

## IFLA Code of Ethics Survey- Results

12 years on from the agreement of the current version of the IFLA Code of Ethics for Library and Information Workers, IFLA's Advisory Committee on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression launched a review process.

As a first step in the process, the Committee designed a survey for IFLA members, volunteers and others in order to gather input about their awareness and use of the Code, and of the ongoing relevance of the topics it covers.

The goal of the survey was to understand more about use of the current Code of Ethics, as well as to gauge what respondents felt about the topics covered, and new aspects or themes which should be taken into account.

### 0. Methodology

The survey ran from 7 February to 13 March 2025 (a prolongation from the original deadline of 3 March). It was distributed via IFLA's social media channels, as well as our main mailing list and regional mailing lists. It was translated into all IFLA languages, primarily using DeepL or Google Translate. Answers were anonymous, with no collection of IP addresses, in order to maintain confidentiality.

The survey consisted of the following:

- Background questions: the region in which respondents were based (IFLA regions), and their role (association staff or official, agency/ministry staff or official, library or information worker, other)
- Awareness of the Code: whether respondents are aware, and if so how
- National codes: whether respondents' countries have a code, and if so what tools there are to monitor adherence, how often librarians refer to it, how far it reflects local culture, and how far it draws on the IFLA code
- For each of the themes in the IFLA Code (listed below), how important themes are, whether ethical responsibilities in this regard have changed since 2012, and what else respondents wish to share. The different themes

are: access to information; responsibilities towards individuals and societies; privacy, secrecy and transparency; open access and intellectual property; neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills; and colleague and employer/employee relationships.

- A question about whether the IFLA code should address ethical obligations specific to different work environments
- An open question about other areas we should consider for a future code

In some cases, we used scales (from 'never' to 'always', or 'very important', 'somewhat important' and 'not at all'). Respondents also had the possibility to choose not to provide an answer. In our analysis, we have ascribed numbers to these figures in order to carry out analysis of those answers that were provided.

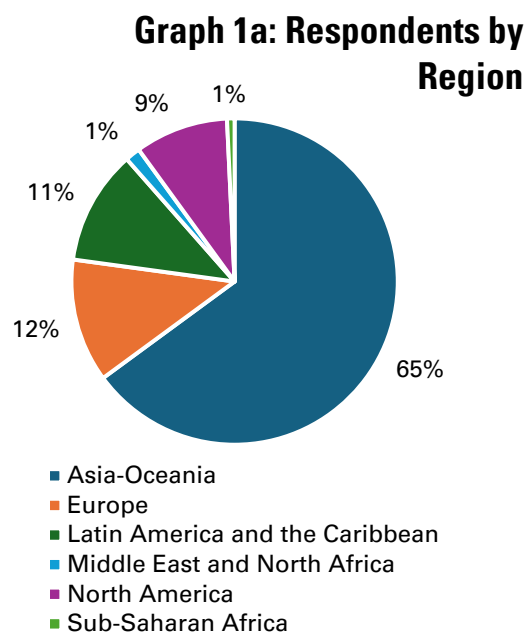
Open answers have been translated by the IFLA team, using automatic translation when needed, and summarised in the analysis.

## 1. A snapshot of the respondents

We received 691 responses overall, which is a good result for a survey from IFLA.

Graph 1a sets out the regional breakdown of the respondents. It is immediately clear that there was a very strong response from Asia-Oceania, potentially due to the survey being shared on national or regional lists. Typically, around 20-25% of responses to IFLA surveys come from Asia-Oceania, so this is out of the ordinary.

Europe provides the second most respondents, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (also representing a higher share than usual), then North America. There were relatively few responses from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).



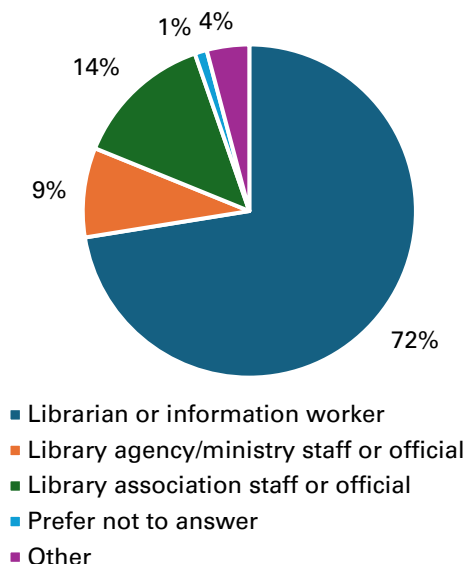
Subsequently in this report, in addition to global averages, we will also include a breakdown of data by region in order to offer clearer insights into priorities and experiences by region. This does nonetheless mean that data for MENA and SSA should be recognised as being based on a small number of responses and so may not be representative.

We can also look at the type of people who answered the survey. Graph 1b shares an overview of this data, with almost three quarters of respondents describing themselves as library or information workers.

Library association staff and officials came next with 14% of the total, followed by library agency or ministry staff or officials. Around 5% preferred not to answer or stated 'other'.

The data here is perhaps less surprising than that for regional breakdowns, and it is positive to have a good number of responses for all three main types. Thanks to this, we can hope to understand better the experience of different actors in the wider library field ecosystem.

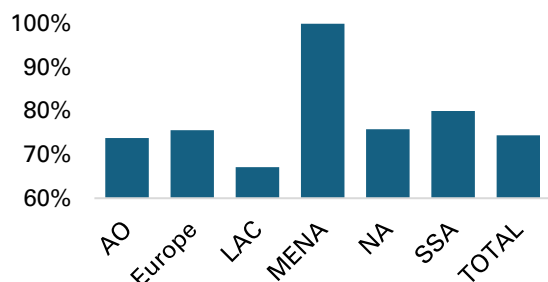
**Graph 1b: Respondents by Type**



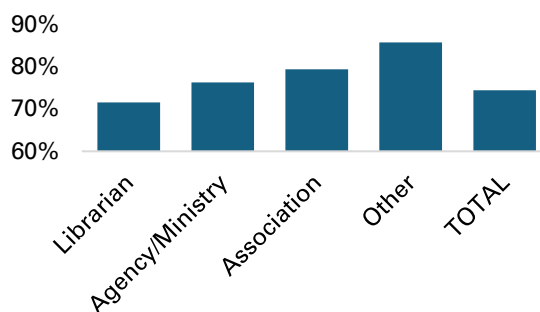
## 2. Awareness of the IFLA Code of Ethics

The first question asked concerned whether respondents were aware of the IFLA Code of Ethics. Overall, almost 75% of respondents answered yes to this, with the break-down by region and respondent type given in Graphs 2a and 2b. Such a high rate of awareness is not surprising, given that the fact of clicking on this survey is higher when there is familiarity.

**Graph 2a: Are you aware of the existence of the IFLA library code of ethics? (Region)**



**Graph 2b: Are you aware of the existence of the IFLA library code of ethics? (type)**



From this, we can see slightly higher levels of awareness among European and North American respondents than those from Asia-Oceania, and significantly higher (although on a low response rate) from MENA and Sub-Saharan Africa. LAC respondents were less likely to be aware. Typically, such a result can be put down to language, but the Code is available in Spanish – however, more outreach may be required.

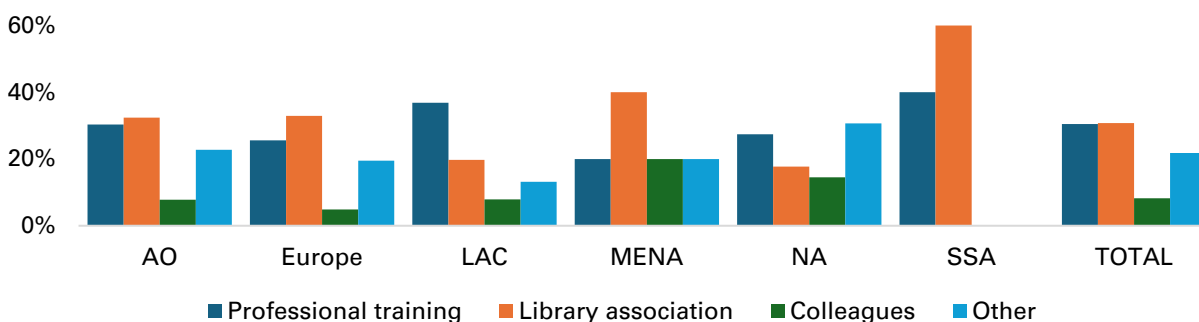
Among respondent types, 'other' scored highest. In previous surveys, 'other' has tended to include library and information science faculty, who may indeed draw on the Code in their teaching. The second highest level of awareness is among association staff and officials, then among agencies/ministries, and the lowest among librarians themselves. This is perhaps not a surprise, given that associations and agencies are likely to be the ones looking to develop their own codes and so refer to IFLA's.

