



EDUCATION TO SUPPORT LGBT+ COMMUNITIES IN GEORGIA, KYRGYZSTAN AND UKRAINE

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Cover Image: Mural in Kherson (May 2019), created by Olena Dyachenko (author of the idea and principal artist), Iryna Dobrovynska and Nastia Shevelyova. The image also contains drawings of other Queer Art Fest participants. Photo credit: the artists. Published with permission.

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Executive Summary

This report identifies issues affecting LGBT+ people in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, and identifies potential educational interventions and approaches to enhance LGBT+ inclusion.

It summarises a three-day workshop held in Kyiv in December 2019. The workshop was organised by The Open University, UK, and supported by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) European Network and by IPPF's Ukrainian Member Association, 'Women, Health and Family Planning'. It was attended by representatives from these organisations and by LGBT+ activists from grassroots and civil society organisations from Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

Participants identified many shared issues negatively affecting LGBT+ people in all three countries:

- Poverty
- Anti- LGBT+ and anti-gender governments and religious organisations
- Far-right threats and attacks
- Emigration of LGBT+ people
- Inadequate health care and an ongoing HIV crisis
- Limited sexuality education, and little or no education which does not assume learners are heterosexual and/or cisgender

In all countries, participants agreed that transgender people and sex workers were the most marginalised groups. All countries share past legacies and current realities of (neo) imperialism from Russia and the West, which shape current experiences and create challenges for LGBT+ activism.

Participants also identified differences between the three countries that affect LGBT+ rights and activism. These include different legal contexts, especially around transgender issues, distinctive histories and cultures, varying feasibility of holding public Pride events, and the war in parts of Ukraine, all of which shape political discourses around LGBT+ issues.



All participants agreed that education has an important role to play in supporting the inclusion and human rights of LGBT+ people. Existing resources are limited although there are some promising grass-roots projects, as well as lessons to be learned from other parts of the world. Participants identified three challenges to developing educational resources in these countries:

1. There is little research and teaching around LGBT+ issues in universities, and LGBT+ organisations are typically under-funded and activists over-stretched. This makes it difficult to form networks and progress educational projects.
2. LGBT+ groups tend to work within global frameworks that prioritise normative LGBT identities and human rights agendas. There is a need to focus on regional/local identities and communities as well as material/economic factors as having profound impacts on inclusion, wellbeing and even survival.
3. Education itself draws on colonialist legacies that run counter to what some LGBT+ activists want to achieve. New approaches are needed, such as decolonial, feminist, queer and radical pedagogies.



Participants identified principles to guide future work:

- Structural inequalities (e.g., poverty) have to be taken into account
- Awareness of neo-colonial and nationalist contexts is vital including colonial imperatives of Western 'LGBT liberation' agendas
- Knowledge and learning must emerge from the experience of LGBT+ people
- Local/national context is crucial for choosing the most appropriate educational tools

Our next steps are to explore funding possibilities for progressing some of the ideas explored during the workshop.

Contributors

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Peter Keogh (he/him) is Professor of Health and Society at The Open University, UK. Peter specialises in community-based research and knowledge production around sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Mariam Kvaratskhelia (she/her) is a co-founder/spokesperson of Tbilisi Pride with extensive experience in LGBTQI Rights/SRHR advocacy and campaigns in Georgia. Currently, Mariam is studying a Human Rights (MA) at the University of Sussex, UK.

Olga Plakhotnik (she/they) is the Bayduza Postdoctoral Fellow at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies and the Department of Sociology, University of Alberta. She published extensively on the issues of feminist philosophy and methodologies, feminist and queer pedagogies, feminist and LGBT activism.

List of abbreviations

IDP – Internally Displaced People (refugees from the military conflict zones)

ILGA – International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association <https://ilga.org/>

IPPF – International Planned Parenthood Federation

LGBT+ – the most common umbrella name for communities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, non-binary, intersex and other people in contemporary Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine who differentiate themselves from the cis-hetero model.

OU – The Open University (UK)

SRHR – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

WHFP - Women Health and Family Planning (Member Association of IPPF in Ukraine)

Introduction¹

On December 3-5, 2019 a workshop focusing on LGBT+² organising and educational needs across Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine took place in Kyiv. Its aim was to gather LGBT+ activists from three countries to form a network and prepare for further grant bidding for creating open-access educational resources related to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). The workshop was organised by The Open University (UK), Women Health and Family Planning Association, Ukraine, and the International Planned Parenthood Federation. Over three days, 11 participants discussed the current situation for LGBT+ people and the current state of LGBT+ activism in their country. Participants identified goals for future activism and priorities for new educational resources to support activism based on a review of existing educational materials (see workshop summary in Appendix 1).

Co-authored by some of the workshop participants, this report details workshop discussion and insights, providing an overview from LGBT+ activists of current contexts and pressing issues in LGBT+ organising across Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine. It also identifies potential educational approaches to improve LGBT+ inclusion.

The report has three parts. Part 1 describes activities to identify current contexts and challenges for LGBT+ communities, considering what is common to all three countries and what is specific to each. Part 2 presents our priorities for potential educational resources to address these challenges. Part 3 identifies principles and next steps for future work.

The context and current challenges

At the workshop, participants reflected on the current situation for LGBT+ people in each nation, visualising commonalities and differences across the three nations (figures 1 and 2). In Section 1, we present the results of these reflections dealing with factors and themes common to all countries before giving a slightly more detailed account of country specificities.



Figure 1. Legislation for LGBT+ people in Georgia (G), Kyrgyzstan (K) and Ukraine (U).

¹ We welcome reuse of this report by others and have therefore released it with a CC-BY creative commons licence

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

² Participants in the workshop discussed the limitations of the term 'LGBT+' and other similar acronyms, which are imported from the West and convey particular understandings of sexuality and gender. We use the term as a convenient shorthand for diverse communities of non-heterosexual, non-cisgender and non-binary people. We chose LGBT+ rather than alternatives such as LGBTQI because in some of the countries under discussion, e.g. Ukraine, many intersex and queer activists do not wish to be included in this umbrella term.

World.

INFLUENCE OF RUSSIA
INFLUENCE OF WESTERN INSTITUTIONS

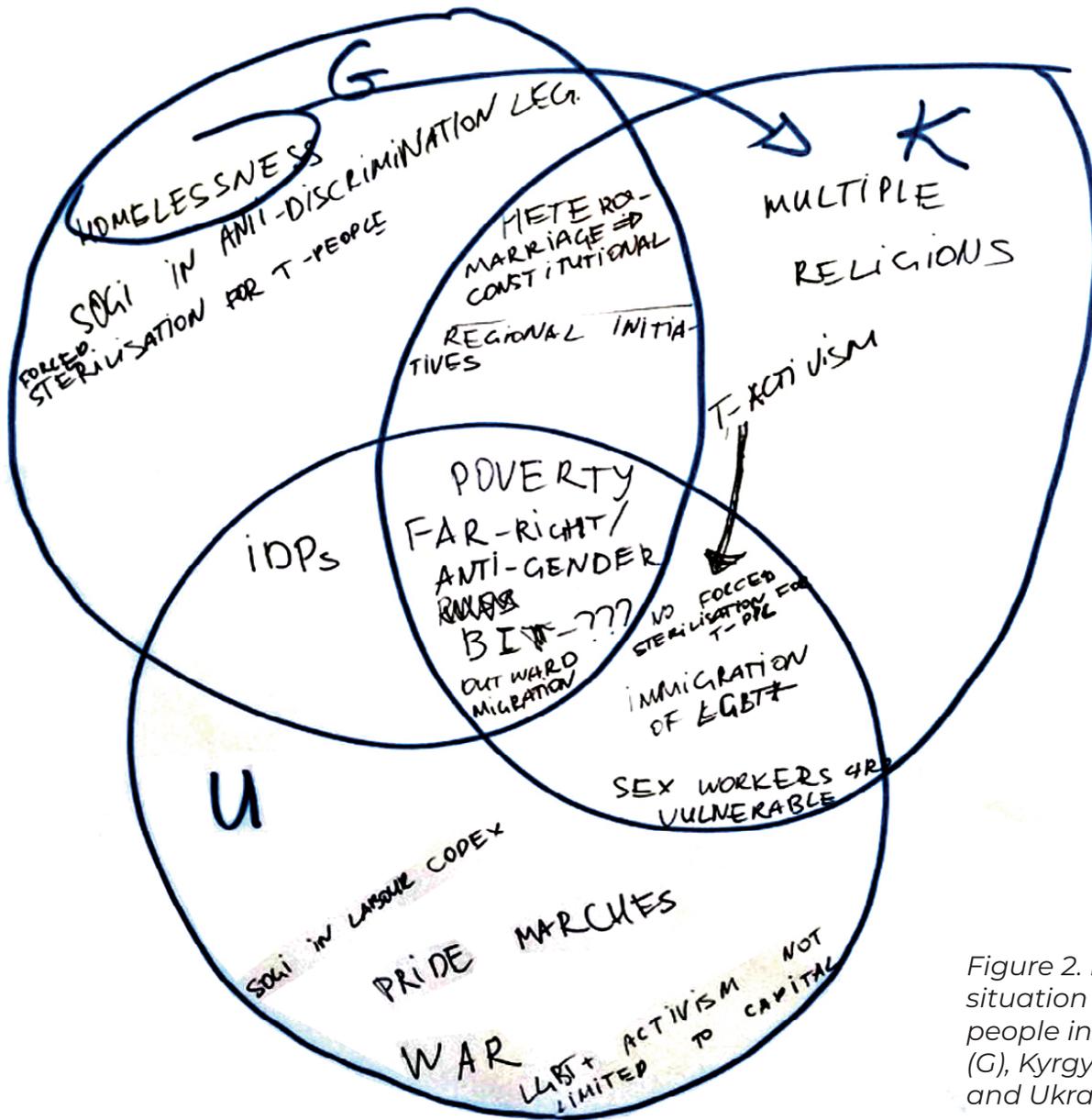


Figure 2. Real-life situation for LGBT+ people in Georgia (G), Kyrgyzstan (K) and Ukraine (U).

