

How IRMA Benefits Labor Organizations

Addressing Risks While Promoting Operational Excellence

The global reliance on mined materials is undeniable. Mined materials form the backbone of modern society, embedded in everything from our electronics to our infrastructure. Mining companies are essential to modern life, providing the materials necessary for these industries.

However, the world is now expecting even more from mining operations, especially in their role in the global energy transition and in addressing their historical legacy. Despite its importance, the mining industry faces significant scrutiny due to the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) risks inherent in its operations.

Labor unions and workers, as key stakeholders in mining operations, have a significant interest in how workplace conditions, labor rights, and safety standards are managed. This is particularly important as the industry expands to meet the growing demand for minerals essential to the global energy transition. Current and emerging regulations, along with the expectations

of workers, labor organizations, and mining companies seeking to mitigate risk and maintain a stable workforce, are driving the industry to adopt more transparent and responsible labor practices. By using IRMA's credible system and independent assessments, labor organizations and workers can advocate for their rights, improve working conditions, and ensure greater accountability in the mining industry as it expands to meet the growing demand.

The Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA) provides labor organizations and workers with a credible system for ensuring that mining operations uphold strong labor rights and safety standards, offering transparency and accountability in workplace conditions.

IRMA recognizes the challenges workers and labor organizations face, including inconsistencies in regulatory enforcement, historical gaps in labor protections, and the complexities of operating in high-risk regions. By providing a platform for transparency

“Trade unions should use the [IRMA] standard for responsible mining to address mine site level issues. It’s important for unions to participate in the audit processes and to use the complaint mechanisms provided. This is an important leverage for our mining affiliates in protecting and advancing the rights of their members.

— KEMAL OZKAN, INDUSTRIALL GLOBAL UNION¹

and accountability, IRMA helps bridge these gaps, enabling workers’ voices to be heard. Just as IRMA was co-created by six diverse sectors, it continues to serve as a vital platform for dialogue, facilitating engagement between workers, companies, and other stakeholders. This collaborative approach enables labor organizations to share their perspectives, build mutual understanding, and drive improvements in the workplace.

IRMA Benefits Labor Organizations and Workers

- * **An Equal Seat at the Table:** IRMA is unique in that it was co-created by six diverse sectors, ensuring communities, workers, and NGOs are given an equal voice alongside mining companies, purchasers of mined materials, and finance professionals. As more and more audit reports are released, we are seeing that this system, built by all sectors, has concrete benefits for each one.
- * **Enhanced Worker Protections:** The IRMA Standard for Responsible

Mining incorporates internationally-accepted core labor standards from the International Labor Organization. This includes basic upholding of labor rights, including the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. This emphasis ensures that workers can organize and negotiate for better working conditions. Additionally, IRMA sets best practices that promote proactive workplace safety measures and a more engaged workforce. Through our experience, we have seen that mine sites engaged in IRMA are making significant efforts to improve labor conditions, enhance health and safety standards, and implement corrective actions to address identified gaps.

- * **A Powerful Framework for Advancing the Rights of Mine Workers:** The IRMA Standard was negotiated over a decade and offers a blueprint for workers and organizations to use as they advocate for improved working conditions. The credibility and rigor of the IRMA Standard make it a potential reference for Collective Bargaining

- * Agreements (CBAs). Integrating aspects of the IRMA Standard into CBAs can serve as an additional tool for labor organizations seeking to strengthen worker protections and promote accountability in mining operations.
- * **Independent Audit Results as Tools for Transparency and Labor Rights:** The ability to leverage audit results as leverage in labor negotiations and corporate engagements enhances union bargaining power, ensuring stronger protections for mine workers. This leverage helps labor organizations in addressing mine-level issues, ensuring the protection of labor rights, enhancing workplace safety, and fostering a culture of accountability and continuous improvement within the mining industry.
- * **Worker Participation and Decision-making:** The IRMA system encourages active worker participation in decision-making processes related to workplace safety and operations. This means that labor organizations can leverage these provisions to ensure that workers have a meaningful voice in the policies and practices that affect their daily work lives. By actively involving workers, the IRMA system helps create a safer and more efficient workplace where employees feel valued and heard. CNV International describes this direct engagement as a process of social dialogue. This concept emphasizes open and continuous communication between

workers, unions, and management. Social dialogue is a fundamental component of a healthy workplace, as it fosters mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation. In this regard, the IRMA system, including audits, helps build trust and collaboration.

