



International Union for the Scientific Study of Population IUSSP
Union internationale pour l'étude scientifique de la population UIESP

2021 Conference Evaluation



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Introduction

The 29th International Population Conference, organized by the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) and the Indian National Organizing Committee (NOC), initially planned as an in-person conference to be held in Hyderabad, India took place exclusively online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, from 5 to 10 December 2021. The Conference was attended live by approximately 1,300 people. After the conference, the recorded sessions and online posters were made accessible to the members of the IUSSP.

The IUSSP carried out an online survey of the conference participants who attended “live”.

The survey was conducted online from 10 December 2021 to 21 January 2022, via Survey Monkey. Responses were collected anonymously. The online questionnaire was sent electronically to 1,319 registered participants who had valid email addresses, of which 660 responded (though not necessarily to all the questions). The response rate was 50%, similar to the IPC2017 conference survey.

The questionnaire was available in English and in French: 88% of respondents (582) chose to answer in English, and 12% responded in French (78). In the following pages, for the sake of clarity, non-respondents are not included in the graphs; the number of respondents (n) is indicated for each question.

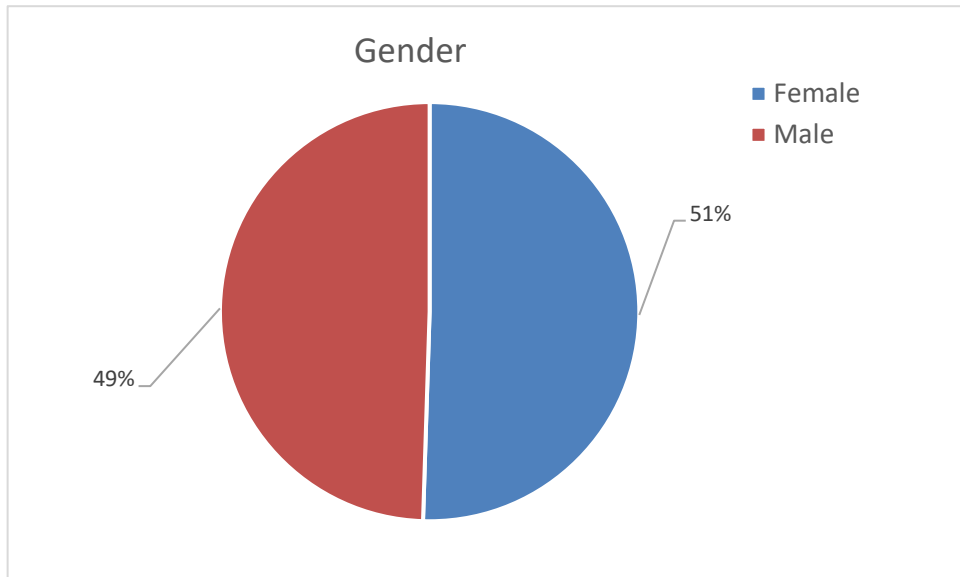
Summary

- Overall, survey respondents found the scientific quality of the research presented at IPC2021 to be very high (92% rated it 4 or 5 out of 5) and the conference well organized, with a good platform and good tech support. Ninety-six per cent of the respondents would recommend their colleagues attend the next conference (78% definitely and 19% probably).
- The main problem is that most participants did not attend many sessions and, as a result, attendance was very low in many sessions and therefore presenters received limited feedback. One-third of the respondents who attended live sessions attended 2 sessions at most; another third attended between 3 and 5 sessions; one-third attended more than 5 sessions.
- At the time of the survey (shortly after the conference for most respondents), 41% of the respondents had not viewed any recorded sessions. However, 73% of the respondents planned (most certainly) to return to the website to watch more recorded sessions in the months after the conference.
- Attendance at live Poster sessions in Gather.Town was even more limited: half the respondents did not attend any of these sessions.
- A large majority of respondents (71%) approved of the decision to ask presenters to pre-recorded their presentations although some presenters did not enjoy pre-recording and some viewers felt that the recordings lacked the spontaneity of live presentations.
- Most sessions did not include any discussants, a choice approved by only 14% of the respondents; 61% would have preferred discussants, especially given the limited feedback they received from an often small audience.
- The low-quality of some of the recordings (sound or resolution) made them impossible to watch.
- Many respondents missed the usual in-person conference, with its formal and informal interactions.
- For the 2025 conference in Brisbane, very few respondents (3%) would prefer an online conference. A large proportion would prefer a completely in-person conference (42%) while a majority (55%) would prefer a hybrid format, which would include some of the benefits of the online format (mainly the ability to attend remotely, for themselves or for those who cannot afford the trip to Brisbane, and the opportunity to watch recordings of the sessions).

I. Respondents' socio-demographics

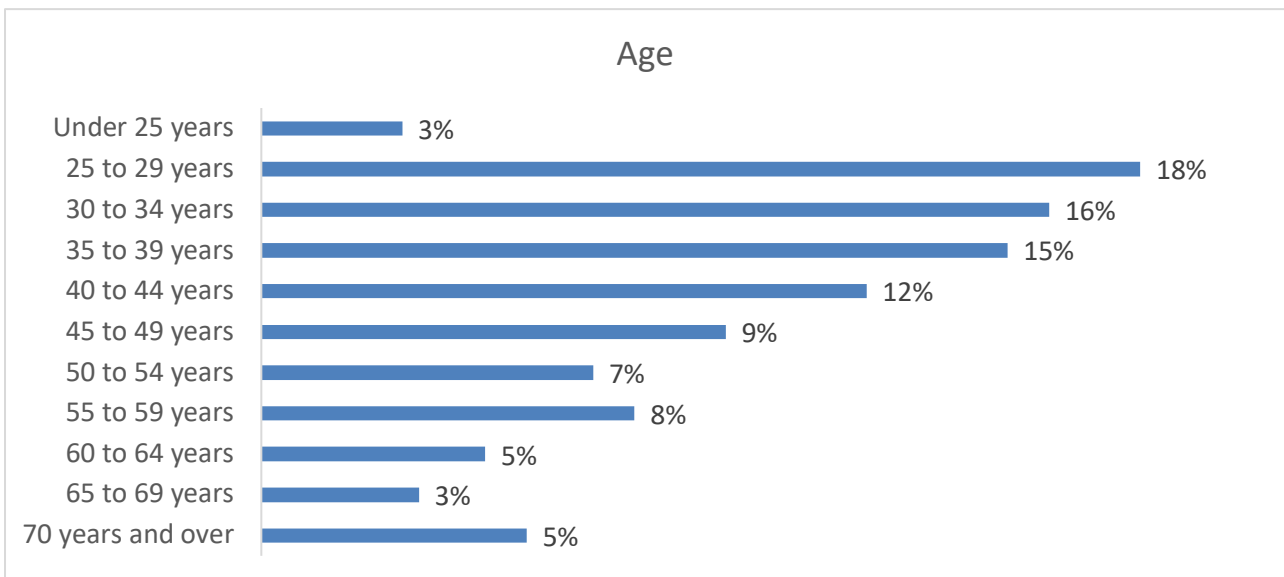
1. Gender (N=598)

The gender balance for respondents was balanced (51% female, 49% male). Among registered participants, women represented 54%, so they were slightly less to answer the questionnaire.