Commonalities and theoretical framings

Following country overview presentations of legislative and real-life contexts for LGBT+ people by country representatives, participants identified the commonalities as follows:

- Poverty
- Anti-gender politics of government and civil society
- Far right threats and attacks
- Outward migration of LGBT+ people
- Ongoing HIV crises
- The situation of transgender communities and sex workers

Participants situated these factors within a geo-political framework associated with imperial influences of Russia and the West. This geo-political perspective prompted us to adopt a critical perspective on a decolonial interpretive framework which sees coloniality as a matrix of power operating through the control of four interrelated domains: economy, authority or governmentality, gender and sexuality, and production of knowledge and subjectivity (cited after Gržinić, Kancler, and Rexhepi 2020). Within this framework, we consider, firstly, the well-recognised tendency of Russian imperialism to position Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine in different but always subordinate ways. Secondly, colonial power comes from the Western hegemony that positions the region as not yet modernized /civilized, corrupted by Soviet influence and 'left to the normalizing processes of democratization and Europeanization' (Suchland 2011, 846) but remaining hopelessly lagging behind.

The commonalities we highlighted are described in detail below.

Poverty

The World Bank estimates that the population percentage of Ukraine living below the poverty line increased from 15% in 2014 to 25% in 2018³. For 2018, the corresponding proportion is 20.1%⁴ for Georgia and 22.4% for Kyrgyz Republic⁵. Economic crises associated with the COVID-19 pandemics mean these proportions are likely to be growing significantly. This overarching poverty affects the most vulnerable segments of LGBT+ communities, however, is rarely accounted for in LGBT+ rights politics.

Although international human rights policies presume a broad range of rights including civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights (UDHR, 1948), prioritisation of LGBT+ rights across the region tends to focus narrowly on protection from discrimination and hate crimes, marriage equality and the right for peaceful assembly. This is a global tendency: as Kate Nash has noted, 'the way in which human rights are currently being interpreted in legal terms accommodates inequalities: human rights give little purchase on structures of social and economic inequality' (Nash 2009, 1080). In other words, mainstream human rights discourses produce 'recognition without redistribution' (Fraser 2000). Social and economic rights typically associated with education, housing, health, work, and income tend to occupy a marginal place in LGBT+ rights discourse, as recent studies in the respective countries show (Plakhotnik 2019; Suyarkulova, Mamedov, and Bagdasarova 2021).

This predomination of civil rights downgrades economic inequality on the agendas of LGBT+ human rights organisations. However, particular groups within LGBT+ communities are especially vulnerable to social-economic inequality and poverty, particularly transgender people with 'problematic' IDs (i.e., an ID where name, picture and gender marker do not correspond to how a person presents and identifies), people with non-conforming bodies, internally displaced people (IDPs) fleeing from military conflict (particularly in Georgia and Ukraine), people with disabilities and those from economically depressed regions.

Anti-gender and anti-LGBT+ politics of government and civil initiatives

No state government across the three regions could be considered supportive towards LGBT+ rights. Many instances of anti-gender and anti-LGBT governmental actions were raised at the workshop, some of which are described here.

3 <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-society/2500940-more-poor-people-in-ukraine-now-than-five-years-ago-world-bank.html>

4 <https://www.adb.org/countries/georgia/poverty>

5 <https://www.adb.org/countries/kyrgyz-republic/poverty>

Marriage Inequality

Recent legislative changes in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan have strengthened the heterosexual model of marriage

In 2016, the ruling coalition in **Georgia** introduced a bill (signed by eighty out of 150 Members of Parliament) to amend the Constitution and define marriage explicitly as a union between a man and a woman. Article 36 of the Constitution previously stated that 'marriage is a voluntary union based on equality between the spouses'. Today article 30 of the Constitution states: 'Marriage, as a union of a woman and a man for the purpose of founding a family, shall be based on the equality of rights and the free will of spouses'. By limiting the constitutional definition of marriage to couples of the opposite sex, the amendment discriminates against LGBT+ people living or wishing to live in a same-sex union denying them their right to family life, the right to marry and all economic and social rights associated with marriage. Although the Civil Code of Georgia already states that same-sex partners do not currently have the right to marry or register their union and exercise their right to family life, an explicit ban on marriage equality in the Constitution aggravates the situation by preventing legislators from extending marriage to same-sex couples in the future and runs counter to the emerging global trend of recognition of marriage equality.

Similar constitutional amendments were adopted by referendum in **Kyrgyzstan**: article 36(5), which previously stated that 'Persons reaching the age of consent shall have the right to marry and create a family', was amended to restrict marriage to a 'voluntary union between a man and a woman'. Through this amendment, the state introduced discriminatory legal provisions, particularly in the area of marriage and family life by excluding gay, lesbian and bisexual couples from marriage (and consequently adoption); however, the amendments may also enable broader discrimination (ARTICLE 19 2018, 38).

Hate crimes and hate speech

LGBT+ people often face discrimination, hate speech and violence in all three countries while authorities consistently fail to investigate crimes motivated by homophobic and transphobic hatred.

In 2014, **Georgia** adopted an anti-discrimination law which aims at combatting all kinds of discrimination and guaranteeing the equal use of rights and freedoms set by Georgian legislation to all people/entities. Even though the law itself is quite advanced, it presents only a symbolic declaration of equality with regards to LGBT+ as it is not translated into specific strategies, policies and actions by the government to improve the equality of LGBT+ people. Moreover, not only does the state not fulfil its positive obligations, but it also violates the human rights of LGBT+ people by restricting the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

Six years after LGBT+ demonstration in Georgia were violently interrupted (2013), the first-ever Pride Week and march were planned in June 2019. However, the Interior Ministry issued a statement saying that the events planned by the Tbilisi Pride entail security risks for the organizers and participants themselves, therefore they could not be held outdoors. Moreover, the Georgian Orthodox Church urged the authorities not to allow Tbilisi Pride, calling it 'absolutely unacceptable'. Two days later, homophobic groups led by ultra-conservative businessman Levan Vasadze held a rally, announcing the formation of vigilante patrols against Tbilisi Pride and gay people. On July 8th, around 40 activists and LGBT+ supporters held a small Pride march outside the Interior Ministry.

The lack of a systemic and integrated understanding of SRHR frameworks by the State manifests in a number of ways including lack of effective financing and shortfalls in the collection of disaggregated data, fragmented family planning services and neglect of Comprehensive Sexual Education as a human right. These and other factors make it difficult for the State to achieve gender equality and implement large-scale, comprehensive, and coordinated policy in an effective manner.

Russia's 2013 law prohibiting 'propaganda' promoting non-traditional sexual relations has triggered an analogous bill in **Kyrgyzstan** that was heading for its third reading and final review in 2016 when a change of government cast it into limbo. Nevertheless, its effect on the LGBT+ community in Kyrgyzstan has been tremendous. Though LGBT+ people were far from socially accepted before the bill, they were, at least, tolerated and could exist on the margins of society. After the bill was introduced, violent homophobic and transphobic attacks against Bishkek's gay community increased approximately 300% according to a report by *Labrys*⁶ whilst gay clubs shut down, and private parties were crashed by patriotic groups. Lack of police action and reluctance of hospital workers to treat survivors are common. Furthermore, police officers are reported to deliberately target members of the LGBT+ community, creating fake profiles on community social media such as Grindr and Hornet, in order to make contact with and subsequently blackmail other social media users extorting sums ranging from \$50 to \$500⁷.

With little or no legal protection against hate speech or crimes LGBT+ people remain easy targets in Kyrgyzstan. After Kyrgyzstan joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) - a Russian-led political and economic union of Eurasian states - in 2015, LGBT+ communities have found themselves in a more difficult situation as the country ramped up anti-LGBT policies in order to counterbalance EU influence in line with Russia's imperial revivalism.

The victory of pro-European political forces in 2014 reduced the risk of new anti-LGBT+ legislative initiatives in **Ukraine**. However, in July 2020, a new law project (#3917) that proposes to criminalize so-called 'propaganda of homosexuality and transgenderism' has been introduced in Parliament⁸. The law project has triggered protests of LGBT+ and human rights organization as well as the human rights ombudsperson in Ukraine⁹. Earlier several attempts to ban Pride rallies and other LGBT+ events on the regional level took place. Although all these attempts were assessed as non-Constitutional in Ukraine, the tendency is alarming. In 2020, a Kyiv-based LGBT+ organization 'Insight' has sued Patriarch Filaret – one of the country's most prominent religious figures – over comments blaming the spread of the coronavirus on same-sex marriage¹⁰. The Patriarch's remarks made during a TV interview risked fuelling further homophobic hatred and discrimination.

6 The Guardian, "All of us will be victims at some point: why Bishkek's only gay club closed" (2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/19/victims-closure-bishkek-only-lgbt-club-kyrgyzstan>

7 <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/life-in-the-closet-the-lgbt-community-in-central-asia/>

8 http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=69583

9 <https://pravo.ua/ombudsmen-schitaet-zakonoproekt-ob-administrativnoj-otvetstvennosti-za-propagandu-gomoseksualizma-nekonstitucionnym/>

10 <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-ukraine-lgbt/lgbt-group-sues-ukraine-religious-figure-linking-coronavirus-to-gay-marriage-idUSL8N2BI6C7>

Far-right threats and attacks

In all three countries, public LGBT+ events are invariably under threat of violent attack by far-right groups.

Far-right groups in **Georgia** form a social movement united around misogyny, racism, homophobia, and anti-immigration. The LGBT+ community is one of their main targets though they also threaten other human rights movements and activists. The Georgian state does not recognize far-right groups as a threat and does not have any policies for preventing and countering them. Moreover, criminal and violent acts often go unpunished. For example, far-right businessman, Levan Vasadze allegedly violated at least 14 articles of the Criminal Code, while acting against Tbilisi Pride. However, investigations against him have not led to any tangible results (Beraia 2020).

