

Interview with Dominik Rozkrut¹



Dominik Rozkrut

This interview is with Dominik Rozkrut, the incumbent IAOS President (2023–2025). After two years as president select (2021–23), Dominik Rozkrut took over during the 2023 ISI WSC as IAOS president from Misha Belkindas and at the same time during the IAOS General Assembly Graciela Marquès² was selected to follow Dominik Rozkrut as the president-elect (2023–25).

Interviewer: Thank you for allowing me to interview you and congratulations on your selection as president of the IAOS for the years 2023-2025. As you are an active member of the community of official statisticians for several years, many people will know you already. Nevertheless, could you tell us, in addition to your CV, some about yourselves?

A few more details about me, then. I have lived in Szczecin since I was born; I have not moved to Warsaw, so every week, I travel almost 600 km one way to work. Szczecin is a charming city with a large port, green-

ery, wide avenues, roundabouts, good universities, a wide cultural offer, and a unique philharmonic. My wife and I work at the University of Szczecin, she is also a statistician, so we happily share interests. Working in two places takes up most of my time, so there is little space for spectacular hobbies and interests. In addition, since childhood, I have been interested in technology, computer science, and programming. I still remember when I coded simple algorithms in Assembler, so what I like is related to my professional work. I have always enjoyed learning new tools and achieving a high degree of initiation in their use. Due to lack of time, I feel unsatisfied in this regard; however, I often work out the possibilities of new applications, systems, and frameworks after hours; it is not easy to surprise me in this respect. I am also involved in the activities of the Polish Statistical Association, in which I am vice president.

Interviewer: Your CV mentions several positions that you had before you entered into the world of official statistics, in the academic world as well as in private business. What did you decide to move into official statistics? Is it possible to name a few striking differences in the working environment between academics, private business, and the government sector?

Dominik Rozkrut has been the President of Statistics Poland since 2016. PhD Rozkrut is a member of the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC). He was elected Chair of the ESS Partnership Group (PG) for 2020–2021. He participates as chair or member in Task Forces and Working Groups on Global, OECD and EU scales.

PhD Rozkrut's career began at the Department of Statistics and Econometrics at the University of Szczecin. At the same time, he also worked as a member of a market risk management team at a commercial bank. He joined official statistics in 2007 and served as Director of a regional branch, acting as project manager for numerous research and development projects. He is an adjunct professor at the University of Szczecin, where he received his Ph.D. in statistics and econometrics.

He completed an internship at the University of Massachusetts, Lappeenranta University of Technology, and UNU-MERIT in Maastricht. Ph.D. Rozkrut is a member of the Main Council of the Polish Statistical Association, member of the Committee of Statistics and Econometrics, and the Committee on Demographic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

¹The views and opinions expressed in the conversation are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of the Statistical Journal of the International Association for Official Statistics, nor IOS Press.

²President of INEGI, Mexico.

Statistics became my main area of interest and the common denominator of my professional work during my studies. Of course, different workplaces have their characteristics. Working in business, in the banking sector, was different from the subject of my work at the university. However, both jobs had the same thing in common, i.e. the development and use of quantitative methods in economics. At the university, this work was mainly scientific and didactic; there, you could freely develop your research interests and publish results. At the bank, the priority was the practical application of methods learned during scientific work at the university. So both places complemented each other and gave me a particular advantage over those who could not develop their skills this way. The combination of both jobs gave me great satisfaction and allowed me to develop my skills in many directions. At the university, I taught various subjects, from statistics and econometrics, through advanced courses in financial econometrics, risk management, time series analysis, numerical methods, and micro and macroeconomics.

Then, after my stay in the United States, it was time for official statistics. I already had experience with the government sector, implementing many research and training projects, so working in administration was not a big surprise. However, there are huge differences between the three sectors. The university means a lot of freedom in conducting research and development, and the bank means precise rules and a high-efficiency orientation. At the same time, the government administration has a unique public mission but tends to fall into bureaucracy and overregulation. As President of Statistics Poland, I use my diverse experience in statistics and management.

Interviewer: You are working since 2016 as the president of Statistics Poland. Could you tell us a bit more about the structure of your organization, how the role of the president of your NSI is defined, and how it works in practice? I think the readers will also be interested to hear about the institutional relationships in the Polish Statistical System, your role in these, and how Statistics Poland stands for its independence.