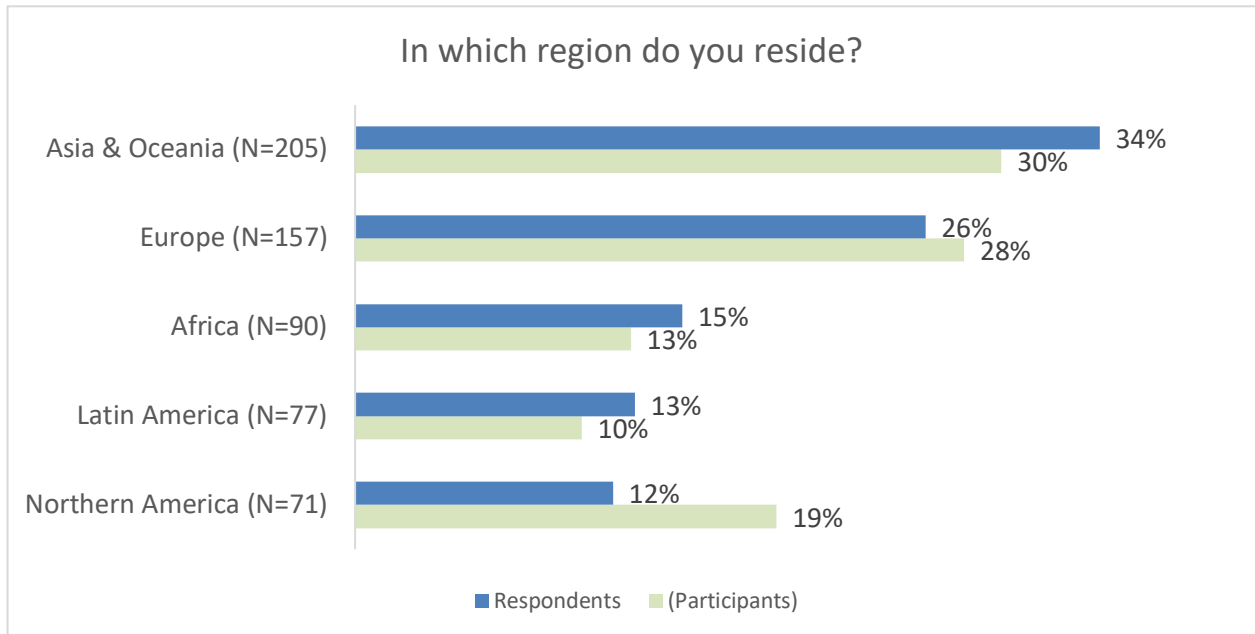
2. Age (N=600)

Respondents were fairly young (with a majority under 40 years of age). The age distribution of respondents was similar to that of the registered participants, with a slight over-representation of the youngest age groups (21% under 30 vs. 17% of the participants).



3. Region (N=600)

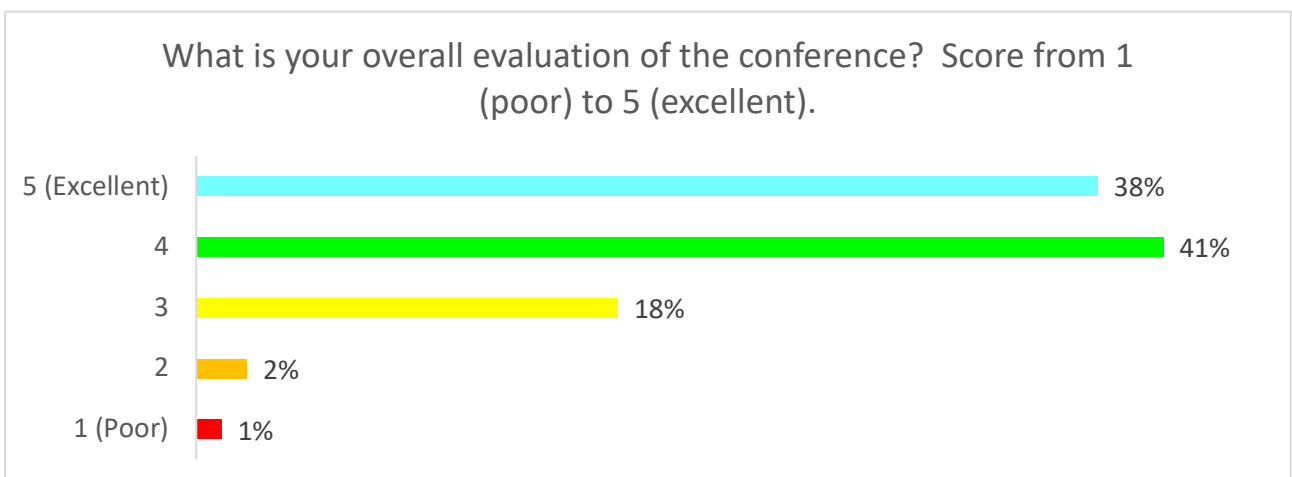
Respondents from Asia & Oceania represent one-third of the respondents (*slightly more than their proportion amongst registered participants*). Respondents from Europe are the next largest group (26%), while other regions are below 15% or less. *Respondents from Northern America (USA & Canada) are under-represented in this survey (as compared to their proportion among participants), 12% of the respondents vs. 19% of the participants. Europeans are also slightly under-represented. This is common in many similar surveys.*



II. Evaluation of the conference

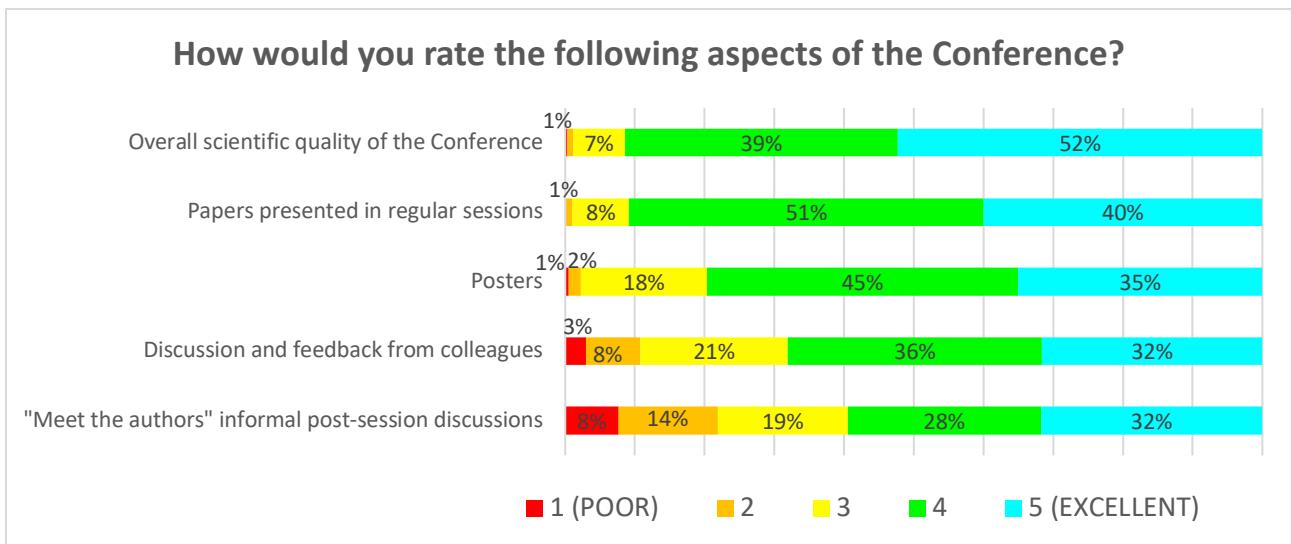
Q2. What is your overall evaluation of the conference? (N=651)

A large majority of respondents (79%) rated the conference positively [4 or 5 on a range from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent)].



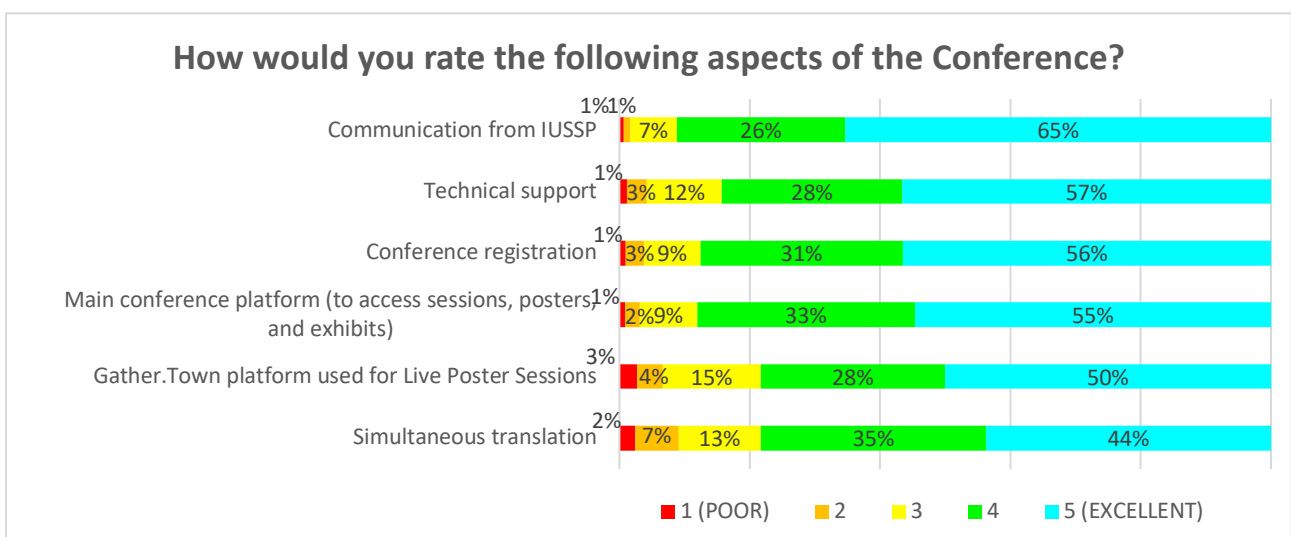
Q5. How would you rate the following aspects of the Conference? (N=274~597)

