The onset of the Syrian crisis in 2010 exacerbated this country’s economic, social and security situation with the influx of over 1.5 million Syrian refugees – added to the pre-existing 500,000 Palestinians – who had to be hosted by an already-fragmented nation with overburdened public institutions.

Rising CBRN threats
The accidental release from Lebanese facilities situated in densely populated areas using hazardous chemical products, in addition to the possible release of chemical warfare agents (CWAs) by terrorist organisations within Lebanon as well as in neighbouring Syria, constitute a concrete menace to Lebanon’s safety and security.

National disaster plan
Prompted by the evolution of the national and regional context, the Lebanese Government, assisted by the international community, in 2010 drafted the National CBRN Disaster Management Plan and created the CBRN National Team – which evolved in the current National CBRN Commission – to be in charge of the national coordination of all CBRN-related prevention and response activities.

The chemical attack on Ghouta, Syria on 21 August 2013 increased the perception by Lebanese authorities of the increasing CBRN risk in the region, calling for a stronger response capacity by national institutions. Subsequently, in 2016, the CBRN National Team collaborated with the European Union Joint Research Centre (EU JRC) to draft the National CBRN Action Plan. This delineated the risk factors in contrast with Lebanon’s ability to address these risks, and to set a framework and baseline for interagency cooperation and response during a CBRN incident or accident. This EU initiative was later followed by the launch of the EU Technical Assistance on CBRN Risks Mitigation in Lebanon in September 2018.

Within a €3.5 million comprehensive programme, some €1.2 million is dedicated to specialized equipment provision with €2.3 million for technical assistance and training. This brings together various national players to develop a complete CBRN preparedness and response capacity.

Implementing the plan
The three-year EU Technical Assistance (TA) project is currently implemented by the consulting firm Business & Strategy Europe (B&S Europe), in partnership with the NGO Security and Freedom in Europe (SAFE), the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Italian Ministry of Defence.

CBRN experts in EU Member States were brought on board the project team to ensure tangible operational results while reinforcing sustainable ties between Lebanon and EU Member States in this sensitive area of work.

The objectives of the project are to:
1. Enhance the technical capabilities of Lebanese first responders and the implementation of CBRN prevention and response tasks by the Lebanese Armed Forces, Internal Security Forces, Civil Defence, Beirut Fire-Fighters, the Lebanese Red Cross, and the Office of the Prime Minister.
Increase interagency cooperation in the operational crisis management of CBRN events. Within this framework, the project provides high-level training and peer-to-peer mentoring and coaching by CBRN experts, along with the provision of specialised equipment.

**Training progress**

The EU TA project team employed a participatory approach in the first months of the project. The aim was to complete a thorough Gap Analysis to identify strengths and weaknesses of various Lebanese institutions, as well as prospective potential actions to enhance CBRN capabilities and reinforce their operational capacities.

As a result, a training plan was designed and tailored to the roles and responsibilities of each of the participating institutions with reference to the National CBRN Action Plan and Disaster Management Plan. With the start of the implementation phase in January 2019, multi-level training has been carried out in parallel with the distribution of specialist equipment. The training structure allows a progressive learning curve for its participants, with challenges in subject matter areas increasing across the lifetime of the project.

By end 2019 at least 150 first responders had been trained in detection, sampling and identification of CBRN agents, and in warning, reporting and decontamination in possible CBRN scenarios. The training sessions also serve as a platform to draft intra-agency Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and establish an interagency information exchange mechanism to institutionalise practices and ensure multilateral sharing and coordination.

**ARZ 1**

In 2020, the TA will support CBRN Field Exercise ARZ 1. This activity will be funded by the Directorate General Development and Cooperation of the European Commission and organised by the UN International Crime and Justice Research Institute and the International Science and Technology Centre. The Lebanese Prime Minister Office within the framework of the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative will assist in the CBRN terrorism response exercise.

At the end of the intra-agency training sessions, field drills and table-top exercises will take place to apply the SOPs and strengthen cooperation among the different institutions to achieve an effective and prompt response. Another essential aspect of the training is the development of self-sustainable capabilities through Train-the-Trainer modules. Selected individuals will constitute a national training body in charge of increasing CBRN awareness and education across their own institutions.

**Coordinating projects**

It is worth mentioning the innovative and proactive coordinating approach adopted by the TA project team. This is aimed at synchronising current CBRN activities with ongoing projects and bilateral initiatives funded by other donors. The target of these harmonisation efforts is to better serve the beneficiaries, while avoiding redundancy and overlaps. For full development of Lebanese inter-agency cooperation and response to CBRN events, a ‘passport’ of performance indicators to measure CBRN response capacities has been developed. This monitoring tool is intended to support the National CBRN Commission, policymakers, and practitioners in monitoring the implementation of the National Action Plan, measure the results achieved, and further define strategies and initiatives to be undertaken in the CBRN sector in Lebanon.

The EU-funded Technical Assistance on CBRN Risks Mitigation in Lebanon project is an example of successful public-private cooperation between specialised entities and practitioners from EU Member States. This highly technical and operational project highlights the efforts of the EU and its Member States to strengthen the resilience of Lebanon’s security institutions against CBRN threats while reinforcing their roles as key drivers of stability, safety and national cohesion.

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