On 17th May 2013 a small LGBT+ activist demonstration was attacked by counterdemonstrators led by Orthodox priests. The church then named 17 May 'Family Values Day' with marches countering LGBT+ anti-homophobia demonstrations. Over subsequent years LGBT+ activists have effectively been denied their right to freedom of assembly through violent far right and ultra-conservative threats.¹¹ In November 2019, far-right hate groups organized protests against the screening of a Swedish-Georgian gay love-themed film 'And Then We Danced' in Tbilisi and Batumi, harassing and attacking moviegoers. Police detained 27 people on misdemeanour, disobedience, and hooliganism charges, and one person faced a criminal violence charge¹².

In **Kyrgyzstan**, ultranationalist groups are similarly engaged in intimidation of LGBT+ activists as well as ethnic minorities¹³. As a result, Kyrgyzstan is losing its reputation as the 'island of democracy' in Central Asia because of the gradual worsening of the situation with a free press, freedom of speech and peaceful assemblies¹⁴. In 2019, activists organizing a March 8th parade for women's rights and equality reported that officials threatened to suspend the march if LGBT+ groups took part. Ultimately the march went ahead, but organizers were threatened by the nationalist group *Kyrk Choro* (40 Warriors), who held a counter-protest. The event also provoked anti-LGBT+ rhetoric in parliament. Other events hosted by LGBT+ groups have been targeted by nationalist groups who threaten and film participants without consent.¹⁵

In post-Maidan **Ukraine**, far-right violence is an everyday reality for LGBT+ organizations and individual activists with little improvement over the years: right-wing radical organizations continue their campaigns of homophobic and transphobic aggression, and law enforcement continue to ignore the problem. In 2019, *Nash Mir* Center documented 369 cases of actions motivated by homophobia/transphobia, discrimination and other violations of LGBT+ rights in Ukraine (Nash Mir Center 2020). Moreover, a recent report by *Insitute Respublica* gives detailed evidence of far-right attacks on LGBT+ people, community centres and activities in Kyiv and other regions recording 14 cases of the ultra-right violence targeted at LGBT+ and feminist organisations and people between January 2019 – January 2020¹⁶.

11 For more details, see <https://tbilisipride.ge/en-US/News/Details/67>

12 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/georgia>

13 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-world/2020>

14 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/farewell-to-kyrgyzstans-island-of-democracy/>

15 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/kyrgyzstan>

16 <http://rosalux.org.ua/ua/publications/196-ultra-right-violence-monitoring-2018-2019>

Migration of LGBT+ people

The relationship between sexuality and gender minority status and the decision to migrate is poorly understood with a frequent assumption that such decisions are exclusively driven by income gaps between origin and destination countries. This results in vulnerability and in the specific challenges of LGBT+ migrants being ignored.

Although demographic information on outward LGBT+ migration is scarce, organizations such as ORAM—the Organization for Refuge, Asylum and Migration¹⁷—report surges of LGBT+ asylum seeking during periods of anti-LGBT+ initiatives – for example, in 2014 when the Kyrgyz parliament examined a repressive law against sexual minorities¹⁸. Since the US, Canada, Australia and the European Union have made it easier for LGBT+ people to apply for refugee status, they are the most popular destinations for LGBT+-migration.

The issue of LGBT+ migration is more complex than the common assumption that emigration is ‘bad’ for the LGBT+ organising in the ‘home’ country would suggest. Studies of the connections between migrant mobility and transnational queer mobilization have found that migrant flows might lead to the formation of the transnational activist networks that champion LGBT+ rights in both ‘home’ and ‘hosting’ countries (Ayoub and Bauman 2019).

In 2016, the EU-Georgia association agreement came into force, effectively granting a ‘visa-free’ regime to **Georgia**. Although there are no official statistics, LGBT organizations have documented around 150 cases during the last two years of LGBT people, especially trans women, fleeing Georgia due to homo/transphobia and economic hardships. This very likely represents a broader trend of LGBT+ people to leave the country and seek asylum in different EU states.

Owing to their relatively better reputation amongst neighbouring regions both **Kyrgyzstan** and **Ukraine** are recipients of inward LGBT+ migration (figure 2). However, this process is generally invisible to researchers because it is most often presented as a labour migration, repatriation etc. Seeking an LGBT+ refugee status might be problematic, as the well-publicized case of Soldado Kovalisidi has shown¹⁹.

17 <https://oramrefugee.org/>

18 <https://blogs.worldbank.org/peoplemove/pink-migration-rising-tide-lgbt-migrants>

19 <https://ukranews.com/ua/news/574653-amnesty-international-oburyla-vidmova-ukrainy-v-prytluku-rosiyskomu-interseks-aktyvistu-kovalisidy>

20 <https://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries>

HIV

Ukraine has the second-largest HIV epidemic in Eastern Europe and Central Asia with around 1% of the general population living with HIV and significantly higher prevalence in key population groups. Recent UNAIDS estimates suggest that there are around 181,000 men who have sex with men (MSM) in Ukraine with HIV prevalence estimated at 7.5% in 2017. In **Kyrgyzstan**, population prevalence is estimated to be 0.2% with key population prevalence estimates highest among prisoners and people who use drugs (11.3% and 12.4%) followed by MSM (6.3%) and sex workers (2%). **Georgia** has a somewhat different picture with a population prevalence of 0.4 and HIV prevalence among MSM estimated at 16.2% while sex workers and prisoners are lower (0.9% and 2.3% respectively)²⁰.

Data are largely absent for other LGBT+ populations. However, high levels of stigma faced by LGBT+ people across all three countries may lead many to keep their sexual orientation and gender identity hidden, suggesting the population estimate for this group may be under reported²¹. Information on transgender people with respect to HIV prevalence is absent in the reports. For historic reasons associated with the positioning of transgender women in relation to sexual HIV practices and vulnerability to infection, this group are currently included in reporting on MSM.

The vast majority of HIV prevention relevant to LGBT+ communities is funded through international aid and organised around MSM organizations and communities. In **Ukraine**, for example, there are only a handful of NGOs addressing issues relating to transgender and intersex populations or lesbian and bisexual women. Although a focus on MSM may make epidemiological sense, it has the effect of promoting gendered and gendering agendas whilst skewing the development of more holistic LGBT+ responses to the material health needs of other groups:

We have to conclude that there is unequal development of different components [of the LGBT+ movement]. The most visible are gay [men's] organisations, the richest are HIV prevention organisations; the number of women's and transgender groups is incommensurable with men's ones (Naumenko, Karasiychuk & Kasianchuk 2015, 129).

In **Georgia**, HIV prevention projects are relatively generously funded given the high prevalence of HIV in the MSM population. HIV prevention is led by the Equality Movement, which is the biggest LGBT+ organisation. However, this does not seem to translate into the uncontested domination of gay men or MSM organizations. Tbilisi Pride, the organization which works primarily on politics of visibility, has several female leaders. Another two of L(G)BT+ organizations, WISG and *Identoba Youth*, are managed by queer women. There is also one queer/trans* organization, *Temida*, which has projects aimed at the transgender community.

In **Kyrgyzstan** there is significant scarcity of open-access information about LGBT organising as well as HIV prevention NGOs. Apart from the most visible NGO, Kyrgyz LGBTQI organisation *Labrys*²², all other organisations and initiatives act below the level of visibility being forced to 'navigate quite complicated landscapes of security and insecurity' (Bagdasarova 2018, 17) in the uncertainty with respect to the anti-LGBT legislation²³.

21 Ibid.

22 <https://kyrgyzlabrys.wordpress.com/>

23 See more <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/fear-and-loathing-in-kyrgyzstan/>

Transgender communities and sex workers

Across all three countries transgender people and sex workers, and sex workers who are trans, are probably the most marginalised and excluded sub-groups of the LGBT+ population and we therefore cover them here.

Probably, the most significant achievement in the sphere of LGBT+ rights in **Ukraine** is the adoption of the new rules of gender reassignment and legal gender recognition procedures for transgender people (Order 1041 of the Ministry of Health, 2016). Consequent to pressure of transgender activists, a new medical protocol has replaced the previously existing requirement where transgender people did not have the right to change their passport without undergoing a number of complex and expensive surgeries (Husakouskaya 2015). Today activists are pursuing a reduction of the minimum term for psychiatric supervision of patients with so-called 'transsexual identification' set by the Unified Clinical Protocols 'Gender Dysphoria' (currently – 2 years). The situation of transgender people in Kyrgyzstan is similar to the Ukrainian one. In contrast, transgender people in Georgia are still subjected to forced sterilization in order to change their gender marker in the documents.

In terms of organizing, the *Trans*Generation* NGO in Kyiv is led by transgender people and alongside other NGOs pursues transgender issues within general LGBT+ agendas (Insight in Kyiv, *Labrys* in Bishkek). For example, *Labrys* has published two online issues of *T-World* – graphic stories about life of transgender people in Kyrgyzstan. Transgender activists from all three countries participate in 'Trans*Coalition in Post-Soviet Space' – the transnational activist network. Alongside the traditional concern of de-pathologizing, there are two regionally distinctive priorities for Trans*Coalition: sex work and migration. These priorities are rare in LGBT+ activism globally. Being particularly focused on the most vulnerable segments of transgender communities, this part of activist work provides information and support that cannot be obtained through mainstream LGBT+ organizations and networks.

In the regional context, another highly vulnerable segments of LGBT+ communities are transgender people and sex workers, with additional vulnerabilities emerging at the intersections of these groups. However, little is known about the situation of sex workers and, specifically, transgender sex workers in the three countries.

In **Georgia**, population estimated for sex workers vary with one report from UNAIDS estimating 6,500 ('UNAIDS Data' 2017, 184) and another estimating 14,500 female sex workers (FSWs), which is about 0.6% of the entire population. 21% of FSWs in Tbilisi work on the street, while in the largest tourist city Batumi 40% of FSWs work on the street (Georgia NGO Coalition 2015). Sex work is an administrative offence in Georgia. Though not criminalized, it is highly stigmatized.²⁷ Most transgender women, and other members of trans community in Georgia are at some point, involved in sex-work with this involvement closely related to cultural and institutional transphobia. Trans persons are often forced to leave school and family at an early age and, unable to find any other job due to discriminatory attitudes of employers, become involved in sex-work for survival. One trans sex-workers, Gabriela, was recently employed by a medical clinic, after she tried to burn herself in front of Tbilisi City Hall, protesting lack of provision for the transgender community under the COVID 19 anti-crisis action plan leaving them without income and social protection during lockdown. Gabriela's case of gaining employment was an exception however with most of the community remaining trapped in work they don't want to do. Violence towards trans sex-workers is prevalent on the so called *Pleshka* – a place where they go to seek clients.²⁸

24 <https://labrys.kg/tmir>

25 <https://www.transcoalition.net/>

26 We are aware of the current debates on the issue of terminology (prostitution vs. sex work) that actually reflects different standpoints with respect to the issue in feminist communities. At the workshop, however, we took the position of recognition of sex workers' agency and their right to define themselves and activist/ political agenda with respect to their problems.