The overall scientific quality of the conference was rated 5 (excellent) by 52% of the respondents. Papers presented in regular sessions were rated 5 (excellent) by 40% and "4" by another 51%. Posters were slightly less positively rated (35% excellent). The discussion and feedback and the "meet the authors" post-session discussions were rated excellent by only 32% of the respondents and, more importantly, only a minority of participants (N=274) responded to this last item, a sign that these were not well attended or often did not take place.



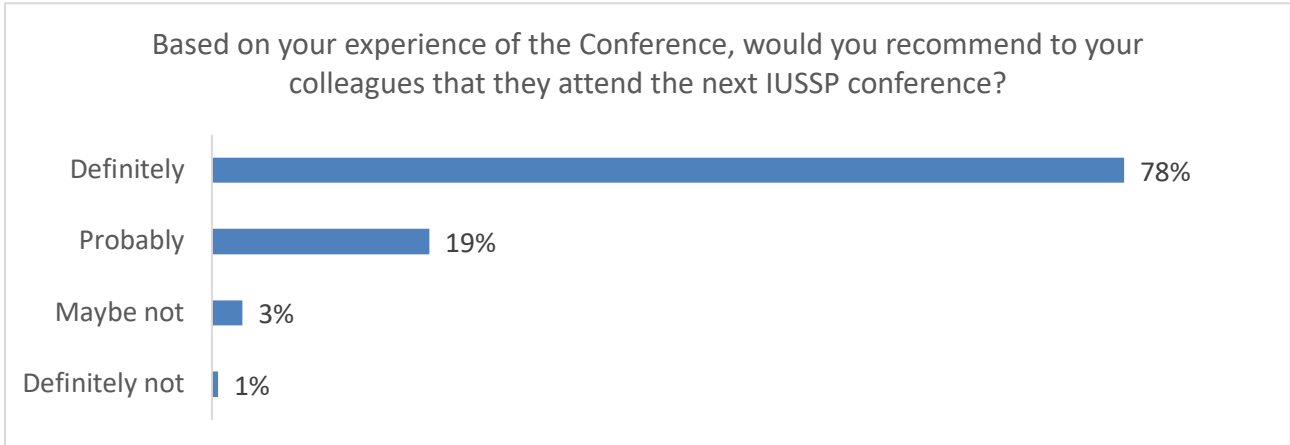
Q6. Please rate the following as well. (N=612~622)

Many specific aspects were rated excellent by a majority of respondents: communication (65%), technical support (57%), registration (56%), the main platform (55%). The platform used for live poster sessions (gather.town) and simultaneous translation were also well rated but many respondents did not answer (N/A) those two questions (about one-third for gather.town and about half for simultaneous translation).



Q18. Based on your experience of the Conference, would you recommend to your colleagues that they attend the next IUSSP conference?

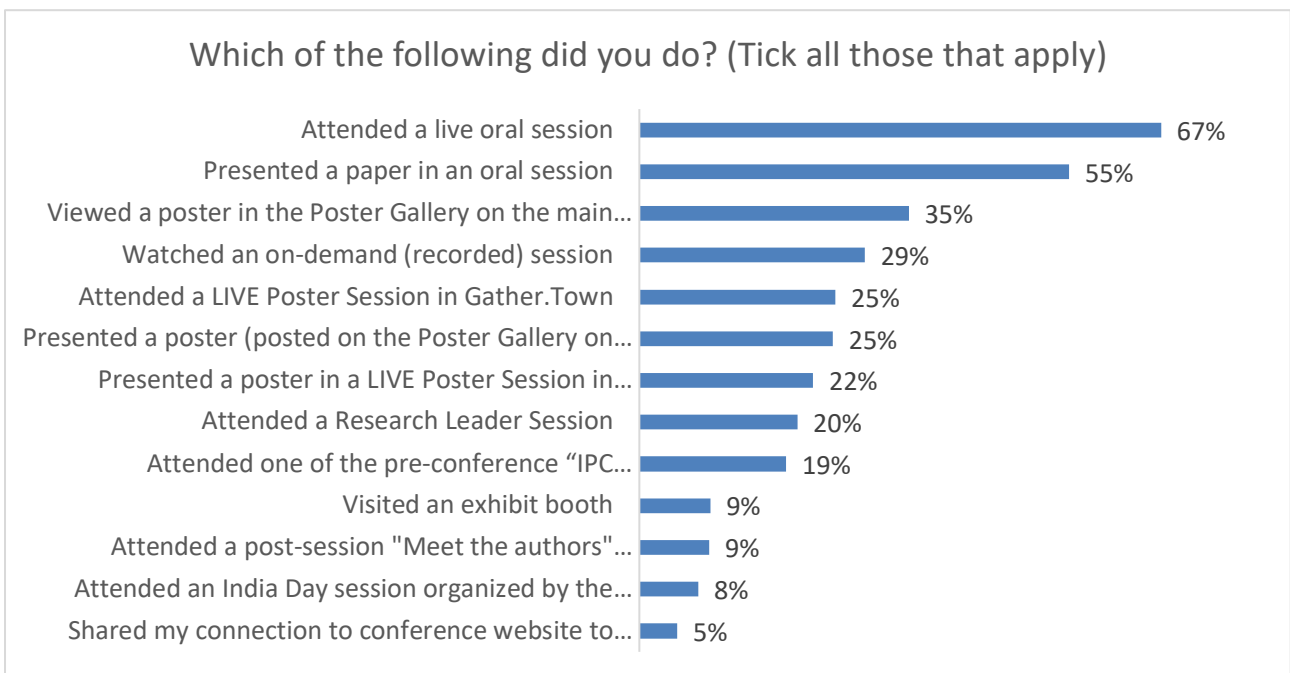
A large proportion of the respondents (78%) were sufficiently satisfied with the conference that they would unreservedly recommend attending the next conference.



III. Conference attendance

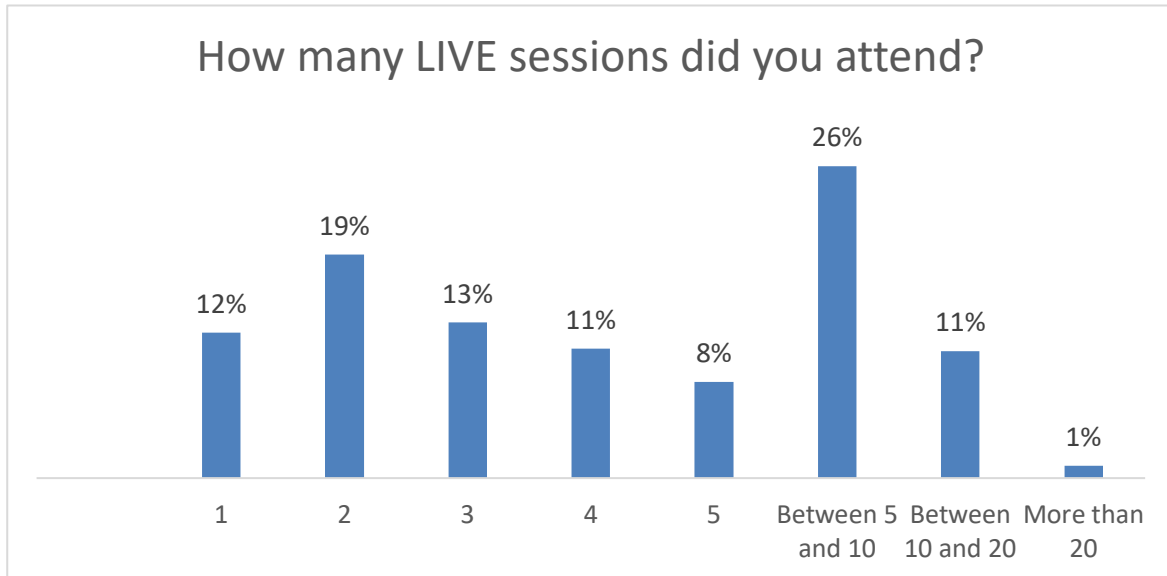
Q4. Which of the following did you do? (Tick all those that apply) (N=635)

Respondents may not have filled out this question accurately (either not ticking all the things they had done or misinterpreting certain items) but the graph below provides an overall picture (and hierarchy) of what respondents did. Most respondents (67%) attended at least one live oral session and a majority of respondents (55%) presented a paper in an oral session. For all the other things a conference participant could have done, only a minority of respondents answered that they had done them.



