

Practitioner perspectives on current approaches to Community Relations at Exploration: Highlights from Northern Europe, Latin America, North America, and Central Africa

Sarah Mackenzie¹, **Kathryn Kochan**¹

¹University Of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, ²Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, Brisbane, Australia

In response to the growing global demand for metals and closer regulatory scrutiny around sustainability performance, explorers must focus on developing strategies and policies to secure the supply of critical minerals responsibly and efficiently. This is taking explorers into new jurisdictions and increasing their presence in others. While explorers are facing growing community opposition to exploration in certain jurisdictions, expectations of economic growth and benefit are creating immense development pressures in others.

As the social context for exploration evolves, consent and access to land are becoming increasingly determinant factors in project success. To meet societal expectations of a responsible transition, geoscientists must address logistical challenges, such as long lead times between discovery and mining, and engage with communities early on. Geoscientists are now expected to have the knowledge base and capability to address the complexities of community relations across diverse and socially complex regions. In response, companies are implementing social performance and community relations skills, data, and resources ahead of shifts in policy and governance agendas.

The Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSRМ) at the University of Queensland has conducted research to understand how exploration stakeholders are building and strengthening community relations capability in the drive to decarbonize. This draws on CSRМ's experience training global exploration teams, and interviews with geoscientists, exploration community relations and sustainability personnel, and local community representatives in four resource-rich regions: Northern Europe, Latin America, North America, and Central Africa. The case studies illustrate how company, regulatory, and community approaches and capabilities are changing in response to geopolitical tensions, increasing land pressures, and the social justice implications of critical mineral exploration. Both missteps and successful approaches to integrating social considerations into exploration activities offer insights into how broad uptake of emerging practices by exploration teams will be critical to the success of future projects.