The structure of our organization is unique in a way. We have a centralized official statistics system led by Statistics Poland. Most of the research is under the control of this office; the exceptions are surveys conducted by the central bank and a few other units. The Central Statistical Office, on the other hand, has an exciting structure. It consists of a main office and sixteen regional offices in the regional administrative units of the country. The act says that the official statistics ser-

vice is constituted by the president of Statistics Poland and sixteen subordinate directors of regional statistical offices. In our legal nomenclature, the president of Statistics Poland is the so-called authority, while the main office supports the president. Additionally, there are special provisions in the act indicating the need to consult the president of Statistics Poland regarding information systems projects in public administration and supervision over the annual research program of official statistics. Thus, it is also a role similar to the Chief statistician in other countries, i.e. combining the role of the institution's head with the responsibility for the official statistics system in the country.

Our act constitutes strong guarantees of professional independence of statistics. It is worth noting that our basic legal act was prepared in the early 1990s under the supervision of Prof. Józef Olenski, one of the fathers of Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. On this basis, it was possible to build a well-functioning office. However, an office is not everything, even if it is best designed. What is needed are people dedicated to the cause, who, with deep commitment, try to implement what is written in the act, and which is also reflected in the first fundamental principle of official statistics, i.e. informing society about the most critical issues regarding its social, economic and environmental development. We have such people, thanks to which so many achievements and successes are possible, such as the second place in the Open Data Watch ranking, which assesses the breadth and depth of statistical research conducted and the results made available on its basis.

Interviewer: An issue very relevant in the IAOS discussions during the last couple of years is trust and mistrust in statistics. How do you see the IAOS going ahead with this theme and are there issues in Polish statistics that you feel could be used as good and as bad examples of this issue of trust?

These issues, although much discussed recently, are as old as the statistical systems themselves. Trust has many dimensions, which are challenging to maintain and easy to lose. Its keeping requires taking many actions. First of all, you have to try to meet the expectations and give an answer to the questions bothering society. A characteristic obstacle to confidence-building has always been the prevailing opinion of official statistics as low-tech, slow and overburdening. These stereotypes we have to fight against, proving in practice that it is entirely different. We faced such a stereotype in Poland, and we managed to overcome it. It was not and is not easy, and it requires well-planned and synchronized actions on many levels. These experiences can be

beneficial to the broader international community. The need to build trust cannot be overestimated; trust is one of the foundations on which our actions are based. We must be sensitive to attempts to undermine this trust, resist them effectively, and provide evidence of their merit daily.

IAOS should support the global statistics community in building and maintaining trust. It can be seen in two main dimensions, national and international. IAOS should be helpful on both levels. It has always been the case; we want to keep everything the same here. We also undertake new initiatives related to this. Here it is worth mentioning the Kraków Group, which, in the spirit of the IAOS conference in Kraków in 2022, undertook to continue deliberations on what our reaction should be to the calls caused by the data revolution, in particular in the context of the implementation of our mission, role and position, as well as the issues of and misuse of statistics. These issues will be further discussed with the rest at the next IAOS conference, in Mexico City, in 2024, which we are organizing together with INEGI. Another initiative is the ongoing process of establishing a working group called Friends of Statistics, bringing together people who, through their professional achievements, have proven a deep concern for public statistics, can boast of many accomplishments and are now retired. This group can be an essential voice in the public debate in an invaluable way supporting the global environment of official statistics. In conclusion, official statistics will survive by staying true to its Fundamental Principles. Next year we will have an excellent opportunity to properly emphasize this as IAOS on the occasion of the FPOS jubilee.

Interviewer: The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in your neighbor country Ukraine have undoubtedly put heavy pressure on Poland as well as on statistics in Poland. Can you tell us how statistics Poland managed the production of statistics during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The international official statistics community has been filled with discussions on timeliness vs granularity of statistics for years. However, events such as a global pandemic or war become a practical test of agility and readiness. Statistics Poland proved to be able to react quickly.

In the first days of the pandemic, just after the Statistical Commission in New York, we made new decisions almost daily, preparing us to operate in pristine conditions. The priorities were protecting human life, maintaining the current statistical production, and, what was especially important to me, the broadest possible offer

of new statistical information that helps to monitor and understand the course of the pandemic and its impact on the economy and society.