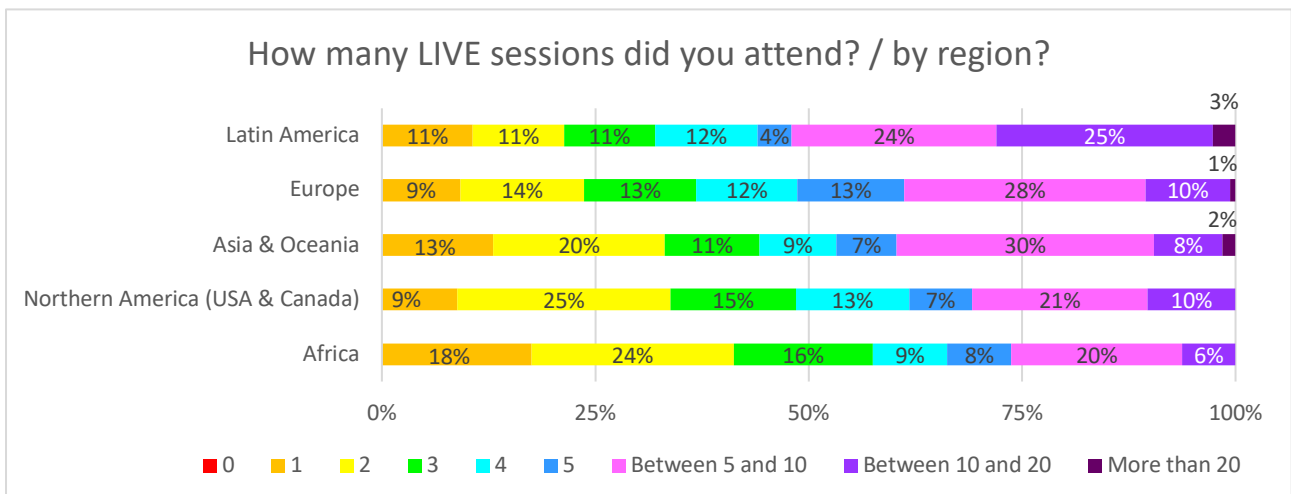
Q7. How many LIVE sessions did you attend? (N=586)

Taking into account only respondents who attended at least one oral session “live”, slightly less than one-third (31%) attended 2 sessions at most; another third (32%) attended between 3 and 5 sessions; and a bit more than one-third (38%) attended more than 5 sessions. Given that respondents to the survey are more likely to be “assiduous”, the real attendance at sessions was likely lower.



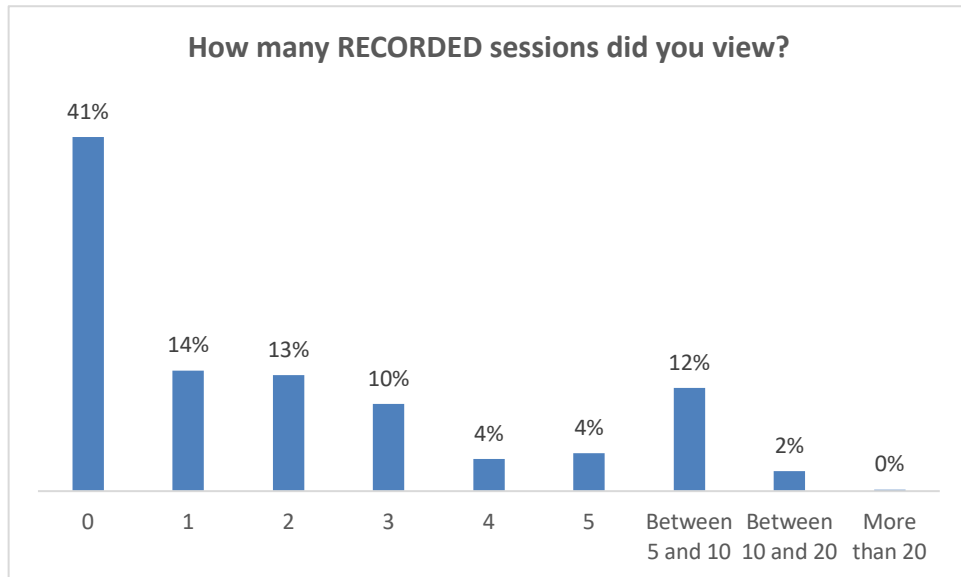
Q7. How many LIVE sessions attended according to the respondents' region (N=574)

The number of sessions attended varied considerably by region: respondents from Latin America attended more sessions (median = between 5 and 10) whereas those from Africa attended less (median = 3).



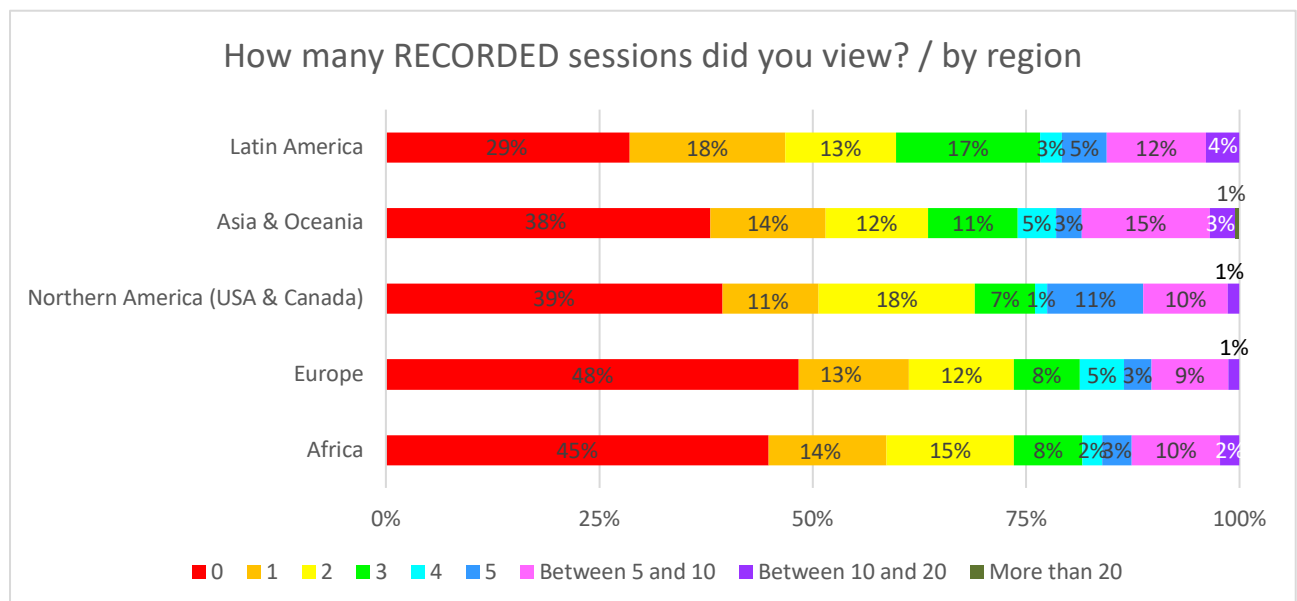
Q8. How many ON-DEMAND (RECORDED) sessions did you view? (N=601)

Many respondents did not watch any recorded sessions during the event (41% at the time they responded to the survey). Only 17% of the respondents watched 5 recorded sessions or more during or shortly after the conference.



