

The first UK Census, taken in 1801, recorded London's population at just over 1 million people. The capital grew at a rate of around 20 per cent per decade throughout the 19th century reaching 6.5 million in 1901. Over the first three decades of the twentieth century the population continued to grow but at a slower rate up to a peak in 1939 of 8.61 million. Figure 1 shows London's population over the period of 1801 to 2011.

The size of London's population then began a period of decline, initially resulting from the impact of the Second World War and then in later years the changes to social structures and increasing suburbanisation. By 1988 the population of London was 6.7 million, a decrease of around 22 per cent since 1939.

The last decade of the 20th century saw London's population begin to rise again and between 1991 and 2011 the capital increased in size by 1.7 million people. Population figures beyond the last census in 2011 are based on births, deaths and projected migration patterns. The GLA projection places London's population in 2015 at 8.63 million, the largest it has ever been. Projected growth over the next thirty years is around five per cent per decade with the population reaching 10.2 million in 2039.

The table in the accompanying data sheet provides the population for each London borough, as well as inner, outer, and Greater London for data points between 1939 and 2039. As outlined above, the overall picture for London between 1939 and 2015 is one of decline and recovery; however this is not the picture across all boroughs. In fact at the sub-regional level the story is one of sustained decline for inner London and sustained growth for outer London.

The boroughs with the largest percentage increases in numbers between 1939 and 2015 were all located in outer London, unsurprising given that overall the population of outer London increased by 24 per cent over this time (4.18 to 5.19 million). The three boroughs with the highest percentage rises were all situated on the Greater London border: Hillingdon, Havering and Bromley. This increase was in the majority of outer London boroughs and is a result of the significant housing development on greenfield sites, particularly during the middle of the twentieth century.

This urbanisation of the outer London boroughs coincided with a decrease in density of occupation in inner London leading to significant population decline. The number of residents of inner London has decreased by 1 million over the period 1939-2015, from 4.44 million in 1939 to 3.43 million people. Boroughs with the highest percentage decrease in numbers were Westminster, Tower Hamlets and Southwark, all with a decline in numbers of between 32-36 per cent.

The clearest indication of the variation in London's population distribution of the last 76 years can be seen in the population density data. In inner London density decreased from 13.9 persons per hectare to 10.7 per hectare while in outer London the change was from 3.3 to 4.1 per hectare.

Figure 2, overleaf, shows the varying growth and decline in the population of the London boroughs over the period 1939 to 2015.

³ http://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/new_resource/population-change-1939-2015

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