



**The value and impact of
International Humanitarian Law Knowledge**

**Australian Humanitarian Sector Baseline Survey Results
January 2023**

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Executive Summary

The January 2023 International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Knowledge Baseline Survey was conducted by Australian Red Cross from 10 October 2022 until 31 January 2023 to develop a better understanding of current IHL knowledge levels across a range of job categories within the Australian humanitarian sector. This survey is a component of an ongoing Australian Red Cross research project to better understand the value and impact of IHL knowledge and training within the Australian humanitarian sector. The survey was designed by the Humanitarian Action Group (HAG) and published as an annex to the [IHL Knowledge Framework](#) in October 2022. In total, 35 humanitarian practitioners from seven humanitarian organisations in Australia responded to the January 2023 IHL Knowledge Baseline survey.

Key findings from the survey include:



Respondents at only one organisation confirmed that IHL topics were included in their staff and volunteer training. Respondents at four organisations indicated that IHL topics were not covered in their training, while respondents at two organisations were unsure.



Issues including a lack of capacity, time, and resources, limited access to IHL learning and development opportunities, and a lack of understanding of the relevance of IHL to their roles, were reported by survey respondents as barriers they faced to enhancing their IHL knowledge.



All respondents suggested that IHL was at least marginally relevant to them in their current roles, and the majority of respondents (57%) thought it was 'somewhat' relevant. No respondents suggested that IHL was not at all relevant to their roles.



Eighteen survey respondents (51%) met or exceeded the recommended IHL knowledge levels set out in the IHL Knowledge Framework. **However, 17 survey respondents (49%) indicated that their current IHL knowledge was lower than the recommended knowledge level for their job category.** In contrast, 73% of respondents from the organisation that included IHL topics in its staff and volunteer training met or exceeded the recommended IHL knowledge level.



A significant number of responses indicated that enhanced IHL knowledge and application might have been relevant to survey respondents, and that IHL could be better understood and utilised within organisations across the humanitarian sector as a tool to enhance humanitarian outcomes and reduce organisational risks. These responses also suggest that survey respondents may be keen to learn more about IHL and how it can be better leveraged by their organisations.

Some of the examples given by survey respondents of how they and their organisations were already leveraging IHL included incorporating IHL topics into their reports and submissions to governments, donors, and members; policy papers; and joint statements relating to conflicts. Survey respondents also explained how they had discussed IHL topics with their colleagues internally in relation to the development of policies and programming, and externally with foreign and Australian partners and authorities, and when making social media posts and engaging with community members and supporters. However, a high number of respondents indicated that they or their organisations were not yet leveraging IHL in these ways, although it may have been relevant to do so. This further supports the finding that people in all job categories may benefit from greater access to IHL learning and development opportunities to better leverage IHL.

Key recommendations resulting from the survey include:



Improve access to IHL learning and development opportunities: Australian Red Cross should work with organisations in the Australian humanitarian sector to facilitate or enhance access to IHL learning and development opportunities to meet and maintain the recommended IHL knowledge levels set out in the IHL Knowledge Framework.



Include IHL knowledge requirements in job descriptions and embed IHL topics in mandatory training: Humanitarian organisations should include IHL knowledge requirements, based on the recommended IHL knowledge levels set out in the IHL Knowledge Framework, in all job descriptions for roles in the Australian humanitarian sector. To ensure their staff and volunteers possess the minimum recommended level of IHL knowledge for their roles, humanitarian organisations should also embed IHL topics into induction and other required training.



Regularly review the IHL Knowledge Framework: To ensure the recommended IHL knowledge levels set out in the IHL Knowledge Framework align with the needs and expectations of organisations within the Australian humanitarian sector, Australian Red Cross should test and review the recommended IHL knowledge levels with each annual baseline survey.

This report details the data collected and the key findings and recommendations made as a result of conducting this survey.

Introduction

In 2019, the Australian Red Cross IHL Program commissioned the Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) to commence research on the value and impact of IHL knowledge and training for the humanitarian sector in Australia. The resulting report was entitled '[Gaining Traction: Measuring the Impact of IHL Training](#)'. The key findings of this report were that:

- Application of IHL training can be linked to improved humanitarian outcomes;
- Training on IHL and humanitarian principles is only one step in the learning process;
- Application of IHL and humanitarian principles is supported only if there is a critical mass of actors in context that understand and support the principles;
- Training needs to be practical and contextualized; and
- Awareness of IHL and the humanitarian principles mitigates risks in the field.

In 2022, Australian Red Cross commissioned the HAG again to progress this research further by developing a framework tool that would explain why IHL knowledge is important for people in particular job categories within the humanitarian sector and provide a recommended IHL knowledge level for people in those roles. The resulting [IHL Knowledge Framework](#) was launched at the Australian Red Cross and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University 2022 IHL Symposium in August 2022. Annexed to this IHL Knowledge Framework was a template of a Baseline Survey that could be used in later stages of the research to repeatedly map current IHL knowledge levels across the Australian humanitarian sector.

