

# The transformation of IAOS 1985–2015: Learning from the past

Stephen Penneck

*13 Worcester Road, Sutton, Surrey, UK*

*Tel.: +44 208 642 9297; E-mail: stephen.penneck@gmail.com*

**Abstract.** The paper provides a summary of the history of the IAOS from 1985 to 2017. Using archive material and recollections of former Presidents it charts the beginnings of the Association in the mid-1980s, reminding us of its original purpose. The paper discusses the successes of setting up the Journal, the Young Statisticians Prize and the web site. It covers the Malaguerra report which reviewed its purpose in 1999 as well as the ‘revitalising’ discussions of 2003. The paper gives useful tables of IAOS conferences, presidents and membership figures, and discusses some of the challenges it has faced, some of which remain relevant today.

Keywords: Official statistics, IAOS, history of statistics

## 1. Introduction

This paper came about when I was asked by Ola Awad, the President of IAOS, to present ‘the past’ as part of a presentation on ‘The transformation of IAOS 1985–2015: the past, the current and the future’ given at the 2017 World Statistics Congress in Marrakech. Given my own relatively recent involvement in the association, which started for me in 2007, I undertook some research into its history and found that we did not have a narrative explaining how IAOS was founded, has developed, and the challenges it has faced. This paper does not attempt all of that, but does set out what I learned during preparation for the WSC presentation.

The IAOS was founded in 1985. It is an international non-governmental organization, created and developed as a specialized section of the International Statistical Institute (ISI).

Its objectives are:

- To promote the understanding and advancement of official statistics and related subjects; and
- To foster the development of effective and efficient official statistical services, particularly in developing countries, through international contacts among individuals and organizations, in-

cluding users of official statistics as well as research institutions.

The Association was founded in the mid-1980s, at a time when Europe was polarised into two blocks, and the new IAOS was seen to have the potential to provide a framework for free and politically unburdened professional exchanges. In particular, statisticians from Eastern and Central Europe were asking for such exchanges; the President of the Hungarian Statistical Office, Vera Nyitrai, was their spokesperson. Its birth was not without its critics, given that official statistics cuts across the activities of many other ISI associations, and some questioned whether an association based on ‘place of work’ would lead to the weakening of other associations based on a specific discipline. Also there was a concern that official statistics had a ‘low scientific profile’ which could not sustain an association. These concerns have not materialised: many members have also become members of IASS, for example, and the discussions at IAOS conferences reflect clearly the particular concerns and issues of official statistics.

## 2. The early days

IAOS was set up on 14 August 1985 by the ISI

Table 1  
Presidents of IAOS

Period	Name
2017–2019	Mr. Mario Palma (Mexico)
2015–2017	Ms. Ola Awad (Palestine)
2013–2015	Mr. Shigeru Kawasaki (Japan)
2011–2013	Mr. Stephen Penneck (UK)
2009–2011	Ms. Irena Križman (Slovenia)
2007–2009	Mr. Olav Ljones (Norway)
2005–2007	Mr. Brian Pink (New Zealand)
2003–2005	Ms. Heli Jeskanen-Sundström (Finland)
2001–2003	Mr. Paul Cheung (Singapore)
1999–2001	Ms. Pilar Martin-Guzmán (Spain)
1997–1999	Mr. Willem de Vries (Netherlands)
1995–1997	Ms. Denise Lievesley (UK)
1993–1995	Mr. Hallgrímur Snorrason (Iceland)
1991–1993	Mr. Ian Castles (Australia)
1989–1991	Mr. Jean-Louis Bodin (France)
1987–1989	Ms. Vera Nyitrai (Hungary)

General Assembly at the centenary World Statistics Congress (WSC)<sup>1</sup> in Amsterdam. It was stressed from the beginning that the Association promoted itself as an association for all those with an interest in official statistics, including users and academics, and not just an association of producers. It was for this reason that it was decided that the name should be the International Association for Official Statistics and not the International Association of Official Statisticians.

By December 1985, 140 people had applied for membership. Membership fees were fixed at 35 Swiss Francs (around €30 today). A provisional Executive Committee of the IAOS was established, under the Presidency of Vera Nyitrai (Hungary), which met in Budapest from 12 to 13 May 1986. It also included:

Beyene (Ethiopia), Bodin (France), Güner (Turkey), Nakamura (Japan), Norwood (USA), Klaassen (ex-officio, IARUS<sup>2</sup> President) (Netherlands), Lunenberg (ex-officio, ISI Director).

