



EU CBRN Risk Mitigation Centers of Excellence Initiative
Projects' design and implementation - Projects 1 to 19
Countries' perspective

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Introduction

Within the framework of the EU CBRN Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence (CoE) Initiative, UNICRI is responsible for the overall administration and monitoring of the implementation of the first 19 CBRN CoE projects. These projects focus on the provision of training and equipment, knowledge development, special and technical support and awareness-raising through interested partner countries, at national, regional and international level.

Starting in January 2013 and for a period of 24 months, a number consortia led by non-profit national and international organizations commenced the implementation of the projects, which are valued at 13 million euro.

As part of the strategy developed and approved by DEVCO for the monitoring of the projects 1 to 19, UNICRI invited the National Focal Points of the countries participating in the projects to share their views about the design and implementation process of the projects 1 to 19, in order to identify ways to improve their effectiveness and efficiency.

This report presents the compilation of the feedback provided by the National Focal Points through phone interviews and questionnaires between 15 December 2013 and 15 March 2014. The countries' representatives were requested to provide feedback about their level of satisfaction with the process of formulation and approach of contracted agencies in implementing the EU CoE Projects 1 to 19. The National Focal Points were informed that their responses would be treated in confidential manner and the information gleaned from the interviews would only be presented in aggregate (analytical) format.

This report contains the findings emanating from the survey and their analysis. It provides an overview of the perception of the National Focal Points about the projects currently in operation- Projects 1 to 19. It concludes with the identification of some areas for improvement as proposed by the respondents which could form the basis for further analysis and/or discussions.

Methodology

UNICRI contacted the National Focal Points of all 35 countries included in the geographical scope of projects 1 to 19¹. To this end a standard interview guide in English was prepared containing 16 questions analyzing various stages of actions' development and implementation. The invitation sent to the National Focal Points along with the interview guide is included in the Annexes.

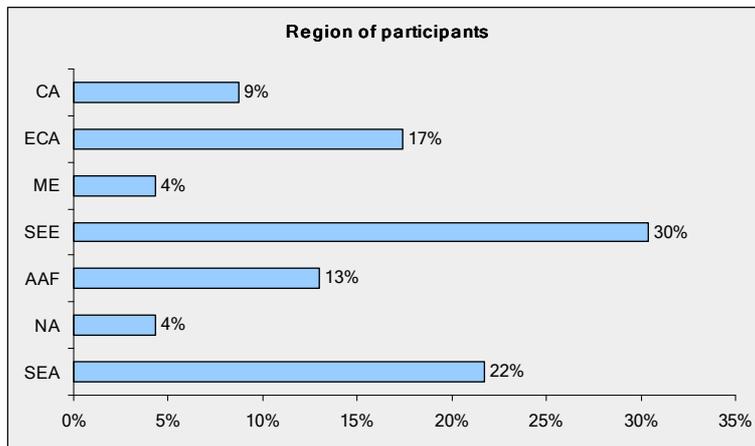
¹ The National Focal Points from the following countries were contacted: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Burundi, Cambodia, DRC, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Gabon, Georgia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Mauritania, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, the Philippines, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Singapore, Thailand, Tunisia, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Zambia.



The guide was translated into Arabic, French, Russian and Serbian in order to facilitate the participation of the National Focal Points in the exercise. The interview guide was shared in advance with all National Focal Points that confirmed their interest and availability for a short phone interview with UNICRI monitoring team. For those National Focal Points that were unwilling or unable to participate in the interview, the possibility of filling out the interview guide as a questionnaire was afforded.

Between 15 of December 2013 and 15 March 2014, a total of 21 National Focal Points were interviewed, with additional two National Focal Points responding by filling in the questionnaire by email. In total, 23 responses were received, summing up to 66% of response rate. Most of respondents were from the South East Europe and Ukraine (SEE) (seven), followed by the South East Asia (SEA) (five responses) regional secretariats. This is consistent with the highest participation of these two regions in Projects 1 to 19.

