The International Standards User Report 2023

Introduction

Ross Wraight, President, IFAN

Standards setting is an open and transparent process and follows the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (WTO TBT) guidelines. In this context IFAN has concluded an international survey of standards users focused primarily on accessibility and use of standards. The report is detailed below and identifies a number of matters relevant to user needs. IFAN will provide the survey results to standards users, developers and publishers and other interested parties and we look forward to their feedback. The interest and input of respondents is very much appreciated and we hope that the results are helpful in advancing the voice of standards users in the global community.

About this report

Welcome to this first International Standards User Report.

In the last few years we have seen growing interest from standards users in sharing their experience, concerns and ideas for improvement in access to and distribution of standards. It is clear that what we thought were important but unrelated areas in fact are often interconnected. The interconnections themselves could bring important new insights in the standards world.

Our aim is to bring to the surface a set of data that can help to understand these interconnections. The data is from 250 standards users worldwide, including from users handling standards from another country or countries outside their own.

The range of questions is broad, covering such topics as commercial policies of standards sellers, digital rights management, publication formats, data protection and getting hold of standards and content management within user organizations.

Many standards users who completed the survey are also helping to develop standards themselves. Comments added in some questions have been included in the survey.

From the start, we intended that the survey should be repeated regularly, and reported back to the worldwide standards community.

If you completed the survey, we thank you very much for your important contribution.

The idea came from IFAN's French Standards User Group member ACANOR, to whom we are grateful. The report's compiler is IFAN's Working Group on standards access and distribution.

Executive Summary

Claudia Bach. Chair, IFAN Working Group on standards access and distribution (WG14)

Standards Users worldwide have an inherent interest in the process that develops and distributes the standards and standards information they use. In this, our first IFAN International Standards Users Report, we've gathered responses from over 250 users on a broad array of issues. The results are compelling. The standards community at large will find much of value in this survey's results.

The survey begins with a quick overview of our respondents: location by continent, for the user and the user's customers, size of the company and so on. Questions regarding basic standards usage – rationale for usage, including mandates both for the organization itself and for its vendors – are addressed.

Next we dive into formats for standards distribution and organization of standards collections. We query our users about their methodology of obtaining standards, including channels outside of the retail marketplace. Questions regarding the use of single standards vs. subscriptions are posed. And the impact of DRM (Digital Rights Management) is also addressed.

The next section looks deeper at some of these questions. Two thirds of respondents find cost variation to be acceptable. And about the same percentage is also concerned about the funding of the development and maintenance of standards in the future. We found that standards are primarily purchased through centralized functions. But standards vendor's support for the management of standards within organizations seems to be spotty.

Fully two thirds of the respondents are involved in the standards development process. For another 17%, other employees within the organization take on that task. Of these, 86% have found the use of remote meetings to be positive. We received a wide variety of commentary on this, all of which are included in the report. Additionally, we asked about standards access from home. Most have had little to no problems, however for 25%, DRM has made use away from the office difficult.

Lastly, we were interested in the adoption path for tagged content. 30% are ready to receive this type of more functional content. However, only half were concerned about copyright and hyperlinking. And 66% wanted legal solutions for integrating external and internal standards data. Surprisingly, a little over half of the respondents were not interested in paying more for this increased functionality. The last question was an open invitation to comment. This again provides an in-depth view into the concerns of standards users over these broad issues.

IFAN, as the international voice of the standards user, is pleased to bring this report on user issues to the attention of the standards community at large. The complete survey is available at www.ifan.org. It represents the value of IFAN's mission to see that the concerns of the standards users are addressed by the community at large. As such, it will be regularly repeated to continually provide feedback for developers, distributors, and regulators.
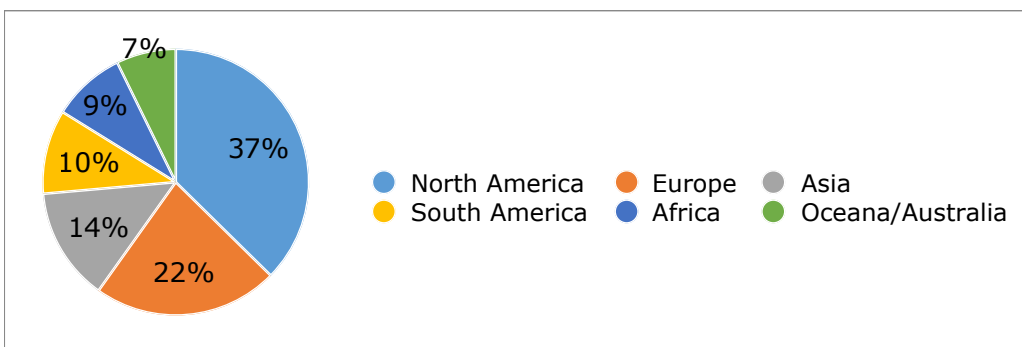
Question 1. Which continent is your organization's headquarters located?

