

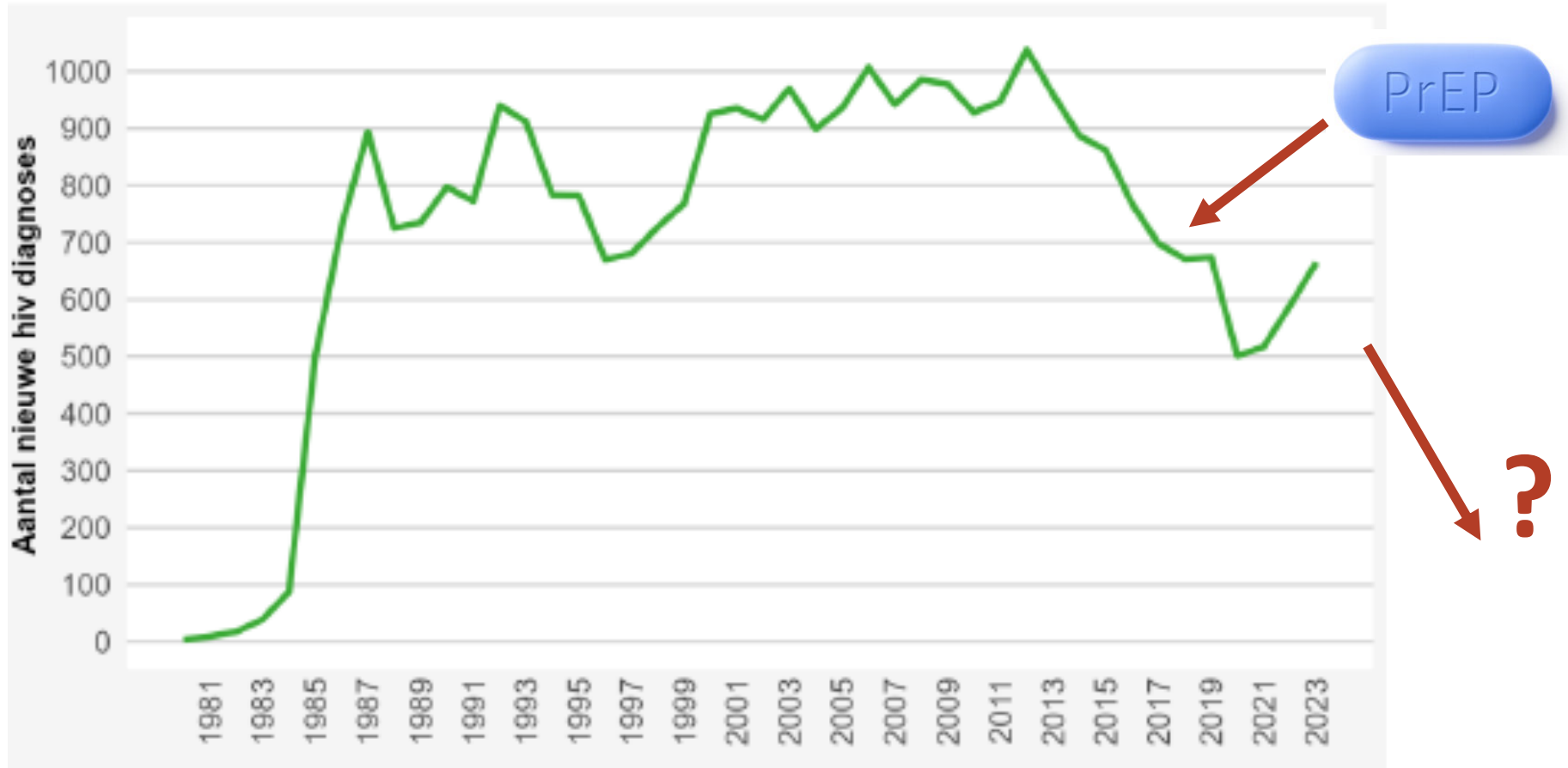
# Missed opportunities for HIV prevention

Case study at ITM (Antwerp)

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BREACH Symposium 28/11/2024

## Yearly number of new HIV diagnoses in BEL 1980-2023



# Background and aims

- **Introduction of injectable PrEP**

- authorized in US and EU, negotiations ongoing in Belgium
- demonstration study ITM: acceptability of CAB-LA
- formative phase: define target groups for injectable PrEP

