

# COVID-19 LEARNING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

SECOND ASSESSMENT

AUGUST 2020

**redr**uk  
people and skills for disaster relief

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## 1. Setting the scene

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact communities around the globe and has fundamentally altered most people's daily lives and activities in society. In this context, aid organisations are finding themselves in a situation of sustained change and need to adapt accordingly. To do so successfully, capacity needs to be built strategically in organisations and individuals in the aid sector. The following report of the second Learning Needs Assessment (LNA) conducted by RedR UK in September 2020 aims to contribute to the understanding of these capacity needs and suitable interventions. The report builds on the findings of the first LNA carried out in April 2020, providing a mapping of needs over time.

### 1.1. Main findings

- **Stabilising programme and organisational impact** – COVID-19 continues to impact the running of activities in the aid community; however, the situation seems to have stabilised somewhat. The suspension and shifting of programme focus has not increased since the time of the first LNA conducted, meaning that capacity-building efforts need to continue considering the changes caused by COVID-19. Organisational and programmatic challenges need to be continuously identified and targeted in order for capacity-building efforts to be relevant.
- **Remote working as the new normal** – Remote working and project implementation continues to dominate aid workers reality and has become a new norm and further capacity building in this area is highlighted as a priority.
- **Community engagement at the core** – Community engagement is a core theme in the sector in order to address COVID-19 challenges.
- **Interactive digital learning** – Aid workers strongly emphasise the preference for interactive types of digital learning which enable connection to both facilitators/trainers and other participants.
- **Key contextual needs to consider** – Capacity building needs vary within sub-groups in the report, highlighting the importance for any intervention to be targeted and specific.

### 1.2. Methodology and Limitations

The LNA was shared with RedR UK Trainers and Associate Trainers, members, selected course participants and project contacts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The survey was available in English and Arabic and was open for 8 days. A total of 110 responses were collected, from 79 different organisations. The responses were analysed using the research questions below:

- What challenges do organisations face in the context of COVID-19?

- What learning do organisations need, both in terms of content and methods?
- What patterns of learning needs can be seen in terms of:
  - Geographical Area of Focus
  - Language
  - Type of Organisation

The findings were subsequently compared to the first LNA results in order to allow for an understanding of the developments in the sector.

A wide range of organisations are represented in the LNA results; however, the majority of respondents are from International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs), UN Agencies and National Non-Governmental Organisations (NNGOs).

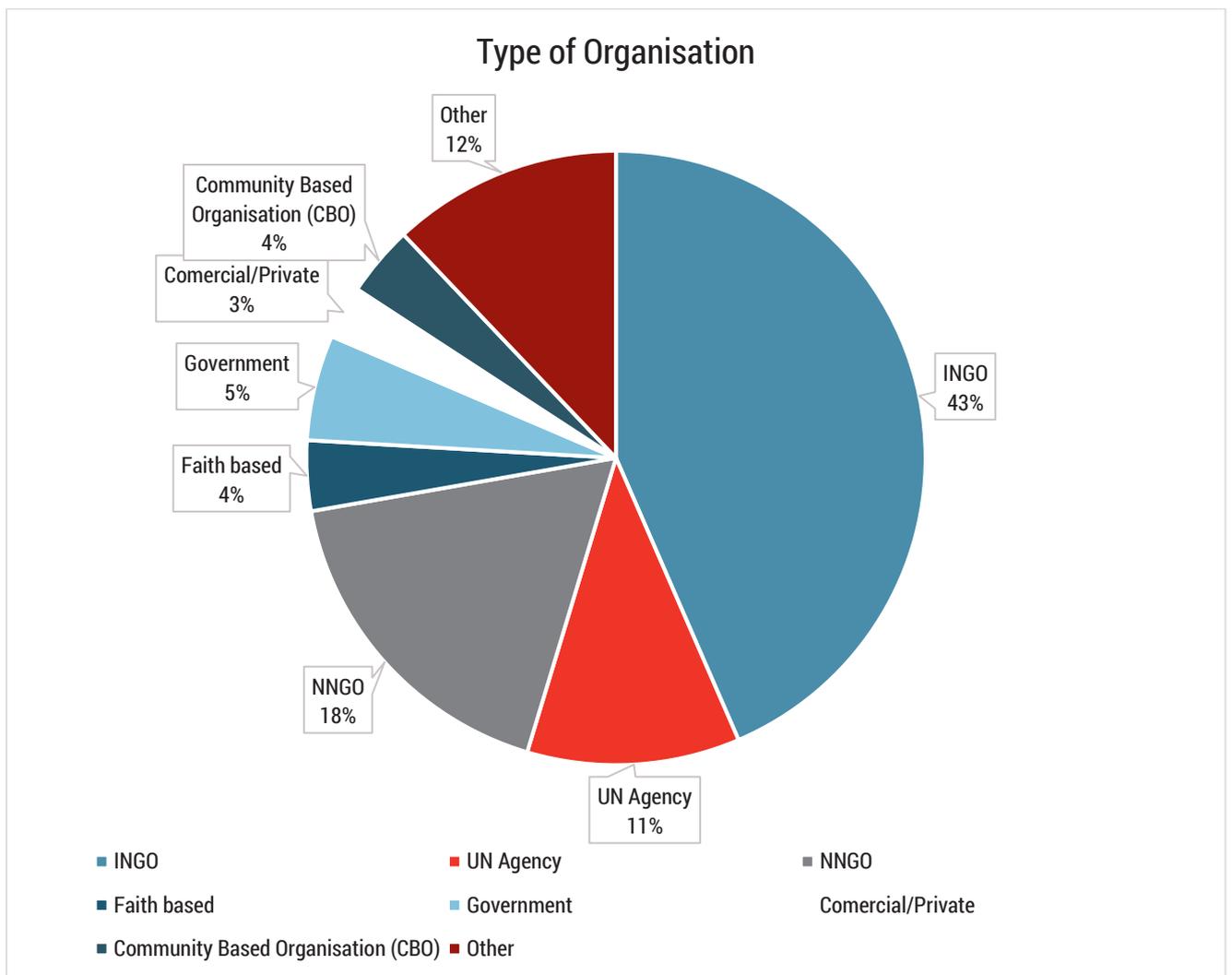


Figure 1. Type of Organisation

65% of respondents work in roles with a country-specific focus, 25% with a regional and 10% with a global focus.

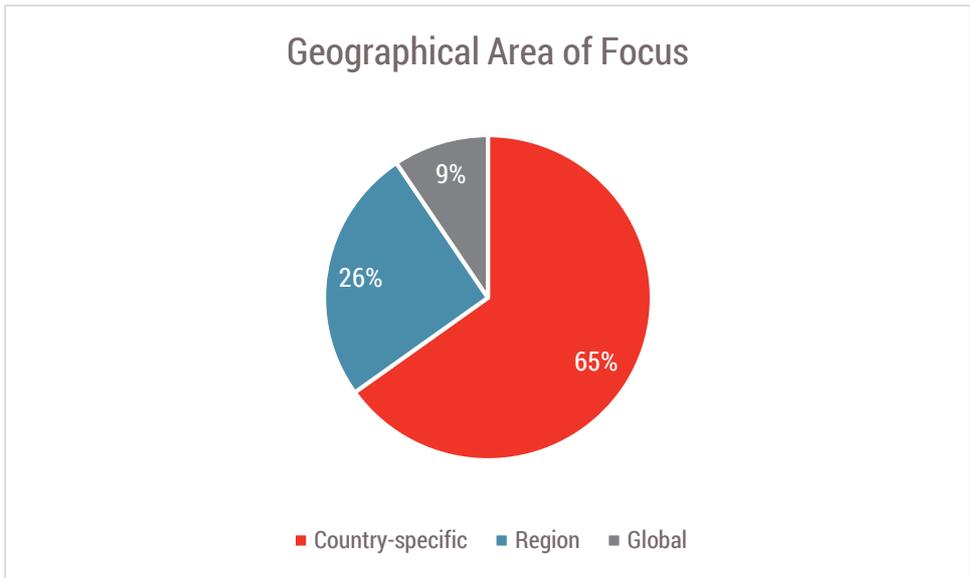


Figure 2. Geographical Area of Focus

Of the organisations working regionally, most of those who responded operate in the Middle East, the second most in Asia and third most in Africa. A small proportion are Europe-focused.

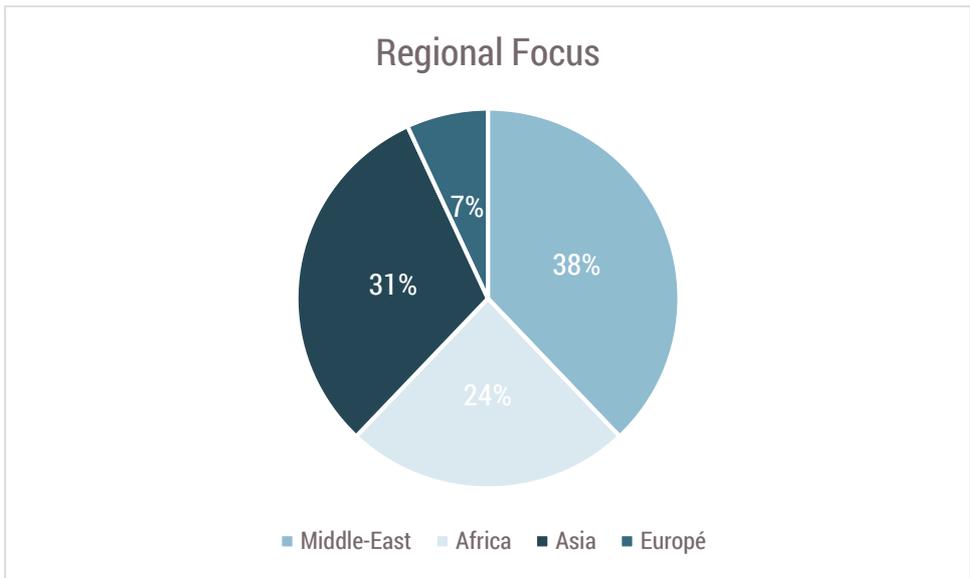


Figure 3. Regional Focus

There was a wide spread of respondents working country-specifically, the represented countries can be seen below.

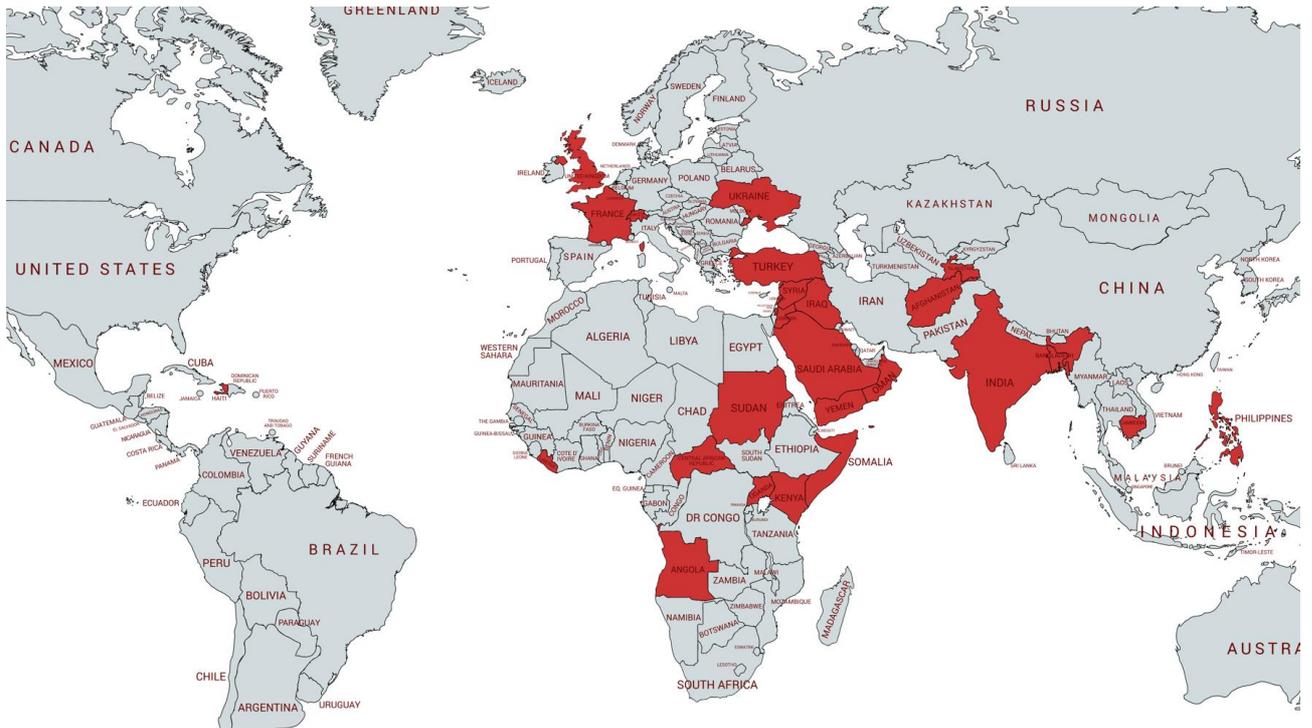


Figure 4. Countries of operations for respondents whose role is country-focused

With regards to the sectors respondents work within, the three most common are Protection, Health, and Livelihoods.

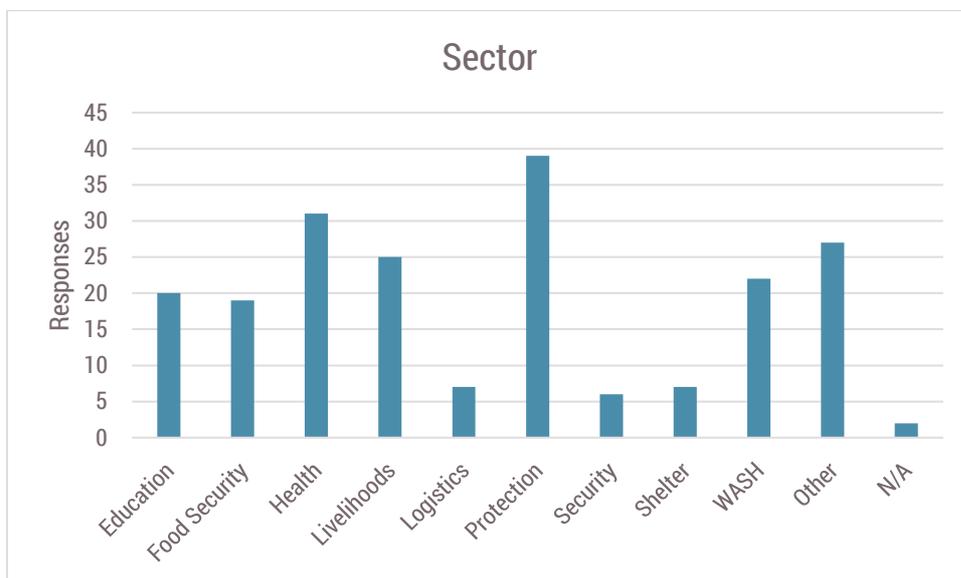


Figure 5. Sector



Figure 6. Roles

Most respondents described their roles as Coordinator, Officer, Administrator or Manager. There are respondents from all staff groups, however Board Members and Students are not very highly represented.

Out of the respondents 88% are involved in COVID-19 response.

The activities include:

- Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) COVID-19 (including remote)
- Psycho-social support (including remote)
- Support to health services and hospitals
- WASH Activities
- Provision and procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Protection concerns
- Translations and Distributions
- Shelter activities
- Cash distribution
- Food distribution and school feeding
- Writing proposals
- Deploying surge staff
- Research on the impacts of COVID-19 on local aid agencies
- Response to person with disabilities
- Livelihood activities (including ensuring and stabilising food access and ensuring stability in food supply chain)
- Recovery studies and planning
- Reporting human right violations during the lock down

- Evaluations
- Surveys

The respondents of the LNA represent a wide range of groups and roles in the aid sector. Regions are fairly equally represented, with MENA being more highly represented and Europe low. This is explained partly due to the fact that the LNA was distributed to partners and course participants in MENA as well as Europe not being a target for as much aid work as other regions. INGOs are more represented than other types of organisations and a majority of respondents work in roles and/or projects that are country specific. This means that whilst international organisations are more represented, most activities take place at a local level. The level of representation is broad, however sample sizes of groups within the survey, such as some types of organisations, are small and should not be seen as representative of the entire group.

This report does not claim to represent the aid sector statistically, instead it does aim to contribute to the understanding of the development of the impact of COVID-19 on organisations and staff in the aid sector. Through being transparent with the process of analysing the data as well as the demographic of the respondents, it is RedR UK's hope that readers can make use of this information in ways that are contextually relevant.

## 2. Findings and Analysis

This section presents the findings and analysis of the LNA. All data is presented in graph and narrative form, with analysis from the perspective of the research questions in section 1 throughout. The section will cover findings and analysis in relation to Organisational Challenges, Organisational Learning Needs and the three themes: Geographical Area of Focus, Language and Type of Organisation.

### 2.1. Organisational Challenges

#### 2.1.1. Organisations

##### 2.1.1.1. *RedR UK LNA Findings*

The biggest impact COVID-19 has had on organisations is the ability to deliver programming. Many respondents also report financial and mental wellbeing impacts.