Europe	94
Asia	68
North America	47
Africa	3
South America	2
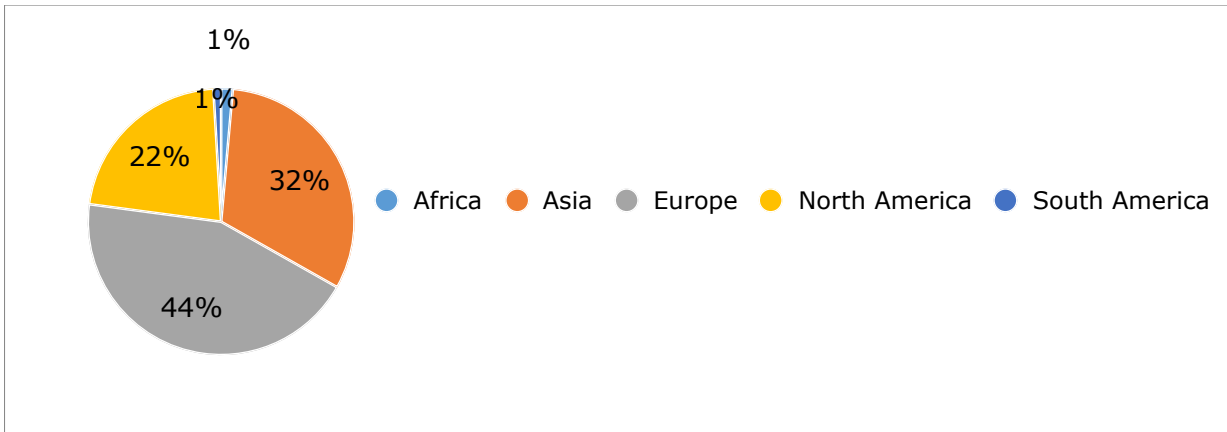
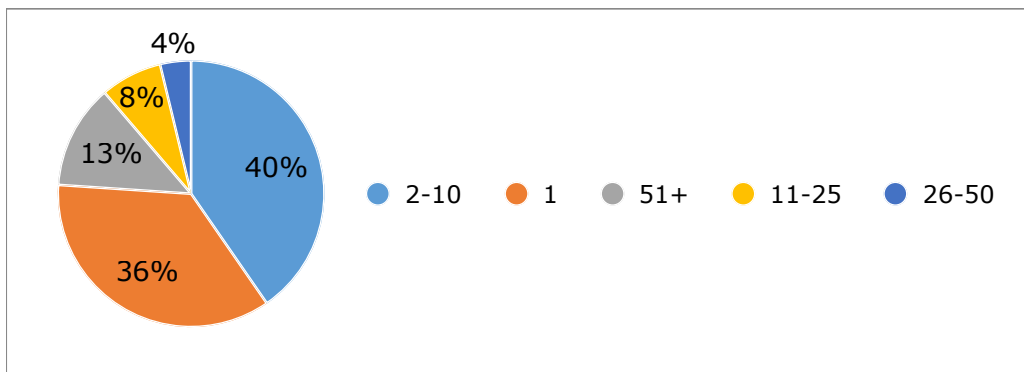## Question 2. Which continents are your customers/users located?
(Respondents could choose multiple options)

North America	201
Europe	121
Asia	74
South America	55
Africa	48
Oceana/Australia	39

Question 3. How many locations does your organization have?

2-10	86
1	76
51+	27
11-25	16
26-50	8

Question 4. Why do you use standards in your business or to meet your organization's mission?

|	
Compliance scheme	101
Regulations	77
Product development	53
Safety	45
Legal liability	43
Research and Development	41

(Respondents could choose multiple options)

Respondent-defined reasons for using standards

Promotion
Standard development and standardization service
Program development and auditing
Efficiency predictability repeatability
To provide consultancy service
To support our client needs
To build a national quality infrastructure
Education
Teaching and training
Customer demand
Member needs
Health
Consultancy

Question 5. Are specific standards mandated by your customers?

Yes	132
Varies by division	53
No	26
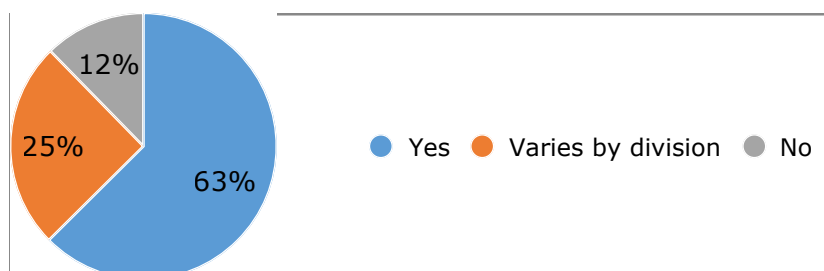
Question 6. Do you require your suppliers to use specific standards

Yes	147
Varies by Division	39
No	27

Commentary on questions 4, 5 and 6.

