

rate reached a peak of 3.3% in 1956-57 and at a time when the economic outlook was favourable for high growth rates. The current annual growth rate (1971-72) is estimated to be about 1.2%. In absolute numbers, between 1966 and 1971 the population increased by 1,553,000, or 310,000 a year, which was about 25% lower than the increase during 1951-56. The sharp reduction in population growth in recent years due to the marked decline in birth rates and lower immigration has caused speculation on the possibility of Canada's population growth approaching the zero level in the very near future.

### 5.1.3 Future prospects

The dominant component of population growth in Canada since 1851 has been natural increase. This trend is likely to continue in the future with a modest contribution from migration. Of the two components of natural increase (births minus deaths), the birth rate will continue to be the dynamic and crucial factor of growth. Moreover, fluctuations in birth rates can create major economic and social problems as society adjusts itself to the effects of such fluctuations. For example, although the postwar "baby boom" is long past, society is now feeling the impact of this generation on the labour market and other aspects of the national economy. Similarly, problems associated with the sharp drop in the birth rate since 1957 are being felt, for example, by school systems as smaller numbers of children enter school.

Because of the importance of the fertility factor, the tempo of future growth depends mainly on whether the current total fertility rate of 2.19 births (1971), which is close to the "replacement level" of 2.13 births under current mortality conditions, will remain constant, fall or rise in future. A fertility rate close to the replacement level does not mean that Canada will soon reach zero population growth. Calculations show that even if immigration ceased, and the average fertility rate were only 2.13, the population would continue to grow until about the year 2040, when birth and death rates would each stabilize at about 13 per 1,000 population. This long delay in achieving zero growth may be attributed to the current high percentage of young people who are moving into the child-bearing age groups.

Table 5.3 summarizes the results of two series of population projections for Canada prepared under different assumptions of mortality, fertility and migration. Series A uses the lowest fertility assumption as stated in the Table with constant mortality level and zero net migration. Under these assumptions, the total population will increase from 21.6 million in 1971 to 24.5 million in 1986, and will reach 26.5 million by 2001. Because the assumed fertility rate does not reach the lowest point until 1985, the full impact of fertility decline on population growth becomes evident only thereafter. The annual growth rate will be lowest at 0.3% by 2001. The population will become more aged with declining proportions of young people and increasing proportions of adult and old-age population.

Series B gives a higher and more realistic projection taking into consideration the more likely changes in mortality, fertility and migration. As described in Table 5.3 this projection yields a total population of 26.5 million by 1986 and 31.4 million by 2001. In terms of rates, the annual growth increases from 1.3% in 1971 to 1.4% in 1986, and then it decreases, reaching 1.0% by 2001. The growth rate is expected to be higher than the 1971 rate until 1986 when the fertility rate will reach the lowest level assumed.

## 5.2 Population distribution

### 5.2.1 Provincial and sub-provincial areas

Decennial and quinquennial censuses of Canada make possible periodic assessments of the size and location of the nation's human resources. They provide data on the distribution of population for many types of geographical, political, and statistical entities. Used as benchmarks, the census counts enable annual estimates to be made for some of the larger areas (e.g., provinces, counties, metropolitan areas). A small selection of these data is presented in this Section, embodying results of the 1971 Census and later estimates for 1972 where applicable.

**Provincial trends, 1951-71.** The growth of Canada's population has not been uniformly distributed among the provinces. The distributions for the 1951-71 period are presented in Table 5.4 and they show substantial variations in rates of growth. This is evident from the number of provinces with higher or lower growth rates compared with the national average. Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and the Northwest Territories had growth rates higher