The committee reviewed progress since the establishment of IAOS in the previous year. Its early priorities included publicising the new organisation, drafting the new statutes, enlisting founder members and initiating a programme of activities. It agreed to circulate a regular newsletter of activities.

The first General Assembly of the members of the Association was held during the WSC 1987 in Tokyo. Vera Nyitrai was elected as the first IAOS President.

<sup>1</sup>Although the term World Statistics Congress was not used at this time for the ISI's Statistics Congress I have used the term WSC throughout for ease.

<sup>2</sup>IARUS was the International Association for Regional and Urban Statistics, which disbanded in 1989 and became SCORUS, a standing committee of IAOS.

The association adopted its first set of statutes, which had been drafted by Vera Nyitrai, Jean-Louis Bodin, Janet Norwood and Bart Lunenberg. The statutes have stood the test of time well. They needed no amendment until they were reviewed and updated in 2013. The meeting also held its first invited paper session to discuss 'The present and future trends of collecting, processing and utilization of official statistics'.

From the beginning English and French were the two official languages, and papers at conference could be presented in either language.<sup>3</sup> The first independent IAOS conference was held in Rome in October 1988. It focused on quality problems with field data collection; legal and ethical issues; the role of the private sector in dissemination; and comparison of the main systems of national accounts. It was followed by a satellite conference on population censuses in Cairo. Around 200 delegates attended. It was reported that there were 500 members with 15 institutional members. In 1987 it had been reported that the association had successfully attracted members from outside national statistical offices, and that 45% of members were from universities, research institutes and 'other' institutions, which gave a healthy mix of users and producers.

In those early days email did not exist, and Jean-Louis Bodin recalls that communication was mainly by fax. In 1995 Hallgrímur Snorrason, then President, described the previous year as 'the year of five hundred faxes'. An email address first appears in the newsletter in 1995. Communication by fax must have made decision making challenging. The Executive Committee would only have the opportunity to meet at conferences and international meetings, such as the WSC, the IAOS conference, and then later sometimes in New York at the United Nations Statistical Commission.

By 2010 it was meeting five times a year by telephone conference as well as at WSC/IAOS conferences. In the later years portfolios were allocated to Executive Committee members, with the President-elect taking on the task of organising the next IAOS conference. Other portfolios included the Journal, the Young Statisticians' prize, programme chair for WSC sessions/IAOS conference, web site/members newsletter, etc.

The Executive Committee from time to time reminded itself of the importance of including users in its membership and launched drives to increase representation in this area.

<sup>3</sup>English became the sole language in 2013.

### 2.1. SCORUS

The International Association for Regional and Urban Statistics (IARUS) was dissolved at the WSC Paris 1989 and reconstituted as the Standing Committee for Regional and Urban Statistics, a committee of IAOS. This change was designed to avoid the overlaps between IAOS and IARUS and to intensify collaboration. The first SCORUS meeting was held in Duisburg, Germany, in June 1990, under the co-chairmanship of the IAOS President and the SCORUS Chairperson. SCORUS remains very active, 27 years later.

There have been discussions from time to time about whether IAOS should be an umbrella body with a range of standing committees or linkages – other possibilities being vital registration (with the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics, which was discussed in 1991/93); demography and population (with the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population); central bank statistics (with the Irving Fisher Committee). None of these discussions has borne fruit.

### 2.2. *The Malaguerra report 1999 [1]*

At the General Assembly at WSC 1997 in Istanbul, some members expressed concern at the very broad role of the association, as well as the risk of duplication with other international organisations. The IAOS had expanded successfully, with 524 individual members from 70 countries and 35 institutional members. However membership was unbalanced, with 53% from Europe, and 83% male, and there were few young members.

The association had developed as an unofficial alternative to formal international organisations. However, since its founding the international political landscape had changed, and formal international organisations had been able to improve the co-ordination of programmes. Also it was noted that the statistical world had changed, with more emphasis on interdisciplinary co-operation, and there was a need for this to be reflected in IAOS' work with other ISI associations. So, the question was posed: what then is the role for IAOS?