Based on how ISO and many publishers explain that a standard is an agreed / the best way of doing something, the results suggest that standards are generally used for operational reasons, and tactical reasons in supporting their position in supply chains and product and service delivery.

Would standards be used to the extent that they are without compliance requirements (which could be both outside and inside organizations) and without referencing in regulations?

Specific mention of their use in product development was relatively low.

Many standards publishers are increasingly promoting the value of standards in research and development. The low response suggests they have some way to go to make the case, which may cover standards training and education through to medium- and long-term planning.
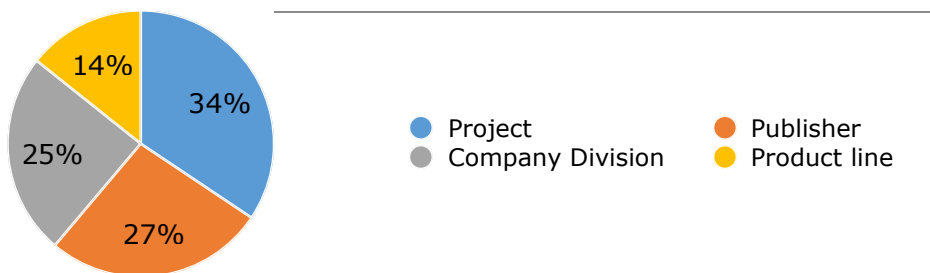
Question 7. We purchase standards in the following formats
(Respondents could choose multiple options)

PDF	178
Paper	64
Text or tagged content	20
Online subscription service	7
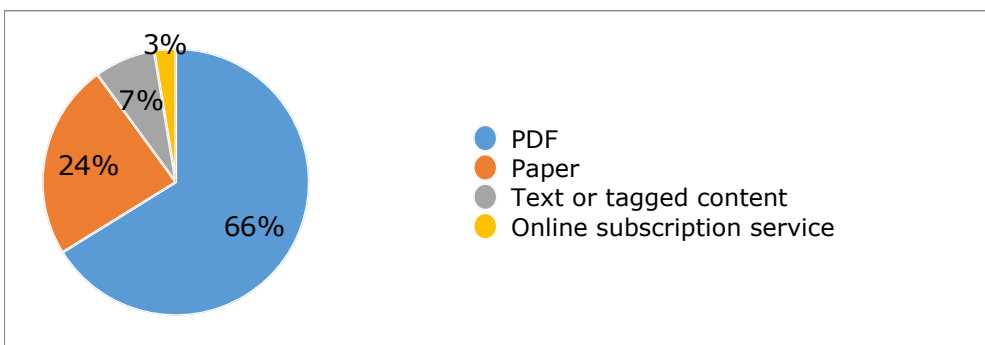
Question 8. We organise our standards by?
(Respondents could choose multiple options)

Project	77
Publisher	60
Company Division	55
Product line	32

Answers that were written by respondents
(Each appeared once)

By customer
Corporate library
Country
Depends of the topic of the standard
Harmonised standards and test standards located separately
Management system
Numerical index/number
Phase of operations
Technical discipline
Varies within the company
With areas of expertise

Commentary on questions 7 and 8.

For many standards users, one of their first tasks is to put standards into project libraries or databases, even if they are also placed in a general library, digital folder or management system.

Do the ways standards are sold and their use controlled by publishers at present complement and conflict with how standards users and their organizations locate them? Are the new publishing frameworks and digital formats under development by many standards development organizations taking a lead in making life easier for organizations wanting to use the same standard in many contexts?

Question 9. We use the following type(s) of suppliers
(Respondents could choose multiple options)

National Standards Body	92
Third party suppliers	80
Source standards developer	45
Low cost generic website	18

- National Standards Body
- Third party suppliers
- Source standards developer
- Low cost generic website
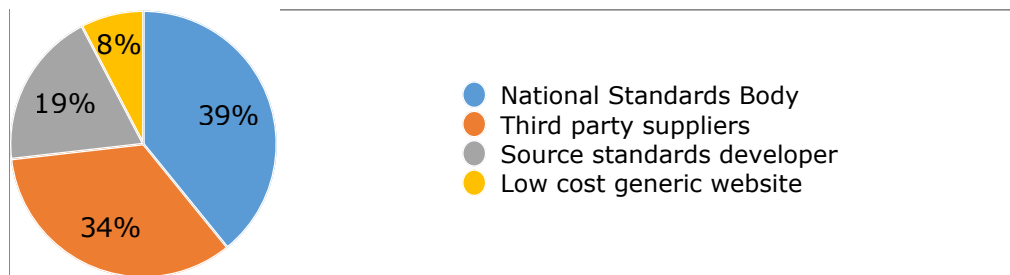
Question 10. We use the following delivery options
(Respondents could choose multiple options)

Single copy	147
Subscription service	75
Multiple copy bundle	39
Open source	31

- Single copy
- Subscription service
- Multiple copy bundle
- Open source

Question 11. Sometimes we get copies of standards from
(Respondents could choose multiple options)

Library/Information centre	96
Professional contracts	85
Customers	71
Suppliers	39
Co-workers	38

Question 12. Some standards have digital rights management (DRM) requirements. Does your IT department support that?

