

Two years on the road to Meet, Test and Treat Sex Workers in Rome: the need for targeted interventions.

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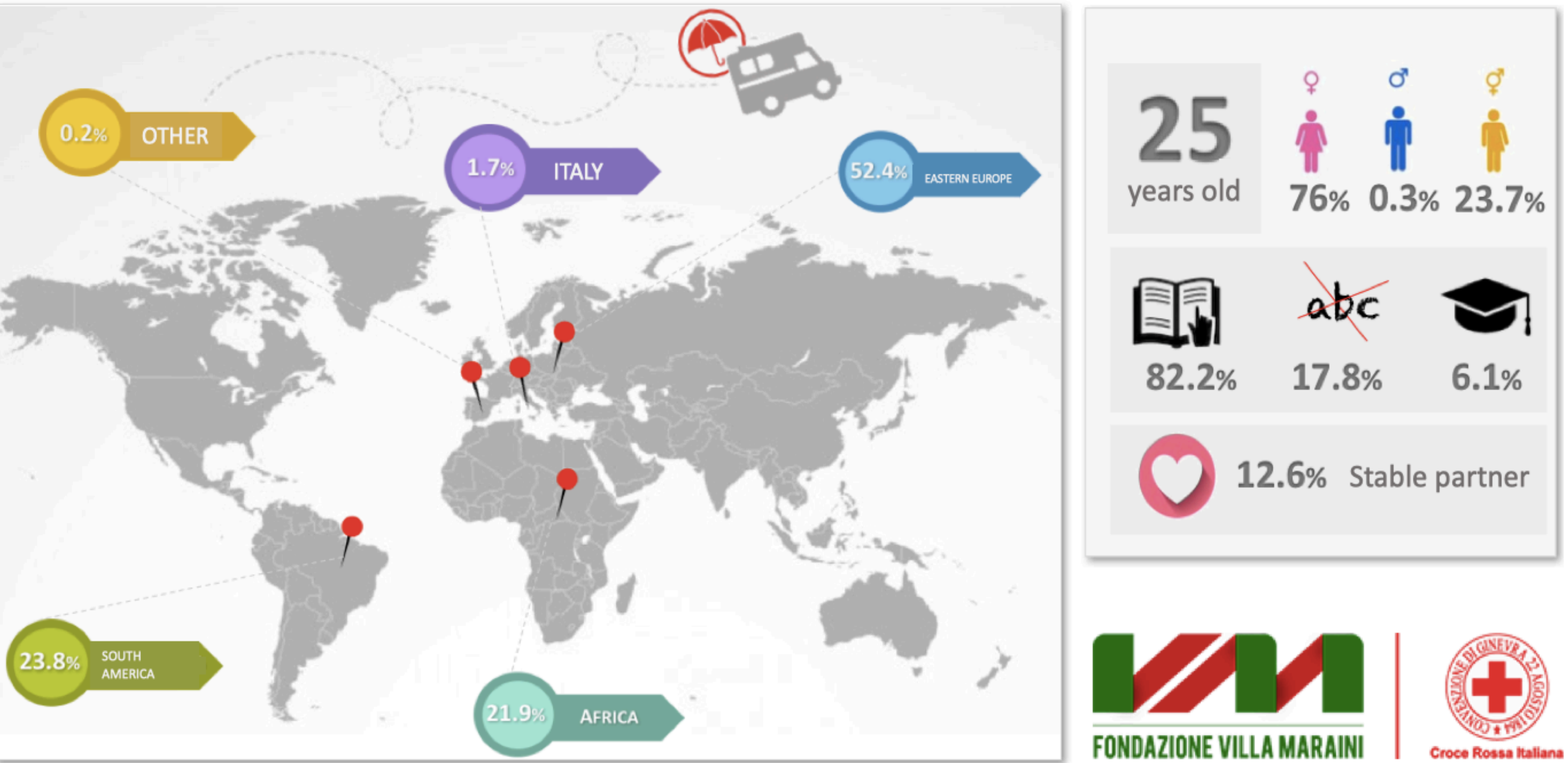
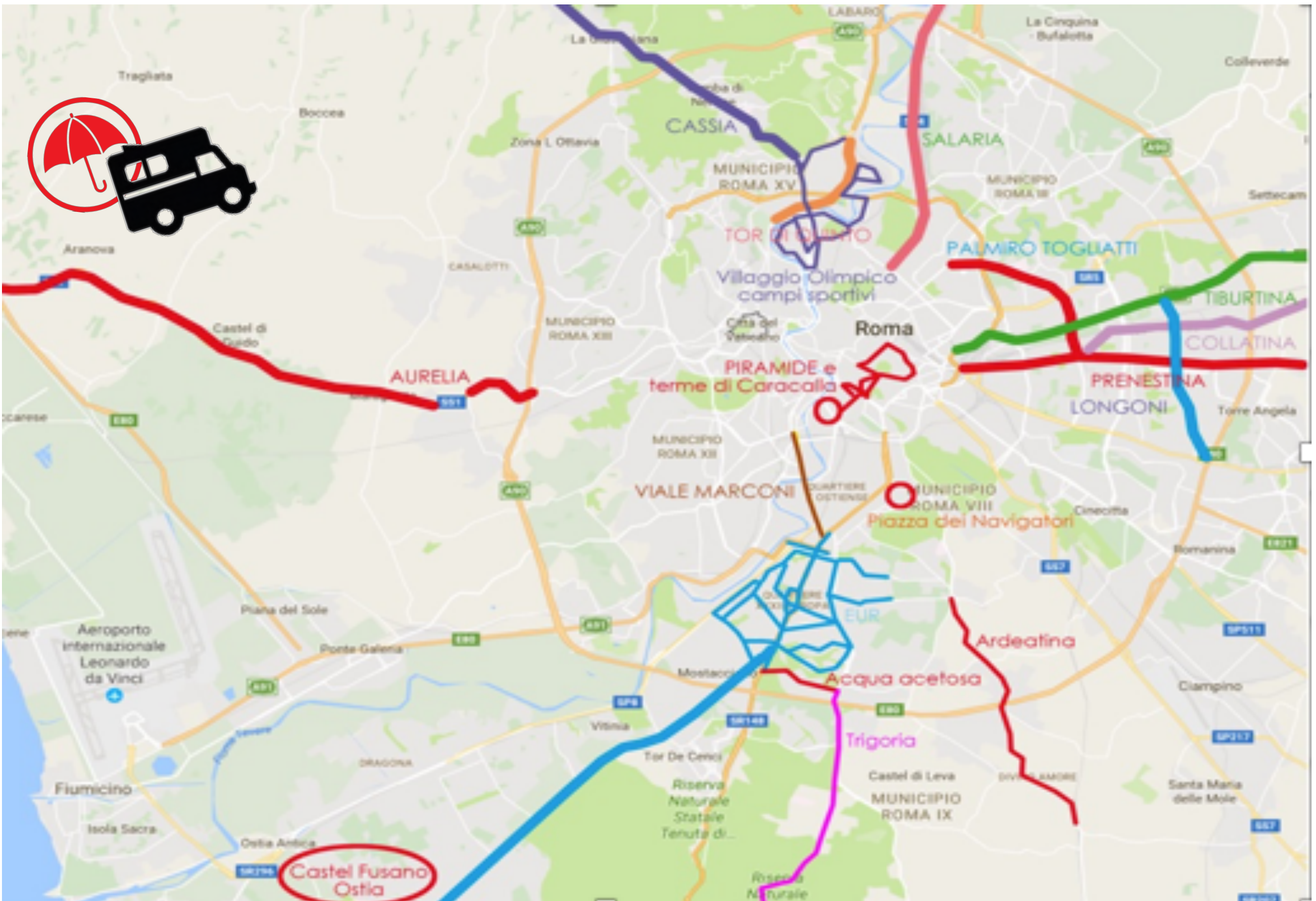
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HepHIV 2019
28-30 JANUARY, BUCHAREST

