

## Covid-19 and the Minerals Sector Survey

25 June 2020

The Covid-19 pandemic rapidly affected human activity across the planet. Covid-19 was first reported in December 2019; the World Health Organisation declared it a pandemic on 11 March 2020. Governments responded by enforcing restrictions to prevent the spread of the virus. Measures included closure of non-essential businesses, travel restrictions, border closures, quarantines, social distancing, limits on the number of people who could congregate together, and cancellation of many in-person gatherings. These measures have had significant economic and social impacts.

Some countries deemed mining and mineral exploration to be essential businesses that could remain open. Temporary mine closures were especially common in Latin America and South Africa, but some operations in the U.S., Canada, and elsewhere also reported reduced activity. Mineral exploration was severely affected by travel restrictions. Mineral-sector share prices and base metal prices plummeted in March due to adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated uncertainty in the financial sector but are showing a gradual recovery. Prices for gold and other precious metals were highly volatile in March and April 2020 but reached new highs more recently; share prices of gold mining companies generally recovered quickly in April.

To better understand the immediate impacts of Covid-19 on the mineral exploration and mining workforce, [iCRAG](#) (the Irish Centre for Research in Applied Geosciences) conducted a brief online survey from 23 April to 2 May 2020. The survey was shared among contacts in the minerals sector who were asked about the impacts on their employment, the nature of the impacts, and their level of concern about their job security due to Covid-19 for the remainder of 2020.

The survey fortuitously captured data just before many parts of the world began to reopen after a nearly global lockdown. Thus, the results capture the opinions of individuals at the height of the response to the initial pandemic.

### Results of the Survey

iCRAG received a total of 1007 useable responses from people whose current or most recent employment spanned 55 countries.

**Covid-19 had a significant impact on work in the minerals sector within seven weeks of the declaration of the pandemic.**

*65% of respondents agreed (28%) or strongly agreed (37%) that "Covid-19 has already affected my work significantly".*

**Overall, 32% of respondents had experienced negative impacts on their employment, having either lost their jobs, been furloughed/temporarily laid off, or working reduced hours.**

*Geographically, the greatest impact on employment was in Africa, where 45% of respondents suffered negative impacts.*

*Younger people were more likely to lose their jobs (13.6% of 18–30-year-olds) than older people (5.5% of 46–60-year-olds).*

*Older people were more likely to work reduced hours (20.8% of 46–60-year-olds) than younger people (13.2% of 31–45-year-olds and 15.4% of 18–30-year-olds).*

*The mineral exploration sector was most affected (40% suffered negative job impacts). Government employees were least affected but were not immune (10% on reduced hours).*

*The impacts on employment in base metals, industrial metals, and precious metals were broadly similar.*

**The level of concern about job security in 2020 due to the Covid-19 crisis varied, with 35% of respondents being more or very concerned or having already lost their job, 43% having little or no concern, and 22% moderately concerned (marking their concern as 3 on a scale of 1 to 5).**

*Levels of concern for job security were highest in Africa followed by South America, and lowest in Australia.*

*The unemployed were most concerned about their employment in 2020, followed by consultants. Students also showed high levels of concern, with 43% ranking their concern as 3 or higher on the 5-point scale.*

*Older people tended to be somewhat less concerned about job stability than younger people (46% of those over 61 and 45% of those 46–60 years old being not or little concerned vs. 40% of 31–45-year-olds and 42% of those 18–30-years old).*

*Levels of concern were highest in the mineral exploration and lowest in the research and government sectors.*

*Levels of concern were broadly similar across the base metals, industrial metals and precious metals sectors.*

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We would like to thank everyone who responded to the survey and the organisations who helped to distribute and publicise the survey.

A full report on the methodology and results of the survey is available on the iCRAG website: <https://www.icrag-centre.org/news-and-media/covid-19andthemineralssector.html>.<sup>1</sup>

Summary compiled by Maeve A. Boland.

<sup>1</sup> Maeve Boland, Murray Hitzman, Fergus McAuliffe, Lingli Zhou, Aileen Doran, David Kaeter, Aoife Brady, Siobhan Burke, Jennifer Craig, David Drejing-Carroll, Sean Johnson, James Stratford, Subaru Tsuruoka. (22 June 2020). Covid-19 and the Minerals Sector: Survey results. Unpublished iCRAG report. 45p. <https://www.icrag-centre.org/news-and-media/covid-19andthemineralssector.html>.

Email: [info@icrag-centre.org](mailto:info@icrag-centre.org) Website: [www.icrag-centre.org](http://www.icrag-centre.org)