

UNICEF

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

TOPIC: Child Labour in Mining and Global Supply Chains

LANGUAGE: English

Child labour in mining has deep historical roots, dating back to ancient civilizations such as Egypt and Mesopotamia and continuing through pre-colonial Africa, where children participated in resource extraction as part of community survival. While historically linked to subsistence and seasonal work, the practice has evolved into a global issue, now embedded within international supply chains that provide essential minerals for modern industries. Today, the demand for resources such as cobalt, gold, and coltan fuels reliance on complex and opaque networks, making it extremely difficult to trace the true origins of raw materials.

Although many corporations publicly commit to due diligence, few disclose meaningful actions or subject themselves to independent monitoring. This lack of transparency, combined with persistent pressure to minimize production costs, fosters dependence on informal and low-cost labour—often involving children—particularly in countries with weak governance structures.

As a consequence, no major corporation has fully eliminated the risk of child labour in its supply chains. Despite public pledges, many continue to benefit indirectly from exploitative practices. Tackling this issue requires more than corporate statements: it demands stronger legal frameworks, genuine international cooperation, and increased consumer awareness. Above all, progress depends on a united global effort to ensure that supply chains uphold and protect the fundamental rights of children.



LEVEL: Intermediate