

## NHS in Brief

# Mixed unions in Canada



## National Household Survey (NHS), 2011



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### Standard symbols

The following symbols are used in Statistics Canada publications:

- . not available for any reference period
- .. not available for a specific reference period
- ... not applicable
- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0<sup>s</sup> value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- P preliminary
- r revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- E use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- \* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)

### Box 1: National Household Survey

This *NHS in Brief* article uses data from the National Household Survey (NHS). Roughly 4.5 million households across Canada were selected for the NHS, representing about one-third of all households.

This article complements the analytical document and the *NHS in Brief* articles released on May 8, 2013, which included [Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada](#), Catalogue no. 99-010-X2011001, [Obtaining Canadian citizenship](#) and [Generation status: Canadian-born children of immigrants](#), Catalogue no. 99-010-X2011003.

Further information on the National Household Survey can be found in the [National Household Survey User Guide](#), Catalogue no. 99-001-X. Specific information on the quality and comparability of NHS data on immigration and ethnocultural diversity can be found in the series of [reference guides](#) for these topics.

## Introduction

In Canada, mixed unions account for a small proportion of all married and common-law couples. However, as Canada's population has become more diversified, their numbers have gradually increased in recent decades.

### Box 2: Concepts and definitions

**Couple** refers to two persons in a marital or common-law relationship who are living in the same dwelling. It includes both opposite-sex and same-sex couples.

Couples in mixed unions can be looked at from different perspectives. For example, it may refer to couples who do not have the same ethnic origin, the same religion, the same language or the same birthplace.

In this article, the concept of mixed union is based on the difference in visible minority status of the two persons in a conjugal relationship. A **mixed union** refers to a couple in which one spouse or partner belongs to a visible minority group and the other does not, as well as a couple in which the two spouses or partners belong to different visible minority groups.

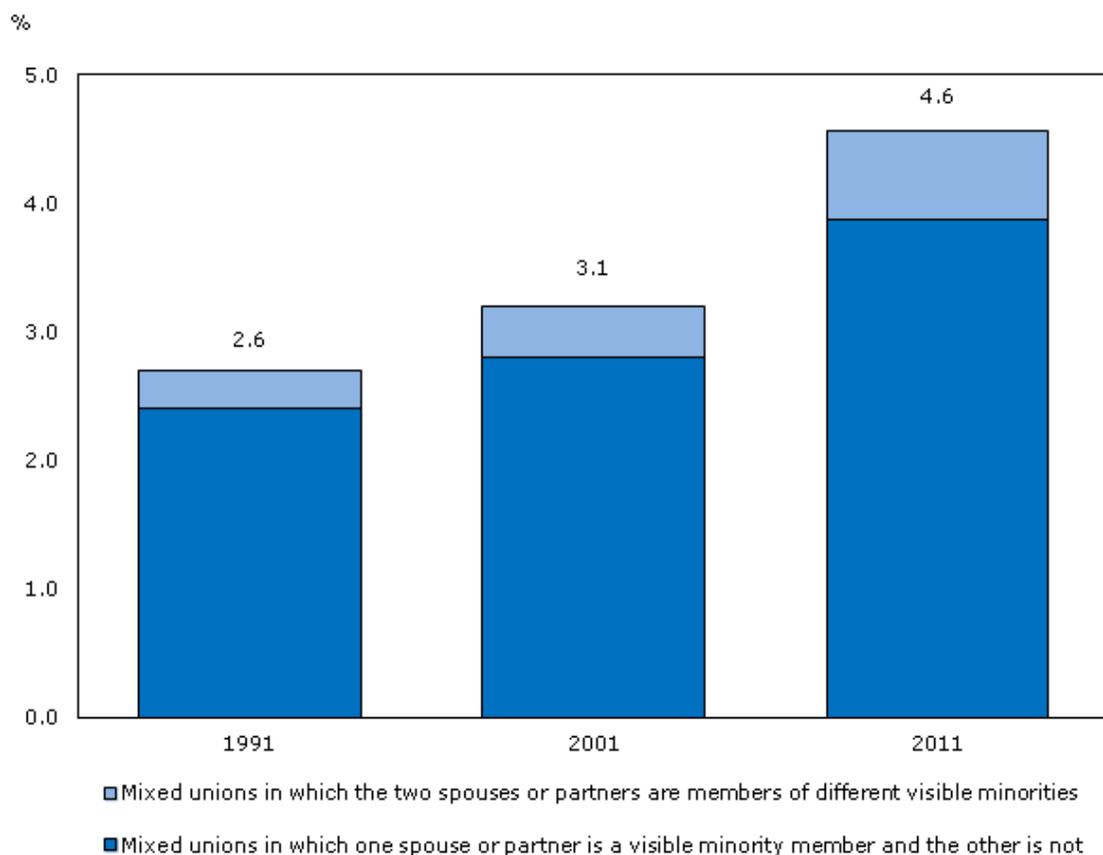
The *Employment Equity Act* defines **visible minorities** as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.

