Introduction

The online survey was run in four languages between 16 March and 13 April 2016. It was promoted among humanitarian practitioners through Sphere's website, social media, newsletter and special campaigns mailing list.

The four language versions of the survey (Arabic, English, French and Spanish) received a total of **2,808 responses** — a high level of responses for a survey of this type.

Over **1,700 respondents** expressed their willingness to contribute the Handbook revision process.

The following is a preliminary analysis of the survey's quantitative responses. Nearly **880 respondents** offered qualitative feedback (in addition to the multiple-choice responses), which will be analysed later on.

Respondents to the survey were self-selected among the audience reached by Sphere's communications work. The usual caveat about representativeness of the data gathered therefore applies to all findings reported in this document.

Survey respondents by language	
Total	**2,808**
English	1,793
Spanish	486
French	313
Arabic	216

Summary of findings

Respondents express a very high level of satisfaction with the Handbook, with nine out of ten finding it extremely or very useful. The satisfaction level is even higher in some linguistic groups (Arabic and Spanish speakers).

Hard copies are still very popular and the data suggests that an application able to deliver the content of the Handbook on electronic devices off-line would be very successful with this type of audience.

Three quarters of the respondents have used the Handbook within the last six months, which suggests both relevance and freshness of insights.

While the WASH chapter is the most popular of the whole Handbook, the data suggests that users works with several sectoral chapters and not just one of them.

Standards and indicators are more used than key actions and guidance notes.

As it could be expected, the Handbook is mostly used in humanitarian response, but also to a large extent in preparedness and recovery.

Aid delivery-related purposes are indicated as being the most popular uses of the Handbook, closely followed by capacity-building-related purposes.

The largest portion of respondents describe themselves as performing "implementation" jobs, which points to a hands-on audience and a significant role for the Handbook in aid delivery.

Pending further research to confirm the hypothesis, the data suggests that the Handbook plays an important role for new practitioners as they enter into humanitarian sector.

The Sphere Handbook seems to be most popular among staff of international NGOs with a good anchorage in local/national organisations.

Practitioners who responded to the survey are based in 149 countries. More than 40% of them are in countries with ongoing humanitarian crises or situations of concern, and 10% just in Syria and surrounding countries.

Usefulness

Respondents show a high level of satisfaction with the Handbook. As the main chart below shows, 88% rated the Handbook as "extremely" or "very" useful (33% and 55%, respectively). Only 11% rated it as "somewhat" useful, 1% as "not so" useful and less than 1% as "not at all" useful.
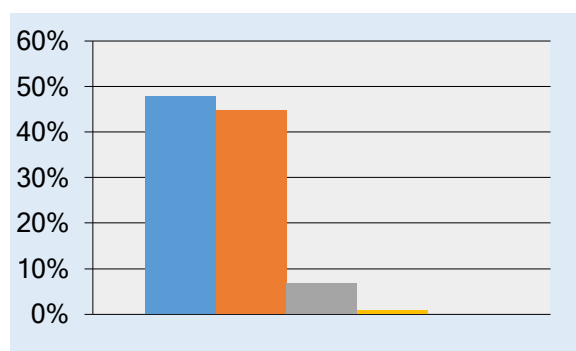
Arabic-speaking and Spanish-speaking respondents show significant higher positive rates (see charts below). Although additional research is required, we can risk the following hypotheses:

In the case of the Arabic-speaking respondents, cross-checking this finding with data about *Recency of use* (page 6) and *Professional experience* (page 12) suggests that the Handbook plays a key role in enabling a group of humanitarians who are new to the sector and are working in a response right now to fulfil their mission.
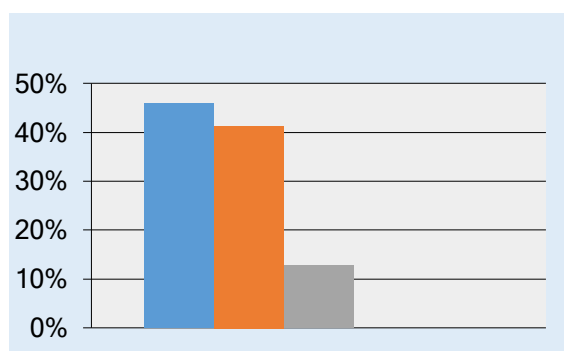
In the case of the Spanish-speaking respondents, cross-checking this finding with data about *Professional experience* (page 12) suggests an attitude of strong fidelity to Sphere principles and standards by a group in which long-timers are prevalent.
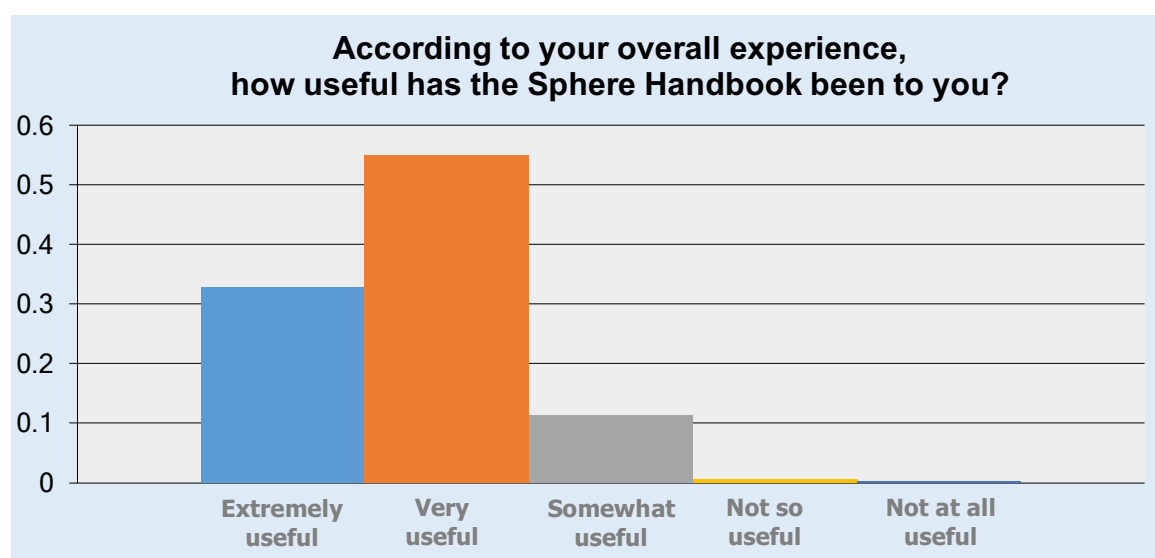
All respondents

