

## Editorial

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### **Challenging times with a large impact on official statistics**

When drafting this editorial at the beginning of August the COVID-19 pandemic is still raging across the globe with record highs of over 300.000 infections per day. Caused by the pandemic, over the last couple of months, the world is confronted with an unprecedented economic downturn, causing enormous socio-economic and financial consequences with long lasting societal changes. As in each disaster, there are winners and losers. In this pandemic specific economic sectors are profiting from the changing demands and needs, others are highly suffering and thrown into deep financial problems and bankruptcy. Groups of households are no more able to pay their normal costs of living, people loosing their jobs and homes. Gigantic financial support programs have been set up to support business and households, offering relieves for a couple of months. However, with the unclear state of the future growth or decline of the pandemic, it is an open question to what extent these support packages will help countries, regions and individual businesses and households to get out of the economic downturn and the long lasting effects it will have on the economic development or the well being of the population. Official statistics are in a greater need than ever to achieve insights in all these effects.

In the first stage of the pandemic the (official) health and epidemiological statistics were first priority to understand the working, the causes and effects of the virus and how it could be efficiently treated. From this first rather ad-hoc development of measures for measuring the epidemiological impact, the COVID health related statistics are now concentrating on developing smart sets of official government indicators (dashboards) that measure on a national, regional and even local scale the pace, strength and impact of the infections. A variety of warning systems, for example via dedicated apps, has been developed, stepping rather easily over confidentiality and privacy suspicions, to keep track of the spreading of infections via tracing direct contacts between individuals.

At this current stage after six months of the pandemic, official statistics in almost all societal and economic domains have high priority to show the differentiated effects of the pandemic to – in first instance – properly gear the financial survival packages, but in second instance to be also prepared to anticipate new still unknown developments and their effects. Starting from employment, household income, consumption, to all types of production statistics, transport, tourism, migration, working conditions, housing, education, etc. all domains of official statistics are effected. It is easy to find examples and information on all these domains. Longer term effects are expected on trade, globalization, agriculture and environment, bridging to measure effects on climate change. Financial and macroeconomic statistics and accounting frameworks such as the system of national accounts (NA) and the system of socio-economic and environmental accounting (SEEA) will show in time series the important impacts of the pandemic.

The set of statistical indicators developed to measure the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), accepted as such by the UNSC in 2016, are – unique on a global scale – un-doubtedly a useful tool, also in these circumstances that totally differ from the situation in 2016. However, the goals and indicators as well as the measurement instruments might need an update to make them realistically fit (both the targets as well the target values) into the new pandemic and post pandemic global (statistical) framework.

The numerical statistics of for example the SDG indicators, are in themselves important to measure the impact, globally and regional, of the pandemic. However, the pandemic also has a strong impact on data collection and data analysis methodologies and their governance. For example population censuses have been canceled, but the necessity for such data is still there. Other data collections and statistical production procedures changed methodology. Urgent needs for statistical information have caused an increased use of other data sources, making the data revolution a fact, rather than a theoretical notion. The need for statistical information of course also leads to erroneous and purposely misuse

of statistics. A point where governance of official statistics has to be even more aware of than in pre pandemic times. The increased need for statistical information necessarily also asked for a strengthened effort of the national and international statistical organizations in preparing countries and regions on the need for specific data and adaptation of tools and methodologies. Clearly this all causes the role of and position of official statistics to be revisited, in the context of data ownership and use, partnerships and dissemination strategies. The pandemic and its widespread impacts will undoubtedly also challenge official statistics in showing and maintaining its relevance confronted with other data sources and other data providers, and last but not least to users.

The pandemic has an important effect on society, however, other issues like climate change and poverty are still as relevant as before as well as new challenges like how to manage the demands of people movements like 'Black Lives Matter'. The effort to develop combined strategies to cope with these challenges at the same time, creates an extra challenge for official statistics, a domain where integrated accounting frameworks like the SEEA are important.