### 3. How did you find out about the IFLA Code of Ethics?

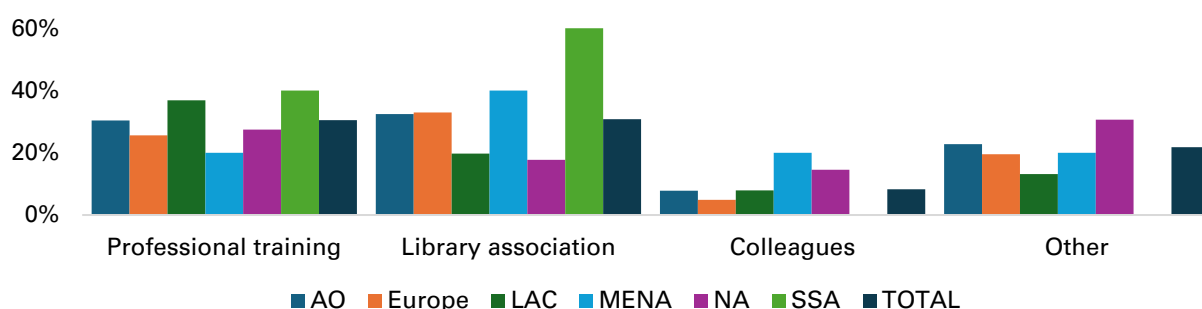
The next question focused on how people had found out about the IFLA Code of Ethics. Overall, an almost identical share reported hearing about this from professional training as from library association work – 30% of the total. Hearing about the Code from colleagues was much less, at just 8%, while 22% suggested other sources.

The results broken down by region are shown in Graphs 3a and 3b. These show the same information but are organised in different ways to facilitate analysis.

**Graph 3a: How did you find out about the IFLA Code (by region)**



**Graph 3b: How did you find out about the Code (by region)**

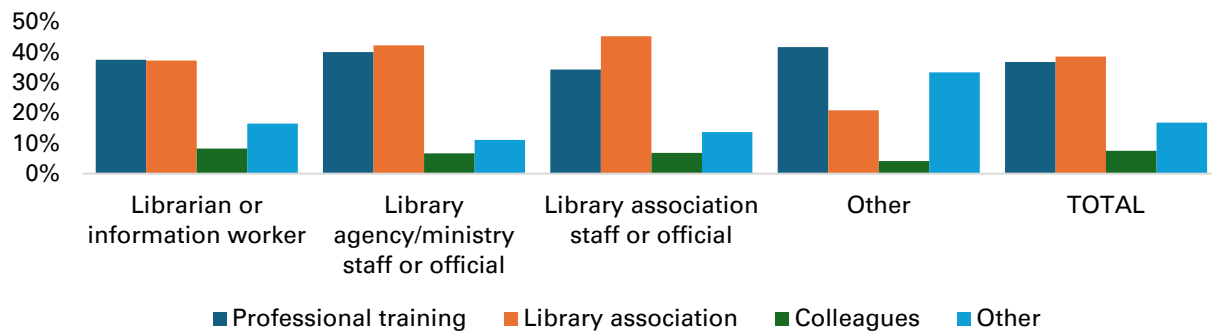


We can see that for respondents from Asia-Oceania and Europe, as well as overall, it was most common to have heard about the Code of Conduct from associations, followed by professional training. The same goes for MENA and SSA, although to note that there is limited data. Word of mouth had limited impact in Asia-Oceania and Europe, while around 20% of respondents in each case had heard about the code in other ways.

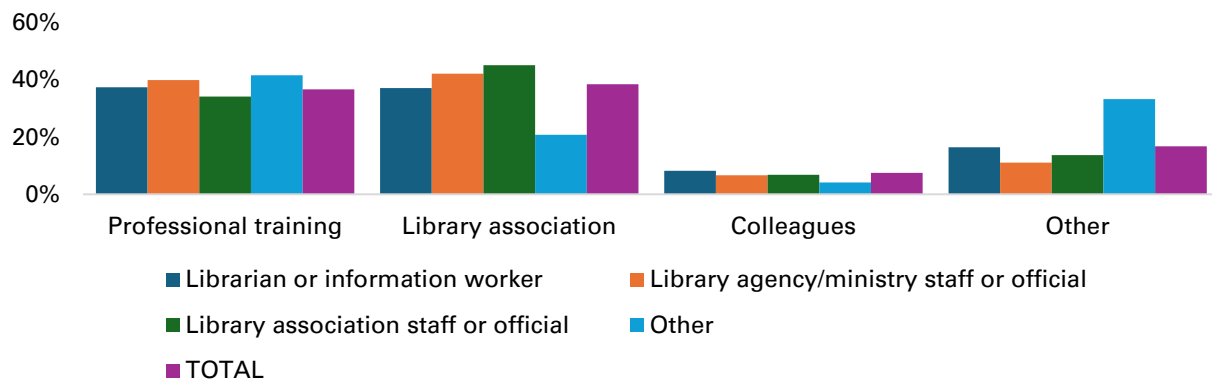
In North America, it was other ways that came out top. In LAC, professional training was the most common way of finding out about the Code. Looking at Graph 3b, we can see that professional training was most impactful for awareness raising in LAC and SSA, while associations came out top in SSA, MENA and Europe. Word of mouth was most effective in MENA compared to other regions, but still not a common way of finding out about the Code.

Graphs 3c and 3d look at the same data but broken down by the type of respondent. The data is shown in two different ways to facilitate different comparisons. From Graph 3c we can see that globally, there was a similar pattern across all different types of respondent. From Graph 3d, we nonetheless see that professional training was slightly more important among ministry and agency workers, and information through associations for association staff and officials.

**Graph 3c: How did you find out about the Code (by type)**



**Graph 3d: How did you find out about the Code (by type)**

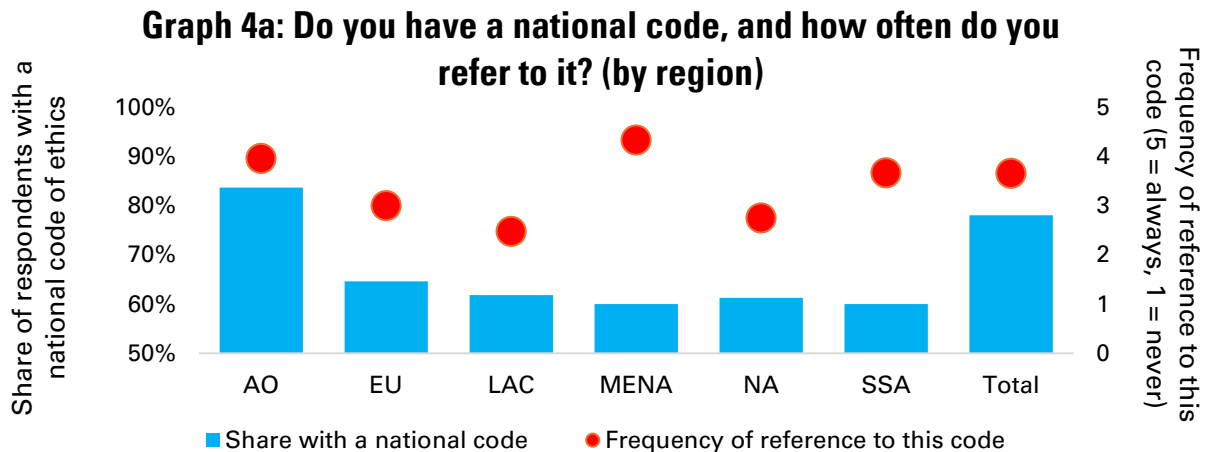


Overall, from this data, we can take away that a mixture of dissemination of the Code through associations and supporting its inclusion into training is likely to meet the needs of most communities, although there may be more potential to work through word of mouth. This could be particularly relevant for the people who aren't already on the mailing lists that received the survey.

