

Opening remarks for the workshop on “Public Acceptance and Social Impact of Mining and Minerals Recycling”

Satellite event of the Raw Materials week on Friday 22.11.2019 from 14:00 to 17:00

The Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME) has been set up by the European Commission to manage several funding programmes such as Horizon 2020 but also COSME, LIFE and the EMFF; and our role is to support research and innovation activities in the fields of environment and resources, energy and maritime areas.

Our mission at EASME is to provide support to our beneficiaries, turning the EU policy into action.

We are in charge of the whole cycle of project implementation: evaluation of proposals, Grant Agreement preparation, scientific, technical and financial monitoring of projects and policy feedback.

In short, we ensure that the funded projects deliver high quality results and provide the Commission with valuable input for its policy tasks.

Social acceptance, which can also refer to “social license to operate”, is an implied agreement between project developers, individuals and organizations that are affected by the operations of a given project throughout its lifecycle.

This agreement has also been represented as a set of meaningful relationships between operational stakeholders based on mutual trust, and as a set of demands and expectations for how a business will operate by local stakeholders and broader civil society (*Warhurst, 2001, Gunningham et al., 2004, Moffat & Zhang, 2014*).

Many industrial sectors such as aquaculture, forestry, tourism and also renewable energy and carbon capture need to grant and maintain social acceptance to avoid public protests that would hinder their operations (*Ian Thomson, 2019*).

The mining industry also needs ongoing approval and broad acceptance of the society in order to avoid human rights risk, conflicts, and political instability that can affect the raw materials security of supply (*Blengini et al., 2017, Mancini & Sala, 2018*).

However, public acceptance of this sector is very low in Europe, mainly because the general public opinion requests that the raw materials sourcing is performed following social responsibility along the supply chain and environmental protection (*Di Noi & Ciroth, 2018*).

The lack of social acceptance can be a potential bottleneck in the process of securing EU production of raw materials. Improving the social sustainability of the raw materials sector is thus a relevant objective, especially in view of gaining trust and acceptability (*Euromines, 2016, ICMM, 2005, Mancini & Sala, 2018*).

The European Union has launched a number of initiatives and policies addressing the main social and environmental issues related to raw materials (*Di Noi & Ciroth, 2018*).

The Raw Materials initiative adopted in 2008, aims at (i) ensuring a fair and sustainable supply of raw materials from global markets; (ii) boosting a sustainable domestic supply; and (iii) improving resource efficiency and supply of secondary raw materials through recycling.

The European Innovation Partnership (EIP) on raw materials aims at bringing Europe to the forefront in these sectors and mitigating their negative environmental and social impacts.

The Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) refers to approaches to gain “social acceptance”, “public awareness, acceptance and trust” and “public acceptance” on priority action areas defined for the three pillars of the EIP.

Moreover, in order to support the EU policy on RM, the European Commission has developed the Raw Materials Information System (RMIS), which is a European reference web-based knowledge platform for primary and secondary raw materials. The RMIS includes information on trade, social and environmental considerations.

The Horizon 2020 calls for projects encourage consortia to investigate how local communities and civil society will be engaged to build public acceptance and trust in the mining and recycling sectors in Europe.

For example, actions responding to 2018-2020 calls are requested to develop activities that will, in the long term, positively impact on “the environmental and social performance of the raw materials sector; and improve public awareness, acceptance and trust”.

Clustering and cooperation between projects and their stakeholders enable to enhance the activities undertaken by means of exchange of ideas, plans and best practices.

The workshop on social acceptance organised by EASME in June 2018 gathered around 30 running projects and aimed at initiating dialogues among beneficiaries engaged in public awareness and trust-related activities, allowing clustering with other EU funded projects to enable alignment and identify synergies; and also developing ways for interaction.

The MIREU project, awarded for funding in 2017, aims to define Social Licence to Operate (SLO) guidelines and develop a toolbox improving communication and transparency during the permitting and licensing procedures and in the raw materials production cycle.

The third workshop organised by this project, in June, in Brussels provided some lessons learned and recommendations for the way forward for SLO in the European Union.

Highlights include the following remarks:

- Some European countries such as Norway and Sweden refer to Corporate Social Responsibility standards (CSR) rather than to SLO;
- In Europe, social acceptance exists at both the societal and community levels and is a continual social relationship building process between the governments, community and industry;
- In the today media-networked world, trend of empowered communities is growing and the industry needs accountability of public stakeholders and representatives such as NGOs to avoid veto ungoverned by rules or regulations;
- Drivers of trust and acceptance at societal and community levels include (i) on one hand: legal, procedural and distributional fairness, as well as confidence in the governance; and (ii) on the other hand: contact quality, perception of procedural fairness and social benefits.

In conclusion, as mentioned at several occasions during the Raw Materials Week, there is a need for establishing a governance framework setting up rules, procedures, and informational guidelines, that will support industries of the raw materials value chain to gain and maintain social acceptance in Europe.

The need for monitoring relevant conditions and drivers has also been evocated, as well as the observation of the progression of the industry toward improving acceptance of their activities at both the local and societal levels.

Finally, interactions between the different stakeholders engaged in this process of acceptance, which are the industries, academia, policy makers, national regulators, local community members, etc..., are necessary. Those interactions should also involve relevant representatives of various universes that are facing similar social and societal challenges (for instance the raw materials, energy, carbon capture, forestry, agriculture sectors).

This event, co-organised by a cluster of H2020 running projects including NEMO, CROCODILE and TARANTULA, in collaboration with the SecREEs, INFACT and CHROMIC projects, takes on this challenge.

This event is also the opportunity to gather relevant stakeholders such as industrials, governments, NGOs, local citizens, academia and international institutions to exchange ideas and share knowledge about further challenges and opportunities for collaboration.