

Article

2011 Census analysis: What does the 2011 Census tell us about Inter-ethnic Relationships?

We examine couples (either married, in a civil partnership, or cohabiting) who each identify with a different ethnic group. This analysis explores some of the different factors that may affect the number of inter-ethnic relationships, including ethnic group, gender, age, type of relationship and dependent children. Exploring inter-ethnic relationships provides further insight into the patterns and trends of an increasingly ethnically diverse population. In 2011 nearly 1 in 10 people who were living as part of a couple were in an inter-ethnic relationship, an increase from 2001.

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1 . Key points

- Nearly 1 in 10 people (9% or 2.3 million) who were living as part of a couple were in an inter-ethnic relationship in England and Wales in 2011. This has increased from 7% in 2001
- People from the Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups were most likely to be in an inter-ethnic relationship (85%)
- Outside the Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups, White Irish (71%), Other Black (62%) and Gypsy or Irish Travellers (50%) were the most likely to be in an inter-ethnic relationship
- White British (4%) were least likely to be in inter-ethnic relationships, followed by Bangladeshi (7%), Pakistani (9%) and Indian (12%) ethnic groups
- The biggest difference between the sexes was found with the Chinese group, where women were almost twice as likely (39%) to be in an inter-ethnic relationship as men (20%)
- Of all people in inter-ethnic relationships, 4 in 10 (40%) included someone who was White British - the most common being between Other White and White British (16%)
- People who were married (or in a civil partnership) were less likely to be in an inter-ethnic relationship than people who were co-habiting (8% compared with 12%)
- Some 7% of dependent children lived in a household with an inter-ethnic relationship
- Pakistani (3%), Indian (3%) and Bangladeshi (2%) dependent children were least likely to live in a household with an inter-ethnic relationship

2 . Introduction

The [2011 Census](#) has shown that the population in England and Wales has become more ethnically diverse and all minority groups¹ (with the exception of White Irish) have increased in number since 2001. In 2011, 1.2 million people (2% of the population) identified themselves with a mixed or multiple ethnicity, increasing from 660,000 (1%) in 2001. These Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups have the youngest age profile of all the ethnic groups. For example, 45% of the Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups were aged under 16, compared with 19% of the overall population.

These earlier ethnicity statistics from the 2011 Census focused on the individual. To provide a wider picture of ethnic diversity we can look at mixed ethnicities within the household. This article therefore examines inter-ethnic relationships of all people who are in a couple. Inter-ethnic relationships are defined here as a relationship between people living in a couple who are married, in a civil partnership, or cohabiting and each partner identifies with an ethnic group different from the other partner (within any of the 18 ethnic group classifications used in the census). For example, if someone who identified as Black Caribbean and someone who identified as White British were in a relationship then that would be an inter-ethnic relationship. An inter-ethnic relationship can also be between groups within the broad ethnic group categories, such as someone who was a Gypsy or Irish Traveller and someone who was White British.

Exploring inter-ethnic relationships provides further insight into the patterns and trends of an increasingly ethnically diverse population and how ethnic identities are changing over time.

The analysis explores some of the different factors which may affect the number of inter-ethnic relationships including ethnic group, gender, age, type of relationship and dependent children. There are likely to be other factors that affect inter-ethnic relationships (such as religion, geographical concentration, country of birth and length of time in the country) which are not fully considered in detail in this article and would require further analysis.

More details about the definitions used in this article can be found in the background notes.

Notes for introduction

1. Minority groups in most instances are all ethnic groups bar White British which is the largest group.

3 . Patterns of inter-ethnic relationships

In 2011, the total household population in England and Wales aged 16 and over was 44.5 million people; of these, 25.7 million people (58%) were in a relationship living as part of a couple, who were married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting¹.

In 2011, of those living as part of a couple almost 1 in 10 (9%, 2.3 million people) were in an inter-ethnic relationship and 9 in 10 (91%, 23.4 million people) were in a relationship with someone from the same ethnic group.

In 2011, people from the Mixed/Multiple groups were the most likely to be in an inter-ethnic relationship (over 8 in 10 or 195,000 people). The groups most likely to contain people in an inter-ethnic relationship were White and Black Caribbean (88%), followed by White and Asian (87%), Other Mixed (84%) and White and Black African (79%). People from the Mixed/Multiple groups are themselves likely to be the result of inter-ethnic relationships² that have emerged in the last 60 years (from post war immigration patterns). These groups have a much younger age profile than some of the other ethnic groups and 80% of the people in this group were born in the UK.