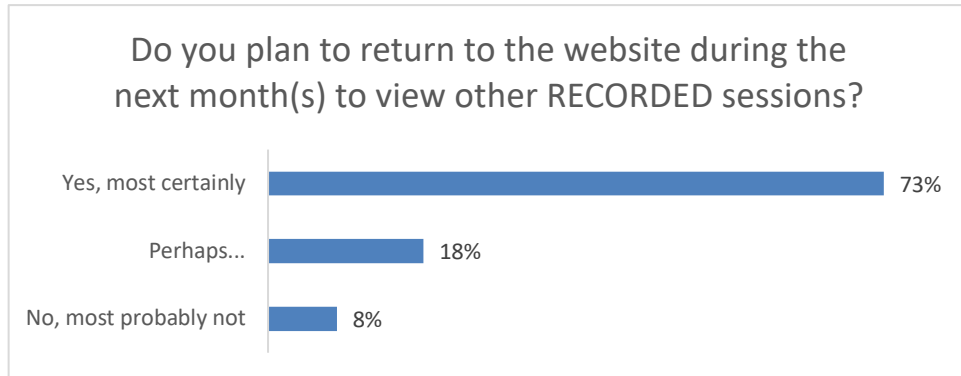
Q8. Number of RECORDED sessions attended according to the respondents' region (N=590)

Given that most respondents answered the survey shortly after the end of the conference, those who did watch recorded sessions during the conference were more likely to be in regions of the world where many sessions were scheduled at a time when they could not watch them. This may explain why respondents in North/South America and Asia-Pacific were more likely to have watched recorded sessions.



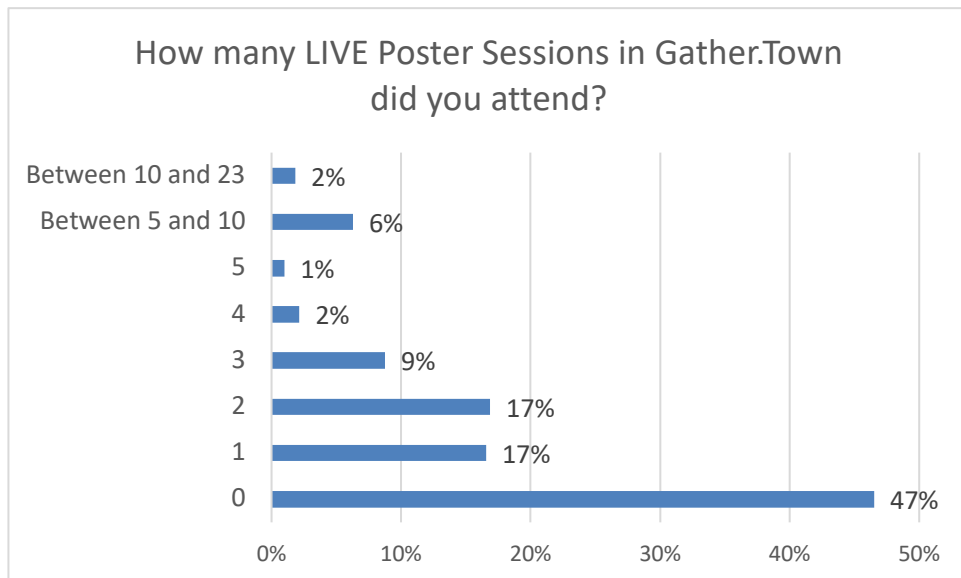
Q9. Do you plan to return to the website during the next month(s) to view other RECORDED sessions? (N=611)

The vast majority of respondents intended to return to the website to watch more recorded sessions in the months after the conference (73% most certainly).



Q12. How many LIVE Poster Sessions in Gather.Town did you attend? (N=604)

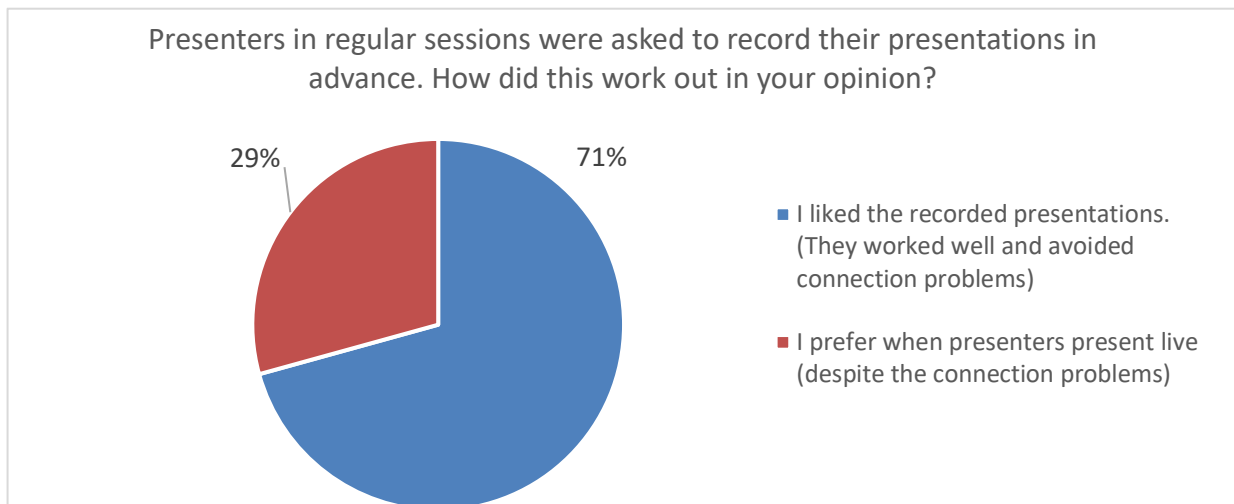
Nearly half the respondents did not attend any live poster sessions in the virtual environment provided by Gather.Town; one-third of the respondents attended 1 or 2 of the 23 poster sessions; only 20% of the respondents attended 3 or more poster sessions.



IV. Assessment of specific choices for the conference

Q10. Presenters in regular sessions were asked to record their presentations in advance. How did this work out in your opinion? (N=594)

A large majority of respondents (71%) appreciated the organizers' choice of having presenters pre-record their presentations. Only 29% say they prefer live presentations despite the potential connection problems.

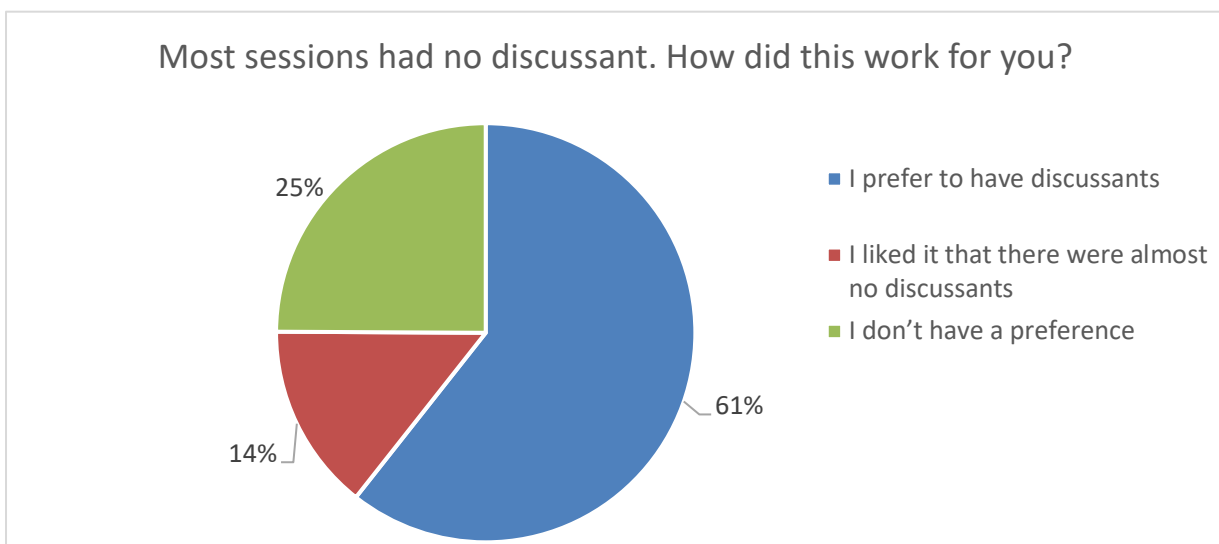


The write-in comments point to poor sound or resolution for a number of recorded presentations, at least in some of the sessions.