Spanish-speaking respondents

Arabic-speaking respondents

Formats

The data gathered reveals two findings and suggests an interesting hypothesis.

First finding: hard copies are still very popular (nearly 50% of respondents have used them).

Second finding: of all of the new and "alternative" versions offered since the publication of the latest edition of the Handbook (that is, online version, eBook and CD), the most popular is the online version, which makes the Handbook fully available online in four languages as a micro-website with built-in search capabilities (34% of respondents have used it).

The popularity of the PDF format (70% of respondents have used it) was to be expected, as this format is free-of-charge, portable, electronic, and can be consulted even when the user does not have access to the internet.

The hypothesis suggested by the data is that offering the Handbook in a format able to combine the above-mentioned features of the PDF format with those of the online version —quick access, searchable, portable, multiple languages — would be a very successful move.

Such a format should be a downloadable application that replicates (or improves) the online version of the Handbook but is also able to work off-line. Ideally, such an application should be able to run not only on PCs but also on tablets and smartphones.

Which format(s) of the Sphere Handbook have you used?
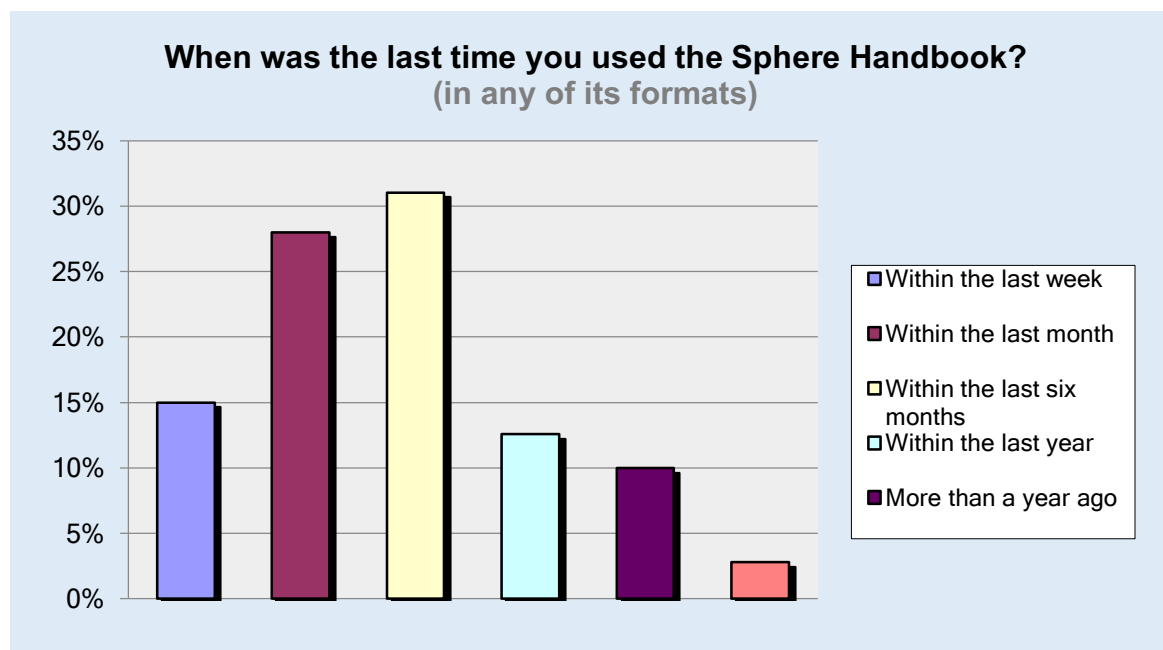Please check all that apply.
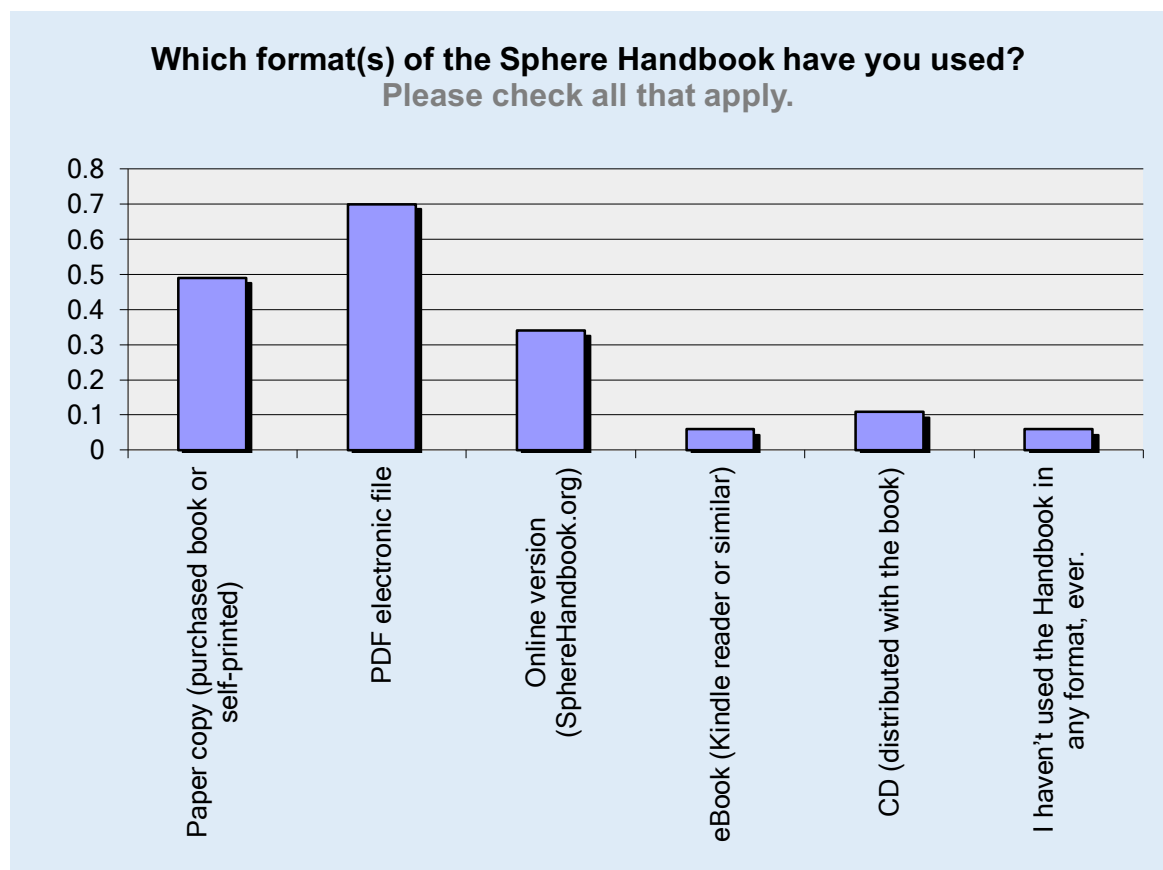
Recency of use

