

An overview of European consent requirements for HIV and viral hepatitis B and C testing

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BACKGROUND

Complicated consent procedures for bloodborne virus testing are a barrier for implementation, particularly in non-specialist healthcare settings. European and global guidelines no longer recommend written consent and individualised pre-test counselling. An overview of testing consent requirements in Europe is lacking.

METHODS

An online survey on legal and policy frameworks and daily implementation was developed by a working group under the EuroTEST Initiative and disseminated to clinical and community-based testing facilities and national public health institutions in the countries of the WHO European Region. Data collection and validation occurred between October 2023 and April 2024. Responses were validated via email and/or bilateral discussions if diverging across same-country respondents to obtain one answer per country.

RESULTS

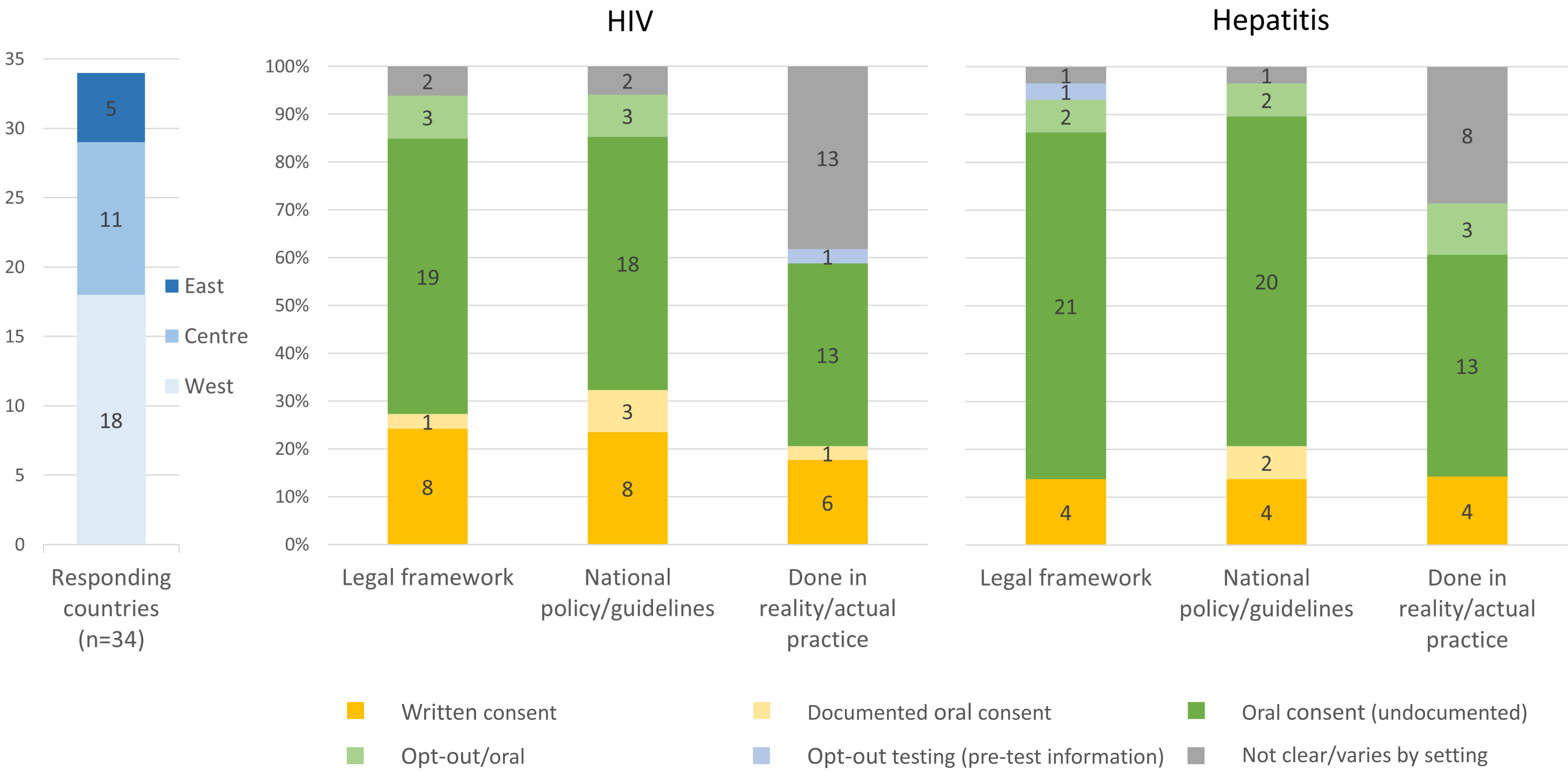
84 responses from 36 community-based testing sites, 33 healthcare facilities and 15 public health institutes in 34 countries were included.

Written or documented consent remains a requirement for HIV testing according to legal frameworks and/or national policy/guidelines in eleven countries (4/18 western, 5/11 central, 2/5 eastern) (Figure 1). In a third of these, written consent is required in some settings only (hospitals/other healthcare). Practices for how consent is obtained in reality vary widely by setting and do not always follow legal/policy requirements (e.g. hospitals/healthcare settings obtaining written consent even if not required, written consent requirements not strictly adhered to in community settings or legally omitted for anonymous testing). For viral hepatitis, consent requirements are less strict in many countries with written or documented consent being a requirement in six (1/18 west, 3/11 centre, 2/5 east) – generally in the form of a broad consent for all investigations.

CONCLUSION

Written or documented consent remains a requirement for HIV testing in more than a third of responding countries. A recommended procedure for obtaining consent in different settings will help reduce testing barriers and support European countries in reaching the first 95 target

Figure 1. Responding countries and requirements for obtaining HIV and hepatitis testing consent



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