

**Age structure.** Age composition is a reflection of past trends in vital rates and immigration. Lower birth rates of the 1961-76 period compared with those in the 1950s had a great impact on the population under 15 years of age in 1976. This group decreased by 485,000 or 7.6% between 1971 and 1976, compared with a loss of only 3.2% in 1966-71 and a gain of 6.4% in 1961-66 (the 1971-76 increase of the total population was 6.6%). The proportion of the age group 0-14 in the total population fell from 29.6% in 1971 to 25.6% in 1976 (Table 4.13).

The adult population (generally regarded as 15-64 years) increased substantially, with a gain of 1,651,000 or 12.3% in the 1971-76 period. This group comprised 65.6% of the total population in 1976 compared with 62.3% in 1971 and 59.4% in 1966.

The growth of the junior working ages (20-34) is of particular significance in the context of Canada's employment situation. In 1976 the count for this population group was 5,754,000, compared with 4,779,000 in 1971, a 20.4% increase. Furthermore, of the total 1971-76 population increase of 1,424,000 persons, the increase in the junior working ages accounts for as much as 68.5%. This group in 1976 corresponds mainly to the children born in the high-birth-rate years following World War II.

The aged population, persons 65 and over, increased 14.8% in the period 1971-76 from 1,744,000 to 2,002,000. In 1976 the proportion of aged persons in the total population was 8.7%, compared with 8.1% in 1971.

The population by age group and sex as at June 1, 1976 is shown in Table 4.14.

**Marital status.** The marital status composition of the 1976 population of Canada indicates increasing proportions of persons married (1976, 47.7%; 1971, 45.3%) and divorced (1976, 1.3%; 1971, 0.8%); a decreasing proportion of persons never married (1976, 46.4%; 1971, 49.5%); and a fairly stable proportion of persons widowed (1976, 4.5%; 1971, 4.4%). Generally, these trends also apply to each sex separately.

The most dramatic change concerns Canada's divorced population, the number of whom increased from 175,100 in 1971 to 302,500 in 1976 (a 73% increase); particularly, the number of divorced females increased from 100,800 in 1971 to 183,500 in 1976 (an 82% increase). This trend, the beginning of which was observed in 1971, reflects the more liberal divorce laws of 1968.

The overwhelming preponderance of females among widowed persons (widows, 853,900 or 82%; widowers, 189,700 or 18%) is a consequence mainly of higher age-specific rates of both mortality and remarriage among males than among females.

Analyses of marital status composition are most instructive when conducted in conjunction with sex and age, as in Table 4.15. Two major findings follow.

The years 1971-76 saw a decline in the proportion of married persons in the age range 25-34 and a corresponding increase in the proportion of single persons in that age range. (Data by quinquennial age group confirm this finding for virtually the entire young adult population.) The implication of this finding is that the 1971-76 increase in the proportion married in the population as a whole (as noted above) is a consequence of the changing age structure, rather than of a tendency to marry at a younger age. The same applies to the 1971-76 decrease in the proportion single in the population as a whole.

In connection with the recent decline in birth rates, the percentages of married women in the prime child-bearing ages 20-39 are: 1976, 11.6%; 1971, 10.6% and 1966, 10.2%. (Table 4.15 reports the figures for the age group 25-34, which show a similar trend.) That birth rates have been declining even though the population in the prime child-bearing group has increased further emphasizes the drop in birth rates over the last decade.

### 4.3.2 Language

In the 1976 Census, a question on language asked for mother tongue, the language first spoken in childhood and still understood, with spaces to mark English, French, German, Italian, Ukrainian, or other languages.

**Mother tongue.** Summary figures on mother tongue in Table 4.16 show the principal languages reported in the 1976 Census with comparative figures for 1971. The