Three quarters (74%) of the respondents have used the Handbook very recently — that is, within the last six months (see main chart below). This finding suggests that the Handbook is significantly relevant to the survey respondents; it also suggests that data gathered by the survey is quite fresh.

Of all linguistic groups, it is the Arabic speakers who have used the Handbook most recently (see chart below). Nearly 60% of them declare that they have used it within the last month (against 43% for the whole group of respondents).

This may reflect the fact that a significant part of this group is likely to be currently involved in the Syria response.

When was the last time you used the Sphere Handbook?
(in any of its formats)

Legend:
- Within the last week
- Within the last month
- Within the last six months
- Within the last year
- More than a year ago
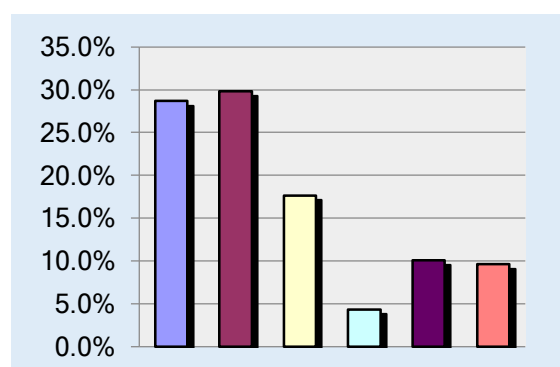
All respondents

Arabic-speaking respondents

Sections

Based on the data reflected in the main chart below, a few hypotheses may be drawn (all of which require further research to be confirmed).

First, the cumulative usage of the four sectoral chapters (which totalize 191%) suggests that the typical respondent works with several and not just one of them.

Second, the Core Standards chapter may be relatively under-used. Only 57% of the respondents report having used it although the Core Standards are supposed to be taken into consideration alongside each sectoral chapter. (This result seems somewhat counterintuitive and needs to be cross-checked with data about *Professional profiles* and *Purposes*.)

Third, the same could perhaps be said of the Humanitarian Charter, which is used by one out of two respondents (53%); however it is difficult to determine what a reasonable rate should be.

Spanish-speaking respondents show a significantly higher use of both the Humanitarian Charter and Protection Principles (61% and 54%, respectively) — something that needs further interpretation.
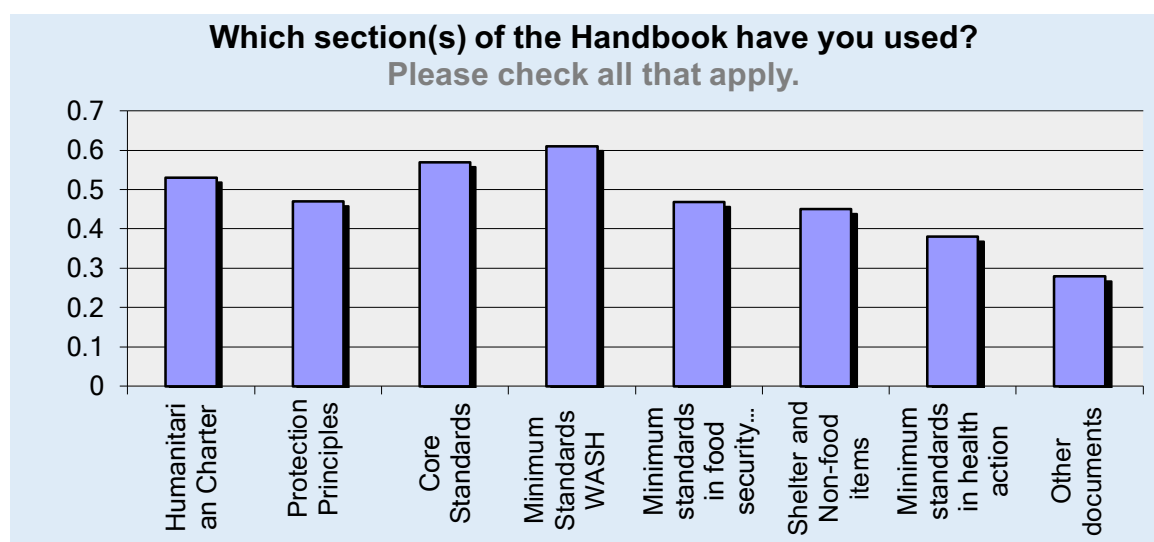
All respondents
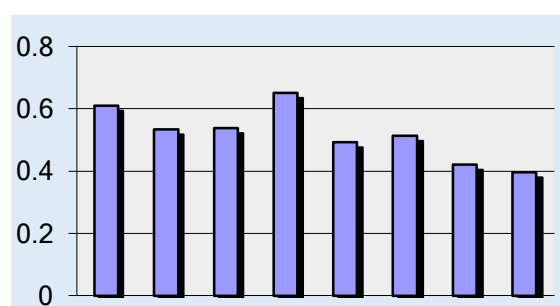
Spanish-speaking respondents