27 See, for example, a report 'Gender-Based Violence Against Sex Workers And Barriers to Accessing Justice' in Georgia, <https://osgf.ge/en/publication/gender-based-violence-sex-workers-barriers-accessing-justice-international-standards-experience-georgia/>

28 See <http://www.equality.ge/3663> and <https://jam-news.net/georgia-transgender-coronavirus-assistance/>

In **Kyrgyzstan**, sex work *per se* is neither persecuted nor regulated in the national legislation. Crimes that are persecuted include involving or forcing somebody into sex work/ prostitution, brothel-keeping, and pimping. However, Kyrgyzstan activists report at least three attempts to criminalize sex work (in 2005, 2012 and 2015)²⁹. There is also evidence that when the draft law on 'homosexual propaganda' has been discussed in Kyrgyzstan parliament (2015-2016), the attitudes of the police towards transgender sex worker have worsened significantly³⁰. According to a UNAIDS report, in 2019 there are estimated to be 7,100 sex workers in the country³¹. The situation of transgender women who are both sex workers and migrants has been recently investigated by the *Kyrgyz Indigo* NGO. The mixed-method study provides unique data on such sex-work related issues as violence and discrimination, migration, physical and mental health, consumption of psychoactive drugs, HIV, STIs and sexual health³².

In **Ukraine**, sex work is criminalised: a sex worker waiting for a client in the street can be apprehended by the police and given an administrative fine. A conviction for pimping is a criminal offence and carries a prison term. However, according to the *Legalife* NGO, criminal legislation against pimping is seldom applied to pimps themselves and more often used to punish sex workers. For these women, the reluctance of the police to accept complaints from sex workers creates a climate of impunity for pimps or clients mistreating them³³. Population and other statistics on sex work are scant with UNAIDS estimating 80,100 female sex workers in 2016 ('UNAIDS Data' 2017). There is no data on transgender sex workers and little or no public discussion on this issue.

The local context: Georgia

The homophobic and transphobic environment in Georgia is pervasive with a key problem being lack of exercising the right to freedom of expression and assembly for LGBT+ communities guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia³⁴. In 2012-2013, peaceful rallies dedicated to the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) were violently disrupted by ultra-right religious extremists while the measures taken by the police forces were insufficient³⁵. The State did not conduct a thorough and efficient investigation regarding the attacks that had taken place in 2012 and 2013 and did not punish the culprits³⁶. According to official information, 28 persons were injured during the attack on peaceful IDAHOT demonstration on May 17, 2013. In the days following May 17, the Women's Initiatives Supporting Group (WISG) documented increased violent attacks on members of the LGBT+ community. This experience of violence made it impossible to mark IDAHOT in 2014³⁷.

Transgender people in Georgia do not have access to legal recognition of their gender without sex-reassignment surgery. 'Sex change' and changing one's name and last name is guaranteed under Georgian legislation³⁸, but the law does not define 'sex change' as such. The State Services Development Agency states that the legal gender could be adapted when providing a Certificate issued by a medical institution confirming the change of sex. Which means that a person has to undergo irreversible sterilization, hormonal treatment, and preliminary surgical procedures to receive a medical 'sex change' certificate allowing for their legal gender identity to be adapted³⁹. Apart from personal distress, the inconsistency of an official sex record with an individual's gender self-expression often serves as the basis for discrimination of transgender persons in labour relations and state and private institutions, where submitting personal identification documents is required. Also, existed regulation of the legal sex/gender records constitutes a serious problem for transgender and intersex people, which is a clear violation of the rights to self-determination, bodily integrity and health. The poor performance of bureaucratic systems and complicated procedures are an additional source of stress for transgender and intersex individuals (Jalagania 2016).

29 https://www.transcoalition.net/swan_brochure_about_sex_work_2019/#more-5696

30 Ibid.

31 <https://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/kyrgyzstan>

32 <https://www.transcoalition.net/trans-women-migrant-in-sex-work-report-of-kyrgyz-indigo/#more-12091>

33 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ukraine-sex-work-in-times-of-war/>

34 Constitution of Georgia, Article 25.

35 Hammarberg, T. 2013. Georgia in Transition. http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/georgia/documents/human_rights_2012/20130920_report_en.pdf

36 <http://emc.org.ge/2015/01/26/ertoblivi-media-ngo/>

37 <https://wisg.org/en/news/detail/237/WISG%E2%80%99s-Statement-for-May-17>

38 Article 78 (g), the Law of Georgia 'on Civil Acts', which states that changing sex is one of the grounds for amending a civil act record.

39 Response letter of the Ministry of Justice, N. 26948, Date: 26.06.2012.

The local context: Kyrgyzstan

Until comparatively recently, Kyrgyzstan was considered to be a leader in the development of civil society and democratic changes in Central Asia. This is changing, however, as stated earlier. Today LGBT+ citizens in Kyrgyzstan cannot rely on the full support of their rights by the state ('Health and Rights of LGBT in Kyrgyzstan' 2012) and experience ill-treatment, extortion, and discrimination by both state and non-state actors. There is widespread impunity for these abuses. In June 2016, Kyrgyzstan voted against a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council establishing the mandate of an independent expert to address violence and discrimination against LGBT+ people.

Public discourse on LGBT+ rights in Kyrgyzstan occurs in a broader environment of socially entrenched prejudice, institutional discrimination, as well as violence and impunity for human rights violations and abuses (ARTICLE 19 2018). There has been limited research on public attitudes towards LGBT+ people in the country. However, the research by the Labrys NGO found that 35% of lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LBT) women believed that their sexual orientation or gender identity creates problems for them in society, while 56% of those interviewed stated that their families have tried to force them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity. The researchers estimate that pervasive homophobia and transphobia in the country means that many, if not a majority, of LGBT+ persons in Kyrgyzstan keep their sexual orientation and gender identity a secret.

The government of Kyrgyzstan does not recognize bias-motivated crimes that target victims on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity or collect statistics thereon. Violence and discrimination against LGBT+ people are monitored by civil society: a 2017 survey by *Kyrgyz Indigo* NGO found that 84% of LGBT+ respondents had experienced physical violence, while 35% experienced sexual violence. LGBT+ NGOs and their staff are also vulnerable to attack. On 3 April 2015, Labrys itself reported an attempted arson attack on its offices, followed by no condemnation by government officials.

The 2014 Human Rights Watch report documented details of human rights violations amounting to possible torture by police officers of gay and bisexual men. *Labrys* and *Kyrgyz Indigo* also reported that 82% of LGBT+ respondents believe that police stations are the location where they are most likely to encounter violence⁴⁶. Impunity for such crimes emboldens further abuses of power, including extortion of LGBT+ people through psychological, physical and sexual humiliation. As a consequence of this deeply entrenched institutional discrimination, and the dangers of revealing one's sexual orientation or gender identity to the police, many LGBT+ people are reluctant to report hate crimes to the police. Even where reports are made, an absence of legal recognition of any category of anti-LGBT+ bias-motivated crimes leads to the police's refusal to take these factors into account when dealing with allegations⁴⁷. Broader dangers of reporting hate crimes include forced public exposure of the survivor's sexual orientation and gender identity, which coupled with social and even familial hostility towards LGBT+ people, may lead to further discrimination and re-victimisation.

40 See evidence in (ADC Memorial 2020).

41 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/kyrgyzstan>

42 Labrys, 'Discrimination and violence against lesbian and bisexual women and transgender people in the Kyrgyz Republic' (2008), <http://www.osce.org/cio/68802?download=true>

43 The Guardian, 'All of us will be victims at some point': why Bishkek's only gay club closed' (2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/19/victims-closure-bishkek-onlylgbt-club-kyrgyzstan>

44 Kloop, 'Bishkek: Ofis zashchitnikov LGBT pytalys podzhech neizvestnye', <https://kloop.kg/blog/2015/04/10/bishkek-ofis-zashhitnikov-lgbtpytalis-podzhech-neizvestnye/>

45 Human Rights Watch, 'Kyrgyzstan: Police Abuse, Extortion of Gay Men. Threats, Detention, Beatings, Sexual Attacks' (2014) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/28/kyrgyzstan-police-abuse-extortion-gay-men>

46 Labrys, Indigo, 'Needs Assessment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community in Bishkek' (2017), <http://www.labrys.kg/ru/library/full/24.html>, p.87.

47 Equal Rights Trust, 'Looking for Harmony: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Kyrgyzstan' (2016) http://www.equalrightstrust.org/ertdocumentbank/Kyrgyzstan_EN_0.pdf, p.188.

In 2014, in its Concluding Observations on Kyrgyzstan, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern over ‘violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) persons by both State and non-State actors, and the failure on the part of the State party to address such violence’. The Committee recommended that Kyrgyzstan:

Ensure that violence against LGBT persons is thoroughly investigated, that perpetrators are prosecuted, and if convicted, punished with appropriate sanctions, and that the victims are adequately compensated and protected against reprisals.⁴⁸

No such steps have been taken by the Kyrgyz authorities. Indeed, apart from some minimal efforts by the Ombudsman to respond to violations of the rights of LGBT+ people, the government is doing almost nothing to respond to discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Notwithstanding Kyrgyzstan’s obligations under international human rights law to protect the rights to freedom of expression and equality, the national legal framework falls far short of this, particularly with respect to ensuring the rights of LGBT+ people. The most recent wave of homophobic hatred has raised after the rally on Women’s Day on March 8, 2019 when about 400 people marched in central Bishkek to promote women’s rights and ‘equality for all’. Because of rainbow flags held by the march participants, many considered the rally to be the first gay-pride march ever held in Central Asia. This unleashed a fiery parliamentary debate in Kyrgyzstan and threats of violence against participants of the peaceful march⁴⁹.