- *“Most recorded sessions were good. But some recordings had terrible audio quality. This seemed to be a bigger problem for recordings by presenters in lower-income countries, who perhaps deserve additional support or resources to ensure their audio is just as good.”*

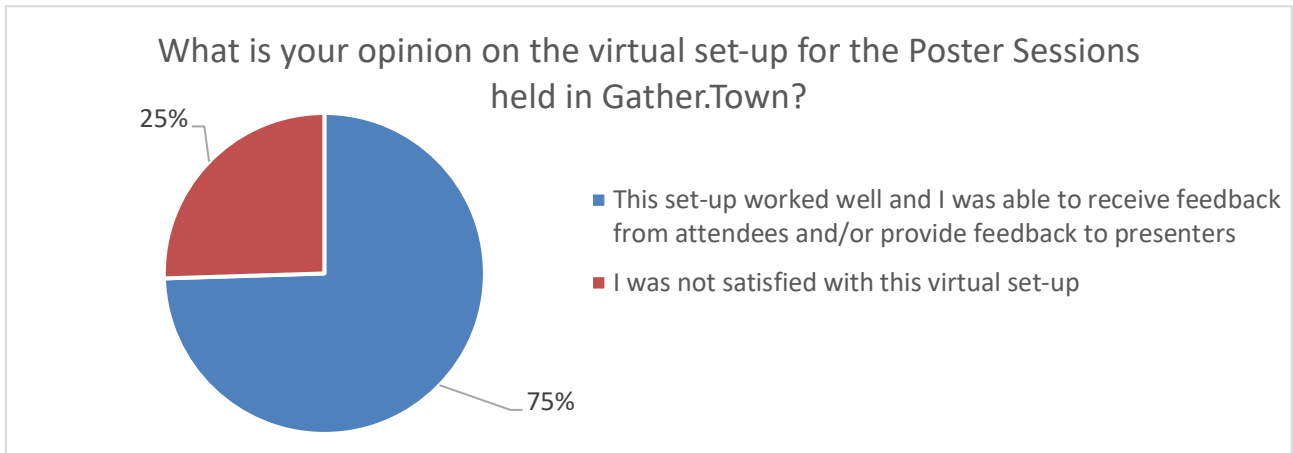
Q11. Most sessions had no discussant. How did this work for you? (N=602)

A large majority of respondents prefer to have discussants.



Q13. What is your opinion on the virtual set-up for the Poster Sessions held in Gather.Town? (N=306)

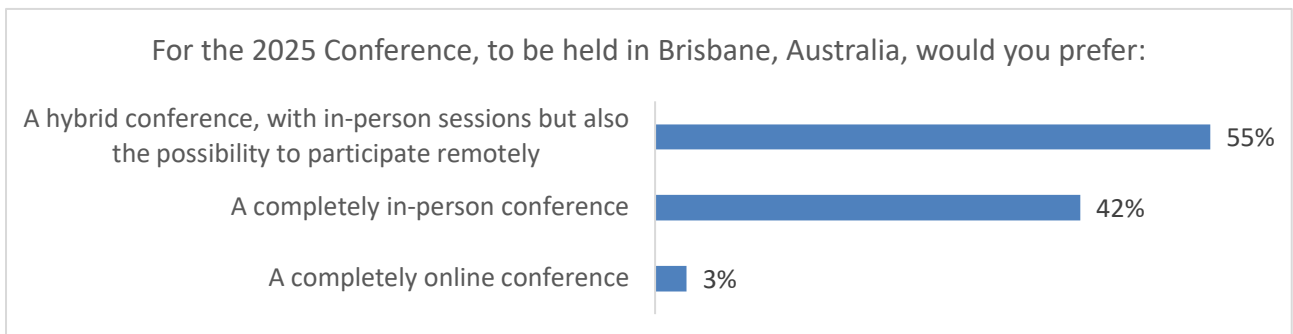
Three-quarters of the respondents who attended at least one poster session said the set-up worked well for them. One-quarter of the respondents were not satisfied.



The write-in comments point to the low attendance at many poster sessions and the limited feedback received by many of the poster presenters.

Q14. For the 2025 Conference, to be held in Brisbane, Australia, would you prefer...? (N=607)

A majority of respondents (55%) would prefer a hybrid conference in 2025, which would allow the possibility to participate remotely, while a large proportion of respondents (42%) would prefer an exclusively in-person conference. Only 3% would prefer a completely online conference like IPC2021.



The write-in comments illustrate the difficulty of having to choose one or the other options:

- *It's certainly more environmentally appropriate and less expensive for attendees to do it online. I like the access to recordings afterwards. Both that I can share it with others who might find it interesting, and I can fill in holes in my notes by rewatching. That said, being in person is also nice. It's a tough call.*
- *I'm not sure what to think now. Online conferences maybe attract a wider range of papers/presenters, in-person conferences offer better networking opportunities. Both have merits that may not be gained through hybrid.*
- *I would prefer an in-person conference, with a few hybrid presentations, AND with the possibility to view the recordings :)*
- *I would prefer that the conference was completely in-person, but I think we must embrace the realities both of the technologies available and the constraints on people unable to attend.*

V. Write-in comments

Q16. What did you like most about the conference? (N=357)

The write-in answers focus in particular on the quality of the research presented and on the fact that the conference was well organized, with a good platform, good tech support and good communication. Many comments insist on the benefits of being able to watch the recorded sessions afterwards. Others simply state that it was great that the conference could take place at all during the pandemic.

- *There were many sessions covering a wide range of topics, and I watched many talks of a very high quality. I really liked the camaraderie amongst the participants and the joy and passion with which they shared their work. People were keen to ask questions and there were very insightful discussions.*
- *The breadth and depth of the Scientific content and the ability to get a comprehensive update on ongoing work in demography around the world!*
- *The quality of presented works/research*
- *Wide range of international scholars and their research.*
- *Wide range of papers, many from younger members.*
- *The chance to see research from different regions of the world, learn about new advances in demography and population studies. Also, see old friends.*
- *The sessions that I attended were very high in quality. I also appreciated having sessions scheduled for different time zones.*
- *The organisation and technological set-up worked very well. I also appreciate that IUSSP put on an online conference allowing ECRs the opportunity to present work and potentially expanding the reach of the conference beyond those who can afford to attend an in-person conference. The Chairs of the oral sessions I attended were excellent and provided good discussion/feedback to participants.*
- *That the organization team did a marvelous job in organizing such a nice online event!*
- *Superb management, planning and quick trouble shooting*
- *It was hassle free and smooth. I liked how everything was organised in a professional way.*
- *Really easy to connect to the online platform, very easy to navigate, tons of sessions to choose from, and that the recording of the sessions will be available for viewing later.*
- *The platform and the instructions were easy to handle. The recorded sessions allowed me to watch the presentations at my own time.*
- *Ease of submission and uploading the papers and posters to the platform*
- *Listen to sessions on demand basis. Conference website was excellent (incl. easy to find information, easy to adapt to time-zone, convenient log in).*
- *Excellent organized; the sessions I watched of excellent quality; the option that everything is recorded, can be watched and used for teaching after the conference is an excellent and much appreciated offer. I also liked that it seemed more international than in-person conferences. It allowed persons to participate who do not have the means or capacity to travel.*
- *I liked that the content is available online to watch later. I also liked that I could chat with the presenters, that was a lot less intimidating than approaching someone in person. And less awkward.*
- *The discussion sessions were very lively in most sessions I have attended.*
- *There were some excellent panel discussions.*
- *Research leader sessions, sessions on COVID-19 and fertility.*
- *The virtual gather-town was a uniquely superb experience!*
- *Ability to chat and "bump" into people at gather town.*
- *The opportunity to set up an exhibition booth virtually was beyond my expectation.*
- *Countdown events and the oral sessions*

Q17. What did you like least about the conference? (N=327)

Respondents mainly missed the usual in-person conference, with the interactions it enables whether in oral and poster sessions or informal interactions. Many comments point to the very small attendance at many of the oral and poster sessions and therefore the lack of feedback received, accentuated by the absence of discussants for most sessions. A number of respondents felt that the conference fee was too expensive for what they got out of presenting their research in such a conference. Some respondents had trouble figuring out the time zones. The quality of some of the recordings, the virtual set-up for posters and the requirement to pre-record oral presentations also drew some complaints.

