



International Association for Official Statistics (IAOS) Strategy 2019-21

This document is an outline for discussion within the IAOS. The intention is to gather comments from members before final agreement by EXCO at its meeting in March 2020. The document sets out: Background; Context; Plan themes; Process for agreement.

Please submit your comments by 30 November 2019.

Background

Official statistics are fundamental to democracy. They provide governments, businesses and civil society with the information they need to make good decisions. And they give people and their representatives the tools to hold decision makers to account

In 2019 we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics which have been adopted by the United Nations to guide all nations in developing statistics that meet the test of practical utility

At the same time, developments in technology mean that it is possible to utilise statistical science to gain insights from data that were unimaginable only a few years ago. This means, as Brad Efron memorably said on receiving the International Prize in Statistics at the 2019 World Statistics Congress, that we are on the verge of a new golden age of statistics.

The IAOS is one of the seven associations of the International Statistical Institute (ISI). The ISI has a medium term vision for the period 2017-21 and the IAOS aligns itself with the ISI vision.

Context

IAOS objectives (<http://www.iaos-isi.org/index.php/about-us/foundation-and-objectives>) are:

- to promote the understanding and advancement of official statistics and related subjects.
- to foster the development of effective and efficient official statistical services, particularly in developing countries, through international contacts among individuals and organizations, including users of official statistics as well as research institutions.

The world of official statistics is changing fast:

- demands are up – users need faster, more fine grained and relevant insight
- many new data sources are available but also many new providers of data services
- we have a challenge to demonstrate trustworthiness and the special value of official statistics in a complex data landscape

The IAOS has many strengths: a growing membership, a well respected journal (SJIAOS), good conferences, the young statisticians prize (YSP), an active community, and the ability to be “free-

thinking". However, we have limited reach and impact with decision makers, our "call to action" for our supporters is not well understood and work rests on few shoulders.

There are opportunities for us arising from the 25th anniversary of Fundamental Principles, World Statistics Day 2020, the 2020 Census round, the 2020 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) review and recent case studies in official statistics. At the same time we face threats from loss of political ("enough of experts") and public ("your GDP not our GDP") support for official statistics.

These issues have already been recognised in the IAOS 2017-19 strategic plan which set out to:

- provide IAOS membership and producers of statistical information in general, with a forum for the analysis and discussion of the most relevant issues in official statistics
- be a recognised vehicle for spreading knowledge in official statistics
- increase and diversify IAOS membership
- invest in creating mutual beneficial partnerships
- strengthen communications with relevant actors related to official statistics
- contribute to the promotion and defence of the fundamental principles of official statistics
- institutionalise IAOS functions
- strengthen links with the ISI family

The positive progress that has been made against the strategic plan is well set out in the 2018-19 annual report and the report on the 2018 IAOS conference.

Plan Themes for 2019-21

My proposal to members is that we build on the existing plan and our current activities rather than develop new ones:

- the conference: for Zambia 2020 we should aim to build on success of Paris 2018 which attracted 323 attendees from 71 countries
- the journal: SJIAOS is in good health, proposals for the next two years are well advanced and our new discussion platform, launched at the World Statistics Congress, has been well received
- the young Statistician Prize: 2020 is the 10th year and the prize is now a well respected feature of our community. This anniversary year provides a basis for linking the prize with wider efforts to engage young statisticians and young people more generally
- the website: our existing infrastructure will allow us to connect within our community and generate new audiences, including making much better use of social media

We can draw on our core principles: the Declaration on Professional Ethics for Statisticians adopted by the ISI in 1985, as well as in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics published in 1994.

In my view the unifying idea behind the IAOS and the principles on which we draw is that our central interest is our users: those who rely on us to provide a trustworthy guide to what is going on in the world around them. What matters is the better use of official statistics in decision making and democratic accountability. We should focus our work in each of our activity areas on delivering an outcome where the IAOS is seen as a leading global advocate for official statistics with the result that:

- Parliaments and Governments recognise value of official statistics and invest in them through strong laws and adequate funding
- Commentators refer to official statistics as fundamental to democracy
- The impact of poorly supported official statistical systems on countries and citizens is widely understood and referenced

This implies five themes for our strategic plan:

1. **Focus on users** so that the value of official statistics is understood and recognised. This requires us to analyse the key users of official statistics and make sure we reach them. (Outcome theme)

2. **Build on existing activities** rather than develop new ones: the conference, the journal, young statisticians prize, the website each with a clear focus that supports our outcomes. (Output theme)

3. **Develop IAOS processes** to deliver activities focused on outcomes: EXCO agendas and actions designed to help those responsible for each activity area. Improved two way communication to engage and enrol. (Process theme)

4. Increase resources by growing membership still further. We have had a growing membership in recent years. We could build on this progress and **recruit more members**, especially in Africa and other underrepresented regions and amongst younger people, to increase the breadth, depth and diversity of our community. Growing membership has not yet resulted in healthier finances. Indeed we have yet to cover the new levy raised on Association members by the ISI since 2018. EXCO has agreed new subscription rates for 2020 that will cover this extra cost. The new rates are intended to be at a level that does not impact on membership but ensures our finances are sustainable. (Resources theme)

5. Enhance capability: build new **partnerships** with others who share our goals eg Parliaments, data ethics bodies and deepen existing partnerships especially with ISI and its Associations. Relationships with National Statistical Institutes are especially important. Specifically, we should support the ISI strategic priority for capacity building, the ISI strategic plan for the Public Voice for Statistics and the new ISI Special Interest Group on Communicating Statistics and Data Science. IASE is another priority partnership for us given the imperative to build statistical literacy and capability. (Capability theme)

The strategic plan could become a call to action:

- Official statistics give people a voice in decisions that affect them, they make the invisible visible. Official statistics are fundamental to democracy, helping society to leave no one behind
- the IAOS is the voice of official statistics
- with a fast growing membership, with acclaimed conferences, journal and young statistician prize, the IAOS is the place to come if you:
 - care about the future of democracy
 - recognise the importance of evidence in making good decisions
 - want to make a difference
- join us

Process for agreement of the plan

To get buy in to the plan we will follow an open and inclusive process as follows:

30 November 2019: please submit your comments by this date

30 December 2019: draft strategic plan circulated to EXCO

31 January 2020: deadline for comments from EXCO

28 February 2020: final plan circulated to EXCO

March 2020: EXCO ratify plan and plan shared and publicised

John Pullinger

September 2019