



COME IN OUT

COMPLEXITIES OF LGBT+ MIGRATION

CHange

CAMPAIGN FOR SERIAL
HEALTH & GENDER EQUALITY



UCOS
UNIVERSITY CENTRE FOR
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION



CHanGE in

ACTION

CHanGE (Campaign for sexual Health & Gender Equality) is a project about gender equality and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). The campaign aims at increasing the support system of the global fight for gender equality and a righteous access to SRHR in not only Belgium, but in the rest of the world as well. CHanGE is a project of the University Centre for Development Cooperation.

During the summer of 2019, a group of motivated students travelled as CHanGEmakers to Uganda, Morocco and Lebanon, where they met various activists and organisations that are fighting for gender equality and sexual rights. Many of them were involved in working with and for LGBT+ migrants.

It is the stories of those inspiring organisations and people that are at the centre of this brochure.

Come In Out

COMPLEXITIES OF LGBT+ MIGRATION

All around the world men fall in love with men, women enter relationships with women, people fancy both men and women, and people identify as transgender. But this is not accepted everywhere. **In a lot of countries, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT+) community is facing the death penalty, many years of imprisonment, homo- and transphobic violence, stigma and discrimination.**

Because of this, many LGBT+ people are left with no other option than to migrate to another country. It may sound simple, but **LGBT+ migration is a complex story filled with difficulties and paradoxes.**

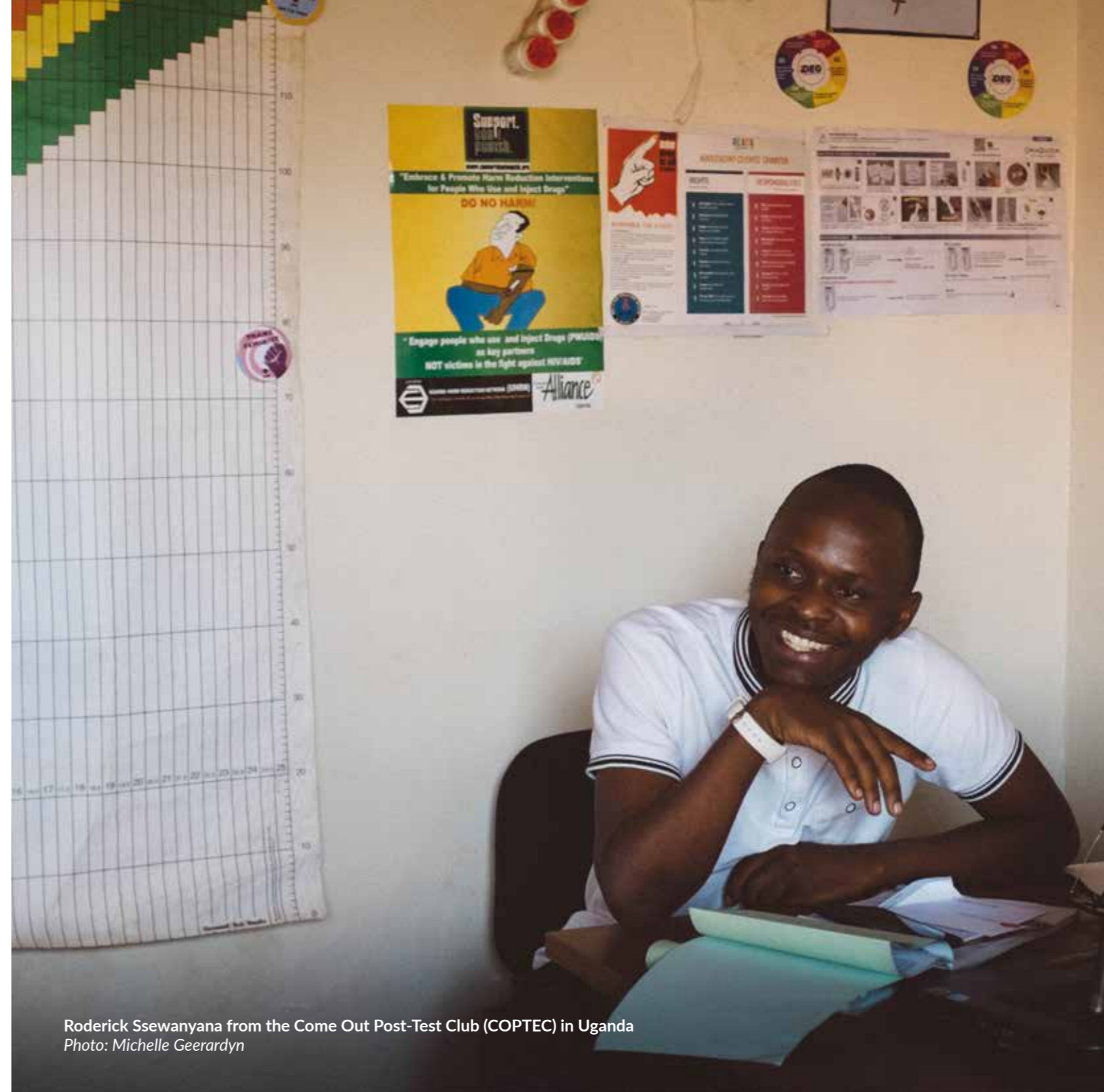
After all, during their flight LGBT+ people often encounter the same discrimination and violence they wanted to escape in the first place. While looking for a new home in a safer environment, they are frequently confronted with racism and rejection by the local LGBT+ community. They also have to prove their sexual orientation or gender identity in order to be granted asylum, but that means they have to conform to the stereotypical image of LGBT+ people. To come in, you have to come out.