## 4. Existence and frequency of reference to national codes

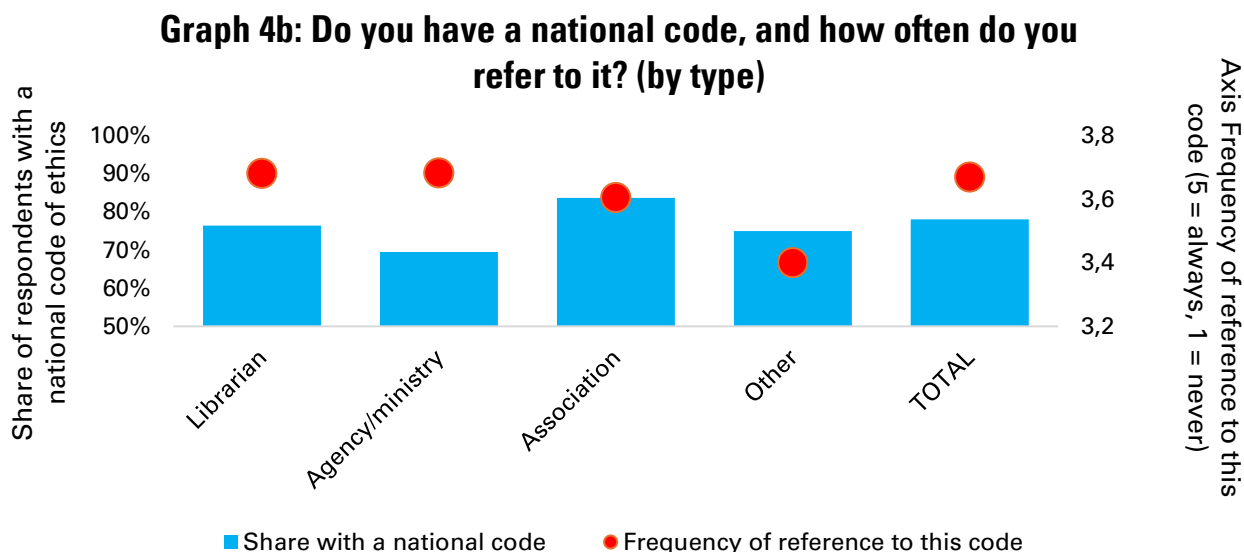
We asked respondents whether they had a national code of ethics, and how often they made reference to this. This data is presented in graphs 4a and 4b.

Concerning the overall share that reported having a national code, 78% said that they did. It should be noted that we did not ask for the country in which respondents were based, so this does not provide any indication of what share of countries have a code. Meanwhile, respondents reported referring to their codes between ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’ (a score of 3.65 on our 1-5 scale).



Breaking things down by region in Graph 4a, we can see that respondents from Asia-Oceania were most likely to have a code of ethics. This also brought up the average globally – all other regions only had 60-65% of respondents reporting having a code. This data is shown by the blue bars.

In terms of how frequently people referred to codes, it was MENA respondents who did this most often, with an average of 4.333 (between ‘often’ and ‘always’). Respondents from Asia-Oceania also scored highly at 3.96 (‘often’). LAC respondents reported making least regular reference to codes (2.47), followed by North Americans (2.75). In both cases, this means that on average, the score was between ‘sometimes’ and ‘rarely’.



Graph 4b provides a breakdown of data by type of respondent. We can see that association staff and officials are most likely to report having a code of ethics (85%), while officials from ministries or agencies are least likely to do so (69%). Concerning frequency of use, Individual librarians and agency/ministry staff refer to codes most often, with a score of 3.68 (between ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’). Association staff and officials make reference to codes slightly less frequently (with an average of 3.6).

From this data, we can see that between regions, there is a need to focus not just on catalysing the creation of code of ethics, but also on thinking about how to make them usable. To do this, it may also be worth thinking through how exactly a code will be used, and looking in particular at those regions where there are high reported rates of reference to codes, in order to learn lessons potentially.

We also asked those who said that there was a code of ethics to say more about mechanisms in place to ensure that this was applied. Of the 460 respondents who provided information, 86 simply said that there were mechanisms. 38 were unsure whether there was anything, and 77 said that there was nothing in place (of whom two respondents made clear that implementation was the responsibility of the individual).

Of those providing more detail, 106 simply referred to library associations, setting out that they oversaw the code, although some noted that this role did not



necessarily mean much in practice. 25 talked about library authorities, such as librarianship councils, and 8 simply referred to the law.

Another 77 pointed to a specific ethics committee, although again there were comments about whether these had much impact, alongside some who pointed to such committees' in promoting ethical practice.

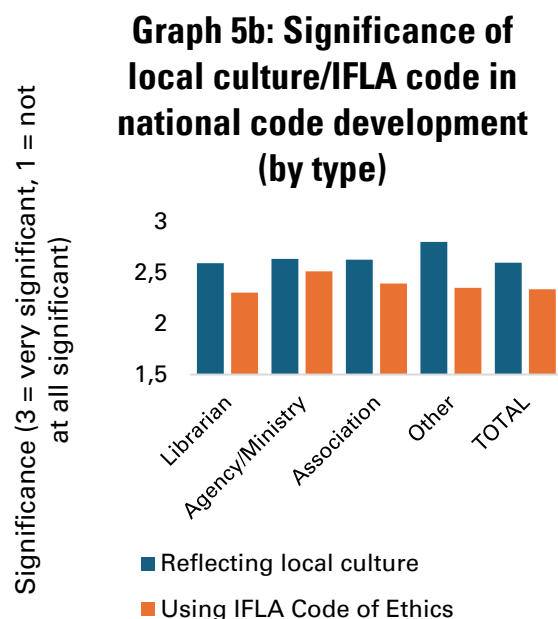
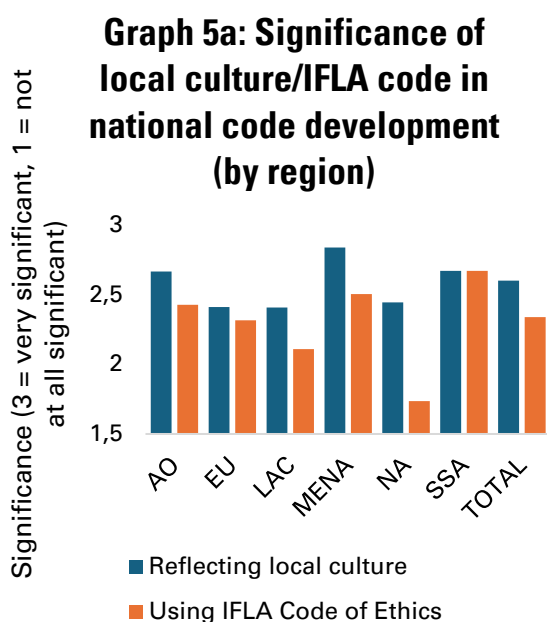
31 responses highlighted specific complaints and reporting mechanisms, with one even talking about a disciplinary committee. Others mentioned the consideration of ethics in professional appraisals or the renewal of certification, while 3 suggested that adherence to a code was necessary to be a member of an association.

In short, these responses suggest that alongside any revised code, it may be valuable to reflect on what can be done to make ethics useful and applicable in reality, and the different approaches taken by associations, authorities and others.

## **5. Influences on the development of national codes**

A key purpose of any IFLA standard is to support reflection and work within member associations and beyond. At the same time, such national codes also likely will need to reflect the characteristics of the environment in which they apply. The next set of questions therefore looked to understand more about how far national codes took inspiration both from the IFLA code, and from national cultures and circumstances.

Graphs 5a and 5b set out answers here, broken down by region (5a) and type of respondent (5b). Overall, both local cultures and IFLA's Code are seen as having between a somewhat and very significant impact on national code development, with the role of local culture seen as slightly stronger.