IAOS set up a Review Committee chaired by Dr Carlo Malaguerra to look at how the role of IAOS within ISI could be more clearly defined. The Committee met during 1998, and produced a preliminary report for discussion at the IAOS conference at Aguascalientes, Mexico in 1998. It consulted members through a questionnaire and finally reported to the Helsinki General Assembly in 1999.

The Malaguerra Report identified nine areas where the Association could develop further. These are set out in the Appendix. The Review had consulted the membership on some key questions, but it is clear that the responses were diverse in many areas, and with some strongly felt differing views. The review identified important issues and discussed them fully, but there was no clear consensus, and it was difficult for the IAOS to develop a clear way forward. Malaguerra was one of the most comprehensive reports on the activities, missions and tasks of IAOS. Many of the issues raised are still important and are covered in the 'key challenges' section later in this paper.

The environment of official statisticians was changing around the time of the discussion on this report and has been changing ever since. There are now more international statistical meetings and conferences where young as well as older statisticians can discuss and develop ideas, and the IAOS does not need to have the same pioneering and inspiring role of connecting people as it used to have. The discussion of the fundamental principles are on the agendas of the official meetings of the international organisations where the NSIs are represented. And this is of course what IAOS wanted.

The Malaguerra Report was discussed at the General Assembly in Helsinki in August 1999. The report and recommendations were welcomed and the Executive Committee was asked to take them into account in formulating new activities and programmes.

## 3. Milestones along the way

Unfortunately few IAOS papers have survived from the earlier period, but the IAOS contribution to the ISI newsletter is preserved from 1999 to 2010 on the ISI web site. Paper copies for 1985 to 1995 are available in the ISI archives. The news are mainly about forthcoming conferences, but the following are of interest.

### 3.1. *The 1990s*

- A satellite meeting of the second Independent IAOS Conference held in Beijing in October, 1990, was organized in Macao (then under Portuguese sovereignty) with the topic 'Statistical issues in small countries and islands'.
- A directory of members was circulated from 1993.

Table 2  
Conferences of IAOS

Date	Theme	Location
2018	(Forthcoming) Better Statistics for Better Lives	Paris, France
2016	The spirit of official statistics: partnership and continuous innovation	Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
2014	Meeting the demands of a changing world	Da Nang, Vietnam
2012	Getting your messages across	Kiev, Ukraine
2010	Official statistics and the environment	Santiago, Chile
2008	Smart Data, Innovative Uses – Reshaping Official Statistics	Shanghai, China
2006	People on the Move: Measuring Environmental, Social and Economic Impacts Within and Between Nations	Ottawa, Canada
2004	Poverty, Social Exclusion and Development (with IASS)	Amman, Jordan
2002	Official Statistics and the New Economy	London, UK
2000	Statistics, Development and Human Rights	Montreux, Switzerland
1998	Statistics for Economic and Social Development (Jointly with IASS)	Aguascalientes, Mexico
1996		Reykjavik, Iceland
1995	Furthering the role of statistics in developing countries (Jointly with African Statistical Association and UNECA)	Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia
1992		Ankara, Turkey
1990		Beijing, China
1988		Rome, Italy

- The IAOS General Assembly in Ankara had discussed in 1992 the benefit of having a conference in Africa, and IAOS planned to have their next conference in Victoria Falls, Zambia in October 1994. The conference was to be held in partnership with the African Statistical Association (AfSA). Unfortunately these plans had to be cancelled due to organisational difficulties. The vision to have a conference in Africa was maintained, however, and a joint conference with AfSA with the support of UNECA was held in Addis Ababa in May 1995. Around 130 attended and it was considered to have been professionally rewarding.
- A joint workshop was held with IASS in Jerusalem in 1997 on longitudinal data.
- The familiar IAOS logo began to appear in the ISI newsletter in 1998.
- A special conference was held in The Hague, Netherlands in 1999 to celebrate the centenary of Statistics Netherlands.

### 3.2. *The 2000s*

- The 2000 IAOS Conference organised in Montreux, Switzerland, on “Statistics, Development and Human Rights” raised questions when the topic for this conference was proposed. These included: Is this really a meeting on statistics? How many statisticians will attend? Will it not turn into a political meeting? What will the role of the media be, likely as they are to distort the statisti-

cal content and conclusions of such a meeting? It was well attended and was successful in attracting a large number of non-statisticians, who were users or potential users of statistics keen to find out what statistics could contribute in the fields of human development and human rights. The media were present in greater numbers than ever before at a statistical meeting, which was a positive development for our discipline, and the quality of reporting was not distorted by political considerations.