There are no specific protections against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity in Kyrgyzstan, although open-ended legal provisions could, were the judiciary so inclined, be read to include such protection. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on a number of grounds, listing a series of protected characteristics, left open-ended by the recognition of protections ‘in other circumstances’. This would afford the government and judiciary flexibility to interpret the Constitution as prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, but no such position has been taken.

In terms of LGBT+ organizing, there are several openly active organizations in Bishkek though activists are under constant pressure. In the regions, especially in the south part of the republic, LGBT+ organizing cannot be open, but some work is being done to support LGBT+ people there (ADC Memorial 2020).

48 United Nations Human Rights Committee, Concluding Observations: Kyrgyzstan, UN Doc. CCPR/C/KGZ/CO/2, 23 April 2014, Para 22.

49 <https://www.rferl.org/a/rainbow-rage-kyrgyz-rail-against-lgbt-after-central-asia-s-first-gay-pride-march/29825158.html>

The local context: Ukraine

In Ukraine, the situation of LGBT+ communities have become particularly complicated as a result of the outbreak of the war in Donbas. LGBT+ people from the so-called LPR and DPR⁵⁰, as well as Crimea, had found themselves under the direct threat of Russia's state-sanctioned intolerance of LGBT+ communities, such that many of them had to flee. So far little is known about LGBT+ people who stay on the occupied territories of Ukraine. Today, international human rights organizations and UN missions are not allowed to enter Crimea, LPR and DPR while the self-proclaimed de-facto government incites hostility towards LGBT+ people⁵¹.

Pro-European political commitment and strong detachment from Russia reduced the risk of new anti-LGBT+ legislative initiatives for a couple of years. Furthermore, under pressure from the European Commission and civil protests, the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) was included in the Labour Code in November 2015. It is commonly understood that adoption of the Labour Code amendment was a pre-condition for the visa-free access to Schengen zone for Ukrainian passport holders which started in June 2017. The National Human Rights Strategy for 2016–2020 included the introduction of civil partnerships and provisions for the development of new sex reassignment and legal gender recognition procedures for transgender people, also granting them permission to adopt children.

However, the rights of LGBT+ people in Ukraine are still not fully protected, leaving them vulnerable to violence and discrimination. The attitudes of the Ukrainian State towards LGBT+ communities are overtly ambiguous. On the one hand, the prohibition of SOGI- based discrimination in the sphere of labour and the efficient protection of Kyiv Pride in 2016-2019 sent a message that can be interpreted as supportive of LGBT+ communities. On the other hand, it has become clear that the government is failing to fulfil its obligations to ensure equality of LGBT+ people, including those in the National Human Rights Strategy (Yarmanova 2018, 90). The introduction of civil partnerships, drafted and actively lobbied for by several NGOs, has not led to any significant progress within governmental structures. On the contrary, anti-LGBT+ bills projects have started appearing in local and central governments and are receiving public support from political leaders and the conservative quarters of civil society (Nash Mir Center 2020).

Pride marches in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities are typically celebrated a significant achievement of LGBT+ activism. By the end of 2019, Pride marches took place in Kyiv (2012, 2013, 2015-19), Odesa (2015-19), Kherson (2018-19), Kryvyi Rih (2018-19) and Kharkiv (2019). In June 2019, the Equality March, held in Kyiv was Ukraine's largest-ever pride event, drawing 8,000 participants. Since 2016, all Pride marches have been mostly peaceful with improved police protection helping to prevent far-right attacks. In many other cases, however, police responses to threats and violence towards LGBT+ people have been largely ineffective. The police are reluctant to investigate cases of homophobic and transphobic crime. Most survivors do not report attacks as they do not trust the system, fear harassment and violence from the police or having to divulge information about their sexual orientation (Nash Mir Center 2018). The absence of an effective investigation and relevant legal categorization of these offences as hate crimes sends a clear message about impunity for such crimes. Furthermore, there are cases when homophobic and transphobic violence has been perpetrated by the police. For example, in April, police in Dnipro raided a gay club, forcing customers to lay on the floor for hours, using homophobic slurs, and filming⁵².

50 LPR and DPR stand for the territories of Ukraine around the cities Luhansk and Donetsk, i.e., self-proclaimed 'Luhansk People's Republic' and 'Donetsk People's Republic'.

51 <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2017/9/597ef1fc4/gay-displaced-frontlines-ukraines-conflict.html>

52 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/ukraine>

Educational contexts, needs and potential approaches

A key aim of the workshop was to explore the potential role of educational interventions in supporting and strengthening LGBT+ communities across and within the three participating countries. We spent time during and after the workshop exploring educational contexts and challenges as they pertain to LGBT+ communities and considered the kinds of educational interventions currently available. During the workshop, we engaged in group activities to begin the process of identifying potential learning objectives, learner groups and approaches around which educational interventions might be developed. In this section, we present the results of these reflections, explorations and activities.

Educational context: Georgia

At tertiary level, both teaching and research on LGBT+ issues are carried out as part of Gender Studies programmes. In Georgia, Gender Studies is a marginal discipline with programmes and institutions underfunded. The Gender Studies Master programme in Tbilisi State University relies on the voluntary activities of academic and administrative personnel. Despite their efforts, fewer students have been accepted in recent years with many potential students apparently being discouraged from enrolling. In Ilia State University, a Centre of Gender Studies, led by Prof. Tamar Tskhadadze has managed to carry out several research projects despite chronic underfunding. The small community of Georgian gender researchers does not have a solid base in academia, so most work in collaboration with civil society organisations. Besides the MA programme, there are also several Bachelors' courses in public universities which focus on gender or feminist/queer theories. These courses are also mostly led by gender researchers and/or sociologists.

Prior to 2014, the Georgian secondary educational system lacked any kind of SRHR education. In June 2014, the EU signed an Association agreement with Georgia, which envisages promotion of healthy lifestyles. A key report⁵³ from July 2014 recommended the introduction of 'age appropriate sexual and reproductive health and rights education, including on responsible sexual behaviour, at all levels'. In 2014, the Ministry of Education and Science started revisions of subject standards and incorporation of the Healthy Life Skills (HLS) education into general education curriculum. The National Standard elaborated thus far covers grades 1-9 of the schools, approved in May 2018. However, due to opposition from far right and religious (Orthodox) groups, the standard does not include major SRHR topics. The main focus is on the prevention of gender-based violence, however, teaching gender and combating stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes is also very much opposed by the groups named above.

In September 2018 the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia announced a new reform of education system, which implies a comprehensive approach to all areas of education and ensures creation of a unified education system by 2023. One of the priority components is establishing a healthy lifestyle at schools which was also highlighted by the Prime Minister. Healthy Life Skills education includes some CSE topics. However, this is unlikely to be sufficient given UNESCO standards on CSE²⁹, as well as teachers' lack of competence regarding HLS.⁵⁴

53 Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (Third cycle, 37th session, 2020), NGO Coalition Joint Submission on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Georgia, <https://cutt.ly/PjewRjT>, 8.

54 Ibid.

Educational context: Kyrgyzstan

The Centre for Critical Gender Studies at the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) in Bishkek, **Kyrgyzstan** is the first and the only academic program in Gender Studies in Central Asia. Since 2017, the Centre offers an Undergraduate Minor in Gender Studies, a Concentration for Liberal Arts & Sciences Majors, and a Concentration for Sociology MA students. The centre also houses a research hub that connects with scholars both within Bishkek and globally: hosting faculty research projects, conferences, workshops, visiting scholars and an Annual Lecture series. These programs offer an Interdisciplinary set of classes related to topics of gender and sexuality that engage issues theoretically as well as empirically.⁵⁵ One of the Centre's events was an International conference 'V Teme: Sex, Politics and Life of LGBT People in Central Asia', co-organized together with LGBT+ organisation Labrys. Held in March 2019, the conference gathered activists, academics, and artists for two days of discussions, presentations, and displays of art and publications and demonstrated the range and quality of LGBT+ studies in the regions of Central Asia, Ukraine and Moldova.⁵⁶

Sex education in Kyrgyzstan's secondary schools has historically been a contentious topic. In 2005, a letter-writing campaign initiated by parents, teachers and religious community leaders prompted the withdrawal of a *Healthy Living* textbook from school libraries after just three years use. Though only two of the book's chapters dealt with sex education, this was enough to evoke thousands of outraged letters. Any efforts to pass a law that institutionalizes sex education in schools meets resistance from more conservative factions in the country. Tensions over conservative traditions and the need for sex education in schools continued until 2015 when Parliament passed the law 'On reproductive rights of citizens and guarantees of its implementation', that introduced comprehensive sexuality education to the Kyrgyz school curriculum and outlined the responsibilities for schools and doctors in relation to sex education.⁵⁷ However, until now there are no standards for sex education in secondary schools and sex education is not offered as a formal stand-alone subject. Only 10 hours a year are set aside for students grade 6 through 11 to attend lectures about 'healthy living' broadly. These lectures are not solely about sex education, but also cover information about nutrition and the consequences of drug and alcohol use.⁵⁸

Given the dearth of formalized education about sexual and reproductive health, the main educational resources are on social media spaces. For example, a feminist online magazine *Boktukorgon* offers peer-to-peer education about sexual and reproductive health in a broad sense, including SRHR and mental health.⁵⁹ Sex education is also provided by NGOs, including The Reproductive Health Alliance Kyrgyzstan (an IPPF member association).⁶⁰ Dominant justifications for sex education in Kyrgyzstan centre on the need to prevent early pregnancies, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.⁶¹ Sex education with a focus on SRHR and transgender right seems to be much less accessible.⁶²

55 <https://directory.criticaltheoryconsortium.org/centers/center-for-critical-gender-studies/>

56 See short video report from the conference <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uvfzNU0IA0> and some media materials <https://www.kok.team/ru/2019-03-18/bishkek-budet-v-teme-22-23-marta>

57 <https://kingsthinktank.com/2017/08/30/sexual-education-in-kyrgyzstan-a-western-phenomenon/>

58 https://kaktus.media/doc/347930_polovoe_vospitanie_v_kyrgyzstane._ychat_li_shkolnikov_seksy.html. See also IPPF report <https://www.ippfen.org/sites/ippfen/files/2018-05/Factsheet%20Kyrgyzstan.pdf>

59 <https://www.instagram.com/boktukorgonemessin/?hl=en>

60 <https://www.ippf.org/about-us/member-associations/kyrgyzstan>

61 See, for example <https://cabar.asia/en/education-or-a-threat-how-sex-education-is-taught-to-schoolchildren-in-kyrgyzstan#:~:text=Kyrgyzstan%20has%20no%20sex%20education.devoted%20to%20relationships%20between%20sexes>.