Components

Respondents use standards and indicators more than key actions and guidance notes.

There are some statistically significant differences by language (see charts below): an above-average number of Arabic- and Spanish-speaking respondents use key actions, while they are used by a less-than-average number of English-speaking respondents; an above-average number of French-speaking respondents use the standards and indicators.

Which of these components do you use the most often?
Please check all that apply.
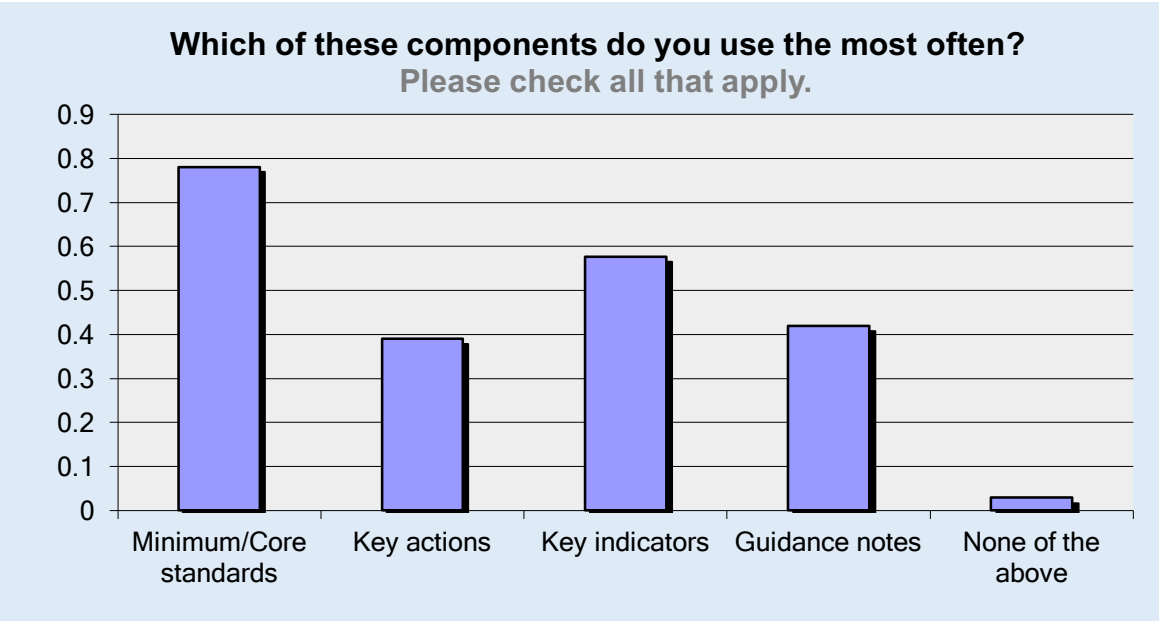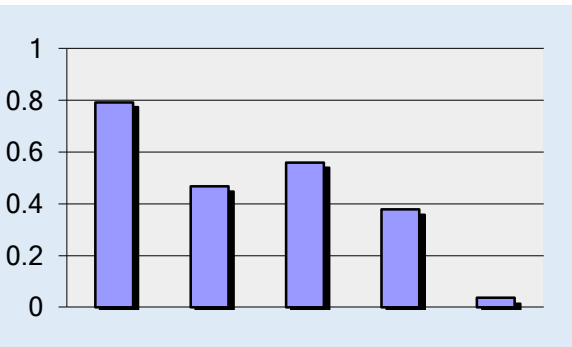
All respondents.