The results below depict the information gathered through the interviews reflecting the valuable ‘voices’ of the appointed countries representatives.



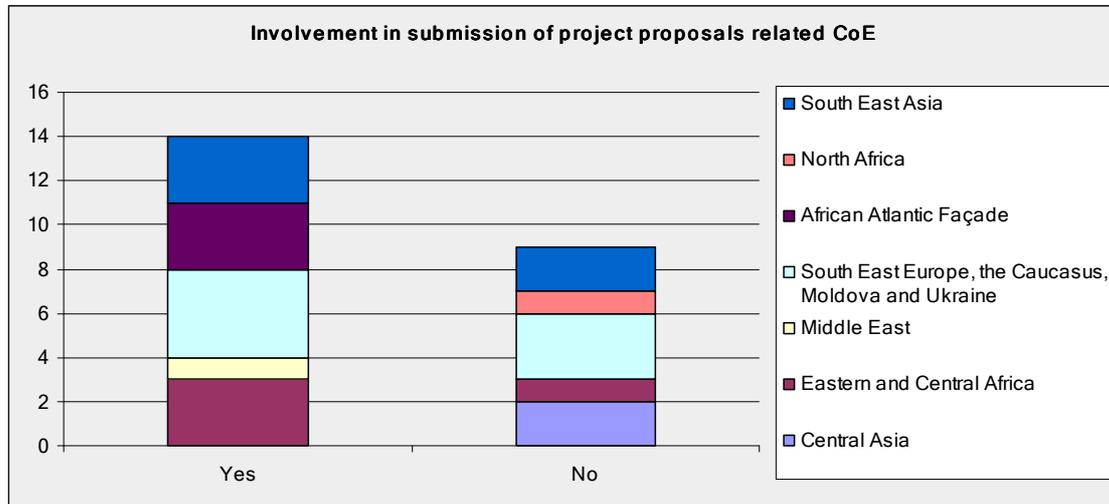
Countries’ perspective about:

1. *The process of developing project proposals*

The majority of respondents (70%), in particular from SEE, SEA, African Atlantic Façade (AAF) and Eastern and Central Africa (ECA) regional secretariats, have participated in the process of preparation of project proposals² by submitting drafts of national projects, contributing to regional projects or participating in the joint assessment process conducted by JRC and UNICRI in 2011³.

² The information provided by the respondents refers not only to the project proposals for Projects 1 to 19, but also all project proposals prepared within the framework of the EU Centres of Excellence.

³ The countries either directly submitted project proposals or UNICRI and JRC prepared project proposals incorporating feedback provided by the countries in response to surveys. The criteria used to establish initial geographical scope for these project proposals were developed either by the country directly or by UNICRI and JRC based on questionnaires. UNICRI and JRC then sought a preliminary expression of interest from



Some National Focal Points have pointed out various challenges they face regarding the process of developing project proposals:

- Complex internal organization in the countries. In some cases, the political organization and structure of the governmental institutions dealing with CBRN in the countries makes it difficult for the National Focal Points to reach out to all relevant ministries at the appropriate level. In those cases, the National Focal Points are not in a good position to report and coordinate with all relevant governmental levels, and therefore, coordinate the development of project proposals across different ministries.
- National CBRN Teams still not consolidated. The added value and importance of the National Teams in the process of identification of needs and development of project proposals has often been stressed during the interviews. Their premature status in some countries is considered an important limitation in the project formulation process. The network created through the composition of the National Team is considered a very useful instrument for the preparation and prioritization of project proposals.
- Limited experience/expertise to develop project proposals. Some National Focal Points reported that in their view, the countries do not always possess strong national expertise and/or experience in developing project proposals that flow from a consistent process of identification of needs. This, along with their limited

