

How can different sectors make use of Earth Observation? The EU-funded project FIRE has gathered user needs through focus group discussions across six key sectors

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FIRE, the industry-led Forum for Innovation and Research in European Earth Observation, has completed a key milestone this week by concluding its first round of focus group discussions on user needs from six key sectors – agriculture, energy, raw materials, infrastructure, marine, and urban spaces. The identified challenges and needs will help in shaping Europe’s Research and Innovation Strategy for Earth Observation.

Earth Observation (EO) provides a major source of data which can be used to monitor our planet, including the land, oceans and atmosphere. The data serves as an input to create insights that can help optimise outputs and minimise negative impact across sectors. Several satellite programmes are in place to provide such data, the largest being the European Copernicus programme. Satellite data has already been adopted and used in many sectors, opening-up niche markets, improving existing technologies’ performance and increasing end user satisfaction. However, uptake of EO usage varies in different sectors due to a number of factors including awareness of benefits, skills, policies, or suitability of existing applications.

Helping to unleash the full potential that EO can bring to society and boosting the productivity, innovation and competitiveness of businesses is FIRE’s main objective. To do so, FIRE has set up a series of sector-driven focus group discussions – enabled by Sector Leads such as: [COPA-COGECA](#) (agriculture), [EIT Raw Materials](#) (raw materials), [Pôle Mer Bretagne Atlantique](#) (marine), [Vital Infrastructure Arena](#) (infrastructure), [SMURBS](#) (urban), and [WindEurope](#) (energy) – to understand and identify the different challenges each sector faces, to exchange on how EO can help tackle these and to gather feedback on where it is currently failing to do so. In each of these focus group discussions, stakeholders from across a sector’s value chain (industry representatives, technology experts, end users, public authorities, etc.) came together to reflect upon the challenges and the needs faced in their sector. Through these discussions, more than 70 participants were also able to learn about the state of play with EO solutions for their sector, enabling them to translate these into their respective environments and eventually influence the Research and Innovation Strategy for Earth Observation solutions in Europe to support the strengthening of their industry capacity.

“The FIRE marine focus group was a great opportunity to look in depth at the data needs of different marine applications and share knowledge on how EO might help. I really liked the interactive working spaces that were created online, which helped foster much more vibrant and directed discussions” said Dr. Hayley Evers-King, marine applications expert at EUMETSAT.

Although nothing can replace a face-to-face discussion, the 2020 pandemic situation demanded something different, therefore a shift was made towards online solutions to facilitate the workshops. A combination of video conferencing with browser-based polling solutions and an online canvas for brainwriting and prioritisation of challenges has been implemented. Avoiding the need to travel eventually enabled more key stakeholders to participate and the online environment solved documentation needs at the same time.

“I was really grateful for the opportunity to meet with other people who are experts in utilising Earth observation technology. In these times of social distancing and isolation it was very nice to meet friendly faces and engage in creative and meaningful work. I am amazed by all the information and the great ideas that were shared today and I truly believe that together we can make a better world” shared Mrs Sigurborg Ósk Haraldsdóttir, Chairperson of the Planning and Transport Committee at Reykjavík City Council who participated in the urban spaces focus group.

The Focus Groups were the starting point of the FIRE initiative, stimulating further discussions for the upcoming FIRE Forum, an open event in Brussels planned for June 2021.

“Although the discussions were held entirely online, we are very happy with the level of engagement and the interactions with all the participants. Despite the pandemic the project is on track to achieve its objectives and we look forward to our next big milestone, the FIRE Forum where we will present all of the results from the Focus Groups.” says Natassa Antoniou, FIRE project coordinator.



During the next two years, the project will further engage sector community representatives and promote the benefits of EO among their sectors. Conclusions from these user-driven activities will ultimately be a major contribution in developing a roadmap and Research and Development strategy for EO to address the needs and challenges of the six FIRE focus sectors and beyond.

About FIRE

FIRE is the first initiative fully dedicated to bringing actors from key commercial sectors together to outline the now and tomorrow of their market and to use these insights to shape a strategic roadmap for the EO downstream sector. FIRE will focus on fostering the development of current and new markets and supporting capacity building activities to realise the EO-enabled benefits. The three-year project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 869634. Its consortium brings together four partners: [EARSC](#) is partnering with SMEs supporting innovation and user uptake ([Evenflow](#) and [Verhaert](#)) and the [National Observatory of Athens](#).

For further information

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