



Number of births up for sixth year in a row: StatsCan

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It's not a baby boom. It's not even enough to replace our own numbers. But more so than other parts of the developed world, Canadian women are becoming moms.

The number of births in Canada rose in 2008 for the sixth consecutive year, according to data released Wednesday.

In 2008, there were 377,886 live births in Canada. That number reflects a rise in every province and territory other than the Northwest Territories.

The rise in births seems to be slowing down, however, with a 2.7% increase in 2008, down from rises of 3.6% and 3.7% in the previous two years, Statistics Canada said.

That reflects a total fertility rate in 2008 of 1.68 children per woman - the highest total fertility rate on record since 1992, when it was 1.69.

While the rate is still "well below" the generational replacement level of 2.1 children per woman - the rate to replace the country's population in the absence of migration - it is still above other developed nations such as Italy at 1.39, and Japan at 1.21.

The numbers in Canada can be attributed to more women reaching their late 20s and early 30s, the ages at which the likelihood women will have a child is highest, said David Foot, an economics professor at the University of Toronto.

Foot, the author of *Boom, Bust, Echo*, a book about Canadian demographics in the 21st century, says that the recent growth in the number of births can be expected to continue for the next decade or so, as the children of the echo generation reach child-bearing age.

The echo generation are those born to baby boomers, who themselves were born in the post-war period between 1947 and 1966.

"This is the echo of the echo, the grandchildren of the baby boomers," Foot says.

In part, the rise in the national fertility rate can be attributed to a rise in the fertility rate in Quebec, Foot said. More than a third of the total increase in births in 2008 (35%) came from Quebec, StatsCan said. There have been more births there "primarily because of expanded child care," Foot said.

The continued increase in the number of births is likely to have "big implications" for child care in the next four or five years, before going on to affect elementary school enrolments as children grow older, Foot said.

And although the fertility rate is below the generational replacement level, immigration compensates for a fewer births than at other times in the country's history.

"The population of Canada would still be growing without immigration, but at a slower pace," Foot said.

An ideal fertility rate is somewhere between 1.6 and 2.6 births per 1,000 women, Foot said.

A society with too few children can't afford the costs of caring for its aging population, and a society with too many children will suffer from political instability because there won't be enough jobs for them all, Foot said.

Canada, with a fertility rate of 1.6, is on the right track.

"I think our position's very good," Foot said. "Canada's demographic future is considerably better than most of Western Europe and Japan, and Southeast Asia."