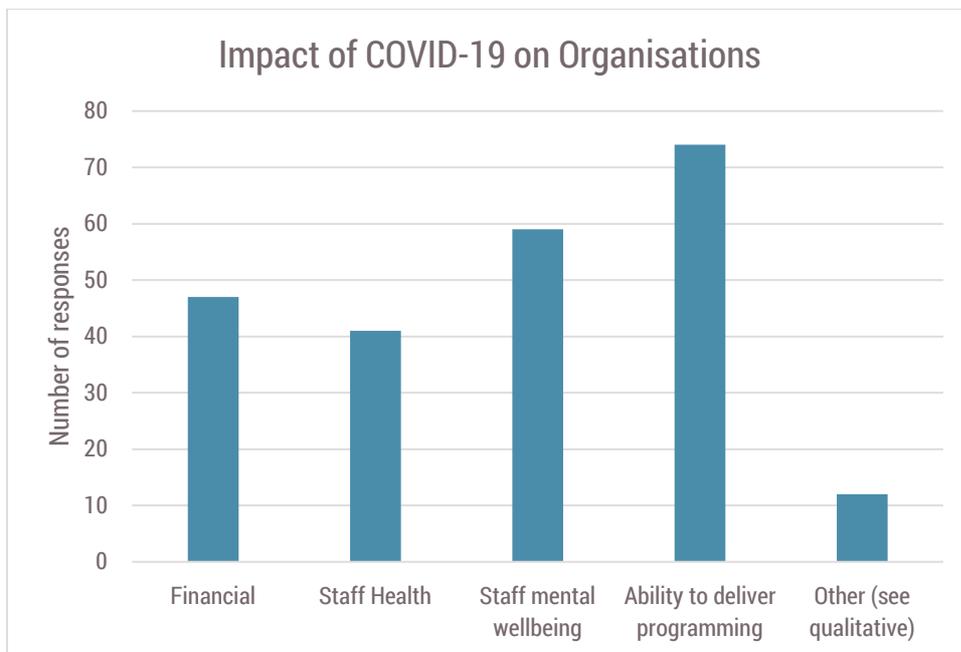


Figure 7. Impact of COVID-19 on Organisations

Beyond this, respondents also report that COVID-19 has led to:

- More online interaction in relation to field work
- Increase in demand for support<sup>1</sup>
- Changes to staffing levels
- Future uncertainty
- Interruption of all travel and face to face activities

<sup>1</sup> Who requested support and what kind of support was not specified by the respondent.

- Raising the voice of older people who are left behind in most emergencies

Some comments state that there has been no change for the respondent's organisation.

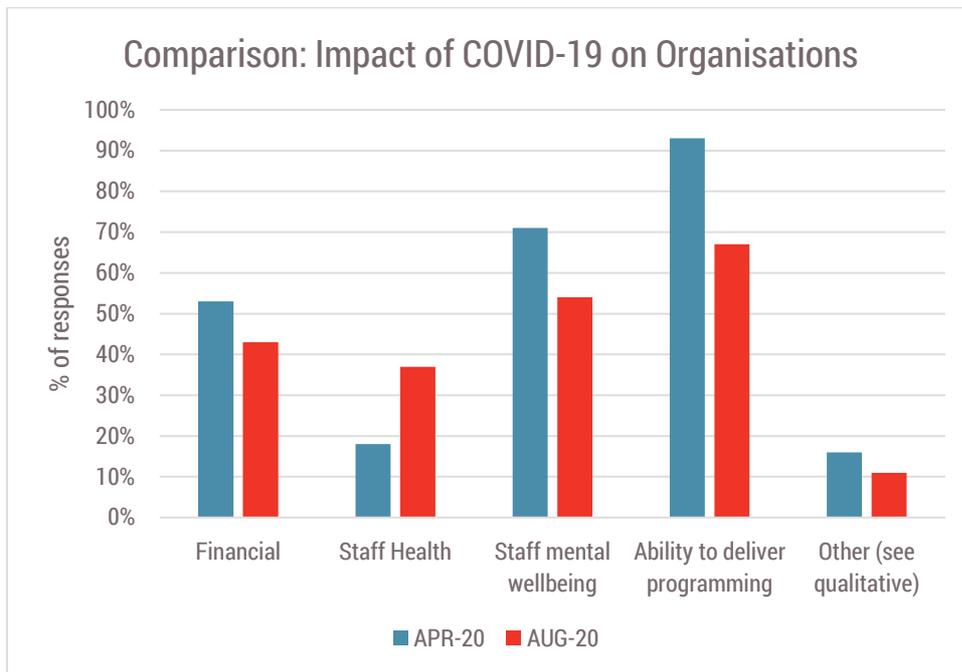


Figure 8. Comparison: Impact of COVID-19 on Organisations

The clearest development from the results of RedR UK's LNA in April 2020 is that the proportion of respondents stating that the staff health has been impacted has increased from 19% to 37%. Beyond this, the other organisational impacts are affecting fewer of the respondents, something which seems to indicate that the situation may have stabilised somewhat. Whilst it should not be assumed that the ability to deliver programming has gone back to previous levels, the responses indicate that there is some easing of the impacts on organisations.

When it comes to the impact of COVID-19 on programmes, the biggest observed impact is the focus on remote programme implementation. This exceeds all other responses, such as programmes having been put on hold and programme focus having shifted to COVID-19.

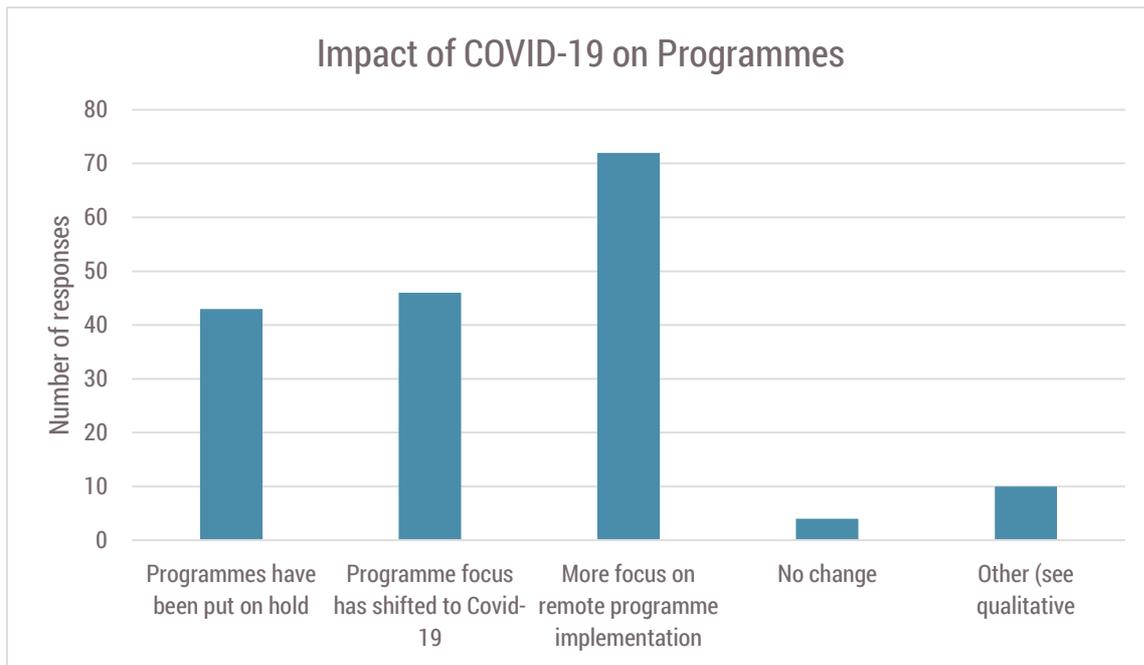


Figure 9. Impact of COVID-19 on Programmes

Upon comparing the results of this LNA to the data from April 2020, it is noticeable that the proportion of responses in two of the question has changed, namely how many respondents report programmes being put on hold or shifting focus. This number has clearly decreased. Furthermore, the previous LNA did not give remote programme implementation as an option, however a large proportion of the comments under 'Other' stated this as the impact. One can therefore conclude that the trends are similar with regards to that at the time of writing this analysis. Yet again, the fact that a smaller proportion of respondents report that programmes have been put on hold and shifted to COVID-19 means that the situation has stabilised somewhat in the sector, as fewer people are reporting programmatic impacts than in April. As a large proportion state that there is a focus on remote programme implementation, it could be that the experience now is of new working modalities, rather than shifts in actual programmes and their focus.

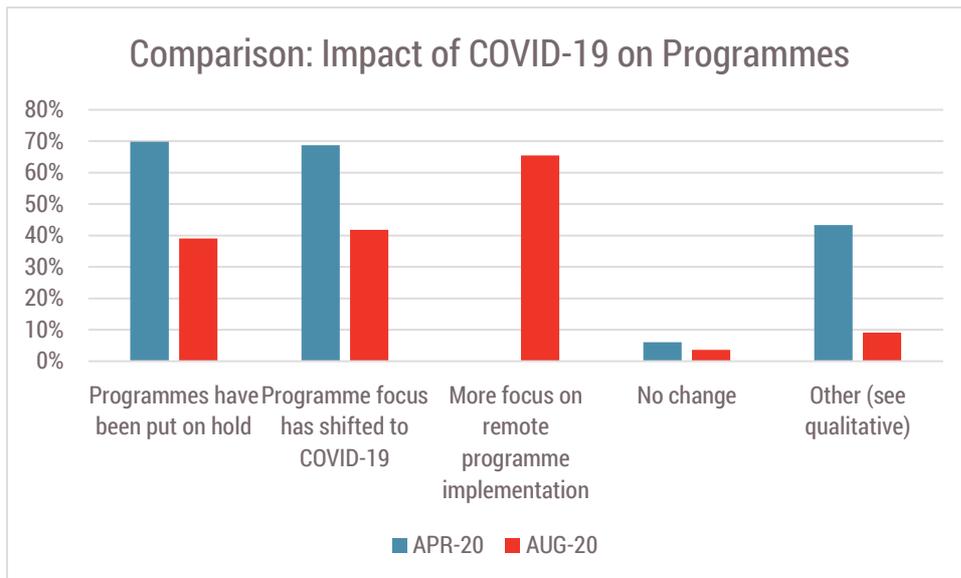


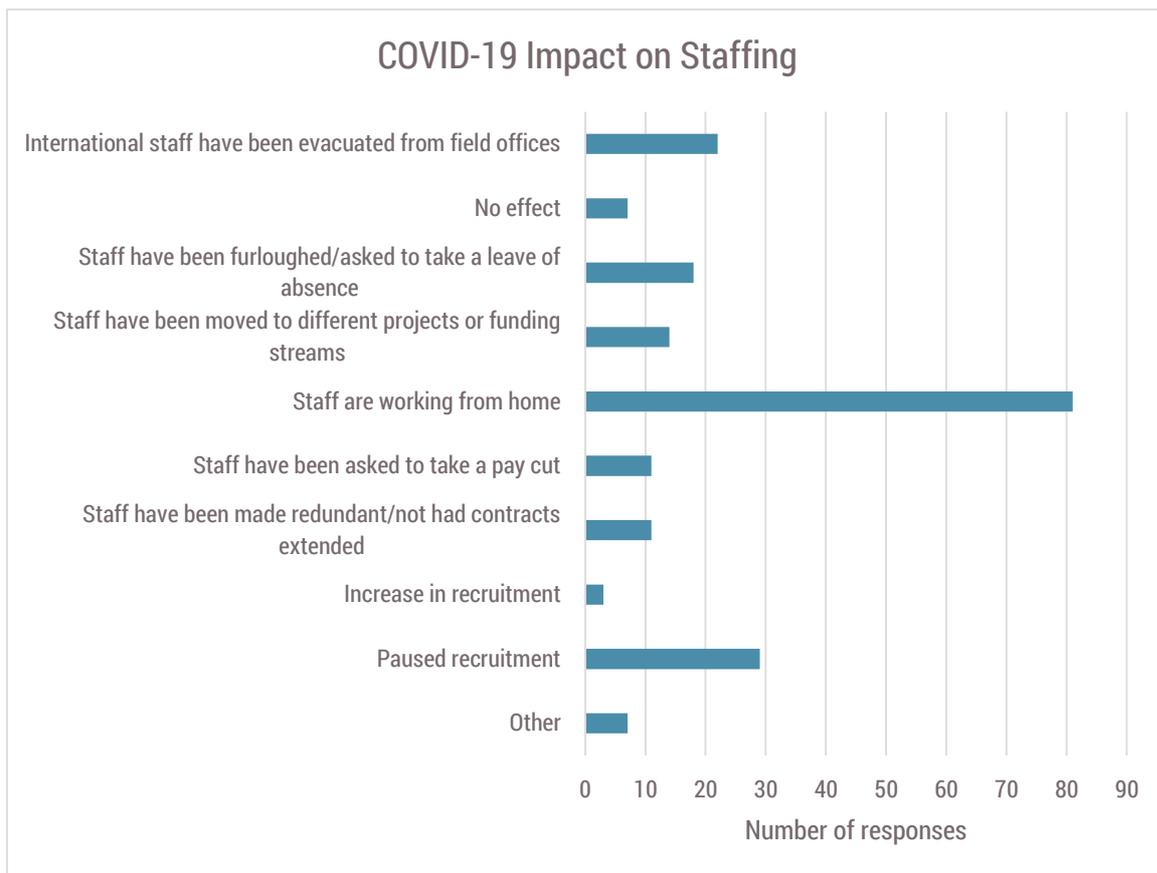
Figure 10. Comparison: Impact of COVID-19 on Programmes

In summary, the impact on organisations and their programming has not worsened since April 2020 in terms of their activities. Simultaneously however, future uncertainties remain in terms of the financial impact and disruptions when it comes to staff health have strongly increased. Remote programming and working remains a strong theme for a large proportion of respondents.

### 2.1.2. Staffing

#### 2.1.2.1. RedR UK LNA Findings

The impact on staffing of COVID-19 is mainly seen in terms of working conditions. 74 % of respondents state that staff are working from home, and this is by far the most significant impact on staff. Other impacts are low in comparison.



*Figure 11. Impact of COVID-19 on Staffing*

Compared to the RedR UK LNA conducted in April, fewer respondents report pausing of recruitment and whilst the differences are marginal, fewer respondents also report that international staff have been evacuated, and that staff have been made redundant. Whilst small, the results show an increase in recruitment compared to in April. All in all, this seems to further imply that the situation has stabilised in the international aid sector.

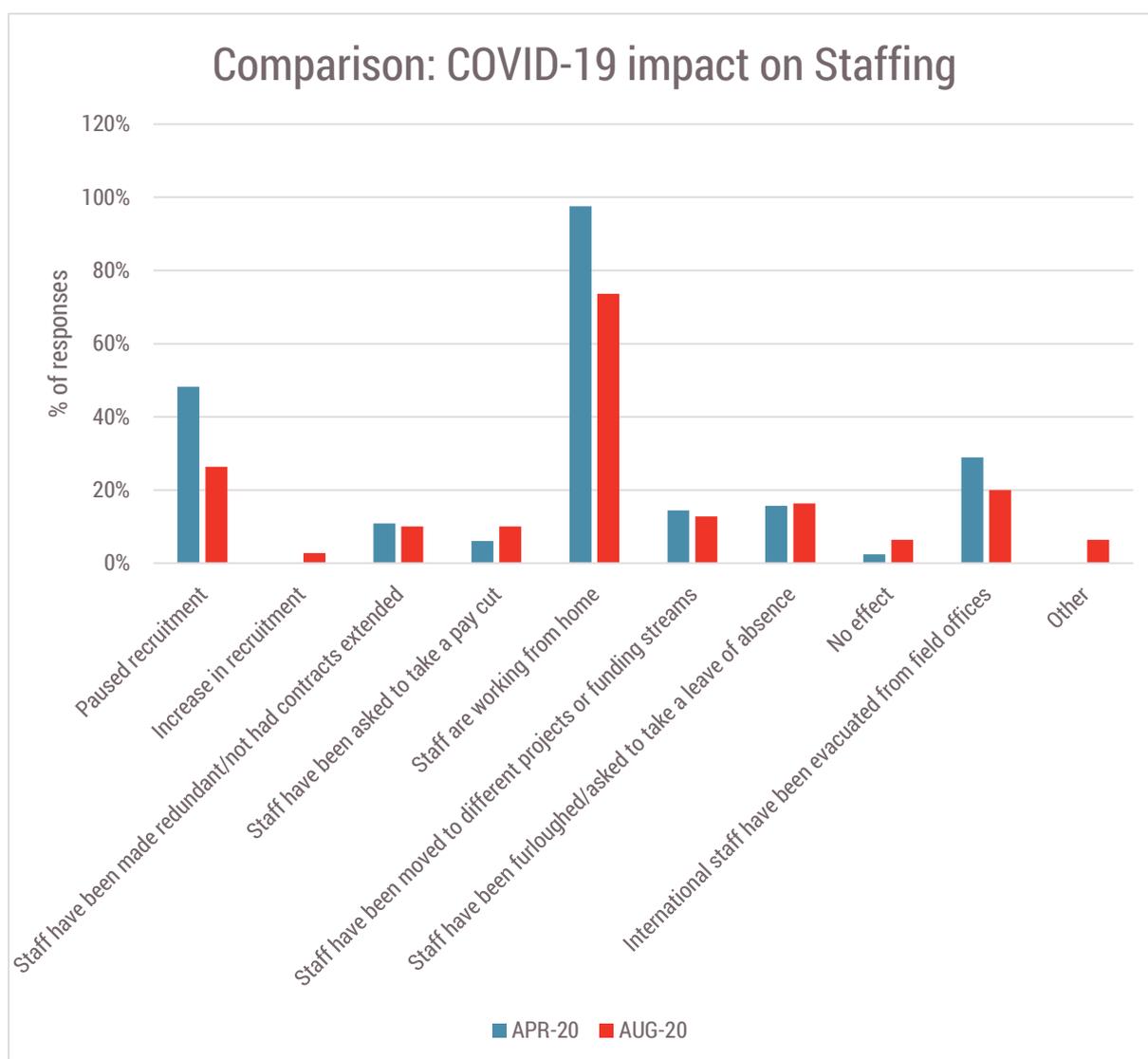


Figure 12. Comparison: Impact of COVID-19 on Staffing

In brief, the trend when it comes to staffing seems cautiously positive, with less negative impacts on staff and some increase when it comes to recruitment. Serious impacts however remain, and the responses indicate that staff are faced with a precarious situation due to the effects that remain in terms of redundancies, furloughs, pay cuts and change in working conditions. A large proportion continue to work from home.

