



# MOBILE MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN: AN EXPLORATION IN EUROPEAN RESIDENTS OF SEXUAL RISK TAKING WHILE TRAVELLING ABROAD

Percy Fernández Dávila<sup>1,2</sup>, Cinta Folch<sup>1</sup>, Laia Ferrer<sup>1</sup>, Jordi Casabona<sup>1</sup>, Ford Hickson<sup>3</sup>, Àles Lamut<sup>4</sup>, Peter Weatherburn<sup>3</sup>, Axel J. Schmidt<sup>3</sup> & the EMIS network

<sup>1</sup> Centre d'Estudis Epidemiològics sobre les ITS i SIDA de Catalunya, Barcelona; <sup>2</sup> Stop Sida, Barcelona; <sup>3</sup> London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Department of Social & Environmental Health Research, London; <sup>4</sup> National Institute of Public Health, Ljubljana

## INTRODUCTION

The formation of the Schengen area, European Union enlargement, and cheap flights have substantially increased the mobility of men who have sex with men (MSM). Internet and mobile phone dating allow long-term planning of sexual encounters. Travellers to foreign countries may disregard conventional norms of behaviour and indulge in risk-taking behaviour. Some studies suggest that the risk-taking behaviour of travellers on vacation (for example, alcohol or drug use, high number of sexual partners) may play an important role in the dissemination of HIV and other STI. Data from the European MSM Internet Survey (EMIS) were used to describe patterns of sexual behaviour risk among European MSM abroad.

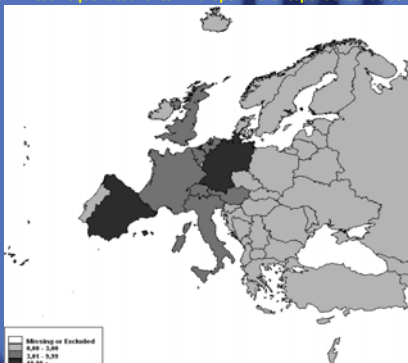
## METHODS

The European Men to Men Internet Survey (EMIS) was implemented in 38 European countries from June to August 2010. Data on socio-demographics, sexual behaviour, HIV/STI prevention needs/services and other variables were obtained using an online questionnaire, translated into 25 languages. Also It included questions on the recency of sex abroad, country of destination, where contact was established, paying/being paid for sex, and unprotected anal intercourse (UAI). Descriptive, univariate and multivariate analyses were performed.

## RESULTS

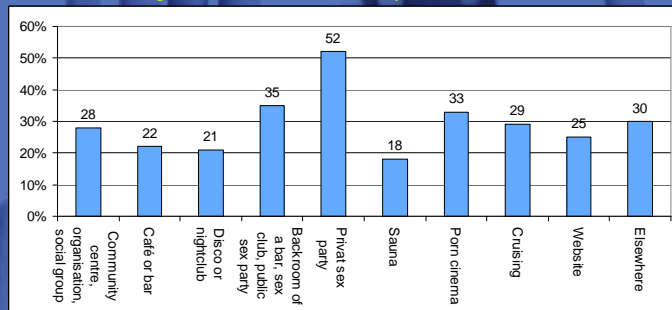
Data from 174,209 MSM living in 38 European countries were analysed. Between 15% (Ukraine) and 57% (Luxemburg) of respondents reported sex abroad in the previous 12 months (median: 26%). The dominant European destinations were Spain (18%), Germany (11%), and France (7%) (see Figure 1), while outside Europe the US (7%), Thailand (3%), and Brazil (2%) were most common.

Figure 1: Most frequent countries in Europe where respondents had sex abroad



Anal intercourse (AI) was particularly common when travelling to Eastern Mediterranean countries or Brazil. Men who reported UAI in their country of residence were more likely to report UAI while abroad (aOR=13.4). As seen in Figure 2, the meeting venues with the highest levels of UAI were gay sex parties in private homes (52% of men who met their last sex partner abroad here, and who had AI, did not use a condom) and in backrooms of a bar, gay sex club or a public gay sex party (35%).