Outside the Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups there were high rates of inter-ethnic relationships with White Irish and Other Black³. Around 7 in 10 White Irish were in inter-ethnic relationships and around 6 in 10 Other Black. Around half of Gypsy or Irish Travellers were in a relationship with someone outside of their ethnic group.

White British couples were the least likely to be in an inter-ethnic relationship with around 1 in 25 (4%). This in part reflects that the White British group are the largest group (81% of the overall population) and as such have a greater opportunity to be in a relationship with someone who is also White British.

The next least likely were Bangladeshi (7%), Pakistani (9%) and Indian (12%). Cultural, racial and religious differences are likely to play a part in the low rate of people from South Asian backgrounds in inter-ethnic relationships.

Inter-ethnic relationships in England and Wales rose by two percentage points between 2001 and 2011 (7% in 2001 to 9% in 2011). The pattern of people in inter-ethnic relationships across the ethnic groups for 2001 and 2011 was broadly similar. The group that saw the largest change between 2001 and 2011 was Other White where the proportion of people in inter-ethnic relationships decreased by 15 percentage points (from 54% to 39%).

The Other White group is a varied group and it saw the largest growth overall of all ethnic groups between 2001 and 2011 (an increase of 1.1 million, 1.8 percentage points). It contains more recent migrants who have had less time to establish mixed relationships. For example 84% of this group were born outside of the UK and the group included people whose country of birth was Poland, the second largest group of non-UK born residents (which saw an increase of 0.5 million)⁴.

Note that caution is required when comparing ethnic group categories over time. This is because of changes to the wording of the question and the addition of new tick-boxes (further details can be found in background notes or in the questionnaire [comparability report](#)).

Table 1: Overall number and percentage of people (over the age of 16) living as a couple who were in inter-ethnic relationships by ethnic group

England and Wales, 2001 and 2011

	2001		2011	
	Thousands	Percentage	Thousands	Percentage
England and Wales	1,709	7	2,327	9
White				
British	744	3	933	4
Irish	220	65	189	71
Gypsy or Irish Traveller ^{1,2}	-	-	8	50
Other White	355	54	465	39
Mixed/multiple				
White and Black Caribbean	29	91	58	88
White and Black African	13	77	23	79
White and Asian	36	85	59	87
Other Mixed	29	81	55	84
Asian/Asian British				
Indian	50	10	82	12
Pakistani	24	9	39	9
Bangladeshi	7	7	12	7
Chinese ³	22	25	45	31
Other Asian ³	34	33	113	32
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British				
African	29	23	59	22
Caribbean	58	34	73	43
Other Black	12	71	30	62
Other ethnic group				
Arab ¹	-	-	28	35
Any other ethnic group ³	47	50	55	42

Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. No comparable data exists for these groups as they these were new tick boxes introduced for the 2011 Census.

2. The majority of write-in responses for Gypsies and Travellers in 2001 were written under Other White and it is likely that a few may have selected white British or White Irish - though impact is likely to be low as numbers in total for 2001 were around 4,000.

3. Comparability issues exist for these groups between 2001 and 2011. The repositioning of Chinese tick box from Other category to Asian/Asian British category, and the introduction of the Arab category means there is a loss of comparability between 2001 and 2011 data for Chinese and other ethnic group.

Notes for patterns of inter-ethnic relationships

1. [Families in households in England and Wales, 2011](#)
2. The groups are made up of predominantly White and Black Caribbean parents, White and Asian parents, White and Black parents as well as a multitude of Other Mixed/Multiple identities.
3. Other Black is made up of numerous groups that chose to identify with a write-in response under this category and such groups could include anything from Nigerian to Mexican etc. However, as the ethnic group question classifies people according to their own perceived ethnic group and cultural background the same ethnic groups could if they wished to report under any one of the 'Other' write-in categories.
4. [Ethnicity and National Identity in England and Wales, 2011](#)

4 . Differences between men and women in inter-ethnic relationships

In 2011, there were 1.2 million men and 1.2 million women living as part of a couple (who were married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting) in an inter-ethnic relationship. The proportions of men and women in an inter-ethnic relationship were the same (9%).