### 2.1.3. Implications for Capacity-Building

The developments of the impact of COVID-19 on organisations, programmes, and staffing since April show that the situation has changed in nature, with fewer disruptions to organisations and programmes reported. Whilst no comments indicate a situation which is back to normality, there are fewer reporting that programming has stopped or shifted focus, meaning that it can be assumed the changes which took place earlier this year have remained but not continued developing to the same extent. Some respondents also report that their activities have begun to

encompass recovery. Simultaneously, the impact on staff health has intensified in the past six months. This implies both a good time for organisations to take stock and capacity-build strategically driven by the lessons learnt thus far, as well as a crucial time to care for staff members' health. As COVID-19 has redrawn the landscape for international aid, it is crucial that capacity-building efforts do not go back to "business as usual".

Based on this, the following capacity-building measures are recommended:

- Working remotely as a new normal – how to sustain and continue working remotely
- Re-imagining organisational culture in a COVID-19 world
- Recovery or mainstreaming COVID-19 in a post-COVID-19 world (how to work with COVID-19 realities in a situation of more stability)
- Staff health
  - Protections and workplace care
  - Rights of staff
  - Resilience of teams and organisations

As the LNA provided a pre-decided set of answers with limited room for respondents to expand on their response, or for RedR UK to follow up on defining further the exact needs, the above should be seen as a starting point for recommendations and further exploration. Assessment is required prior to development.

## 2.2. Organisational Learning Needs

The following section presents the findings when it comes to self-selected learning needs both in relation to topics and digital learning styles.

### 2.2.1. Topics

#### 2.2.1.1. RedR UK LNA Findings

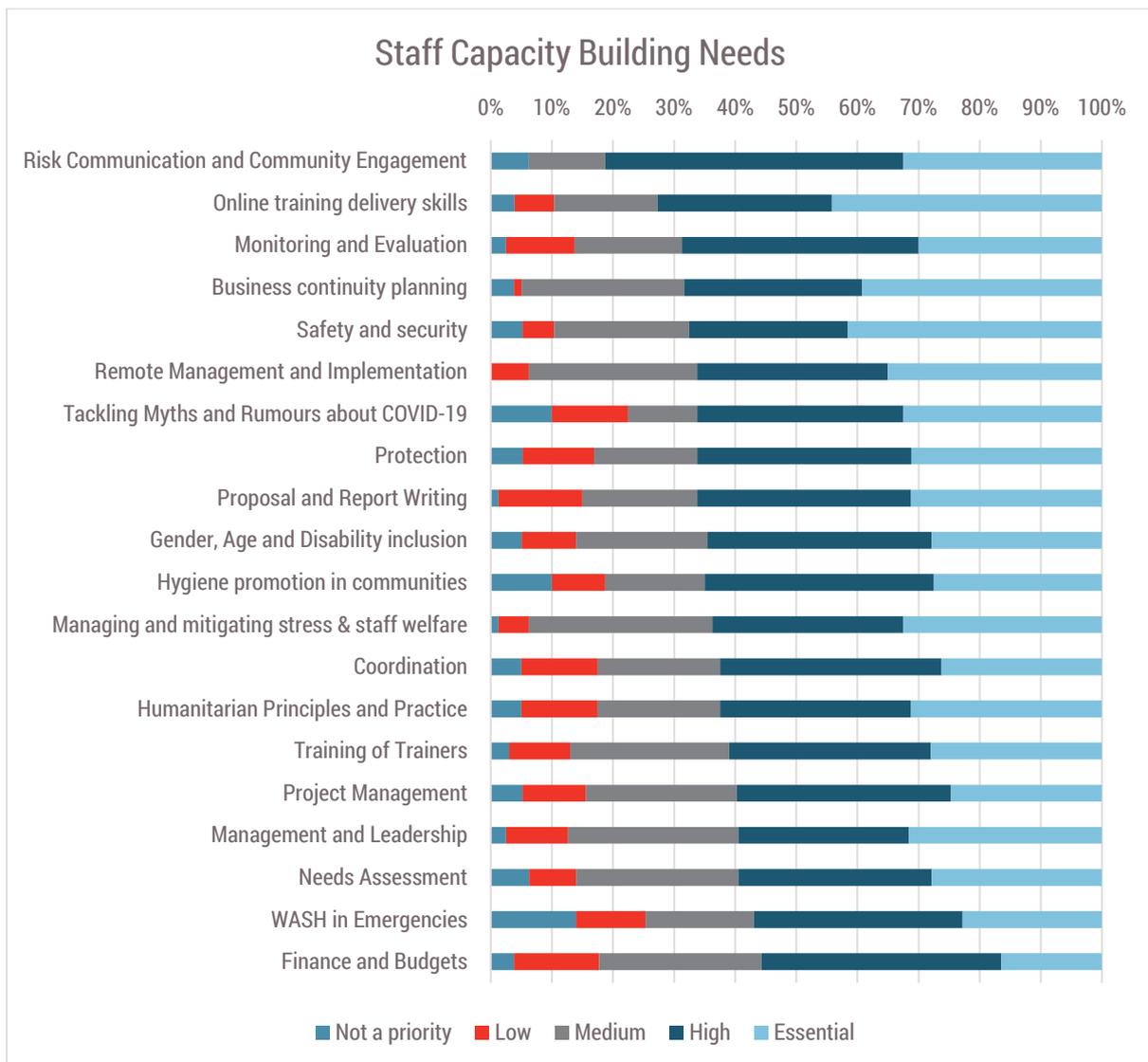


Figure 13. Staff Capacity Building Needs

The most prioritised topics (topics that are most frequently listed as high priority and essential) for capacity building are:

1. Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)
2. Online Training and Delivery Skills
3. Monitoring & Evaluation

Many respondents also listed Safety and Security (39%) and Business Continuity Planning (42%) as essential. These topics speak to the need for skills in how to reach communities and at-risk groups when it comes to COVID-19, the new working modalities organisations find themselves in as well as the long-term sustainability and viability of organisations. As 68% of respondents reported that programme focus had shifted to COVID-19 in RedR UK's previous LNA, the need for Monitoring and Evaluation could be showing up strongly now due to reporting demands from donors and target populations, as well as the organisations' own learning.

Further comments on capacity building needs included:

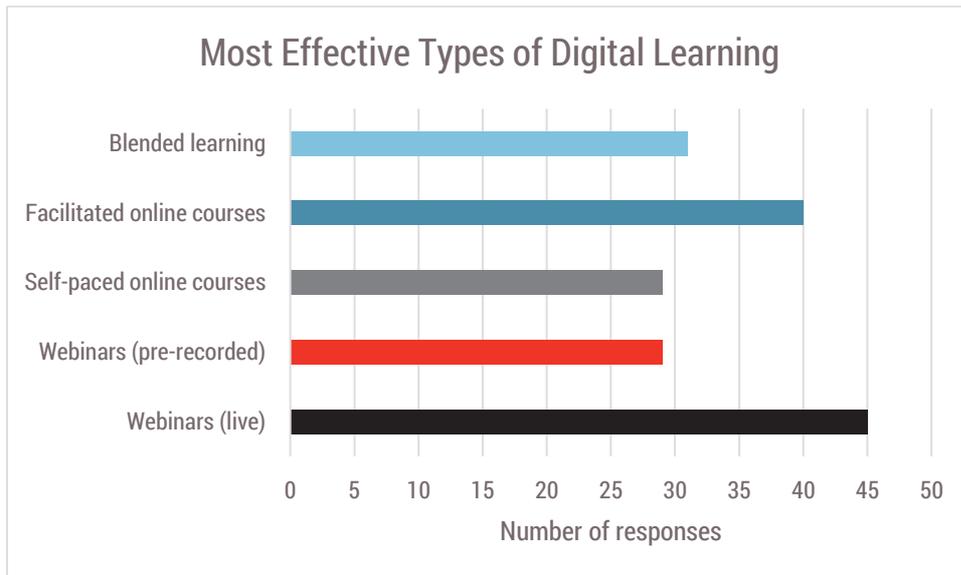
- Behaviour change and working with communities to understand risks and mitigating actions
- Food security and quality
- Tackling logistics and transportation challenges during COVID-19
- Working with people with special needs
- ICT and social media presence
- Psychological First Aid
- Understanding compliance
- Accessibility (for services and messaging)
- Infection control
- Life Skills
- Future plans and project which help with the rehabilitation after the pandemic period and resilience for second wave
- Simulations
- Local resources mobilisation
- Child Protection in emergencies
- Refugees and migration
- Field management training
- Principled negotiation

In conclusion, it is clear that aid workers continue to identify tools to manage the new effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on their operations. Both support to activities and the specific needs that arise from COVID-19 as well as more organisational support is identified and sought after from respondents in this LNA.

## 2.2.2. Types of Digital Learning

### 2.2.2.1. *RedR UK LNA Findings*

Live webinars and facilitated online courses are the most preferred types of digital learning, with blended learning, self-paced online courses and pre-recorded webinars being close to equally preferred.



*Figure 14. Most Effective Types of Digital Learning*

This shows that participants appreciate online and digital learning but value the presence of a facilitator. It also shows that respondents value engagement with other participants, as live webinars and facilitated online courses often provide opportunities such as chats, forums, or small group work. In light of lockdowns and physical distancing guidelines, aid workers could be looking for peer support and connection, hence showing a preference for these types of digital learning.

Compared to the RedR UK LNA in April, the main difference is that the total preference for self-paced online courses, facilitated online courses and blended learning has gone down, however the two most preferred learning modalities are still the same. Self-paced learning has gone from 43 % of respondents listing it as the most effective type of digital learning, to 26 %. As can be seen in figure 16, 17 % have a lack of interest in digital learning and 29 % do not have enough time available. Self-paced online courses require both time and interest, more so than webinars, and therefore this could explain the decrease in prioritisation.

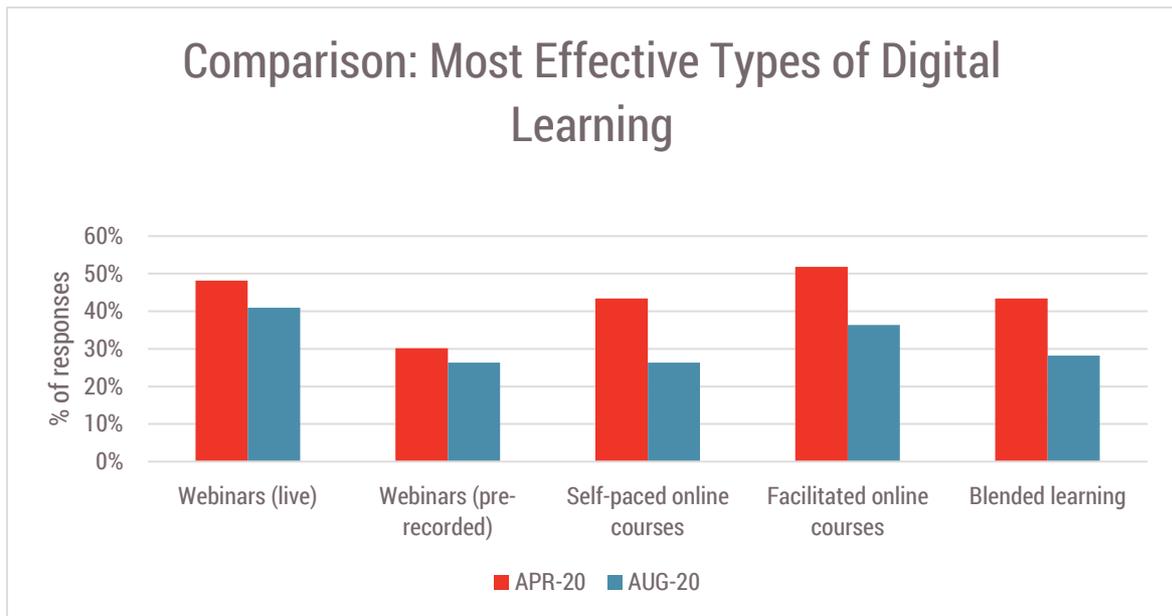


Figure 15. Comparison: Most Effective Types of Digital Learning

Most respondents report that their staff are unable to access digital learning due to bandwidth or connectivity issues. Course fees that are too high is also an issue. Beyond this, staff are faced with a lack of time, unawareness of resources and electricity cuts.

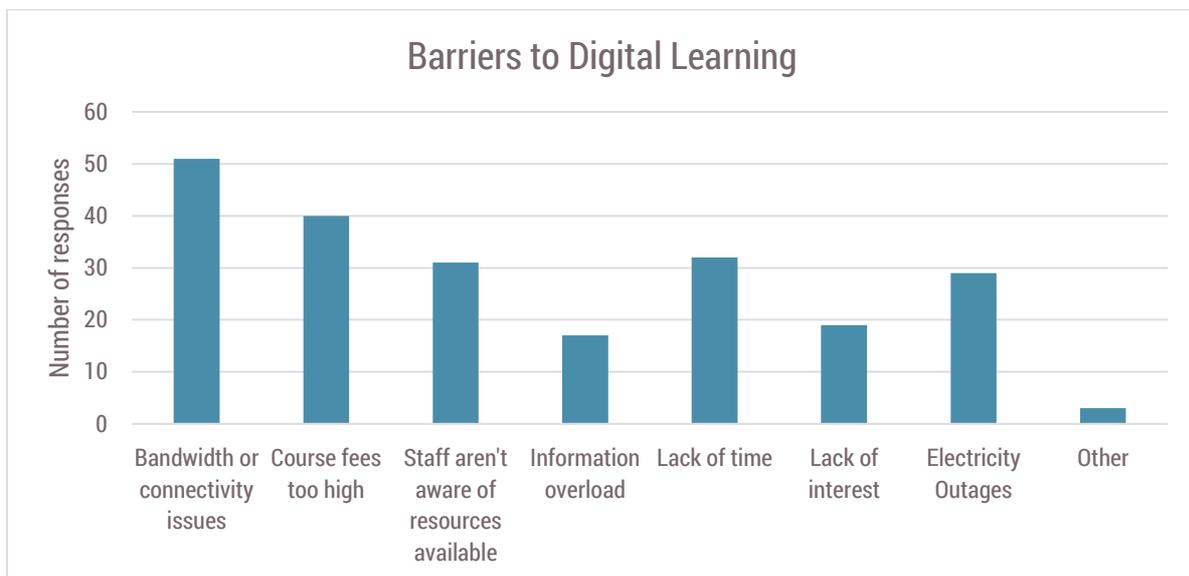


Figure 16. Barriers to Digital Learning

Upon comparison to the previous RedR UK LNA, more respondents are reporting barriers to digital learning, especially when it comes to course fees. Whilst many courses offered at the beginning of the pandemic were free, several providers have now transitioned into offering their standard courses online, keeping fees. The fact that the percentage of respondents who cannot access digital learning because of too high course fees has increased from 23 % to 36 % highlights the importance of keeping costs accessible.

