

## Changes in Government Views and Policies on Population since the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which followed the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, took place at a time of emerging global consensus that population dynamics and development are intricately linked and that human rights and equality must be at the core of all development. These principles were reflected in the overriding goals of the landmark 20-year ICPD Programme of Action (United Nations publication, sales No. E.95.XIII.18) to improve human welfare and promote sustainable development by empowering people, reducing inequalities and protecting human rights. Many of the population and development goals of the ICPD Programme of Action were subsequently incorporated in various internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (General Assembly resolution, A/RES/55/2).

Recognizing the continued relevance and centrality of the ICPD Programme of Action to national and global population and development challenges of today and in the future, the United Nations General Assembly has decided to extend the ICPD Programme of Action beyond 2014, for further implementation and to ensure its follow-up in order to fully meet its goals and objectives (General Assembly resolution, A/RES/65/234). The ICPD beyond 2014 review mandated by the General Assembly will identify progress and achievements towards the goals of ICPD, and provide key building blocks for the post-2015 global development agenda.

In the past two decades since ICPD, as the world has made considerable progress in addressing population and development issues, new population dynamics have emerged that require renewed, differentiated policies and programme efforts at both national and international levels.

### *1. Many developing-country Governments remain concerned about high fertility and rapid population growth*

Rates of population growth have continued to decline in developing countries, from an average annual rate of 1.8 per cent in 1990–1995 to 1.3 per cent in 2010–2015. Correspondingly, Governments of 26 developing countries changed their view on population growth from too high to satisfactory between 1996 and 2011. **Yet, in 2011, nearly one half (46 per cent) of Governments of developing countries viewed their population growth as too high.**

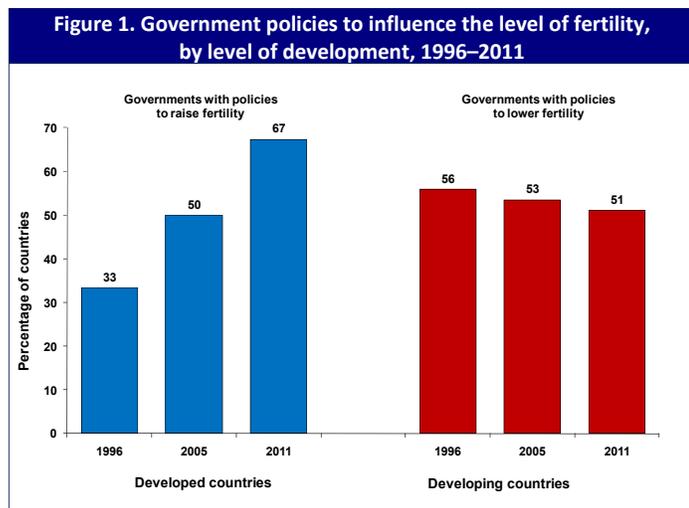
**The large majority of Governments of least developed countries expressed concern about high rate of population growth in their countries.** Eighty per cent of Governments of least developed countries viewed their population growth as too high in 2011, up slightly from 73 per cent in 1996.

**Africa remains the region with the highest percentage of Governments viewing population growth as too high.** In 2011, about two thirds (65 per cent) of Governments in Africa were concerned that their rate of population growth was too high, a decline from 74 per cent in 1996.

Slightly over one half (52 per cent) of Governments in developing countries considered the level of fertility in their countries as too high in 2011, down slightly from 59 per cent in 1996. While, in least developed countries, this percentage increased from 78 per cent in 1996 to 92 per cent in 2011.

In spite of a declining trend, fertility levels have remained the highest in Africa among major geographic areas. The fertility level in Africa has declined from 5.7 children per woman in 1990–1995 to 4.7 children per woman in 2010–2015.

In 2011, almost all Governments of developing countries that viewed fertility level as too high had adopted policies to lower it. During 1996 to 2011, the percentage of developing-country Governments with policies to lower fertility has declined slightly from 56 per cent in 1996 to 51 per cent in 2011, while this percentage has increased considerably in least developed countries from 65 per cent in 1996 to 80 per cent in 2011.



## 2. A growing number of Governments have expressed concern about high rates of adolescent fertility

In 2011, 73 per cent of developing-country Governments and 40 per cent of developed-country Governments expressed a major concern about the level of adolescent fertility in their countries, up from 53 per cent and 27 per cent respectively in 1996.

