

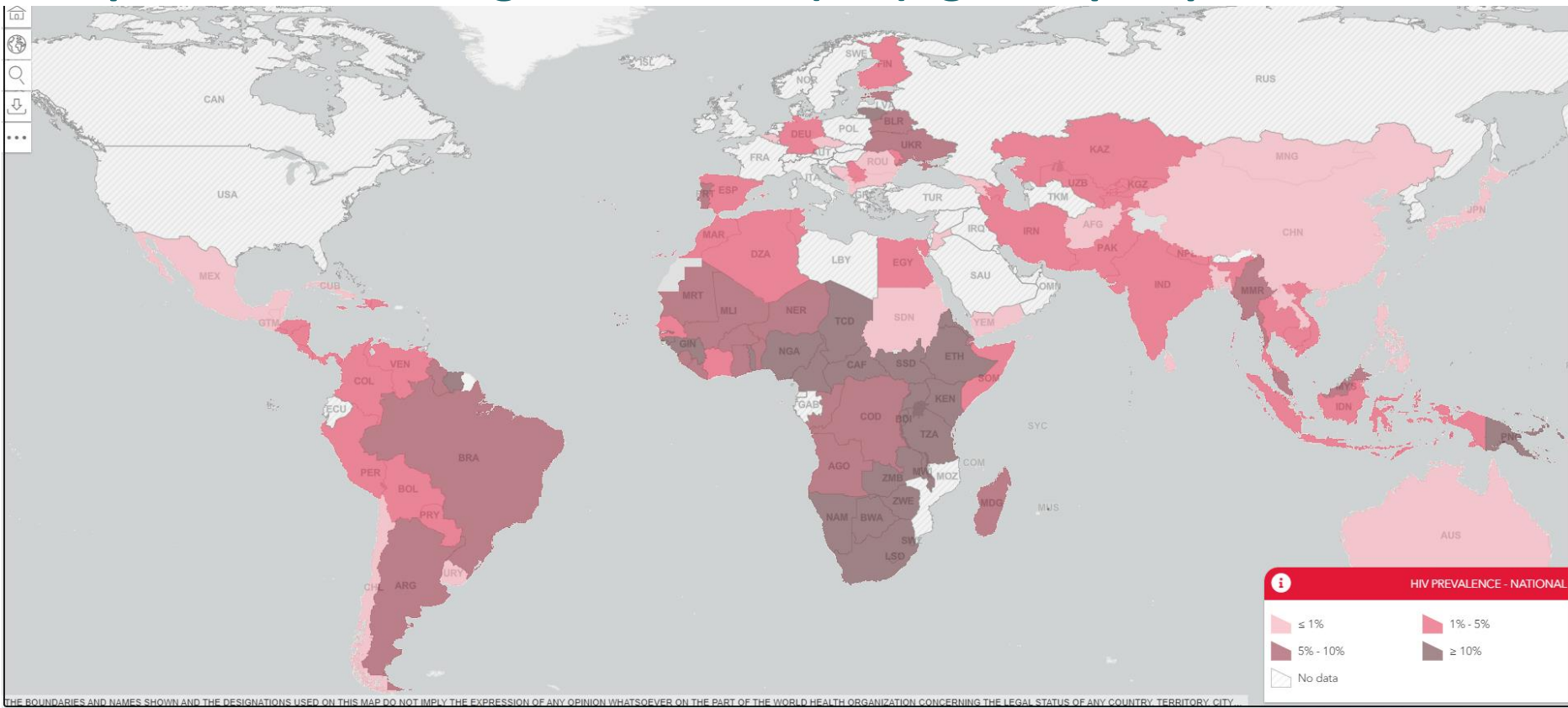
# PrEP for female sex workers : what do we know?