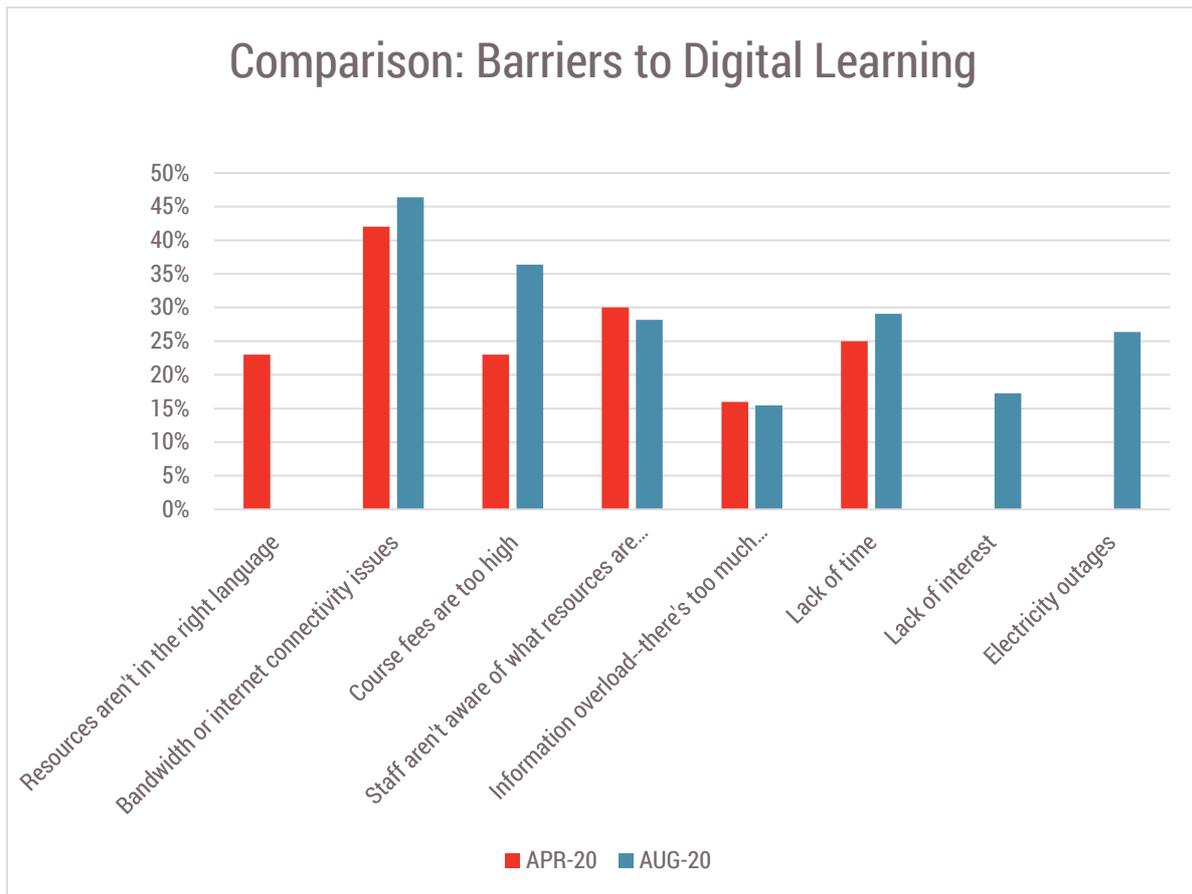


Figure 17. Comparison: Barriers to Digital Learning

Thus, the results of this LNA show that live webinars and facilitated online courses are the most preferred types of digital learning, meaning the presence of a facilitator/trainer and other participants is valued. From the data, one can see that barriers have increased somewhat when it comes to time, course fees and bandwidth. There are further challenges regarding electricity access, interest, and information dissemination of resources. These need to be considered carefully in any capacity-building activities if aid workers are to be reached comprehensively.

## 2.3. Capacity Building Needs by Theme

In order to understand learning needs appropriately, preferred topics and digital learning styles will now be presented in relation to geographical focus of organisations, language and type of organisation. This is in order to support the development of resources as effectively as possible.

### 2.3.1. Geographical Area of Focus

#### 2.3.1.1. *RedR UK LNA Findings*

As was shown in section 1.3, respondents of the LNA indicated whether their role has a global, regional or one-country focus. These will now be unpacked accordingly.

#### ***Regional - Asia***

The pattern for those who focus on Asia (9 respondents) as a region is somewhat different from the survey results as a whole. Whilst Online training and delivery skills and RCCE are in the top topics, Needs Assessment and Managing and Mitigating Stress & Staff Welfare are equally ranked. One possible reason for the difference in ranking from the overall group of respondents above could be that 55 % of the respondents from this region work in the Health sector. Hence, the need for managing staff welfare could be stronger in comparison with other respondents, as they will be particularly exposed to the physical and mental health risks of COVID-19. It is worth noting that the sample size for this group is very small, and hence the findings should not be considered representative for the region.

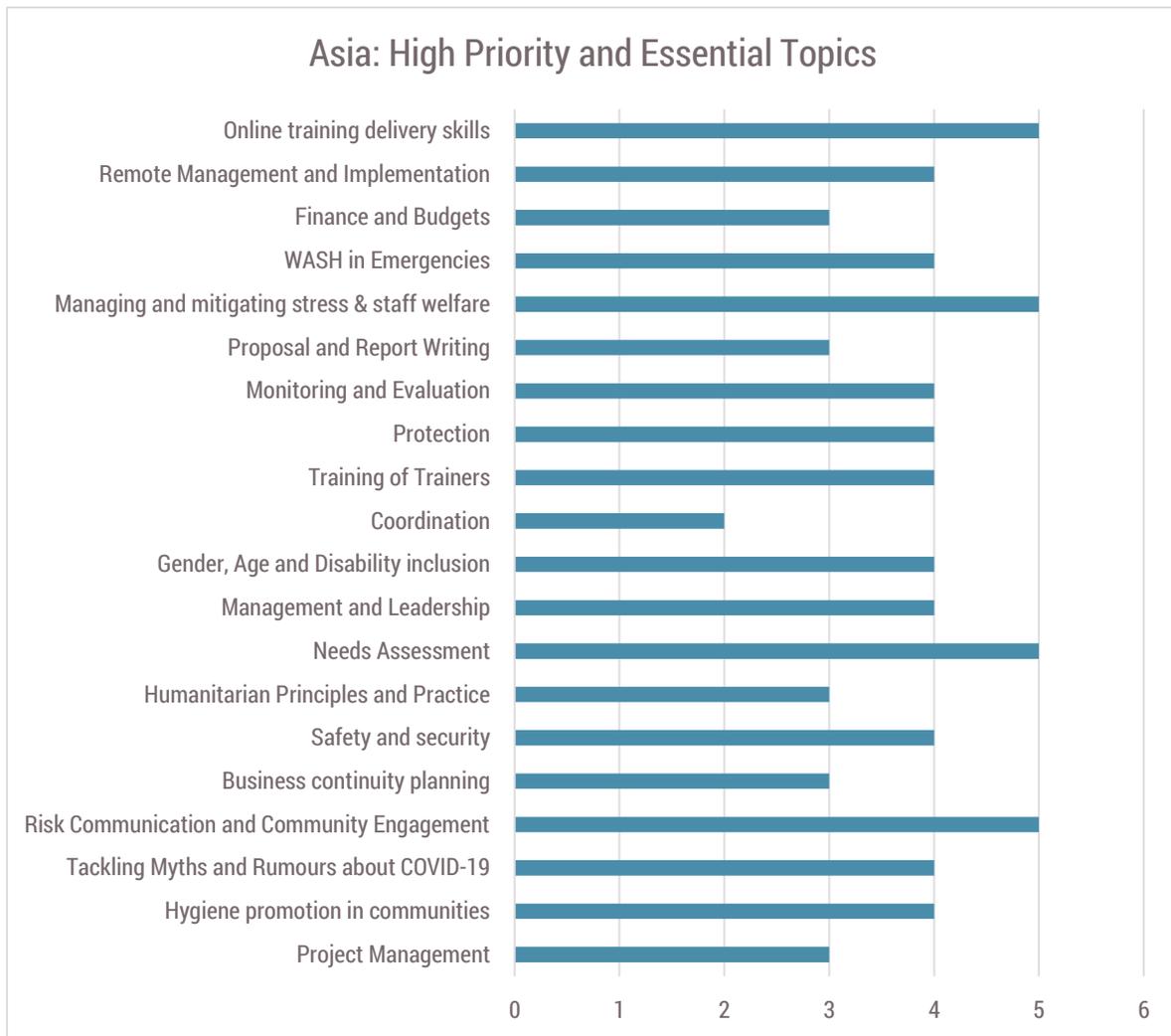


Figure 18. Asia: High Priority and Essential Topics

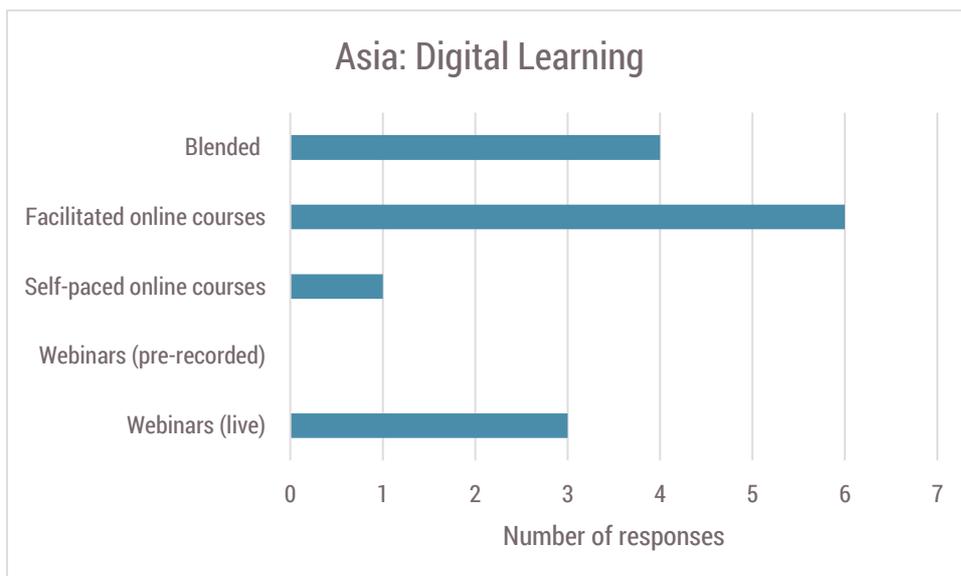


Figure 19. Asia: Digital Learning

Facilitated online courses were very strongly preferred for those whose organisations focus on the region, and pre-recorded webinars not at all preferred.

**Middle East**

In the Middle East as a region (11 respondents), RCCE, and Training of Trainers were the two topics with most rankings as high priority and essential. Facilitated online courses are the most effective type of digital learning, with no respondents selecting pre-recorded webinars as their preference.

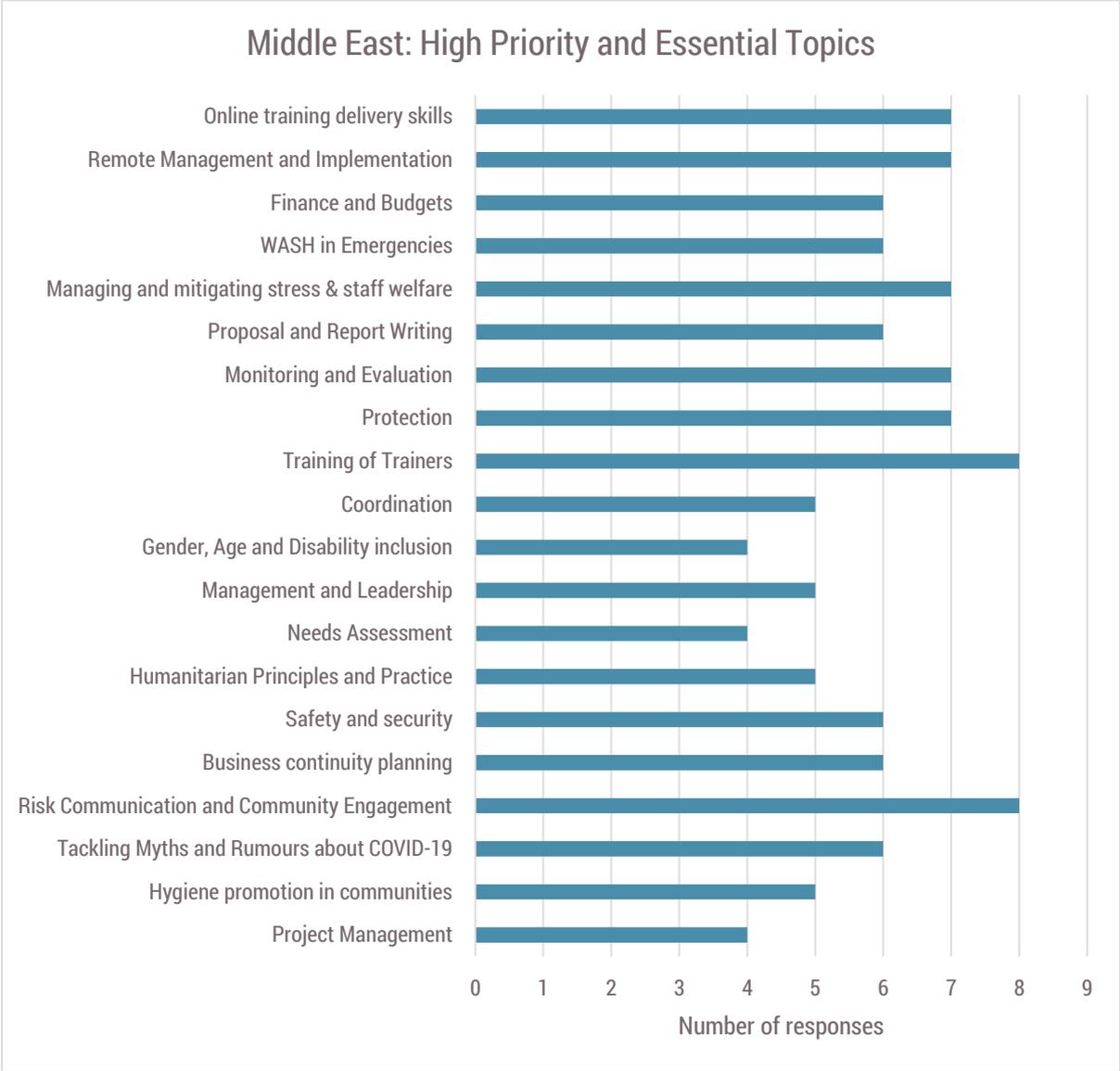


Figure 20. Middle East: High Priority and Essential Topics

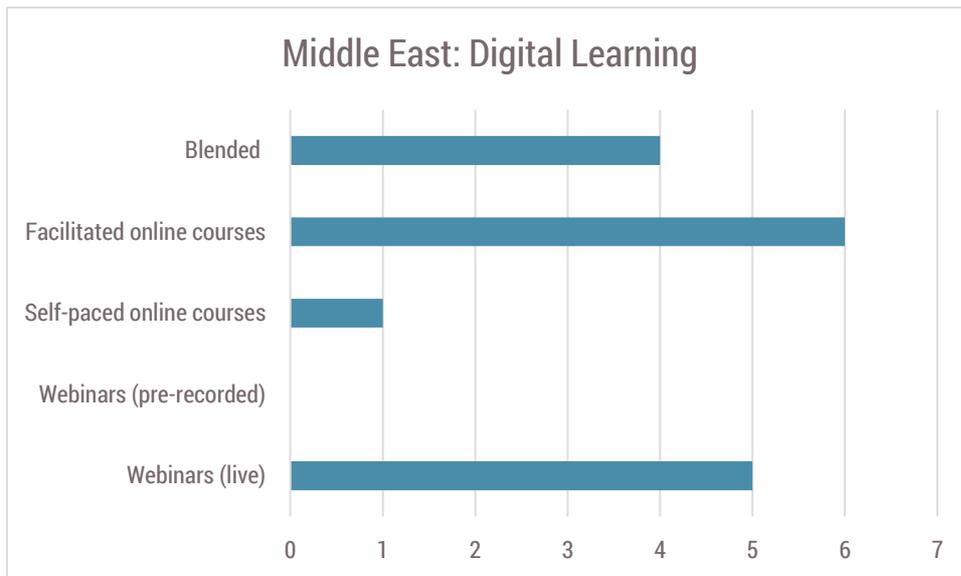


Figure 21. Middle East: Digital Learning

### Africa

Of the respondents whose work focus on Africa as a region (9), most respondents listed Monitoring and Evaluation as a high priority and essential topic.

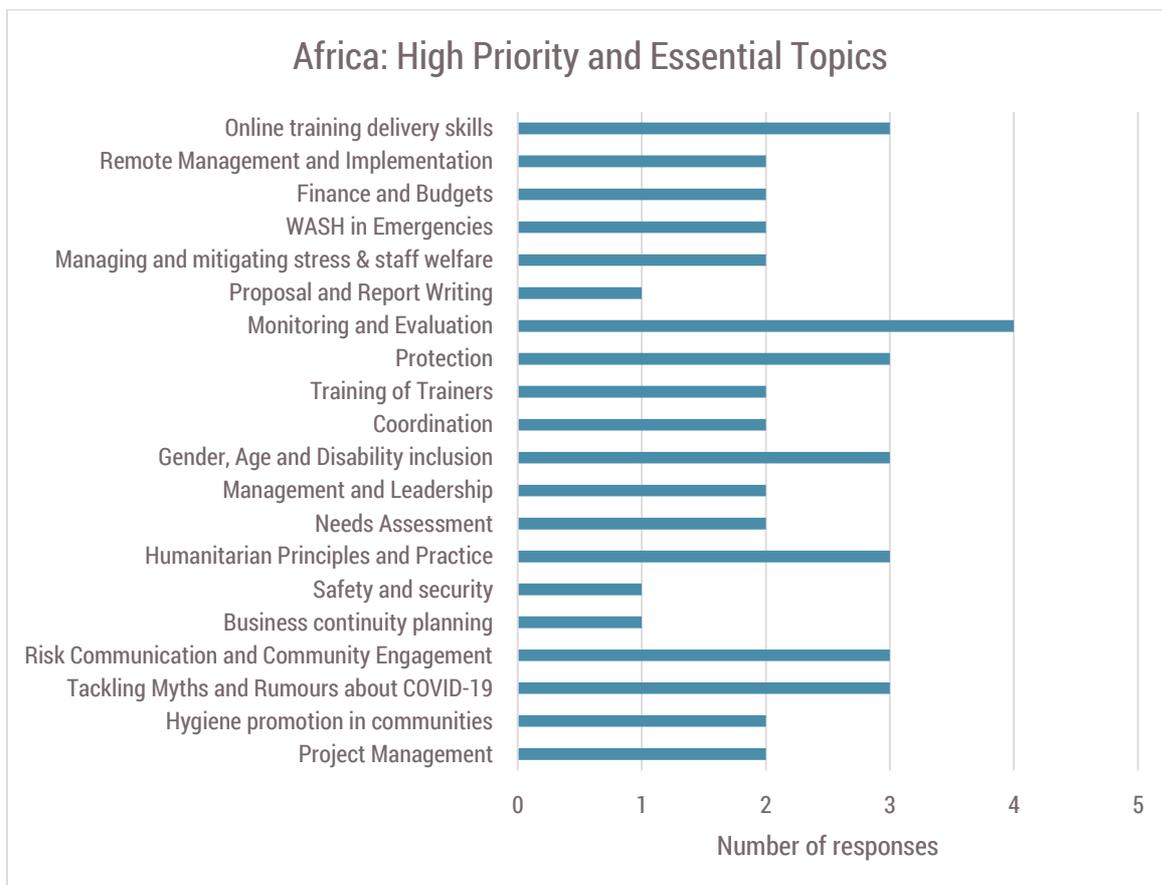


Figure 22. Africa: High Priority and Essential Topics

When it comes to types of digital learning, live webinars are preferred.