**Governments in both developing and developed countries have increasingly adopted policies to reduce adolescent fertility.** In 2011, nearly 9 out of 10 Governments worldwide had policies to reduce adolescent fertility, up from 6 out of 10 in 1996.

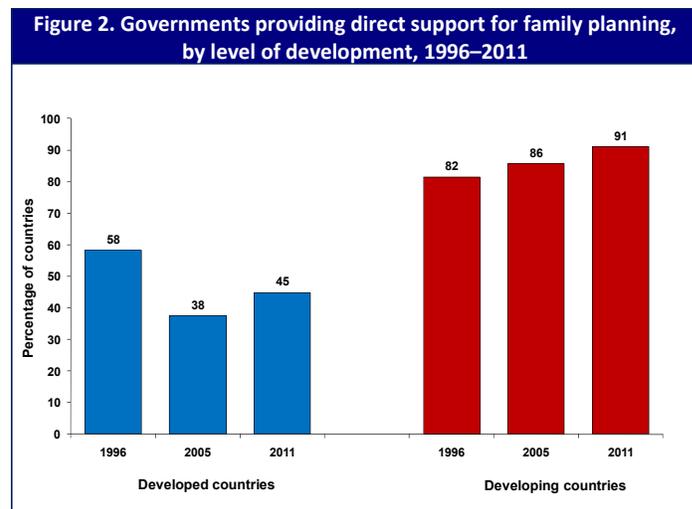
**Ninety-three per cent of Governments in developing countries had policies to reduce adolescent fertility in 2011, up from 63 per cent in 1996.** All Governments in the least developed countries had adopted such policies in 2011, up from 60 per cent in 1996.

## 3. Government direct support for family planning has continued to increase in developing countries

At the global level, in 2011, 156 out of the 196 Governments (80 per cent) provided direct support for family planning, 22 Governments provided only indirect support, and the remaining 18 Governments provided no support.

**In developing countries, the percentage of Governments providing direct support for family planning has increased, from 82 per cent in 1996 to 91 per cent in 2011.**

In 2011, Governments of developing countries were twice as likely to provide direct support for family planning (91 per cent) as those of developed countries (45 per cent).



## 4. Persistence of very low fertility is a growing concern for Governments of developed countries

**About two thirds of Governments of developed countries viewed their level of fertility as too low in 2011.** The percentage of Governments of developed countries that viewed the level of fertility in their countries as too low has increased from 40 per cent in 1996 to 65 per cent in 2011.

The lowest fertility rates among major geographic areas are in Europe, where total fertility has remained well below replacements, at 1.6 children per woman, between 1990–1995 and 2010–2015.

**A growing number of Governments in developed countries have implemented policies to raise their level of fertility.** In 2011, two thirds of developed-country Governments had implemented policies to raise the level of fertility in their countries. Only one third of Governments had implemented such policies in 1996.

**As fertility has continued to decline, some Governments of developing countries have also expressed concern about low fertility and a few have adopted policies to raise fertility.** In 2011, 13 per cent of developing-country Governments had adopted policies to raise fertility, up from 8 per cent in 1996.

## 5. Population ageing is one of the most commonly cited demographic concerns in developed countries

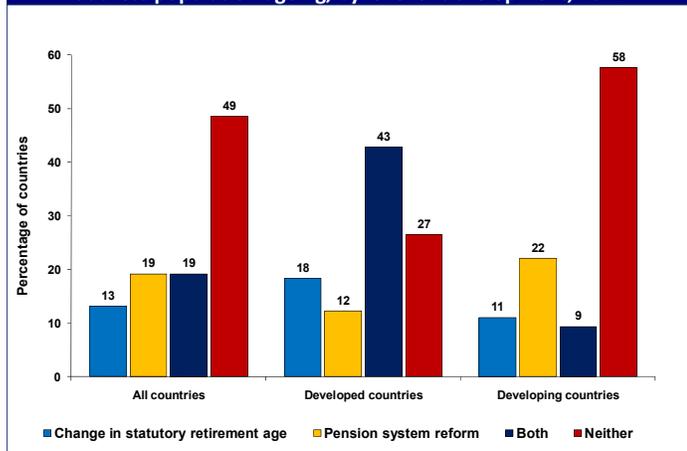
**In 2011, about 9 out 10 Governments of developed countries (88 per cent) identified population ageing as a major concern, up from 76 per cent in 2005.**

**Population ageing is increasingly becoming a concern in many developing countries.** In 2011, 41 per cent of

developing-country Governments viewed population ageing as a major concern.