Overall, the pattern of inter-ethnic relationships was similar for men and women across the ethnic groups. However, there were some differences between sexes for some ethnic groups: the biggest differences were found with the Chinese group where women were twice as likely (39%) to be in an inter-ethnic relationship as men (20%). The next biggest difference was with the Arab group though the reverse was true here where men (43%) were more likely than women (26%) to be in an inter-ethnic relationship. Other Asian women (38%) were also more likely to be in an inter-ethnic relationship than Other Asian men (23%).

Figure 1: Percentage of men and women living as a couple who were in inter-ethnic relationships

England and Wales, 2011

Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

5 . Most common inter-ethnic relationships

The most common type of inter-ethnic relationships in England and Wales included people who were White British and this was the case for every ethnic minority group. In total there were 933,000 people from all ethnic groups that were in an inter-ethnic relationship with a White British person, 4 in 10 (40%) of the total number of people in inter-ethnic relationships.

The most common inter-ethnic relationship was between Other White and White British (366,000 people or 16% of all people in inter-ethnic relationships). Other White is made up of numerous groups, a large proportion include Polish, other Western European and numerous others. Other White is the second largest ethnic group in England and Wales (4% of the overall population).

A closer look at the breakdown of the top three inter-ethnic relationships within each ethnic group can be found in Appendix 1.

Table 2: Top ten most common inter-ethnic relationships; England and Wales, 2011

	Thousands	Percentage
Other White and White British	366	16
White Irish and White British	165	7
Other Asian and White British	63	3
White and Black Caribbean and White British	44	2
Caribbean and White British	43	2
White and Asian and White British	42	2
Indian and White British	40	2
Other Mixed and White British	33	1
Chinese and White British	29	1
Any Other ethnic group and White British	28	1
All other inter-ethnic relationships	1,474	63
Total inter-ethnic relationships	2,327	100

Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics

6 . Differences across age groups

Age is likely to play a factor in inter-ethnic relationships in a number of ways. Older and younger people from different ethnic groups may have different attitudes across the generations. For example, some older people may have more traditional views on inter-ethnic relationships and they were also more likely to have entered into a relationship at a time when England and Wales was less ethnically diverse. Younger people are more likely to have grown up in the UK and exposed to other ethnic groups and to respond to observed changes in society, in terms of increasing diversity (Platt, 2009)¹.

Table 3: Men and Women in Inter-Ethnic Relationships by Age; England and Wales, 2011

	Men		Women	
	Thousand	Percentage	Thousand	Percentage
16 – 24	31	11	55	11
25 – 49	724	12	753	12
50 – 64	272	7	238	7
65+	149	5	105	5
All 16+	1175	9	1151	9

Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics

People in the older age groups (50 to 64 year olds and 65 and over) were less likely to be in an inter-ethnic relationship than those aged 16 to 24 and 25 to 49 (7% and 5% compared to 11% and 12% respectively). A lower proportion of young people aged 16 to 24 were in an inter-ethnic relationship than 25 to 49 year olds. This is affected by the low number of young people living as part of any couple (people of this age are less likely to have formed relationships, only 13% of young people were living as part of any couple in 2011).

Some ethnic groups follow this pattern including White British. However, some different patterns are apparent across ethnic groups:

- The White Other ethnic group follows the opposite pattern with older age groups more likely to be in an inter-ethnic relationship than 16 to 24 year olds.
- 16 to 24 year olds have the highest rates of inter-ethnic partnerships (relative to the other age groups) in a number of ethnic groups, the highest being Other Black (67%), Black Caribbean (65%), Gypsy or Irish Traveller (57%) and Indian (19%).

Figure 2: Inter-ethnic relationships by ethnic group and age band

England and Wales, 2011

Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

Notes for differences across age groups

1. [Platt, 2009](#)

7 . Differences across relationship type

Overall, in 2011, people who were cohabiting were more likely to be in an inter-ethnic relationship than people who were married or in a civil partnership (12% compared with 8%). This was the case for all ethnic groups except Other White where the proportions were the same (39%).

The pattern for inter-ethnic relationships for those married or in a civil partnership and those who were cohabiting was similar to the overall picture of inter-ethnic relationships across the ethnic groups – with the Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups as the most likely and White British the least likely.

The largest differences between people who were married and cohabiting were in the Asian ethnic groups. Bangladeshis who were cohabiting were nearly seven times more likely to be in an inter-ethnic relationship than Bangladeshis who were married or in a civil partnership (39% compared with 6%). Indians (56% compared with 10%) and Pakistanis (41% compared with 8%) were around five times more likely. Two thirds (65%) of Other Asians cohabiting were in an inter-ethnic relationship compared with 28% who were married (or in civil partnership).