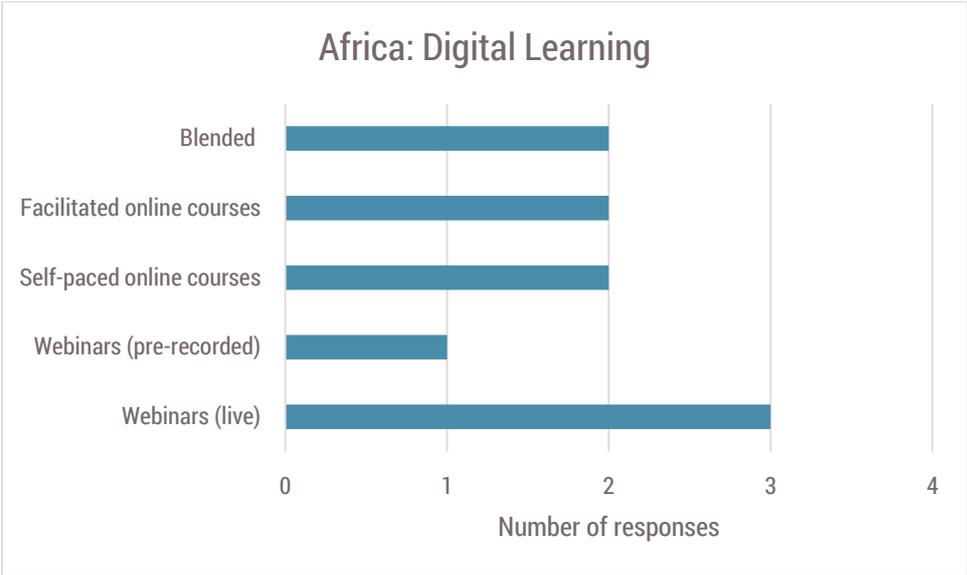


Figure 23. Africa: Digital Learning

**Country-specific**

Due to the fact that there were many individual countries represented in the LNA, this report looks at the trend of those working on one country as a whole group, rather than disaggregated data for each individual country. This is in order to judge whether there is a pattern for organisations and individuals working locally. RCCE is the highest ranked topic, followed by Hygiene Promotion in Communities and Business Continuity Planning. As the respondents of this group are working on one country, it is likely that they are working on the ground and involved directly in projects delivering aid. This contributes to our understanding of why Hygiene Promotion in Communities is more important than for other groups in the LNA, and also why RCCE is of high value.

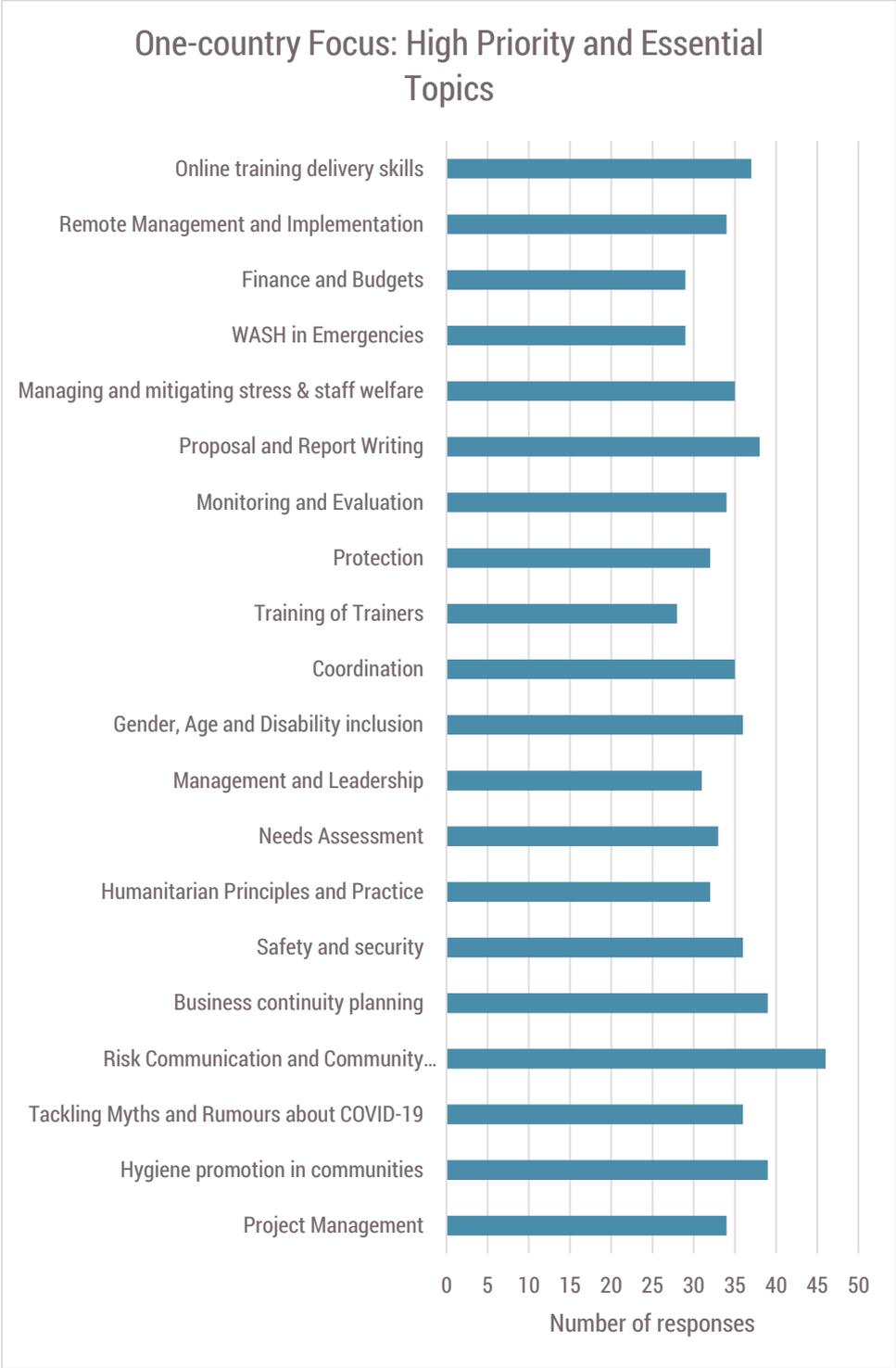


Figure 24. One-country Focus: High Priority and Essential Topics

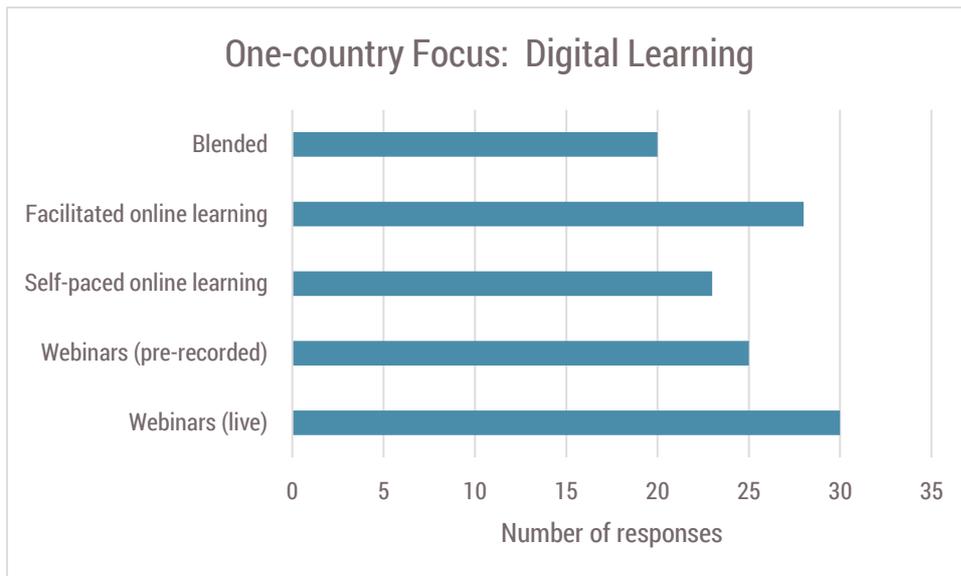


Figure 25. One-Country Focus: Digital Learning

Live webinars are the most preferred type of digital learning, followed by facilitated online learning.

### 2.3.2. Language

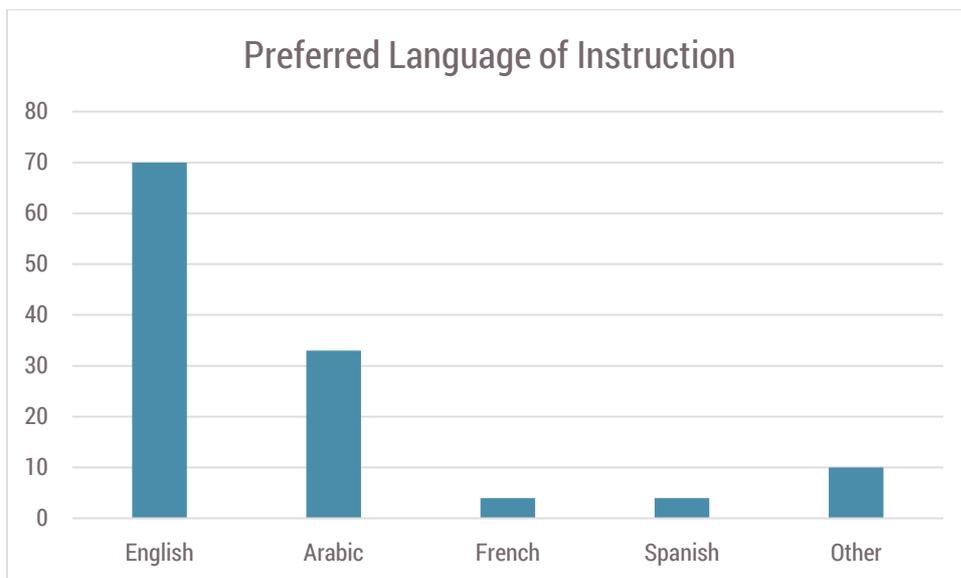


Figure 26. Preferred Language of Instruction

#### **English**

A total of 70 respondents listed English as one of or the preferred language of instruction for capacity-building activities. The pattern of topics ranked as high priority and essential was the same as for all respondents.

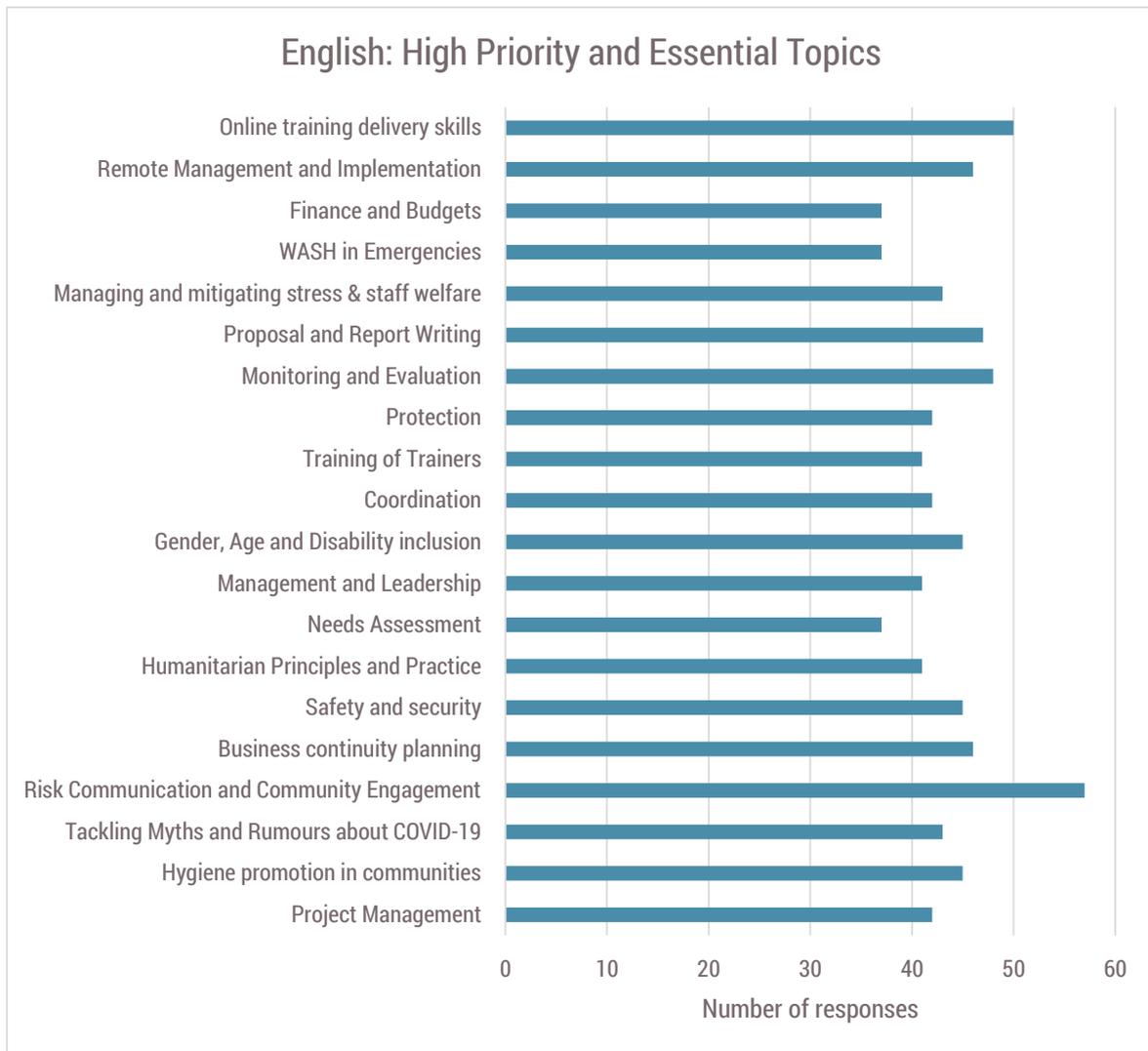


Figure 27. English: High Priority and Essential Topics

Compared to the previous LNA, there is a higher preference for nearly all topics, with the exception of Management and Leadership.

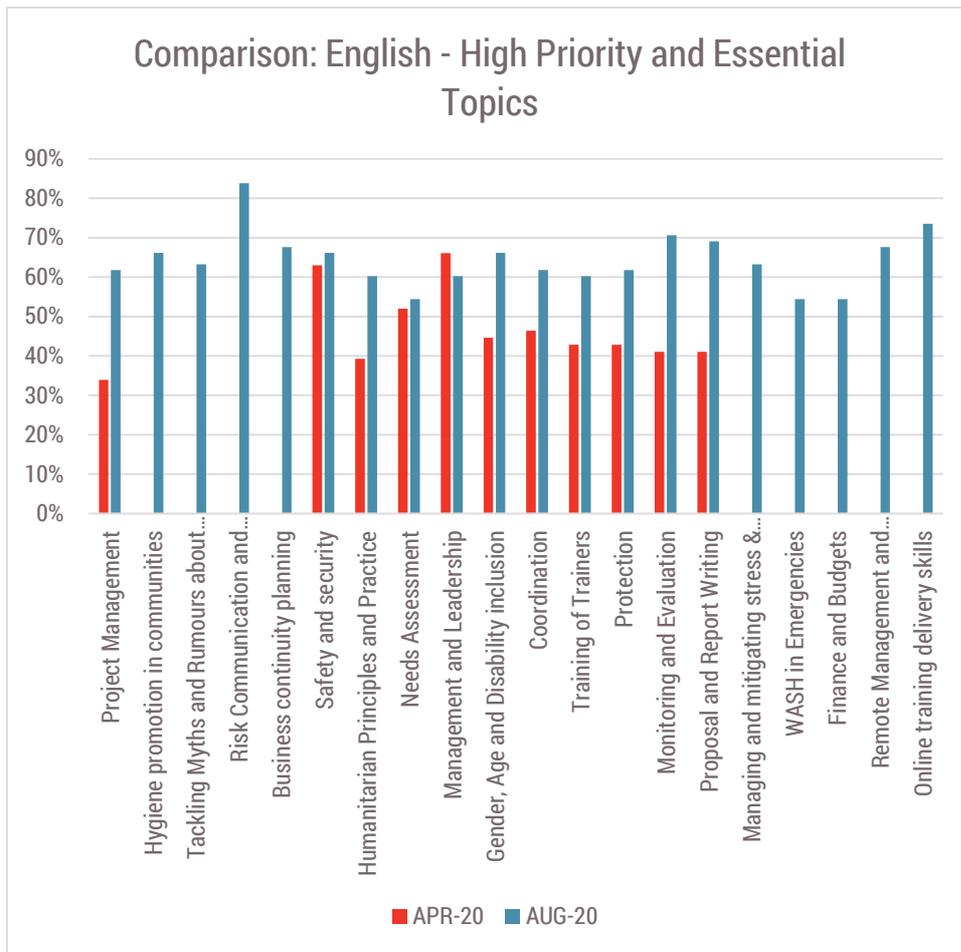


Figure 28. Comparison: English – High Priority and Essential Topics

### Arabic

33 respondents listed Arabic as the or one of the preferred languages of instruction. The top two preferred topics are RCCE, and Online Training Delivery Skills. The third topic is Business Continuity Planning.