LGBT+ migration is subject to many **global challenges**. International and national policy should guarantee the

protection of people in these vulnerable situations to safeguard their human rights. Migration routes and shelter initiatives should be safe and prevent LGBT+ people from being discriminated. Host countries should be safe havens. LGBT+ persons should be granted asylum on the basis of their personal experience.

Fortunately, there's a wide range of organisations and activists worldwide defending this. They are addressing the problems, creating safe spaces for LGBT+ refugees and show us where and how improvements can be made. And these are exactly the kind of people that the CHanGEmakers met in Morocco, Uganda, Lebanon and Belgium. Appalled by the injustices that occur with LGBT+ migration, but impressed by the work of these organisations and activists, this campaign came to existence: **Come In Out. Complexities of LGBT+ Migration.**

A journey throughout LGBT+ Migration. From stories about homo- and transphobic policy in countries of origin to difficult migration routes. From stereotypical asylum procedures to discrimination on the rental market. From what isn't going well to what we can do better. **Come out, join the debate and ride with us.**



Roderick Ssewanyana from the Come Out Post-Test Club (COPTEC) in Uganda
Photo: Michelle Gearardyn



Bibe Kalalu and his Angels in Kampala
Photo: Michelle Geerardyn

CAUSES OF LGBT+ MIGRATION

When it comes to LGBT+ migration, people flee because they risk persecution due to their sexual orientation or gender identity in their country of origin. **In 70 countries this criminalisation is established by law and are sexual acts with a person of the same gender punishable by death or imprisonment.** Only 68 countries provide LGBT+ people with some form of protection, while the remaining 55 countries remain silent by neither protecting, nor criminalising them.

One of the countries where people are being excluded by society and criminalised by law because of their sexuality or gender identity is Uganda. Today, **LGBT+ Ugandans risk a life in prison** and the government is even considering the implementation of the death penalty. Moreover, murders on LGBT+ people are not uncommon. Therefore, some Ugandans deem it necessary to suppress their sexual orientation or gender identity, and others are forced to live a double life. While others succeed in fleeing the country.

LGBT+ Ugandans who aren't or can't flee are often living in precarious circumstances. Despite all of this, there are still **LGBT+ people from countries such as**

the Democratic Republic of the Congo or South Sudan who wind up in Uganda through the existing migration flows after having escaped the dangers in their home countries. They are not always aware of the Ugandese law, which causes them to fall between two stools: they are not welcome to refugee organisations because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, but cannot turn to LGBT+ organisations either, as they are struggling to stay afloat themselves and do not have the necessary means to tackle the specific challenges faced by refugees.

To meet these needs, **Bibe Kalalu** founded the organisation **Angels Refugee Support** in 2009. Despite the many challenges and the lack of financial resources, Bibe and his Angels provide a listening ear, shelter, professional education, medical support and legal assistance for other LGBT+ refugees.

*Bibe Kalalu : “I could never
abandon my community”*

THE PATH TO ASYLUM

When LGBT+ people eventually decide to (or are forced to) flee, they are only at the beginning of **a long and difficult road to a host country** where they hope to live in safety. Along the way, many refugees are confronted with violence, rough realities of survival and violations of their human rights. As finding support or a safe place is even more challenging for them, LGBT+ refugees experience an even larger impact of these hardships.

Mohammed was evicted from his home in Guinea at 12 years old after his family found out that he was gay. He decided to flee to Europe after people had promised him that his human rights would be respected there. Things didn't go as expected, though. Just like many other refugees, Mohammed **got stuck in Rabat**, the capital of **Morocco**.

Because Morocco criminalises homosexuality, the LGBT+ community is forced to

lead a secret life. On top of that, societal stigma makes it hard for LGBT+ people to find jobs or shelter, because of which many are barely managing to survive.

In these circumstances, LGBT refugees are able to file for refugee status with the **UNHCR** (the UN Refugee Agency). This status is a first step towards a possible **resettlement in a country which offers protection for LGBT individuals**. These procedures are, however, **long, complex and bureaucratic**. Mohammed has already been waiting seven years for a resettlement. Meanwhile, he survives by staying close to his friends, going into hiding when necessary and by continuing to believe that a better future is awaiting him.