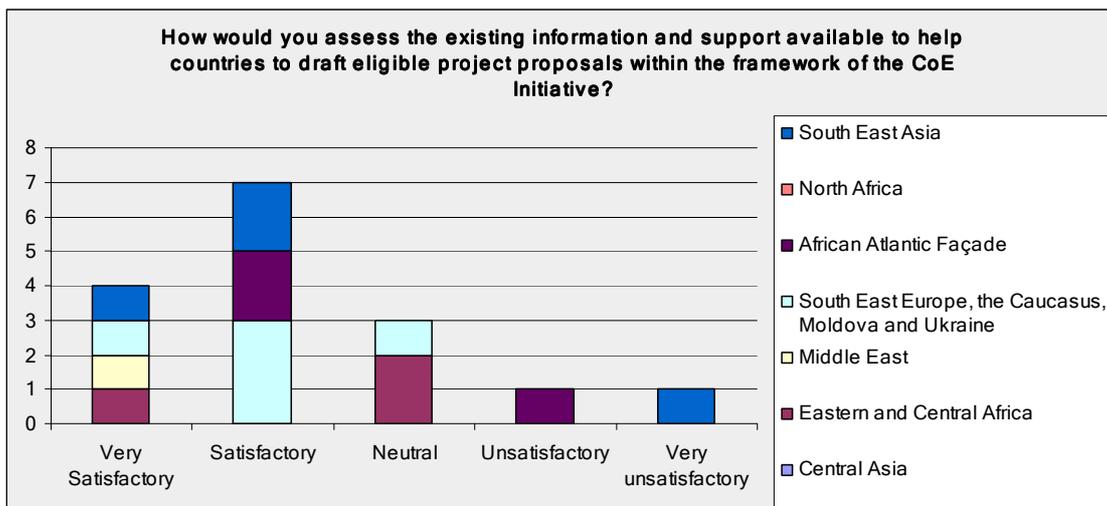
the National Focal Points and expanded the scope as necessary. During the first and second meetings of the Coordination Committee, consisting of DEVCO and EEAS as the decision-making body and JRC and UNICRI as technical advisors, DEVCO and EEAS afforded countries the additional opportunity to participate in the projects in the future by extending the country-specific scope to a regional scope. In some cases, this was done after the majority of countries of the same region expressed interest (but not necessary all countries from that region).



authority to coordinate the process within the country, makes the process of designing project proposals very challenging.

Most of the National Focal Points that had not participated in the development of project proposals come from the partner countries that have joined the initiative at a later stage. In such cases, the National Focal Points have been appointed only recently and haven't had the chance to engage in the process of formulation of projects proposals. Other countries have opted for focusing their efforts on the development of a national strategy for CBRN, and for developing project proposals once they have a National CBRN Action Plan in place. Some other countries stated that the lack of information about the CoE mechanism for submitting project proposals was the main reason behind their non-involvement in project proposals' design.

The National Focal Points shared their views about the existing information available to prepare project proposals. In this regard, the existing support was considered satisfactory or very satisfactory. Although some of the National Focal Points stressed that they had received limited support during drafting, they very much appreciated the suggestions received from the EC and UNICRI on how to improve the proposals.



2. The process of approving project proposals

With regard to countries' awareness about the approval of the project proposals, 50% of the respondents confirmed that to the best of their knowledge, the proposals they submitted were approved for funding. The other half responded that their project proposals were either not approved or they did not know if the proposals had been approved. Several National Focal Points expressed discontent about the lack of sufficient information regarding the approval process of proposals submitted by their countries.