We then made many bold decisions. Fortunately, there was a favourable atmosphere in government structures for this. Everyone realized the gravity of the situation. Thanks to this, it was possible to change the methods of operation and adapt the legal provisions to them almost simultaneously. I will not mention the obvious, which does not mean easy things, such as an almost complete change in research modes, legal adjustments, and remote work. The big advantage of our system is significant IT resources, we have large IT departments in each unit, and we have a separate large computer and programming centre, thanks to which we were able to quickly adapt our IT tools for production management in the new situation. What I am particularly pleased about is that, by using our potential to the limit, we have significantly expanded the scope of our current and annual research to include issues relevant to the analysis of the situation in the pandemic. However, we focused on more than just current problems. Still, we approached it more broadly, thinking about the needs of researchers in a few years and designing a substantial empirical resource that will help in a deeper understanding of what happened in the longer term. We currently have comprehensive empirical material that gives excellent research opportunities. During the pandemic, we received many compliments on the manner and extent of our response.

The full-scale war in Ukraine has become another unique challenge for Polish statistics. The sudden influx of war refugees and abrupt economic shocks pushed the demand for relevant information even further. Our experiences from the pandemic came in handy here as well. We were prepared to make quick decisions and adapt our research to current needs. As before, we also responded by expanding the scope of our statistical study, considering the current information needs and the future needs of scientists. On this occasion, I would like to mention a survey we could quickly design and launch in cooperation with the WHO, i.e. the Refugee Health Study. We have developed an innovative approach on a global scale, which we are currently promoting together with WHO as a model for this type of research. And the needs in this area are enormous; the number of refugees on a global scale is invariably terrifying. Our experience has already been used in several other countries, and at the last Statistical Commission, we were encouraged to continue work in this area with WHO.

Interviewer: In the context of the war in Ukraine I remember very well the strong commitment of statistics

Poland to support the Ukrainian colleagues as emphasized several times during the 2022 IAOS Conference in Krakow. In practice how has this worked out?

The war, unfortunately, continues, which in itself is doubly terrifying. Were the lessons of both world wars not enough? From the beginning of the war, Poland reacted quickly, offering help to hundreds of thousands of emigrants and those who stayed there. It was no different at the Statistical Office. We conducted fundraisers, for which we bought the most necessary goods, which were then transferred to Ukraine. We provided support in the field of IT infrastructure. Many people were directly involved in the help provided personally, for example, by hosting refugees in their homes or the activities of non-governmental organizations. The involvement was massive; Poles remember the enormous tragedies of wars and false ideologies, and they carry the baggage of experiencing traumatic events stored in the memory of almost every family, so we naturally respond with a willingness to help.

We also tried to act as callers for help to other countries. At the beginning of the war, it seemed it was a bit paralyzing, the shock of the outbreak of war, and a robust mobilization was needed to take humanitarian action and provide support in other areas as soon as possible. We tried to help this by running an information campaign, particularly among the European official statistics community.

We have had bilateral, personal relations for years with our friends from Ukraine, also at the level of our regional border offices. Despite all difficulties, we remain in constant contact and try to implement joint initiatives. I will mention one important one here. Our scientific journal, *Statistics in Transition*, has published a special issue in the *Statistics of Ukraine* journal, with articles on statistics during the war. Please read it; unlike many other statistical journals, our journals are fully available in Open Access mode. This should also become a priority for the IAOS journal. We will certainly work on it.

Interviewer: If I may say, the Polish statistical system has under your presidency become much more visible than in earlier years. How do you see the contribution of individual NSI's to the global statistical system and specifically the role of Poland?

Let me start again by referring to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, the last one which directly points to the need for international cooperation. Public statistics should be a kind of *Lingua Franca* describing the socioeconomic development of nations, and we statisticians should take care of it. It cannot be

done alone; unlike any other government administration, our community has a special obligation to maintain good relations and deep collaboration on developing our common language of describing the reality surrounding us.

From the beginning of my presidency, I have made it clear and consistent to my colleagues that this is one of my two strategic priorities. International cooperation has two crucial aspects. On the one hand, it is the obligation to care for the common public interest, not only at the national level; on the other hand, there are great opportunities for developing new methods for official statistics, which accelerate along with the number of partners involved.

