

4.1.2 Recent trends

The beginning of the present century witnessed a flood of immigrants which helped to raise the growth rate to 3.0% per annum during 1901-11, the highest rate recorded since 1851. Over 1.5 million immigrants entered Canada in this decade, as many as had arrived during the previous 40 years. As a result, over 44% of the total population increase during this period was due to migration gain.

Following the phenomenal increase during 1901-11, the intercensal rate of increase dropped during each successive decade until it reached a low of 10.9% during 1931-41 when the reduced birth rates during the economic depression seriously affected population growth. Moreover, immigration during this period was negligible, and as a result there was a net migration loss of about 92,000 persons.

After 1941, the population again registered an accelerated growth, reaching a near-record rate of expansion of 30.2% in 1951-61, nearly three times the rate of increase in 1931-41. Part of the accelerated increase in population after 1941 was accounted for by the addition of Newfoundland in 1949 but the surge in birth rates (commonly referred to as the "baby boom") and the upswing in immigration during the immediate postwar years were the main factors of growth during the period.

After 1956 a steady decline in population growth occurred, reaching a rate of 1.5% per annum in 1966-71. This gradual fall in the growth rate in recent years — the lowest except the depression decade — has evoked special interest mainly because it occurred after the growth 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 (1972-73) 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.

4.1.3 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 fewer 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 4.3 summarizes for Canada as a whole the results of the most recent population projections for Canada and the provinces prepared under different assumptions of fertility and migration. These projections replace earlier ones which were shown in the *1974 Canada Year Book*. For a full account of the methodology and results of these projections, see *Population projections for Canada and the provinces, 1972-2001*, Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 91-514.

Projection A uses the highest fertility assumption of 2.60 children by 1985, and a net migration gain of 100,000 a year. Under these assumptions, the total population will increase from 21.6 million in 1971 to 27.8 million in 1986 and will reach 34.6 million by 2001. On the other hand, Projection C is a low projection based on an assumed total fertility rate for Canada