

## Debate organised by the Krakow Working Group

# Fostering strong ethical principles underpinning data and statistics for the common good

21 June 2023, 14:00-16:00 CEST - via Zoom

The aim of this debate organised by the IAOS Krakow Working Group is to exchange views on the ethical challenges arising from the evolving data environment under which Official statistics operate. It will cover two sets of issues: (i) how the increasing use of privately-held data by official statistics is leading to new developments to reinforce the professional values and ethical principles underpinning official statistics; and (ii) how official statistics could engage with providers of data from outside Official statistics that contribute to public decision-making and public debates and other stakeholders to foster strong ethical principles.

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The IAOS, as an independent association that is not bound by a specific institutional mandate, brings together a diversity of actors from the data ecosystem and is thus well placed to facilitate exchange of views, advance possible solutions and add specific value to make progress on these issues.

This conversation is part of a series<sup>1</sup> that will provide inputs for recommendations, in particular as regards, trust, ethics and misuse in relation with Official Statistics, that the IAOS will present at a later stage. These recommendations should be for the benefit of all the actors in the data-ecosystem that aim to contribute to quality information for the common good.

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A key characteristic of Official statistics, which highly contributes to the trust the general public attaches to them, is their strong ethical underpinnings resulting from the professional values they are committed to and implement. New practices and approaches have emerged with respect to the access to and processing of privately generated and other non-official data that contribute to Official statistics. Data-science techniques such as AI and machine learning are also now routinely used. These developments have raised questions inside NSIs and other institutions producing official statistics regarding their impacts on how ethical principles should be applied and adapted throughout the whole official statistics life-cycle (from data collection, to processing, dissemination and use).

By and large, the new ways of accessing data and processing them are likely to imply only limited changes to the ethical principles already prevailing in Official statistics (as stated in proposed revisions to the ISI Declaration on Ethics to be adopted next July and shown by the on-going discussion on the update of the UNFOPS).

That being said, we see a trend in the development of new organisational tools<sup>2</sup> inside NSIs aiming at strengthening transparency regarding the ways data are introduced and processed at all stages of the statistics life-cycle (from needs assessments, to programme planning, data collection, dissemination, analysis and use), indicating that there is a need for adjusting/reinforcing those principles and their visibility beyond Official Statistics. We also observe the development of a range of supporting actions aimed at strengthening/expanding the reputation and branding of Official statistics, such as enhanced communication addressed to the variety of users about the ways ethical principles are implemented in Official statistics. Actions are also taken towards the training of statisticians and data scientists to incorporate ethical issues in relation with informing public policies and public debates. Statisticians are also encouraged to develop a 'reflexive attitude' regarding ethics in their daily work.

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1- A first debate about "*Sharing experiences among official statistics producers on their interactions with the diversity of non-official data providers*", a second about "*Increasing official statistics' engagement with users, addressing misuse and misinformation*".

2- For instance, Statistics Canada has adopted a Necessity and Proportionality Framework and established a Data Ethics Secretariat as well as governance committees to ensure an appropriate use of data throughout its life-cycle.

Meanwhile, the role played by non-official providers of data and statistics that contribute to informing public policy and the public debate raises the question of how ethical dilemmas are dealt with in the work processes of actors from outside Official statistics. There is thus a case for Official statistics to know more about the practices of these new providers of statistics and data owners. It would be worthwhile to engage with them to foster strong ethical principles aimed at promoting the quality and trustworthiness of the statistical information that is produced and used for informing policy making and public debates.

Whatever their economic models and reputation concerns, it is important to recognize that the contribution made by private data owners in the provision of data for the public good is growing steadily. For all those involved in this endeavour, it might be beneficial to reflect jointly on how to develop transparent information about the quality of statistics that contribute to common good objectives, as well as how providers of statistics, whether public or private, who disseminate information for decision-making and public debates can take responsibility for the ethical principles underpinning the way this information is produced.

Besides data providers, other stakeholders who are in various ways directly confronted with ethical issues related to quality information, AI and data science techniques should also be involved in the reflections about initiatives that might contribute to fostering ethical principles and reinforcing the professional values promoted by Official statistics. These include academics and data scientists, who are confronted with crucial ethical issues regarding AI and data science, journalists and the media as they are trying to get trustworthy information to inform the public and are calling governments to account.

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***The guest panellists will share experiences on initiatives taken to reinforce the implementation of ethical principles in light of the increasing role played by data generated outside Official statistics and public institutions. Relying on examples of collaborative interactions with providers of data and statistics and other stakeholders from outside Official statistics, the guest panellists will also provide insights on ways to explore the possible convergence of ethical approaches when informing policy making and public debates.***

**Chair:** Walter Radermacher, Chair of the ISI Advisory Board for Ethics

**Introduction:** Jan Robert Suesser, IAOS Krakow Working Group co-Chair, member of the ISI Advisory Board on Ethics

**Panellists:**

Éric Rancourt, Assistant Chief Statistician and Chief Data Officer, Statistics Canada

Rajesh Srinivasan, Director of Research at Gallup World Poll

Léa Rogliano, author of *“Training in digital ethics in higher education”*, Free University in Brussels

Ed Humpherson, Director of the Office for Statistics Regulation in the UK Statistics Authority

Shaida Badiee, Managing Director and co-Founder, Open Data Watch

**Rapporteur:** Martine Durand, IAOS Krakow Working Group co-Chair, Member of the European Statistics Governance Advisory Board and of the French Official Statistics Authority, former (retired) OECD Chief Statistician