

## Population growth

4.1

The most fundamental fact about a population is its rate of growth which affects almost every aspect of the national life. The opening up of a new continent and the gradual evolution of an industrial and urban economy form the historical background for population growth in Canada. Several demographic elements have combined to produce this growth: births, deaths, immigration and emigration, which are the processes, or components, of population change.

### The early period

4.1.1

The population of the area now known as Canada (excluding Newfoundland) grew from a handful of French colonists in the early 17th century and an unknown number of native Indians and Inuit to about 2.4 million in 1851 and 3.7 million at the first Census of Canada in 1871. Estimates suggest that there were about 136,000 Indians in 1851.

In the early settlement years the immigrant population grew rapidly while the native population remained almost stationary or declined as a result of warfare and disease. Between 1681, when the number of settlers passed the 10,000 mark, and 1851 the average annual growth rate of the non-native population in each decade varied between 1.6% and 4.5%; the average annual growth rate for the whole period was 3.2%.

The decade 1851-61 was one of surging expansion, with an average annual growth rate of 2.9% (Table 4.1). About 23% of the population increase was due to net migration; over 350,000 immigrants arrived and there was little emigration. A long period of slow growth followed. Between 1861 and 1901 the average annual growth rate was closer to 1% due to heavy emigration resulting in a net migration loss (Table 4.2). Emigrants included elements of both the Canadian and foreign-born populations. While many immigrants continued to come to Canada, a large number re-emigrated to the United States where prospective settlers found more favourable economic and climatic conditions. The westward movement in the United States attracted not only settlers from many parts of that country, but from Canada as well.

### Recent trends

4.1.2

The beginning of the present century witnessed a flood of immigrants which helped raise the growth rate to 3% a year during 1901-11. Over 1.5 million immigrants entered Canada in this decade, as many as had arrived during the previous 40 years, and over 44% of the population increase was due to migration gain.

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

After 1941, population growth again accelerated, reaching a near-record expansion rate of 30.2% in 1951-61, nearly three times that in 1931-41. Part of the increase was due to the addition of Newfoundland in 1949, but the surge in birth rates and the upswing in immigration during the immediate post-war years were the main factors.

After 1956 population growth declined from an average rate of 2.8% a year in the 1951-56 intercensal period to 2.5% in 1956-61, then to 1.9% in 1961-66 and 1.5% in 1966-71. The average annual rate of population growth dropped further in the 1971-76 intercensal period to 1.3%. Preliminary postcensal population estimates indicate that this gradual decline has continued following the 1976 Census. By July 1, 1979 Canada's estimated population was 23,690,500, an increase of 191,600 over July 1978.

### Future prospects

4.1.3

The dominant component of population growth in Canada since 1851 has been natural increase (births minus deaths). Although this trend is likely to continue for some time,