Spanish-speaking respondents
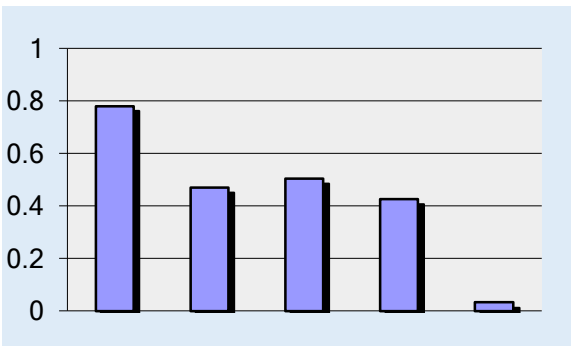
Arabic-speaking respondents
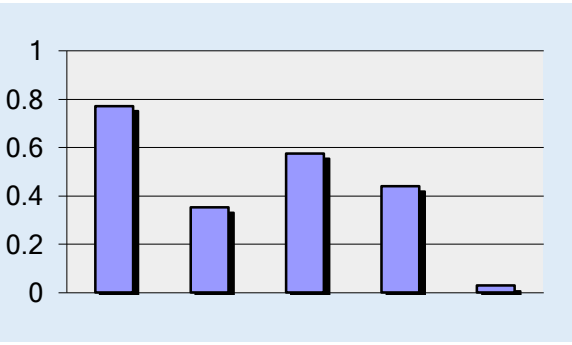
English-speaking respondents
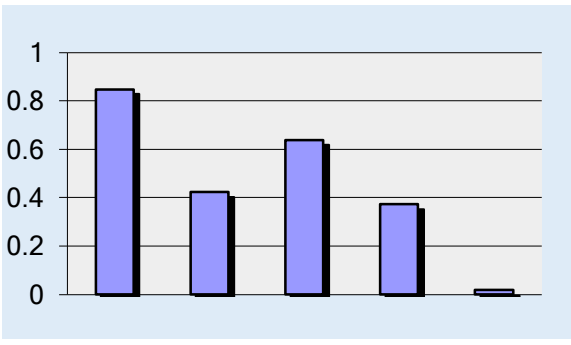
French-speaking respondents

Phases of humanitarian action

The main finding is the high proportion of respondents who use the Handbook in preparedness. Designed with a specific focus on humanitarian response, the Handbook also claims to be a "reference tool […] useful in both the disaster-preparedness and the early recovery phases". The data gathered supports the claim in relation to the recovery phase, but also suggests that the Handbook may be playing a role in preparedness that goes beyond just being a reference tool.

Disaggregating the data by language, French- and Spanish-speaking respondents seem to be those responsible for the high level of use in preparedness. A significantly higher-than-average number of Arabic-speaking respondents use the Handbook in the response phase.
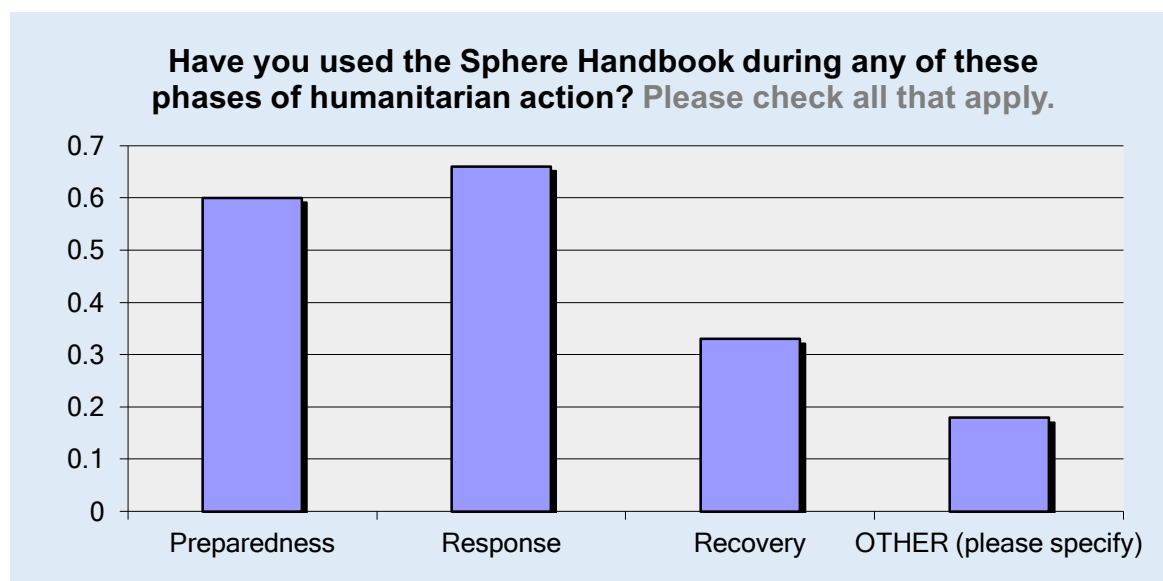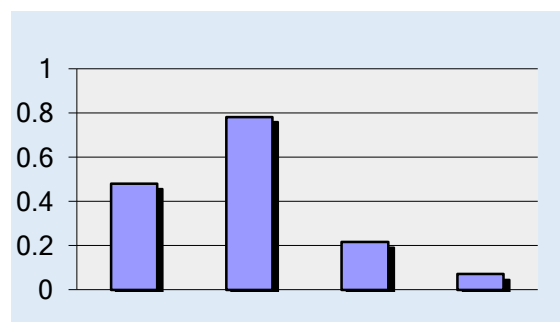
Have you used the Sphere Handbook during any of these phases of humanitarian action? Please check all that apply.

All respondents.

Arabic-speaking respondents
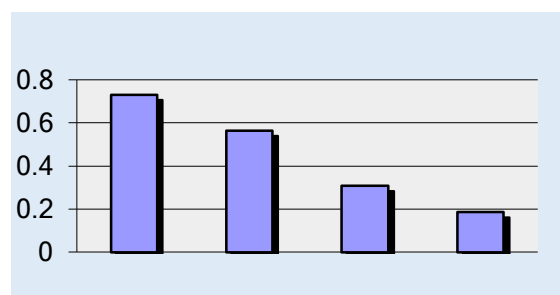
Spanish-speaking respondents
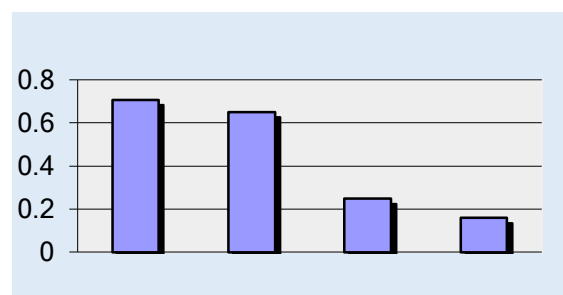
French-speaking respondents

Purposes

Considered together, the aid delivery-focused purposes (needs assessment, programme design and management, monitoring and evaluation, and coordination) account for the largest portion of purposes checked in the chart below.