**Concerns with population ageing are being translated into policy changes.** By 2011, Governments of 73 per cent of developed countries either changed the statutory age at retirement or reformed their pension system or both in the past five years. In contrast, Governments of only 42 per cent of developing countries had taken at least one of these two measures associated with population ageing.

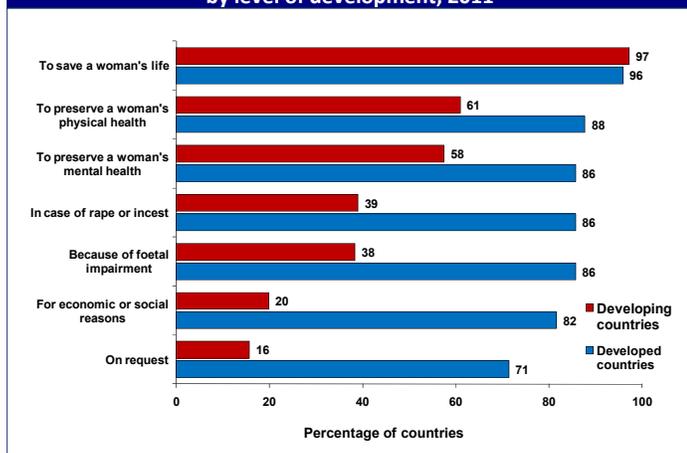
**Figure 3. Measures adopted by Governments in the last five years to address population ageing, by level of development, 2011**



## 6. A growing number of countries have liberalized their abortion policies

Between 1996 and 2011, for instance, the percentage of Governments allowing abortion in order to preserve the physical health of a woman rose from 63 per cent to 68 per cent, while those allowing abortion on request rose from 24 per cent to 30 per cent. The percentages of Governments allowing abortion similarly increased for grounds to preserve the mental health of a woman, in case of rape or incest, because of foetal impairment, and for social and economic reasons.

**Figure 4. Legal grounds on which abortion is permitted, by level of development, 2011**



While a growing number of countries have liberalized their abortion policies since 1996, in about two thirds of countries in 2011, abortion was permitted only when the

physical or mental health of the mother was endangered, and in about one half of countries, only when the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest or when it could cause foetal impairment.

## Abortion policies continue to be much more restrictive in developing countries than in developed countries.

For instance, in 2011, Governments of 86 per cent of developed countries allowed abortion in cases of rape or incest, compared with only 39 per cent of developing-country Governments.

## 7. Despite much progress, mortality levels are viewed as unacceptable by Governments of most developing countries

Despite considerable declines in child mortality since 1990, more than three quarters (77 per cent) of Governments of developing countries viewed the level of under-five mortality in their countries as unacceptable, compared with only 27 per cent of Governments of developed countries. The respective figures were 85 per cent and 54 per cent in 1996.

## The percentage of Governments viewing the level of life expectancy at birth in their countries as unacceptable changed little from 60 per cent in 1996 to 56 per cent in 2011.

In 2011, 65 per cent of developed-country Governments considered the level of life expectancy as acceptable, compared with only 37 per cent of developing countries. The respective figures were 63 per cent and 32 per cent in 1996. Governments of all but one least developed country viewed the level of life expectancy at birth in their countries as unacceptable.

## 8. Maternal mortality has been declining, but Governments of most developing countries continue to view their levels as unacceptable

At the global level, there was a 47 per cent decline in maternal mortality ratio between 1990 and 2010, from 400 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births in 1990 to 210 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births in 2010.

In 2010, women in developing countries were about 15 times (31 times in sub-Saharan Africa) more likely to die from pregnancy and childbirth-related causes than those in developed countries.

In 2011, Governments of 76 per cent of developing countries and 96 per cent of least developed countries considered the level of maternal mortality in their countries as unacceptable.

## 9. An increasing number of Governments have adopted policies to reduce migration into urban areas

In 2011, 55 per cent of Governments desired a major change in the spatial distribution of the population in their countries, compared with 42 per cent in 1996.

Governments in developing countries were more than twice (64 per cent) as likely as those in developed countries (27 per cent) to desire a major change in the spatial distribution of the population in 2011. The respective figures were 48 per cent and 23 per cent in 1996.