### Increase of mixed unions

According to data from the 2011 National Household Survey, about 360,045 couples, or 4.6% of all married and common-law couples in Canada, were in mixed unions. Of that number, 305,075, or 3.9% of all couples, were composed of one person who was a member of a visible minority and one who was not, while 54,970 couples (0.7% of all couples) involved two persons from different visible minority groups.

Compared with the results from past censuses, the proportion of couples in mixed unions is up. Couples in mixed unions accounted for 2.6% of all couples in 1991, 3.1% of couples in 2001 and 3.9% in 2006.

**Figure 1 Proportion of couples in mixed unions, Canada, 1991 to 2011**



**Source:** Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1991 and 2001; National Household Survey, 2011.

### The proportion of mixed unions varied by visible minority groups

Some visible minority groups have a greater tendency to be in mixed unions than others ([Table 1](#)). In 2011, Japanese were by far the most likely to be in a conjugal relationship with a person from another group. Of the 32,800 couples in which at least one person was Japanese, 78.7% involved a spouse or partner who was not Japanese. Latin Americans (48.2%) and Blacks (40.2%) were the second and third most likely visible minority groups to form mixed unions.

## Mixed unions in Canada

In contrast, the two largest visible minority populations in Canada, South Asians and Chinese, had the smallest proportions of couples involving a spouse or partner from outside their group, at 13.0% and 19.4% respectively.

Size, demographic and ethnocultural composition, geographic distribution, number of generations and years spent in Canada, along with other characteristics, could all contribute to explain the variation in the mixed unions among visible minority groups.

**Table 1 Couples by visible minority group, Canada, 2011**

Visible minority groups	All couples	Mixed unions	Non-mixed unions
	number	percentage	
Japanese	32,820	78.7	21.3
Latin American	112,265	48.2	51.8
Black	167,950	40.2	59.8
Filipino	155,700	29.8	70.2
Arab	94,315	25.4	74.6
Korean	41,370	22.5	77.5
Southeast Asian	74,560	21.9	78.1
West Asian	51,300	19.5	80.5
Chinese	351,640	19.4	80.6
South Asian	407,510	13.0	87.0
Multiple visible minorities <sup>1</sup>	40,415	64.9	35.1
Visible minority, n.i.e. <sup>2</sup>	27,215	52.4	47.6

1. This category includes respondents who reported more than one visible minority group by checking off two or more mark-in circles, e.g., "Black" and "South Asian."

2. The abbreviation 'n.i.e.' means 'not included elsewhere.' This category includes respondents who reported a write-in response such as "Guyanese," "West Indian," "Tibetan," "Polynesian" or "Pacific Islander," etc.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

### Diversity within couples

Most mixed unions are made up of persons born in two different countries. In 2011, nearly half of mixed unions (49.2%) were composed of a person born in Canada and a person born abroad, and 19.4% of mixed unions involved two foreign-born persons from different countries. Couples in which both persons were Canadians by birth accounted for 25.3% of mixed unions, while those in which both members were born in the same country outside Canada represented 6.0% of mixed unions.

In comparison, the vast majority of all couples involved two persons born in the same country. Couples composed of two Canadians by birth represented 66.9% of all married and common-law couples, while the share of couples in which both members were born in the same country outside Canada was 18.2%. Couples composed of two persons from different countries accounted for smaller shares of all couples: 11.2% of couples included one person born in Canada and one born outside Canada, while 3.7% of couples involved persons from two different countries outside Canada.

## Mixed unions in Canada

The majority of persons in conjugal relationships reported the same religion as their spouse or partner. This is also the case for persons in mixed unions, but to a lesser degree. In 2011, couples in which both spouses or partners were from the same broad religious group represented 73.6% of all couples, while couples in which both persons reported having no religious affiliation accounted for 16.6% of couples. In comparison, half of all mixed unions were composed of two persons with the same religion, and in 2 out of 10 mixed unions, both persons reported no religious affiliation.

Couples in mixed unions are less likely than other couples to have learned the same language at home during childhood. In slightly less than half (45.4%) of mixed unions, both members had at least one common mother tongue. In comparison, close to 9 in 10 couples in non-mixed unions had one or more common mother tongue(s).