Capacity-building-focused purposes (training, training materials, personal study and learning) come in a close second place.

Have you used the Handbook for any of the following purposes? Please check all that apply.

Purpose	
Needs assessment	~58%
Delivery of training, teaching, capacity-building	~57%
Programme design	~51%
Development of training materials,…	~50%
Monitoring and evaluation	~49%
Personal study, online self-training	~48%
Learning (participant in workshop, course, etc)	~46%
Coordination	~36%
Management of assistance programmes	~34%
Quality assurance	~34%
Research (academic, policy, other)	~29%
Accountability	~28%
Writing funding proposals (as a fundraiser)	~27%
Programme reporting	~27%
Development of organisational policies	~25%
Development of NDM policies	~20%
Advocacy with non-humanitarian actors	~20%
To prepare for a job application	~17%
Negotiations with donors	~17%
Evaluating funding proposals (as a donor)	~13%
To evaluate a job candidate	~9%
In a for-profit company (aid supplies &…	~7%

Professional profile

Considered together, the largest portion of respondents are apparently playing "implementation" roles (technical expert, programme manager and support, monitoring and evaluation expert, head of mission/country/department, logisticians, protection officers), which points to a hands-on audience and a significant role for the Handbook in aid delivery. This is consistent with the relative weight of the aid delivery-focused purposes for which the Handbook is used (see p. 10).

The single most important professional profile is linked to capacity-building, which is consistent with training being the second most popular purpose for which the Handbook is used (see page 10). This in turn suggests the Handbook plays a role in the professionalization of the sector.

Which of the following categories best describe your professional profile? If needed, you can choose more than one to describe what you do.

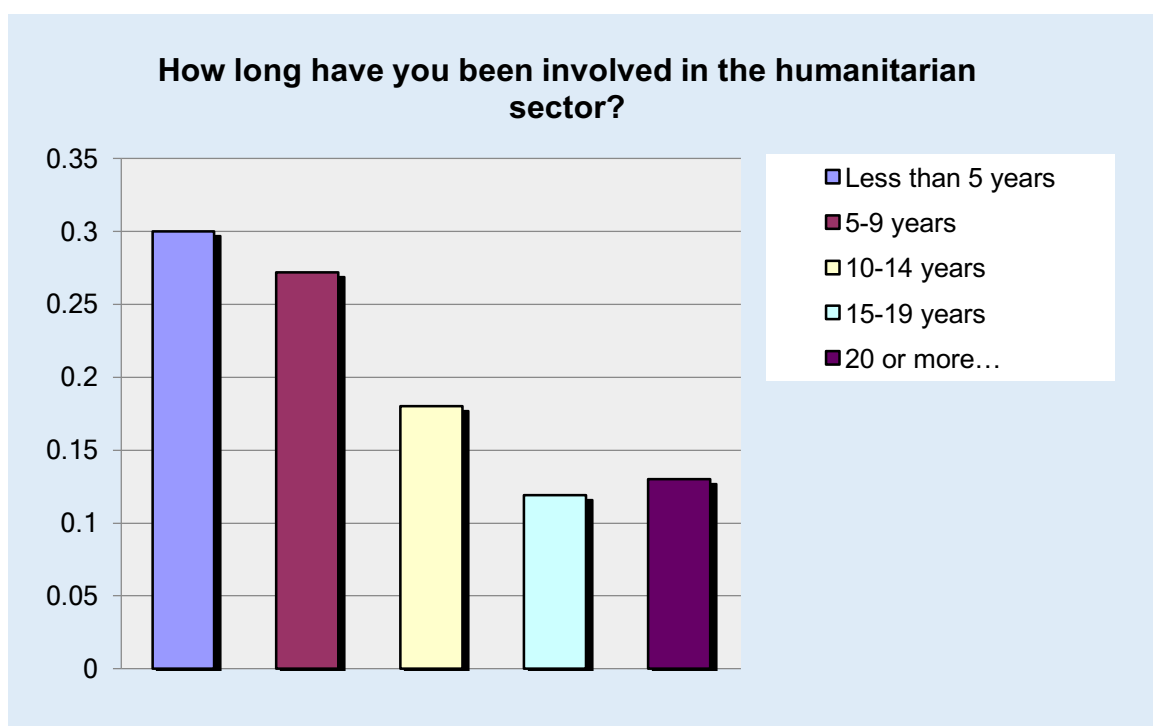| Category	
Trainer, Teacher, Learning Expert	
Technical/Sectoral Expert (WASH, etc.)	
Programme Manager	
Consultant, Researcher	
Volunteer	
Monitoring & Evaluation Expert	
Programme Support	
Student (all levels)	
Head of Department	
OTHER (please specify)	
Logistics, Procurement	
Protection Officer	
Government Official	
Quality and/or Accountability Expert	
Advocacy Expert	
Country Director, Head of Mission	
Policy Expert	
Human Resources Management	
CEO, President	
Fundraiser	
Communications, Journalist	
Finances, Administration	
Grants Manager (in a donor agency)	

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35%
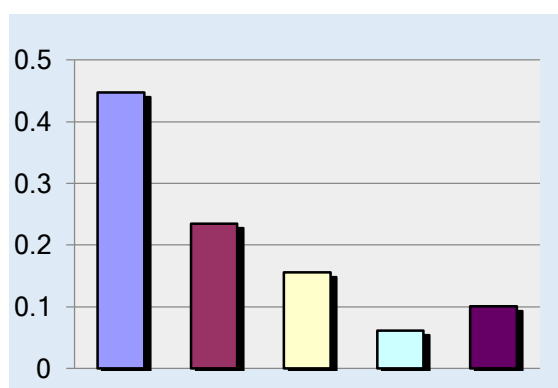
Professional experience

To fully interpret the distribution of survey respondents by years of experience (see main chart below) further research is required. In particular, it is necessary to determine the extent to which that distribution mirrors — or deviates from — the distribution of the whole sector.

