

European Population Conference 2008

Report of participation

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European Population Conference (EPC) is a biannual meeting of European Association for Population Studies (EAPS). The meeting of the year 2008 took place in Barcelona, Spain and was a 25th in a row or jubilee one. EAPS unites individual demographers of the world in order to promote studies of demographic developments as well as the causes and consequences of population trends. EPC is mainly (but not solely) a forum for EAPS members. Personal face to face communications are very important for professional growth. The conference in Barcelona included the 10th jubilee General Assembly of EAPS. Francois Heran (France) replaced Janina Józwiak (Poland) in the president's chair. EAPS members elected a new ruling council of association. This year EPC does not have a plenary session, only a set of various simultaneous sessions, although migrants' subpopulations were a major topic of the conference.

Demographers from all over the world uploaded more than eight hundred submissions to the conference site, 720 of them registered for participation, i.e., paid a registration fee. The true number of participants is not known yet; the steering committee is working out to publish this figure in near future. According to closing speech by Prof. Heran this meeting was record high in participation. The greatest share of participants (more than a hundred and a half persons) naturally belongs to Spain, the second is Italy (more than 70), and the third – North America (US and Canada combined) about 70 persons. Russian (and Russian speaking) demographers were a minority (about a dozen), and a major part of them presented other than Russian institutions. Absence of Ukrainian (as well as other CIS nations) demographers surprised me. A real breakthrough was a participation of (about ten) demographers from Iran. They did not obtain a British visa to take part in the previous (Liverpool) conference. An Iranian girl even won one of the EPC awards, which seems like a political decision of evaluating committee.

I reported my (and coauthors) results in two sessions: #18 Data Collection and Analysis and #26 Contraception and Induced Abortion in Europe.

Mortality-Migration Interplay Case of Russia after the USSR

This paper had been provoked by Prof. Vlassov of Moscow Medical Academy and covers some research needs within Migrants' Health project. The idea: mortality undercount causes underestimation of life expectancy, and in an (un)certain year might hide even direction of mortality dynamics in Russia.

This presentation had been attended by about eighty colleagues, the room was fully occupied. The discussion grew into technical matters (the technique of estimation of life expectancy undercount), and to possible extensions of the idea (inclusion of cause of death specific data, etc.). Unfortunately, Dr Shkolnikov (expected chairman of the session) was sick and thus unable to arrive. My paper opposes his (and Dr. Nemtsov) idea of alcohol determination of Russian mortality dynamics, and I expected a good deal of discussion about this topic. Dr. Andreev did not arrive either; albeit I expected his criticism in data collection and interpretation areas. The project Migrants' Health provoked curiosity which I was unable to satisfy – it is my coauthor area of expertise. I promised to put them in touch, and I already did it.

The future of abortions in Russia

The main author of this paper is Dr. Sakevich of Institute of Demography, Higher School of Economics. The idea: Russian government restricts induced abortions instead of promoting family planning and sexual education.

The audience had been smaller (about twenty persons) but the discussion happened breath taking. Some colleagues even supported our government policy. Iranian colleagues had been surprised with a presence of Moslem population in Russia, and then with its size. The audience substantially discussed the reasons of abortion (due to our presentation was the last one), splitting into two major viewpoints: (1) existence of so called abortion culture, and (2) social and economic determination of restricted access to family planning and strong propensity of having no children. The latter relates more to migrant population. We were unable to satisfy the request to explain the position of our government, although it is supported by the majority of population (mainly by those who are not at risk).

Other

There were a lot of interested sessions and presentations on the conference's agenda.

Due to my second affiliation (Interdisciplinary Center for AIDS Research and Training) I was especially interested in issues of HIV Demography, thus I attended session # 66 The Behavioral Dimension of the HIV Epidemic. The session strengthened my opinion that surveys of sexual behaviors are greatly needed to understand the development of this epidemic. Unfortunately, Russia enjoys only one national survey in this area (one in the RLMS series), but the data are not in the public domain.

Prof. Anna Cabre (a hostess of the entire conference) chaired a very interesting session #75 Is there a Spanish demographic exceptionalism? The session proved that feeling exceptional is absolutely not exceptional. This topic might be good for discussion in Russia in sane audience.

Impression of trends (mortality and migration)

The conference revealed not only real population growth in demography, moreover community of demographers is no longer aging, and lots of young men and women took part in EPC-2008. Many esteemed professionals presented their mutual work together with their undergraduate and PhD students. It seems that in Europe it is near obligatory for the seekers of Master and PhD degrees to present the study results before adequate audience. Contrary to this overall European trend Russian demographic community suffers from rapid aging partly due to higher mortality (news came during the conference on the death of Dr. Bakhmetova, 66, who lived in Belgium), but more due to deficient supply of new young specialists. Russian demographic community keeps on shrinking. Many demographers work outside of their country of origin, and Russia is not exclusion. EAPS remains keeping global vector of development and not a sect Europeans studying Europe.

Every two years another European country hosts the European demographic community. In September 2010 Vienna, Austria will be home site of the EPC. Let me hope UNFPA Moscow office will remain benevolent for EAPS and EPC. Last but not least, I would like to thank UNFPA for support of my trip to EPC-2008 in Barcelona.

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