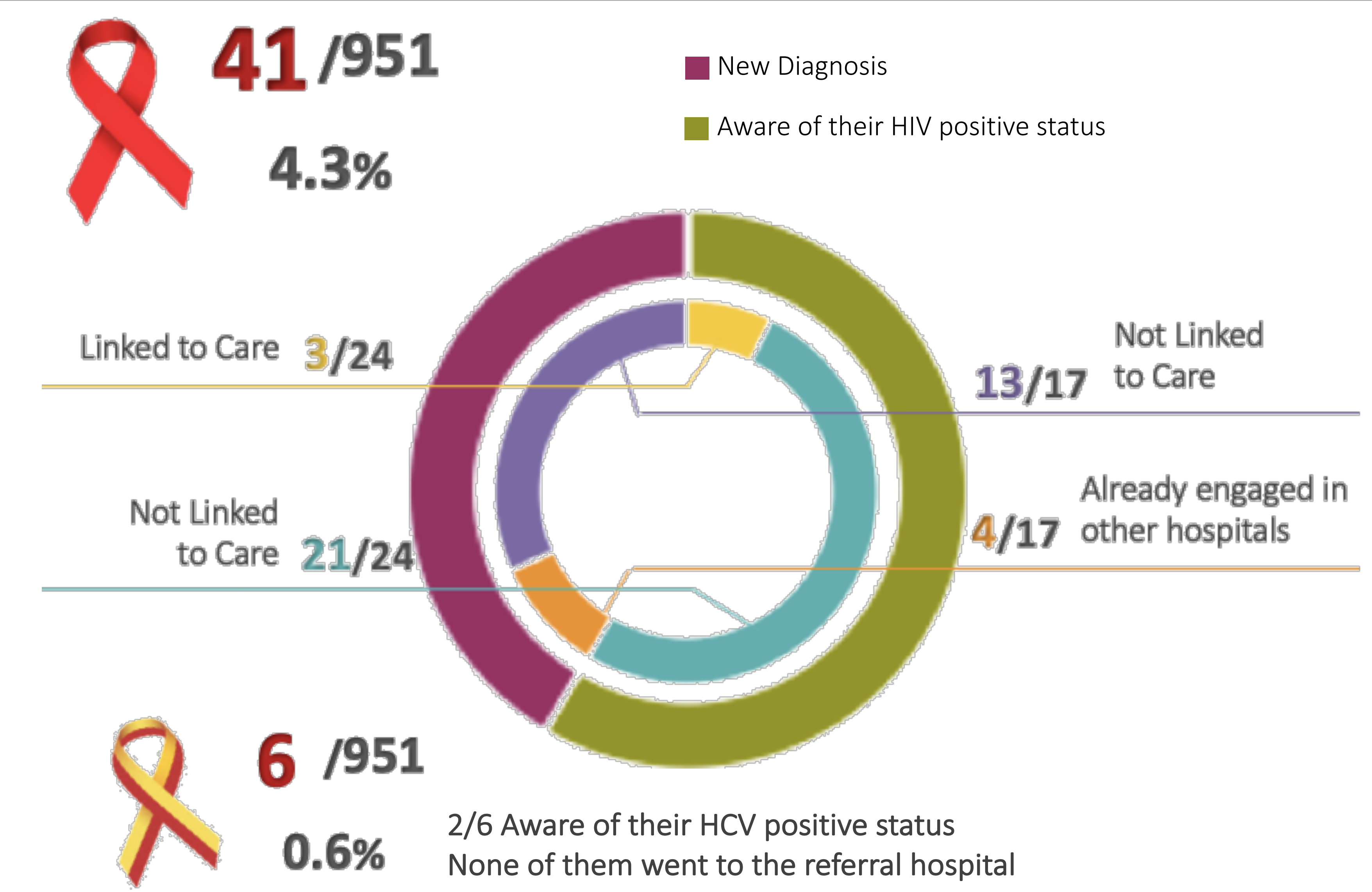
Background. Innovative strategies are needed to identify and link to care key populations such as sex workers for which Villa Maraini Foundation's "Meet, Test and Treat" campaign.

