

migration is assuming an increasingly important role as the rate of natural increase declines. The birth rate will continue to be a dynamic and crucial factor of growth. Moreover, fluctuations in birth rates can create major economic and social problems. 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.

The tempo of future growth depends mainly on whether the total fertility rate, which is now below the replacement level of 2.1 births, will remain constant, fall or rise. A fertility rate below the replacement level does not mean that Canada will soon begin to decline. Calculations show that even if the fertility rate continued to decline to a level of 1.7 births per woman by 1991 and net migration were zero, the population would continue to grow until about the year 2010, when the death rate would exceed the birth rate and the population would begin to decline. The long period of continued 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 two of four new population projections for Canada prepared under different assumptions of fertility and migration. The two are based on the highest and lowest fertility assumptions used in the four projections. For a full account of the methodology and results of the projections, see *Population projections for Canada and the provinces, 1976-2001* (Statistics Canada Catalogue 91-520).

Projection 1 uses the highest fertility assumption of 2.1 children per woman by 1991, and a net migration gain of 100,000 a year. Under these assumptions, the total population would increase from 22.9 million in 1976 to 28.1 million in 1991 and 30.9 million by 2001. On the other hand, projection 4 is a low growth projection based on an assumed fertility rate of 1.7 by 1991, and a net migration gain of 50,000 a year. This projection yields a total population of 26.5 million by 1991 and 28.1 million by 2001. Extensions of these projections beyond the year 2001 indicate that, under these assumptions, the population would be between 37 million and 29.4 million by 2026.

These projections indicate that the rate of population growth is expected to decline. During the 25-year period 1976-2001, the population of Canada would increase by between 22% and 35% of its actual size compared to a growth of 64% during 1951-76. Past fluctuations in the fertility rate and a continued slowdown in population growth will result in an aging of Canada's population. By 2001, 11% to 12% of Canada's population is expected to be 65 or over compared to under 9% in 1976. During the first quarter of the next century aging will be even more pronounced as the baby boom cohorts reach retirement age. By 2026 between 16% and 19% of the population may be 65 or over.

At the provincial level past growth rates have varied both over time and from one area to another primarily due to differences in fertility and migration. As natural increase declines and differences between the provinces narrow, migration plays an increasingly important role in shaping the geographic distribution of the population. Although there is general agreement that migration is the outcome of a variety of demographic, socio-economic and political factors, there is a lack of systematic knowledge on the determinants of the volume of migration and its fluctuations over time. Consequently there is much uncertainty concerning future growth patterns.

## 4.2 Population distribution

Decennial and quinquennial censuses of Canada make possible periodic assessments of the nation's social and economic conditions and provide data on the distribution of population for many types of geographical, political and statistical areas. Used as benchmarks, the census counts enable annual estimates to be made for provinces, counties and metropolitan areas.

**Decennial census.** The basic legal reason for the decennial census is to enable a redistribution of seats in the House of Commons. Under the terms of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, the census must provide population counts by electoral districts. Those from the 1976 Census of Canada are shown in Chapter 3, Tables 3.4 and