Yes	124
No	81
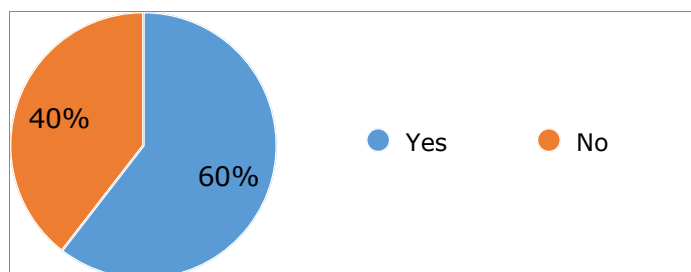
Commentary on questions 9, 10, 11 and 12.

The popularity of single copy acquisition could point to their need being seen to be for a specific or connected single requirement. More work is likely to be needed to advocate to and inform the standards user community of the wider benefits of using the increasingly diverse and complementary range of standards outside the immediate area of their business focus. Cost, however, may be a decider (see later)

Standards acquired as part of contracts and supply and service chains and from co-workers represented 56% of discretionary sources of standards. Is this desirable for standards users? Is it likely to increase? Questions 7 and 8 might help the answer.

Question 13. Is the variation in the costs of standards documents from different suppliers or formats acceptable?

| Yes	128
No	75
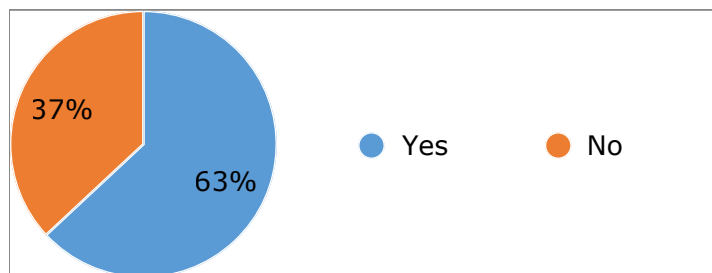
Question 14. Who purchases standards in your organization?
(Respondents could choose multiple options)

Departments/Divisions	115
Individuals	78
Information Centre/Library	76
Quality Manager/Standards Department/Compliance/Purchasing	5

Question 15. Do your standards suppliers support your inhouse Standards Management activities?
(Respondents could choose multiple options)

Yes	80
No	63
Sometimes	21
We do it inhouse exclusively	53
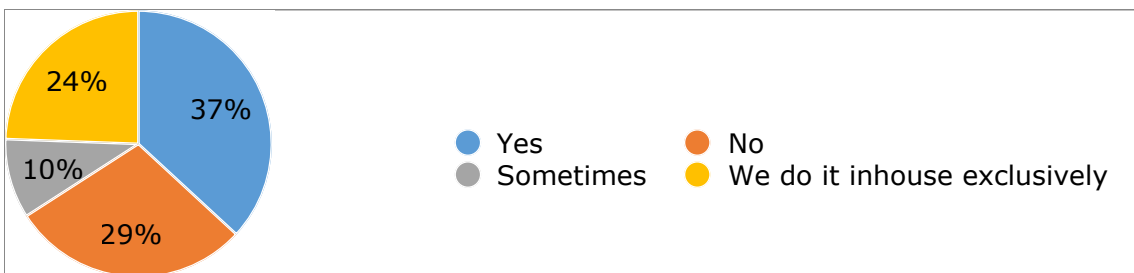
Question 16. Are you concerned with how the development and maintenance of standards will be funded in the future?

Yes	137
No	70
Not sure/depends on business goals	3
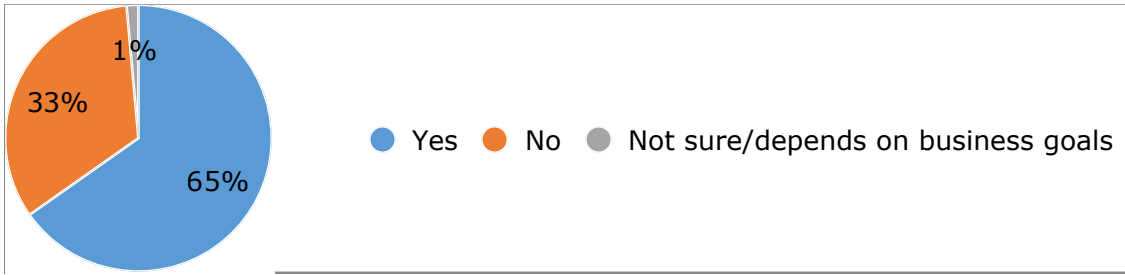
Commentary on questions 13, 14, 15 and 16.