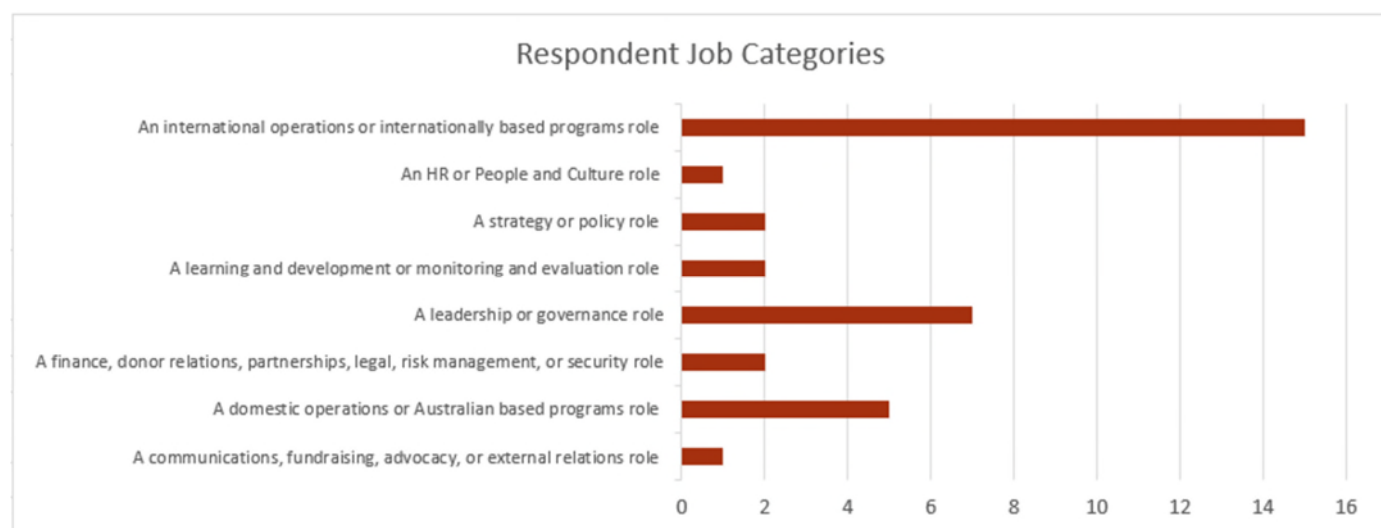
Methodology

This IHL Knowledge Baseline Survey template was converted to a Microsoft Form and shared electronically with Australian Red Cross' contacts across the humanitarian sector in October 2022. Survey responses were collected between 10 October 2022 until 31 January 2023.

Survey data analysis

In total, 35 humanitarian practitioners from seven humanitarian organisations in Australia responded to the IHL Knowledge Baseline Survey. The majority of these responses came from respondents working for World Vision Australia (43%) and Australian Red Cross (31%), while staff from CARE Australia, CBM, Plan International, the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, and another independent organisation also submitted responses.

Respondents identified that they were working in a range of roles and job categories. Their roles included Technical Advisers, Country Impact Managers, Induction and Training roles, Grant Specialists, and Portfolio and Program Managers and Officers, among others.



Sector Wide Organisational Results

In the first section of the survey, respondents were asked some questions relating to how their organisations leveraged IHL. The survey respondents indicated that:

- All respondents worked for organisations that work in areas and/or engage in issues concerning armed conflict. Six of the seven organisations engage with the Australian Government, including the departments of Social Services, Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and Defence, as well as the Attorney-General's Department, Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Australian Defence Force. All respondents worked for organisations that are committed to the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and/or other internationally recognised humanitarian principles.
- Respondents at four organisations suggested their organisations acknowledge the importance and relevance of IHL and other applicable legal frameworks in key strategic plans and relevant publications. Respondents at two organisations were unsure, and respondents at one organisation advised that their organisation did not.
- **Respondents at only one organisation confirmed that IHL topics were included in their staff and volunteer training.** Respondents at four organisations advised that IHL was not covered in their training, while respondents at two organisations were unsure.

- Respondents at two organisations confirmed that their organisations included IHL topics in their public-facing communications messaging. IHL topics were incorporated into their reports to governments, donors, members, policy papers, and joint statements relating to conflicts. Respondents at three other organisations were unsure if their organisations did this, while respondents at the other two organisations indicated that theirs did not.
- Respondents at three organisations confirmed that their organisations discuss IHL topics as part of their internal communications and/or engagement with partners. For example, IHL topics were discussed with local partners in a conflict zone. Respondents at three other organisations were not sure if their organisations did this, while the respondents at the other organisation indicated that theirs did not.

The relatively high number of respondents indicating that they were unsure whether IHL was embedded in organisational frameworks or referenced in internal or external communications suggests that either IHL is not regularly or obviously embedded, leveraged, or referenced internally or externally at many organisations in the humanitarian sector, or staff do not always recognise when this is the case.

Respondents reported the following barriers to IHL knowledge within their organisations:

- Staff working overcapacity and with minimal resources, with a focus on program development rather than staff development;
- Lack of time for additional training;
- Limited or unknown IHL learning and development opportunities;
- Lack of understanding of the relevance of IHL to many roles in the sector;
- IHL is 'in the space of' the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, rather than other organisations; and
- Costs of completing training.