These are challenging times, where official statistics play an important role to inform policy makers, researchers and society in general. With in mind that sharing information and new insights between official statisticians will be most important for society in general and specifically within the group of those working in our profession, I invite authors to submit manuscripts that describe these current developments, from theoretical and empirical perspective and with emphasis not only on analytical results and their policy relevance but also on the quality of the data and the governance of the production processes.

For submission of manuscripts the following link brings you into the submission system: <https://www.iospress.nl/journal/statistical-journal-of-the-iaos/?tab=submission-of-manuscripts>.

### **The future of business and economic statistics**

In this Special Issue the focus is on the future of economic statistics. A very relevant and central topic also considering the efforts needed in the coming years in this central domain of official statistics. Some 20 manuscripts with in total almost 50 authors contributed under the lead of the Guest Editor Ivo Havinga (UNSD) to this Special. The articles are for an important part based on the work of the Friends of the Chair Group

(FoC Group) on Economic Statistics. This FoC Group was invited, already 12 months before the far-reaching consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic became apparent, by the Statistical Commission at its 50<sup>th</sup> session in 2019<sup>1</sup> to consider the future of economic statistics. The Statistical Commission in particular provided the mandate to the FoC Group to assess the efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of the current system of economic statistics, take stock of the governance arrangements of existing statistical groups and statistical initiatives, and provide recommendations on the working methods and the update of the system of economic statistics. The challenges and lessons learned for business and economic statistics and especially also the lessons from the COVID-19 crisis, made clear that the future system of economic statistics becomes more relevant than ever, but at the same time needs to be more responsive and agile to meet the collective needs of users.

The publication of the Special Issue on the future of economic statistics has, with the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact, become timelier than ever and shows the ways this set of statistics can be organized and guided by multi dimensional statistical frameworks and needs to be agile and responsive to user needs on the national, international and regional scale. It also shows how the outreach of this work can take place, via partnerships and cooperation and capacity building efforts.

For the detailed introduction into the theme of this issue and the structure of the Journal, I refer to the Guest Editorial by Ivo Havinga. I congratulate Ivo Havinga, the authors of all articles and the team of reviewers, for this fantastic result and would like to thank Ivo Havinga and his team of reviewers and experts as well as the FoC Group on Economic Statistics in general and specifically its chair Anil Arora, Chief Statistician of Canada, and his team at Statistics Canada (Andrew Loranger, Greg Peterson, Etienne St. Pierre and Cara Williams) in providing the intellectual leadership for the work of the FOC Group on Economic Statistics.

The fifth discussion on the SJIAOS discussion platform ([www.officialstatistics.com](http://www.officialstatistics.com)) will also focus on the future of business and economic statistics. The statements will be based on the manuscripts in this issue. The discussion will come on line on the 15th of September 2020. See also the description of the Discussion Platform, further in this issue.

You are invited to contribute to the discussions via [www.officialstatistics.com](http://www.officialstatistics.com).

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<sup>1</sup><https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/>.

I am pleased to also refer you to the Statistical Journal's website ([www.officialstatistics.com](http://www.officialstatistics.com)) with interviews with the authors of manuscripts, as well with many other colleagues in Official Statistics – prepared by the interview editor Nancy Torrieri.

*I wish you pleasant readings of the interesting articles.*

### **Some words about the next issues (Volume 36(2020), Issue 4 and Volume 37(2021), Issue 1**

#### **The next two issues of the journal are already in full preparation**

The December 2020 issue (Vol. 36(2020), Nr. 4) will be an issue with several sections, each containing 4 to 8 articles: a section on Agricultural statistics with manuscripts based on papers from the 2019 International Conference on Agricultural Statistics (ICAS) conference in New Delhi, edited by Linda Young (NASS); a section based on manuscripts from younger official statisticians from the Asia-Pacific statistics week, organized by Gemma van Halderen (ESCAP) and her team; a third block of articles on 'The future role of Official Statistics in the informational ecosystem', selected and edited by Walter Radermacher. This discussion on Data4Policy (D4P); the special relation between official statistics, science and policy, was launched with three manuscripts in the December 2019 issue (Vol35(2019), Nr. 4) followed by a second block in the June 2020 issue. (Vol 36(2020), Nr.2). Further there will be in this issue the four award winning manuscripts from the 2020 IAOS Young Statisticians Prize. The issue will contain further a range of other manuscripts dealing with a diversity of other topics finally a manuscript closing the first discussion of the SJIAOS discussion platform: *Can unofficial statistics help to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Global Indicator Framework and how can official statistics play a role in this process?* See [www.officialstatistics.com](http://www.officialstatistics.com).