Acceptability of cost variations indicates that standards users should also accept cost variations for new formats of publishing (assuming publishers make beneficial cases for them).

Most answers to question 14 indicate that organizations get standards through central procurement.

Question 15 suggests that standards publishers may still have work to do to support how users manage their standards. The question does not relate the answers to the next generation of standards publishing, or whether digital publishing in, for example xml format, is whether supporting these activities.

While answers to question 16 show a majority are concerned about future funding, it is an area to investigate. The question is general, and not specific to funding by standards users' organizations or standards publishers.
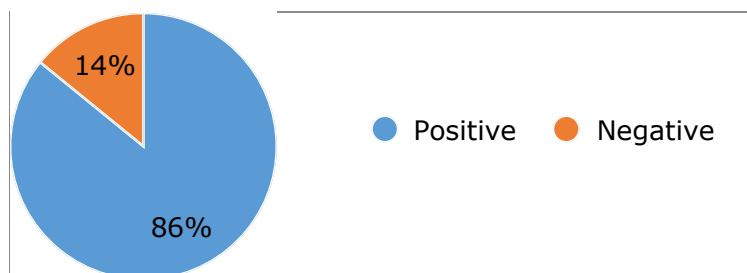
Question 17. How does your organization actively participate in writing standards?

I do	134
Not at all	42
Other employees do	36

Question 18. If your organization participates, what has been the impact of remote meetings?

Positive	152
Negative	25

Question 19. Please describe any positive or negative impacts.

Many areas of disagreement are more difficult to resolve in remote meetings and it is not possible to visually demonstrate potential solutions. However, remote meeting access has reduced cost and time out of the office which provides other benefits to my employer.

Its a balance - on the one hand, remote working removes time wasted in travelling, on the other hand the meetings are less satisfactory.

Remote access to all meetings.

My correct answer to 22 was both. Positive: means short meetings for simple decision making is effective and efficient. Negative : where technical discussion or active standards drafting is being done. as a chair, not all communication is spoken. body language can show confusion/loss of understanding which might be a translation issue. this is not available via Zoom etcl

Having an insight into up-and-coming standards, having an input in to the standards

Less direct travel has allowed more people to become part of the process

We can have more, shorter meetings and get more done

Reduction in travel costs can be applied elsewhere, interact with more people that would not otherwise be able to participate

The cost to travel to a standards meeting both financially and personally is usually 2-3 days and $2000, neither of which we have time or budget for in todays do more with less working arenas. While the personal interaction of meeting in person is nice, it is not worth 3 days of my time. I would end up not attending most stds meetings that are in person only

Without remote meetings- less work would be accomplished

Good communication face to face and progress on specific topics/concerns

Hard to get to (time.... not distance)

Works fine as an addition to face to face meetings

Remore "non-in person) meetings do not provide the same level of participation and feedback as in person meetings. Standards take considerably longer to write/rewrite and information exchange is not sufficient.

Information

It has made it affordable for me to participate in committee meetings, which has let me participate more frequently and consistently.

Ineffective communications; people do not speak up; do not pay attention; all leading to poor decisions

More participation, less funding for travel

Not good at managing meeting virtually, I would prefer face to face.

Lack of personal interaction outside of the meeting.

Get latest developments and current discussions for changes in safety standards

Face-to-face meetings allow for more thorough and successful conversation.

More difficult to reach consensus virtually. Also very difficult to schedule meetings with varying time zones - has reduced overall participation.

Knowledge and benchmarking

Flexibility in participating

Can participate more

More convenient work

Online meetings have enabled more of us to engage more often. (21 should be both "I do" and "Other employees do")

Learn rules,

Quality

Gain the trust of the market and get orders

Positive = increased attendance, greater frequency, reduced travel costs, time saving. Negative = difficulty of technical discussions, misinterpretations, missed networking opportunities.

Positive since we can remain involved. Negative since face to face helps to understand and resolve differences better.

All participates can attend the meetings. Approval for travel is not an issue so we can attend any of the sessions. Only have to book time for the meetings so I do not need additional time for travel.

Increased committee productivity

Quick decisions

Lack of connection; hard to read body language; people don't speak up as much virtually.

Easy access world wide without travel

It gives you more time to assist

Get info about techinical discussion immediately

Having your say/interests taken into consideration.

Easier to schedule

Remote participation has had a positive impact in that people can join that otherwise would/could not have due to travel, however, there are also many negative impacts because now travel has been cut as management now believes standards work can be done remotely and it is very difficult to build trust, teamwork, and rapport exclusively virtually

Remote provide opportunity for lower cost contributions.