Breaking down the results by region (Graph 5a), in all regions except Sub-Saharan Africa (which had a low response rate anyway), local culture had a stronger influence than the IFLA code. This was particularly pronounced in North America, where the influence of IFLA's code was seen as being between 'somewhat' and 'not at all' significant, while there were also relatively large gaps in LAC and MENA.

Looking at results by type (Graph 5b), all categories of respondent scored both the IFLA Code and local culture as having somewhere between a 'somewhat' and 'very' significant role, with in each case local culture being more important. The gap in favour of the role of local culture was highest in the case of individual librarians, and lowest in the case of library agency/ministry staff.

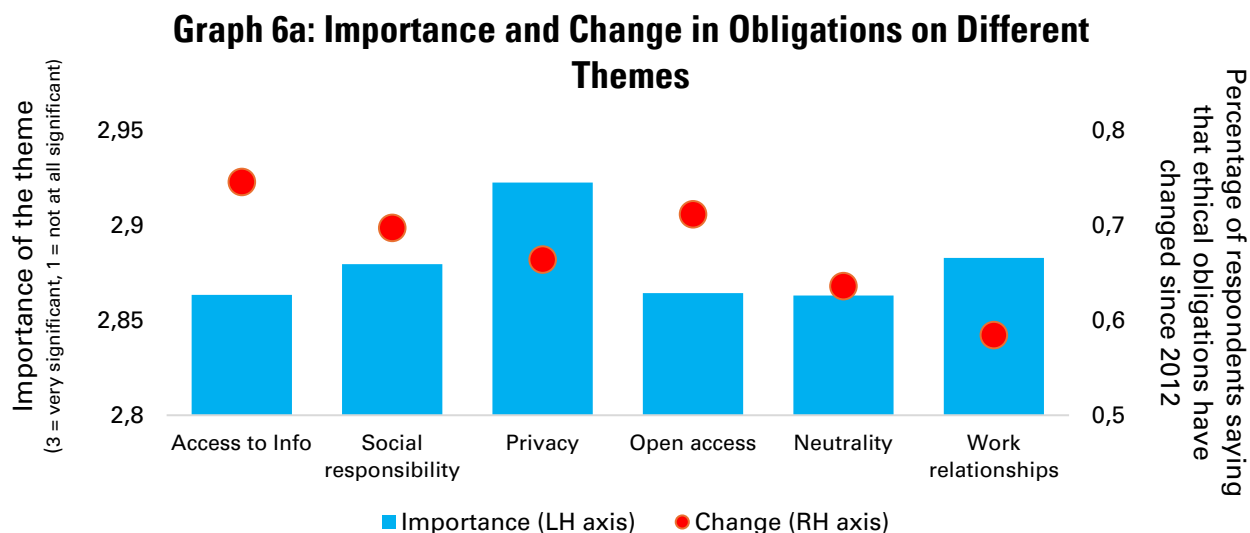
From this data, we can see clearly the role of local culture and experience in shaping codes of ethics. This suggests that any future IFLA Code likely needs to allow for adaptation, either by staying at a high-level, or simply by accepting that there will be variation between countries. It also opens up interesting questions about what process is followed in order to consider and integrate local cultural factors.

## 6. Views on the specific topics covered by the Code of Ethics

With a view to a potential review of the Code of Ethics, the survey asked respondents to provide their sense of how important each of the themes included in it are, and whether ethical responsibilities around them have changed since 2012. As a reminder, the themes covered in the 2012 Code are as below, with the shorthand used in graphs also provided:

- **Access to information:** this includes the role of libraries to ensure access to information, to reject censorship, and to minimize barriers including fees (Access to info);
- **Responsibilities towards individuals and society:** role of librarians and other information workers to ensure access is equitable and to provide assistance through training and skill development (Social responsibility);
- **Privacy, secrecy and transparency:** obligation of librarians and information workers to protect personal information and support transparency of information relating to public bodies (Privacy);
- **Open access and intellectual property:** obligation to promote open access and to respect creators' rights, while seeking to limit the expansion of copyright terms (Open access);
- **Neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills:** commitment to an unbiased stance regarding collection, access and service, avoiding impact of personal convictions on carrying out professional duties (Neutrality);
- **Colleague and employer/employee relationship:** opposing discrimination, supporting equal payment for equal work, and contributing towards the profession (Work relationships).

Graph 6a provides the overall responses to these questions, with the blue bars showing the average for how important respondents felt that the theme was (from 3 = very significant to 1 = not at all significant), and the red dots the share saying that ethical responsibilities have changed. To note, the blue bars should be read against the left-hand axis, and the red dots against the right-hand axis.



The data shows that of the different themes, all are scored relatively highly in terms of importance, with averages between 2.85 and 2.95, but privacy, secrecy and transparency come out with the highest score of all, followed by colleague and employer/employee relationships and responsibilities to individuals and society. Access to information, open access and intellectual property, and neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills are a little further back.

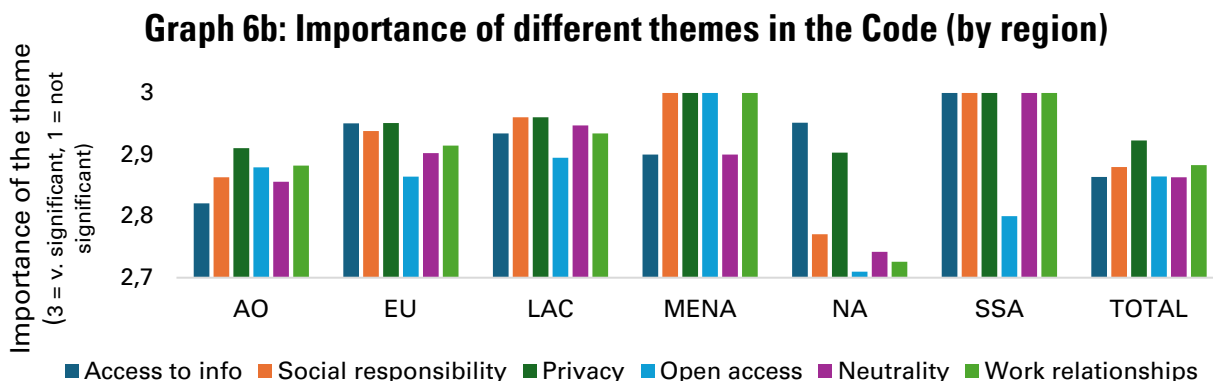
The picture is a different one as concerns the responses to how much ethical responsibilities have changed. First of all, the shares saying that there has been change vary much more strongly, ranging from between below 60% to almost 75%. Respondents were most like to say that ethical obligations have changed around access to information (74.6%), followed by open access and intellectual property (71.2%) and responsibilities to individuals and society (69.8%).

On the other hand, only 59.4% felt that responsibilities had changed around colleague and employer/employee relationships, while 63.6% said that this was the case around neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills, and 66.4% around privacy, secrecy and transparency.

The data overall seems to suggest that all of the themes covered in the Code of Ethics remain important, although it may be valuable to reflect on the differences. It will also be worth exploring the drivers behind the different scores around changes in responsibilities. This could inform any future review of the Code.

## 6.1. Perceptions of the importance of themes and changes in responsibilities by region

The next graphs look at this data by region. Graphs 6b and 6c set out how important each theme is seen as being. The data is the same in both, just organised in different ways.