BREACH SYMPOSIUM 30<sup>TH</sup> OF NOVEMBER 2021 – DOLCE LA HULPE

Heleen Van Mieghem



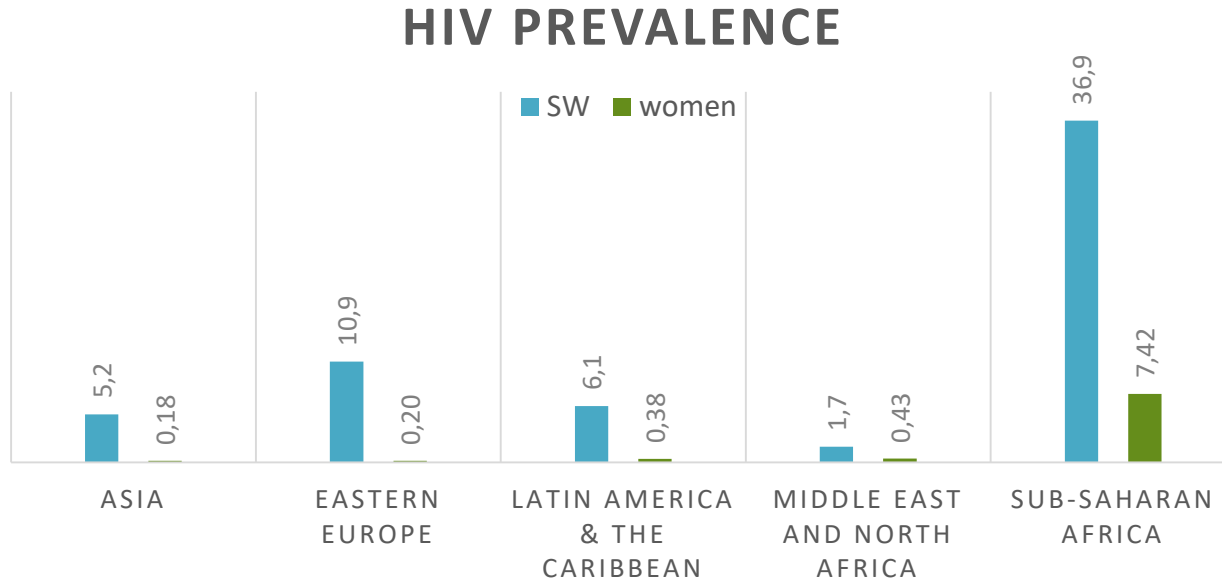
# HIV-prevalence among sex workers (SW): global perspective



Source : UNAIDS key populations atlas – July 2021



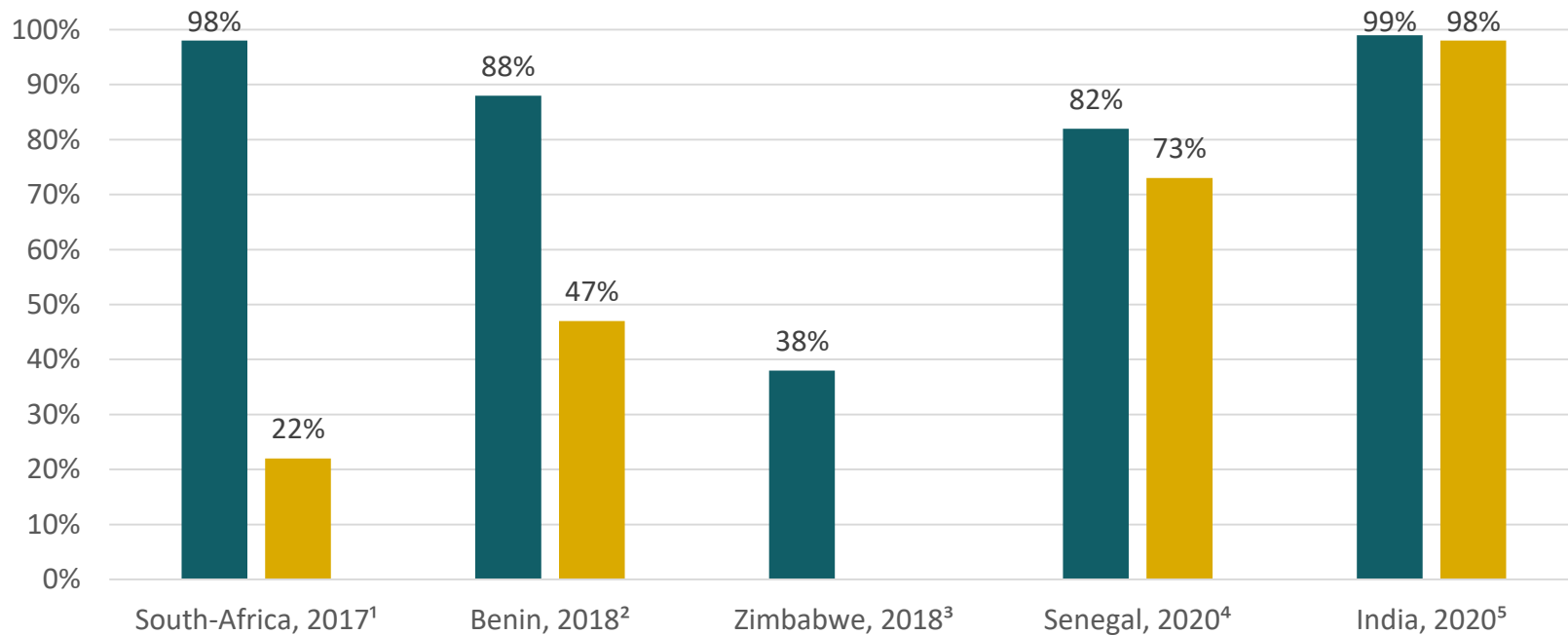
# Disproportional of HIV burden in female SW as compared to the general population, in Low- and Middle-income Countries