IRMA's Value Proposition to Labor Organizations and Workers

Engaging in IRMA provides significant benefits that strengthen the ability of labor organizations and workers to secure decent working conditions, safer workplaces, and greater accountability in the mining industry:

- * **Transparency and Accountability:** Through its independent assessment system, IRMA provides workers and labor organizations with access to verified data about workplace conditions, enabling them to hold mining companies accountable. Through independently verified insights into mining operations, reports create a clearer picture of workplace conditions and enable gaps to be identified and addressed.
- * **Strengthened Labor Rights and Workplace Protections:** IRMA's rigorous standards help ensure that mining companies uphold strong labor rights, including fair wages, freedom of association, and collective bargaining (among others). By using the IRMA system, workers and unions gain a tool to achieve improved working conditions.

- * **A Platform for Engagement and Cross-sector Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** As a multi-stakeholder initiative, IRMA provides a unique forum where labor organizations can engage with industry leaders, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to share best practices, address challenges, and collectively shape the future of responsible mining.
- * **Influence on Industry-wide Change:** Just as IRMA enables downstream purchasers to leverage their collective power, unions and workers can use IRMA's framework to align their demands, set industry-wide expectations for responsible labor practices, and drive systemic improvements. By participating in IRMA, labor organizations gain a direct platform to influence industry standards globally.

IRMA is Widely Accepted and Respected for its Credibility

IRMA has established itself as the preeminent standard in the mining industry, consistently outperforming other frameworks in terms of transparency, accountability, and robustness. This recognition is echoed by several leading global organizations and companies.

Mercedes-Benz released a guidance document² for suppliers in late 2023, comparing several mining standards in terms of governance, auditing and transparent reporting. IRMA received the highest score of all standards and the

company has publicly endorsed IRMA as the leading mining standard for its rigorous approach to responsible sourcing.

Germanwatch has recognised⁴ IRMA's inclusive governance model, which ensures that the voices of all stakeholders — including communities, workers, and civil society organizations — are represented in the standard-setting process.

Lead the Charge, an NGO coalition advocating for sustainable practices in the electric vehicle and battery sectors, has cited IRMA⁵ as the most robust standard for ensuring that raw materials are sourced responsibly. The coalition emphasizes that IRMA's focus on continuous improvement and long-term risk mitigation is crucial for the sustainable growth of these industries.

IRMA is Rapidly Scaling Globally Across All Minerals

IRMA's growing influence in the mining industry is reflected in its expanding adoption. Currently, over 100 mining companies are formally engaged in the IRMA system, representing hundreds of sites worldwide.

Companies that align with IRMA are not only better positioned to meet the demands of regulators, customers, and investors, but are also leading the way in building a more sustainable and equitable mining industry.

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Aggregates	Kyanite	Rare Earths
Barite	Lanthanum	Rhodium
Bauxite	Lead	Ruthenium
Cerium	Limestone	Samarium
Chromite	Lithium	Sand
Chromium	Magnesium	Selenium
Coal (metallurgical)	Mica	Silver
Cobalt	Mineral sands	Staurolite
Copper	Molybdenum	Sulphur
Diamonds	Monazite sand	Talc
Europium	Neodymium	Tantalum
Feldspar	Nickel	Tellurium
Gadolinium	Osmium	Titanium
Gold	Palladium	Tourmaline
Graphite	Praseodymium	Vanadium
Iridium	Platinum	Xenotime
Iron	Potash	Zinc
	Quartz	Zircon

IRMA is Both Practical and Achievable

Widely-recognized for being the most robust and rigorous standard system available, IRMA is absolutely achievable. The vast majority of audited mines assessed to date met more than 75% of the standard as a whole, and in 25 of the 26 chapters in the Standard, there has been at least one site achieving a score of 90% or more.

IRMA's assurance process does more than verify responsible mining. It actively strengthens the role of labor by creating a credible platform for worker voice, transparency, and accountability. It ensures that labor rights and safety are protected and central to how mining performance is assessed and improved. Through meaningful participation, workers become key actors in driving continuous improvement and shaping a mining sector that reduces harm and leaves positive legacies.

IRMA is Here to Help

IRMA offers labor organizations dedicated support to help them understand and effectively engage with the IRMA system. These sessions provide labor organizations with an in-depth understanding of IRMA's standards, covering its robust requirements and the detailed audit process.

Please reach out to IRMA's Labor Sector Lead at info@responsiblemining.net for an introductory meeting.

Notes

1. <https://www.industrialunion.org/new-standard-for-responsible-mining-released>
2. <https://group.mercedes-benz.com/responsibility/sustainability/supplychains/risk-raw-materials.html>
3. https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/germanwatch_an_examination_of_industry_standards_in_the_raw_materials_sector_2022-09.pdf
4. <https://leadthecharge.org/wpcontent/uploads/2024/02/LeadTheCharge-Assessment-06022024.pdf>