The issue of how far IAOS should become involved in politically contentious subjects is still a matter of debate. One consequence of the conference was the decision by OECD and the World Bank to start the Metagora project in 2004 – an international project focusing on methods, tools and frameworks for measuring human rights and democratic governance.

- An IAOS satellite meeting on ‘Statistics for the Information Society’ was held in Tokyo in August 2001, with other satellites around the WSC in following years.
- A second African IAOS conference was proposed for Côte d’Ivoire in 2002, but this was not able to take place, with the conference being held instead in London on the subject of the ‘New Economy’.
- In 2002 a membership drive was underway to increase the recruitment of young statisticians and users of statistics. This initiative included the establishment of a Young Statisticians’ Prize, and the provision of funding for members from developing countries to attend the IAOS conference.

- Also at this time the first IAOS web site was set up, hosted by Statistics Singapore.
- Discussions took place in 2003 on the relationship with the Irving Fisher Committee on Central Bank Statistics.
- At the General Assembly in Berlin 2003 there was lively discussion about revitalising the IAOS (see below). Further contributions were encouraged via the web site in 2004.
- In 2004 a support fund was set up by the World Bank to assist members attending the IAOS 2004 conference in Amman, Jordan.
- The General Assembly in 2005 considered setting up working groups on ‘membership and revitalising IAOS’ and on ‘future programming issues’.
- A joint lunch session on Millennium Development Goals was organised with UNSD at WSC 2005.
- A satellite meeting was organized before the ISI WSC held in Sydney, Australia, in April 2005 – in Noumea, New Caledonia on “Statistical issues for Small Countries and Islands” (15 years after the meeting in Macao).
- An ISI briefing session for Chief Statisticians was held in conjunction with the IAOS 2006 conference in Canada. The seminar had two main objectives:
  - \* To provide Chief Statisticians with an inside look at the complex system of international statistical organisations and arrangements; and
  - \* To address contemporary challenges faced by NSOs, in particular the management of a National Statistical Office and statistics system in a continuously changing environment.

The briefing session was aimed at newly appointed Chief Statisticians during the first year of their term in office.

### 3.3. The 2010s

- A Governance workshop was held at the IAOS 2010 Chile conference for statistical leaders in Latin American countries. This successful initiative was repeated for leaders in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States countries in IAOS 2012 Ukraine.
- The Ukraine conference also included a training workshop on ‘Good practices in dissemination and communication of statistics’ attended by 46 young statisticians of the region.
- A joint satellite was held in Macao with IASE at WSC 2013 Hong Kong on ‘Youth and Official Statistics’.

## 4. ‘Revitalising the IAOS’ 2003

During the WSC Berlin 2003, a special meeting on “Revitalising the IAOS” was organised. The aim of the meeting was to discuss how the IAOS can ensure that it plays a vital and dynamic role in the field of official statistics. More than thirty participants attended. The discussion was led by Denise Lievesley, former President of the IAOS.

As the background for the discussion were the concerns expressed by many members about the future of the IAOS, as the number of IAOS members was leveling off and the average age of members was increasing. At the same time, the demands for official statistics and their quality were increasing and the need for networking with the users of official statistics was becoming more and more important. The role and profile of the IAOS was not considered to be well known among international statisticians, nor even amongst its own members. The new electronic means to facilitate the activities and contacts amongst the members was not thought to be very effectively used within IAOS. Many of the issues were similar to those identified by the Malaguerra report, suggesting that not much had changed.

During the lively discussion, a number of new views and ideas were presented to strengthen the IAOS. The meeting of the Executive Committee held during the WSC in Sydney in 2005 discussed how the issue of revitalising the IAOS could be progressed. It was decided to set up a number of working groups to examine various issues: Future Programming and Partnering; Membership Revitalisation; Publicity and Marketing. Other issues under consideration were a review of the IAOS Statutes, the Strategic Direction, and Ethics.

Successive Executive Committees continued to review their activities and consult the membership on how best to take these issues forward.