Knowledge

Save time

A good place to get different opinions, but the decisions are not always made for professional reasons only

It saves traveling expenses and time

On the positive side: easier to schedule and execute meetings. On the negative side: lack of physical interaction and discussion

The participation within working committees allows to be updated and involved in the preparation of standards

Advocacy for specific items

We need in very low price

This sometimes results in extended follow-up E-Mail exchanges. For Teams / Zoom, etc. meetings, the inherent delay in the communications results in people talking over each other, especially for meetings of more than 5-10 persons whereas the "in person" environment allows each to observe when others are about to speak and the meeting is less "chaotic" and fosters a faster resolution to disagreements / arrival at a mutually agreeable solution.

Less open discussions

NO NEED TO SPEND TIME ON TRAVELLING

Use of new tools but discussions and online meetings are more lengthy and participants are not easily engaged in decision making

Good inputs

Saves hours of journey time to reach meetings

Giving feedback from industry experience

Saves time

Interaction with other entities towards a common goal and ambition for EU is a very positive impact.

No comments.

Remote commitee meetings is less time consuming. This facilitates participation

Reduced number of meeting and the discussions exchange of expertise is limited

it is easy and cheap to join zoom meetings

Wider participation. Also negative in slowing progress and reduced personal understanding

Easier to attend meetings

Very easy

I would like to add a table of changes between an old standard and a new one and note safety effects as a result of the changes if any.

Observe and provide technical advice on standards development

Efficient and saves a lot of time

Its easier for participantes to have an active participation in the meetings

Direct information

People do not give full attention

Developing standards and skills

Each department within our organization formulates operating procedures from relative standards

Easier to attend, lower costs and less time lost travelling. I cannot think of any negatives...

Ease of access

We are a very big company with a lot to say about standards

MCCAA service and management are up to standard

It's easier to commit to a non-revenue generating event when it's remote.

Needed to pass sucessful

Not applicable

Costs saving. Faster decisions.

Easier to schedule meetings, easier to have the meeting, time and petrol saving, meetings are more focused.

Saving travel time and cost, allows to take part in international comities

Less time out of office travelling to/from meetings.

Easier to attend, harder to concentrate

Significantly reduced costs of travel, however on-line meetings never as productive.

Technical language mis-understandings are often resolved in face to face coffee breaks using drawings or sample product. also lack of team work , with some attendees signing in but never participating. As a convener, a glance along the table at a meeting can indicate if some experts are "lost". in a remote meeting those who are "lost" or dont understand need great courage to ask questions, especially if the discussion is intense. the social side of the meetings is as important as the meeting itself and committee members feel valued and with better well-being. In my opinion, it is only the experience of some CEN & ISO experts which have enabled the delivery during covid and the forced remote meetings. With the social side, newer experts can integrate more rapidly and ask informal questions to get up to speed ,

ABILITY TO WORK ANYWHERE WITHOUT THE NEED TO TRAVEL HAS MEANT LESS TIME IS WASTED AND MORE CAN BE SPENT ON DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECTS

Better attendance BUT poorer discussion

Its more to difficult to understand what people mean or to describe things without physical examples in the same space as the other attendees

Enable us to have our view point and understand others

Able to influence content, usability and knowledge of content intent

I am developing a new ISO standard. Because this is a creative effort (as against the revision of an existing standard) we have found remote meetings difficult. We have found the best is to have a core group that meets weekly for an hour. "homework" has been difficult to get done because of many distractions of regular work / travel / holidays etc. Have had to revise project programme and extend convenor appointment.

Having the meetings largely online has enabled wider participation. But it is harder to bring new people into a team and explore deeper issues - it's good that we're returning to "hybrid"

Low costs for such meetings, no travel time

Save Travel time

Positive: Shorter meetings. You do not have to travel. Negative: Interactions.

Commentary on question 19.

All comments are included in the report.

In summary, advantages of remote meetings include:
Cost saving
Less time away from work (and home)
Shorter meetings
Can attend more meetings
Easier to agree meeting times and dates
More work can be done in the time allocated
Improves international participation
Training (including observing) can be more effective.

The disadvantages include:
More difficult to resolve disagreements
More difficult to pick up non-verbal reactions
Less participation by some attendees
Less informal information and knowledge sharing
Less networking
Teamworking more difficult
Technical issues more difficult to resolve
Multi—language misunderstanding.

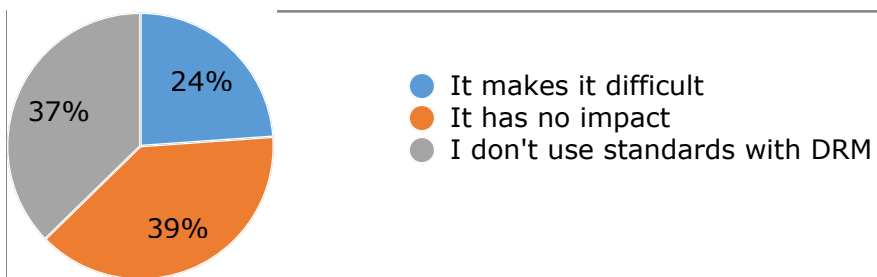Question 20. If you have been working from home, have you been able to access the standards you need?