Baral S, [Lancet Infect Dis.](#) 2012 Jul;12(7):538-49. doi: 10.1016/S1473-3099(12)70066-X. Epub 2012 Mar 15.



## Prep-uptake and retention among female SW (FSW): demonstration projects



<sup>1</sup>Eakle R et al, PLOS Medicine 2017

<sup>2</sup>Mboup A et al, JIAS 2018

<sup>3</sup>Cowan et al, The Lancet HIV 2018

<sup>4</sup>Sarr M et al, Int J STD AIDS. 2020

<sup>5</sup>Reza-Paul S et al, Glob Public Health. 2020

■ Uptake    ■ Retention (12 months after initiation)

# HIV-prevalence among high-risk groups in Europe

**Cobatest Network : Data from organizations that provide Community Based Voluntary Counselling and Testing (CBVCT) to high-risk populations. (2019)**



Gogishvili M et al. COBATEST Network 2019 Report: Monitoring and Evaluation. Barcelona: CEEISCAT; 2020.



# PrEP – guidelines in Belgium

## Emtricitabine/Tenofovir disoproxil as pre-exposure prophylaxis (Prep)

### Criteria for reimbursement

#### ❖ MSM (men having sex with men):

- who had unprotected anal sex with at least 2 partners during the last 6 months.
- who had multiple STD's (Syphilis, Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, or a primo-infection with hepatitis B or C) within the last year.
- who have used PEP multiple times within the last year.
- who use psycho-active substances during sexual intercourse.

#### ❖ High Risk Persons :

- PWID (People who inject drugs) who share needles
- People in prostitution, exposed to unprotected sex.
- People in general who are exposed to unprotected sex with a high risk of HIV-infection.
- Partners of HIV-positive patients without viral suppression (newly on treatment or no viral suppression with adequate treatment)



## Remaining questions

- What is the HIV-prevalence among sex workers in Belgium ?
- What is the HIV-incidence among this group ?
- What are the risk factors for HIV among sex workers ?
- What is the access to PrEP-care among sex workers ?



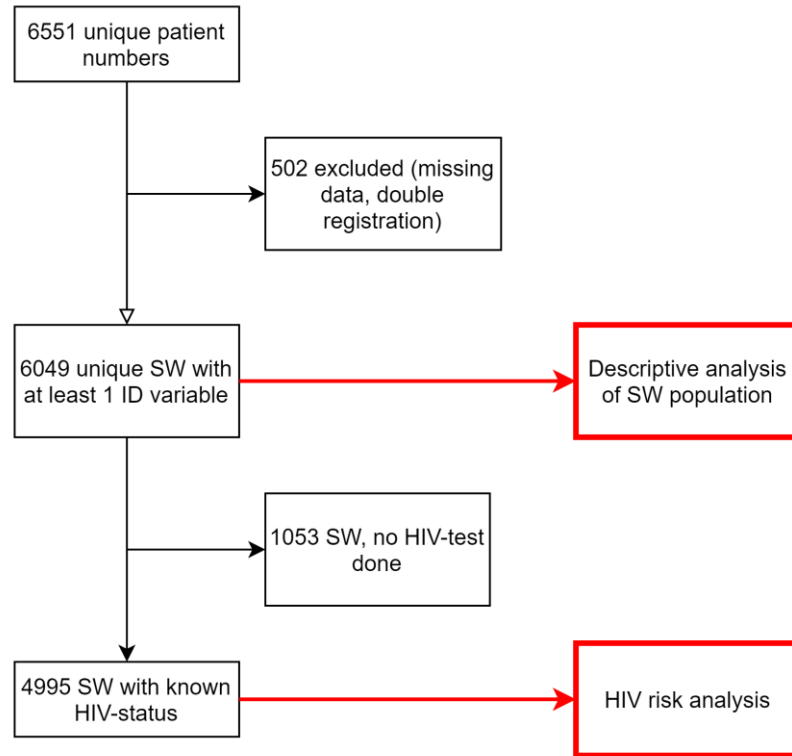
# A retrospective analysis of routine data from a community-based organization (1 Jan 2016 – 31 Dec 2019)

