

Title: Unravelling Child Labor in the Cobalt Mining Industry in the Congo Basin.
Side event sponsored by the NGO Mining Working Group in Commemoration of the International Day of the African Child, World Day Against Child Labor, and the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labor
Date: 18/6/2021 Time: 9:00 EST

The [NGO Mining Working Group](#) (MWG) is a coalition of NGOs advocating through the UN system for human and environmental rights related to extractive industries. The MWG addresses unjust and unsustainable extractive practices and policies through the lens of Earth's carrying capacity and the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples. This year, which the UN Secretary-General has declared the [International Year for the Elimination of Child Labor](#), the MWG has taken a particular interest in shining a light on child labor practices in the extractive industry. One epicenter of such practices is the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The DRC is the origin of over half the world's cobalt, a mineral essential for the production of lithium-ion batteries in electric cars, phones, and computers ([Amnesty International](#)). These technological gadgets serve as the foundation of modern global commerce and communication and the future of private transportation. Behind the ubiquitous devices purchased around the world from Apple, Microsoft, Samsung, Tesla, and numerous others, is a labor force that the UNICEF estimates to include over 40,000 children, many of whom are out of school.

At a typical cobalt mine in the DRC, children can work without gloves or masks as they sort cobalt from the soil by hand. This task exposes their skin and lungs to cobalt dust, which the World Health Organization has reported causing long-term health problems. Birth defects are also common in babies born to mining mothers, children whose families' poverty and lack of decent work opportunities are likely to force them into full-time mining work when they are teenagers, if not as soon as they can walk.

Child labor in the extractive sector in the DRC is not limited to cobalt mines. Exploited children can be found trapped in mining operations for coltan, copper, diamonds, gold, tantalum ore, tin ore, and tungsten ore across the country. Despite recent public-private initiatives aimed at curtailing child labor, the lack of labor regulation and enforcement at the source continues to make the phenomenon challenging to trace across supply chains that span the globe. As a result, the use of child labor remains blatantly pervasive in DR Congo's mines.

In this side event, the NGO Mining Working Group will mark the [International Day of the African Child](#) (June 16), [World Day Against Child Labor](#) (June 20), and the [International Year for the Elimination of Child Labor](#) (2021) by leading a frank discussion on the unacceptable reality of child labor. It will feature insights from policy analysts on the difficulties with implementing the mining code in the DRC. The event will also present the perspective of a social work practitioner who has witnessed firsthand the social, psychological, and physical effects of mining labor on children in the country and some of the initiatives aimed at addressing these problems. Panelists will also discuss the relevance of some international frameworks like the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), the [ILO Conventions on Child Labor](#) (No. 138 and No. 132), and the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 8, Target 7) to child labor. Together, discussants will put forth guidance for policymakers and civil society advocates on the pathway to eradicating child labor in the mines of DRC.