Mohammed in Morocco
Photo: Latifah Abdou



THE ASYLUM PROCEDURE

In order to obtain international protection as an LGBT+ person, you must **prove your sexual orientation or gender identity during the asylum procedure**. This is also the case in **Belgium**. In the last 10 years, 4% of all asylum seekers in our country applied for protection on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

All too often, this procedure takes place in an **atmosphere of distrust**: it is generally assumed that the applicant is feigning their sexual orientation or gender identity in order to receive asylum illegally. Therefore, it is up to the asylum seeker to prove otherwise. Research shows, however, how difficult this credibility procedure is. As many of **the assessors and judges tend to have a stereotypical image**, anyone who falls outside of their homo- and transnormative image, might as well forget about it.

In this stereotypical image, an LGBT+ person is expected to be able to reflect about their own emotions and identity. A homosexual man is imagined to behave feminine. A lesbian woman should have never had any feelings towards a man. LGBT+ people cannot be religious.

They are supposed to use Western concepts (such as "LGBT") to describe themselves. It is assumed that, immediately after their arrival in Belgium, they dive into the LGBT+ scene. And the list goes on.

But the procedure **does not take into account the personal and cultural interpretation of one's sexual orientation or gender identity**. The meaning of words is very culturally bound. The extent to which someone can describe their own sexuality, is personal and research indicates that sexual orientation and gender identity are fluid. An understanding of internalized homophobia is also absent, as is awareness of the impact of traumatic experiences and the confrontation with racism and financial restrictions in Belgium.

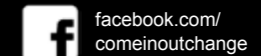
It is time to start a credibility procedure **not from the expectations, but from the individual story of the LGBT+ refugee**. And to get there, we need to switch from distrust to dialogue, and from stereotypical expectations to insights on the complexity of sexuality and gender identity.

Can you prove you're straight?

Moeilijk, nee?

LGBT-asielzoekers moeten in de asielprocedure de geloofwaardigheid van hun geaardheid of genderidentiteit bewijzen. Deze procedure staat bol van de stereotiepe verwachtingen.

Hoog tijd om dit te veranderen!





Sam in Lebanon
Photo: Gijs Van Dyck

AN INCLUSIVE, NEW HOME?

Once an LGBT+ individual has completed the asylum procedure and obtained international protection, a huge weight may be lifted off their shoulders. In a safe(r) space, they can finally start building a new home. In the Middle East many LGBT+ people choose to resettle in Beirut. After all, the capital of **Lebanon** is known for its vibrant (yet hidden) LGBT+ scene.

One of them is **Sam**, who fled from Syria to Lebanon in 2012. As a trans woman she was not welcome at most refugee organizations and the classic LGBT+ organizations lack the expertise or means to answer the questions of newcomers. **Helem**, established in 2014 as first LGBT+ organization in the Arab world, offered an answer to this and explicitly opened the door for LGBT+ people on the run.

Sam: ***“Trans people get bothered and harassed more than any other letter in LGBT.”***

Apart from a **safe space**, Helem also offers **psychological support**. This is urgently needed considering the vulnerable and often precarious circumstances LGBT+ people are confronted with. Via their telephone helpline, Helem receives more than 200 calls every month from LGBT+ people in need. “Sometimes, people in prison are only allowed one phone call per week, but still choose to call us”, one employee of Helem says.

The organization is also **pressuring the government** to shape a structurally inclusive policy. After all, the group of LGBT+ newcomers is not only routinely called out or attacked in the streets, they also face a lot of **discrimination on the rental and labour market**. Because of this, many LGBT+ Syrians are unemployed. This is very dangerous since, as soon as the police find out, they can be deported from the country, even when they are officially recognized as refugees. As a result, LGBT+ refugees are often forced to manoeuvre between living in fear and seeking protection. Between living in a safer place than home and continuously suppressing their own identity.

INSPIRED?

Would you like to contribute to a world where LGBT+ migrants take a full-fledged place in society? Here are some tips!

- Question homonormative and trans-normative expectations with yourself and others in order to have a broader understanding of LGBT+ people.
- Make existing LGBT+ organizations more inclusive by explicitly creating space for people with a migration background.
- Support LGBT+ migrants in their search for housing, employment or leisure. You can find a list of organisations and initiatives to join on our website.
- Support our Warmste Week action through which we are collecting funds

for the *Ugandan Angels Refugee Support Group Association*.

- Pull up policy makers to provide funds for LGBT+ people in a refugee context and for trainings on sexuality and gender identity to employees in the asylum procedure.
- Take part in of our activities on this theme!

Come In Out. Complexities of LGBT+ Migration travels throughout Flanders and Brussels with stories and perspectives on the different aspects within LGBT+ migration. Our bus will stop on:

14.11 IN GHENT: CAN YOU PROVE YOU'RE STRAIGHT?

18.11 IN ANTWERP: COME IN OUT INVITES: JAOUAD ALLOUL

27.11 IN GHENT: QUEER TALKS

7.12 IN BRUSSELS: REDEFINE

14.12 IN GENK: VUB ORCHESTRA AMOR MUNDI

Visit our facebook page for more information on our events and opportunities to visit our mobile exposition.



UCOS - University Centre for Development Cooperation vzw
Pleinlaan 5 | 1050 Brussels | contact@ucos.be
www.ucos.be



ucosfanpage



comeinoutchange



ucos.be

With the support of:



België
partner in ontwikkeling



Vlaanderen
verbeelding werkt