

# ONS 2014-based Subnational Population Projections: Consultation response from the GLA

February 2016

## Introduction

This document forms the GLA Intelligence Unit's response to ONS's consultation on the 2014-based Subnational Population Projections (SNPP). Details of the consultation process and the accompanying documentation are available on the ONS website<sup>1</sup>.

The SNPP forms the official projection of population for local authorities in England. Each set of subnational population projections forms the basis for an equivalent set of household projections, produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). National Planning Policy Guidance states that these household projections should form the starting point for assessments of housing need used in local plans. It is therefore critical that the SNPP is based on sound methodology, and is accompanied by the necessary documentation and supporting outputs to inform interpretation of the results by users.

## Feedback requested by ONS

ONS have requested feedback on a number of specific areas of the SNPP methodology, outputs and supporting documentation. The GLA's response to this consultation is limited to responding to those specific questions raised by ONS. The questions posed by ONS are listed in the sections below (italicised) together with the GLA's responses.

In its response to the consultation for the previous (2012-based) subnational projections, the GLA provided comments on various aspects of the projection methodology employed by ONS in producing the SNPP. As the 2014-based SNPP is based on a similar methodology to the 2012-based set, these comments still largely apply. The GLA's response to the 2012-based SNPP is available on the London Datastore<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/get-involved/consultations-and-user-surveys/consultations/consultation-on-the-2014-based-subnational-population-projections-for-england/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/gla-response-to-ons-2012-based-subnational-population-projections/GLA%20SNPP%20consultation%20response.pdf>

## Variant subnational population projections

- *What variant projections would you find useful and why?*
- *Preliminary research has been made into producing a variant projection using a longer trend of migration data. This could potentially smooth out the effects of the recession, which may have resulted in internal migration patterns which may not continue in the future. Is this variant still of interest to you?*

To understand the impact that constraining the components of change to those from the National Population Projection (NPP) it would be useful to have a set of projection outputs produced without this constraint. It is felt that this step may have a disproportionately large effect on the projections for many London local authorities – particularly those that experience large international inflows that are offset by large domestic outflows.

The GLA remains an advocate for the production of a variant using a longer term migration trend. There is a growing consensus among the planning community that such projections should be considered alongside those based on shorter-term trends when assessing local housing needs. The GLA recommends that the ONS engage with a range of stakeholders, including DCLG and local authority representatives, to help determine the specification for such a variant. Key matters to consider would include whether to constrain to a national projection, and the period of past migration on which to base the patterns projected forwards.

## Format of outputs

- *How useful are our current tables?*

The tables produced for the 2012-based projections are well formatted and the provision of detailed components of change data is extremely helpful to facilitate analysis of the projections and to use the results in subsequent modelling work.

- *Are there any other tables that you would like to see?*

Currently births are not disaggregated by sex in the tables. Doing so would make the data simpler to use in analysis and onwards modelling.

Publishing full tables of the local authority to local authority migration flows would improve the transparency of the projections and would facilitate understanding of the differences between the SNPP and other projections.

- *Do you find the Statistics Bulletin useful?*

The Statistics Bulletin provides a useful overview of the projection results and helps to alert users to the key stories in the data.

- *In line with the government's open data policy, we make the projections available in Excel (xls) and comma-separated values (csv) format. Would you like access to the data in other formats, e.g. xml?*

Excel and CSV outputs are adequate for our current purposes.

- *Would you like the data to be available on NOMIS where we now publish historical population estimates?*

The NOMIS portal provides a simple and efficient means to obtain aggregations of the population estimates. Making the projections available through the same service would be welcome.

- *What other supporting information would you like to see e.g. comparisons with previous sets of projections?*

Comparison with previous projections would be helpful, especially if this included some discussion or analysis of the main sources of differences between successive sets of projections. Ideally such an analysis

could help provide some guidance to users about the expected accuracy of the subnational projections over the near and long term.

In addition, it would be helpful for ONS to conduct and publish an analysis of the sensitivity of the results to the period of past migration used to determine trends projected forward and to the act of constraining to the NPP.

### **General comments about the projections**

- *Is there anything we currently do which you would not want changed?*

The GLA hopes that ONS continues to publish results with at least the level of detail as it did for the 2012-based SNPP. Reducing the level of detail available in the outputs of population and components of change would be a step backwards, reducing the transparency of the projections and undermining confidence in the use of them.

- *We would like to know how our projections are used so that we can understand their impact.*
- *We are considering producing the projections every 3 years rather than every 2 years. We have recently consulted on this as part of a wider consultation on outputs but we would welcome your thoughts on this.*

The GLA principally relies on its own (annually updated) population and household projections to inform planning and policy for London. However, key inputs to the GLA's models are taken from both the ONS's national and sub-national projection outputs. These ONS outputs are assumed future trends in age and sex specific fertility and mortality rates (from the National Population Projections (NPP)), and births by mother's age for each local authority in England from the Sub-national Population Projections (SNPP). Reducing the frequency of these outputs will therefore be directly detrimental to the quality of the GLA's own projections.

There would likely be direct effects on London's neighbouring authorities – many of whom make extensive use of ONS sub-national projections and corresponding household projections from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to underpin planning policy. Cooperation across the wider region is essential to ensure effective planning to accommodate its rapidly growing population and a reduction in the frequency of official projection outputs is likely to make this more challenging.

- *How useful do you find this consultation process?*

The value of the consultation will ultimately depend upon its outcomes. The GLA encourages ONS to continue to actively engage with stakeholders about the direction of its projection work beyond this current consultation exercise.