In the Other ethnic groups, nearly three quarters of Arabs (72%) and Any Other ethnic groups (74%) cohabiting were in interethnic relationships, compared with almost a third (31%) of Arabs and over a third (37%) of Any Other ethnic group who were married (or in a civil partnership).

The proportion of people in inter-ethnic relationships was lower in 2001, compared to 2011. Some 6% of people who were married in 2001 were in an inter-ethnic relationship compared to 10% who were cohabiting.

Figure 3: Percentage of people who are married and cohabiting who are in inter-ethnic relationships by ethnic group

England and Wales, 2011

Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

8 . Dependent children in multi-ethnic households

This section looks at dependent children living in a multi-ethnic household and where there is an inter-ethnic relationship¹. It also explores how this varies by the child's ethnic group.

There were 11.9 million dependent children in England and Wales in 2011 and around 7% of them lived in a multiple ethnic household where there was an inter-ethnic relationship. 6% lived with couples who were married or in civil partnerships and 1% were cohabiting couples. Similar proportions of dependent children in families with inter-ethnic relationships (6%) have been found in other research (Platt, 2009)².

The majority of dependent children lived in a household with the same ethnic group partnership (67%) – either married and in a civil partnership (54%) or cohabiting (13%) or a lone parent household (26%)³.

Figure 4: All dependent children by family type by whether or not they live in a household with an inter-ethnic partnership

England and Wales, 2011

Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

Looking at the ethnic group of dependent children⁴, it is not surprising that those with Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups were most likely to live in a household with people who had an inter-ethnic relationship. They are likely to have identified with the Mixed/Multiple ethnic group as a result of having parents in an inter-ethnic relationship⁵.

Outside of the Mixed/Multiple group dependent children who identified themselves as Irish (33%), Gypsy or Irish Traveller (16%) Other White (15%) and Any Other ethnic group (15%) were the most likely to live in a household with an inter-ethnic relationship.

Dependent children least likely to live in households where there were inter-ethnic relationships were Bangladeshis (2%), Pakistanis (3%) and Indian (3%).

Figure 5: Ethnic group of children by family type by whether they live in a household with an inter-ethnic partnership

England and Wales, 2011

Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

Notes for dependent children in multi-ethnic households

1. Multiple ethnic household classifies households by the diversity in ethnic group of household members in different relationships – for example, different ethnic groups between generations or within partnerships. Couples in the household in an inter-ethnic relationship may not necessarily be the parents of the dependent children, however, they are likely to be the parents in most cases.
2. [Platt, 2009](#)
3. For this group there was no inter-ethnic relationship to compare but it has been included to show the family type alongside married (or civil partnership) and cohabiting.
4. The ethnicity of children in the 2011 Census will generally have been ascribed by their parents – though this might not have been the case in all instances - it would depend on who completed the form and the age of the child.
5. Children from the Mixed/Multiple group are the result of inter-ethnic partnerships that have predominantly been between people from the 'White British Group and people from ethnic minorities which included children of 'White and Black Caribbean' parents, 'White and Asian' parents and 'White and Black African' parents, as well as a multitude of other Mixed identities. Focus on Ethnicity and Identity, [Who are the 'Mixed' ethnic group? \(372.1 Kb Pdf\)](#)

. References

1. Platt, Lucinda (2009) Ethnicity and family Relationships within and between ethnic groups: An analysis using the Labour Force Survey. Institute for Social & Economic Research, University of Essex.
2. ONS, 2006, Who are the 'Mixed' ethnic group?

. Appendix

This table shows the top 3 inter-ethnic relationships within each ethnic group and the percentage of all people living as a couple within that ethnic group.