Key finding: Only one of the seven humanitarian organisations that survey respondents worked for clearly include IHL topics in their staff and volunteer training.

Issues including a lack of capacity, time, and resources, limited access to IHL learning and development opportunities, and a lack of understanding of the relevance of IHL to their roles, were reported by survey respondents as barriers they faced to enhancing their IHL knowledge.

Sector Wide Individual Results

Survey respondents were asked to identify which job category they fell into, how relevant IHL is to them in their current roles, and how they would describe their current IHL knowledge level. The responses to these questions are summarised here and contrasted to the recommended IHL knowledge levels set out in the IHL Knowledge Framework.

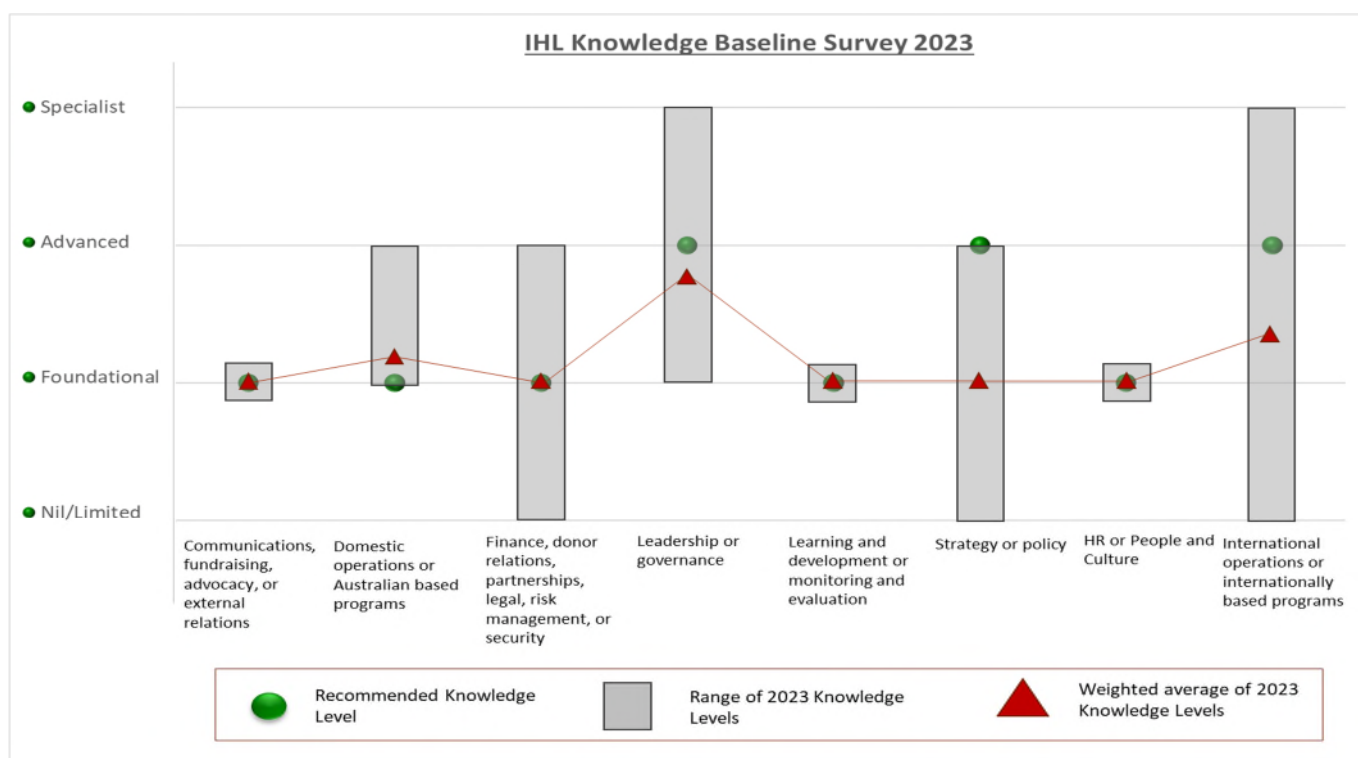
Job category (from IHL Knowledge Framework)	Recommended IHL knowledge level (from IHL Knowledge Framework)	#	Relevance of IHL to current role (response to survey)	Description of actual knowledge level (response from survey)	Comparison of actual and recommended IHL knowledge levels
A communications, fundraising, advocacy, or external relations role	Foundational/specialist	1	Somewhat relevant	Foundational	Meets recommended level.
A domestic operations or Australian based programs role	Foundational/specialist	5	Highly relevant Somewhat relevant Somewhat relevant Somewhat relevant Marginally relevant	Advanced Foundational Foundational Foundational Foundational	Meets recommended level. Meets recommended level. Meets recommended level. Meets recommended level. Meets recommended level.
A finance, donor relations, partnerships, legal, risk management, or security role	Foundational	2	Somewhat relevant Somewhat relevant	Advanced Nil/Limited	Meets recommended level. Does not meet recommended level.
A leadership or governance role	Advanced	7	Highly relevant Highly relevant Somewhat relevant Somewhat relevant Marginally relevant Marginally relevant Marginally relevant	Specialist Advanced Foundational Foundational Advanced Foundational Foundational	Meets recommended level. Meets recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Meets recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Does not meet recommended level.
A learning and development or monitoring and evaluation role	Foundational	2	Somewhat relevant Marginally relevant	Foundational Foundational	Meets recommended level. Meets recommended level.
A strategy or policy role	Advanced/specialist	2	Somewhat relevant Somewhat relevant	Advanced Nil/Limited	Meets recommended level. Does not meet recommended level.
An HR or People and Culture role	Foundational	1	Somewhat relevant	Foundational	Meets recommended level.
An international operations or internationally based programs role	Advanced/specialist	15	Highly relevant Highly relevant Highly relevant Somewhat relevant Somewhat relevant Somewhat relevant Somewhat relevant Somewhat relevant Somewhat relevant Somewhat relevant Somewhat relevant Somewhat relevant Marginally relevant Marginally relevant Marginally relevant Marginally relevant	Advanced Foundational Nil/Limited Specialist Specialist Foundational Foundational Foundational Foundational Foundational Foundational Nil/Limited Advanced Foundational Foundational Foundational	Meets recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Meets recommended level. Meets recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Meets recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Does not meet recommended level. Does not meet recommended level.
				18 x Meet recommended IHL knowledge level. 17 x Do not meet recommended IHL knowledge level.	