- Violett (former Ghapro and Pasop)
- Medical care for sex workers
- Offices in Gent, Antwerp and Hasselt
- Outreach programs covering the whole region of Flanders
- Voluntary screening for HIV and STI





# Number of participants included in the study



# Gender of sex workers in Flanders

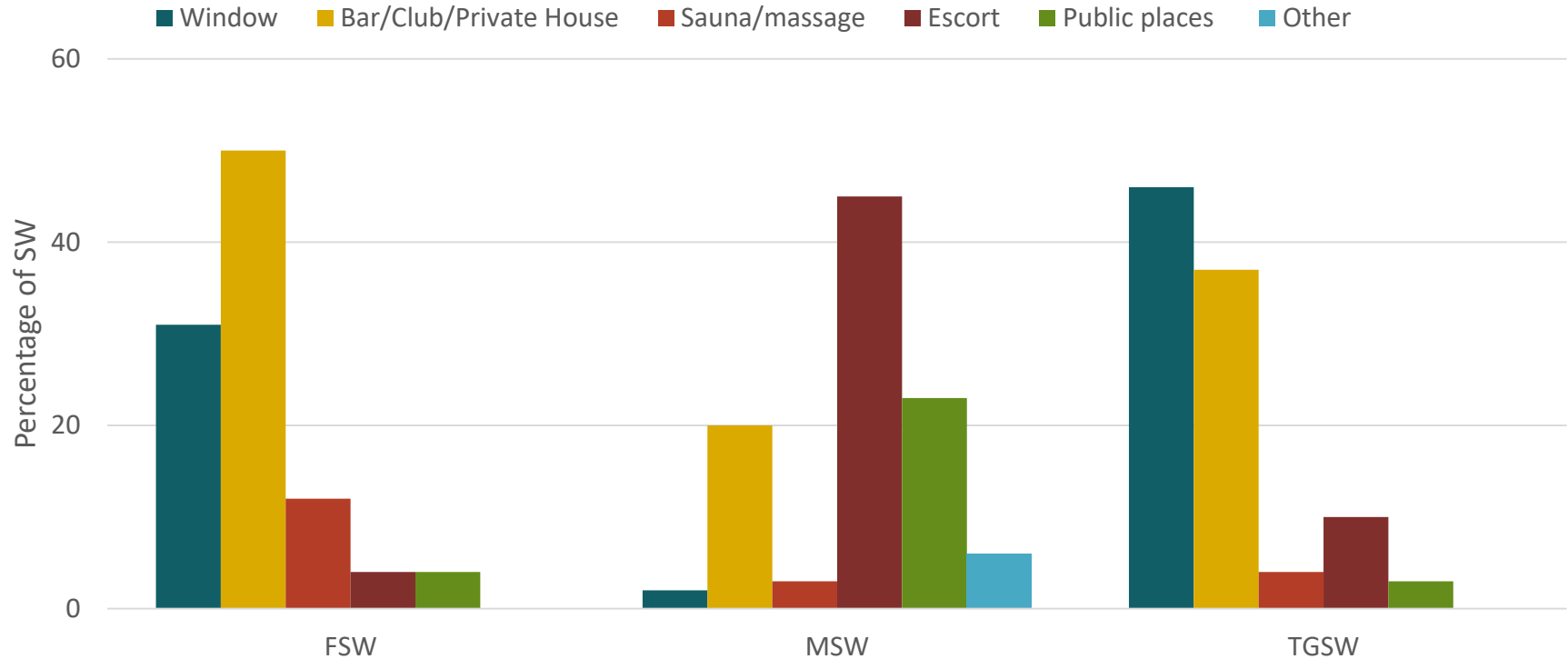
	Number	%	HIV-status
			Unknown
<b>Gender</b>			
FSW	5622	92,9%	996 (17,7%)
MSW	228	3,8%	29 (12,7%)
TGSW	192	3,2%	22 (11,5%)
Unknown	7	0,1%	
<b>Total</b>	6049	100%	1053 (17,4%)

FSW are significantly less tested for HIV than male SW (MSW) and transgender SW (TGSW)

( $\chi^2=8,47$ ,  $p<0,05$ )



