(commonly referred to as the baby boom) and the upswing in immigration during the immediate post-war years were the main factors.

After 1956 population growth declined from an average 2.8% per annum in 1951-56 to 1.5% in 1966-71. This gradual fall in the growth rate, the lowest except during the depression decade, has evoked special interest mainly because it occurred after the peak of 3.3% in 1956-57 and at a time when the economic outlook was favourable for high growth rates. Despite this trend, with a further drop to 1.3% per annum in 1971-76, Canada still ranks as one of the industrialized countries with the fastest population growth. During the 12-month period following the 1976 Census, the Canadian population increased by 298,500 persons, at a rate nearly equalling the average for the five-year period 1971-76, despite a decrease in the number of immigrants entering Canada.

4.1.3 Future prospects

The dominant component of population growth in Canada since 1851 has been natural increase (births minus deaths). This trend is likely to continue with a modest contribution from migration. Of the two components of natural increase, 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 to the effects of such fluctuations. For example, although the post-war 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 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 total fertility rate of 2.19 births (1971), which is close to the replacement level of 2.13 births under existing mortality conditions, will remain constant, fall or rise. 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 the results of population projections for Canada and the provinces prepared under different assumptions of fertility and migration. 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 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 would increase from 21.6 million in 1971 to 27.8 million in 1986 and 34.6 million by 2001. On the other hand, projection C is a low projection based on an assumed fertility rate of 1.80 by 1985, and a net migration gain of 60,000 a year. This projection yields a total population of 25.4 million by 1986 and 28.4 million by 2001.

These projections indicate that after a short phase of increase in the population growth rate (between 1976 and 1986), the rate will gradually decline toward the end of the century to about 1.3% per annum according to projection A, and to 0.6% under projection C. The slowdown in population growth and fertility rates will cause some aging of Canada's population. With an upward shift in the age structure, there will be a steady decline in the child-dependency ratio and an increase in the old age dependency ratio.

4.2 Population distribution

Decennial and quinquennial censuses of Canada make possible periodic assessments 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 such as