### 4.1. The IAOS web site

The idea of a web site had been raised in 1997, and IAOS web pages on the ISI web site were introduced in 1998, but the first web site was not launched until 2002. Originally hosted by Statistics Singapore, and then transferred to Statistics Finland, the practice was to have the web site hosted by the NSI associated with the President. In 2008 the web site transferred to a permanent home at the ISI permanent office. This made the web site more sustainable.

Table 3  
Statistical Journal of the IAOS: Special issues and guest editors

Year	Vol No.	Topic	Guest editor
2007	24/1–2	Evolution of National Statistical Systems	
2008	25/3–4	Web 2.0 and official statistics	
2009	26/3–4	Official statistics and microdata – access and confidentiality	
2011	27/1–2	Official statistics and ethics	William Seltzer
2011	27/3–4	Statistical literacy	
2012	28/1–2	Health Statistics	Jane Gentleman
2013	29/2	International Year of Statistics: interviews with statistical leaders	
2013	29/3	‘Getting our message across’ papers from IAOS	Gemma van Halderen
2014	30/1	‘On the role of population and housing and agricultural censuses in the national statistical systems’	Éva Laczka
2015	31/2	Big Data	Fride Eeg-Henriksen and Peter Hackl
2015	31/3	Statistics without borders	
2016	32/3	Data Fabrication	
2016	32/4	The integration of statistical and geospatial information and data	Gemma Van Halderen
2017	33/2	Counting young children	

In 2013 IAOS began, in the spirit of transparency, to publish more information about itself on the web site: including minutes of Executive Committee meetings, its work programme, finances, and membership numbers.

In 2016 the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics redesigned the IAOS website, but it remains hosted in the ISI domain.

#### 4.2. *Young Statisticians’ Prize*

Part of the 2002 initiative to extend the membership to younger statisticians included an announcement of a Young Statisticians’ Prize. The idea was to encourage young statisticians to submit papers that could be presented at the WSC. The prize included payment for the costs of travel to the WSC.

Ida Stamhuis led the project, using her experience of other similar scientific competitions. The prize was launched in the autumn of 2004, with the first prize being presented at the WSC Sydney 2005. There were 22 submissions and the first winner was Mika Gissler from Finland. At that stage the Prize was biennial. Second and third prizes were added for 2007. The prize became annual in 2011 and was put on a sustainable basis by developing a rotating panel of assessors. In 2013 to celebrate the International Year of Statistics, all three prize winners were funded to present their papers at WSC 2013 Hong Kong. By 2017 the number of entries had grown to 45 from 23 countries.

#### 4.3. *The Statistical Journal*

From the beginning the IAOS participated in the Editorial Board of the International Statistical Review, as

a section of the ISI. Also the Journal of Official Statistics had agreed to have an ‘IAOS Corner’ in each issue, to be used for some short articles together with information on activities. But an early survey of members supported the idea of the association having its own journal. There was much discussion of this. In 1991 the newsletter reported that there was a general reluctance to embark upon a new publication before existing newsletters and journals had been explored.

From the beginning the main method of communication with members was through the section in the ISI newsletter, which appeared three times a year. This gave reports of past and upcoming conferences, the contents of relevant journals, and in the mid-1990s began to give fairly full accounts of Executive Committee meetings. The first IAOS Occasional Newsletter appeared in 1990 and was circulated every two years in non IAOS conference years.

IAOS’ own quarterly journal, the Statistical Journal of the IAOS, was finally established in 2007. Essentially the association took over the Statistical Journal of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, so the first issue is volume 24! This first issue was devoted to a series of papers on the evolution of official statistics across the globe over the previous 60 years.

IOS Press, based in the Netherlands, was commissioned to publish the Journal. The arrangement was reviewed in 2015. The new contract has improved provisions in comparison with the previous one, such as the publisher’s responsibility to provide a quarterly usage report to the Editor-in-Chief and to allow open electronic access for one article in each issue and one issue in each year.

