

The richest source of information on the socio-economic condition of Canadian society is the Census of Population conducted every five years. Canadian Social Trends will be highlighting some of the key trends observed in data released from the 2006 Census.

Think of Canada and what tends to come to mind are wilderness scenes and wide-open spaces. However, the Canadian population is becoming increasingly urbanized. In 2006, 80% of all Canadians lived in an area classified as urban, up from 78% in 1996 and 76% in 1986. The fact that four out of five Canadians currently live in an urban area represents a great shift from earlier years in the 20th century. Before the Second World War, for example, just over half the Canadian population was urbanized.

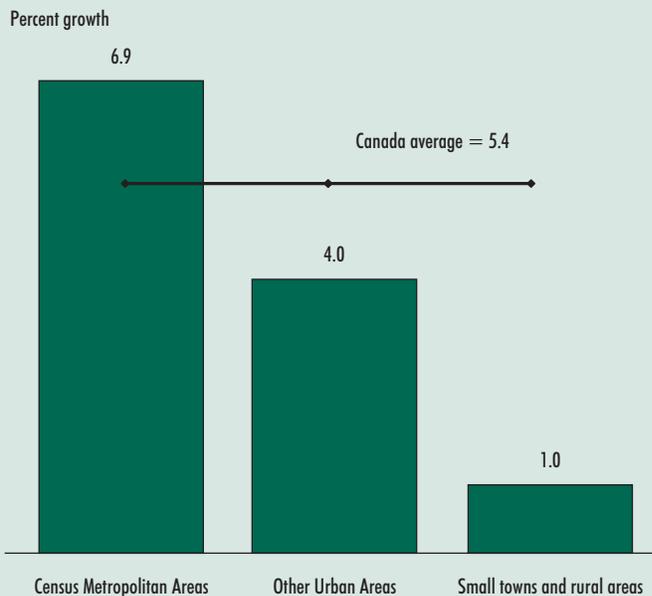
Census quick fact

As of May 16, 2006, the population of Canada stood at 31.6 million. This represented an increase of 5.4% from 2001, a faster rate of growth than the previous five-year period when the population rose by 4.0%. The current population growth rate, though, is still considerably slower than in the period following the World War II. From 1956 to 1981, for example, the average growth of the Canadian population was around 9% in each five-year intercensal period.

Most of the recent increase in the urbanization of the Canadian population is accounted for by the country's largest urban areas. Almost 90% of the total population in growth in Canada since 2001 has occurred in the country's 33 census metropolitan areas (CMA). Overall, between 2001 and 2006, the population living in one of the country's CMAs rose by almost 7%, compared with 4% in other urban centres and just 1% in small towns and rural areas.

As a result, as of 2006, 68% of the Canadian population lived in a CMA. Moreover, the majority of CMA inhabitants (45% of the total population) lived in one of the six largest CMAs – that is, either Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, Ottawa-Gatineau, Calgary or Edmonton. And these six urban areas accounted for two-thirds of population growth in the past 5 years. In fact, between 2001 and 2006, the population of the country's six largest CMAs grew by almost 8%, double the rate for the other CMAs (4%) over the same period.

Urban-rural variation in population growth across Canada, 2001 to 2006



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2001 and 2006.

(A census metropolitan area is an urban area with a population of at least 100,000, including an urban core with a population of at least 50,000. Canada now has 33 CMAs, up from 27 in 2001. The six new CMAs are Moncton, Barrie, Guelph, Brantford, Peterborough and Kelowna.)

Overall, the population of the Toronto CMA is now over 5 million, while 3.6 million people live in Montréal, over 2 million in Vancouver, and just over one million in each of Ottawa-Gatineau, Calgary and Edmonton.

Calgary and Edmonton, whose populations exceeded one million for the first time in the 2006 census, are Canada's fastest growing major urban areas. Between 2001 and 2006, the population of Calgary grew by 13%, and that of Edmonton by 10%. There were also substantial population increases in Toronto (9%), Vancouver (7%), Ottawa-Gatineau (6%) and Montréal (5%).

While the largest metropolitan areas account for most of the overall population growth in Canada in recent years, a number of smaller cities have also grown substantially. Between 2001 and 2006, for example, the population of

CST Census snapshot of Canada — Urbanization — continued

Okotoks, Alberta, which is nestled in the Sheep River Valley just south of Calgary, rose by 47%, while other Alberta communities recording increases of over 20% included Wood Buffalo (24%), Red Deer (22%) and Grande Prairie (22%). The population was also up 19% in Barrie, one of Canada's newest

CMAs, while there were increases of 13% in Lloydminster on the Alberta-Saskatchewan border, and in Yellowknife.

For more information on census population and dwelling counts, or about the Census in general, visit the Census website at <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census/index.cfm>.