- *Missed in person experience*
- *Poor attendance of participants and having no discussant*
- *More discussants would have been good for comments/feedback.*
- *When I attend a conference in person, I can disconnect from everyday activities and attend sessions throughout the day, during the entire conference. In this online event, I was able to merely present my paper, because I had to teach classes and work meetings normally. Even with the possibility to watch the videos on demand, the experience is different.*
- *It is harder to keep connected or engaged with the event since it is easy to get distracted and do other activities at the same time.*
- *I don't like online conferences. I cannot focus and cannot switch off my other obligations.*
- *Honestly, I did not think the IUSSP conference worked well online and am unlikely to attend another online IUSSP conference. This is not any fault of IUSSP or the conference organisers, it's simply that IUSSP is too big a conference to succeed well online. Both oral and poster sessions I attended had few participants and little discussion apart from that provided by the Chairs. Smaller conferences were only a single plenary session or few simultaneous sessions work better online, as it's easier to build up a sense of common purpose/camaraderie and so discussion flows more easily. With big conferences it's too easy to disengage and sit passively behind your laptop. It was also very expensive for an online conference!*
- *Online format. Online conferences are not useful and I'm just so exhausted and sick of them. I don't plan to attend anymore virtual conferences - there is almost 0 value.*
- *I thought the registration fee for presenters was too high; some papers poor quality*
- *Chaos over time zones*
- *Difficult to understand when or how to attend a live presentation of posters.*
- *Trying to work out where to find gather.town.*
- *The requirement to record the presentations.*
- *I did not like having to pre-record my presentation but in the end I think it worked out well to have all presentations pre-recorded.*

Q19. If you have any other comments on the 2021 Conference or suggestions that you would like to make for the 2025 Conference, please note them briefly in the space below. (N=159)

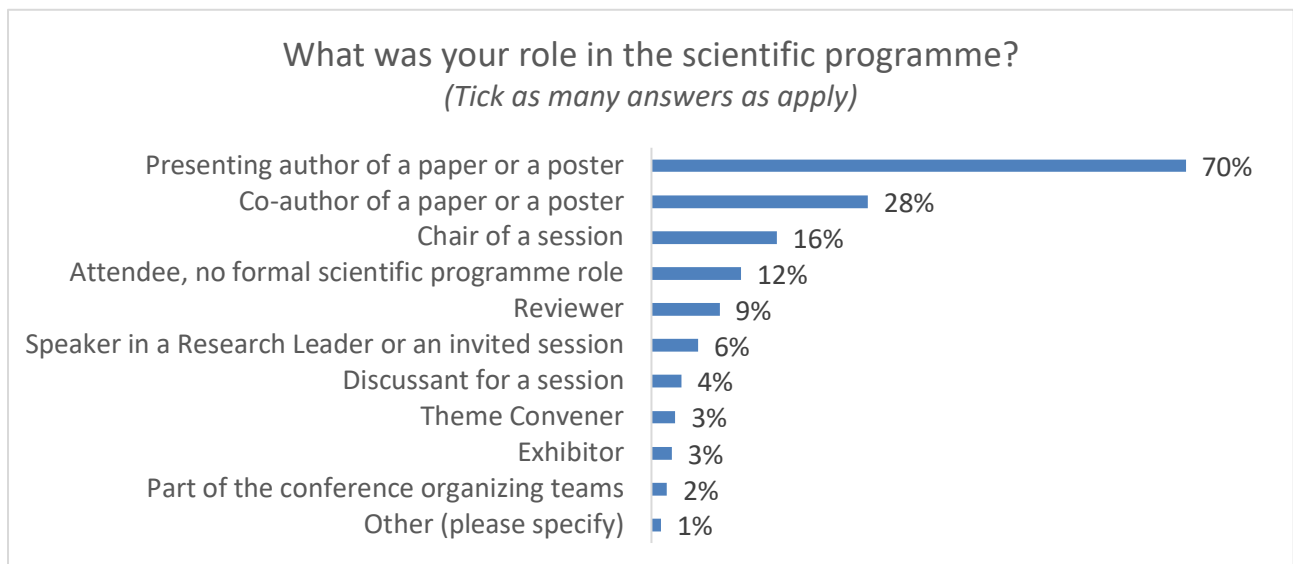
Respondents used this last write-in field to commend the organizers on the 2021 conference, to thank the IUSSP for covering the registration fees of low-income participants, especially given the circumstances, and to offer suggestions to improve the next IPC, whether it is organized in an online, in-person or hybrid format.

- *Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to learn. Thank you very much, IUSSP team. Thank you for providing me with registration funding, otherwise it would have been impossible for me to attend this important and educative event where the experts meet. I am very grateful.*
- *A huge thank you to the IUSSP staff for pulling off this incredible feat of managing the IUSSP conference for it to be entirely virtual. I can't even begin to imagine how hard that was and the learning curve you were on for the last six months. So many things worked so smoothly, and having tech support in each session really helped everything to go smoothly. Thank you for your Herculean effort!!*
- *Some of the online elements (e.g. possibility to watch the video of the session on demand basis) could be incorporated to the conference setup even if the it takes place on site.*
- *A hybrid conference could help, but we should be careful to avoid ending with two conferences, one for attendees and one for onliners...*
- *1) I would suggest to keep the pre-recorded videos even if the conference is in-person. 2) Sometimes there are two or three sessions taking place at the same time and I cannot go to all of them, although I'm interested in doing so. Thus, I would suggest that 2025 conference has a website as the 2021 conference so we can watch the videos of the presentations of the sessions that we weren't able to attend.*
- *For 2025, if it is hybrid, it would be useful if IUSSP can share e-conference proceeding with abstract of conferences a few days prior to the conference via e-mail so that attendees are able to scan through papers and attend those of interest.*
- *If we gave a grading to the sessions, then at the end we could have a list of the best graded sessions and it can be sent around.*
- *English is the universal language but perhaps the possibility of allowing presentations in other languages could allow for greater cultural and linguistic exchange. Including translators would be a good option.*

VI. Respondents' roles and characteristics

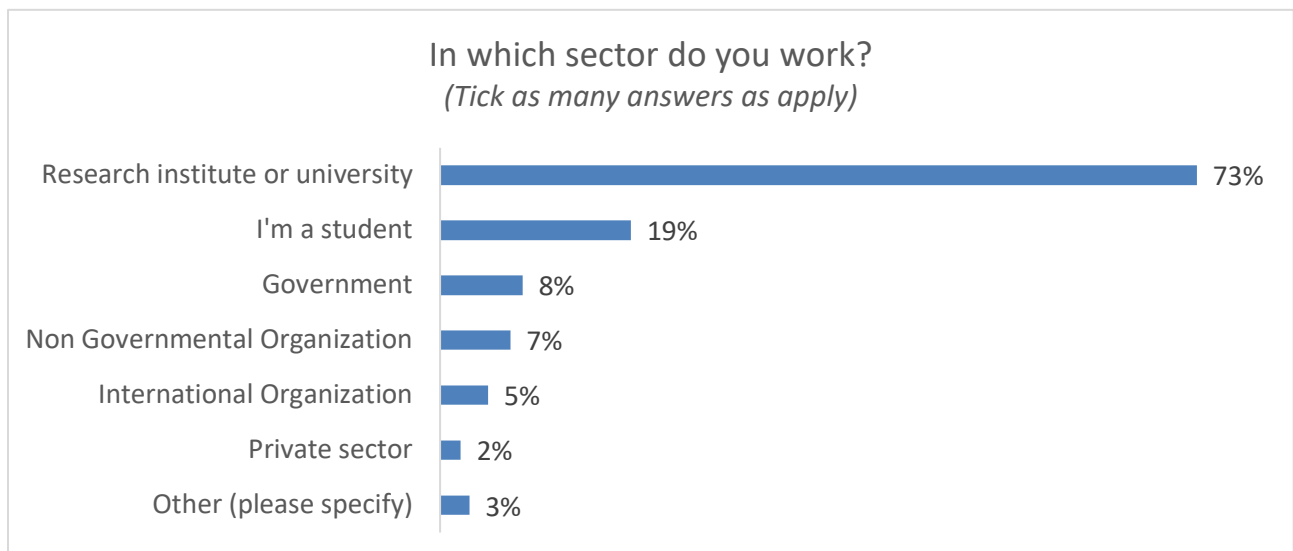
Q3. What was your role in the scientific programme? (Tick as many answers as apply)? (N=641)

Most respondents (70%) were presenting authors of a paper or a poster. Others, or in addition, had other roles during the conference -- co-author (28%), chair (16%), discussant (4%), speaker in a special session (6%) -- or prior to the conference – reviewer (9%) or Theme convener (3%), part of the conference organizing team (2%). Attendees with no formal role in the programme were 12% and exhibitors were 2% and “others” (1%) included mainly Poster Judges.