**Table 2 Percentage distribution of couples by various ethnocultural characteristics, Canada, 2011**

	All couples	Mixed unions	Non-mixed unions
<b>Number of couples in private households</b>	<b>7,888,100</b>	<b>360,045</b>	<b>7,528,050</b>
<b>Country of birth</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0
Both spouses born in Canada	66.9	25.3	68.9
Both spouses born outside Canada in the same country	18.2	6.0	18.8
Spouses born outside Canada in two different countries	3.7	19.4	3.0
One spouse born in Canada, the other in another country	11.2	49.2	9.3
<b>Religion</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0
Same religious affiliation	73.6	52.8	74.6
No religious affiliation for either spouse	16.6	20.4	16.5
One spouse with a religious affiliation, the other with no religious affiliation	8.6	17.3	8.2
Different religious affiliations <sup>1</sup>	1.2	9.5	0.8
<b>Mother tongue</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0
Having one or more common mother tongue(s)	87.6	45.4	89.6
No common mother tongue	12.4	54.6	10.4

1. This category is composed of couples in which the spouses or partners reported an affiliation with two different broad religious groups (e.g., one person is Buddhist, and the other Christian). Differences in affiliations within a broad religious group (e.g., Anglican and Roman Catholic) are not included in this category.

Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

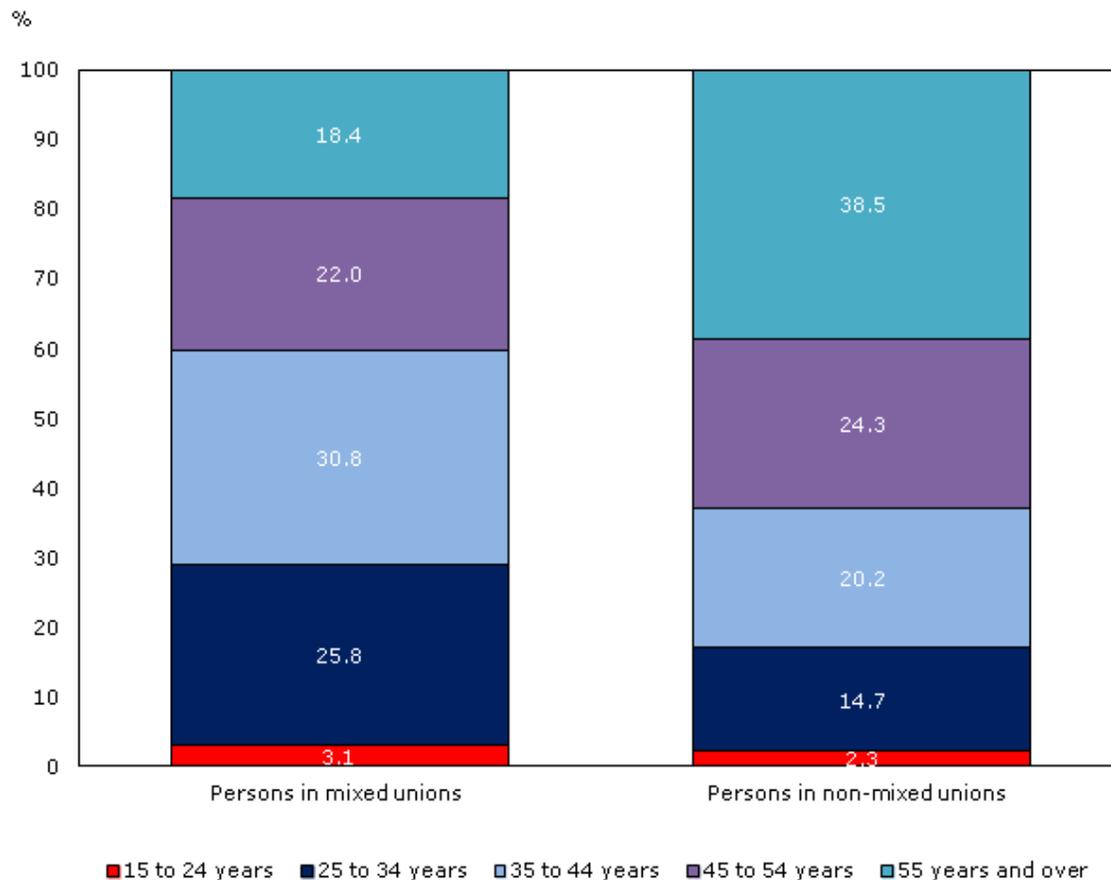
### Persons in mixed unions are more likely to be young

Persons in mixed unions tend to be younger than those in non-mixed unions. In 2011, the median age of persons in mixed unions was 41.6, while the median age for persons in non-mixed unions was 50.3.