Table 4  
Membership of IAOS

Year	Individual members	From countries
1985	140	
1986	267	63
1987	473	75
1989	590	
1991	511	
1992	541	

	Individual membership							Totals	Institutional membership
	Europe	Africa	Canada	USA	Cen & S. America	Asia	Australia/Oceania		
2006	172	13	9	49	16	72	19	350	
2007	169	13	8	44	15	70	22	341	35
2008	163	16	8	42	16	66	23	334	37
2009	153	15	8	40	15	58	24	313	36
2010	151	20	9	41	16	53	20	310	41
2011	156	28	10	45	20	58	22	339	34
2012	161	28	10	44	21	60	22	346	38
2013	169	31	11	42	25	71	27	376	38
2014	171	29	11	40	23	78	28	380	40
2015	176	31	9	52	24	77	31	400	40
2016	181	35	9	88	24	91	26	454	37

The main aim of the Journal is to support the IAOS mission by publishing articles to promote the understanding and advancement of official statistics and to foster the development of effective and efficient official statistical services on a global basis. Papers are expected to be of wide interest to readers. All papers are refereed.

Broadly based papers of wide interest to users and producers of official statistics are welcomed. This includes:

- Global and national statistical services,
- Statistical independence and legislation,
- New directions for official statistics,
- Delivering relevant and effective statistical services,
- New and innovative ways of increasing uses and users of official statistics,
- Quality of statistics,
- Engagement of producers,
- Innovative use of ICT for official statistics,
- Creative use of statistical sources,
- Organisation of statistical services,
- Statistical infrastructure and tools,
- Management of statistical and related metadata,
- Innovative statistical products and services,
- Training of statistical staff, users and producers,
- Improving statistical literacy in the community.

The Journal is available free to members online, with printed copies at a reduced rate. There have been a number of special topic editions or special sections,

some with guest editors. See Table 3 the Journal regularly publishes papers by the Young Statistician Prize winners.

The Journal has an Editor-in-Chief who is responsible for ensuring that the Journal focuses on current and emerging issues and challenges related to the management and operations of official statistics and related public policy matters. The Editor-in-Chief is supported by an Editorial Board. Siu-Ming Tam was the first Editor-in-Chief, and served until the end of 2010. Frank Nolan took over the editorship and served until his untimely death in the autumn of 2012. Issue 3, 4 Vol 28 2012 was dedicated to Frank.

Fritz Scheuren took over the editorship from the first issue of 2013 up until 2016. Up until then although nominally a quarterly journal, a shortage of good papers had required the journal to be published twice a year, each edition being in fact two issues together. Fritz' success in commissioning papers meant that the journal could publish on its planned quarterly schedule. A popular initiative he introduced was a series of interviews with statistical leaders around the world. Articles on indigenous issues for statistics became a regular feature. Fritz also made one paper in each issue free to everyone on-line, and then one issue each year when all articles were free. He also began the practice of publishing the IAOS President's report to the General Assembly. Fritz drew heavily on IAOS sessions at WSCs, and on IAOS conferences where he was a regular attendee, buttonholing authors after their presentations to persuade them to publish. Fritz expanded the

Editorial Board and built a team to support him for this enhanced activity.

The number of papers published in each of the last few years has grown and reached a record 84 in 2016.

By 2014 the Journal was able to show increased readership and was looking for an independent ranking measure. Co-operation with the Journal of Official Statistics has continued.

Kirsten West took on the mantle of the journal in 2016 and is the current Editor-in-Chief. During the last two years, the SJIAOS has begun to publish discussion of some of its articles, and to offer training on article writing at WSC and IAOS conferences

## 5. Some key challenges for IAOS

This brief review of the IAOS has highlighted some key challenges for the IAOS. Some were picked up by the Malaguerra report, and by the discussion on ‘Re-vitalising the IAOS’. They are set out below.

### 5.1. *Role within the ISI*

The IAOS is an important association of the ISI which reflects a particular usage of statistics rather than a statistical discipline. You would expect the links with the other associations to be stronger than they are. The ISI family offers opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and stronger academic links. The Malaguerra report recommended more joint meetings with other associations. It also suggested exploratory talks on a merger with the International Association of Survey Statisticians (IASS), and incorporating Irving Fisher as a committee within IAOS. Neither of these have been pursued, though the practice of joint meetings has continued, most recently with the International Association for Statistical Education (IASE).

### 5.2. *The importance of users in the membership*

Despite continued declarations that the IAOS is an association for official statistics and not an association of official statisticians, it has proved a more attractive society for producers of statistics and now has fewer users in its membership. Part of the difficulty is that producer/user relationships are managed at national level, and there are no international equivalents (apart from in the EU) of national statistics councils. The IAOS 2012 Ukraine conference focused on users with its theme of ‘Getting your messages across’, but there is a need to ensure that emphasis continues to be given to interactions with users in sessions at IAOS conferences.

