

ITACA: The implementation of a cohort of HIV negative MSM among clients of a Community-Based Center in Barcelona



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Background

In Spain, Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) are the only population group where reported HIV cases show a significant increase. Nevertheless, HIV incidence data (the most useful measurement to monitor the epidemic) are scarce. The ÍTACA cohort is the first community-based prospective study among HIV negative MSM established in Spain. We aim to describe the design and the implementation of a cohort among clients of BCN Checkpoint, a Community-Based Centre for detection of HIV and other STIs for gay men and other MSM, established in 2006 in Barcelona, Catalonia.

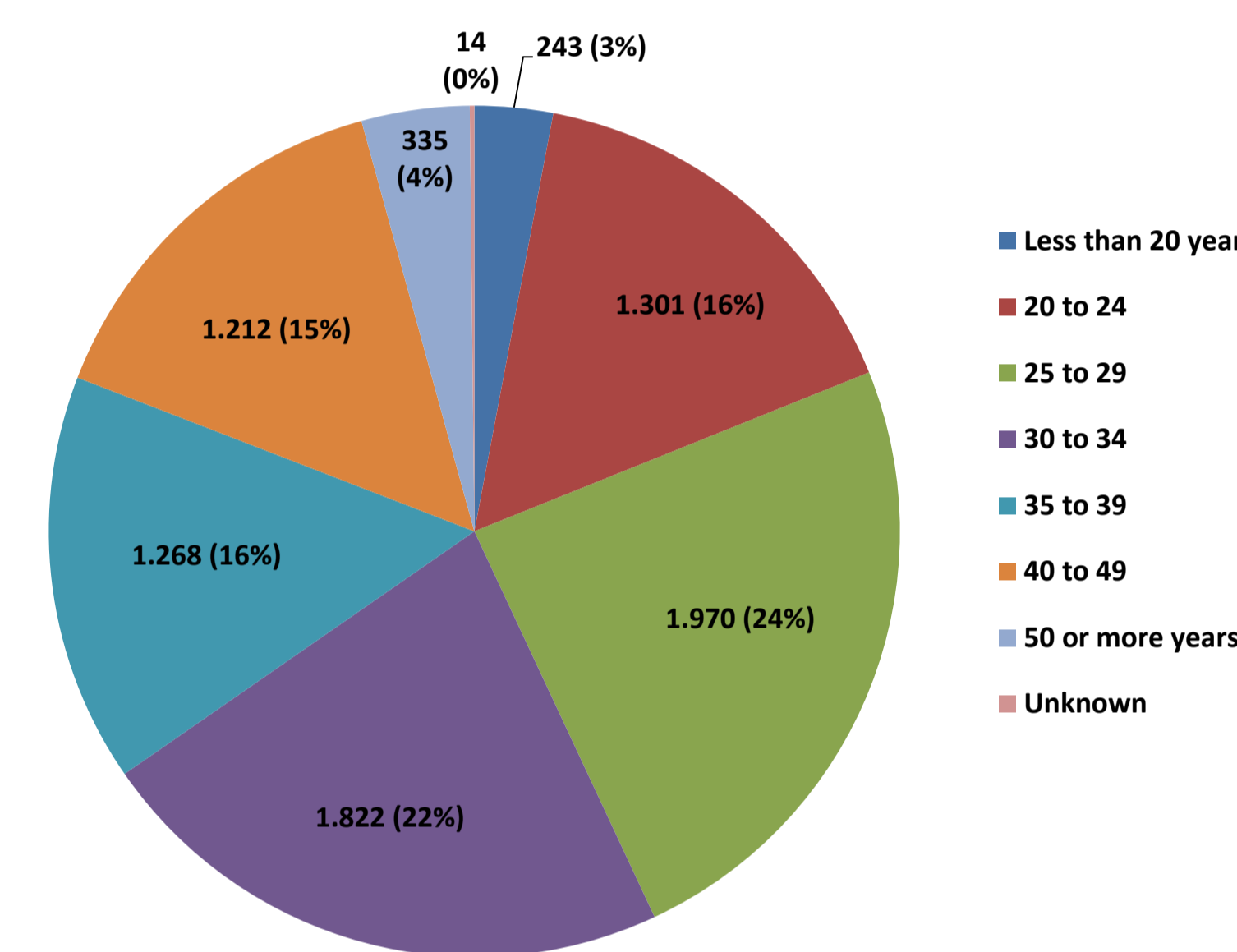
Methods

The ÍTACA cohort started in December 2008 in collaboration with the epidemiological institute CEEISCAT after a two-year period of adaptation of variables to the reality of MSM, piloting the respective questionnaires and software. We analyzed all visits of participants that were recruited between December 2008 and December 2013. Inclusion criteria: clients of BCN Checkpoint, age ≥ 18 years, HIV negative test at baseline, signed informed consent. Participants are tested and exhaustively counseled by trained peers every 6 or 12 months. Participants are followed-up through emails, text messages and telephone calls. Men who seroconvert receive immediate peer support and are linked to care to an HIV unit.