As the President of IAOS, I want to promote such an approach and encourage my colleagues worldwide to collaborate simultaneously on many formats and platforms. We should cooperate not only supra-nationally but also more and more supra-regional because official statistics are global. Existing supranational structures, though important, must not be limiting.

Interviewer: Currently there is a huge discussion ongoing on the future of official statistics, due to the ongoing IT and data revolution, the big data, and especially the many other stakeholders that are active in preparing and disseminating statistical information. This discussion swops in all different directions. There are colleagues that do not see a role anymore for official statistics as others claim that official statistics are the only safe haven for high-quality statistics. What is your opinion about this for official statistics rather an existential issue?

Someone said history doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes. We have already gone through similar challenges in terms of scale, although probably of a different nature. Of course, what is current is also often more dramatic, but I think we can only cope with these challenges. In the most simplified approach, I would characterize it as follows: once we faced the challenge of scarcity, today we have the challenge of excess. We used to have too little data, too small samples to satisfy all stakeholders, and insufficient administrative data of good enough quality. Today we have big data, an excess of data, from which we must choose the most valuable sources and aggregate them into useful information. The same applies to the information environment in which we operate. There used to be only us and possibly universities and research units. Currently, we are dealing with a broad spectrum of institutions and entities, including new types of entities, such as data collaboratives.

You can see all this as a threat, but I see it as an opportunity. Even more, data means more opportunities to generate valuable knowledge. The more participants in the information market, the better the chance to focus on the mission of official statistics, its commitment, competence and competitive advantage. I see only possibilities and opportunities in this and am very optimistic about the future.

Interviewer: ... and how do you see this position in relation to your role as incumbent president of the IAOS? Can you tell us more about how in your period you would like to include this in the work of the IAOS?

There is a role for IAOS to play here, to help adapt to these new conditions. The association should facilitate mutual support and sharing of experience. The technological, methodological and organizational innovation time has come in official statistics. I want our society to participate in discussions in these spheres, especially the latter two. Recently, the natural focus on technological issues has led to a shortage of conversations on the methodology and organization aspects of statistical systems. In the case of methodology, partnership with the scientific community is essential. When discussing processes and organizations, we must remember that we are part of a broader government apparatus bound mainly by specific rules set at a higher level. However, we should be active in discussions and actively participate in activities aimed at improving the functioning of the state administration, ensuring the appropriate role and opportunities for official statistics systems.

This is one of the areas of my previous experience, and I look at official statistics from a slightly broader perspective. The issues of process efficiency are particularly close to me. Unfortunately, the international discourse in this area has somewhat weakened, which is not favourable. Nevertheless, I would like to systematically introduce these issues into our discussions and use them to inspire further initiatives.

Interviewer: you mentioned already the Krakow working group that has been established during the IAOS Conference in Krakow in 2022. The mandate of this group,³ seems to be rather ambitious. Can you tell

a bit more about how you want to implement the objectives of this group and what you and this working group expect to deliver as concrete output at the end of your presidency?

First of all, outstanding representatives of our community are involved in the group's work, so the level of ambition is not surprising, and we need such work and results. The group fits perfectly into today's times and challenges, including the association's priorities and mine as its president. The group wants to address several questions troubling the community regarding such issues as the mission of official statistics, new governance arrangements, interactions with the outside world, relations with users, data stewardship issues, data science, new data sources, new partnerships, fake news and misuse of statistics, and last but not least, ethics in official statistics. Work in many of these areas is already underway in many forums, and it is good that our society also takes up these topics, deepening the discussion.

The group's work is expected to result in recommendations that will make it easier for official statisticians to navigate today's increasingly complex environment. We need appropriate, thoughtful guidance. Our association will offer a comprehensive and coherent system of recommendations that will de facto indicate how to operationalize FPOS in today's world.

Interviewer: In more general terms what are beyond the objectives of the Krakow Group your other objectives as president of the IAOS? How would you like these to be reflected in the IAOS strategy 2023–2025?