### 5.3. *Supporting statisticians in the developing world*

IAOS needs to serve its membership across the world, in more- and less-developed countries, where needs may be different. But IAOS recognises the roles of inter-governmental organisations and cannot compensate for weaknesses in formal statistical co-operation. IAOS needs to encourage more participation from less-developed countries in its activities, and consider how professional links can be encouraged internationally.

There has been more participation from the developing world in IAOS conferences in recent years, both in attendance (made possible partly by funding from the Trust Fund for Statistical Capacity Building, managed by the World Bank), and in programming (the IAOS 2004 Amman, Jordan conference was specifically on Poverty, Social Exclusion and Development). The IAOS 2010 conference was held in Chile, and led to an upturn in Latin American membership.

### 5.4. *Professional ethics*

The ISI adopted a Declaration on Professional Ethics in the year that IAOS was founded. After a lot of preparatory work, the ISI revised the declaration in 2010, and established an Advisory Board on Ethics in 2011. Issues around professional ethics and official statistics have always been dominant in the issues considered by the Board, though often the concerns are about government interference in official statistics, and failure to conform to the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, rather than the ethical behaviour of official statisticians. However, there have been cases where government actions have put pressure on statisticians not to abide by the ISI Declaration. Recent cases have been in Argentina, Canada and Greece.

The IAOS had ethical questions on its agenda from the beginning, and since then, ethical issues have continued to rank highly on the IAOS agenda. The IAOS has held sessions promoting good practice. As a part of a new programme, the IAOS Executive Committee organised regional workshops on governance and sustainability of modern statistical systems to exchange information about good practices. These were held in conjunction with IAOS conferences in Chile 2010 and Ukraine 2012.

Discussions on ethics have been regularly held at IAOS and WSC meetings, including ‘Professional ethics – a panel discussion’ at WSC Rio 2015, ‘Supporting statisticians in developing countries’ at IAOS 2016 Abu Dhabi, and ‘Ethics and Big Data’ at WSC 2017 in Marrakech.



### 5.5. *The age profile of the membership*

There is a risk that the Association is dominated by senior government statisticians, who have many other opportunities for international engagement, and that younger voices are not heard. IAOS is non-hierarchical and everyone has an equal voice. The Young Statisticians' Prize has been set up to encourage participation from younger members, and although IAOS does not report the age of its members, there is a sense of younger members making an impact at recent conferences.

## 6. Going forward

The key role of other international and regional organisations in advancing official statistics, through the development of new concepts, definitions and methods must be recognised. This has not been the main role of IAOS. Nonetheless IAOS, as the unique non-government global body of statisticians, encompassing producers, users, academics and researchers has provided a platform for advancing these ideas. Debates have often been at a high level, looking at such areas as:

- the importance of statistical co-operation;
- the need to keep statistics in line with an ever-changing world;
- the need to communicate statistic well; and
- modernising statistical systems.

as well as new challenges such as:

- the environment;
- poverty and social exclusion;
- migration; and
- the new economy.

It seems that IAOS has always been concerned about its true value. It keeps lifting up the stone to look at why it's there. Its members have always had strongly held diverse views on how proactive it should be, especially on ethical issues, and this is inevitable given the wide reach of its membership. Some of the early initiatives, such as setting up the Journal, the Young Statisticians' Prize and the web site, are now well established. The other challenges summarised above continue to provide an agenda for the future.

The association has always relied on the hard work of a core group of committed members, together with the ISI Permanent Office, over many years, and we owe them our thanks.

As the IAOS moves into its fourth decade, it might rightly claim to have become middle aged, but some of the issues of its youth continue to be a challenge.

## Acknowledgments

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## Reference

- [1] Malaguerra C, Final report on the review of the profile, mission and tasks of the IAOS, 1999, prepared by the IAOS Review Committee, chaired by Carlo Malaguerra, discussed during the ISI Helsinki Session in 1999.