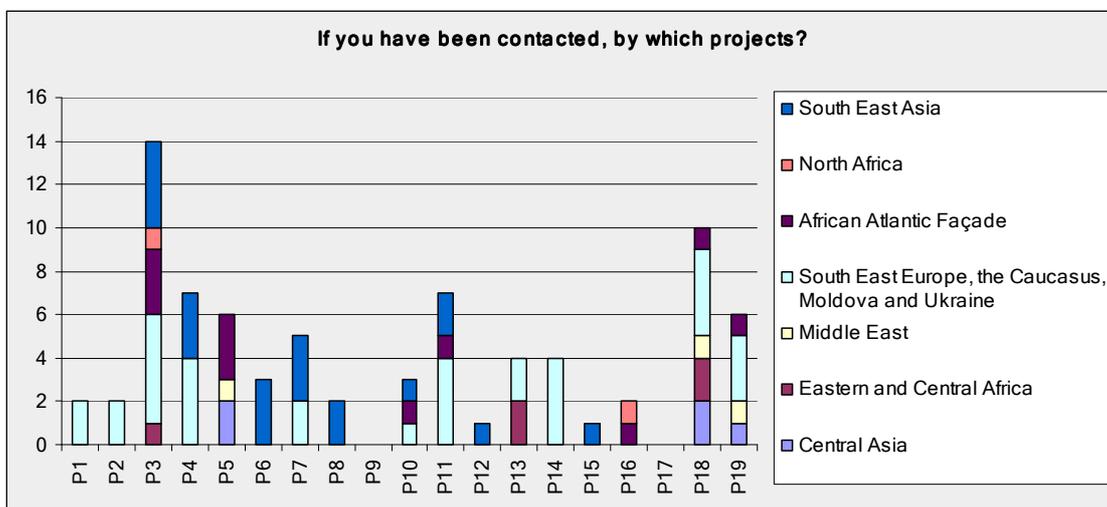


Moreover, several National Focal Points expressed concerns about substantial changes made in the projects in comparison with the original proposals. This was particularly relevant for some respondents from SEE Region, where it was noted that the equipment component was drastically reduced from the original proposals and the projects were left with the training/education component only. While the National Focal Points understood that probably there must be coherent reasons behind those changes, they considered that more regular communication about the status and final versions of the proposals would be very beneficial.

The situation was described as internally problematic given the responsibility of the National Focal Points to inform the different ministries that had been involved in the development of the proposals about the final results of the projects' selection, and changes, if any. It was mentioned that the limited information about the results and changes could undermine the willingness of the ministries to remain engaged in the initiative and to devote their time to developing or implementing projects.

3. Interaction with project implementers

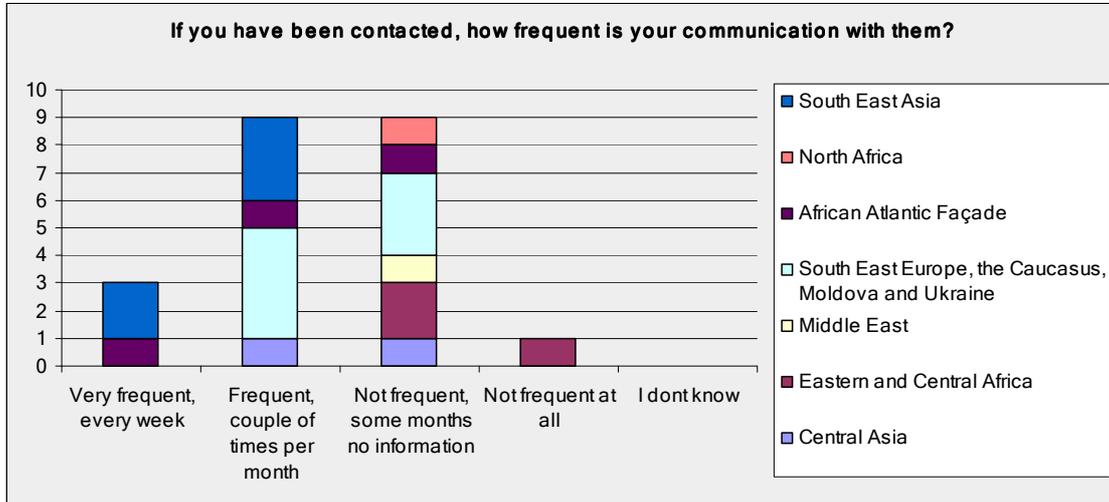
All respondents, except for one representing a new partner country have been in contact with the agencies implementing projects from 1 to 19. The agencies mentioned by the respondents as being in regular communication with the countries are those implementing projects 3, 18, 4 and 11 (in that order). These projects have a regional and/or interregional approach and have an important component of capacity building and CBRN awareness-raising.



