

2026 Toronto International Film Festival World Premiere

RESCUE

feature documentary



Photo credit: Troels N'Koya Jensen

A Film by Sine Plambech

Produced by Elk Film, Denmark

Running time: 82 minutes

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Director's Statement by Sine Plambech

Today, the EU outsources its border control to African countries, to act as a border fence to keep migrants out of Europe. It is a reality where rescue operations at sea have become a political tug-of-war over overcrowded boats with children and families, and where those who try to save lives risk being prosecuted themselves.

As an anthropologist, I have documented the migration routes to Europe for twenty years, but on the deck of the *Geo Barents* migrant rescue ship in the middle of the Mediterranean, I truly saw the brutal tug-of-war over human lives that takes place in the name of the EU. With RESCUE, my desire is to examine what we, as a society, are actually funding at Europe's borders, to show the human consequences of this political strategy, and give a voice to the people who brave the open sea and risk everything in hopes of a safer future for their children.



Photo credit: Troels N'Koya Jensen

Logline

A kidnapping at sea splits a Yemeni family apart, and a mother's fight for survival reveals the human cost of Europe's policy of outsourcing migration control.

Synopsis

RESCUE is the extraordinary true story of one woman's refusal to disappear, and her relentless search for justice, dignity, and the right to be seen.

Roro, a Yemeni mother with young children, fights to reunite her family after surviving a Mediterranean rescue that separated her from her husband and left her in captivity in Libya. Filmed with unprecedented access to Doctors Without Borders boat, the *Geo Barents*, Sine Plambeck's documentary exposes the consequences of Europe's outsourcing migration control to North African countries through "Externalization." RESCUE is a deeply moving story, told through the journey of a woman caught in a broken system, and her unbreakable determination to reunite her family and pursue a better life.



Photo credit: Rawa Mohammed Hazaea Ahmed Qasem

Extended Synopsis

On a dead-calm morning in the Mediterranean, *Geo Barents*, the migrant rescue ship of Doctors Without Borders, spots a deflating rubber boat. Dozens of people are struggling in the water. Among the refugees is Roro, a Yemeni mother traveling with her husband, Hani, their two-month-old baby, and two sons.

As the rescue begins, a Libyan militia boat intervenes and abducts all of the women and children, including Roro and the baby and younger son. Hani is rescued, but left watching helplessly as his family is taken back to the country they risked this perilous voyage to flee. A family is violently torn apart across the Mediterranean. Hani will step onto European soil alone.

RESCUE offers unprecedented access to the world's largest rescue ship, *Geo Barents*, operated by Doctors Without Borders in the Mediterranean Sea. On board, the rescue team witnesses the devastating impact of the EU's border policies, which funnel millions of euros outsourcing migration control to North African countries like Libya, in an effort to halt migration across the Mediterranean.

Hani and Roro's harrowing story unfolds as the central narrative thread of RESCUE. While Hani fights from Europe to reunite the family, Roro struggles to survive captivity in Libya and to protect her children. Trapped by a violent system deeply entangled with EU border politics, once released from captivity, she relentlessly attempts to cross the sea again.

While Hani, who has made it to Germany, is left in dreadful uncertainty, and rescue ships are being criminalized, accused of participating in the human trafficking they are saving people from. Eventually, the Italian government shuts down *Geo Barents*, making Roro and her children's journey across the Mediterranean even more perilous.

Hani receives a call from Lampedusa – Roro is alive, and very pregnant. On the brink of giving birth, and after another perilous failed attempt, she has managed to cross the Mediterranean into Italy. Roro reunites with Hani in Munich, and her baby is born. Determined to seek justice, Roro recounts her migration journey to human rights lawyers, revealing the rape and abuse that she escaped from in her home country of Yemen, and in captivity Libya.

RESCUE is a gripping story of hope and survival, and a powerful portrait of a young mother migrating to save her life.

Filmmaking Team

RESCUE is directed by anthropologist and author Sine Plambech. She previously directed the critically acclaimed and award-winning documentary films *Trafficked* (2017); *From Thailand to Thy* (2007); and *Heartbound* (2018) – the latter two in collaboration with Janus Metz. Sine Plambech holds a Ph.D. in anthropology and has researched migration and human trafficking in Africa, Europe, and Asia for more than two decades. She works and films in immigrant communities, border areas, red-light districts, and along migration routes in West Africa, Asia, and at Europe's southern border. By filming directly in these hotspots, Sine Plambech combines rare ethnographic depth with a strong cinematic narrative.

The film is produced by Sofie Husum Johannesen, Andreas Dalsgaard & Tereza Šimíková for the Danish production company Elk Film. Elk Film specializes in high-profile stories driven by extensive research and strong narratives for a global audience.

RESCUE has been made possible with support from the Danish Film Institute, Creative Europe, OPEN, the Politiken Foundation, DR, the Swedish Film Institute, Film i Skåne, SVT, NRK, VPRO, VRT, and others.

CREDITS

Director	Sine Plambech
Screenplay	Sine Plambech, Janus Metz
Producers	Sofie Husum Johannesen, Andreas Dalsgaard & Tereza Šimíková
Cinematographer	Troels N'koya Jensen
Editors	Per K. Kirkegaard & Marion Tuor
Composer	Uno Helmersson
Sound design	Björn Viktorsson
Co-producers	Davide Barletti, Cristina Rajola (Fluid Produzioni, IT) Elin Kamler (Kamlert Film, SE) Hanna Björk Valsdóttir (Akkeri Films, IS) Stefan Kloos, Anja Dzierk (Kloos & Co., DE) Lisa Nyed, Film i Skåne (SE)
Executive producers	Janus Metz Andreas Dalsgaard Barbara Truyen Lisa Nyed
Production company	ELK FILM
Supported by	The Danish Film Institute Creative Europe MEDIA The Swedish Film Institute Film i Skåne Nordisk Film and TV Fund Open, DIIS, Statens Kunstfond, Politiken Fonden DR, SVT, NRK, VPRO, VRT, RTS

Filmmaker Biographies

Sine Plambech (Director, b. 1975) is an award-winning director, anthropologist, and senior researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). She possesses a rare combination of academic depth and cinematic flair and has worked extensively with migrant communities in Thailand, Nigeria, Italy, and Denmark for twenty years. Plambech's unique access to the field has resulted in a series of striking and award-winning documentary films that combine ethnographic depth with gripping, character-driven storytelling. Among other things, she directed *Mission Trafficking* (2010, in collaboration with Judith Lansade) and *Becky's Journey* (2014), and provided the research foundation for *From Thailand to Thy* (2008) and *From Thy to Thailand* (2008), which were directed by Janus Metz – a collaboration that was awarded by the Danish Arts Foundation in 2008.

Her major breakthrough, *Heartbound* (2018), which built upon the two films from 2008, had its world premiere at TIFF, was selected for IDFA, and won a special award at the Zurich Film Festival. Her work is widely used today in both academic and political contexts and has contributed to the international debate on migration and human rights for over two decades. With RESCUE, she continues her strong commitment to the intersection between high politics and the human costs on the Mediterranean.

Elk Film

Copenhagen-based Elk Film produces documentary films, series, and fiction adaptations for a global audience, combining the best Scandinavian talents with leading European and international partners and financing. Specializing in high-profile stories built on thorough research and well-crafted narratives, Elk's team of producers and creative staff strive to expand the creative boundaries within film production. The company was founded in 2013 by Andreas Dalsgaard and Nicolás Nørgaard Staffolani.