## Appendix

### The Malaguerra Report

The Review identified nine characteristics or special strengths of IAOS:

1. The association is an Non-Government Organisation of special character within the scene of international statistical co-operation. The strength of IAOS is that official statisticians are not representing their country as they do in most meetings on official statistics: they take part in a personal capacity, and discussion takes place outside the framework that governs other international meetings.
2. It is a forum for informal exchanges and professional co-operation among official statisticians. This allows members to have informal discussions on new challenges and emerging issues.
3. It is a branch of the ISI family. The Report felt this gave scope for advancing the scientific potential of the Association and asked members what more could be done to establish links with other ISI associations.
4. An association of producers and users of statistics. Malaguerra highlighted the importance of users as members and attracted a wide range of diverging responses. The Report reinforced this area as a key one for IAOS, and recommended identifying main groups of users for recruitment as institutional members.

5. Based on agreed principles of integrity and professional ethics.

Issues around professional ethics and official statistics have always been dominant in the issues considered by the ISI's Advisory Board on Ethics, though often the concerns are about government interference in official statistics, and failure to conform to the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, rather than the ethical behaviour of official statisticians.

The Malaguerra Report noted that the IAOS is in a good position to monitor the implementation of ethical principles, given our worldwide coverage and the fact that almost all countries sign up to the ISI Declaration and the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

A preliminary version of the Malaguerra Report stated that the ISI family at large should provide active defence of the professional autonomy of statisticians, and that the IAOS has a role to monitor and report on particular situations where integrity is endangered. Further, implementation should be in close connection with the ISI whose accreditation to the UN would strengthen its capacity to address such issues. However, the consultation on the preliminary report showed that the views of members were divided on this issue. A minority felt that the IAOS had no role at all to play in these matters. The majority thought that there was a role, but they differed on how it should be taken forward.

The Malaguerra report finally recommended that the IAOS:

1. Acknowledge as an 'agreed policy' of the IAOS the promotion of good practices as a major criterion in setting up programmes of meetings;
2. Modify the Statutes of the IAOS, with the introduction of the following sentence: "the promotion and defence of professional ethics and the integrity of official statistics are inherent parts of the mission of the IAOS";
3. Encourage analytical work and presentation of case studies on the status of integrity and ethics, within the framework of IAOS conferences and meetings, as well as the development of monitoring and reporting services to be established and carried out on a voluntary basis;
4. Express its official support for the proposal to create an ISI Committee on Professional Ethics, which was on the agenda of the ISI Council meeting to be held in August 1999; and

5. Request the ISI Council to establish a task force including the Executive Committee of the IAOS to set up mechanisms and procedures for intervention in cases when the integrity of official statistics is endangered.

The Report was discussed at the IAOS General Assembly held in Helsinki in 1999, with the Assembly agreeing to take account of the recommendations in future work.

The IAOS Executive Committee asked members at the 2011 General Assembly why the recommendations of the Malaguerra Report – especially the second and third ones – have not been fully taken forward. Regarding the second recommendation, it seems that the IAOS can continue with activities that promote and defend professional ethics and the integrity of official statistics through the Journal and the regional governance workshops, as well as in other venues. Doing so does not require modifying our statutes.

The meeting considered whether the ISI/IAOS should set up a web site to offer a platform where all those who think that the ISI Declaration has been violated can report. Through such a site, the ISI/ IAOS might possibly get more accurate information from the countries and could also monitor the cases. But such a web site would be difficult to moderate and require resourcing.

6. Has to serve all regions of the world.

The Report recommended setting up awards for authors from developing countries, organising one workshop a year in a developing country, acknowledging the issues of developing countries in conference programming, and increasing IAOS activities in Latin America (where membership was especially low).

National Statistical institutes (NSIs) play a critical role in supporting the IAOS by hosting the conferences and through financial support as institutional members. The Report recommended that this should be encouraged. However, institutional membership has remained flat.

7. Many members are in senior jobs, and ageing.

The review asked what IAOS could do to encourage younger members and more interaction between senior and more junior statisticians.

The Report recommended more active recruitment among younger statisticians, the consideration of younger members for the Executive Committee, invited paper meetings with 'young speakers' and 'senior discussants' at IAOS con-

ferences and to encourage institutional members to support the development of younger statisticians.

8. It covers a wide area of statistical work.

This follows necessarily from the breadth of official statistics. The review was concerned that this led to a lack of focus for IAOS. The consultation with members produced five areas for focus:

- Institutional aspect of official statistics;
- Issues of statistical policy;
- Challenges of strategic prospects ;
- Quality issues and policies;
- Ethics and integrity.