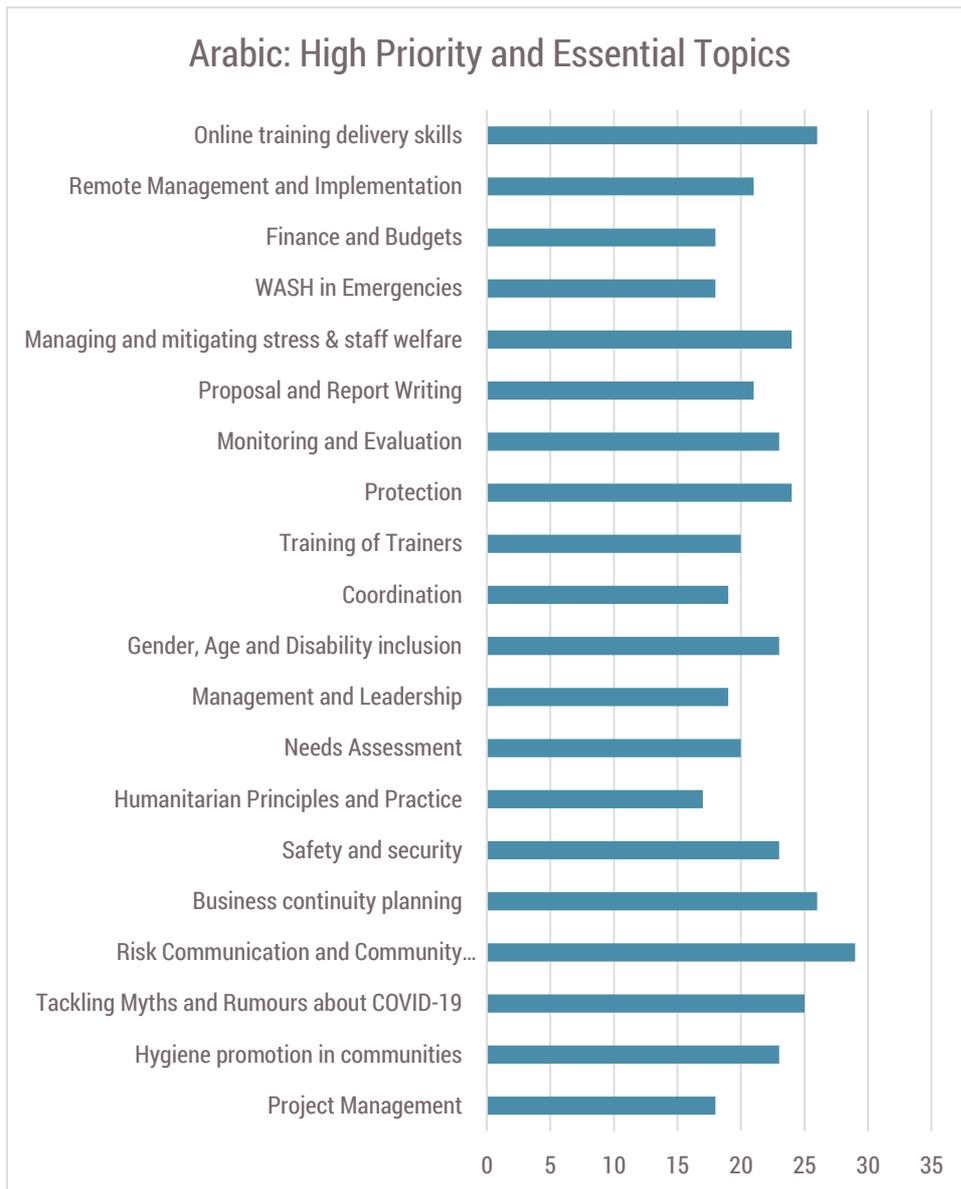


Figure 29. Arabic: High Priority and Essential Topics

Compared to the previous LNA, all topics are more preferred at this moment in time, except for Management and Leadership.

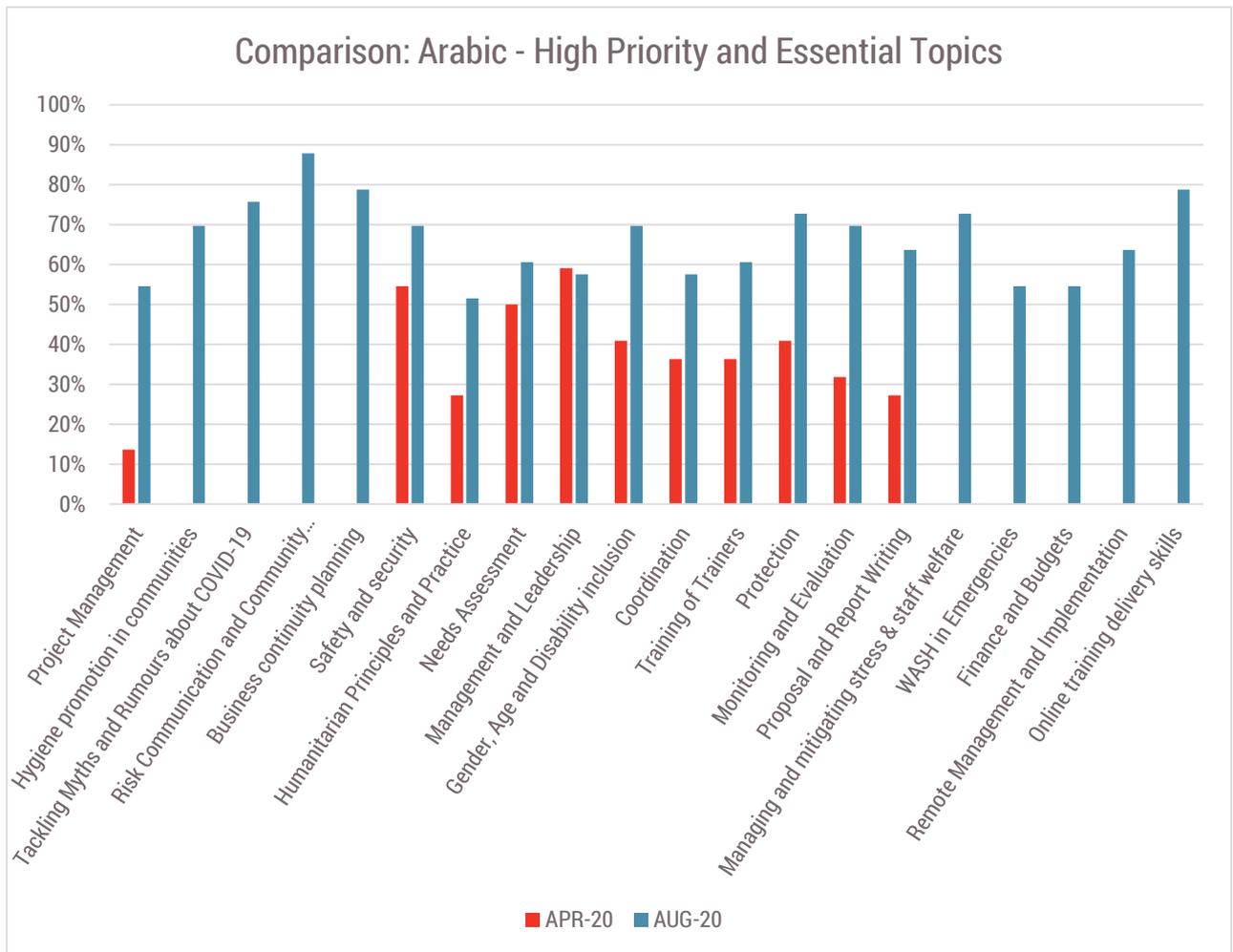


Figure 30. Comparison: Arabic - High Priority and Essential Topics

### French

For the four respondents who listed French as one or the preferred languages for instruction, four topics were of equal importance: WASH in Emergencies, Monitoring and Evaluation, Gender, Age and Disability Inclusion and RCCE.



Figure 31. French: High Priority and Essential Topics

Compared to the earlier LNA conducted by RedR UK, three topics are much less prioritised: Needs Assessment, Training of Trainers and Proposal and Report Writing.

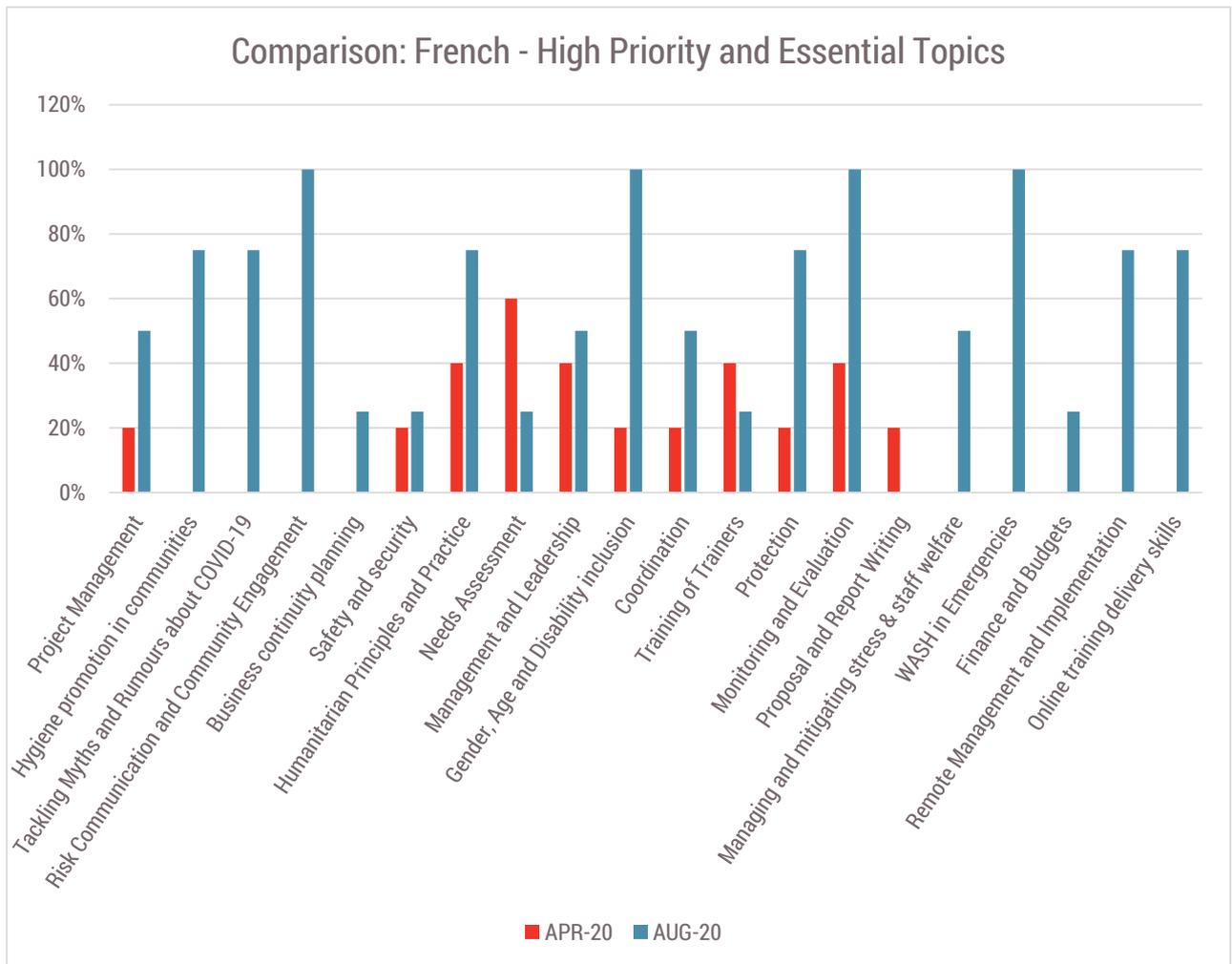


Figure 32. Comparison: French – High Priority and Essential Topics

### Spanish

Out of the four respondents who listed Spanish as their preferred language, three topics stand out compared to the main pattern in the findings: WASH in Emergencies, Humanitarian Principles and Practice, and Tackling Myths and Rumours about COVID-19.

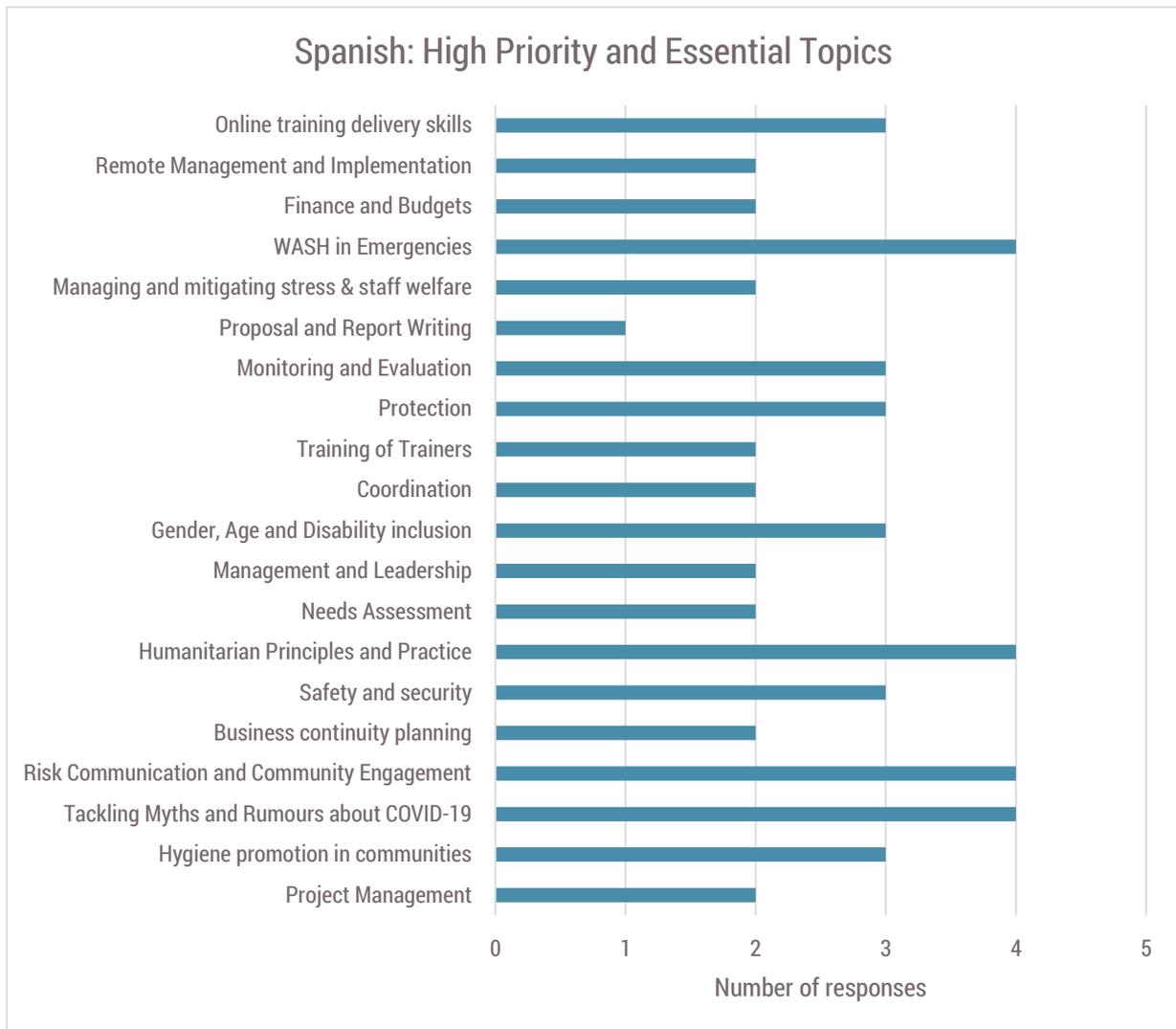


Figure 33. Spanish: High Priority and Essential Topics

### 2.3.3. Type of Organisation

#### 2.3.3.1. *INGO*

47 respondents describe their organisation as an INGO. The pattern for INGOs when it comes to the topics ranked as high priority and essential is similar to the overall responses, with RCCE and Online Training Delivery Skills being the most prioritised topics. Tackling myths and rumours about COVID-19 and Hygiene Promotion were also ranked highly.