Seventy-nine per cent of Governments had policies to lower rural to urban migration in 2011, an increase from 70 per cent in 2005.

The percentage of Governments with policies to reduce the inflow of migrants into urban agglomerations increased from 45 per cent in 1996 to 69 per cent in 2011.

In 2011, Governments in developing countries were more than twice as likely (79 per cent) as those in developed countries (38 per cent) to have adopted policies to lower migration into urban agglomerations.

## 10. A growing number of Governments have shown openness to immigration

At the global level, the percentage of Governments with policies to lower immigration has declined (from 40 per cent in 1996 to 16 per cent in 2011), while the percentage to raise immigration has increased (from just 4 per cent in 1996 to 11 per cent in 2011).

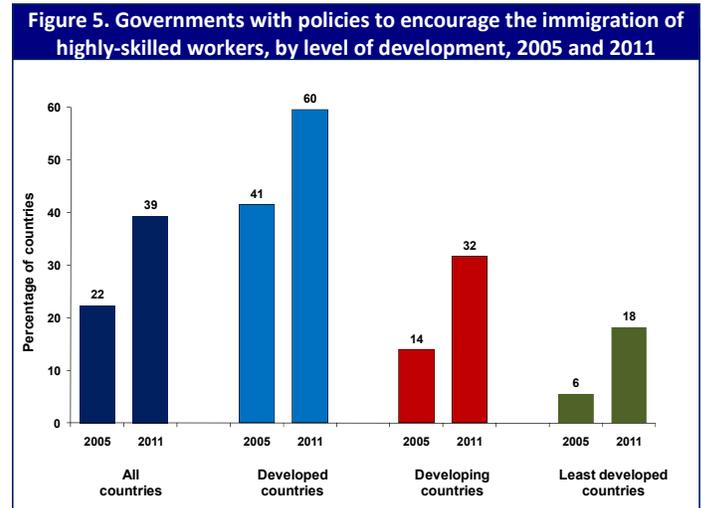
**The trend towards openness to immigration was especially pronounced in developed countries.** The percentage of developed-country Governments that had implemented policies to lower immigration fell dramatically from 60 per cent in 1996 to just 10 per cent in 2011.

**During 1996 to 2011, the percentage of Governments seeking to raise immigration has risen sharply in developed countries, but not in developing countries.** In developed countries, the percentage of Governments that had policies to raise the level of immigration increased from just 2 per cent in 1996 to 22 per cent in 2011. While in developing countries, the percentage of Governments with policies to lower the level of immigration declined from 34 per cent 1996 to 18 per cent in 2011.

**The receiving countries have shown greater selectivity towards highly-skilled workers.** A growing percentage of Governments have adopted policies to raise the immigration of highly-skilled workers, which increased from 22 per cent in 2005 to 39 per cent in 2011.

In 2011, policies to raise the immigration of highly-skilled workers were about twice as common in developed

countries (60 per cent) as in developing countries (32 per cent).



**In 2011, three out of four Governments viewed irregular migration in their countries as a major concern.**

## 11. Many Governments recognize that successful integration of migrants into the host society is essential to maximize the opportunities afforded by migration

In developed countries, 9 out of 10 Governments had policies in place in 2011 to improve the integration of non-nationals, compared with less than half (47 per cent) of developing countries or less than a third (29 per cent) of least developed countries.

Between 2005 and 2011, the proportion of Governments with policies to integrate non-nationals increased in developed countries (from 84 per cent to 91 per cent), but remained unchanged at 47 per cent in developing countries.

### NOTES

This brief presents groupings of countries according to classification of regions in 2011 into two major groups: the developed regions comprise all regions of Europe plus Northern America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. Countries in the developed regions are referred to as "developed countries". The developing regions comprise all regions of Africa, Asia (excluding Japan), Latin America and the Caribbean plus Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Countries in the developing regions are referred to as "developing countries". The terms "developed" and "developing" are used for statistical convenience and do not express a judgement about the stage reached by a particular country or area in the development process. The least developed countries include 49 countries (34 in Africa, 9 in Asia, 5 in Oceania and 1 in Latin America and the Caribbean), as defined by the United Nations General Assembly resolutions 59/209, 59/210, 60/33, 62/97, 64/295 and 67/136.

Results presented in this brief are based on the 2011 revision of the World Population Policies Database. Further information about the Database and related publications can be obtained from the United Nations Population Division website: [www.unpopulation.org](http://www.unpopulation.org)