62 Since the Workshop participants from Kyrgyzstan could not be co-authors of this report, all the information about Kyrgyzstan has been collected via desk study.

Educational context: Ukraine

Gender studies courses started to emerge in **Ukrainian** higher education in the early 2000s with their growth boosted by the adoption of the Law of Ukraine 'On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men' (2005). Since then, universities encourage teaching gender studies to report the alignment of their institution with national gender politics. However, the first MA in Gender Studies program (minor, with major in sociology) was opened in Ukraine only in 2018⁶³.

The main theoretical underpinnings of gender studies courses taught in Ukrainian universities is based on the distinction between biological binary 'sex' and 'gender' as its socio-cultural equivalence. This theoretical framework was labelled the 'coat-rack view' where the sexed body is seen as a rack 'upon which different societies impose different norms of personality and behaviour' (Nicholson 1994, 41). In tune with this perspective, instructors and researchers typically built their work on the conceptual apparatus of 'gender roles' and 'stereotypes'. From this perspective, the mission of gender knowledge and politics is seen as teaching how to avoid stereotyping on the level of interpersonal interaction. Any critical perspective on gender as a regime of power is absent or takes a marginal place in the studied syllabi. The rare occurrences of sexuality in syllabi are typically interpreted in bio-essentialist binary terms which reproduce heterosexism overtly or covertly (Mayerchuk and Plakhotnik 2012). These tendencies can be seen on a broader scale in Ukrainian higher education, with just a few exceptions including courses in Queer Theory, Sociology of Sexuality and Critical Feminist Theory in the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.

The implementation of sex education in secondary school curricula is contested in Ukraine with one survey showing that 84% of parents expect schools to provide sex education for their children.⁶⁴ Although there are no standalone courses for sex education, some relevant topics are taught within compulsory courses for middle and high school such as 'Basics of Health Care', biology and others. However, a recent study (Filipchuk et al. 2019) shows that the content of sex education is limited by heterosexual models and focuses more on 'traditional family values' than sexuality as such. The coverage of such issues as contraception, sexual violence and sexual/gender diversity is insufficient or absent while existing syllabi often stigmatizes HIV-positive people, survivors of sexual violence, sexual activity before marriage and so on. Homophobia and transphobia are common in educational materials and may be reinforced (or challenged) by teachers. A recent survey shows: 62% of schoolteachers believe girls are to blame in experiencing sexual abuse if they wear short skirts and make-up; 33% would promote a ban on abortion; 36% are sure that non-heterosexual orientation is a disease that has to be cured.⁶⁵

In addition to religious institutions, some secular organisations and professional associations are opposed to the inclusion of SRHR secondary and higher educational curricula. For example, the Association of Sexologists and Sex-Therapists of Ukraine takes blatantly homophobic and transphobic positions⁶⁶ which are supported in some universities. In such unfavourable conditions, sexual education with a focus on SRHR and LGBT+ communities are offered beyond educational institutions by some media⁶⁷ and, predominantly, LGBT+ organizations.

65 Ibid.

66 <https://sexology.org.ua/stop-seksualna-osvita-v-ukraini/>

67 See, for example, informal educational project for teenagers "Vpershe" [For the first time] <https://vpershe.com/stories>

Existing educational resources

All participants agreed that both formal (in schools, universities and vocational settings) and informal education (through grassroots organisations and NGOs for example) have a vital role in supporting the inclusion and human rights of LGBT+ people. However, across all three countries, formal educational policy and delivery do not address this purpose and as a consequence non-governmental organisations and civil society groups are the key providers of educational resources both for LGBT+ communities and for broader publics. Participants also agreed that online educational resources have particular potential for LGBT+ people because they can be accessed in private and because mobile phones are making the internet increasingly accessible.

Although participants identified a serious lack of educational resources to support LGBT+ people in the three countries, some such resources do already exist, and much can also be learned from existing work in promoting sexuality education and LGBT+ rights in other parts of the world. This includes a substantial body of work produced by IPPF and its Member Associations, as well as work by international LGBT+ groups such as the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) Workshop participants presented some examples of their own work at the workshop. For example:

- Rebecca Jones and Peter Keogh from the OU shared an example of the kind of educational resource they have previously helped develop: <https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=3764>. This resource was created for educators working with the Family Planning Association of India (FPAI), an IPPF Member Association. It responded to an identified difficulty in talking about pleasure within comprehensive sexuality education sessions and aims to support educators to include discussion of pleasure within the training and education they offer.
- Catherine Bailey Gluckman from IPPF European Network shared examples of some of the existing resources that IPPF members were involved in developing.
 - *Sexuality Education in Europe and Central Asia: State of the Art and Recent Developments*. This is an analysis of sexuality education policy and access in 25 European and Central Asian countries, conducted by IPPF European Network and the Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung (BZgA, German Federal Centre for Health Education) <https://www.ippfen.org/resource/sexuality-education-where-it-stands-across-europe-and-central-asia>
 - *Healthy, Happy & Hot* a guide for young people living with HIV on how to enjoy their sexuality. This is an IPPF publication that has been updated and republished for its tenth anniversary in 2020; https://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/IPPF_Healthy%2C%20Happy%20and%20Hot%20Guide_EN.pdf
 - IPPF European Network's youth network, YSAFE, finished a project in April 2021 developing a new toolkit for non-formal comprehensive sexuality education for use with young people from marginalized groups, to address sexual and gender-based violence. The toolkit is called "Safe from SGBV" and includes content designed by and for young queer, trans and intersex people throughout. It will be published summer 2021 and an interactive online version will be available in autumn 2021.
 - *Queering SRHR* a report on the state of sexual and reproductive health and rights of LGBTQI people in Europe produced by Inspire, an independent SRHR network that was hosted by IPPF EN until its closure in 2020. <https://share-netinternational.org/queering-srhr-report-state-srh-lgbtqi-people-europe/>
- Mohira Suyarkulova described a participatory action study on the sexual lives of LGBTQ+ people in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan that she developed in association with Labrys <https://labrys.kg>, a grassroots LGBT+ organisation. The project, which started in 2018, aims to create a queer education curriculum that reflects the experiences and needs of LGBT+ people in Kyrgyzstan, rather than simply reproducing heteronormative medicalised views. She has also recently published a book (Suyarkulova, Mamedov, and Bagdasarove n.d.).

- Ukrainian participant Marina Usmanova talked about a study in Kherson that they started without any financial support. The idea of the project was to historicize local sexualities and to show that LGBT+ people didn't appear in an empty space but were named and perceived differently in different times and spaces. Another aim was to investigate sexual life, women and the war in Ukraine. For example, how family memories about WWII could be related to the current war in the eastern part of Ukraine. In the year after the workshop (and owing to the inspiration of the workshop) Marina also led on a unique project on sexual education in Ukraine. The training module titled *Kviruem Sexprosvet* [Queering Sex Education] – a trans* queer-inclusive educational program – was created by the non-governmental organisation *Insha* from Kherson in collaboration with two other organisations – *Articul O* and *Trans Generation*. The purpose of the training module is making sexual education for adults inclusive with respect to trans* and queer people to the maximum possible extent. It contains educational materials for trainers who work with different LGBT+ communities. During the process of module's development, the authors faced numerous challenges, such as the predominant binary model that stigmatizes trans* and non-binary people, and scarcity of non-binary, non-heteronormative and non-cis-normative sexual terminology. The full packages of the project's materials in Ukrainian and Russian languages are available online⁶⁸. It is also possible to order the printed package of materials if needed.

68 <https://boinsha.com/posts/kviruem-seksprosvet?fbclid=IwAR1AFvz0VOV5x6cf65hp1isouUhxPJEMJPQvXGjBD3juacm5l0JCslIagYE>



Learner Personas

As a first step towards creating new educational resources, participants began to think about potential learners, using an activity from the Learning Design approach used at The Open University (Conole, 2016). This involves creating 'personas' of different types of potential learners, in order to think about the topics, educational approaches and media that might be appropriate. Participants thought about possible learners' living conditions, interests and plans, available resources, challenges and needs. The four personas described below do not exhaust, of course, all the types of potential learner. However, they provide insights into some of the characteristics and nuances that will have to be taken into account.

