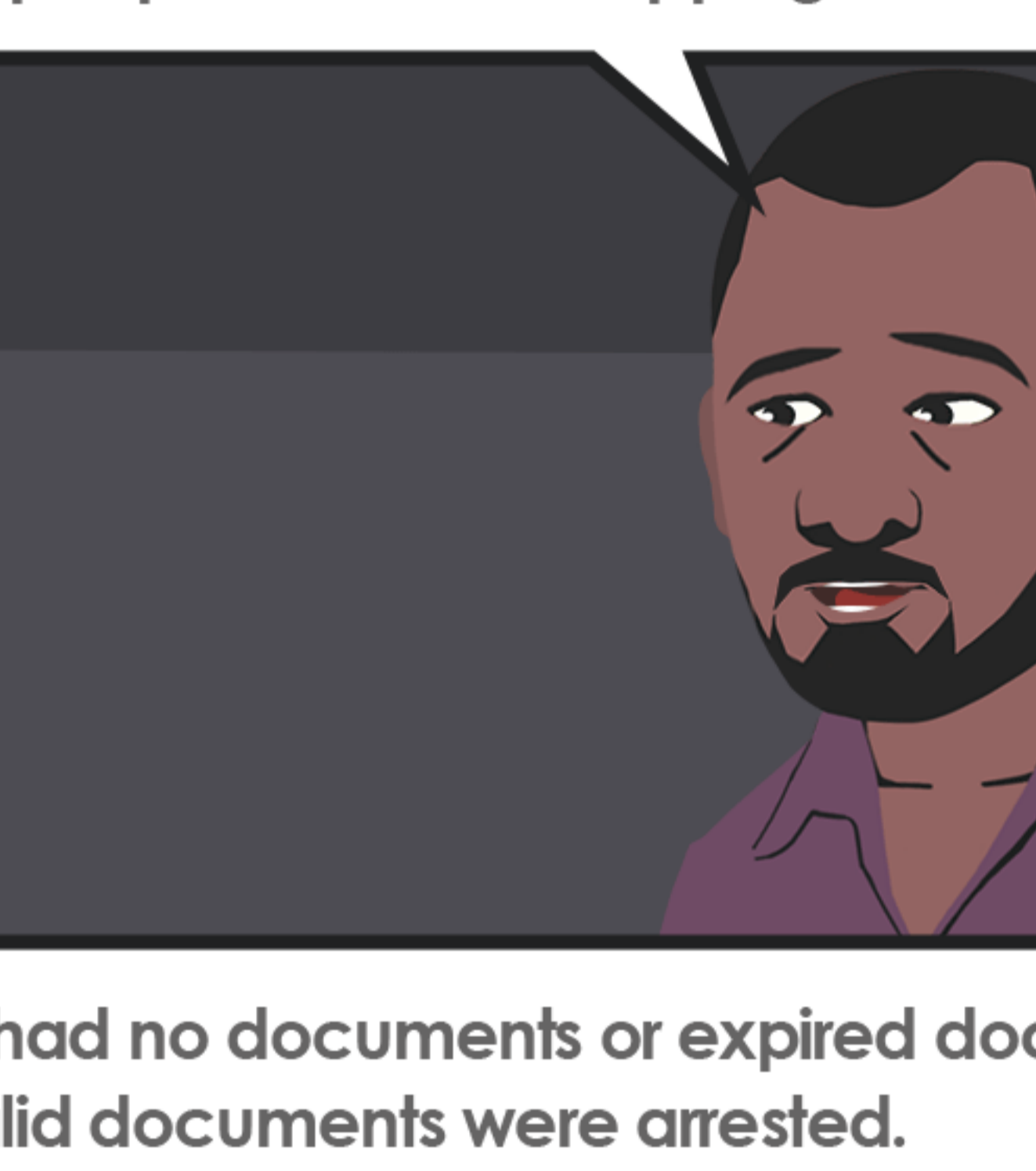
The most fearful time was after Covid-19 when there were campaigns against Rohingya and some were arrested. Most of the hate speech came from the media. This was new to our community. I'm very scared of being sent to a detention center and being deported. Also Covid-19 has meant that I could not work or make money. Many NGOs have given me food packages which has helped me to survive.



Do you know any member of your community that was arrested, detained or deported in Kuala Lumpur? What is their current situation?

An illustration of the same woman as in the first panel, looking towards the right.

Many are in a difficult situation because of mass arrests. Luckily none of my relatives have been arrested. In my area, when the movement control order was in place, people couldn't go out. When people went out shopping for food, they got arrested.

