

PRESSEMITTEILUNG

Study shows child labour in cobalt mining is still a pressing issue aggravated further by COVID-19, highlights opportunities for companies to improve the situation for affected communities

Berlin, 10 December 2021 – A new ‘on-the-ground’ study from Save the Children Germany and The Centre for Child Rights and Business (The Centre) identifies ongoing child rights risks in informal, or artisanal cobalt mines in the Democratic Republic of The Congo (DRC), and highlights how international companies can adopt a responsible approach to address root causes of child labour.

Cobalt is a key ingredient in lithium-ion batteries used in a vast range of applications, from consumer electronics and smart devices to electric vehicles – as such cobalt is one of the world’s most sought-after minerals and is an essential mineral for the green transition. Approximately 70% of the world’s cobalt is sourced from the DRC.

Save the Children Germany and The Centre’s study [“Opportunities for Businesses to Promote Child Rights in Cobalt Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining”](#) is based on visits to 10 ASM sites in the DRC, input from 207 parent artisanal miners, 209 children from ASM communities and 27 in-depth interviews with local and community stakeholders.

The study finds that children in cobalt ASM communities are facing an education crisis that has worsened in recent years and has been further aggravated by the income shocks of a cobalt price slump and unstable supply chains caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With over 200,000 people reliant on ASM to make a living, the study highlights how disengaging in ASM in supply chains is not a responsible sourcing approach; rather, collaborating with co-operatives, local governments, large-scale mining and other key actors along the supply chain to formalise ASM and engage in community development can have a significant impact on reducing child labour in mines and improving the lives of those making a living from the mining.

The study examines how recent changes and supply chain practices impact child rights risks and how actions of downstream players, such as battery producers, technology and car companies, can function as either risk multipliers or best practices in relation to child rights.

While the fact that child labour is present in ASM is not a new revelation, data from the study shows how limited access to education is one of the key drivers of child labour in the sector. The study finds that the older the children are, the more likely they are to try to balance work with school, hence a significant uptick in the percentage of secondary-school children working. Of those, 90% work to pay for school. On the other hand, for younger children who are out of school, there are very few incentives or support systems in place to help them transition back into the education system after dropping out. The study also found that children in ASM communities suffer from poor psychological health, and many have long-term health issues due to accidents and exposure to air-borne pollutants from the mines.

The study puts forward several recommendations for downstream brands and buyers to address root causes of child labour and to promote child rights in ASM. These include:

- Engage ASM as part of the supply chain to push for formalisation

- Set up a functional child labour remediation system as part of formalisation efforts
- Investment in ASM communities should focus on improving access to education and reduction of school fees
- Formalisation efforts should push economic partnerships between LSM and ASM to improve productivity and safety
- LSM investment in ASM communities to improve the living conditions (infrastructure) should not only be considered as a philanthropic contribution but to be expected as part of a due diligence process

Commenting on the results of the study, Ines Kaempfer, CEO of The Centre for Child Rights and Business and one of the key authors of the study said: “Demand for cobalt to fuel the green energy transition is expected to increase four-fold over the next few years. International companies must accept that ASM is a part of their supply chains, whether directly or indirectly, and action needs to be taken to make sure that workers, children and impacted communities are not the ones who lose out. Too many children’s rights and futures are at stake to turn a blind eye. We believe that the industry actors, from producers to buyers, all have both the responsibility and the opportunity to significantly improve the situation for children in ASM communities within the next few years by working with the local community, CSOs and the government. We hope that this study can help ignite the way forward.”

Both The Centre for Child Rights and Business (The Centre) and Save the Children Germany are working with stakeholders to develop and implement practical on-the-ground solutions to child rights issues in complex supply chain settings while working with a diverse range of actors.

The Centre in collaboration with Save the Children has become a member of the Fair Cobalt Alliance (FCA) to help establish child labour prevention and remediation systems in artisanal mining (ASM) communities. Read more [here](#).

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Note to editors:

The study and accompanying infographic is available in English and German. Please download the studies [here](#).

Download the full English report [here](#).
 Download the German report [here](#).
 Download the English infographic [here](#).

About The Centre for Child Rights and Business (The Centre):

The Centre is a social enterprise that works with companies to promote and respect children's rights in all their operations, with a particular focus on supply chains. The Centre helps businesses understand how and where they impact children and delivers practical solutions and services for mitigating risks and creating positive change.

These services include child labour prevention and remediation, child rights risk assessments, packages to support women, migrant parent workers, young workers and other vulnerable groups, and a comprehensive set of services to create family-friendly workplaces in supply chains. The Centre supports businesses across multiple industry sectors in close to a dozen Asian countries, with staff and projects also located in Africa, Australia, Europe and The Americas. Please visit www.childrights-business.org for more information.

About Save the Children:

Save the Children is the world's leading independent children's organisation. For over 100 years, Save the Children has been fighting for the rights of children worldwide. Save the Children is recognised for its commitment to accountability, innovation and collaboration. As quickly and as effectively as Save the Children responds to tsunamis and civil conflict, it works to resolve the ongoing struggles children face every day — poverty, hunger, illiteracy, child labour and disease — and replaces them with hope for the future. For more information, please visit www.savethechildren.de.