

Social Aspects of Remediation of Uranium Mining Legacy Sites in Portugal

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Portugal has a high geological, geotectonic and geodynamic diversity which generated particular conditions concerning its geological resources and a relevant mining legacy as a result of the post-industrial revolution period where mining activity grew and assumed a strong expression in Portugal. In result of this situation, a significant number of legacy mining sites can be found spread all over Portugal. Given the environmental hazards associated with many of these legacy mines, the Portuguese Government has committed itself for its environmental remediation, and in 2001, entrusted to EDM – Empresa de Desenvolvimento Mineiro, SA, a state-owned company, the responsibility for the recovery of all legacy mining sites under a concession contract approved by the Decree-Law nº 198-A/2001. EDM is responsible for the environmental remediation of 199 legacy mining sites identified in Portugal, 62 of which in radioactive minerals and 114 in polymetallic sulphides.

EDM defined the strategy for the environmental remediation of the legacy mining sites, and started with the inventory and detailed baseline characterization and the prioritization of environmental remediation projects on the basis of technical and scientific analysis.

Social license plays an important role in uranium mining and milling process and, although the benefits of the environmental remediation of legacy sites are undeniable, social acceptance of the remediation should be taken into consideration during the whole process. In Portugal, EDM adopted a set of measures to ensure stakeholders engagement since the early phases of the process and to contribute to obtaining the social license for the remediation and ultimately for the acceptance and future use and preservation of the reclaimed sites.

By 2018, remediation of 103 mining areas has been completed out of a total of 199 and 7 are with ongoing remediation works. In regard to radioactive mines 40 of a total of 62 have been remediated and 6 are with ongoing remediation works.