

Inter-ethnic unions

Introduction

The size and variety of different ethnic minority communities in England has been reported extensively elsewhere. One issue which is less well covered is the degree to which people live with or marry people from other ethnic groups. This Update aims to highlight the extent to which those unions occur. It begins by outlining the number of inter-ethnic unions in England. It then examines different ethnic groups, looking at both men and women to assess the degree to which people co-habit and marry outside their own ethnic groups. Finally it looks at 1991 data to assess changes over time. Information about data sources and definitions can be found below.

Summary

Inter-ethnic unions form a small proportion of all unions in England as a whole - 7 per cent. Of these inter-ethnic unions, most (87 per cent) included a White British person. Of the inter-ethnic unions between people of different ethnic minority groups the largest were between people who were White Irish and Other White, Indian and Other Asian, Other White and Other, and Black Caribbean and Black African. In terms of proportions, people in Mixed ethnic groups were the most likely to marry or co-habit with someone from a different ethnic group, whilst South Asian people (Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis) were the least likely. In some ethnic groups differences could be seen between the propensity of men and women to marry or co-habit with someone of a different ethnic group. Black Caribbean women and Other Asian women were less likely than men in the same ethnic groups to have married or be co-habiting outside their ethnic group, and Other, Chinese and Other White women were more likely than men in the same ethnic group to have done so. Change since 1991 is difficult to measure because of differences in ethnic categories over time, but analysis does indicate a significant increase in the proportion of inter-ethnic unions over time, although inter-ethnic unions are still a small proportion of overall unions.

Q: Where did the data come from?

This briefing is based upon tables commissioned from the decennial censuses of 2001 and 1991 in England & Wales. Tables used were CO007 from the 2001 Census and LRCT60 from the 1991 Census.

Q: What definitions are used?

'Ethnic minority' in this briefing refers to all ethnic groups apart from the White British group unless otherwise specified. 'Unions' include couples who are both married and co-habiting. An 'inter-ethnic

Table 1 Number in and percentage of same and inter-ethnic group unions, England, 2001

	Percentage	Number
Same ethnic group unions	92.9	10,788,935
Inter-ethnic unions	7.1	823,178
<i>White British & ethnic minority backgrounds</i>	6.1	714,081
<i>Different ethnic minority backgrounds</i>	0.9	109,097
All unions	100.0	11,612,113

Source: 2001 Census Commissioned Table CO007

union' includes people who are married or co-habiting with someone from a different ethnic group using the 2001 Census 16-fold classification.

Q: Are inter-ethnic unions common in England?

Inter-ethnic unions form a small proportion of all unions in England as a whole - 7 per cent (see Table 1). There were 11.6 million couples in England who were either married or cohabiting on census day in 2001. The vast majority of these unions, 93 per cent, were between people from the same ethnic group.

Q: Which ethnic groups had the largest numbers marrying or co-habiting with someone from a different ethnic group?

Seven per cent of unions were between people from different ethnic backgrounds (823,000). Of these inter-ethnic unions, most (714,000 - 87 per cent) included a White British person. In the remaining 109,000 inter-ethnic unions both partners were from different ethnic minority backgrounds.

The most common inter-ethnic unions were between White people from different ethnic groups (see Table 2). These White unions accounted for nearly 60 per cent of all inter-ethnic unions. Over a third (36 per cent) of all inter-ethnic unions were between a White British and a White Other person. The White Other group includes White people who were European (other than British or Irish), Australian, American, South African, Middle Eastern, and South American, as well as many others. The next most common union (23 per cent of all inter-ethnic unions) was between White British and White Irish people.

The next three most common inter-ethnic unions were between White British and Black Caribbean people, White British and Other people, and White British and Indian people.

Table 2 Number and percentage of inter-ethnic unions, England, 2001

	Number	Percentage of all inter-ethnic unions
White British & Other White	297,755	36.2
White British & White Irish	192,175	23.3
White British & Black Caribbean	37,266	4.5
White British & Other	31,600	3.8
White British & Indian	26,271	3.2
White British & Mixed White and Asian	25,026	3.0
White British & Mixed White and Black Caribbean	20,884	2.5
White British & Other Mixed	18,440	2.2
White British & Chinese	15,842	1.9
White British & Black African	12,755	1.5
White British & Other Asian	12,334	1.5
White Irish & Other White	10,747	1.3
White British & Pakistani	9,037	1.1
White British & Mixed White and Black African	7,271	0.9
Indian & Other Asian	6,835	0.8
Other White & Other	5,546	0.7
White British & Other Black	5,218	0.6
Black Caribbean & Black African	5,177	0.6
Other inter-ethnic unions	82,999	10.1
Total inter-ethnic unions	823,178	100.0

Source: 2001 Census Commissioned Table CO007

Q: Which ethnic groups had the highest proportions marrying or co-habiting with someone from a different ethnic group?