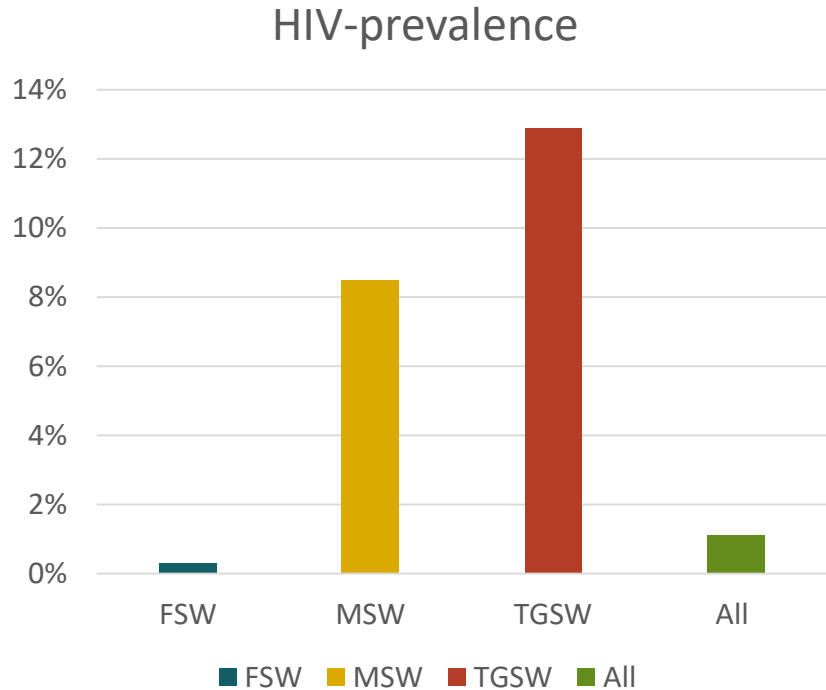
# Work setting of SW in Flanders according to gender



## Nationality of SW per gender

Region of nationality	FSW		MSW		TGSW	
<b>Belgium</b>	1177	21%	116	52%	31	16%
<b>Western-Europa</b>	1049	19%	25	11%	67	35%
<b>Eastern-Europa</b>	1865	34%	19	8%	6	3%
<b>E-Europa non-EU</b>	105	2%	11	5%	2	1%
<b>Latin-America</b>	601	11%	11	5%	79	41%
<b>N. Africa/M. East</b>	53	1%	25	11%	3	2%
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	402	7%	8	4%	0	0%
<b>North America</b>	3	0,05%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Asia and Oceania</b>	249	5%	9	4%	4	2%
	5504	100%	224	100%	192	100%

# HIV-prevalence among sex workers in Flanders



Only one FSW  
seroconverted during  
follow-up



# Risk factors for HIV

	% HIV	RR	aRR
Gender			
Female	0.3%	1	1
Male	8.8%	26.4	20.5
Transgender	13.0%	39.3	37.1
Nationality			
Belgian	0.9%	1	1
Western Europe	1.2%	1.3	2.2
Eastern Europe	0.3%	0.3	1.3
Latin America	3.1%	3.4	3.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.3%	2.5	7
Other	1.1%	1.2	1.1
Work setting			
Window	0.6%	1	1
Private house/massage	0.8%	1.2	1.8
Escort	5.9%	9.5	4.2
Public places	3.2%	5.1	2.5
Other	0.5%	0.8	2.0

Statistically significant ( $p < 0,05$ )

RR = risk ratio

aRR = risk ratio, adjusted for gender, nationality, work setting and age at first contact

# Access to PrEP-care for SW in Belgium : limited and inconsistent

## With insurance

HRC *	SW on Prep
Flanders	14 (1 FSW)
Wallonia	3
Brussels	8 (1 FSW)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25</b>

*Data collected February 2021*

\*HIV-reference centre

## Without insurance

CBO°	SW on Prep
Violett Antwerp	42
Violett Gent	2
Alias Brussels	27
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>89</b>

Only Male and TG sex workers

*Data collected November 2021*

° Community-based organization

## Conclusion

- High HIV prevalence among male and transgender sex workers in Flanders
- No HIV test was done in more than 1 in 6 female sex workers
- Access to regular PrEP-care for SW is limited





## Recommendations

- Strengthening of surveillance of STI and HIV among sex workers in Belgium is needed.
- Further research on risk factors for HIV acquisition linked to sexual behaviour should be conducted.
- Structural access to PrEP-care for male and transgender SW is urgently needed.



# Sincere thanks to

- The staff of Violett Antwerp and Gent :
  - Kris Keersmaeckers and Wendy Gabriëls
  - Anne-Sophie De Cannière and Martine Claeysens
- The colleagues of the Promise project
- FWO





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