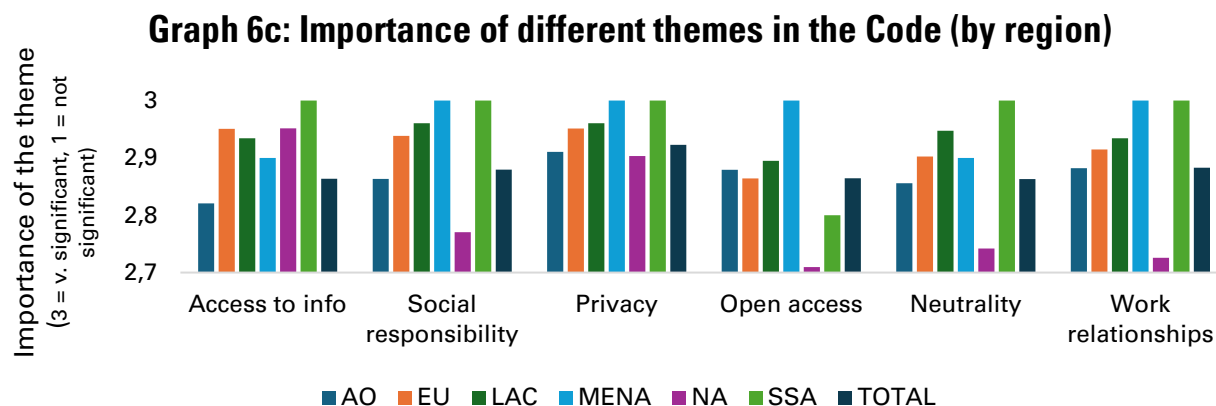


Graph 6b allows us to understand the order of priorities among themes for each region. We can see that privacy, secrecy and transparency is the most important theme in Asia-Oceania, as well as Europe, and joint most important in LAC. North American respondents were most likely to identify access to information as the most important issue. There are differences in the order of priorities though – Asia-Oceania sees open access and intellectual property and colleague and employer/employee relationships as coming next while, in Europe it's access to information and responsibility to individuals and responsibilities.

LAC respondents also place responsibility to individuals and responsibilities as second most important, followed by neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills, while North America places privacy, secrecy and transparency second.

The least important issues also varied, with Asia-Oceania selecting access to information, and Europe, LAC and North America choosing open access and intellectual property.

As before, low response rates from MENA and Sub-Saharan Africa make it harder to draw conclusions, although they tended to score a range of issues highly.

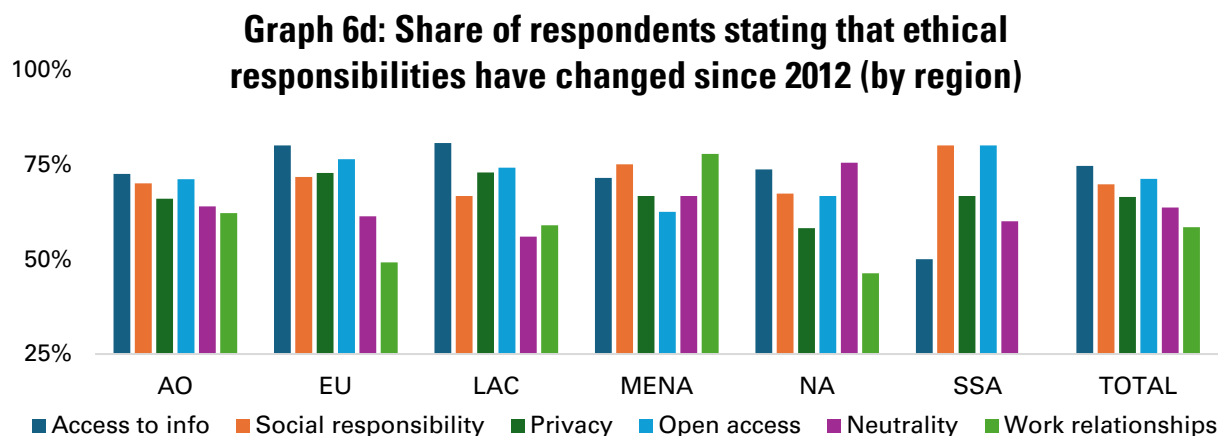


Graph 6c allows for a stronger sense of which regions have the strongest or weakest belief in the importance of each theme. For example (and setting aside MENA and SSA given low response rates), Europe and North America stand out for their belief in the importance of access to information, while Asia-Oceania scores this lower. Europe and LAC are most concerned about the responsibility of libraries to individuals and society, while North America scores this lower.

On privacy, secrecy and transparency, LAC and Europe are most concerned, while Asia-Oceania and North America are least (although still with a score of 2.9 out of 3), and on open access and intellectual property, it is LAC followed by Asia-Oceania with the highest scores and North America with the lowest.

LAC respondents tended to give the highest scores to the importance of neutrality, personal integrity and professional skill, while North America gave the lowest. Finally, North American respondents were also likely to assess the importance of colleague and employer/employee relationships as less important, while LAC saw this as more important.

The next graphs look at the data for the share of respondents from each region believing that ethical responsibilities have changed for each theme since 2012.

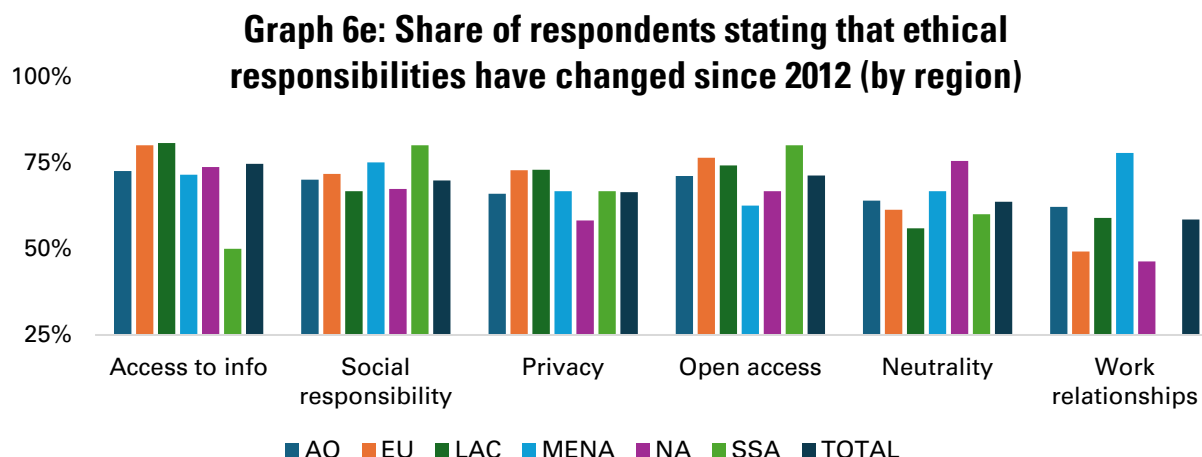


Graph 6d allows for comparisons within regions in order to compare which themes saw a greater or lower share of respondents suggesting that there had been a change. For example, we can see that for Asia-Oceania respondents, access to information, open access and intellectual property, and responsibility to individuals and society come top.

Europeans and Latin American and Caribbean respondents also tend most to see responsibilities around access to information as having changed, followed by open access and intellectual property and privacy, secrecy and transparency. Meanwhile, North American tend most to see changes as having happened around neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills, followed by access to information and responsibility to individuals and society.

The areas where respondents were least likely to see change were colleague and employer/employee relationships (Asia-Oceania, Europe and North America), and neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills (LAC).

Graph 6e shows the data organised by theme, in order to see in which regions there are higher or lower shares of respondents believing that there has been change. Therefore, we can see that European and LAC respondents were most likely to see change as having happened in responsibilities around access to information, while Asia-Oceania and North American ones were a little less likely to.



Europeans tended more to see change in responsibilities to individuals and societies, and LAC and North Americans less. European and LAC respondents were most likely to say responsibilities had evolved around privacy, secrecy and transparency, while North Americans were somewhat less likely to say so.