An illustration of the same man as in the second panel, looking towards the left.

Some of those arrested either had no documents or expired documents. But also migrants and refugees with valid documents were arrested.

How do people in your community keep each other safe?

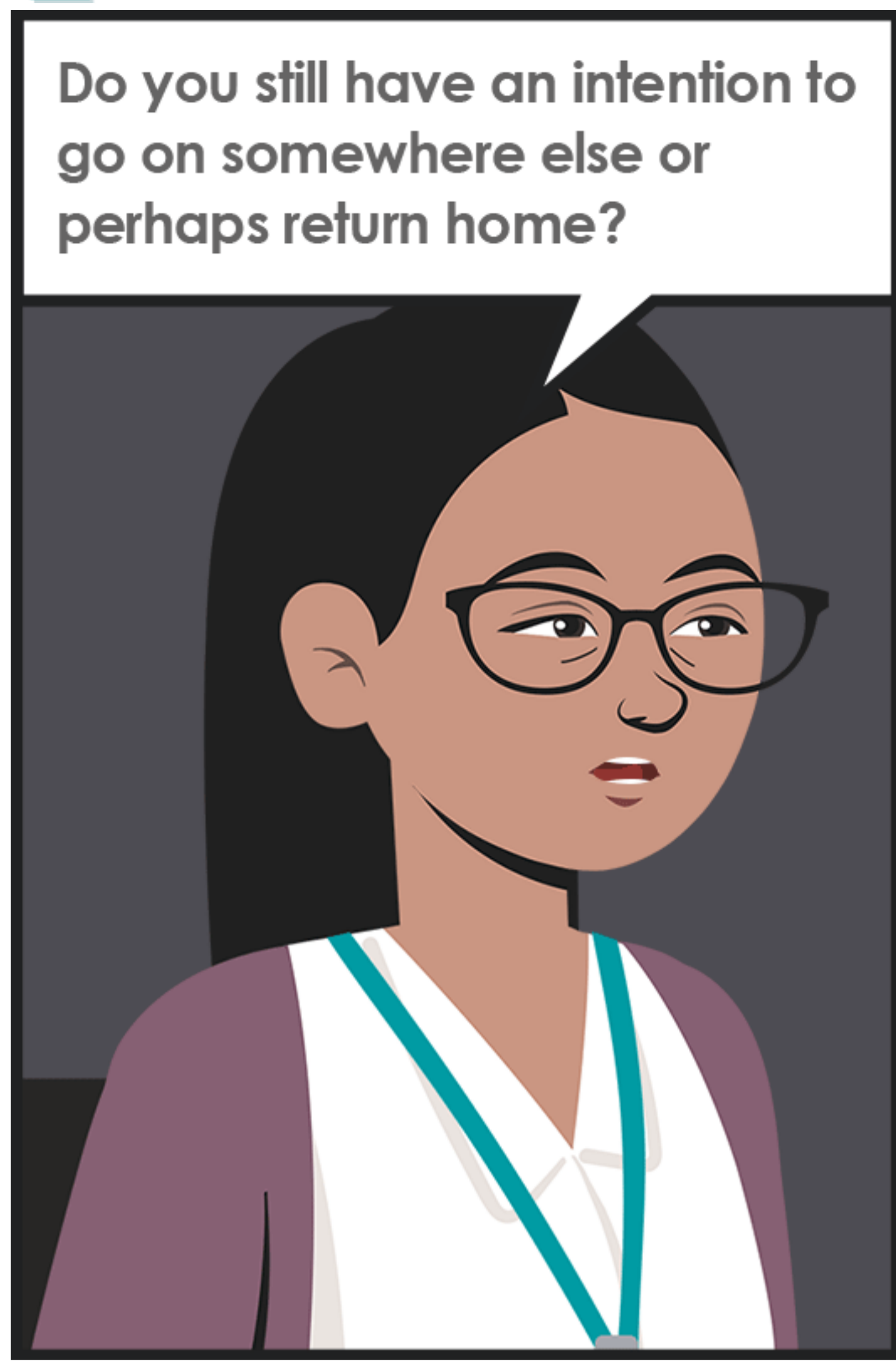
An illustration of the same woman as in the first panel, looking towards the right.

I think Rohingya people in Kuala Lumpur now are more careful because we are scared.

An illustration of the same man as in the second panel, smiling slightly.

There is not much we can do other than to keep each other informed about the situation.





End of the interview

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