

IFSO, EASP & ECPO

Joint Statement on Surgical Tourism

Bariatric surgery can be a highly effective intervention for weight loss and overall health improvement in patients with severe obesity. Bariatric procedures may also include endoscopic treatment and bariatric surgery is often followed by post-weight loss plastic surgery. However, the lack of access to affordable bariatric healthcare in national health systems and long waiting lists in many European countries has led to the rise of bariatric surgery tourism. Patients with severe obesity are increasingly opting to travel to different countries for bariatric surgery, self-funding their arrangements without involvement from their general practitioner or specialist physician.

Regrettably, recent reports have highlighted the dangers associated with bariatric surgery tourism. Vulnerable patients have been subjected to inadequate, fraudulent, and even dangerous care, resulting in significant physical and psychological harm, and tragically, some have lost their lives. Pre-travel health care management and post-travel medical follow-up are vital components of a comprehensive medical tourism service, but these have often been lacking or insufficient.

Recognising the severity of this issue, the International Federation for the Surgery of Obesity and Metabolic Disorders, European Chapter (IFSO-EC), the European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO), and the European Coalition for People Living with Obesity (ECPO) have created a task force to develop an evidence-based Consensus Statement. This statement will address the dangers of bariatric surgery tourism and provide guidelines for patients considering this option. Using a modified Delphi methodology, we aim to raise awareness, advocate for patient safety, and ensure that accurate and transparent information is available to patients seeking bariatric surgery outside of their national healthcare systems in order to protect potential patients from surgical mismanagement and potential health complications.

Before the availability of this evidence-based guideline, we strongly urge patients to exercise extreme caution and consult their own general practitioner (GP) or a certified specialist healthcare provider in their country. It is essential to seek professional advice before considering any decisions related to bariatric surgery for obesity outside of their national healthcare system.