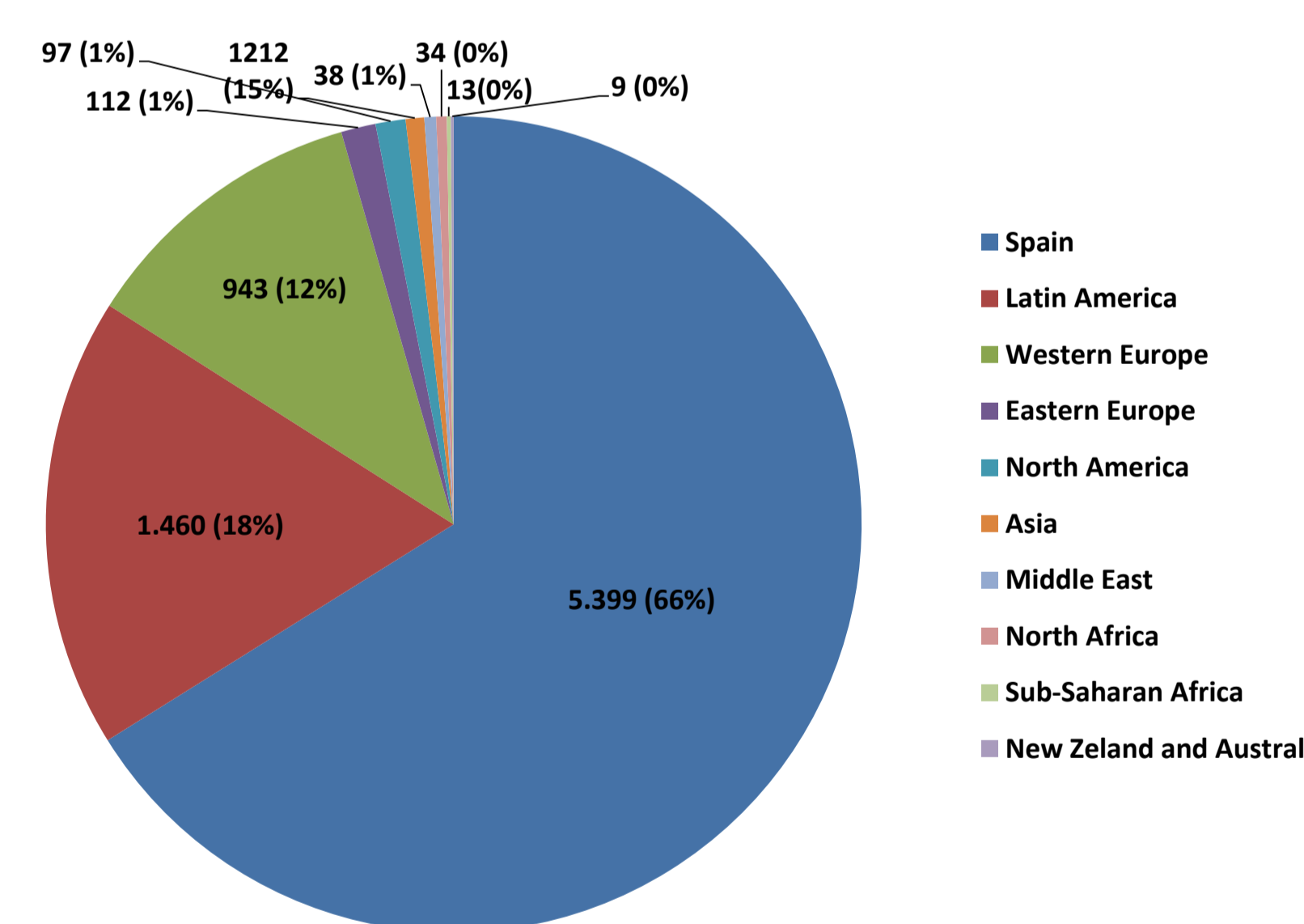
Results - Participants

Total number of participants: 8,165

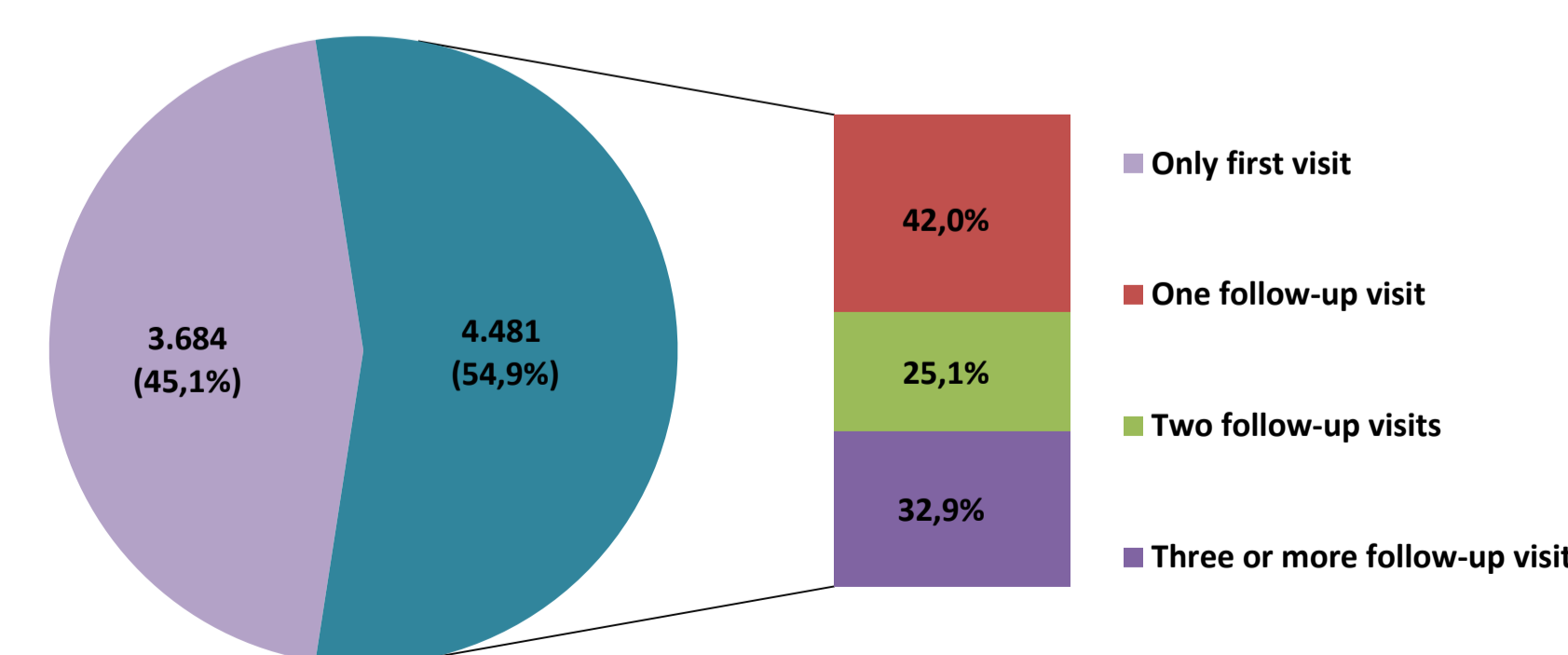
Graphic 1: Age distribution of participants