The work of the Kraków Group is only a part of a broader strategy. On the one hand, we will try to build up on the cornerstone of Krakow Group as a strategic development and recommendations for the community; on the other hand, we will try to leave space for new, important emerging topics. In particular, I would like further discussions on the challenges posed by new data sources, new legislative environments and governance of official statistics. I also want to add to our discussions on methods of managing the statistical system, costs and effectiveness, and the role of international collaboration. Indeed, the multiple and intensive discourse in official statistics is one of the essential tools for implementing my strategy.

Speaking of a slightly more strategic level of influence on society, I want to focus on further increasing recognition of the official statistical system as a source of reliable information and further supporting the international community of official statisticians in their day-to-day endeavours. Krakow Group will help us achieve

³In April 2022, during its annual Conference, the IAOS has formally established the Krakow Working Group? whose aim is to contribute to the collective reflection on the challenges that our datafied? societies pose to Official Statistics. The Krakow Working Group aims to fulfill the following three actions: – To reflect on the issues of Trust, Misuse and Ethics using a multidisciplinary approach. – To be a place for open exchanges with all stakeholders in the data ecosystem. – To provide recommendations that contribute at addressing the challenges faced by Official Statistics.

those outcomes by advising us on adapting to the new data ecosystems and information environments.

I want to support the above activities by intensifying internal communication, increasing members' engagement and sense of ownership, and extending external communication, including essential initiatives like IAOS 2024 Mexico City Conference and IAOS Young Statistician Prize.

A particular object of our concern will be the further development of our Scientific Journal. This issue is very close to my heart. I have done much in recent years supporting the scientific journals published by Statistics Poland and Polish Statistical Association, and I would like to help in this case as well. The scientific publishing market has witnessed radical innovation and restructuring of business models in recent years. The association's goal should be to have a completely Open Access journal. We must also strive to increase the journal's ranking, the number of citations and authors, including from underrepresented regions.

I want all these activities to increase the number of members of the association, and we will also look at institutional membership. I would also like to start an internal discussion on the possibilities of partnering with other organizations.

Interviewer: Your predecessor Misha, had as a strong objective of his presidency the IAOS membership. Recent years have shown a growth in the number of members, however, it seems that the institutional membership and the membership of staff from international organizations are still lagging behind. How would you like to tackle these issues?

This is not a small association, so the situation is not particularly difficult. Of course, we know that the number of members could be greater. On the one hand, this requires the willingness to participate by potential members, and on the other, seeing the possibilities and opportunities offered by membership in the association. We will work on further developing society's communication; this is the first thing to be heard better. Communication requires content. Hence the plan to organize more webinars, meetings under the auspices of the society, work within internal groups, and search for new partnerships, all those activities that I already

announced in the previous answer. I am particularly interested in increasing activity from regions that have been underrepresented so far. We observe a clear dominance of the usual suspects in the statistical community. Still, I would like to support everyone who, due to objective difficulties, finds it more challenging to compete for attention, but I know that their voice is precious, needed and enriching to all of us.

Interviewer: Thanks for the answers. Maybe as a final question, may I ask you to inform us about concrete events that you are planning with the Executive Committee of the IAOS for the coming two years?

The most important event will be the IAOS conference, which we are organizing with INEGI in Mexico City, on May 15–17, 2024. Traditionally, the conference will be preceded by training sessions on the previous day and an IAOS thematic seminar. We will try to maintain the association's activity by participating in other major global events, such as the World Statistics Congress or the World Data Forum. There will be more and more of these opportunities. We will take advantage of opportunities for further integration and promotion of the IAOS. On my initiative, I also plan regular webinars on topics that bother us. Considering next year's anniversary of adopting the FPOS at the UN level, I would like to devote the first ten meetings to individual principles and their relevance in today's world. In the second year of my presidency and subsequent meetings, I want to devote myself entirely to the issue of innovation in official statistics. Due to the many activities carried out, e.g. within the Krakow Group, other initiatives will undoubtedly appear.

Interviewer: thanks Dominik, are there other points you want to tell to the audience.

I look forward with hope and enthusiasm to the two years of my presidency. It is a great honour, but above all, a commitment to serve our community. I will do my best with the task entrusted to me. I count on the help and dedication of the members of the IAOS, and I remain open to any suggestions. I am convinced that even more exciting times are coming, which will be an opportunity for us to achieve our professional and personal goals, and above all, a source of great satisfaction.