In principle, the data below (together with that on pages 10 and 11) suggests that the Handbook plays an important role in the induction of new practitioners into the sector. The case of Arabic-speaking respondents (see below) seems to further support the point. With 250 respondents based in Syria and surrounding countries (see page 14) it is not surprising that 45% of the Arabic-speaking respondents have less than five years of experience in humanitarian work.

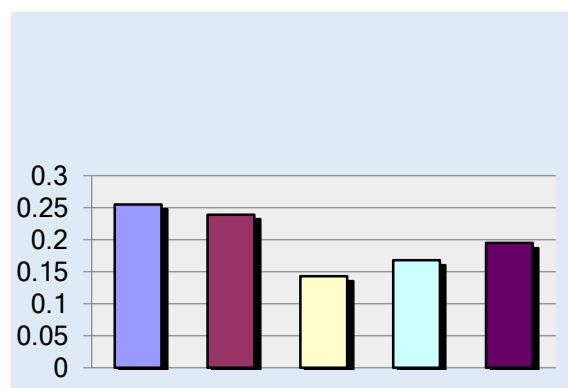On the other hand, the case of Spanish-speaking respondents (see below) shows a significantly larger prevalence of long-timers among them, a finding that also requires further research to be interpreted.

How long have you been involved in the humanitarian sector?

- Less than 5 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15-19 years
- 20 or more…

All respondents

Arabic-speaking respondents
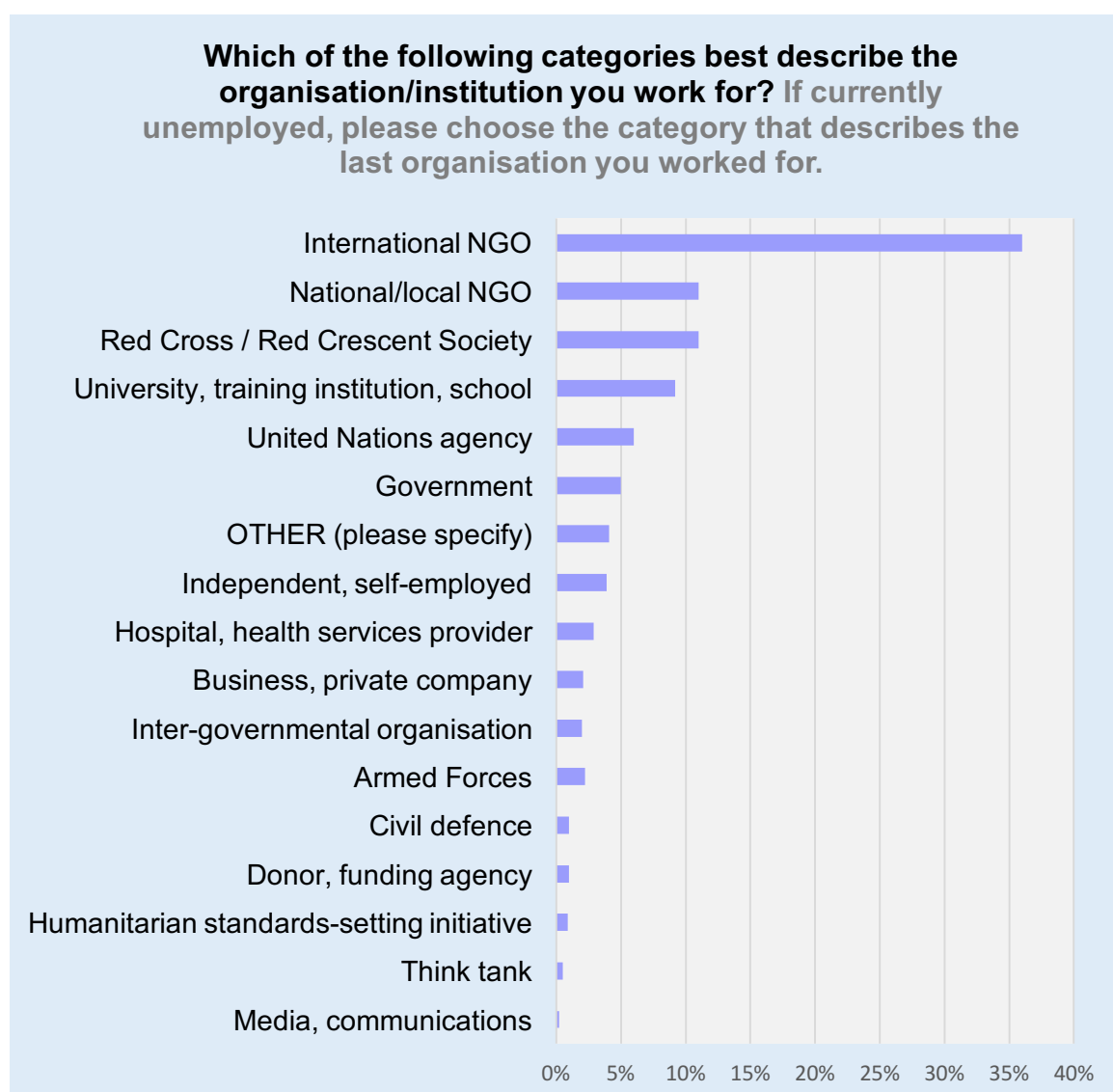

Spanish-speaking respondents

Organisations

The Sphere Handbook seems to be most popular among staff of international NGOs (36% of respondents), which probably reflects its origin as an initiative of large international NGO networks as well as the current composition of its Board.