Graphic 2. Distribution of origin of participants



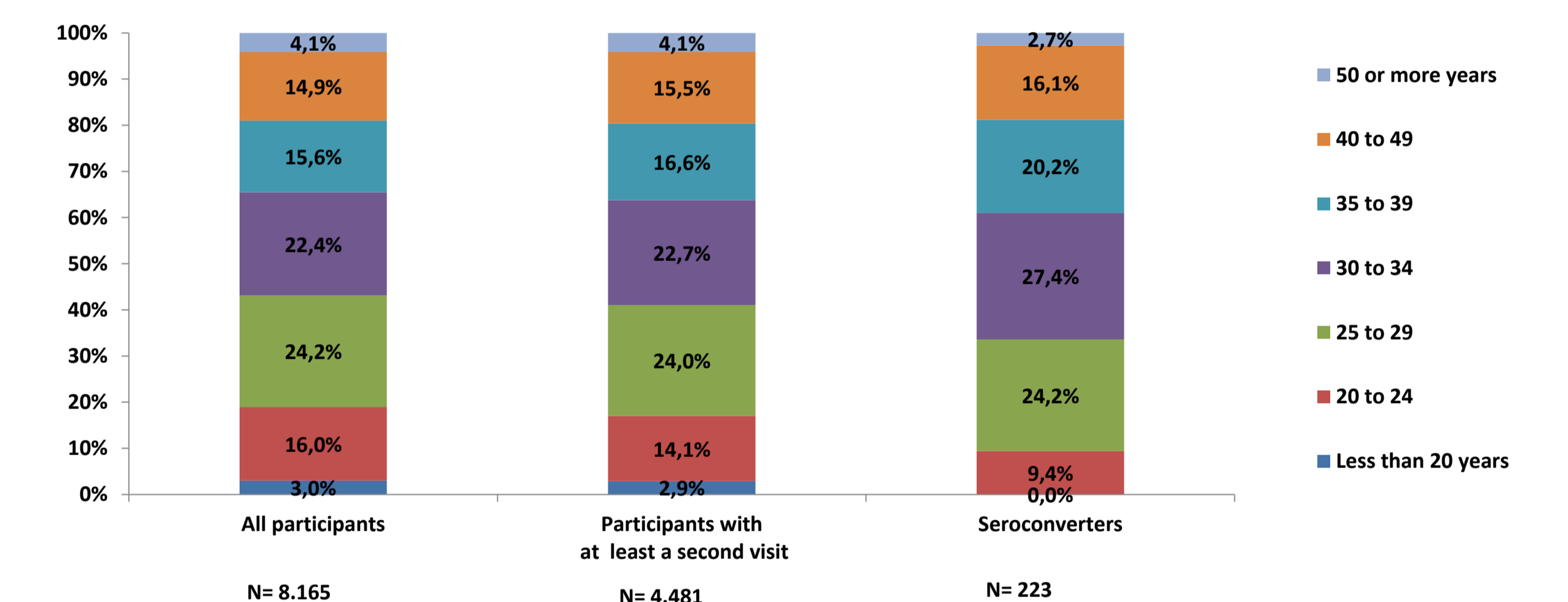
Graphic 3. Distribution of first and follow-up visits