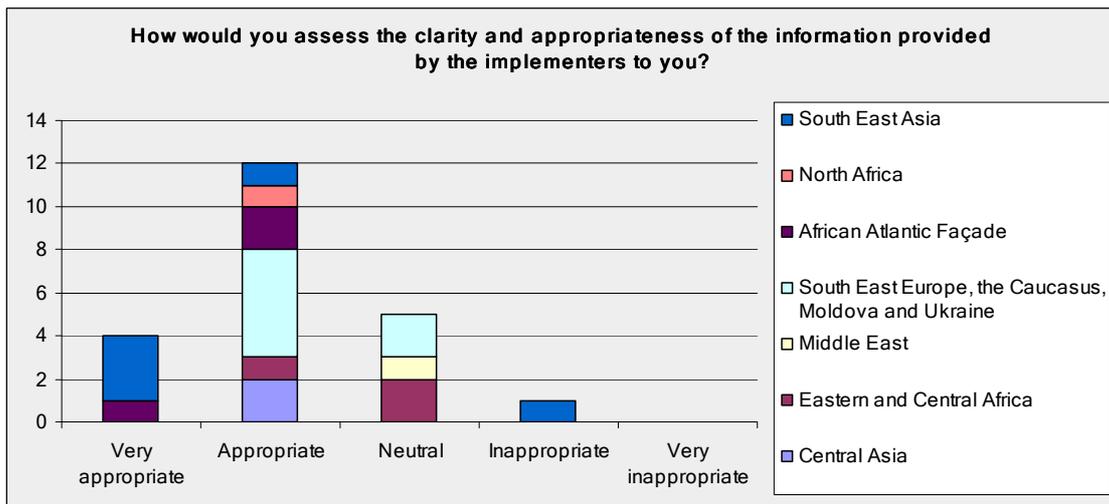
The National Focal Points fully recognized that the frequency of the interactions between the countries and implementers depends on many factors, including the nature of the project, the implementers' approach, the stage and timing of implementation. Overall, with all these factors taken into consideration, the majority of respondents rated their communication with the implementers as frequent, although in some periods irregular



and driven by implementers' needs. Countries from the SEA region reported more frequent communication with project implementers than in other regions.



A majority of respondents considered that the information provided by the implementers was clear and appropriate. The highest level of satisfaction about the clarity and appropriateness of the information of respondents was observed in the SEA, AAF and CA Regional Secretariats. Some of the National Focal Points stressed that the situation has positively changed in comparison with a year ago. Now, one year into implementation, the regular interaction with implementers has improved the quality of the information received. In some cases, the National Focal Points recognized internal limitations, in particular in terms of time and resources to follow and digest all information provided by the project implementers.





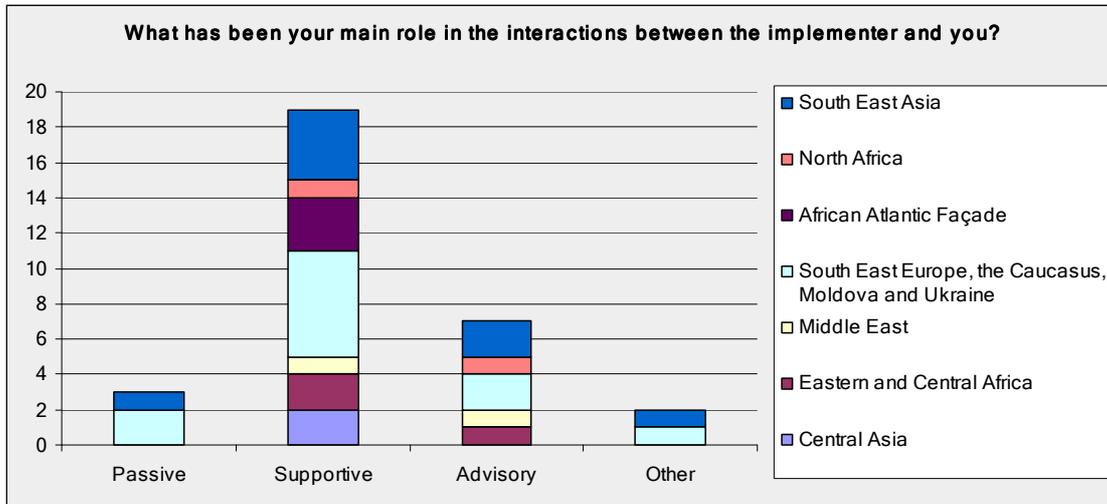
It should be noted that some respondents expressed that still there are 'grey areas'. For instance, when National Focal Points are asked to provide support in arranging meetings or booking venues for seminars/events, there is not enough clarity about to what extent eventual costs will be covered by the projects budget. Although those costs can be minor, more information about the expected support and assistance from the countries would be appreciated by the National Focal Points.