The fact that national/local NGOs together with Red Cross / Red Crescent societies account for 22% of the survey respondents shows a good anchorage in local settings.

Government, UN agencies, Inter-governmental organisations, Armed forces and Civil defence all together account for 16% of respondents — suggesting the interest in the Handbook goes beyond the NGO world.

The fact that 9% of respondents work for training institutions suggests relevance for capacity-building purposes.

Which of the following categories best describe the organisation/institution you work for? If currently unemployed, please choose the category that describes the last organisation you worked for.

Category	Percentage
International NGO	36%
National/local NGO	11%
Red Cross / Red Crescent Society	11%
University, training institution, school	9%
United Nations agency	6%
Government	5%
OTHER (please specify)	4%
Independent, self-employed	4%
Hospital, health services provider	3%
Business, private company	2%
Inter-governmental organisation	2%
Armed Forces	2%
Civil defence	1%
Donor, funding agency	1%
Humanitarian standards-setting initiative	1%
Think tank	<1%
Media, communications	<1%

Countries

Practitioners who responded to the survey are based in 149 countries. More than 40% of them are in countries with ongoing humanitarian crises or situations of concern, and 10% just in Syria and surrounding countries (Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan).

All but three of the 33 countries listed by the ACAPS Global Emergency Overview as currently experiencing humanitarian crises appear in the table below, which shows a ranking of countries by number of survey responses.

Colour code	Severe humanitarian crisis	Humanitarian crisis	Situation of concern

Source: ACAPS Global Emergency Overview, 12 April 2016.

Country	Resp.	Country	Resp.	Country	Resp.
United States	179	Cameroon	29	Uganda	17
United Kingdom	100	France	29	Ivory Coast	15
Syria	81	Somalia	29	Senegal	15
Colombia	75	El Salvador	29	Sierra Leone	14
Kenya	72	Yemen	29	Belgium	13
Turkey	64	Burma	28	Iran	13
Germany	63	Niger	27	Morocco	13
Ecuador	60	Bangladesh	25	Saudi Arabia	13
Spain	59	Italy	25	Argentina	12
Pakistan	57	Zimbabwe	24	Paraguay	12
Philippines	53	Honduras	23	Egypt	11
DRC	52	Mexico	23	Greece	11
Canada	49	Guatemala	22	Hong Kong	10
Australia	48	Haiti	22	Sri Lanka	10
Sudan	44	Burkina Faso	21	Norway	10
Peru	41	Thailand	21	Tanzania	10
Switzerland	38	Venezuela	21	Ukraine	10
Ethiopia	38	Palestine	20	Austria	9
Iraq	38	Mali	20	CAR	9
India	37	Nigeria	20	Dominican Republic	9
South Sudan	36	Afghanistan	18	Japan	9
Lebanon	34	Netherlands	18	Cambodia	9
Jordan	33	Bolivia	17	Nicaragua	9
Indonesia	30	Chile	17	Rwanda	9
Nepal	30	Costa Rica	17	Burundi	8

Country	Resp.	Country	Resp.	Country	Resp.
Denmark	8	Singapore	4	Anguilla	1
Portugal	8	Chad	4	American Samoa	1
Sweden	8	Guinea	3	Barbados	1
South Africa	8	Guinea-Bissau	3	Bulgaria	1
Czech Republic	7	Hungary	3	Brunei	1
Ghana	7	Libya	3	Congo, Republic of the	1
Ireland	7	New Caledonia	3	Cuba	1
Algeria	6	Panama	3	Djibouti	1
Mauritania	6	Serbia	3	Guyana	1
Mozambique	6	Swaziland	3	Croatia	1
Brazil	5	United Arab Emirates	2	Iceland	1
Liberia	5	China	2	Marshall Islands	1
Malaysia	5	Estonia	2	Macau	1
New Zealand	5	Finland	2	Mauritius	1
Qatar	5	Georgia	2	Maldives	1
Tunisia	5	Gambia, The	2	Poland	1
Albania	4	Kyrgyzstan	2	Puerto Rico	1
Bosnia & Herzegovina	4	Mongolia	2	Reunion	1
Benin	4	Malta	2	Russia	1
Fiji	4	Togo	2	Slovakia	1
Israel	4	Timor-Leste	2	Uruguay	1
Laos	4	Trinidad and Tobago	2	British Virgin Islands	1
Madagascar	4	Taiwan	2	Vanuatu	1
Malawi	4	Vietnam	2	Zambia	1
Romania	4	Kosovo	2		

Total number of respondents who answered this question: 2,488.

Languages

Of the 27 language versions in which the Handbook is currently available in PDF format on the Sphere website, survey respondents indicated that they had used it in 15 languages (see below). Several factors have almost certainly influenced the relative weight of the first four languages listed below.

First, the survey was carried out in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

Second, the relative distribution of the three first languages in the chart is most likely heavily influenced by the reach of Sphere communications work (the distribution per language of subscribers to the Sphere newsletter — which is published in English, Spanish and French — is pretty much the same as that shown below).

The weight of the Arabic language in the chart below may reflect the deliberate outreach work done in that language by the Sphere office in recent years.

Respondents requested the Handbook to become available in a number of languages; the most popular being **Swahili, Portuguese, Somali, Amharic** and **Filipino** — in that order.

In which of the following languages have you used the Handbook? Please check all that apply.