Although the IHL Knowledge Framework makes it clear that IHL knowledge is relevant to all job categories in the humanitarian sector, only six respondents (17%) felt that IHL was highly relevant to their roles. The majority of respondents (20 respondents, or 57%) felt that IHL was somewhat relevant to their roles, while nine respondents (26%) felt it was only marginally relevant. No respondents indicated that IHL was not at all relevant to their current roles, or that they didn't know whether it was relevant to their current roles, though these were survey response options.

Key finding: All respondents across all job categories suggested that IHL was at least marginally relevant to them in their current roles, and the majority of respondents (57%) thought it was 'somewhat' relevant to them.

No respondents suggested that IHL was not at all relevant to their roles.

The following graph illustrates the recommended IHL knowledge levels for each of the job categories set out in the IHL Knowledge Framework (in green) and contrasts this to the weighted average of the actual IHL knowledge levels that people in these roles feel that they currently have (in red). The majority of respondents described their IHL knowledge level as foundational, and for this reason, many people in job categories that require an advanced or specialist knowledge of IHL knowledge, such as people in leadership or governance roles and international operations and programs roles, did not meet the minimum recommended IHL knowledge levels. The 'baseline' mapped below will be reassessed and remapped on an annual basis going forward.



Of the six respondents who felt that IHL was highly relevant to their roles, only one respondent had specialist knowledge of IHL and three had advanced knowledge of IHL. One respondent who felt that IHL was highly relevant to their role recognised that they only had a foundational knowledge of IHL, while one described their knowledge of IHL as 'Nil/Limited'.

Key finding: Eighteen survey respondents (51%) met or exceeded the recommended IHL knowledge levels set out in the IHL Knowledge Framework. **However, 17 survey respondents (49%) indicated that their current IHL knowledge was lower than the recommended knowledge level for their job category.**

In contrast, 73% of respondents from the organisation that included IHL topics in its staff and volunteer training met or exceeded the recommended IHL knowledge level.

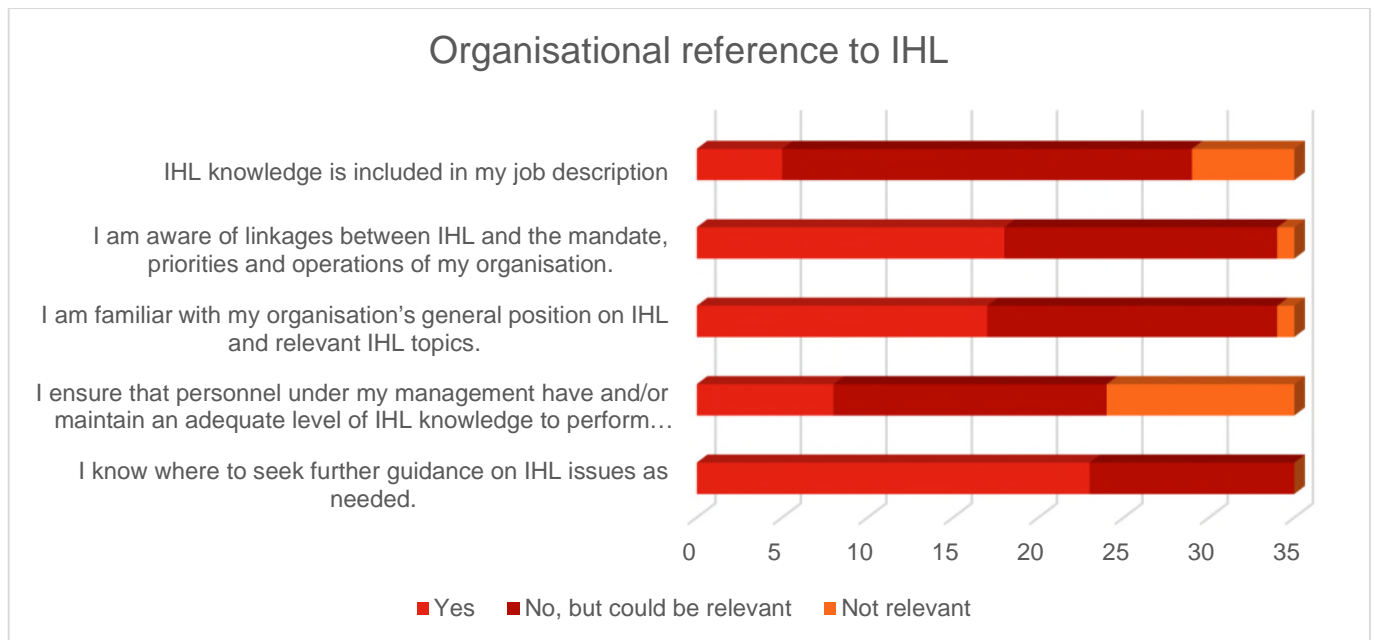
The majority of respondents who indicated that their current IHL knowledge was lower than the recommended knowledge level are in job categories where advanced or specialist knowledge of IHL is recommended.