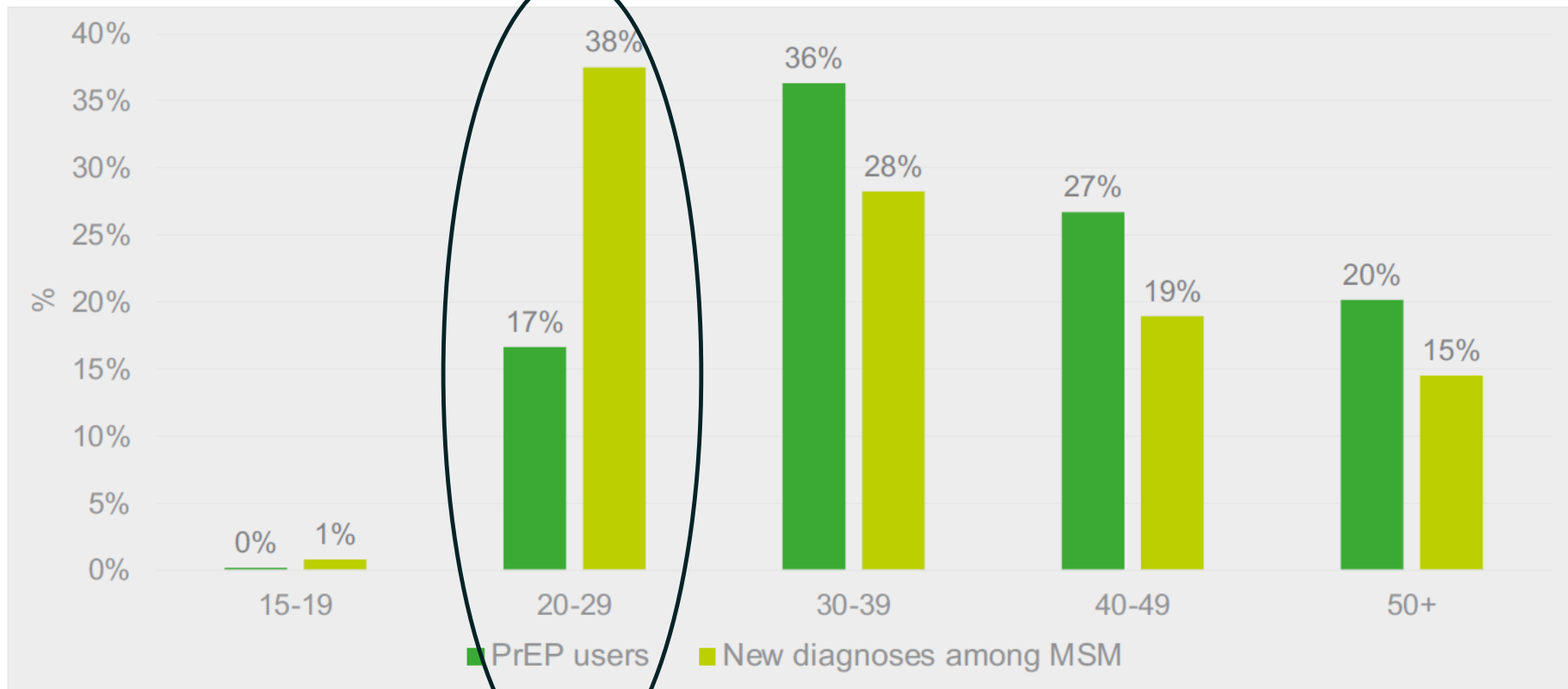
- **Research questions**

- What are missed opportunities for HIV prevention?
- Which groups at risk for HIV are we not reaching with PrEP, and why?