Methods. Evaluation on a voluntary basis and prior informed consent of Sex workers in Rome reached by the street unit was performed from October 2016 to October 2018. For HIV/HCV assessment OraQuick HCV Ab and Alere HIV 1/2 Ag/Ab Combo rapid tests were used in finger stick. Sex workers made a questionnaire to assess risk behaviours. In case of positive tests, they were promptly taken in charge by Infectious Diseases Clinic of Policlinico Tor Vergata.



Results. 1651 sex workers were contacted in two years of street activities (52 night trips with the camper), 951/1651 performed the HIV/HCV rapid test. HIV seroprevalence in this population was 4.3% (41/951 – median age 25 years old, 87.8% transgender). 17/41 were already aware of their HIV seropositive status, but only 4/17 were followed at an infectious diseases clinic and were receiving antiretroviral therapy. Among the new diagnoses (24/41), linkage to care was successful only in three sex workers. 87.8% of the preliminary

positive sex workers comes from South America, 24.4% received a Sexual Transmitted Disease diagnosis in the last year, 61% uses drugs (mainly cocaine), 68.3% reports to use condom, but at the same time clients ask not to use it, 53.7% has been abused, 68.3% works every day. HCV seroprevalence was 0.6% (6/951).



| n. 41 | % |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| Sex | |
| Transgender | 87.8% |
| Female | 12.2% |
| Country | |
| South America | 87.8% |
| Africa | 12.2% |
| Education | |
| Compulsory school – completed | 87.8% |
| Compulsory school – not completed | 7.3% |
| Degree | 12.2% |
| Stable Partner | 19.5% |
| STIs in the last year | 24.4% |
| HIV test already done | 80.5% |
| > 6 months | 56.1% |
| Drug use disorder | 61% |
| Cocaine | 64% |
| Condom, yes | 68.3% |
| Condom, no | 31.7% |
| Working days | |
| 7 days | 68.3% |
| Violence | 53.7% |

Conclusion. HIV seroprevalence among sex workers screened in these two years is high: 4.3%. Linkage to care is difficult, therefore it is critical to identify successful strategies to improve this aspect and start specific intervention programs to guarantee the health status of sex workers and, more extensively, of the community, remembering that the number of Italian clients exceeds 9 million per year.