

Critical raw materials: The EU should secure its own supply

- MEPs highlight EU's dependence on imports of resources needed for digital and green transitions
- Materials used for electromobility, renewable energy technologies, electronic and medical devices
- Investments must be made in recycling and secondary raw materials



critical raw materials such as lithium and cobalt are needed, among other reasons, for battery production© Romaset / AdobeStock

To boost an autonomous and sustainable EU supply of materials needed to produce key technologies, MEPs call for diversification, more recycling and domestic sourcing.

Critical raw materials (CRMs) are crucial for producing a broad range of goods and technologies. The transition towards digital, highly energy-efficient and climate-neutral European economies will lead to a significantly higher demand for CRMs. The technologies requiring them, such as batteries and electric engines, will be key to achieving the goals under the Paris Agreement.

Parliament calls for an EU strategy to boost Europe's strategic autonomy and resilience regarding the supply of CRMs, by creating a secondary market for recycled resources containing these materials. Under the Parliament's proposals, more CRMs will have to be sourced from within the EU and its neighbourhood, sources for these materials will need to be diversified, and more research should focus on sustainable alternatives to these scarce materials.

Recycling to play a key role

MEPs say that, in the short- to mid-term, focusing on recycling will not be enough on its own to meet the increasing demand for CRMs. They call for sustainable sourcing possibilities to be explored in CRM-rich member states. Parliament urges member states to make their authorisation processes for prospecting and sourcing projects more time-efficient and transparent, without lowering environmental and social standards.

CRM projects should also get better funding opportunities under the National Recovery Plans and the [Taxonomy Regulation](#). Member states' efforts should be pooled via an [Important Project of Common Interest](#) (IPCEI), MEPs stress.

Waste recycling is crucial, MEPs say, given the significant presence of CRMs in electrical and electronic equipment. The Commission and member states should improve their efforts to properly collect and recycle end-of-life products with CRMs instead of stockpiling them in households and landfills, or incinerating them. Stronger controls of EU exports of key CRM waste products are needed, according to MEPs. A new task force should be set up to coordinate national CRMs activities.

They call on EU member states to consider the strategic stockpiling of CRMs in order to secure their supplies, and say that future EU free trade and partnership agreements should include specific provisions on CRMs.

Quote

"We have a consistent and ambitious package that tackles the urgency of stable and sustainable critical raw materials supply chains while at the same time ensuring Europe's competitiveness and jobs", said lead MEP [Hildegard Bentele](#) (EPP, DE). "All forecasts predict a higher demand for critical raw materials due to the twin transition. We therefore pledge to

enhance our efforts to make full use of the circular economy. However, research shows that these efforts will not be enough, at least in the short- to mid-term. We must therefore build the political framework to enable sustainable mining in Europe and in non-EU countries”, she said.

The report was adopted with 543 votes to 52, with 94 abstentions.

Background

[According to the European Commission](#), the supply of many CRMs is highly concentrated outside the EU, with its main providers being China, Turkey and South Africa (N). The document indicates that the EU may need up to 18 times more lithium and five times more cobalt in 2030 for electric vehicle batteries and energy storage.

The raw materials sector provides around 350.000 jobs in the EU, and more than 30 million in downstream manufacturing industries that depend on it, [according to the European Economic and Social Committee](#). The Commission [estimates](#) that moving towards a more circular economy could bring a net increase of 700.000 jobs in the EU by 2030.

Further information

[Adopted text \(23.11.2021\)](#)

[Steps of the procedure \(2021/2011\(INI\)\)](#)
[Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection](#)

[EP Research - Critical raw materials in EU external policies: Improving access and raising global standards](#)

[Free photos, video and audio material](#)

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