

The results of the 2010 census – a deepening demographic crisis in Russia

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On 16 December, the Russian Statistical Office released the first detailed results of the census carried out in Russia in October 2010. These confirm a dramatic drop in the population, as well as ongoing structural changes, such as the ageing population and the rising predominance of the number of women over men. The results also highlighted the widening disparities in population density of the different regions of Russia caused by urbanisation and the depopulation of Siberia and the Russian Far East. The data on the ethnic structure of Russian society testifies to a decline of the ethnic Russian population, which is the largest group in the country's ethnic structure. The results also confirm the ongoing negative demographic trends which are adversely influencing Russia's further socio-economic development, security and internal stability. This demographic crisis may lead to a shortage of labour, reduce the potential for mobilisation, and lead to an escalation of social tensions caused by illegal migration.

Unfavourable demographic trends

The 2010 census results confirm that there has been a deepening demographic bust in Russia since the early 1990s. Over the past eight years, as a result of the falling number of births and the rising number of deaths, the population of Russia has decreased by 2.3 million people, and now stands at 142.9 million (down 1.6% compared to the results of the previous census in 2002). The statistical Russian woman is giving birth to fewer children than in previous years; the number of births per 1000 women has decreased by about 3% since 2002, and stands at 1469 (according to UN figures, the fertility rate for Poland and Germany is 1.4). The average age of the average inhabitant of Russia (median age) has risen from 37.1 to 38 years (the figure is 38 years for Poland, and 44.3 for Germany). The deepening disproportion between the numbers of men and women in Russian society is worthy of particular attention (see Appendix).

The census results have highlighted the increasing urbanisation and widening disparity in population density of individual regions of the Russian Federation (see Appendix). Residents of Russia are moving *en masse* to large metropolitan areas in the European part of Russia. The urbanisation rate is currently 74%. As a result of migration, provincial towns and villages

are becoming deserted; the census revealed that over the last eight years, the number of Russian villages has decreased by 8500, with their total number now standing at 134,000. (This is partly due to the complete depopulation of some of them, but also partly a consequence of the mergers of other administrative units).

Russia is a multi-nationality state in which the ethnic structure is dominated by Russians (80.1% of the population). The census shows that in recent years there have been successive increases in the number of inhabitants from the Caucasian nations in Russia: Chechens (1% of the population), Avars (0.7%), Ossetians (0.4%) and Ingush (0.3%). Against the background of the general population decline in most Russian regions, the total population of the Northern Caucasus Federal District has risen by 500,000. The increased influx of people from Central Asian countries who are legally resident in Russia – mostly from Tajikistan (an increase of 64,000 to 87,000) and Uzbekistan (an increase of 71,000 to 131,000) – is also noteworthy.

The reasons for the demographic crisis

The adverse demographic trends in Russia presented above are caused by many factors. Among the most important of these are the premature mortality of men of working age, mainly as a consequence of excessive alcohol consumption; accidents at work (due to poor work culture and the failure to observe safety rules); and the high number of homicides and suicides. The crisis in the institution of the family in society also has a negative impact on the demographic situation. This is reflected adversely in reproduction rates, as well as the number and quality of the working age population.

The life expectancy of Russians is rising. This has been confirmed by the WHO, whose figures state that the average life expectancy in Russia is now 68 years; the value of this figure for men and women respectively is about 74 and 62 years (the average life expectancy in Poland is 76 years [80 for women and 72 for men], and in Germany 80 years [83 years for women, 78 for men]).

Mass migrations to big cities in search of work and better living conditions are conducive to the further concentration of population in cities and increasing disparities in population density. The state's resignation from the active control of internal migration which took place in the Soviet era – for example, by means of incentives in the form of attractive salaries, and long holidays for people living in areas less suitable for settlement – will deepen these disparities. Despite attempts to stimulate the birth rate, for example by introducing high bonuses for new mothers, the government cannot compensate for the loss of population, or fill the growing gaps in the labour market. This gap is partly being reduced by the influx of migrants (mainly from the Caucasus and Central Asia), but due to the lack of appropriate integration programs, their presence has met with a lack of general acceptance, and has exacerbated ethnic tensions in Russian society.

The methodology of the census

The census, which covers all persons permanently residing in Russia, is the most comprehensive study of the country's population. However, due to the methodology used, doubts have arisen concerning the inclusion in the study of illegal migrants, whose numbers may be as high as 10 million people according to estimates. Other problems include the possibility that some of the data has been concealed by the respondents, for example, in order to avoid military service; or the distortion of results by local authorities in order to gain larger financial grants, which are dependent on the number of the region's inhabitants. Despite these reservations, the census reflects current trends that affect the country's present socio-economic situation. The demographic bust is in fact one of Russia's biggest internal problems.

Conclusions

- The continuing demographic crisis could lead to slower economic growth in Russia, due to a decrease in the population of working age. Until now, the negative effects of labour shortages have been partly offset by positive net migration. However, with the growing gap in the labour market and the gradual ageing of the Russian people, comprehensive reforms of the pension system will need to be carried out, and spending on health must be increased in order to mitigate the effects of the demographic bust.
- Russia must open up to its legal foreign workers, as this could offset the effects of demographic decline. However, the unfavourable social atmosphere around migration means that without reform to the migration law and the implementation of effective integration programmes, it will be very difficult to realise the potential of the migration from the Caucasus and Central Asian countries.
- The drop in the number of men, and the worsening state of health of this part of the population, are affecting Russia's mobilisation potential. These factors also affect the shrinking of the Russian armed forces.
- The Russian census results from 2010 show that over the last decade, despite the favourable economic situation, the authorities have failed to overcome the demographic crisis. It is assumed that, given the ineffective population policy, the population will continue to fall. The improvement in some indicators recorded in recent years does not mean that the negative trends have been reversed, but only that the pace of the decline has entered a temporary slowdown. There is also the fact that the generation of the 1990s population bust are now beginning to have families, but this will not suffice for a simple replacement of the generations.
- It should be noted that different regions of Russia have different demographic characteristics. A detailed analysis of trends will be possible after the publication of the complete census results at the end of 2012.

Appendix

Total population number, urban and rural population share

	Million people		Average annual decline rate in %	
	2002	2010	1989–2002	2002–2010
Population number	145.2	142.9	-0.09	-0.20
Urban population	106.4	105.3	-0.10	-0.13
Rural population	38.7	37.5	-0.06	-0.39

Distribution of population across the Russian Federation

	Population in million of people		Share in total population number (%)	
	2002	2010	2002	2010
Russian Federation	145.2	142.9	100	100
Central Federal District	38.0	38.4	26.2	26.9
North-western Federal District	14.0	13.6	9.6	9.5
Southern Federal District	14.0	13.9	9.6	9.7
Northern Caucasus Federal District	8.9	9.4	6.2	6.6
Volga Federal District	31.1	29.9	21.5	20.9
Urals Federal District	12.4	12.1	8.5	8.5
Siberian Federal District	20.1	19.3	13.8	13.5

Far Eastern Federal District	6.7	6.3	4.6	4.4
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Age and gender structure of Russian society

	Population in million of people				Share of men in total population number (%)	
	men		women		2002	2010
	2002		2010			
Population number	67.6	66.1	77.6	76.8	46.6	46.2
Urban population	49.1	48.1	57.3	57.2	46.2	45.7
Rural population	18.5	18.0	20.3	19.6	47.6	47.8