

“MEN FROM AFAR” 3

REPORT ON THE DIVERSITY OF MEN ATTENDING THE GAY MEN'S HEALTH SERVICE (GMHS) IN 2008



Recent migration trends in Ireland have contributed to a gay male community that represents a wider diversity than ever before. Meeting the diverse needs of men from different backgrounds creates unique opportunities and challenges for service provision, including the need to ensure services are accessible to people from all backgrounds. Migrant gay men are also at risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) due to a number of behavioural, social, and structural factors. With a lack of information to accurately characterise the diversity and migration trends of the gay male community in Ireland, this report updates the changes among the Irish gay male community since the *Men from Afar 2* report by using recent population estimates and HIV surveillance data, and information from the Gay Men's Health Service (GMHS) clinic in Dublin.

Migration in Ireland

Over the last decade, the Republic of Ireland has experienced an unprecedented increase in immigration due to rapid economic growth and European Union (EU) enlargement. The latest national census data in 2006 reflected this growth, with residents born outside of Ireland accounting for 14.7% of the total population¹. Although the number of immigrants fell in 2008 due to economic decline, the estimated immigration figures were still 43.2% greater than levels seen in 2004². In 2008, the largest immigrant group continued to be individuals from the 12 EU accession states³, accounting for 40.2% of all immigration.

Migration is also a phenomenon that occurs within Ireland with individual movement throughout the country for a variety of factors. Rural-urban migration is usually characterised by increased employment opportunities in urban centres, while high levels of unemployment and higher costs of living are typical causes of urban-rural migration. Among gay and bisexual men, migration to the urban centres of Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Limerick and Galway may also be due to the focus of the gay community in these areas.

HIV Infections in Ireland

HIV surveillance data from the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) have included geographic origin since 2002. The following information was determined through an analysis of HIV surveillance data from 2002 to 2008⁴. At the end of 2008, the total number of newly diagnosed HIV infections in the Republic of Ireland was 2598. Of these cases, 50.8% were acquired through heterosexual contact, 19.7% were among men who have sex with men (MSM), 14.7%

were among injecting drug users (IDUs), 2.5% other, and 12.3% undetermined.

Geographic origin was recorded for 2206 (84.9%) of all newly diagnosed HIV infections between 2002 and 2008. Over half (59.6%; n=1314) were among those born abroad, illustrating the influence migration has had on HIV prevalence in Ireland.

MSM remain a key population at higher risk in Ireland, contributing a significant share of HIV incidence among all men infected through sexual intercourse. HIV surveillance data between 2002 and 2008 highlights that men born abroad represented a significant proportion of HIV diagnoses among MSM in Ireland, with 31.4% born abroad and mostly from other countries within Europe (60.9%). In 2008, 47.3% (n=55) were born in Ireland and 40.9% (n=38) were born abroad, representing a 35.7% increase of newly diagnosed HIV cases among foreign-born MSM from 2007.

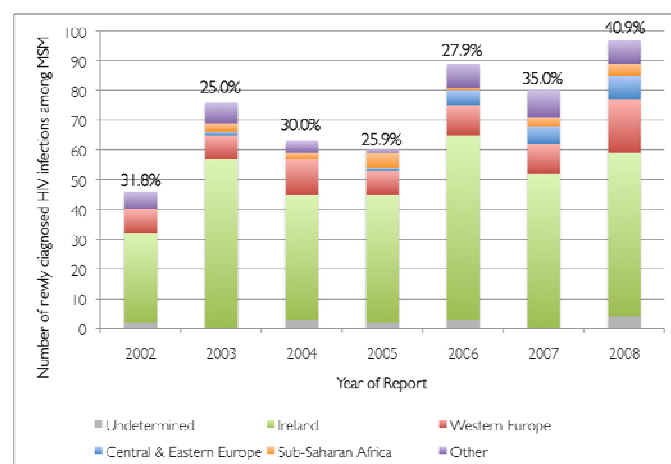


Fig 1: Number of newly diagnosed HIV cases among MSM between 2002 and mid-2008 by geographic origin, including percentage of MSM born abroad

GMHS Clinic: Birthplace of New Attendees

The Gay Men's Health Service (GMHS), established in 1992, has witnessed an increasing diversity of men attending the sexual health clinic in Dublin over recent years. Between 2004 and 2008, the number of foreign-

¹ Central Statistics Office (2007). *Census 2006: Principal demographic results*. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

² Central Statistics Office (2008). *Population and Migration Estimates: April 2008*. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

³ EU 12: 10 accession countries who joined the EU on 1 May 2004: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia; and the 2 accession states who joined the EU on 1 January 2007: Bulgaria and Romania

⁴ Health Protection Surveillance Centre (2009). HIV & AIDS diagnoses in Ireland: surveillance tables. Dublin: Health Protection Surveillance Centre.

born new attendees registering at the GMHS clinic has increased nearly 50%. In 2008, data from the GMHS clinic in 2008 found 33% of syphilis diagnoses and 38% of men tested HIV positive were among men born abroad.



