Raw Materials Week 2019
21 November 2019, Le Plaza Hotel, Boulevard Adolphe Max, 1000 Brussels

EU Knowledge Base Event

1. Nature of the meeting

The third edition of the EU Knowledge Base event discussed data and knowledge needs on the economic, environmental and social dimension of raw materials.

2. Welcome and opening remarks

DGs JRC and GROW opened the event, emphasising the need for data and knowledge to provide the evidence-base for transparent policy making. Knowledge on raw materials helps to clearly explain societal benefits of sustainable consumption, and a holistic view of value chains can improve resource-efficiency and diversification of supply.

3. Session I: UN Resource Management System and Sustainable Development Goals

The session addressed the new developments towards the UN Resource Management System (UNRMS), the OECD inventory of export restrictions and their relevance to the EU, as well as the latest development in building and improving the knowledge base in the EU.

In light of an increasing material footprint combined with declining mineral productivity, gathering and maintaining knowledge on available resources becomes paramount. The UNECE is building a common toolkit that also provides for environmental and societal aspects with the UNRMS, while the EU Geological Surveys (EGS) work on integrating information from the national geological surveys into a mineral resources knowledge base and cooperate on knowledge sharing with other continents. The OECD database on trade restrictions increases transparency on trade in raw materials and complements the work of the WTO on import restriction. DG GROW put the need for reliable data into the context of long-term strategies, highlighting both the complexity of the global raw materials value chains and the lack of harmonisation at both EU and global level.

Session II: Raw materials knowledge for analysing industrial Value Chains

The session discussed possibilities to enhance dialogue and knowledge sharing along the value chains, from producer to recycler, and how the work of the EU can support this. Terrafame, the EU's largest supplier of nickel, presented how and why it has been moving up the battery value chain. Umicore, at the other end of the value chain argued that effective recycling is based on data and information sharing, from the producer down to the value chain; also that more information is needed on stocks and flows of products in the economy to make the business case for developing recycling processes and facilities. EUROSTAT presented how their data collection framework can enable better knowledge on all parts of the value chain, through NACE on trade in goods and Prodcom on production. DG JRC highlighted the need to look at value chains by presenting the analytical work on materials for dual use and improvements in the Raw Materials Information System (RMIS).

Session III: Sustainable Raw Materials Supply Knowledge

The session discussed all the knowledge needed to support sustainable sourcing of raw materials, addressing mainly social, but also environmental aspects.

DG DEVCO opened the session by highlighting the importance of partnerships with the EU for raw materials supplying countries, listed the current on-going EC initiatives in the area and identified the current efforts. Then, the University of Surrey (UK) introduced a new global platform for Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) data (called Delve database) and highlighted the importance of using data collected on the ground as much as possible. OECD presented the recent developments of its

"Responsible sourcing and risk portal", a practical tool for due diligence that covers more than 40 minerals supply chains, and gave some outlooks (including the planned connection of the portal with the Raw Materials Information System (RMIS) hosted by the JRC). The JRC then gave an update on how social aspects are currently captured in the RMIS (in particular in profiles and in the tile concerning Sustainable Development Goals). Upcoming RMIS content includes sustainable sourcing of battery raw materials building on OECD criteria, and recent data collection in the Democratic Republic of Congo on cobalt. The session concluded with an update of current knowledge developed in the frame of the "Climate Change and Resource Efficiency" working group of the UN International Resource Panel. It takes stock of material-related greenhouse gas emissions in various sectors, and identifies potential material efficiency gains with the example of the road transport sector according to various strategies (e.g. re-use, material substitution, down-sizing, car-sharing and ride-sharing).

Session IV: Training on United Nations Framework Classification for Resources (UNFC)

The session included a detailed presentation/training on the set-up and methodology of UNFC, a generic, principles-based system for classification, applicable to projects within solid minerals, fluids, injection, renewables, anthropogenic resources, using a numerical coding system. UNFC is based on three fundamental criteria: Environmental, economic and social viability; field project status and feasibility; geological knowledge. UNFC is a decision support system for governments, industry and the financial sector.

Practical applications of UNFC on two topics were explored. Firstly, to European Mineral Resources; UNFC does not replace CRIRSCO types reporting in this context, but facilitates the national, EU-level knowledge and management of resources. Water and anthropogenic resources is not fully integrated at this stage, but work is on going in this direction. Secondly, application to anthropogenic resources; this process is being supported by H2020. The success of this application would require the establishment of a System of Anthropogenic Resource Assessment (SARA). There are many standards but they are not comparable. This would need to be transparent, consistent and objective for all stakeholders, applicable to all kind of anthropogenic materials, and should be possible to use in decision-making at different levels (local / regional / national / international).

The Q&A session discussed the need for more real UNFC case studies from application on specific commodities, regions, countries. For anthropogenic resources, further development of the e-axis is needed. The establishment of some kind of excellence centre would support the process overall.