The largest share (30.8%) of persons in mixed unions was in the 35 to 44 age group, followed by those in the 25 to 34 age group (25.8%). For persons in non-mixed unions, the largest share (38.5%) was in the 55 and over age group, followed by the 45 to 54 age group (24.3%).

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**Figure 2 Distribution of persons in mixed unions and persons in non-mixed unions by age group, Canada, 2011**



**Source:** Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

In terms of the proportion of all couples, couples in mixed unions are more common in the young generations. In 2011, the highest proportion of couples in mixed unions was among persons aged 25 to 34 (7.7%), followed by those aged 35 to 44 (6.8%) and those aged 15 to 24 (6.1%). In contrast, persons aged 45 to 54 and those aged 55 and over had the smallest proportions of couples in mixed unions, at 4.1% and 2.7% respectively.

### Most couples in mixed unions live in the major census metropolitan areas

Most couples in mixed unions reside in the major census metropolitan areas. In 2011, 6.0% of couples living in one of the 33 census metropolitan areas were in mixed unions, compared with 1.0% of couples living outside such areas. Vancouver and Toronto, the two census metropolitan areas with the largest visible minority populations, also posted the largest numbers and the largest proportions of couples in mixed unions.

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**Table 3 Number and proportion of couples in mixed unions in census metropolitan areas, 2011**

Census metropolitan areas	Total number of couples	Number of couples in mixed unions	Proportion of couples in mixed unions
Vancouver	536,710	51,375	9.6
Toronto	1,259,250	103,025	8.2
Victoria	81,185	5,850	7.2
Calgary	285,210	20,095	7.0
Ottawa - Gatineau	284,855	18,045	6.3
Ottawa - Gatineau (Ontario part)	211,510	15,175	7.2
Ottawa - Gatineau (Quebec part)	73,345	2,870	3.9
Edmonton	267,185	15 915	6.0
Oshawa	84,055	4,725	5.6
Montréal	846,445	43 845	5.2
Winnipeg	162,765	7,975	4.9
Hamilton	168,065	7,520	4.5
London	110,055	4,890	4.4
Kitchener - Cambridge - Waterloo	112,665	4,940	4.4
Barrie	44,030	1,865	4.2
Windsor	72,460	3,050	4.2
Abbotsford - Mission	40,545	1,685	4.2
Guelph	33,830	1,370	4.0
Halifax	91,815	3,665	4.0
Kelowna	45,450	1,765	3.9
Saskatoon	58,720	1,920	3.3
Regina	47,685	1,535	3.2
St. Catharines - Niagara	93,160	2,880	3.1
Kingston	37,635	1,110	2.9
Saint John	30,375	785	2.6
Brantford	31,830	795	2.5
Sherbrooke	46,515	905	1.9
Moncton	34,300	660	1.9
Thunder Bay	28,075	535	1.9
Peterborough	29,000	525	1.8
Québec	182,985	3,230	1.8
Greater Sudbury / Grand Sudbury	39,240	605	1.5
Trois-Rivières	34,990	490	1.4
St. John's	46,995	570	1.2
Saguenay	40,030	210	0.5

Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

### Additional information

Additional information on immigration and citizenship can be found in the [NHS Data Tables](#), Catalogue nos. 99-010-X2011026 through 99-010-X2011035, the [NHS Profile](#), Catalogue no. 99-004-X, as well as in the [NHS Focus on Geography Series](#), Catalogue no. 99-010-X2011005.

For details on the concepts, definitions, universes, variables and geographic terms used in the 2011 National Household Survey, please consult the [National Household Survey Dictionary](#), Catalogue no. 99-000-X. For detailed explanations on concepts and for information on data quality, please refer to the reference guides on the [2011 National Household Survey \(NHS\)](#) website.

### Note to readers

**Random rounding and percentage distributions:** To ensure the confidentiality of responses collected for the 2011 National Household Survey while maintaining the quality of the results, a random rounding process is used to alter the values reported in individual cells. As a result, when these data are summed or grouped, the total value may not match the sum of the individual values, since the total and subtotals are independently rounded. Similarly, percentage distributions, which are calculated on rounded data, may not necessarily add up to 100%.

Due to random rounding, estimates and percentages may vary slightly between different 2011 National Household Survey products, such as the analytical documents and various data tables.

**Comparability between estimates from the 2006 Census long form and the 2011 National Household Survey estimates:** When comparing estimates from the 2006 Census long form and estimates from the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), users should take into account the fact that the two sources represent different populations. The target population for the 2006 Census long form includes usual residents in collective dwellings and persons living abroad whereas the target population for the NHS excludes them. Moreover, the NHS estimates are derived from a voluntary survey and are therefore subject to potentially higher non-response error than those derived from the 2006 Census long form.

### Acknowledgments

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