The picture is less clear when it comes to the level of information the implementers share about the projects and activities planned, which some of the respondents consider appropriate, but sometimes insufficient. In this regard, the National Focal Points suggested that the information is clear in the sense that the implementers request clearly what it is expected from the National Focal Points. However the information is limited, since the implementers do not share often details/substance about the activities that will be conducted or how will be conducted. These concerns very much relate with the next paragraphs, about the role of the National Focal Points in project implementation.

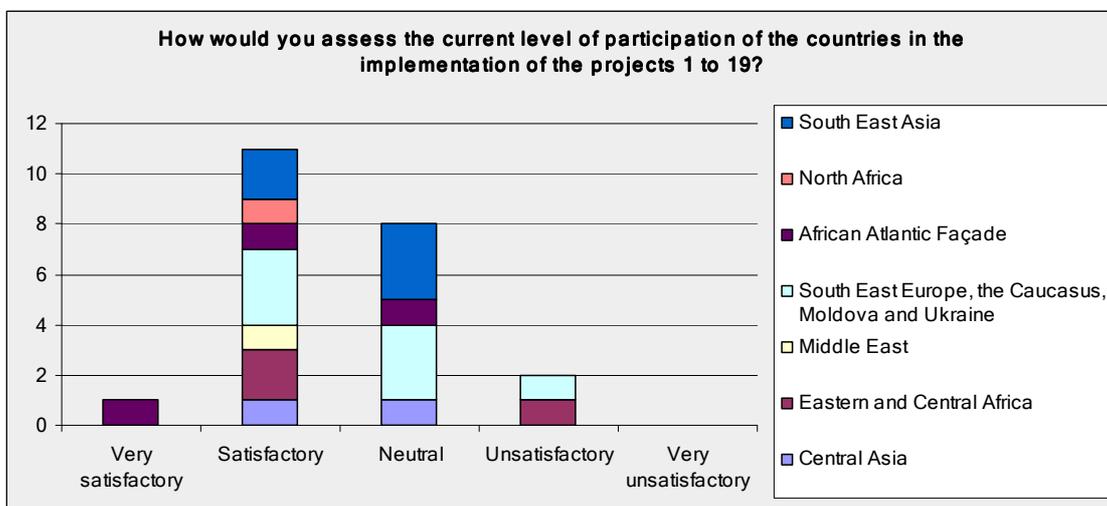
4. The role of National Focal Points in project activities

It was clearly pointed out by most of the National Focal Points that the situation differs notably among implementers when it comes to engaging them in activities. Some of the implementers very much request the advice of National Focal Points on important aspects of the projects (i.e. contents of a training, outline of a manual), while others limit their requests to the provision of national contact details (i.e. to give them access to training material, or to participate in project events), but not consulting them on the substantive aspects of the projects.

Responses overall indicate that the main role played by the National Focal Points in the implementation of the projects is *supportive*, in particular through the identification of local stakeholders, arranging venues etc. Their role in identifying the right people at national level to participate in projects activities is crucial for the success of the projects and can hardly be conducted without their involvement. Some others considered that their main role was to intermediate between project implementers and local experts, in particular informing the local experts about the projects and the Centers of Excellence.



