

Summary: Perspectives on sustainable mining in Finland

The economic, social, and ecological sustainability of mining is debated in Finland, in the EU and around the world. In the report Perspectives on sustainable mining in Finland this topic is approached from the following perspectives: the connection between sustainable mining and central government finances, objectives and implementation of Finland's mining policy, increasing the added value of battery minerals and battery industry, circular economy solutions for mining operations, local acceptance of mining operations (social licence to operate, SLO), and the management of environmental risks arising from abandoned and closed mines.

Even though mining is a commercial activity, it is connected with the state and central government finances in many ways. Environmental protection and ecologically sustainable mining have also been major themes in Government Programmes in the 2010s. The Finnish Mineral Strategy published in 2010 and the Sustainable Extractive Industries Action Plan presented in 2013 are the two key strategies guiding Finland's mining and mineral policy. The Sustainable Mining Network and the mining responsibility system created by it were established on the basis of the recommendations set out in the Sustainable Extractive Industries Action Plan. Mining sector actors have been mostly satisfied with the networked activities and the responsibility system. On the other hand, it seems that the 2010 Mineral Strategy and the Sustainable Extractive Industries Action Plan of 2013 do not otherwise necessarily guide the activities anymore. In fact, the question arises whether these strategies should be updated or overhauled. National and various EU-level strategies could also be coordinated with each other more effectively.

Finland presented its national battery strategy in early 2021. Batteries play a key role in the achievement of climate targets. Finland has also worked to improve the added value of battery minerals and battery industry. The key strategic objective of the state-owned Finnish Minerals Group is to develop an electric car battery value chain in Finland.

Circular economy solutions for the mining sector can be used to implement circular economy policy objectives. However, most of the circular economy solutions are still on a trial basis. The problem is to make the solutions more widely and systematically available.

In order to be commercially successful, a mining company must gain the acceptance of the local community (social licence to operate, SLO). Gaining local acceptance is not always a straightforward matter. There may be major differences between operating practices of mining companies and they sometimes fail to receive the social licence to operate.

In the past, many Finnish mines were abandoned and closed using methods that do not meet today's environmental and safety standards. In Finland, the state of closed and abandoned extractive waste sites has been examined in the KAJAK projects since the 2010s. A number of projects to reform the environmental liability legislation applicable to mining operations are also under way.