Fig 2: Number of new attendees born in Ireland (Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) and elsewhere from 2004 to 2008

In 2008, 36.2% (n=210) of all new attendees registering at the GMHS clinic were born outside of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Irish-born men visiting the clinic also represent a diverse group, with men born in all counties in Ireland, North and South. In 2008, 46.5% (n=172) of all Irish-born new attendees were born outside of County Dublin.

Table 1: Top 15 countries of birth of new attendees born outside of Ireland in 2008 (percentage of foreign-born new attendees)

| | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Brazil (16.7%) | 6. France (6.2%) | 11. Australia (2.4%) |
| 2. Spain (9.0%) | 7. China (4.3%) | 12. Germany (2.4%) |
| 3. Poland (8.6%) | 8. Mauritius (3.3%) | 13. USA (2.4%) |
| 4. Great Britain (7.6%) | 9. Malaysia (2.9%) | 14. Philippines (1.9%) |
| 5. Italy (7.1%) | 10. Romania (2.9%) | 15. Slovakia (1.9%) |

Foreign-born new attendees represented a total of 45 different countries in 2008, with the top fifteen countries of birth recorded listed in Table 1. Compared to the 2006 and 2007 data reported in *Men from Afar 2*, increases were seen in new attendees from Latin America and Asia. Brazil was the top country of birth among foreign-born new attendees in 2008, and increases were seen among men from China and Malaysia.

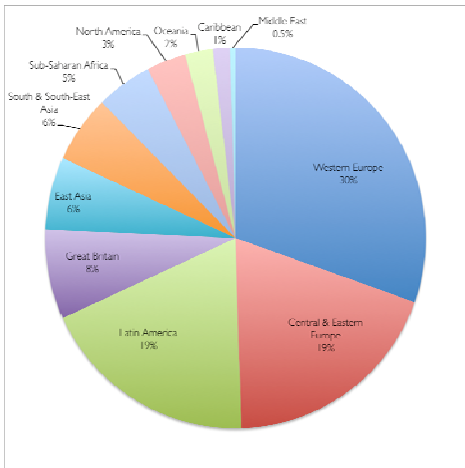


Fig 3: Percentage of foreign-born new attendees (n=210) by region of birth registered at the GMHS clinic in 2008

GHMS Clinic: Current Residence of New Attendees

The GHMS clinic records the current residence of all new attendees. This information helps to identify where men travel from to visit the sexual health clinic in Dublin. In 2008, 84.8% of all new attendees were residing within County Dublin. However, there was a significant difference between Irish-born and foreign-born men as 80.0% (n=296) and 93.3% (n=196) respectively were currently living within County Dublin. Table 2 illustrates that many men travel a great distance to visit the clinic.

Table 2: Current residence of new attendees living outside County Dublin by HSE Region (n=88)

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| HSE Mid-Leinster | 42.0% |
| HSE North East | 36.4% |
| HSE West | 10.2% |
| HSE South | 9.1% |
| Outside Republic of Ireland | 2.3% |

Interventions to Target Migrant Gay and Bisexual Men

Migrant, LGBT, and sexual health organisations in Ireland need to work collaboratively to meet the needs of gay and bisexual men from a variety of backgrounds. This requires additional resources for further research, outreach, and development of informational materials. Since *Men From Afar 1*, consideration of these needs have begun both in the GMHS clinic and their work with the Gay Health Network (GHN).

In 2008, GHN launched the *ix8 Translations* project to provide all sexual health information published by GHN in eight languages: Chinese, English, French, Irish, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. The project became *ix9* in 2009 after the addition of Arabic. New materials have also been specifically developed with migrant men in mind, as demonstrated by the recent Syphilis awareness campaign where both the campaign postcards and leaflets contain key words in different languages.

Targeting the needs of migrant gay and bisexual men also requires the dissemination of important information about life in Ireland including immigration issues, searching for housing and employment, accessing healthcare and available benefits, learning English, and negotiating the 'gay scene'.

For more information:

Gay Men's Health Service, HSE
Baggot Street Hospital, Dublin 4
Tel: 01-669 9553 Fax: 01-668 0050
Email: mick.quinlan@hse.ie
www.gaymenshealthservice.ie

Centre for Global Health
3-4 Foster Place, TCD, Dublin 2
Tel: 01-896 8594 Fax: 01-677 4956
Email: mccartdj@tcd.ie
www.medicine.tcd.ie/global-health