Yes	179
No	24
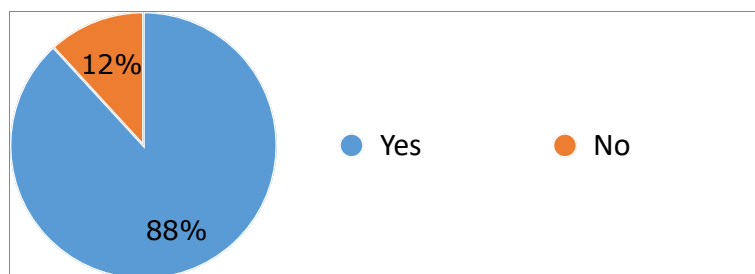
Question 21. Has DRM played a role in your ability to use your standards at work and at home?

It makes it difficult	48
It has no impact	78
I don't use standards with DRM	75

- 24% It makes it difficult
- 39% It has no impact
- 37% I don't use standards with DRM

Question 22. Has your subscription service allowed you to access the standards you pay for while at home?

Yes	104
Not Applicable	89
No	15

- 50% Yes
- 43% Not Applicable
- 7% No
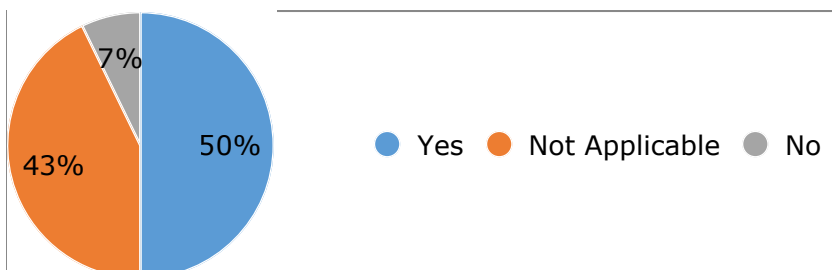
Question 23. If standards were available as tagged content (xml), would your company be able to use this data now?

|	
I don't know	92
Yes	60
In some cases	36
No	24
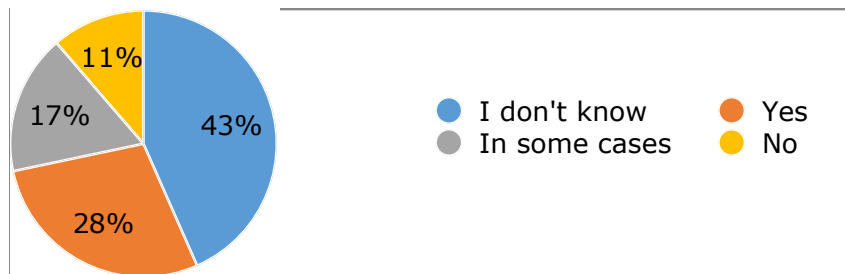
Commentary on questions 20, 21, 22 and 23.

Digital locks by publishers do not affect the majority of users also working from home using standards protected by them, although 38% of answers are that standards used are not locked. Subscription services have been generally available to use at home. A theme throughout the survey is the range of barriers to use that digital locks present.

Publishers of standards in xml format have more work to do to explain what the benefits are for standards users.
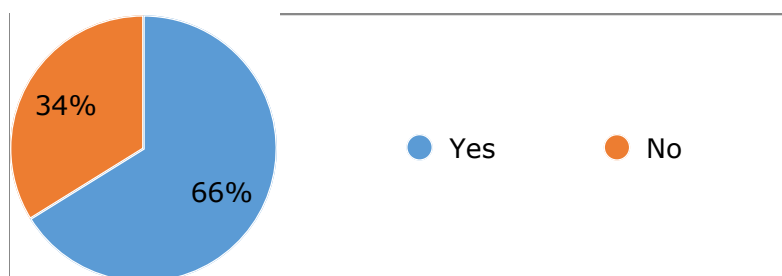
Question 24. I am concerned about the copyright issues raised by hyperlinking standards

No	112
Yes	92

45%   55%   ● No   ● Yes
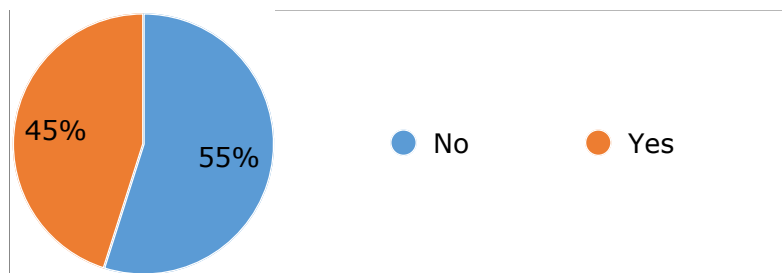
Question 25. I would like legal solutions for integrating standards information into my organization's documents and protocols

| Yes	133
No	68

34%   66%   ● Yes   ● No

Commentary on question 25.