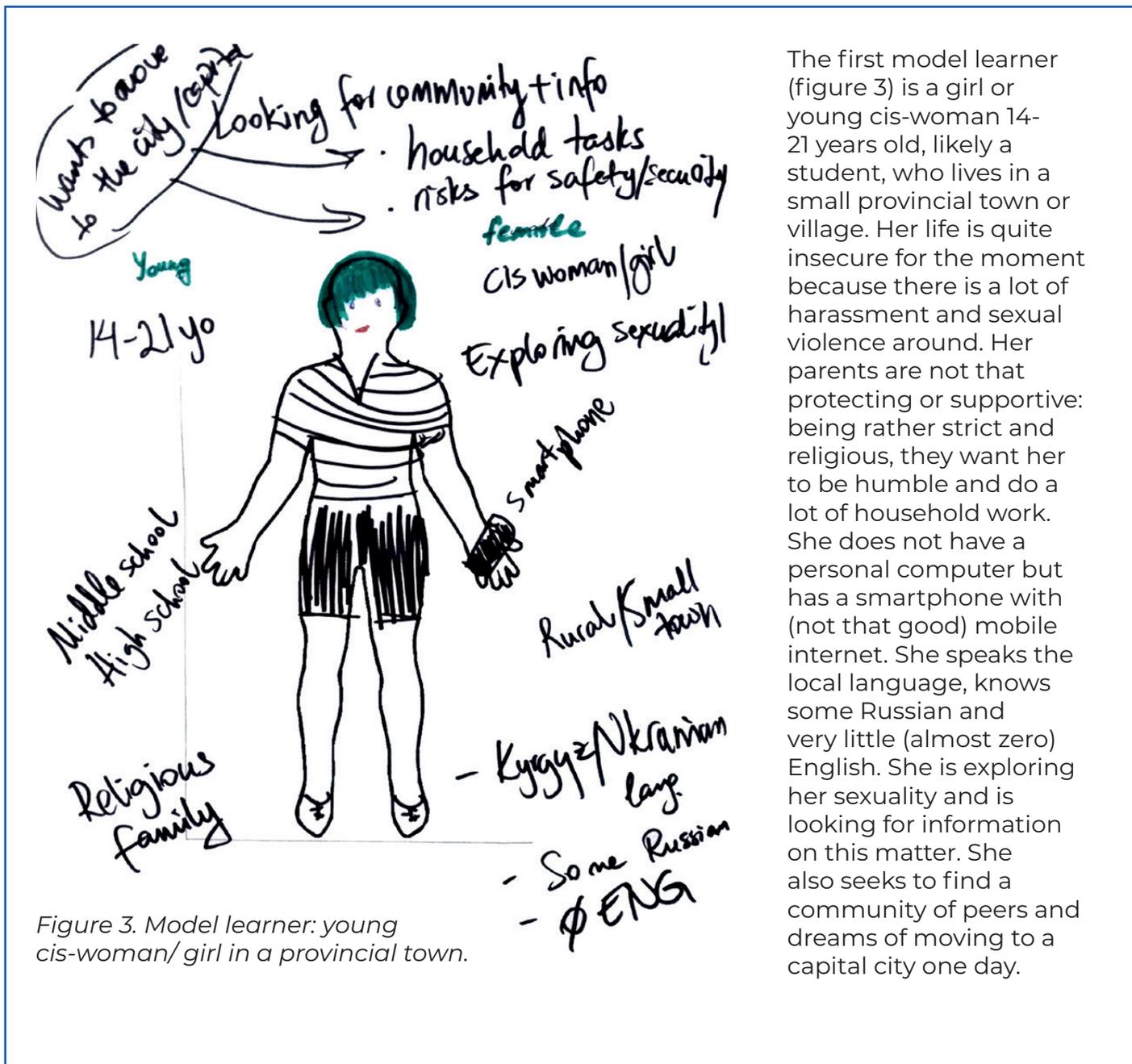


Figure 3. Model learner: young cis-woman/ girl in a provincial town.

Community leader → Peer educator Tokmok

She has lec-s
~~three~~ days a week
she works in
a bar on Fr and S.

Finished school.
Entered Uni.
(19) Is a student

Her role-model
is Ellen DeGeneres

She wants to
be activist
but is not
confident

She lacks
knowledge
G/S/Q/F

She can not
attend the events
of community org-s/
face-to-face
trainings, etc.

She has a
smartphone and
internet all the
time but
computer not
often.



She speaks
Kyrgyz and Rus

Figure 4. Model learner:
Tokmok – a community leader
and potential peer educator.

The second model learner (figure 4) is Tokmok – a 19 years old cis-female student who has leadership skills and could become a great peer educator. She speaks local and Russian languages, and her role model is Ellen DeGeneres. However, she has to work in a bar to sustain herself economically every Friday and Saturday. This schedule allows her to study full-time productively but does not leave time to attend activist meetings, workshops, training sessions and other events. Tokmok would like to be an activist and a leader but does not feel confident enough. She feels she needs more knowledge in the areas of gender, sexuality, queer, feminism etc. She uses the Internet on her smartphone but does not have much access to a computer.

Non-binary student in the city

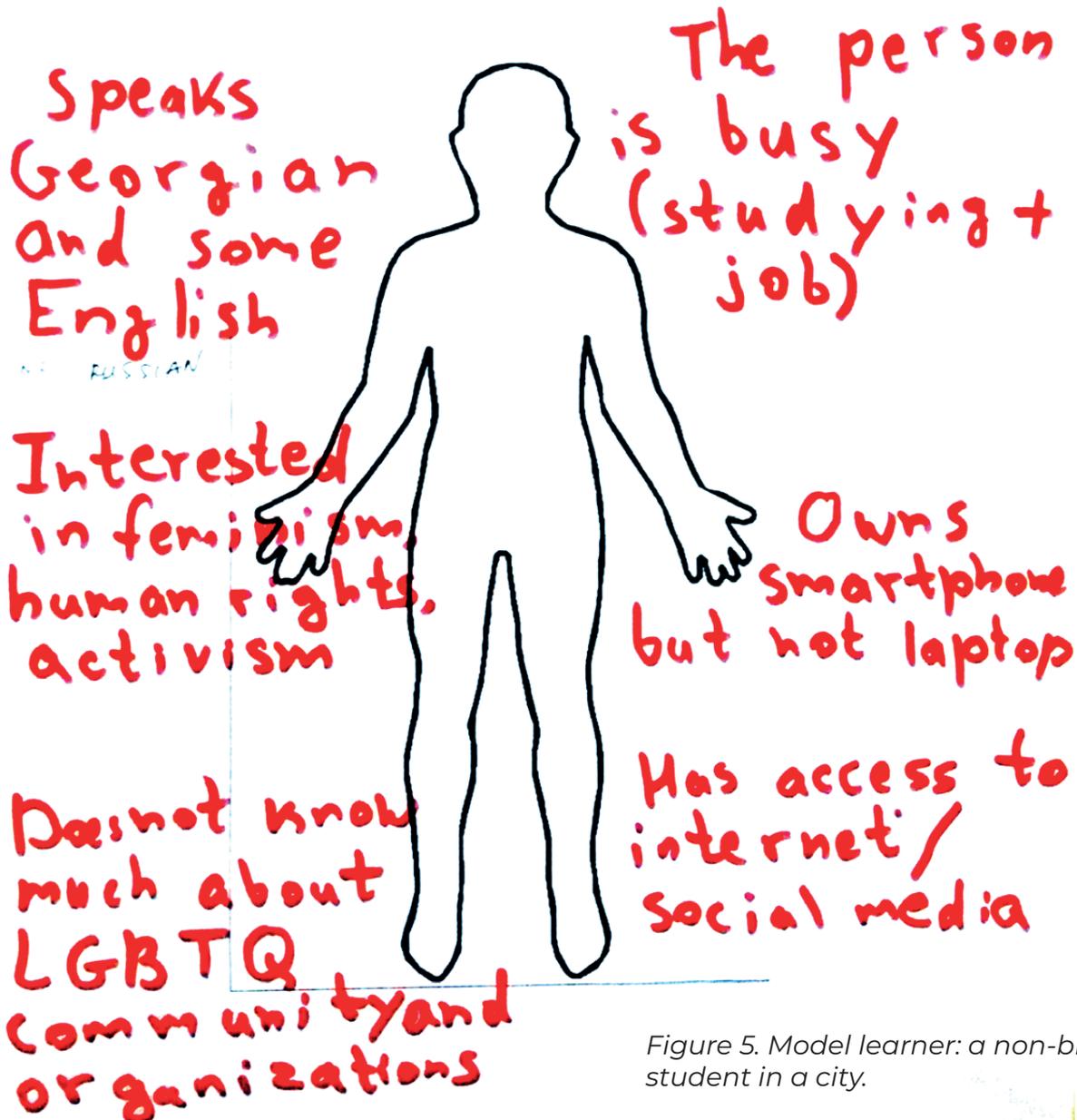
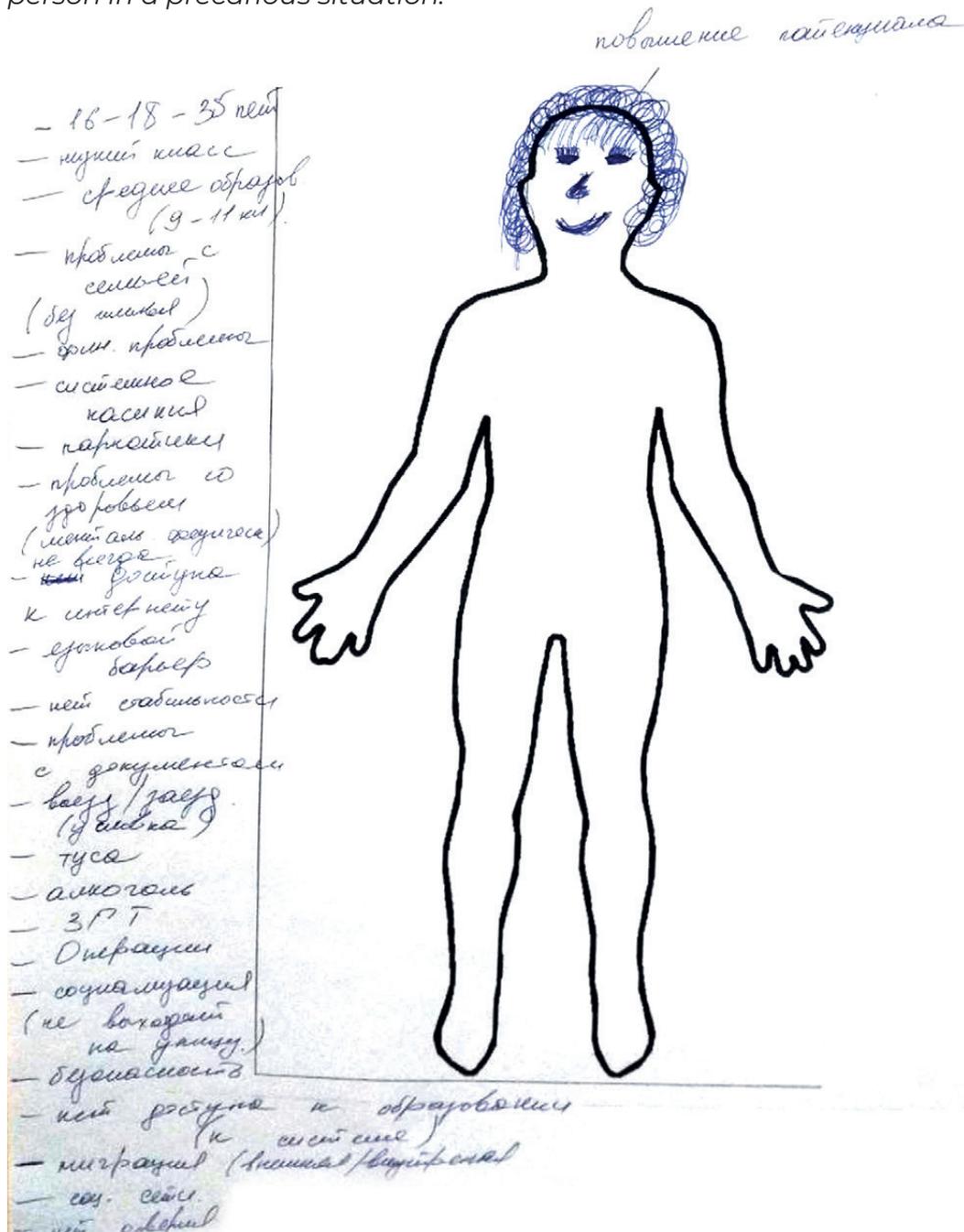