People from the Mixed ethnic groups were the most likely to be married to someone outside their ethnic group (see Table 3). All four Mixed ethnic groups had less than a quarter of unions within the same ethnic group. The Mixed White and Black Caribbean group had the lowest level of same ethnic group unions - only 9 per cent were within the same ethnic group. Part of the reason for this may be that the size of these groups are relatively small compared with the size of many of the other ethnic groups and therefore the opportunity for people to meet people in the same ethnic group is more limited. It was also evident that people of mixed ethnicity often form unions with people in ethnic groups which are linked in some way. For example, most people with Mixed White and Black Caribbean ethnicity marry or co-habit with a person who is White British, followed by Black Caribbean, and also Mixed White and Black Caribbean.

After people of Mixed ethnicity, the other groups of people which had 50 per cent or more unions outside their ethnic groups were Other Black (includes many young Black British people), White Irish, Other White (see above for composition) and Other (around half this group were born in the Far East in countries such as Japan and Malaysia, and this category also contains many people from the Middle East, South Asia outside India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and North Africa).

People from South Asian backgrounds were the least likely of the minority ethnic groups to marry or be cohabiting with someone from a different ethnic group. Only 10 per cent of Indians, 9 per cent of Pakistanis, and 7 per cent of Bangladeshis had married or were cohabiting with someone outside their ethnic group.

Although most inter-ethnic unions include a White British person, White British people are the least likely to be married to someone outside their ethnic group - only 3 per cent of White British people had done so in 2001. White British people form the majority population in England and consequently there are fewer opportunities to live with or marry someone from an ethnic minority group. This is particularly

Table 3 Percentage of people in inter-ethnic unions by ethnic group, England, 2001

	% in inter-ethnic unions	% in same ethnic group unions	Total
White British	3.4	96.6	100.0
Bangladeshi	6.7	93.3	100.0
Pakistani	8.9	91.1	100.0
Indian	10.2	89.8	100.0
Black African	22.4	77.6	100.0
Chinese	25.1	74.9	100.0
Other Asian	32.7	67.3	100.0
Black Caribbean	34.1	65.9	100.0
Other ethnic groups	49.8	50.2	100.0
Other White	53.2	46.8	100.0
White Irish	64.6	35.4	100.0
Other Black	70.1	29.9	100.0
Mixed White and Black African	76.6	23.4	100.0
Other Mixed	80.3	19.7	100.0
Mixed White and Asian	84.5	15.5	100.0
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	91.1	8.9	100.0

Source: 2001 Census Commissioned Table CO007

Table 4 Percentage of males and females in each ethnic group who were in same ethnic group unions

	Females	Males
White British	96.9	96.3
White Irish	34.8	36.0
Other White	43.0	51.3
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	8.7	9.1
Mixed White and Black African	23.3	23.5
Mixed White and Asian	14.6	16.4
Other Mixed	18.2	21.4
Indian	89.7	89.9
Pakistani	92.2	90.1
Bangladeshi	93.5	93.1
Other Asian	72.9	62.5
Black Caribbean	71.7	61.0
Black African	81.0	74.5
Other Black	31.7	28.3
Chinese	68.1	83.3
Other ethnic group	41.8	62.9

Source: 2001 Census Commissioned Table CO007

true for people living outside larger cities, where the ethnic minority population can be small.

Q: Were there any differences between men and women?

Patterns of inter-ethnic marriage were fairly similar for men and women for many of the ethnic groups (see Table 4). Exceptions were that Black Caribbean women and Other Asian women were less likely than men in the same ethnic groups to have married or be co-habiting outside their ethnic group, and Other, Chinese and Other White women were more likely than men in the same ethnic group to have done so.

Q: Has there been any change in the level of inter-ethnic unions since 1991?

Data are hard to compare as the ethnic categories included in the 1991 Census are different from those in the 2001 Census. However a comparison can be improved by recalculating figures for 2001 to aggregate the three White groups, White British, White Irish and White Other. When the White ethnic groups are combined 2.8 per cent of the unions in England in 2001 were between people of different ethnic groups, compared with 1.3 per cent for Great Britain in 1991. This does seem to show a substantial rise despite the reservations of slightly different categories and slightly different geographical areas.

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