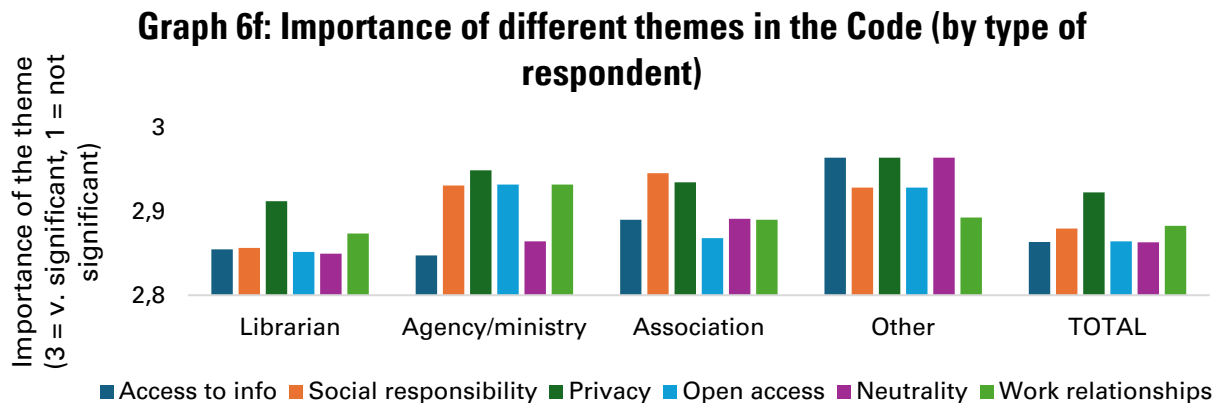
Europeans most tended to believe that ethical responsibilities had changed around open access and intellectual property, followed by LAC and Asia-Oceania ones, while North American were less likely to. On neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills, North Americans most regularly assessed that there had been change, while LAC respondents did so least. Finally, Asia-Oceania respondents most commonly said that there had been evolutions in colleague and employer/employee relationships, while North Americans and Europeans said this least frequently.

This data provides an interesting basis for discussion about what may be the drivers of different answers per region – have there been specific developments that may be triggering these answers? It also highlights the value of taking account of regional differences in order to develop any revised Code that will be relevant for all regions, but also underlines that inevitably such a Code will need to be adaptable.



## 6.2. Perceptions of the importance of themes and changes in responsibilities by type of respondent

This section looks at the data for how important respondents felt each theme is today, and whether ethical responsibilities have changed, disaggregated by the type of respondent (librarian, library agency/ministry official, or library association staff/official).

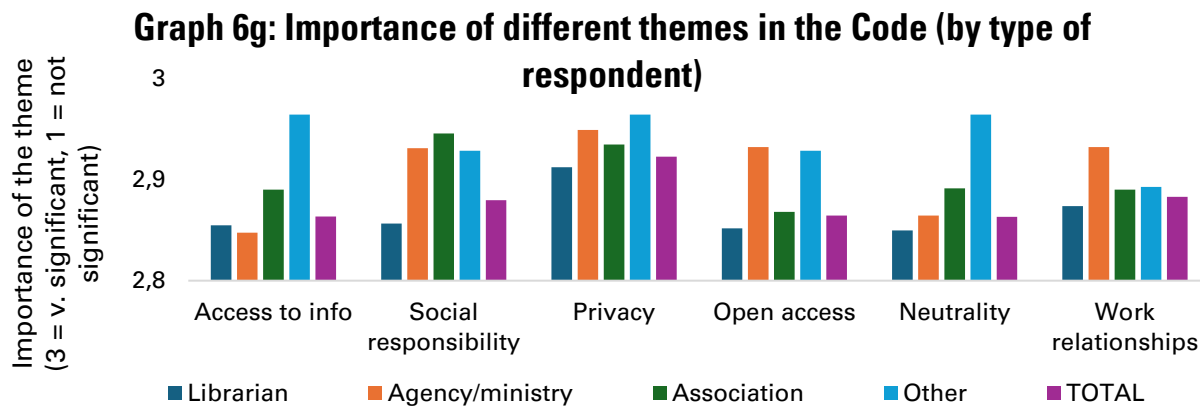


Graph 6f sets out how important, on average, respondents from different types felt that each theme was, ranging from 3 (very significant) to 1 (not at all significant). This graph is set out to make it possible to tell which issues are more or less important for each type of respondent.

We can see for example that for librarian respondents, privacy, secrecy and transparency stands out as being important, with colleague and employer/employee relationships second most important, all other themes at more or less the same level after that.

Among agency and ministry staff, privacy, secrecy and transparency also scores highest, but responsibility to individuals and society, open access and intellectual property, and colleague and employer/employee relationships all close behind. Access to information and neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills are seen as least important.

Association staff and officials, by contract, saw responsibility to individuals and society as most important, followed by privacy, secrecy and transparency. Open access and intellectual property was seen as least important.



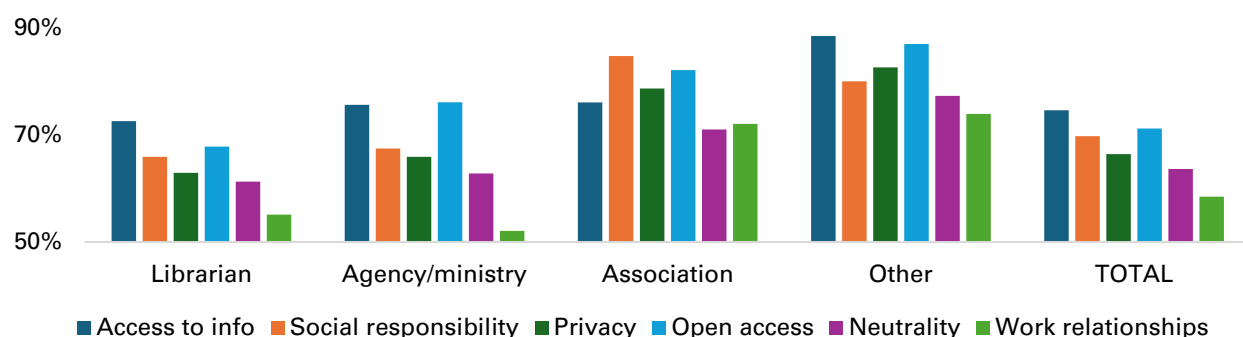
Graph 6h presents the same data, but this time in order to assess which type of respondent was most likely to see each theme as being most or least important. For example, access to information mattered most for associations and least for agency/ministry staff. Responsibility to individuals and society was most significant for associations and agency/ministry staff and officials, and less so for individual librarians.

Looking at privacy, secrecy and transparency, it is agency/ministry staff who are most likely to see this as significant, and individual librarians who are least likely to. The story is the same on open access and intellectual property, with the interest among agency/ministry staff quite a lot higher than for other types of respondent.

Finally, association staff and officials were most likely to see neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills as important, while agency/ministry staff most often saw colleague and employer/employee relationships as significant. In both cases, the lowest scores came from individual librarians.

Graph 6h turns to the share of respondents of each type saying that they felt that ethical responsibilities have changed on each of the themes in the current Code of Ethics. The data is set out in order to see where each respondent type is most and least likely to see there as having been change.

**Graph 6h: Share of respondents stating that ethical responsibilities have changed since 2012 (by type)**



From this graph, we can see that (similarly with the overall average), individual librarians are most likely to see change as having happened around access to information and open access and intellectual property. They are least likely to say that there have been changes in responsibilities around colleague and employer/employee relationships, followed by around neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills.

Meanwhile, agency/ministry staff were most likely to see responsibilities around open access and intellectual property as having changed, followed by access to information. Like individual librarians, they saw responsibilities around colleague and employer/employee relationships, and around neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills as less likely to have changed.

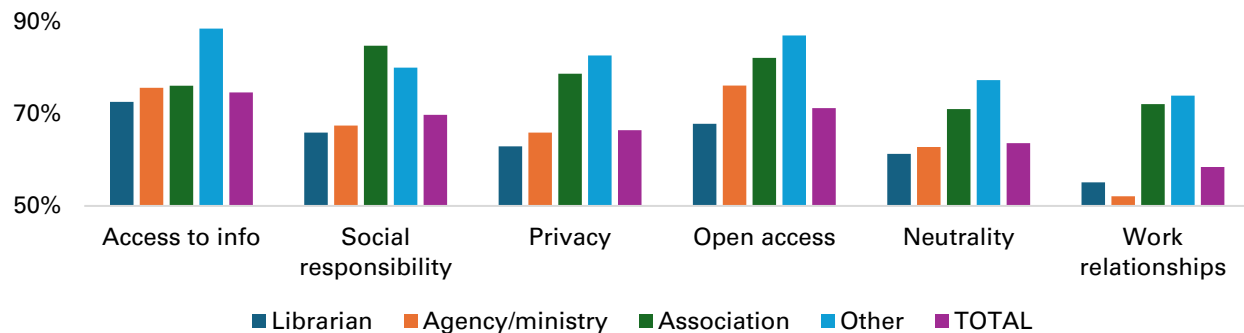
Association staff and officials also saw responsibilities around access to information and open access and intellectual property as most likely to have changed, but then placed privacy, secrecy and transparency in third place. They also were least likely to see responsibilities around colleague and employer/employee relationships, and around neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills as having changed.