Despite this key finding, 22 survey respondents (63%) felt they had an adequate level of knowledge of IHL to perform their role effectively. Eleven respondents (31%) indicated that they didn't, though it might be relevant to them in their roles. Only two respondents (6%) felt it wasn't relevant to them to have an adequate knowledge of IHL.

The slight deviation between the survey respondents' subjective assessment of their own IHL knowledge levels and the relatively objective assessment of the survey respondents' IHL knowledge levels indicates that certain IHL knowledge levels set out in the IHL knowledge framework may be set slightly too high or may not be sufficiently nuanced. However, the similarity of these results suggests that with some minor adjustments, the IHL Knowledge Framework could prove to be an effective tool for humanitarian organisations to identify a minimum IHL knowledge level required for all roles and enable them to ensure that their teams possess the necessary IHL knowledge levels to perform effectively in their roles.

Recommendation: To ensure the recommended IHL knowledge levels set out in the IHL Knowledge Framework align with the needs and expectations of organisations within the Australian humanitarian sector, Australian Red Cross should test and review the recommended IHL knowledge levels with each annual baseline survey

Survey respondents were next asked a series of questions about how IHL is understood and used by their organisations.



The key findings from the responses to these questions were:

- IHL knowledge was included as a requirement in the job descriptions of only five survey respondents (14%). **However, twenty-four respondents (69%) indicated that although IHL wasn't included in their job descriptions, it might have been relevant.** Only six respondents felt that including IHL in their job descriptions was 'not relevant', and four of these six had previously indicated that IHL was only 'marginally relevant' to their roles. This result suggests that, particularly for job categories where IHL is somewhat or highly relevant, IHL knowledge should be included in job descriptions.
- Eighteen survey respondents (51%) indicated that they were aware of linkages between IHL and the mandate, priorities and operations of their organisation. **However, 16 respondents (46%) indicated that they weren't aware of these links, but this could be relevant to them in their roles.** Only one respondent felt these linkages weren't relevant to them.

- Seventeen survey respondents (49%) indicated that they were familiar with their organisation's general position on IHL and relevant IHL topics. **However, 17 respondents (49%) indicated that they weren't familiar with their organisation's position on these matters, but this could be relevant to them in their roles.** Only one respondent felt this wasn't relevant to them.
- Eight survey respondents (23%) indicated that they ensure that personnel under their management have and/or maintain an adequate level of IHL knowledge to perform their roles effectively. **However, 16 respondents (46%) indicated that they didn't, though it could be relevant to them in their roles.** Eleven respondents (31%) indicated that this wasn't relevant to them, possibly because it wasn't relevant to personnel under their management or because they did not manage any staff.
- Twenty-three survey respondents (66%) indicated that they knew where to seek further guidance on IHL issues as needed. **However, 12 respondents (34%) indicated that they didn't.**

Key finding: These responses indicated that enhanced IHL knowledge and application might have been relevant to survey respondents, and that IHL could be better understood and utilised within organisations across the humanitarian sector as a tool to enhance humanitarian outcomes and reduce organisational risks.

These responses also suggest that survey respondents may be keen to learn more about IHL and how it can be better leveraged by their organisations.

Recommendations: Noting that all respondents felt that IHL was at least marginally relevant to them in their roles, and that 69% of respondents felt that it might have been relevant to reference IHL in their job descriptions, humanitarian organisations should consider including IHL knowledge requirements, based on the recommended IHL knowledge levels set out in the IHL Knowledge Framework, in all job descriptions.

To ensure their staff and volunteers possess the minimum recommended level of IHL knowledge for their roles, humanitarian organisations should embed IHL topics into induction and other required training.

