

## Sustainable extraction in Europe – what does it entail?

**PRESS RELEASE | BRUSSELS | OCTOBER 2023 – The SUMEX Consortium is pleased to announce the successful completion of the project and provides high level recommendations to European extractive industry players for sustainable mining and quarrying in Europe.**

SUMEX (Sustainable Management in Extractive Industries) is a 36-month project funded by the European Commission that finishes on 31 October 2023. The project successfully **established an up-to-date sustainability framework for the extractive industry in Europe** and created a **database of already existing examples of sustainability practices** with the involvement of stakeholders from civil society, academia, industry and government from all across the EU.



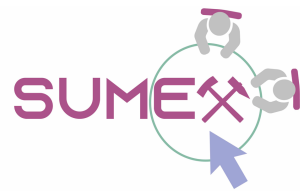
Aligned with the European Green Deal's twin targets of an energy and digital transformation, in March this year the European Commission presented a draft Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA), which shall equip the EU with the necessary tools to ensure the EU's access to a secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials. In parallel, the European Commission is also working on the implementation of the biodiversity strategy for 2030 to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems, which might seem contradictory to the CRMA. The SUMEX project results support the aims of the Green Deal for a just and sustainable economy and can support a successful implementation of both the CRMA and the biodiversity strategy for 2030.

First and foremost, the [SUMEX Sustainability Framework](#) created with extensive stakeholder consultation during the project duration and tailored to Europe is the most advanced framework at the moment and should be considered as a guide by the extractive industry, by policy makers at the EU and member state level, as well as civil society in order to enable mines and quarries to be aligned with societal expectations concerning the environmental and social consequences of mineral extraction.

With the advance of strategic projects under the CRMA and improved access to essential raw materials in coming years, this framework needs to be further advanced and kept updated by the European Commission, in order to enable land use and permitting authorities to make the right choices, i.e. how to measure and weigh different interests and trade-offs between benefits (often accrued remotely) and impacts (often accrued locally). This also needs to include a debate about responsible mineral consumption, i.e. sufficiency (how much is enough and what can be considered luxury?) and what will the minerals extracted being used for. It will also require significant capacity building for all land use and permitting authorities involved. For this, the SUMEX project created a [Knowledge Repository](#), that is freely available via the project website, and a [Massive Open Online Course \(MOOC\)](#), which is being handed over to the EIT RawMaterials to become part of their [RawMaterials Academy](#).

Land use conflicts between mineral extraction and, e.g. nature protection will continue to have high conflict potential in Europe. Mandatory instruments that promote a deeper understanding of the cumulative effect of land use changes would help. The lack of such instruments results in failure to





identify tipping points and safeguard the renewal capacity of natural environments and ecosystems exposed to multiple pressures, including extractive activities. This is the result of a policy misalignment between land use planning and extractives, e.g., not taking into consideration future extractive projects (requiring better knowledge from mineral exploration, as required in the CRMA) and associated land uses such as transport infrastructure, or not considering the implications of potential extractive activities on other land uses. The Strategic Environmental Assessment of land use plans could be an adequate instrument to tackle this, but policy gaps between land use planning and extraction should be addressed first.

All of the above will require more and accelerated technology development and a research-friendly policy environment in Europe. Only then will we be able to explore suitable, design and develop automated and safe extraction sites that operate zero-waste, have a minimal environmental footprint or even a biodiversity net-gain, are well integrated into a circular economy, and track materials across the value circle. Working towards such a transition of the European extractive industry is an opportunity for Europe to further advance its position in technologies, gain societal acceptance and attract also the younger generation to the industry.

Lastly, the over 370 good practice examples collected in the [SUMEX Knowledge Repository](#) should be used by all stakeholder groups to discover what is already possible regarding the sustainable management of extractive operations in Europe. They set the benchmark going forward.

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