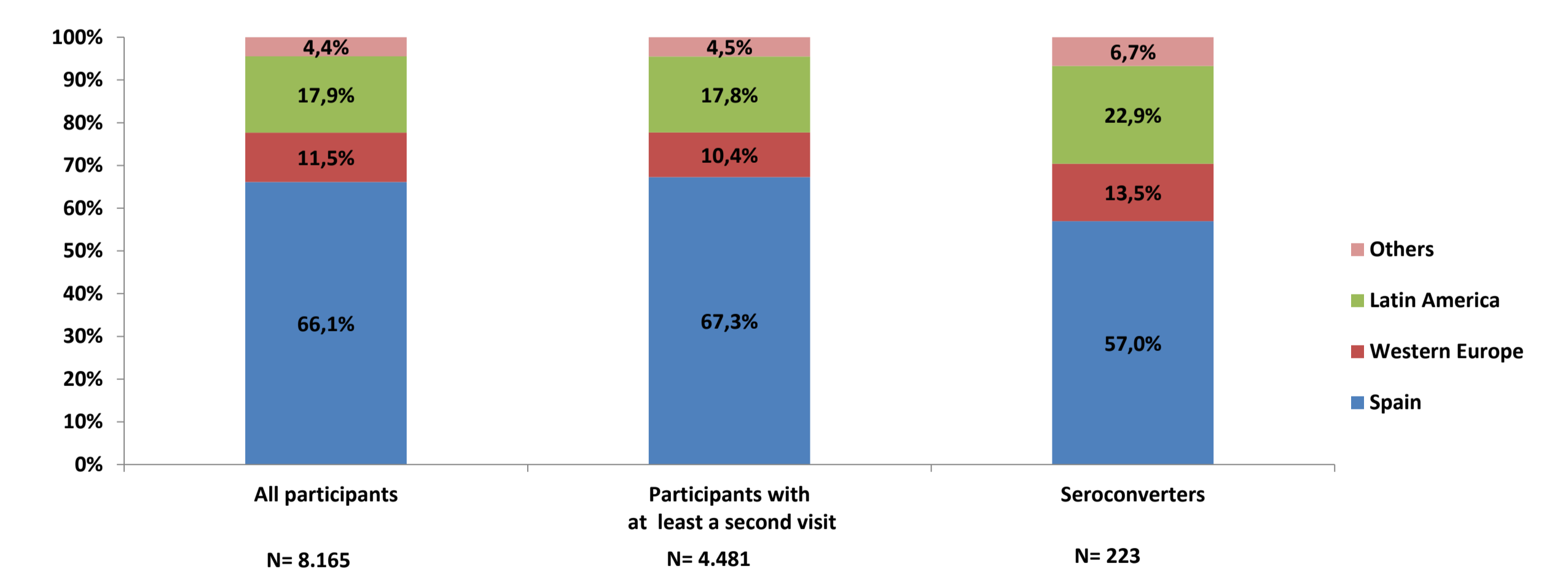
Results - Incidence

4,481 persons repeated visits and counted for 9,177,74 PY of follow-up. Total HIV seroconversions: 223.
The overall HIV incidence rate was 2,43 per 100 PY (95% CI: 2,13 – 2,77)

Graphic 4. Age distribution of participants according to follow up visits and seroconversion



Graphic 5. Distribution of origin according to follow up visits and seroconversion



Conclusions:

The implementation of a cohort of HIV negative MSM in Spain is feasible and allows an adequate study of HIV incidence in MSM in South Europe. The Itaca cohort will be a fundamental source to obtain new insights into the epidemic in MSM.