Graph 6i presents the same data, but this time with a view to telling which type of respondent was most likely to believe that there had been change for each of the themes.

On access to information, scores were close, but association officials and staff most frequently said that there had been change. On social responsibility, it is

association staff and officials that stand out for believing that responsibilities have changed, with a similar story for privacy, secrecy and transparency and neutrality.

**Graph 6i: Share of respondents stating that ethical responsibilities have changed since 2012 (by type)**



Concerning open access and intellectual property, association staff and officers once again come out as most likely to believe that there has been change, but agency and ministry staff are closer behind them. Finally, on colleague and employer/employee relationships, it is agency/ministry staff who are least likely to believe that there has been a change in responsibilities (barely 50%), and associations who are most likely to think that responsibilities have evolved.

Overall from this data, we can see that while privacy tends to be seen as the most important, it is access to information where there is seen to be the greatest change in responsibilities, and so potential need for revision of the Code of Ethics. The data also raises interesting questions about the different perspectives of the realities facing libraries from librarians themselves, associations and agencies/ministries. In particular, the gap between the perception of change among associations compared to librarians themselves is interesting and worth reflecting on.

### 6.3. Drivers of changes in ethical responsibilities

For each of the themes covered in the Code, we also asked those people who said that ethical responsibilities had changed to explain more. In this section, we summarise those answers.

### 6.3.1. Access to information

Access to information, in the survey, was presented as including the role of libraries to ensure access to information, to reject censorship, and to minimize barriers including fees. The following factors driving change in responsibilities here were identified by respondents:

- Technological change, including AI, the development of open source, and in turn the impact of this on people's information seeking practices
- Linked to this, the rise of disinformation, and in particular the speed of its spread
- Political pressures on the right of access to information and censorship (notably hijacking the language of freedom of expression), as well as threats to democracy in general. In particular, the internationalisation of illiberal movements is a challenge. At the same time, a need to serve all communities, including conservative ones.
- The continued rise of remote access to collections
- The rise of platformisation and the evolution of social media, as well as business models built on attention. There is also a trend towards the concentration of information markets with fewer companies offering resources, and the risk of these disappearing
- The increasing isolation experienced by people without access to technology
- Growing awareness of barriers to access caused by non-inclusive practices, and the role of social justice
- The expansion and maturation of the open access movement
- New approaches to fees, but also with this a different sense of responsibility
- Use of technology to influence behaviour, including through geo-blocking to prevent access to websites, often without people being aware of this
- Rising awareness of the need for information and other literacies
- Growing use of paywalls, and contrast between free but poor information, and expensive but quality. Linked to this, the loss of the power to build a collection due to materials only being available under licence and held on vendors' servers
- Growing awareness of the need to take account of the needs and interests of indigenous peoples
- Possibilities to tailor online experiences raising questions about commonality of experience

- Diversification of expectations of libraries, including taking on the role of knowledge producers

### **6.3.2. Responsibilities towards individuals and society**

The topic of responsibilities towards individuals and society was presented in the survey as including the role of librarians and other information workers to ensure access is equitable and to provide assistance through training and skill development. Reasons for ethical responsibilities changing here, as suggested by respondents, were:

- The opportunities and risks for societies created by technology, including AI, the impacts of disinformation, and simply feeling overwhelmed. Linked to this, the growing need to enable digital inclusion in order to combat inequalities more generally, in particular in order to develop digital literacy.
- The growing need to enable digital inclusion in order to combat inequalities more generally, in particular in order to develop digital literacy
- The privatisation of education, meaning that those without resources have fewer possibilities to learn and rely more on libraries. Linked to this, a growing understanding that libraries' role is not just to provide access, but also to support learning.
- Connected to this, expectations of libraries may rise as other public services are cut back
- New understandings of how to maximise accessibility and inclusion, but also new fractures in society, as well as an evolving understanding of how to define the public interest
- New conceptions of how to engage individuals and societies in new ways through digital tools
- Evolving responsibilities to support the production of knowledge by groups who otherwise may not have a voice
- The changing nature of political and civic debate within communities due to the rise of filter bubbles, and – more dramatically – the presence of violence
- Challenges around how to serve communities that include individuals or groups who discriminate against or express hatred towards another group. At the same time, some worried that strong promotion of a social justice agenda may lead to some feeling alienated
- A growing readiness, in some countries at least, to see libraries as a fair target in wider agendas
- New relations within society post COVID-19

### **6.3.3 Privacy, secrecy and transparency**

In the survey, this theme was described as including the obligation of librarians and information workers to protect personal information and support transparency of information relating to public bodies. Factors behind changing ethical responsibilities included, for our respondents:

- The impact of new privacy and data protection laws, but also the differences between them
- Greater technological possibilities to collect and exploit personal data (also surveillance), including the implications of AI (both in terms of data scraping, and the potential privacy violations it might facilitate)
- Evolving business models and market structures, based on data exploitation, including for example tracking what and how people are reading
- Threats to data and cybersecurity, and the impacts of hacking (both on individuals and libraries)
- The emergence of the concept of data sovereignty
- Evolving approaches to internet and digital governance
- Growing use of eGovernment, and the privacy implications that this brings
- Evolving understandings of the line between public and private life, in particular through social media
- Growing awareness of issues around privacy
- New possibilities to use data in order to plan and evaluation library services (including under pressure to show results)
- Questions around the ethics of promotion and advertising using platforms that in turn target through data

### **6.3.4. Open access and intellectual property**

The concept of open access and intellectual property was presented in the survey as including the obligation to promote open access and to respect creators' rights, while seeking to limit the expansion of copyright terms. Specific drivers of change here, as proposed by respondents, included:

- The questions raised by AI about what it is acceptable to do with information, as well as how far there should be control over what libraries and users can do with material

- Also linked to AI, questions about what marks out creativity, and the possibilities to generate new content
- Reduced respect for copyright when so much material is available apparently without restriction on the internet
- Growing library mobilisation around intellectual property issues
- The undermining of exceptions and limitations to copyright through contract terms and other rightholder actions, linked to evolving business models in publishing and content. Closely linked to this is the decline in possibilities for libraries to own collections, and the move from law to licences determining what is possible or not
- The maturing of open access, but also growing awareness of potential issues that need to be addressed. A particular concern are efforts to maintain private control over the scientific information system
- Reconciling open access mandates and the drive to promote this with concerns/opposition around moral rights
- Easier detection of plagiarism, but also a perceived rise in piracy
- Greater focus on enforcement of copyright in some countries
- Greater attention to the idea of a knowledge commons, linked to (but not the same thing as) the public domain
- Growing awareness that the Western approach to intellectual property is just one amongst different ones
- Awareness that we need to be careful in promoting open, bearing in mind that there may be good reasons for not sharing everything

### **6.3.5. Neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills**

This theme was presented in the survey as covering a commitment to an unbiased stance regarding collection, access and service, avoiding impact of personal convictions on carrying out professional duties. Issues at play in evolving ethical responsibilities included, according to respondents:

- Intensifying debate about what neutrality means, especially in a more polarised society, combine with greater readiness (even from traditionally liberal governments) to question the value of universal access to information
- Greater readiness to attack libraries, but also a sense among some librarians that the sector has leant into a sense of libraries being on one side of the debate



- Greater readiness to attack minority groups (or at least a loss of a sense of embarrassment in doing so)
- Increasing questioning of what it means to be objective, and whether this is even possible. What comes under a diversity of viewpoints, and what does go too far? Should we be neutral in the face of aggression?
- Instrumentalisation of language, in particular around words like 'unbiased'
- A rise in identity politics (on both sides of the debate)

While there are fewer points mentioned here, there were two clear parallel approaches – one focusing on the idea that libraries should drop the idea of being neutral and more actively support groups at risk of exclusion, while the other worried that such an approach was making libraries vulnerable and alienating users and others. There were slightly more comments along the lines of the first than the second but not by many.