Figure 2: Place where men met a sexual partner and had UAI



Paid sex abroad was particularly common in Thailand (32%), the Czech Republic (15%), and Brazil (14%); but under 5% in most European countries or the US. The internet (32%) and gay saunas (14%) were the most common means to meet for sex abroad.

A higher proportion of men with diagnosed HIV reported sex abroad than others (40% vs. 24%; aOR=1.81) and were more likely to report UAI (49% vs. 21%; aOR=3.75).

## CONCLUSIONS

Among European MSM, sex abroad is common. How men meet sexual partners abroad varies by the country visited. The internet was the primary means by which participants in this study met sexual partners when travelling. The internet permits the creation of social and sexual networks that facilitate contact and the security of having a sexual encounter. Sexual risk (UAI) was particularly higher among MSM with diagnosed HIV while travelling abroad, particularly meeting partners at sex-venues, perhaps because these are places where verbal communication between sexual partners rarely occurs. These venues may be felt as safe spaces that do not require disclosure of HIV status. Prevention planning must address such cross-border sexual networks. Popular destination cities for MSM need to be sensitive to their international visitors.

More information: [www.emis-project.eu](http://www.emis-project.eu)  
Contact: [percy.fernandez.davila@emis-project.eu](mailto:percy.fernandez.davila@emis-project.eu)

EMIS Collaborating Partners: AT: Aids-Hilfe Wien; BE: Institute of Tropical Medicine, Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, Ex Aequo, Sensoo, Arc-en-ciel; BG: National Centre of Infectious and Parasitic Diseases, Queer Bulgaria Foundation; BY: Vstrocha; CH: Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive, Aids-Hilfe Schweiz; CY: Research Unit in Behaviour & Social Issues; CZ: Charles University (Institute of Sexology); Ceska spolocnost AIDS pomoci; DE: Berlin Social Science Research Center (WZB), Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe; Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA); DK: Statens Serum Institut, Department of Epidemiology, stopaids; ES: National Centre of Epidemiology, stopaida, Ministry of Health and Social Politics; EE: National Institute for Health Development; FI: University of Tampere (Nursing Science), HIV-osaatio/Aids-tukikeskus; FR: Institut de veille sanitaire (InVS), AIDS, Act Up Paris, Sida Info Service, Le Kiosque, The Warming; GR: Positive Voice; HR: University of Zagreb (Humanities and Social Sciences); HU: Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ), Háttér; IE: Gay Men's Health Service, Health Services Executive; IT: University of Bologna, Arcigay, Istituto Superiore di Sanità; LT: Center for Communicable Diseases and AIDS; LV: The Infectology Centre of Latvia; Mozaka; MD: GenderDoc-M; MK: Equality for Gays and Lesbians (EGAL); NL: schoren; NO: Norwegian Knowledge Centre for the Health Services, The Norwegian Institute of Public Health; PL: National AIDS Centre, Lambda Warszawa; PT: GAT Portugal, University of Porto (Medical School), Institute of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; RO: PSI Romania RS: Safe Pulse of Youth; RU: PSI Russia, La Sky; SE: Malmö University, Riksförbundet för homosexuella, bisexuella och transpersoners rättigheter (RFSL); SI: National Institute of Public Health, Legebitra, ŠKUC-Magnus; SK: OZ Odysseus; TR: Turkish Public Health Association, KAOS-GL, Istanbul LGBTT, Siyah Pembe Uçgen Izmir; UA: Gay Alliance, Nash Mir, LIGA Nikolaev; UK: City University, London, CHAPS (Terrence Higgins Trust); EU: ILGA-Europe, Aids Action Europe, European AIDS Treatment Group, GayRomeo, Manhunt and Manhunt Cares  
EMIS Advisory Partners: Executive Agency for Health and Consumers (EAHC), European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), WHO-Europe



ROBERT KOCH INSTITUT

