

WORKSHOP REPORT

Human Rights and Environmental Aspects in Mining: state obligations and business opportunities

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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1. Topic Overview

This multi-stakeholder workshop organised under the [project Human Rights and Environmentally Responsible Business Practices](#) brought together government officials, private sector representatives, international experts on human rights and business, and international organisations to discuss the responsible mining in Armenia and globally. The central theme revolved around how the mining sector can be aligned with expectations on human rights and environmental compliance and inclusive economic development.

Organised by the Council of Europe, Grant Thornton Armenia, and IRMA (Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance), the event represents an example of cooperative engagement between public institutions and the private sector.

The mining industry is an important part of national economies, sourcing of materials crucial for technological progress, critical for energy transition and development of renewable energy infrastructure. At the same time this industry is historically associated with environmental harm, conflicts with local communities, and human rights violations.

In the Armenian context, mining industry plays a vital role in exports and employment. However, speakers noted that its potential remains underexploited due to outdated technologies, insufficient regulatory oversight, and a trust deficit with local communities. A central question that emerged was: How can Armenia harness its mineral wealth while safeguarding rights, health, and the environment?

The workshop aimed to address this question from various angles.

2. Key Insights

2.1. Responsible Mining Means Shared Responsibility

A major theme across the discussions was the need for a shared responsibility of all stakeholders: governments, businesses, civil society, local communities, and international investors. The existing mining strategy must be operationalised not only through regulation, but also through implementation, oversight, and mutual accountability.

Government roles include setting national priorities, enacting policies and laws, and ensuring enforcement and effective remedies. Companies are expected to go beyond compliance, adopting ethical practices, engaging communities, and reporting transparently. Civil society plays a critical watchdog role, ensuring social and environmental concerns are addressed. Local communities, particularly those directly affected, must actively and effectively participate in the discussions.

2.2. Legal and Regulatory Frameworks are crucial

For mining to become responsible strong legal frameworks are needed. The Council of Europe shared recent initiatives including the 2022 Recommendation of the [CoE Committee of Ministers on Human Rights and the Protection of Environment CM/Rec \(2022\)20](#) and a new [Convention on Protection of the Environment Through Criminal Law](#). These instruments provide a solid ground for states to enhance environmental protections.

For better human rights and environment respect in mining the national authorities can strengthen the implementation of various instruments and recommendations, as well as take into account the set jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights presented at the event, that provides various practical illustrations of good practices and possible shortcomings in the area.

2.3. Building Trust and Community Engagement

The lack of trust between local communities and mining companies and communication gaps were cited as yet another negative point in mining. Historical grievances, environmental degradation, poor communication, and unmet promises can contribute to resistance to new projects.

The IRMA standard was presented at the event as a way to rebuild the trust. It requires companies to undergo independent audits that are publicly available and consider input from stakeholders, including affected communities and trade unions.

Speakers emphasized the need for full transparency and early, continuous engagement with communities. This includes not only consultations, but access to information, effective grievance and mediation mechanisms, and the ability to influence outcomes.

2.4. Access to Capital and Investment Challenges

Despite Armenia's resource wealth, the mining sector faces a serious investment

drought. With only 7–8 operational mines out of 23 licensed, and minimal exploration in recent years, the sector risks stagnation.

Several factors deter investors: the volatility of commodity prices, geopolitical risks, poor ESG performance, and lack of trustworthy data.

Increasing demand of robust ESG compliance by investors, particularly pension funds and asset managers, was underlined. Mining companies that fail to demonstrate social responsibility and environmental safeguards will struggle to attract funding.

2.5. The Human Rights and Legal Remedies

Robust remedies to the environmental and human rights violations were discussed – both external, and internal. The discussion also focused on some cases examined by the European Court of Human Rights, where the Court dealt with such issues as like fair trial and equality of arms principles in absence of an access to information (including expert reports or evidence). Independent expert reviews are especially crucial in “science-heavy” cases like environmental litigation and some of the participants stressed that the parties to such processes shall be allowed to effectively challenge technical evidence, and experts must be neutral and credible.

2.6. Gender Equality and Women in Mining

Gender disparity in the mining industry was identified as a structural barrier to inclusive growth. With women comprising less than 15% of the global mining workforce, there is a need for targeted policies.

Examples from Armenia were promising: one of the companies stated to have 22% women amongst its employees and providing childcare. UN Women presented a 7-point framework for gender-sensitive business practices, including equal representation in decision-making, pay equity, health and safety protections, and gender-sensitive procurement.

To measure the progress in gender balancing the companies and governments can introduce special quotas, mentorship programs, and gender audits.

2.7. Transition Minerals and Energy Policy Integration

As the world shifts toward renewable energy, demand for “transition minerals” is accelerating. However, fast-tracking projects without due diligence leads to greater

risks: social conflict, environmental damage, and stalled operations.

The workshop stressed that mining projects should be embedded within national energy and climate strategies, guided by SDG-aligned cost-benefit analysis. Investments must be long-term, environmentally sound, and socially just.

3. Conclusions

1. **The global energy transition presents both risks and opportunities.** The path of strategic, rights-based, and sustainable mining can bring long-term benefits for economic and societal development in the country.

2. **Responsible mining is essential** not only to mitigate harm, but to secure long-term economic resilience, attract quality long-term investment, and build trust in the society.

3. Armenia has made **progress with the 2023 mining strategy**, but implementation must follow. Political will, coordination and communication with all stakeholders, involvement of local communities, and accountability are critical.

4. **Global alignment is key.** For sustainable development of the industry as a major part of the country's economy, Armenia shall adopt international standards in the area of human rights and environment protection.

5. **Public trust** requires **transparency and inclusiveness.** Independent audits, open information, and genuine community engagement should become standard practice.

6. **Gender equality is not optional.** From leadership roles to workplace conditions, women must be fully included in shaping and benefiting from the sector.

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