#### **6.3.6. Colleague and employer/employee relationship**

Finally, the wider topic of colleague and employer/employee relationship was represented as including opposing discrimination, supporting equal payment for equal work, and contributing towards the profession. Suggested factors of change in ethical responsibilities were:

- Cancellation of diversity programmes
- Wider labour market deregulation, and weakening of trade unions in general
- Growing awareness of neurodivergence as well as the need for mental wellbeing at work
- Differing perceptions around discrimination in the workplace – some suggesting that it is less and less possible to point this out, others suggesting that diversity initiatives are causing division. There were more comments along the lines of the first.
- Impacts of technology and distance on professional relationships
- Growing readiness to speak out against abuse and mistreatment
- Ongoing concerns about unequal pay, gender and age discrimination, and that linked to freedom of religion
- Information professionals in the private sector are facing more and more insecurity in their jobs
- Worries about insufficient pay leading to people leaving the sector
- Evolving role of associations

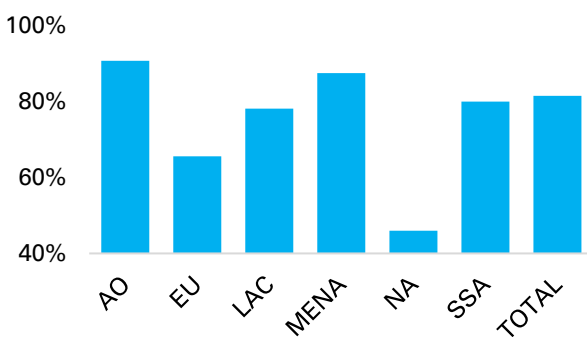
- The evolution of library education programmes, as well as of the relationship between staff with and without library qualifications. Also, concerns about fake degrees.

## 7. Should the IFLA Library Code of Ethics address ethical obligations specific to different work environments?

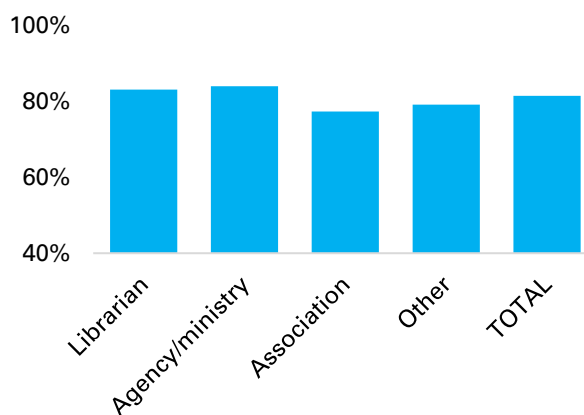
Next, we asked respondents if they felt that the IFLA Code of Ethics should address ethical obligations specific to different work environments, such as government, private institutions, in addition to general professional ethics? Overall, 81% of respondents who answered this question said 'yes', representing a strong call for this to be taken into account.

Graphs 7a and 7b set out the breakdown of these figures by region, and then by type of respondent.

**Graph 7a: Share saying that the Code should address obligations linked to work environments (by region)**



**Graph 7b: Share saying that the Code should address obligations linked to work environments (by type)**



Starting with the regional breakdown (Graph 7a), we can see that there is quite strong variation, with Asia-Oceania respondents most likely to say that the Code should address obligations linked to specific work environments (91% in total), with 78% of LAC respondents saying so (MENA and Sub-Saharan African respondents also were likely to say 'yes', but the sample size here is small).

Meanwhile, European and North American respondents were less likely to agree, with only 2/3 of Europeans, and just 46% of North Americans thinking that the Code should address these issues.

Interesting, the variation is much weaker between different types of respondents (Graph 7b), ranging from 84% of agency/ministry staff supporting the statement to 77% of association staff.

From this, we can tell that there is quite a different approach to the value of tailoring the Code to different environments. This may be because of different approaches to how universal ethics should be, different appreciation of the complexity of such an exercise, or potentially the existence of guidance or codes already.

## **8. What other topics could be covered?**

Finally, we gave respondents the opportunity to share their own ideas about what other aspects could be covered in a revised IFLA Code of Ethics. Around 200 respondents chose to do so, although it is worth noting that another roughly 70 suggested that the list already provided was enough.

In summary, ideas shared were:

- AI ethics, including questions around algorithmic justice, communication about AI-powered tools, and more
- More broadly, approaches to new technologies, including how we should assess these and reflect on whether and how to incorporate them into our work, and how to promote digital inclusion
- Librarians' potential responsibilities to advocate and uphold the position of the profession
- How libraries should act in situations where governments or wider societies are hostile to inclusion
- Environmental sustainability
- How to deal with threats to libraries
- The specific applicability of the Code in the education sector, where school libraries (like schools) have parental-type responsibilities
- Ethics of partnerships, including in relationships with vendors, and in particular whether to prioritise not-for-profit partners

- The ethics of commercial offerings by libraries
- Social justice and wider inclusion (although there was also a comment that specifying particular groups could be counterproductive). Particular groups highlighted included LGBTQIA+, the homeless community, gender, and persons with disabilities
- Ethics and associations, as well as other professional bodies
- The labour rights of libraries and questions about employment standards and progression
- Collections ethics, as well as the ethics of working with antiquities
- Cultural rights
- Ethics in education by libraries
- Misinformation and information integrity
- Ethics and the relative place of colleagues without formal library qualifications, and their status
- Information security
- Resource sharing and international cooperation
- Openness (different open movements)
- Professional development, reflective practice and self-evaluation
- Self-censorship
- Questions around the privatisation of the information sector
- Data protection
- Relationships with scientific and research ethics
- Ethics in sensitive situations, such as hospitals, places
- Ethics in dealing with differing political beliefs
- Ethics of communication, promotion and media use
- Ethics in supporting activities aligned to libraries, such as book groups

More focused on the 'how' than the 'what' of the Code, suggestions included:

- Reflection on how to apply the Code in different cultures
- The applicability of the Code for people in information roles outside of libraries
- Reflective practice and how to update Codes constantly in the face of emerging issues
- How to apply ethics in situations of crisis or uncertainty

- There were different views about whether to apply the code to different workplaces – some supported this but others suggested that it should focus more on different relationships
- How to integrate the code into training and qualification

## 9. Conclusions

The goal of this analysis is to contribute to discussions about any potential update of the IFLA Code of Ethics. The data offers some useful perspectives both on the form of any update, and its content, in order to maximise impact.

On the first point, the data underlines the importance of developing and promoting the Code in a way that makes the most of the potential of associations and training in order to raise awareness. It also makes it clear that even if the IFLA Code may help catalyse the development or updating of national Codes, these will likely draw more strongly on national culture and requirements. The IFLA Code should therefore leave space for this, and may even help by providing ideas about how to consider what local factors are and what impact they might have.

On the second, all of the themes appear still to be seen as important, with privacy, secrecy and transparency coming out as most significant, followed by responsibilities to individuals and societies. However, it is on the topics of access to information and open access and intellectual property where respondents felt that change had been most profound.

Nonetheless, there is regional variation in responses. Given the points made previously about the need to adapt codes to local circumstances, it will be worth thinking about how to accommodate these when setting out guidelines on different themes. Independently of this, there is potentially an interesting discussion about why there are variations.

A large majority feel that providing guidance on obligations specific to work environments would be useful. However, the fact that in one region the majority said that this shouldn't happen shouldn't be forgotten. It will be worth reflecting more on this question, and what it might mean in practice.

To support any further reflection, the different explanations offered for changing ethical responsibilities provide a basis for discussion, although it is clear that this

may not be simple. In particular, differing approaches to the concept of neutrality are likely to require a careful approach.

Finally, it is worth underlining that the low response rate among MENA and Sub-Saharan African respondents means that it has been hard to draw conclusions about their perspectives. Any review would do well to seek out inputs from these regions, each of which have strong traditions and specificities, in order to take fuller account of these.