Although most respondents considered the level of participation of the countries in the implementation of projects as satisfactory, nearly half of the respondents provided a neutral or unsatisfactory assessment. In this regard, a high number of National Focal Points considered that the participation could improve, and a more active role of the countries in the implementation of the projects could benefit the sustainability and ownership of project results. Many respondents expressed their willingness to have a more active role in the decision making process of the projects.



Moreover, in terms of countries participation, some of the National Focal Points mentioned that the role of the countries in the projects is unclear. In such cases, the National Focal Points were unsure whether their role was simply to notify national authorities and leave it up to the implementers to do the rest, or the country was expected to be very much active on a technical level and substantial level. It was also pointed out by some of the respondents that in this area of uncertainty about what is expected from the National Focal Points, they have opted to advise the implementers in

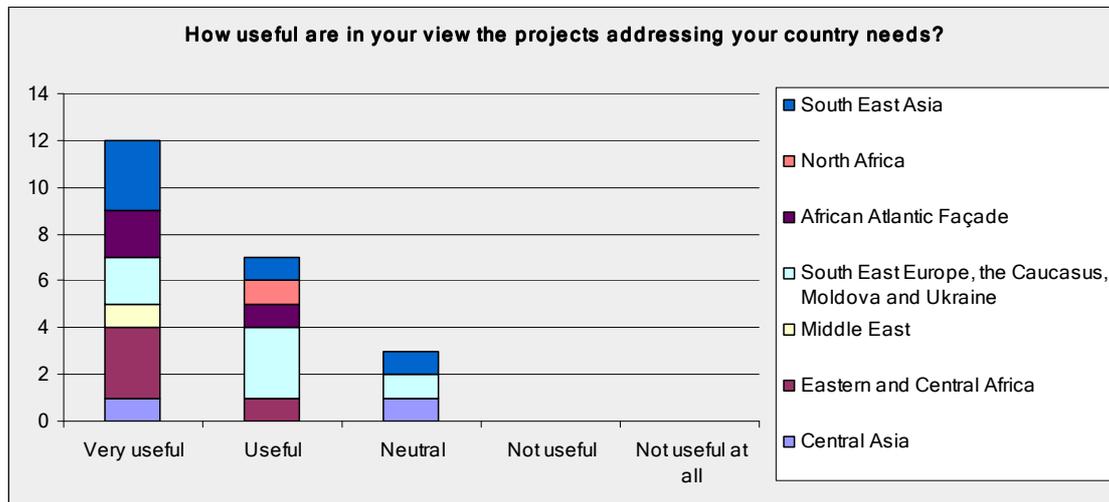


their planned activities, even if that was not specifically requested. Normally, in those cases of pursuing a more active role, the advice from the National Focal Points has been well taken into account by project implementers.

5. Usefulness of projects

Most of respondents judged very positively the potential utility of the projects to their country needs in the areas of CBRN response capabilities. Some respondents, however, noted that it is difficult for them to assess the utility of the projects taking into account the limited information available to them at this point.

Some National Focal Points mentioned that the potential usefulness was not evident at the beginning, but as the implementation evolves, benefits are becoming increasingly evident to all involved. Generally, several respondents considered that the utility would be more obviously assessed when the projects come to an end.



Respondents noted that although the projects are useful, in some cases, the projects do not tackle the root/structural problems in the countries. They indicated that while the knowledge sharing and training was very much welcome, the acquired knowledge was however not very effective with the fundamental legislation in place. The need to link the projects to the national action plans and build on experiences from current projects into future needs of assistance was highlighted.

6. Potential areas for improvement

The interviews make it clear that the projects are contributing significantly in supporting countries to strengthen their CBRN risk mitigation capabilities. This first year of implementation of projects 1 to 19 has been mainly focused on desk research, conducting missions to the partner countries, identifying stakeholders and national experts and collecting information from participating countries. The respondents have



expressed an overall positive perception about the formulation, approval and implementation process of the projects up to now.