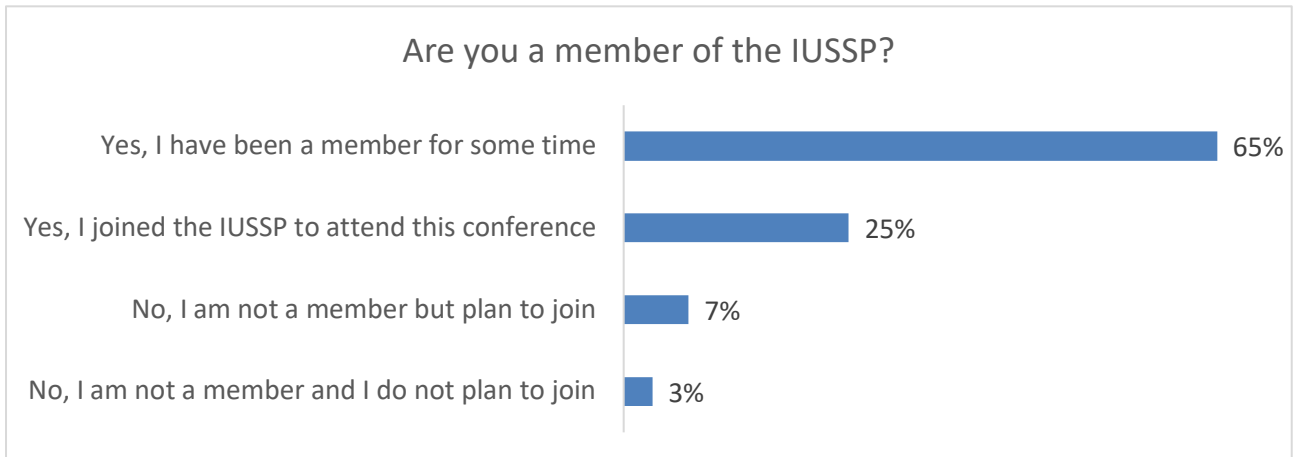
D. In which sector do you work? (Tick as many answers as apply) (N=599)

Most respondents worked for a research institute or a university (73%) or were students (19%). Others include retired and independent population specialists.



Q15. Are you a member of the IUSSP? (N=604)

Most respondents were IUSSP members (90%); two-thirds had been members for some time and one-fourth joined to attend the conference. Ten per cent were not members (7% say they plan to become members; 3% don't plan to join).



Annex 1 – Questionnaire for the IPC2021 post-conference evaluation (English version)

Thank you for attending the 2021 International Population Conference. While it is still fresh in your memory, we would like to get your feedback on this virtual conference: what worked well, what should be dropped and what could be kept or improved for future hybrid or online conferences. We would be very grateful if you could take 5 minutes of your time to answer this short, anonymous survey.

1. In what language would you like to take the survey? / Dans quelle langue souhaitez-vous répondre à ce questionnaire ?

- English
- Français

2. What is your overall evaluation of the conference? Score from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

- 1 (Poor) 2 3 4 5 (Excellent)

3. What was your role in the scientific programme? (Tick as many answers as apply)

- Theme Convener
- Reviewer
- Chair of a session
- Discussant for a session
- Presenting author of a paper or a poster
- Co-author of a paper or a poster
- Speaker in a Research Leader or an invited session
- Exhibitor
- Part of the conference organizing teams
- Attendee, no formal scientific programme role
- Other (please specify)

4. Which of the following did you do? (Tick all those that apply)

- Presented a paper in an oral session
- Presented a poster (posted on the Poster Gallery on the main platform)
- Presented a poster in a LIVE Poster Session in Gather.Town
- Attended a live oral session
- Watched an on-demand (recorded) session
- Viewed a poster in the Poster Gallery on the main platform
- Attended a LIVE Poster Session in Gather.Town
- Attended a post-session "Meet the authors" informal discussion
- Attended an India Day session organized by the Indian National Organizing Committee Attended a Research Leader Session
- Visited an exhibit booth
- Shared my connection to conference website to watch the sessions with colleagues or students
- Attended one of the pre-conference "IPC Countdown Events"

PLEASE RATE EVERY ITEM ON THIS PAGE (or tick N/A when you can't)

5. How would you rate the following aspects of the Conference?

Score each item from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), or tick N/A if you cannot evaluate the item.

- Overall scientific quality of the Conference
- Papers presented in regular sessions
- Posters
- Discussion and feedback from colleagues
- "Meet the authors" informal post-session
- Discussions

6. Please rate the following as well.

Score each item from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), or tick N/A if you did not use or cannot evaluate the item.

- Conference registration
- Main conference platform (to access sessions, posters, and exhibits)
- Gather.Town platform used for Live Poster
- Sessions
- Technical support
- Communication from IUSSP
- Simultaneous translation

7. How many LIVE sessions did you attend?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Between 5 and 10
- Between 10 and 20
- More than 20

8. How many ON-DEMAND (RECORDED) sessions did you view?

- None
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Between 5 and 10
- Between 10 and 20
- More than 20

9. Do you plan to return to the website during the next month(s) to view other RECORDED sessions?

- Yes, most certainly
- No, most probably not
- Perhaps...

10. Presenters in regular sessions were asked to record their presentations in advance. How did this work out in your opinion?

- I liked the recorded presentations. (They worked well and avoided connection problems)
- I prefer when presenters present live (despite the connection problems)

Comment (optional):

11. Most sessions had no discussant. How did this work for you?

- I liked it that there were almost no discussants
- I prefer to have discussants
- I don't have a preference

12. How many LIVE Poster Sessions in Gather.Town did you attend?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Between 5 and 10
- Between 10 and 23

13. What is your opinion on the virtual set-up for the Poster Sessions held in Gather.Town?

- This set-up worked well and I was able to receive feedback from attendees and/or provide feedback to presenters
- I was not satisfied with this virtual set-up
- N/A

Comment (optional):

14. For the 2025 Conference, to be held in Brisbane, Australia, would you prefer:

- A completely in-person conference
- A hybrid conference, with in-person sessions but also the possibility to participate remotely
- A completely online conference

Comment (optional):

15. Are you a member of the IUSSP?

- Yes, I have been a member for some time
- Yes, I joined the IUSSP to attend this conference
- No, I am not a member but plan to join
- No, I am not a member and I do not plan to join

16. What did you like most about the conference?

17. What did you like least about the conference?

18. Based on your experience of the Conference, would you recommend to your colleagues that they attend the next IUSSP conference?

- Definitely
- Probably
- Maybe not
- Definitely not

19. If you have any other comments on the 2021 Conference or suggestions that you would like to make for the 2025 Conference, please note them briefly in the space below.

PLEASE FILL IN THESE 4 LAST QUESTIONS

A. In which sector do you work? (Tick as many answers as apply)

- Research institute or university
- Government
- Private sector
- Non Governmental Organization
- International Organization
- I'm a student
- Other (please specify)

B. In which region do you reside?

- Africa
- Asia & Oceania
- Europe
- Latin America
- Northern America (USA & Canada)

C. In which age group are you?

- Under 25 years
- 25 to 29 years
- 30 to 34 years
- 35 to 39 years
- 40 to 44 years
- 45 to 49 years
- 50 to 54 years
- 55 to 59 years
- 60 to 64 years
- 65 to 69 years
- 70 years and over

D. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other (specify, if you wish to)