

women of all ages. This is possibly one of the contributing factors to the sharply declining birth rates in recent years. In 1971, 59.7% of all married females were in the age group 15-44, compared to 61.2% in 1966, 62.9% in 1961, and 64.0% in 1951.

One of the most striking changes revealed by the 1971 Census compared to the previous one in 1966 is the large increase in the number of divorced persons over the 1966-71 period, reflecting in part recent relaxations in the divorce laws. Divorced persons of all ages in 1971 increased to almost three times the size of the 1966 figure (from 64,776 to 175,115). The age group 15-24 experienced the greatest relative increase, but the actual numbers were small compared to most older groups. Moreover, the total number of divorced persons still represented fewer than 1% of Canada's population in 1971. (See also Section 5.8.2.)

5.3.2 Language characteristics

In the 1971 Census, three questions were asked on the languages of the Canadian people. Two of these represented the more traditional census inquiries: one on mother tongue (the language first spoken in childhood and still understood) and the other on official language (the ability to speak English, French, or both languages). These were augmented in 1971 by a third question concerned with the language most often spoken at home. Final figures on official language and the new inquiry on language spoken at home were not available in time for this edition but may be obtained from relevant reports of the 1971 Census. Preliminary data are given in Tables 5.16 and 5.18.

Mother tongue. Summary figures on mother tongue are presented in Table 5.16 which shows the principal languages reported under this concept at the 1971 Census with comparative figures for 1961. It may be noted that the proportion of the Canadian population reporting English mother tongue increased from 58.5% in 1961 to 60.2% in 1971, while the percentage reporting French declined from 28.1 to 26.9. Italian, Greek, Chinese, and Portuguese were others showing significant advances in the ten-year period, while Ukrainian, German, Netherlands, Polish and Yiddish were among the larger groups registering declines.

In addition to providing information on the basic linguistic affiliations of the Canadian people, mother tongue data obtained at decennial censuses form the statistical basis for the creation of Bilingual Districts under the Official Languages Act. For this reason, Table 5.17 is of interest in showing the number and proportion of the population reporting English or French as their mother tongue, by province. The relative gains in English mother tongue over the 1961-71 period occurred mostly in the western provinces at the expense of other mother tongues such as Ukrainian, German and Polish, as the descendants of earlier immigrants now report English as their mother tongue to a greater extent than in previous decades.

Official language. Table 5.18 shows preliminary 1971 Census figures on the population reporting the ability to speak one or both of Canada's two official languages, with comparative data for 1961. This Table indicates that in 1971 a total of 67.1% were able to speak English only, 18.0% French only, and 13.4% were bilingual. These ratios represent a slight increase in the proportion of the population able to speak both English and French over 1961, when the percentage was 12.2.

Language spoken in the home. The new inquiry on language most often spoken at home was introduced in the 1971 Census on the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism and other groups. It adds a new dimension and insight into the languages of Canada since some persons, particularly immigrants, do not use either of the two official languages as the one they speak most often in their homes. Conversely, many others with a non-English mother tongue may no longer employ their mother tongue for this purpose. Preliminary results of the 1971 Census in Table 5.16 indicate that 67.0% of the population spoke English most often in their homes, whereas only 60.2% reported English as their mother tongue.

5.3.3 Ethnicity, religion, birthplace

A population made up of diverse ethnic groups, religious affiliations and countries of birth gives rise to political, social and economic problems quite different in nature from a country with a more homogeneous composition. It is equally true that different backgrounds lend variety and diversity to the national life. Because of the varied nature of Canada's population, the measurements provided by decennial censuses on such subjects as ethnic and religious composition are of widespread interest and in continuous demand. Since the final