That said, the information gathered also points out that there are some areas that could be strengthened from the perspective of the National Focal Points. Below, ten principal areas are listed (ordered following the sequence of formulation, approval and implementation), which were considered by the countries' representatives in need of particular attention in order to improve the process of projects' formulation and implementation:

1. *Coordination among Regional Secretariats.* Some countries, after reviewing the projects that are currently in operation, would have liked to benefit from projects that are implemented in other regions. In order to facilitate coordination among countries and regions, it would be beneficial if Regional Secretariats shared the developed project proposals with other regions to ascertain if they were also interested in participating in the projects before submitting them officially to EC for funding.
2. *Geographical scope of projects.* Although the regional scope of projects should provide advantages in terms of synergies and optimization of resources, the geographical scope and countries distribution could be further discussed with the countries before projects are approved. Special attention should be given to the potential political problems that may prevent country participation in regional projects in particular as well as to the level of importance of a project for a given country/countries to address their identified needs.
3. *Information on project results.* Overall, there is a positive impression of the clarity and availability of the information to support the formulation of project proposals. That said, more information would be appreciated about final decisions and changes in the originally submitted proposals, as well as to shorten the period between submission and approval of projects. The lack of information or changes without informing correspondent ministries may undermine the willingness of the ministries involved in the preparation of project proposals to remain engaged in the initiative and devote their time to working on the projects.
4. *Role of the National Focal Points.* Although there is an overall positive perception about the role currently played by the National Focal Points in the implementation of the projects, many expressed the need to have their role better defined. There is some ambiguity in the kind of support that the National Focal Points are expected to provide to the implementers. The borderline between the supportive and advisory role should be identified and communicated to all parties involved.
5. *Countries' participation.* Many countries expressed their interest in having more responsibilities than supporting project implementers in the direct implementation of the projects. The countries that expressed this interest for a more active and direct participation in the projects considered that their direct involvement would strengthen national ownership and improve prospects for sustainability.



6. *Communication with implementers.* The respondents rated satisfactorily the level of communication with project implementers. However, it was also mentioned that the information is very much needs-driven, and once they provided the requested information, the communication would stop for a long time. More regular interaction with the implementers, in particular after training events, or when projects activities are delayed would be appreciated. Sharing projects' work plans and indicators of success with the National Focal Points would help them to understand the dynamics of the projects and their status during implementation, and therefore enable them to be in a better position to support the implementers as and when needed.
7. *Financial support.* The need for financial support to cover the work entailed in coordination was an important point raised by some of the respondents, as a measure to cope with their expected responsibilities as National Focal Points during the formulation and implementation of the projects, in addition to their regular daily work.
8. *Better harmonization of procedures.* The project implementers apply different approaches, procedures and rules for the organization of similar project activities (*i.e.*, field visits, national seminars, regional events). This results in different approaches to covering interpretation services, translation of materials, *per diem* and visa coverage for participants. It would be beneficial to work on a better harmonization of procedures among implementers.
9. *Link between current projects and future projects.* Some of the respondents suggested that they do not have enough information on the actual stage of implementation and achievements of the projects currently in operation so as to identify needs and work on the preparation of new project proposals in an informed way. Access to updated information about the status of projects in operation, combined with the process of identification of countries' needs and development of national action plans, would help the countries to better build new proposals on existing results.
10. *Communication limitations.* Several projects are providing capacity building for CBRN risk mitigation through e-learning platforms and on-line distribution of materials. The limited access to internet connections in some countries and regions should be more thoroughly taken into account when planning project activities in them. Off-line materials and alternative methods of communication should be considered in order to overcome communication challenges.

We trust you will find this report a useful reference for further discussions as we strive collectively for effective, useful and sustainable projects within the framework of the EU CBRN Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative. UNICRI would like to thank all respondents for their valuable time, frank opinions and constructive views shared during the interviews.