⇒ *inform demonstration study*



# Age distribution PrEP users & new HIV diagnoses among MSM, 2022



# Methods: triangulation of data

Case study at ITM

## 1) People with a recent HIV infection

### A. ITM clinic patient records 2023

- Analysis of patient characteristics
  - age, gender, sexual orientation, nationality
  - number of sex partners, chemsex, sex work, previous HIV test, ever PrEP use



### B. In-depth interviews (N=15, ongoing)

- topics
  - sexual behaviour and partners, HIV risk perception, HIV prevention, testing
  - circumstances of HIV acquisition, factors increasing vulnerability
  - PrEP: awareness, attitudes, previous use, experiences and challenges
  - recommendations for HIV prevention



# Methods

## 2) People at risk for HIV, but not on PrEP

### A. ITM clinic patient records 2023

- Groups at increased risk: **PEP use** **chemsex** **≥ 2 STIs** **≥ 2 HIV tests**  
**not on PrEP**
- Analysis of patient characteristics
  - age, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, number of sex partners



### B. In-depth interviews

- male sex workers not on PrEP (N=14)
  - at CBOs for sex workers in Antwerp and Brussels (Violet, Boysproject, Alias)
  - topics
    - sexual behaviour and partners, HIV risk perception, HIV prevention, testing
    - (injectable) PrEP: awareness, attitudes, interest, preferences





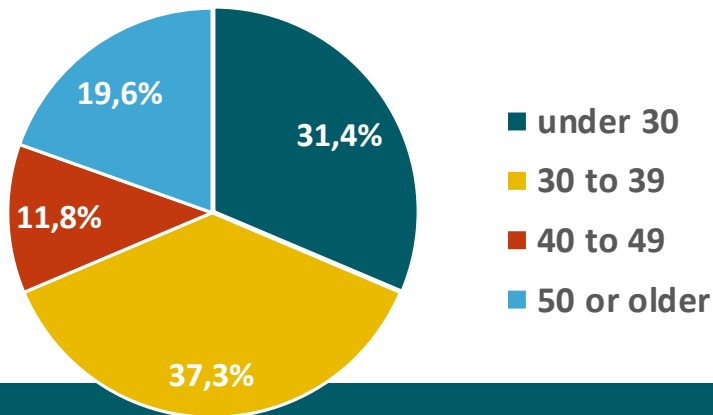
# Results

## 1) People with a recent HIV infection

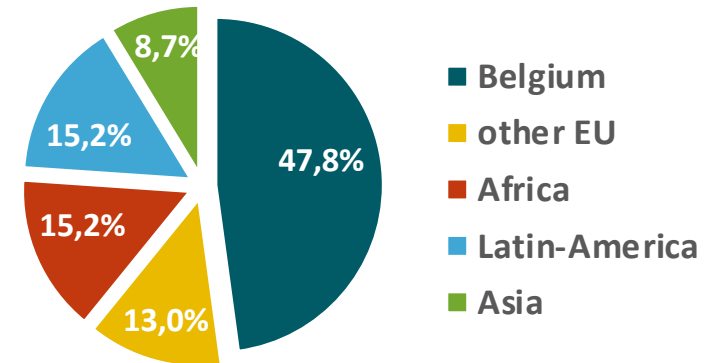
### A. Analysis of ITM clinic patient records 2023

- N=90 HIV diagnoses      => n=51 recent infections (57%)  
   => n=39 late / preexisting diagnoses (43%)

age group



nationality



76% homo- or bisexual

68% of non-Belgians are MSM (Lat Am, East Eur)



# Results

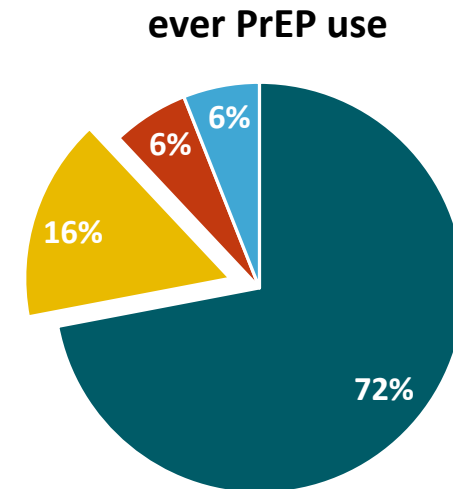
## 1) People with a recent HIV infection

### A. Analysis of ITM clinic patient records 2023

- N=51 recent HIV infections

participated in chemsex	42%
engaged in sex work	4%
previous negative HIV test*	95%

\* last 5 years



- never
- yes before, but stopped
- wanted to, but tested positive at PrEP screening
- was prescribed PrEP but never started