The March 2021 issue (Vol. 37(2021), Nr. 1) will start with manuscripts that describe statistical elements of COVID-19. It will contain a section with papers from the UN Chief Statisticians network on Nowcasting edited by Steve McFeely, a first set of manuscripts prepared for the (canceled) Quality in Statistics conference 2020 (Q2020) and again several articles on a diversity of topics. The march 2020 issue will also have the closing manuscript of the second SJIAOS discussion:

*Why should there still be a need for elaborate official statistics in the future?* See [www.officialstatistics.com](http://www.officialstatistics.com).

Of course there are always slots for other manuscripts; authors are kindly invited to submit their manuscript to <https://www.iospress.nl/journal/statistical-journal-of-the-iaos/?tab=submission-of-manuscripts>.

### **Guest editorial teams working on two Special Issues for 2021**

Beyond the two regular issues with a diversity of manuscripts, there are in 2021 two issues planned as Special Issues. A guest editorial team has started preparing a Special Issue on 'New developments in statistical training and Data Science' and another team on new developments in Statistical Capacity Building. The teams are still in search for additional authors and manuscripts, so, do not hesitate, to inform me when you have a manuscript or idea for a manuscript for these specials. ([pevssjiaos@gmail.com](mailto:pevssjiaos@gmail.com)).

### **An Extra issue "Official statistics in Africa" will be published in autumn 2020**

The bi-annual IAOS Conference planned for 19–21 May to be held in Livingstone, Zambia, has been postponed (new date not yet available at time of preparing this issue) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It would have been the second time of this conference to be held on the African continent. As African official statistics have gone (and are going) through a process of change and fast development the conference was expected to specifically result in contributions from African Statistics and would mark a milestone in Official Statistics for Africa. It was decided to go ahead with the extra issue even when the conference was postponed to not lose the momentum of the extra attention on statistics in Africa. Based on their abstracts and status of accepted paper for the conference, a group of some 20 authors from the African region have been invited to submit their manuscripts for this extra issue of the journal. A team of guest-editors (Gary Dunnet, New Zealand; Badia Ettaki, Morocco; Ben Kyregera, Uganda; Hugues Kouadio, Ivory Coast; James Whitworth, UK/Greece), is currently with the Editor in Chief reviewing the manuscripts. The articles will be pre-published (online) on the Journal's website and it is expected that the paper issue of the Journal will be available in the 4th quarter of 2020.

### **The COVID-19 pandemic and new ways of soliciting manuscripts**

The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially changed the international conference agenda. Conferences are canceled or postponed (or organised virtually). As for many other research fields the cancellation or change of format of the international conferences has an important impact. Many Journals (also SJIAOS) are partly based on the active soliciting by the editors of articles on important and relevant new developments via the participation in conferences, networking and observing presentations, listening to peers etc.

Virtual conferences are more and more seen as a good alternative. In general it is easier to participate in a virtual conference (from home, no travelling costs, etc). However the oversight and flexibility for the editor in chief will be substantially restricted compared to walking around and switching sessions in a physical confer-

ence, and this risks that Journals will – to a lesser extent than before – be able to catch at an early stage important developments. New ways to solicit manuscripts are experienced. The editorial board of SJIAOS is inviting all readers, the editors and reviewers and other interested not to hesitate to send important papers and manuscripts for review. The editor in chief and editorial boards members will also, more than before, try to be involved at an early stage in discussing contributions from the virtual conferences.

<https://www.iospress.nl/journal/statistical-journal-of-the-iaos/?tab=submission-of-manuscripts>.

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