

# Researchers assess EU citizens' attitudes toward critical metals and mining technologies

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Critical metals, such as cobalt and lithium, are essential for the green transition. However, citizens' awareness of critical raw materials is low,

which may affect their attitudes towards, and acceptance of, mining activities.

"Increased [mining](#) activities are the flip side of the coin in the green transition. In Finland, too, several ore exploration and mining projects are currently under way. It is interesting to see how the negative environmental impacts of mining, for example, affect the green transition and on what conditions people are ready for it," Senior Researcher Tuija Mononen says.

Mononen is involved in the SEMACRET project led by the University of Oulu, which secured 7.5 million euros of Horizon Europe funding for the sustainable exploration of critical raw materials in the European Union. The work package led by Mononen examines what EU citizens know about critical materials and the need for them, and how this affects their attitudes towards, and acceptance of, mining activities. The work package accounts for nearly 840,000 euros of the total funding.

"In ore exploration and mining, [social acceptance](#) has become a key challenge for the future of the entire industry. Responsibility is an integral part of it. Citizens and communities need information in order to participate in the debate and possible decision-making on an informed basis," Mononen emphasizes.

## **Finnish sites: Akanvaara in Savukoski and Terrafame in Sotkamo**

At the University of Eastern Finland, Mononen leads the SERM research group, which focuses on social-scientific mining research. In the SEMACRET project, her research group examines citizens' awareness of critical materials and their attitudes towards mining activities in Finland, Portugal, Poland and the Czech Republic. In Finland, the study

sites are Akanvaara in Savukoski and Terrafame in Sotkamo.

Terrafame is an interesting site, as it contains the largest cobalt resources in the European Union.

Researchers have studied the attitudes of local residents towards mining activities in Sotkamo for a long time. Despite the previous problems in Talvivaara mine in Sotkamo, Mononen says that locals in Sotkamo have a surprisingly positive attitude towards mining activities. A comparison study carried out in 2016 found that 71.7% of the respondents in Sotkamo accepted mining activities. The corresponding figure for the whole country was 73.7%.

"Terrafame was included in the SEMACRET study in order to obtain comparative data on whether there has been a change in the acceptance of mining activities. In addition, Terrafame's battery minerals and chemicals production are closely linked to the green transition."

## **Hopes to increase citizens' awareness of the green transition and critical metals**

The SEMACRET study examines where citizens get information about the green transition and where they would like to get it—from researchers, the media, neighbors, environmental organizations, authorities or mining operators.

A national online survey will be conducted in the four case countries to examine citizens' knowledge base, awareness, attitudes and acceptance of the green transition and mining activities. Workshops will also be organized in the study locations at the start and end of the project, and local stakeholders will be interviewed as well.

The study also follows discussion on the subject in social media. This is theme will be explored by Kyle Bahr, one of the leading [international scholars](#) addressing the social license to operate in the context of mining activities.

"Using a variety of methods, we generate data on the main challenges associated with the green transition and acceptance of mining activities. The results reflect stakeholders' concerns and knowledge, attitudes and acceptance."

The other work packages of the SEMACRET project focus on charting soil metal concentrations using sustainable ore exploration methods.

"Our role is to produce material to raise citizens' awareness. We will also make [policy recommendations](#) and visualize the results of the study. In addition, we'll make a concise information package for citizens on critical materials and the green transition."

Provided by University of Eastern Finland

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