# Preliminary results

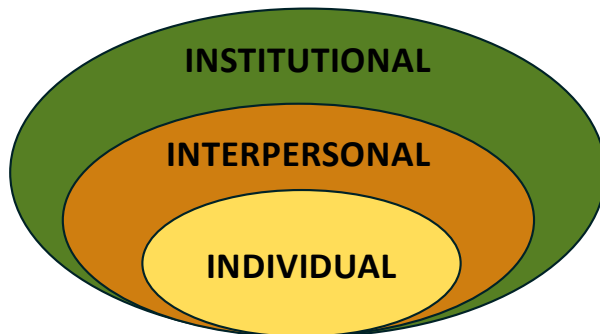
## 1) People with a recent HIV infection

### B. In-depth interviews (N=15, ongoing)

- Main themes

*“I arrived alone in Belgium and used dating apps to connect. This often resulted in sex and I did not dare to set boundaries. I ended up in the scene”*

[DisHIV001]



#### ➤ Individual factors & vulnerabilities

- most wanted to protect themselves
- limited knowledge of PrEP (e.g. recent MSM migrants)
- questions about costs, necessity of PrEP, effects on health
- loneliness



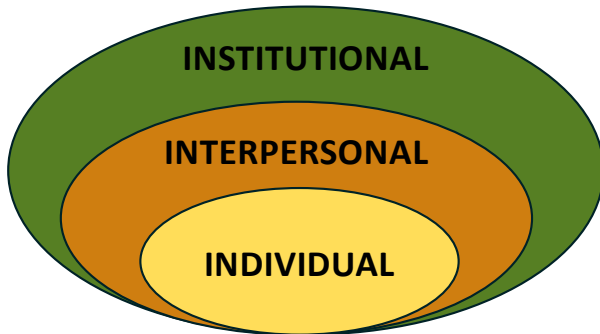


# Preliminary results

## 1) People with a recent HIV infection

### B. In-depth interviews (N=15, ongoing)

- Main themes



#### ➤ Interpersonal and social factors

- chemsex: losing control
- negative attitudes and social norms of MSM towards condoms
- undue confidence in steady partner, condom slipping off

#### ➤ Institutional factors

- not approached to consider PrEP (e.g. by GP, outreach)

*“When I go to a chemsex party, I go with the flow”*

[DisHIV008]

*“My partner didn’t tell me he got infected with HIV”*

[DisHIV002]





# Results

## 2) People at risk for HIV, but not on PrEP

### A. Analysis of ITM clinic patient records 2023

	PEP-users (N=101)	Chemsex (N=59)	≥ 2 STIs (N=36)	≥ 2 HIV tests (N=333)
heterosexual	54%	40%	39%	42%
<30y old	33%	15%	58%	26%
>50y old	8%	54%	14%	29%
migrant background	35%	11%	36%	25%
multiple sex partners	12%	93%	89%	73%
(nearly) always condom use	70%	28%	9%	46%





# Results

## 2) People at risk for HIV, but not on PrEP

### B. In-depth interviews with male sex workers (N=14)

- Main themes
  - **Vulnerable population**
    - mostly migrant background, precarious circumstances
    - no health insurance, very mobile
  - **Sexual behaviour**
    - nearly all: consistent condom use
    - but sometimes slip off, break, or even removed
    - low perceived HIV risk
  - **PrEP**
    - most aware of PrEP
    - misconceptions about PrEP
    - afraid to forget pills

*“I want to protect my health, my body is my source of income”*

[DisHIV009]

*“I select my partners carefully, you can tell if they have something”*

[TBM010]

*“I heard that PrEP is not good for your body”*

| 49  
[TBM008]



# Conclusions

- **Factors leading to HIV acquisition / missed opportunities for HIV prevention**
  - 95% of people with recent HIV acquisition had a previous negative HIV test
  - 16% of people with recent HIV acquisition used PrEP before
  - 42% of people with recent HIV acquisition participated in chemsex
    - associated with losing control
  - misconceptions about PrEP
  - negative social norms toward PrEP and condoms
  - not actively approached to consider PrEP
  - lack of access to PrEP (uninsured)



## Recommendations: mitigating missed opportunities

- A more pro-active role for GPs to discuss PrEP
- Use frequent HIV-testing as an opportunity for PrEP counseling
- Strongly recommend chemsex users to start PrEP
- Reengage former PrEP users
- Influence social norms of MSM toward condoms and PrEP (e.g. through campaigns or opinion leaders)
- Tailored messaging for heterosexuals and MSM with a migration background
- Ensure access to PrEP for uninsured people



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