GLAINTELLIGENCE

ONS 2016-based Subnational Population Projections

Consultation response from the GLA

February 2018

Introduction

This document forms the GLA Intelligence Unit's response to the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) consultation on the 2016-based Subnational Population Projections (SNPP). Details of the consultation process and the accompanying documentation are available on the ONS website[1].

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. The 2016-based households projections will be the first to be produced by ONS, previous rounds having been produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The 2016-based household projections are scheduled for release in Summer 2018. 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 in two areas:
- The proposed changes to the subnational projection methodology and whether there is anything that has not been considered;
- Comments on any activities that would be helpful at the time of the SNPP's release.

This response is limited to answering the first of these points concerning methodology and data sources.

In its response to the consultation for the previous (2012-based & 2014-based) subnational projections, the GLA provided comments on various aspects of the projection methodology employed by ONS in producing the SNPP. As the 2016-based SNPP is based on a similar methodology to those earlier sets, these comments still largely apply. The GLA's responses to the 2012-based and 2014-based SNPP consultations are available on the London Datastore[2, 3]

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[1]https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/articles/2016basedsubnationalpopulationprojectionsforenglandchangestomethodologyandsourcedata/2018-01-19

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

[3] https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014_snpp_consultation_response.pdf

Methodological improvements

The GLA considers the proposed changes to the methodology set out in point 5 of the consultation document to be broadly positive.

In particular, the removal of New Migration Geographies (NMGos) is a move towards greater clarity, reproducibility and transparency. In the past this element of the projection methodology has proved a barrier to fully understanding the model's operation. In addition, the move to using a five-year trend in calculating international outmigration brings a welcome consistency across the internal and international migration components.

The GLA welcomes the attempts to improve the capture of dependents of US foreign armed forces, returning UK armed forces, people granted humanitarian protection and asylum seekers.

The changes to the cross-border methodology in both the NPP and SNPP are supported. The GLA agrees that the proposed method of scaling cross-border flows based on location and across the projection period is likely a more robust approach. The GLA incorporates NPP cross-border flows as a constraint in its own modelling using a method similar to that being proposed for the 2016-based SNPP.

Variant projections

The GLA principally relies on its own (annually updated) population and household projections to inform planning and policy for London. The GLA model is a cohort component model which operates in a manner closely aligned to the ONS SNPP model. The Centre for Population Change at the University of Southampton undertook an independent review of the methodology and implementation of the GLA model in 2016[4].

For its own 2016-based projections (released July 2017), the GLA produced three model variants based on different migration assumptions. Of these the GLA considers the projection based on averaging a ten-year back series of migration data to be the most suitable for strategic planning (the GLA central trend projection)[5].

The GLA believes there would be value in the ONS producing variant SNPP projections, and specifically a ten-year migration projection. 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.

In addition, in order to understand the impact of constraining the SNPP 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.

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[4] https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/projection-methodology-independent-review
[5] https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/projections/

Additional outputs

Key inputs to the GLA's own models are taken from both the ONS national and subnational projection outputs. These ONS outputs are assumed future trends in age and sex specific fertility (ASFR) and mortality (ASMR) rates (from the NPP), and births by mother's age for each local authority in England (from the SNPP).

It would be extremely useful if the SNPP outputs included the underlying ASFR and ASMR data for local authorities for the full projection period.

Output format

For modelling, and to an increasing extent, analytical purposes outputs in a flat csv file format are relied upon. The GLA supports the continued production of outputs in machine readable formats and would welcome a move to providing projections and supporting data through an API service.

For more information please contact demography, GLA Intelligence
Greater London Authority, City Hall, The Queen's Walk, More London, London SE1 2AA
Tel: e-mail: demography@london.gov.uk