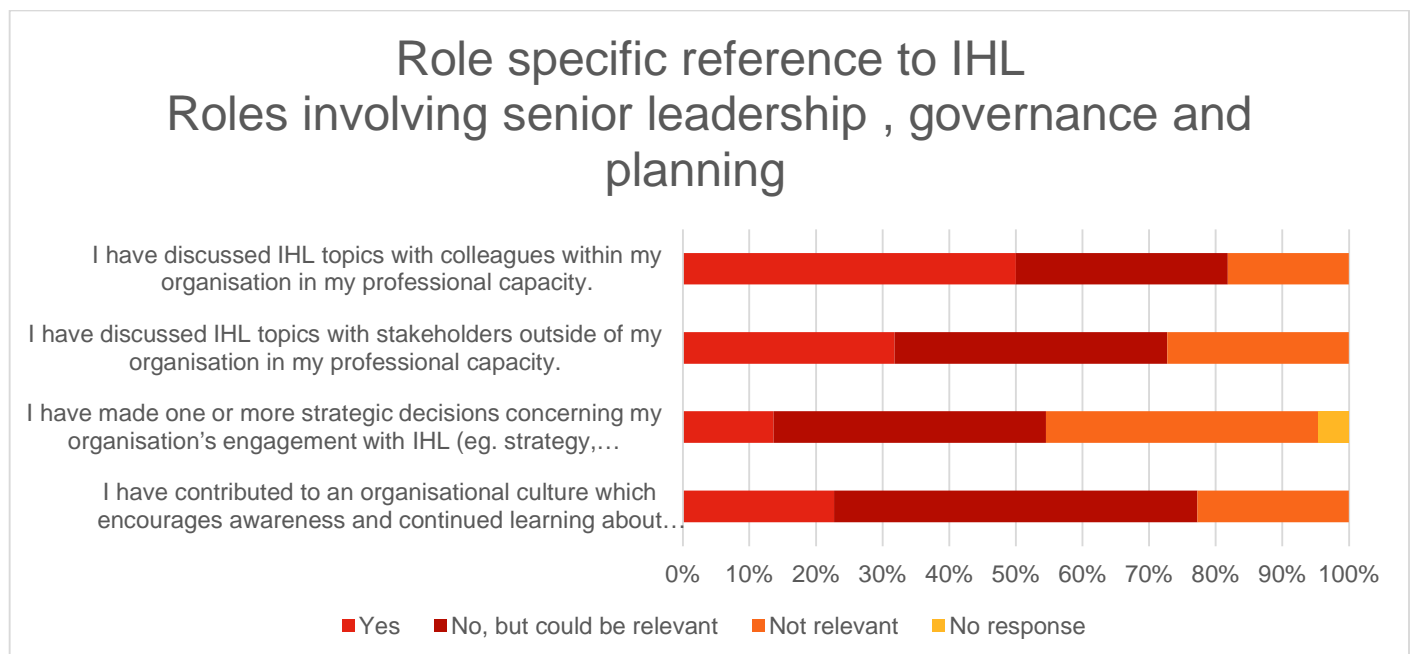
Australian Red Cross should work with organisations in the Australian humanitarian sector to facilitate or enhance access to necessary IHL learning and development opportunities to meet and maintain the recommended IHL knowledge levels set out in the IHL Knowledge Framework.

Job Category Specific Results

In the final section of the survey, respondents were asked a series of questions depending on which group of job categories they felt their current roles fell into. Respondents were asked to complete the questions in the category or categories which were most relevant to their current roles. If their role involved a combination of several different categories, they were asked to complete questions in all categories that were relevant to them. For this reason, the number of survey respondents answering these questions varied.

Roles involving senior leadership, governance and planning

Twenty-two of the survey respondents indicated that their current roles fell into the category of 'roles involving senior leadership, governance and planning'.



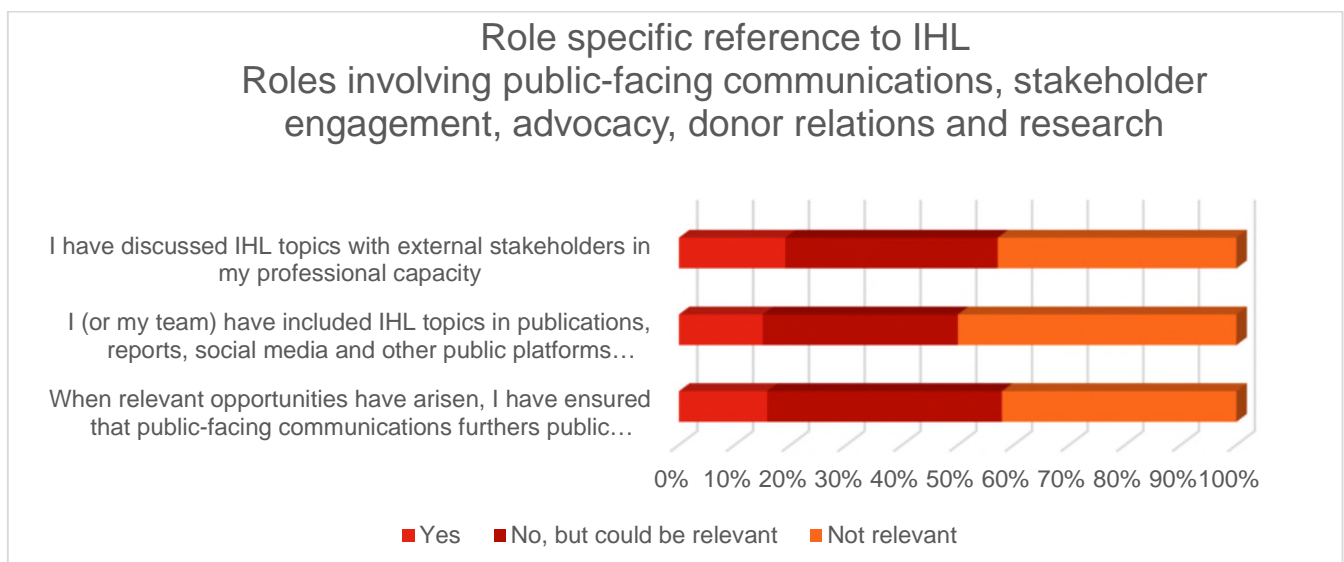
These survey respondents indicated that in the past 12 months:

- Eleven of the 22 survey respondents (50%) had discussed IHL topics with colleagues within their organisation in their professional capacity. Examples provided of how this was done included discussions relating to policies and programming, and the development of submissions. **Seven of the 22 survey respondents (32%) indicated that they hadn't had such discussions within their organisation but noted that it might have been relevant.** Four of the 22 survey respondents (18%) indicated that this wasn't relevant to them.

- Seven of the 22 survey respondents (32%) had discussed IHL topics with stakeholders outside of their organisations in their professional capacity. Examples provided of how this was done included discussions with local partners in foreign countries and discussions with DFAT. **Nine of the 22 survey respondents (41%) indicated that they hadn't had such discussions outside their organisation but noted that it might have been relevant.** Six of the 22 survey respondents (27%) indicated that this wasn't relevant to them.
- Three of the 22 survey respondents (14%) had made one or more strategic decisions concerning their organisation's engagement with IHL (eg. strategy, operations, communications/advocacy, training, HR etc). **Nine of the 22 survey respondents (41%) indicated that they hadn't made such decision but noted that it might have been relevant.** Nine of the 22 survey respondents (41%) indicated that this wasn't relevant to them. One respondent (5%) did not provide an answer to this question.
- Five of the 22 survey respondents (23%) had contributed to an organisational culture which encourages awareness and continued learning about relevant IHL topics. **Twelve of the 22 survey respondents (55%) indicated that they hadn't done this but noted that it might have been relevant.** Five of the 22 survey respondents (23%) indicated that this wasn't relevant to them.

Roles involving public-facing communications, stakeholder engagement, advocacy, donor relations and research

Twenty-one of the survey respondents indicated that their current roles fell into the category of 'roles involving public-facing communications, stakeholder engagement, advocacy, donor relations and research'.

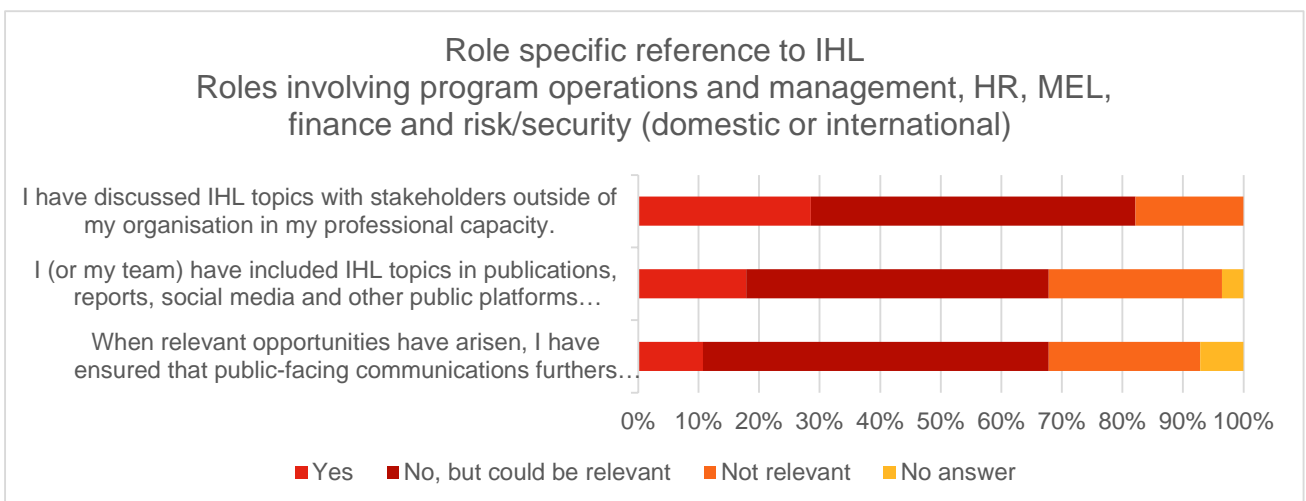


These survey respondents indicated that in the past 12 months:

- Four of the 21 survey respondents (19%) had discussed IHL topics with stakeholders outside of their organisations in their professional capacity. Examples provided of how this was done included discussions with local partners and local authorities in foreign countries. **Eight of the 21 survey respondents (38%) indicated that they hadn't had such discussions outside their organisation but noted that it might have been relevant.** Nine of the 21 survey respondents (43%) indicated that this wasn't relevant to them.
- Three of the 21 survey respondents (14%) or their teams had included IHL topics in publications, reports, social media and other public platforms produced on behalf of their organisation. **Seven of the 21 survey respondents (33%) indicated that they hadn't done this but noted that it might have been relevant.** Ten of the 21 survey respondents (48%) indicated that this wasn't relevant to them. One respondent (4%) did not provide an answer to this question.
- Three of the 21 survey respondents (14%) indicated that when relevant opportunities arose, they have ensured that public-facing communications furthered public awareness about IHL or knowledge on specific IHL topics. **Eight of the 21 survey respondents (38%) indicated that they hadn't done this but noted that it might have been relevant.** Eight of the 21 survey respondents (38%) indicated that this wasn't relevant to them. Two respondents (10%) did not provide an answer to this question.

Roles involving program operations and management, HR, MEL, finance and risk/security (domestic or international)

Twenty-eight of the survey respondents indicated that their current roles fell into the category of 'roles involving program operations and management, HR, MEL, finance and risk/security (domestic or international)'.



These survey respondents indicated that in the past 12 months:

- Eight of the 28 survey respondents (29%) had discussed IHL topics with stakeholders outside of their organisations in their professional capacity. **Fifteen of the 28 survey respondents (54%) indicated that they hadn't had such discussions outside their organisation but noted that it might have been relevant.** Five of the 28 survey respondents (18%) indicated that this wasn't relevant to them.
- Five of the 28 survey respondents (18%) or their teams had included IHL topics in publications, reports, social media and other public platforms produced on behalf of their organisation. **Fourteen of the 28 survey respondents (50%) indicated that they hadn't done this but noted that it might have been relevant.** Eight of the 28 survey respondents (29%) indicated that this wasn't relevant to them. One respondent (4%) did not provide an answer to this question.
- Three of the 28 survey respondents (11%) indicated that when relevant opportunities arose, they have ensured that public-facing communications furthered public awareness about IHL or knowledge on specific IHL topics. Examples of how this was done included making social media posts and engaging with community members. **Sixteen of the 28 survey respondents (57%) indicated that they hadn't done this but noted that it might have been relevant.** Seven of the 28 survey respondents (25%) indicated that this wasn't relevant to them. Two respondents (7%) did not provide an answer to this question.

Key findings: The majority of respondents across all role types indicated that they had either:

- discussed IHL topics with stakeholders outside of their organisations in their professional capacity;
- had included IHL topics in publications, reports, social media and other public platforms produced on behalf of their organisation; and
- when relevant opportunities arose, had ensured that public-facing communications furthered public awareness about IHL or knowledge on specific IHL topics; or
- were not yet doing these things, though it might have been relevant to do so.

This supports earlier findings that people in these job categories may benefit from greater access to IHL learning and development opportunities to better leverage IHL as a tool that can be used to enhance humanitarian outcomes and reduce organisational risks.

Conclusion

The January 2023 IHL Knowledge Baseline Survey indicated that only 51% of respondents from the Australian humanitarian sector met or exceeded the recommended IHL knowledge levels set out in the IHL Knowledge Framework. However, all respondents suggested that IHL was at least marginally relevant to them in their current roles, and the majority of respondents (57%) thought it was 'somewhat' relevant. No respondents suggested that IHL was not at all relevant to their roles. Additionally, a significant number of survey respondents indicated that enhanced IHL knowledge and application might have been relevant to them, and that IHL could be better understood and utilised within organisations across the humanitarian sector as a tool to enhance humanitarian outcomes and reduce organisational risks. These responses also indicate that survey respondents may be keen to learn more about IHL and how it can be better leveraged by their organisations.

For these reasons, Australian Red Cross will continue to work in consultation with the Australian humanitarian sector to facilitate or enhance access to necessary IHL learning and development opportunities and to continually refine the IHL Knowledge Framework so that it aligns with the needs and expectations of organisations in the sector.

Additionally, all organisations in the humanitarian sector should consider including IHL knowledge requirements, based on the recommended IHL knowledge levels set out in the IHL Knowledge Framework, in all job descriptions for roles in all job categories. To ensure their staff and volunteers possess the minimum recommended level of IHL knowledge for their roles, humanitarian organisations should also consider embedding IHL topics into induction and other required training.

Next Steps

In 2023, Australian Red Cross hopes to continue this ongoing research project to better understand the value and impact of IHL knowledge and training within the Australian humanitarian sector by commencing a third phase of this research project. It is hoped that this third phase will build on earlier phases of the project by commencing a longitudinal study (potentially in partnership with an academic institution and/or other humanitarian organisations) which relates to the value of IHL training for people in different roles in the humanitarian sector. This study will seek to map the knowledge and use of IHL by selected humanitarians over at least three years. This third phase will also involve a review of the IHL Knowledge Framework recommended knowledge levels and the development of a training guide and training resources to help humanitarian organisations access tailored IHL training for people in particular roles. The IHL Knowledge Baseline Survey will also be repeated by March 2024.

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