Appendix: Top 3 inter-ethnic relationships within each ethnic group; England and Wales, 2011

		Number	Percentage
White			
White British	Other White	366,000	2
	White Irish	165,000	1
	Other Asian	63,000	0
White Irish	White British	165,000	62
	Other White	12,000	4
	Other Asian	2,000	1
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	White British	7,000	43
	Other White	450	3
	White Irish	160	1
Other White	White British	366,000	31
	Other Asian	14,000	1
	White Irish	12,000	1
Mixed/multiple			
White and Black Caribbean	White British	44,000	68
	Black Caribbean	4,000	7
	Other White	3,000	4
White and Black African	White British	13,000	44
	Black African	3,100	11
	Other White	3,000	10
White and Asian	White British	42,000	62
	Other White	5,000	8
	Indian	2,000	3
Other Mixed	White British	33,000	50
	Other White	10,000	15
	Asian Other	2,000	3
Asian/Asian British			
Indian	White British	40,000	6
	Other Asian	11,000	2
	Other White	9,000	1
Pakistani	White British	10,000	2
	Indian	8,000	2
	Other Asian	6,000	2
Bangladeshi	White British	3,000	2
	Bangladeshi	2,000	1
	Indian	2,000	1
Chinese	White British	29,000	20
	Other White	5,000	4
	Other Asian	4,000	3

Other Asian	White British	63,000	18
	Other White	14,000	4
	Indian	11,000	3
Black/African/ Caribbean/Black British			
African	White British	24,000	9
	Other White	10,000	4
	Black Other	7,000	2
Caribbean	White British	43,000	25
	Black African	6,000	4
	White Other	5,000	3
Other Black	White British	11,000	23
	Black African	7,000	14
	Black Caribbean	4,000	9
Other ethnic group			
Arab	White British	12,000	15
	Other White	6,000	8
	Any Other ethnic group	2,000	2
Any Other ethnic group	White British	28,000	22
	Other White	10,000	8
	Other Asian	3,000	2

Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics

. Background notes

1. The Ethnic Group Question

The ethnic group question is a self defined question and has been asked on the England and Wales census since 1991. The number of tick-boxes has grown from nine to eighteen in 2011.

2. Defining an Inter-ethnic Relationship

Inter-ethnic relationships are defined in this article as a relationship between people living in a couple who are married, in a civil partnership, or cohabiting and each partner identifies with an ethnic group different from the other (within any of the 18 ethnic group classifications used in the census). For example, if someone who identified as Black Caribbean and someone who identified as White British were in a relationship then that would be an inter-ethnic relationship. An inter-ethnic relationship can also be between groups within the broad ethnic group categories, such as someone who was a Gypsy or Irish Traveller and someone who was White British.

This analysis uses the full 18 ethnic group classification for analysis. This is for two reasons:

1. The pattern of inter-ethnic relationships is far better understood using all 18 ethnic group classifications - this shows inter-ethnic relationships and the differences between and within the subcategories of the main ethnic groups, thus offering insights into changes in society. Numbers in the census also make analysis at the lower level possible and thus such detail adds more value.
2. Differences in the ethnic group tick-box classifications between the years have affected comparability with some groups. Therefore the detailed ethnic group categories should be used. Comparability issues between 2001 and 2011 include:

Chinese was moved from Other ethnic group to the Asian/Asian British group. This could impact on Asian Other and Asian populations at a broad level. There may also be some impact on responses to the 'White and Asian' tick box under the 'Mixed/multiple ethnic groups' category.

New tick box 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller': Respondents may have identified in 2001 as 'British', 'Irish' or 'Any other White background' but instead use the new tick-box to identify as 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' in 2011.

New tick box Arab: Data from the 2001 Census suggested that many British Arabs ticked one of the 'Other' categories.

Further details of comparisons between the question in 2001 and 2011 can be found in the [comparability report](#).

3. All people living as a couple

Analysis includes all people living as a couple who are married, in a civil partnership, or cohabiting. Data are not available for those in civil partnership separately due to the small numbers involved. Civil partnerships were introduced in the UK in December 2005. Therefore they were not present in the comparative 2001 census data. Cohabiting refers to two people living together as a couple but they are not married to each other or in a registered same-sex civil partnership together. This includes people living with a partner of the same sex.

4. Dependent children living in multiple ethnic households

This article analyses data on dependent children living in a multiple ethnic household. This classifies households by the diversity in ethnic group of household members in different relationships – for example, different ethnic groups between generations or within partnerships. It picks out different ethnic groups within partnerships where there is at least one couple in the household who have different ethnic groups. Couples in the household in an inter-ethnic relationship may not necessarily be the parents of the dependent children, however, they are likely to be the parents in most cases.

Dependent children are those aged under 16 living with at least one parent, or aged 16 to 18 in full-time education, excluding all children who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household.

5. Recording children's ethnicity

The ethnicity of children in the 2011 Census will generally have been ascribed by their parents – though this might not have been the case in all instances - it would depend on who completed the form and the age of the child.

6. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gov.uk