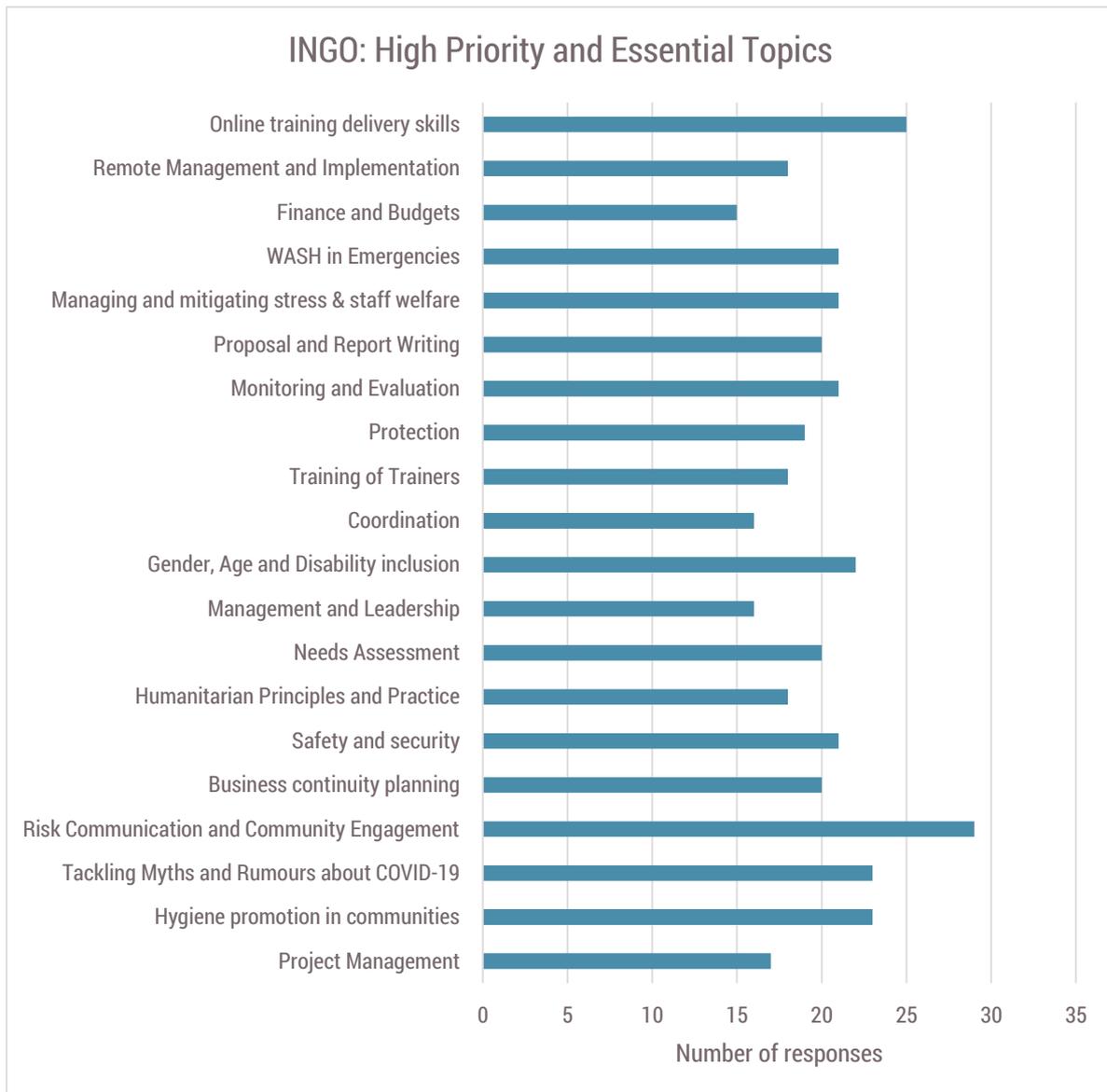


Figure 34. INGO: High Priority and Essential Topics

Live webinars are the most preferred types of digital learning, as well as facilitated online learning.

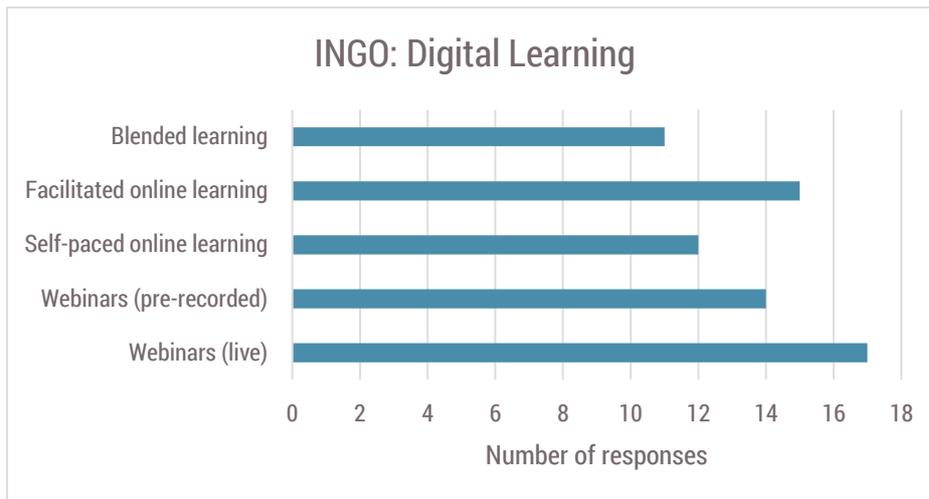


Figure 35. INGOs: Digital Learning

As can be seen on the comparison chart below, the topics covered in the previous LNA are more prioritised at this moment in time compared to April<sup>2</sup>, with the exception of Management and Leadership.

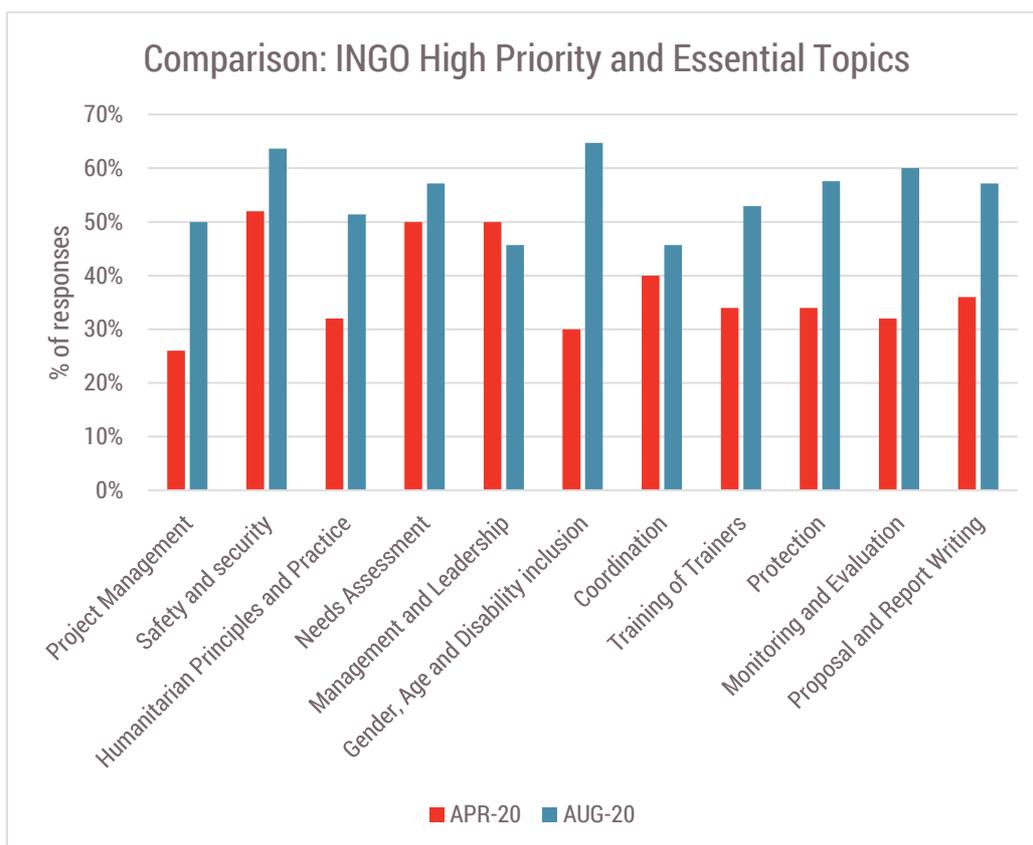


Figure 36. Comparison: INGO - High Priority and Essential Topics

<sup>2</sup> Note that the August 2020 LNA included additional topics, which are not shown in Figure 36 as this compares only those topics offered in both the April 2020 and August 2020 LNA.

### 2.3.3.2. NNGO

A total of 19 respondents reported belonging to NNGOs. The three most preferred topics for respondents working at NNGOs are RCCE, Business Continuity and Online Training Delivery Skills. Facilitated Online Learning and Live Webinars are the highest valued types of digital learning. This pattern is in line with the overall responses and shows that in the case of the respondents for this LNA the analysis thus far would also apply to NNGOs.

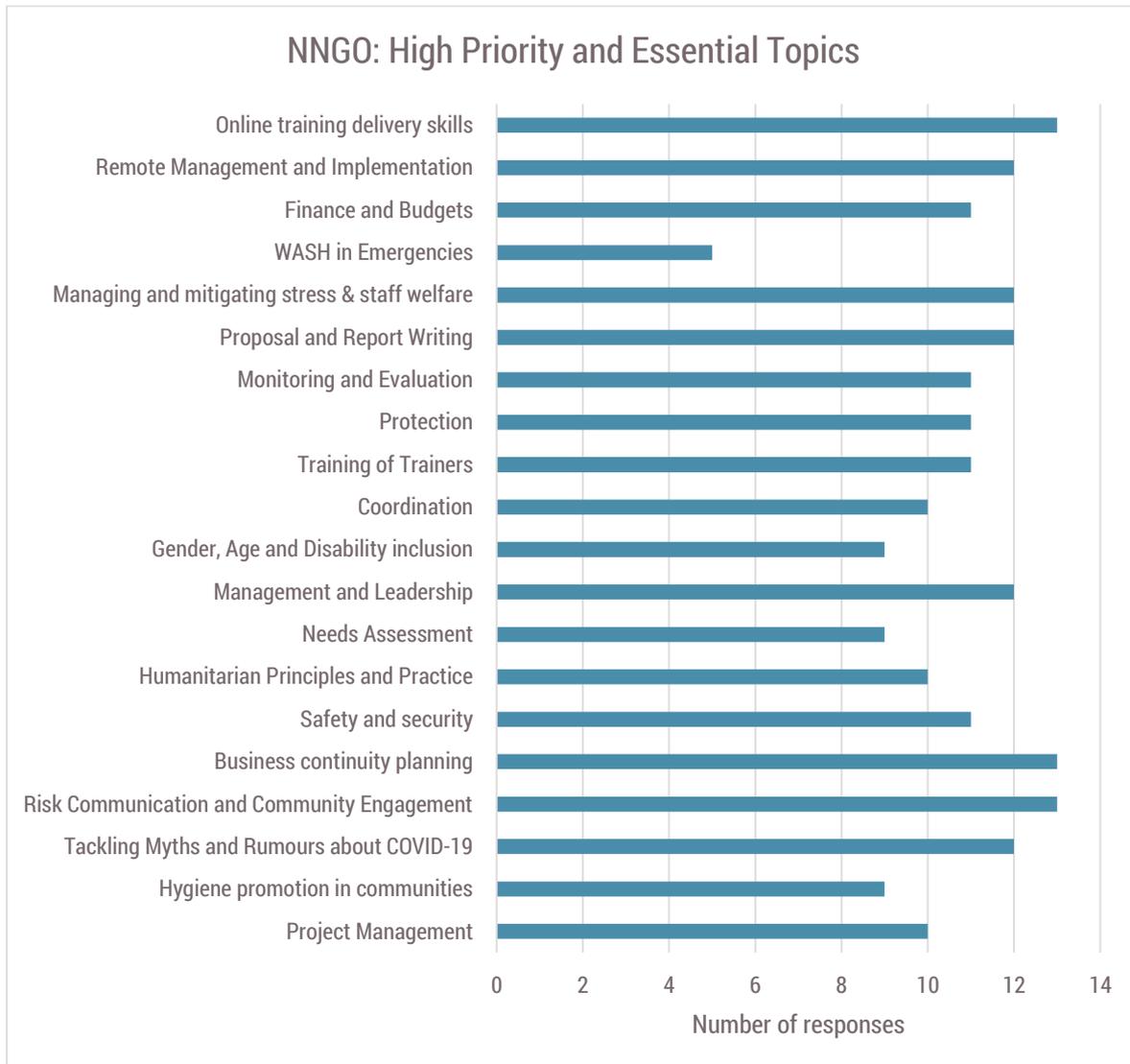


Figure 37. NNGO: High Priority and Essential Topics

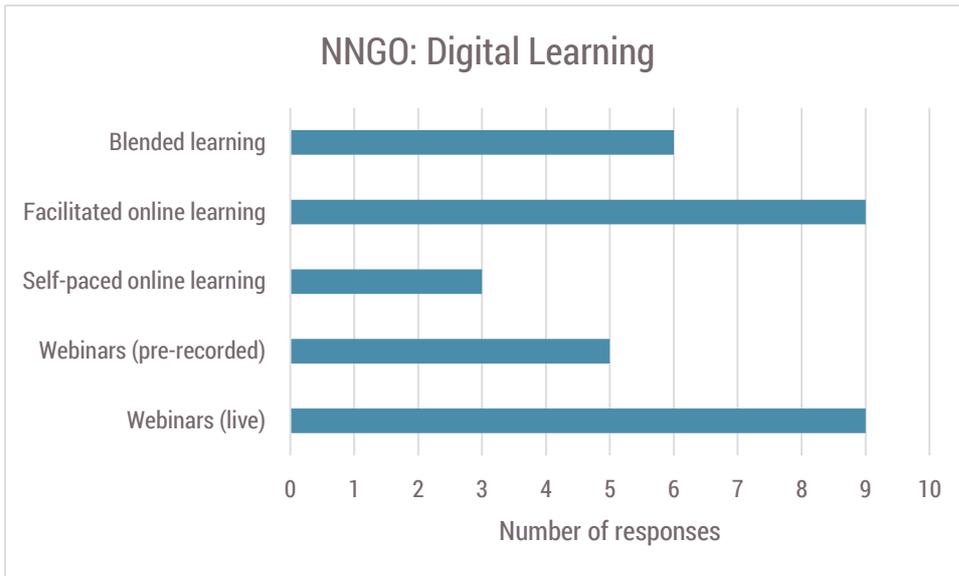


Figure 38. NNGOs: Digital Learning

Upon comparison, it is clear that more respondents in this group prioritise all topics covered in both this and the previous LNA to a higher degree at the time of writing this report than in April 2020. The proportions have in particular changed when it comes to Coordination and Proposal and Report Writing.

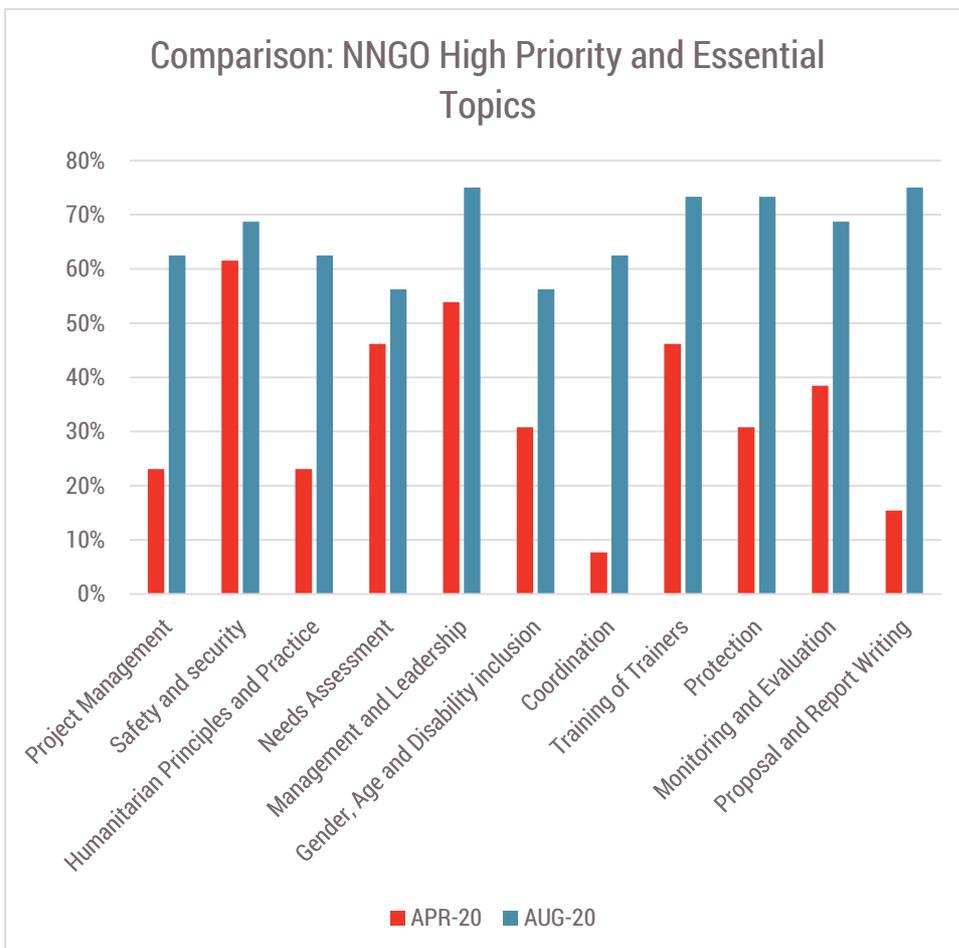


Figure 39. Comparison: NNGO - High Priority and Essential Topics

2.3.3.3. Faith-Based

Four respondents represent Faith-Based Organisations, with the result that the ranking of topics does not reveal large differences. One difference is that Business Continuity Planning was not one of the most popular topics.