The answers support those earlier in the survey, that suggest that publishers have more to do to make standards available in ways that integrate into users' and organizations' workflows and management systems.

Question 26. If standards had more functionality, I would be willing to pay more for a standard

No	106
Yes	94
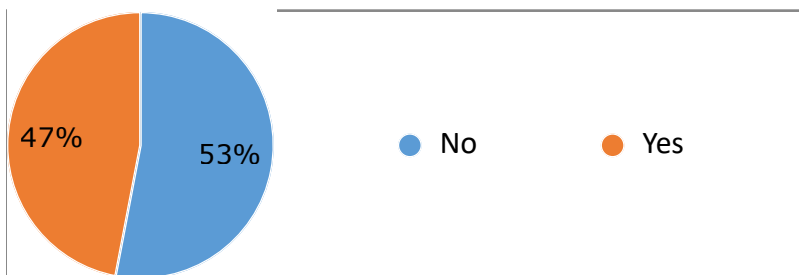
Respondents' general comments

We are the national accreditation body therefore use standards as an integral part of our work.

We get a lot of our copies of ISO/BSI standards as a quid pro quo from our contribution to the relevant standards committes. In our industry area, the leading standards body operates a membership model & distributes their standards free of charge.

Provide more opportunities for communication. Meanwhile, I hope to get the investigation report.Provide opportunities for communication,

Concerns about widely different costs of standards from different suppliers. Costs of standards for our customers (many are SMEs). Worried about divergence of EN and BS standards, resulting in manufacturers needing to operate two compliance systems and purchase two sets of standards.

Purchasing every standard we need is extremely expensive since they are getting longer and reference so many more normative standards. They are also more time consuming to implement. Need a way to remove duplicated parts and only have to purchase "new" updates or what is needed.

Standardization is very important for the uses but also for the producers of products. Common language in standards is very helpful.

Please add support for Open Security Controls Assessment Language (OSCAL)

Standards should be published for free. there us absolutely no sense to charge for it in 2022...

NOT ALL STANDARDS ARE UP TO DATE

You have to consider to reduse the rate of issuing new standarts. The cost of buing and implementing them sometimes does add any value to the company

The largest issue my organization encounters with standards is when groups (i.e. AIAG) do not allow their standards to be distributed through a 3rd party electronically and instead force us to buy individual copies of the standard for each employee that needs access. It results in people violating copyright to be able to have their own copy and adds an additional item we must monitor.

Our business is quite small but we are in aerospace so we rely on standards a lot. We often find that purchase of a standard is only the beginning of a "spec hunt", and we have to purchase multiple additional standards to get the answer we are really looking for. This happens because the description of the standard is lacking detail or because the standard's subject matter has been intentionally subdivided, apparently to sell more standards. For this reason we are very reluctant to purchase standards due to the expense and only do so when absolutely necessary. Another concern is former government standards that were originally publicly funded but now only available from standards organizations. Often we find that the versions available from standards organizations are unchanged from the original government versions, but we are expected to pay prices that are completely out of line with the value added. While we realize that standards organizations have an important place in the technical world, the cost of doing business with them is prohibitive for small companies.

The "personalised" licencing is an issue. it is not clear, if this to a person- what happens when they leave? or to a machine- what happens if the machine is replaced ?

This questionnaire seems to make assumptions about standards users. We are not all in product making industries, nor supported by large teams.

Standards are far too expensive and UK national subscription for read-only access is prohibitively expensive given the wide range of product sectors we operate in. In addition access is limited to UK and US (ASTM) standards but not to other countries. There is a need for a value for money global standards access service. Online access (read-only) to standards is helpful but we need to be able to share digital access with a large number of users within our organisation and DRM inhibits our ability to do so.

Overall remote meetings only work where participants already know one another. With the normal churn of membership, continuing remote meetings are becoming even less productive. My last CEN wg meeting finished early, as we found that for technical reasons the planned agenda was a waste of time. on of the experts commented, " it was good we were remote attending as there were no travel implications, BUT had we met face to face, we could have gone to the pub to share our dismay, and plan a way forward!" That is a team with fellowship, not just a committee

When developing standards it is useful to copy text from related standards and then edit it. DRM makes this very difficult and prone to errors so is a backwards step

There is now discussion about new standardization law at our Parliement

Commentary on general comments.

The comments cover more negative than positive topics, with cost being the recurring theme. Cost includes price of standards, necessity to buy many to cover a topic, extra costs for added-value content in national versions of standards, cost of inflexibility in using standards in workflows, uncertainties over licensed access.