Figure 5. Model learner: a non-binary student in a city.

The third model learner is a non-binary student in a city, likely in Georgia, speaking Georgian and some English but not Russian. They are very busy because they have to combine study and work. At the same time, they are interested in feminism and human rights activism but do not know much about LGBTQ+ communities and organising. Through their smartphone they have permanent access to the Internet and social media, however they do not have a laptop.

Figure 6. Model learner: a transgender person in a precarious situation.



The fourth model learner (figure 6) is a transgender person in the age range from 15 to 35 years old. They have a secondary education and a working-class origin. Their relationship with their birth family is bad, so they have nowhere to live and encounter significant financial problems. They use drugs and have health problems, including mental health issues. They speak local languages; their English seems to be poor. Being a transgender person, they encounter problems related to identification cards and documents, safety, access to health care and educational institutions, and systemic violence. They are present on social media and rely on these contacts a lot since they leave home rarely. But their access to the Internet is not stable. They think about gender reassignment surgery but cannot afford it financially. They also think about possible migration.

Conclusions and next steps

Based on the exploration of common and country-specific challenges facing LGBT+ communities as well as educational contexts and needs, participants identified a set of education-connected problems that are common for all three countries as well as key principles for future work.

Education-related challenges and insights

First, the marginal status of queer and gender studies in the academy means there are few courses and scholars in these areas. This marginalisation alongside chronic underfunding makes it very difficult to undertake research, knowledge production and teaching to the extent that these might contribute to changes in rights agendas and public attitudes more generally. Thus, the impact of the university sector around LGBT+ knowledge and rights agendas remain limited.

Second, LGBT+ academics and scholars across all three countries often carry out research and education in collaboration with LGBT+ and other civil society organisations. However these organisations are themselves under-funded and activists are often over-stretched. As a result, it is difficult to find partners within each country for fruitful collaboration on relevant research and education activities. This demonstrates the importance and potentiality of the networking activities such as this workshop.

Third, LGBT+ NGOs tend to focus on visibility and the recognition of civil rights with less emphasis on material inequality and economic aspects of LGBT+ life as described above. Rights agendas in all three countries have been shaped by politics of de-communisation and neo-liberalism. This further diverts attention from material analyses and critiques and limits what is possible to demand e.g., calls for socialised housing, education or universal basic incomes are too 'communist' for contemporary political and public discourses. The very label of 'leftist' in all countries is a trigger word for marginalization and stigmatization of respected ideas (and, sometimes, people).

Fourth, participants agreed that the task of SRHR education for LGBT+ communities cannot be realized using top-down and traditional pedagogies requiring instead the use of transformative decolonising, radical, feminist and queer pedagogies. The approaches these pedagogies entail demand that educational resources be co-created with and by local and regional LGBT activists, advocates and communities and must emerge from the struggles and dilemmas faced by these communities. These struggles are shaped by global and local political, historical, cultural and material factors. Thus a 'one-size-fits-all' approach where educational resources are conceived and developed in global north contexts and tailored to developing contexts needs to be avoided.

Fifth, this suggests that creative and knowledge co-creation approaches are also adopted including arts-based approaches, videos and animations. The task also includes prioritizing the perspective of queer teachers and queer learners, and corresponding challenges/ interventions to the cis-heteronormative domination in education and society. In parallel, queering already existing resources and user-friendly online courses on SRHR could be an effective strategy.

Key Principles for future work

In the course of the workshop, participants developed a list of overarching principles to guide any future work and projects (figure 7). These could be summarized as follows:

- Structural inequalities (e.g., poverty) have to be taken into account
- Neo-colonial and nationalist contexts have to be taken into account. This includes the colonial power of the Western agenda of 'LGBT liberation'
- Knowledge and learning must emerge from the hands-on experience of LGBT+ people
- Local/national context is crucial for choosing the most appropriate educational tools

Principles for future work

- Taking account of inequality (structural)
e.g. poverty
- Taking account of neo-colonial & nationalist contexts
- Emerging from knowledge & expertise of LGBTQ+ people
- Using the most appropriate educational tool for the context

Figure 7. The main principles/priorities for future projects

Next steps

The group remains enthusiastic about working together to seek funds to develop some of these ideas further. While participants are committed to working collaboratively together, we also recognise that access to time and money to progress our ideas is unevenly distributed among members of the group. Those who are paid for this work need to take the greatest share of the labour. Furthermore, since we met, the Covid-19 pandemic has altered life and capacities to undertake activism in all three countries, in ways that are still not fully understood. Nevertheless, through the process of producing this co-authored report, we continue to work together and explore future possibilities.

In the short-term participants were interested in taking forward two ideas based on existing work being undertaken by workshop attendees:

1. Undertaking a similar study to the one in Bishkek in selected cities in Ukraine and Georgia
2. Extending the Ukrainian oral history project to Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, focusing particularly on the potential this offers to think about LGBT+ lives and identities beyond Western framings.

In the median term, the group would like to pursue funding and support to develop country and region-specific educational resources for LGBT+ communities that take account of local and global geo-political contexts and structural and material inequalities. These resources would be created through collaborations of academic partners with civil society grass roots LGBT organisations and realised through the use of transformative critical pedagogies.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Workshop plan (summary)

Tuesday 3rd December

Focus: Getting to know one another

Suggested activities:

Introductory activities and agreeing 'ground rules' for our time together

An introduction to open and distance learning and The Open University

Presentations from participants about the current situation for LGBT+ people in each nation

Finding out what LGBT+ activism and activities participants are currently doing

Wednesday 4th December

Focus: Goals and plans

Suggested activities:

Identifying goals for future activism

Identifying which of these might be helped by creating educational resources

Sharing relevant existing educational resources that might be adapted

Beginning to identify specific new resources that could be created

Thursday 5th December

Focus: Making plans for future work

Suggested activities:

Further work developing plans for new educational resources

Beginning to think about a funding bid to develop further educational resources

Forming a sub-group to take forward writing a bid

Agreeing any future work together

Appendix 2. Ultimate ambitions

Towards the end of the workshop, we undertook an additional activity aimed at energising participants by connecting our discussions with larger dreams and visions. We discussed “What do we want?” (figure 8). The statement we produced can be understood as an ultimate manifesto that delineated a horizon of our aims and activist missions.

What do we want?

- Universal basic income
- No borders
- No gender markers in ID documents
- Free and accessible education and health care for all
- More LGBT+/ feminist activists
- Break down the division between LGBT+ and cis-hetero people
- More shelters
- No more binaries
- The richest people give money for the ecosystem’s improvement
- No more money
- Free housing for all
- Degrowth
- To stop marketing everything
- Smash the patriarchy
- Redefine citizenship inclusively

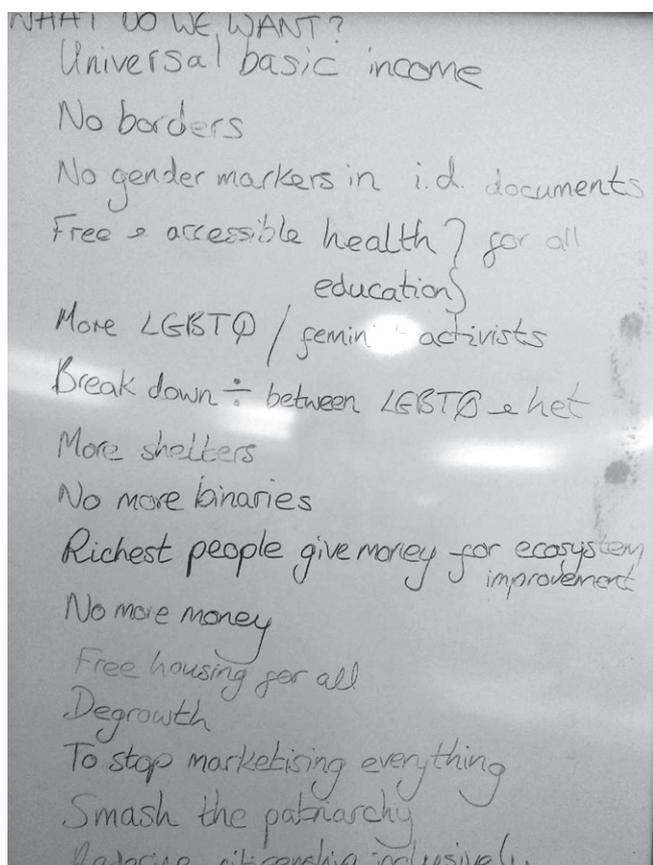


Figure 8. “What do we want” ultimate manifesto.



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