

### 5.3 Demographic and social characteristics

This Section provides data on the general demographic and social characteristics of the population which were available at the end of 1972 from the most recent 1971 Census of Canada. In certain instances, comparisons with earlier census periods are included. Where they are not, such figures can generally be obtained from the relevant reports of previous censuses.

#### 5.3.1 Sex, age and marital status

The age and sex composition represents the most fundamental of the attributes of a given population. Along with marital status, these variables are primarily a function of vital trends: births, deaths, marriages, and dissolutions of marriages. Social and economic factors, by their effects on vital events and migration, influence these characteristics as well. An unbroken series of census data is available as far back as the first Census of Canada in 1871, although only recent trends are summarized here.

**Sex ratios.** The relatively short demographic history of the Canadian population has been characterized by an excess of males, although this excess has nearly disappeared in recent years. Over the past century the sex ratio (i.e., number of males per 100 females) for Canada reached a peak of 113 in 1911 following a decade of heavy immigration in which males have traditionally predominated. By 1971 the sex ratio had almost evened out at 100.2 which represented only 22,425 more males than females in a total population of over 21.5 million (Table 5.12). In the older settled provinces east of Manitoba the sex ratio has varied between Nova Scotia's 104 in 1911, and Quebec's and Ontario's 1971 ratio of 99. In the western provinces, which were being rapidly settled in the early years of this century, the sex ratio has ranged between Alberta's 1911 high of 149 and Manitoba's 1971 figure of 100.

**Age structure.** The age composition of the Canadian population is, of course, a reflection of past trends in vital rates and immigration. The lower birth rates of the 1961-71 period compared to those of the 1950s have had a tremendous impact on the population under 15 years of age in 1971. This age group decreased by 211,000 or 3.2% between 1966 and 1971 compared with a gain of 399,800 or 6.4% in the 1961-66 period. As a result the proportion that this age group formed of the total population fell from 34.0% in 1961 to 29.5% in 1971 (Table 5.13).

The population of working age (generally regarded as those 15-64) increased substantially, with a gain in excess of 1,559,000 or 13.1% in the 1966-71 period. This age group comprised 62.3% of the total population in 1971 compared with 59.4% of the total population in 1966 and 58.4% in 1961. Of the total 1961-71 increase in the 15-64 age group, 49.8% of the gain occurred in the 15-24 age group. This young adult age group in 1971 is, of course, the cohort of children born in the high-birth-rate years following World War II. The proportion of persons 65 years of age or over was approximately the same (roughly 8%) in 1971 as in 1961 and 1966.

The latest estimates of the population by age group and sex are shown in Table 5.14 for Canada and the provinces as at June 1, 1972. The method followed in preparing these estimates was much the same as that used in calculating the population estimates described in Section 5.2.1. These estimates are subject to revision when data from the next census in 1976 become available.

**Marital status.** Analyses of the trends and size of the single, married, widowed and divorced segments of the population assume their most revealing aspects when these categories are observed in relation to their distributions at different age levels and by sex. Table 5.15 shows these three fundamental demographic characteristics in relationship to each other, based on results of the 1971 Census. The figures show, for example, such imbalances as the far greater numbers of single males than single females at the younger age levels and the reverse for widows as compared to widowers in the older age groups. The former condition results from the generally earlier ages of marriage for females, and the latter is due to the longer life expectancy of females as well as the greater tendency for widowers to remarry.

Among the recent trends in the marital status structure is the steady decrease, since 1951, in the number of married females in the child-bearing ages in relation to the total married