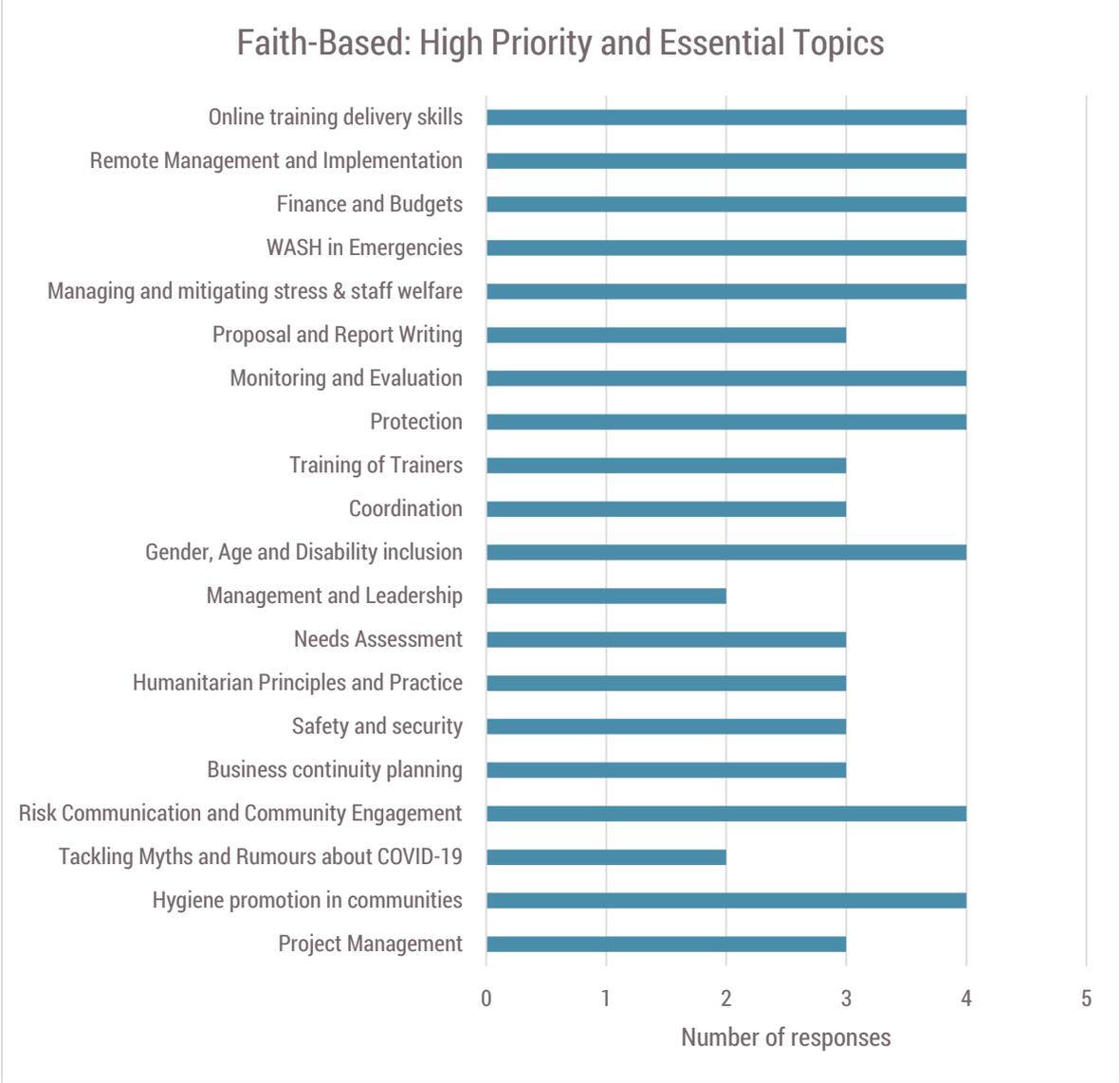


Figure 40. Faith-Based Organisations: High Priority and Essential Topics

Blended learning and live webinars were the most preferred types of digital learning for all respondents from Faith-Based Organisations.

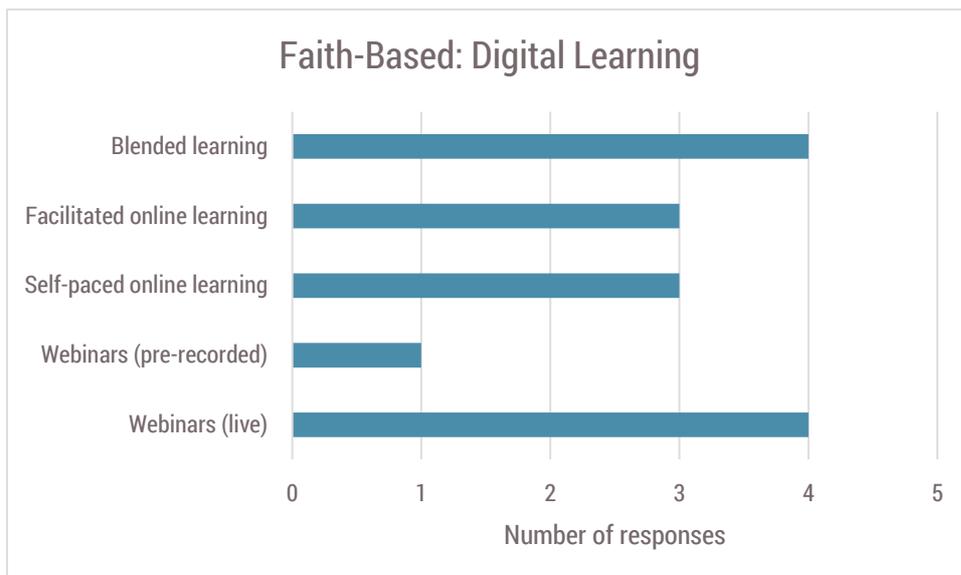


Figure 41. Faith-Based Organisations: Digital Learning

As with the previous types of organisations, the proportion of respondents in this group who have ranked the topics as high priority and Essential has increased since April. As for INGO respondents, Management and Leadership shows a small increase.

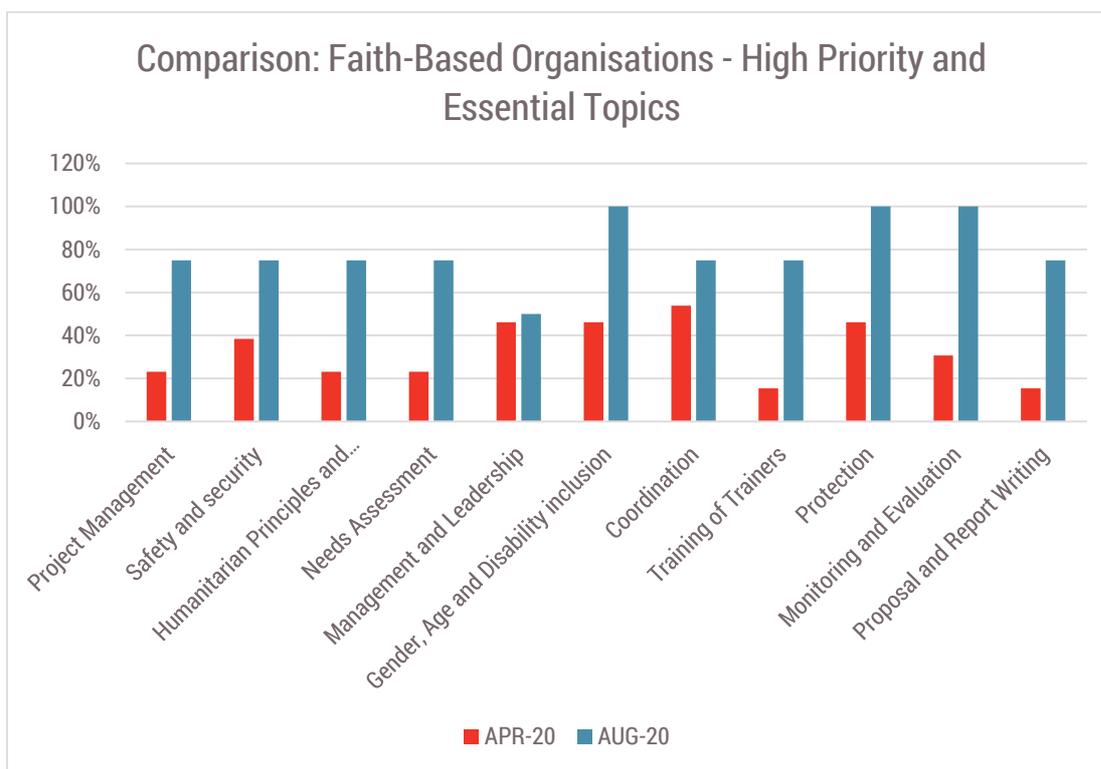


Figure 42. Comparison: Faith-based organisation – High Priority and Essential Topics

#### 2.3.3.4. UN Agency

For the twelve respondents who represent UN Agencies, RCCE and Business Continuity are highly prioritised topics, together with Hygiene Promotion in Communities.

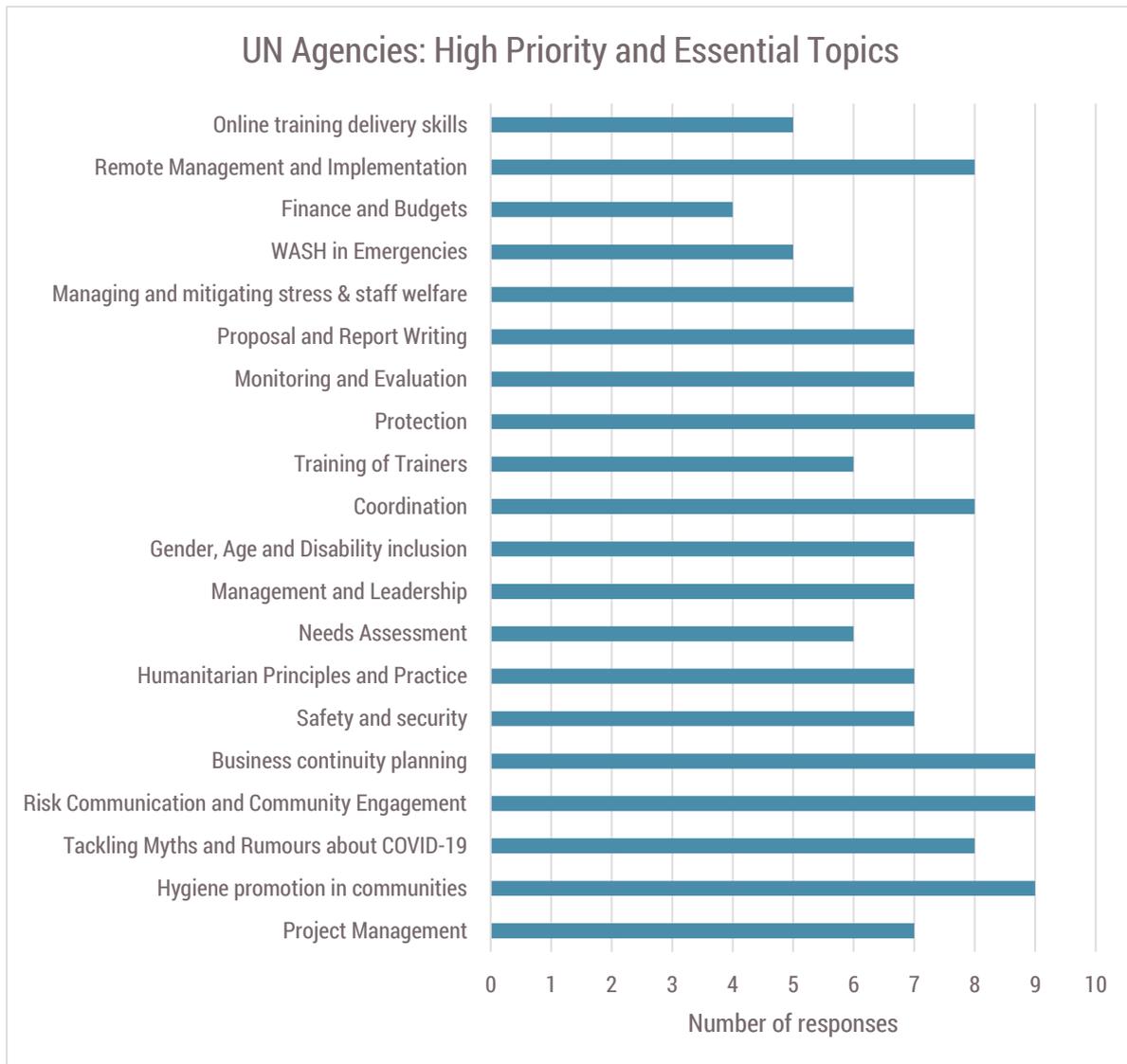


Figure 43. UN Agencies: High Priority and Essential Topics

Facilitated Online Learning is the most preferred type of digital learning. Whilst this differs from the overall pattern slightly, it remains that facilitated learning is a valued type of learning.

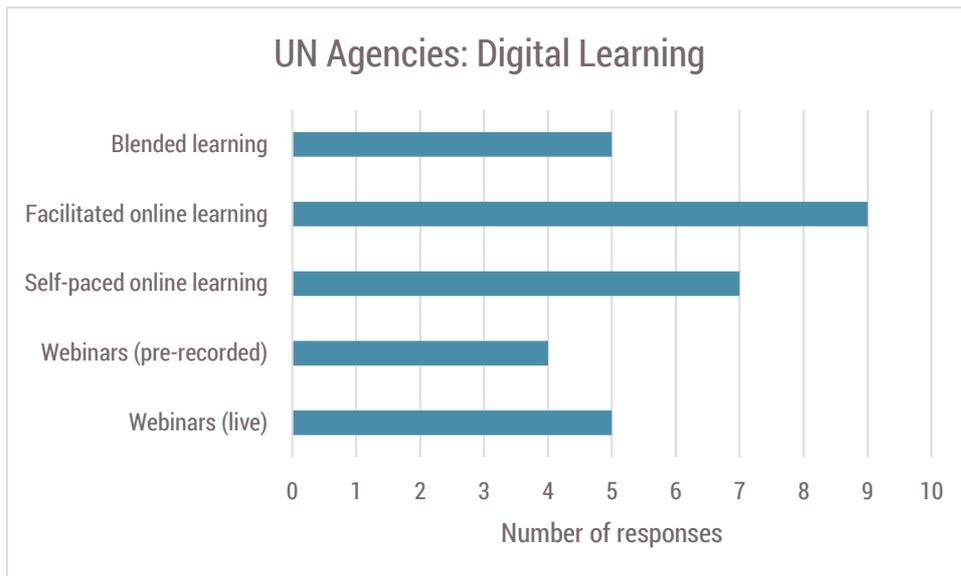


Figure 44. UN Agencies: Digital Learning

In summary, the section on learning needs for different geographical areas, language groups and types of organisations shows that there are broad similarities between the different groups of respondents. However, there are differences and it is therefore crucial to analyse the capacity-building needs for specific target groups at the onset of any intervention.

### **3. Conclusion**

This report has presented and analysed the data of the second RedR UK LNA on capacity-building needs within the international aid community in the wake of COVID-19. The data shows that organisations and aid workers in the sector are still strongly impacted and challenged by the consequences of the global pandemic. Whilst the situation for programmes and staff seems to have stabilised somewhat, disruptive effects still remain. The findings show that the staff and organisations in the aid sector need to continue strengthening skills in relation to changing circumstances due to COVID-19, despite some stabilisation. This includes both specific topic knowledge as well as sustained new ways of working and implementing projects.

Respondents of the LNA report three main topics for capacity building:

1. Risk Communication and Community Engagement
2. Online Training Delivery Skills
3. Monitoring and Evaluation

The findings of this LNA highlight that respondents at this time are requesting different skills than at the beginning of the pandemic and have become more specific in identifying their needs. It seems clear that many organisations in the international aid sector are working directly with communities, whilst needing to balance remote implementation, and are looking for skills to meet this challenge.

The results of this LNA show that live webinars and facilitated online course are the most preferred types of digital learning, sustaining the trend from the previous LNA conducted by RedR UK. This indicates that aid workers in the sector value the presence of a facilitator/trainer and other participants in online learning. A vital consideration is how to mitigate the barriers to digital learning, such as too high course fees, connectivity issues and a lack of time. Online learning needs to be financially and technologically accessible, as well as relevant and time efficient.

This report has added a further layer of knowledge of the capacity building needs of staff in the international aid community and mapped the path the international aid community is on when it comes to capacity building needs. The report provides a knowledge base upon which actors in the sector can stand when developing interventions, and RedR UK continues to participate in the mapping of learning needs to support this strongly.