

United Nations Children's Fund

BACKGROUND GUIDE FOR DELEGATES

Committee	United Nations Children's Fund
Agenda	Eradicating Child Labour in Critical Mineral Supply Chains Essential for the Global Green Energy Transition
Conference	SCIMUN 2026 · The Eighth Edition
Venue	The Scindia School, Fort Gwalior
Dates	April 10-13, 2026
Theme	Pretia Imperii: The Cost of Power

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C H A P T E R I

Letter from the Executive Board

It gives us immense pleasure to welcome you to SCIMUN'26. We are most looking forward to seeing what you, members of the committee, can bring to the table, both in terms of your ideas in debate and your creativity in crafting solutions.

This Background Guide has been formulated keeping in mind various aspects of the agenda to be discussed in committee. Though it lists out the broad facets of the agenda we would like to see being debated upon, it is NOT exhaustive and further reading on the part of delegates is essential. Under no circumstances can the Background Guide be quoted or used as substantial proof in committee sessions.

Mr. Keshav Khurana, Chairperson · Mr. Aryan Bhagat, Vice Chairperson

C H A P T E R I I**UNICEF**

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is a globally recognised organisation dedicated to promoting and protecting the rights and well-being of children. Established in 1946 in the aftermath of World War II, UNICEF initially provided emergency food and healthcare to children affected by the war. Since then, it has evolved into one of the most influential humanitarian agencies, operating in over 190 countries and territories. UNICEF's mandate is rooted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and its work is guided by the principles of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, survival and development, and child participation.

UNICEF's operations span education, child protection, healthcare, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and emergency relief. One of its primary goals is to ensure that every child has access to quality education, particularly in marginalised and conflict-affected regions. UNICEF also plays a pivotal role in global vaccination campaigns, contributing significantly to reducing child mortality through its partnerships with the World Health Organization and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

Child protection is at the core of UNICEF's mission, addressing child trafficking, exploitation, and violence. Funding is primarily sourced from voluntary contributions by governments, private donors, and corporate partnerships. UNICEF's commitment to innovation and data-driven solutions ensures that it remains a leading force in the global fight for children's rights and well-being.

C H A P T E R I I I

Introduction to the Agenda

The global transition toward a low-carbon economy represents one of the most significant industrial shifts in human history, predicated on the rapid replacement of fossil fuels with renewable energy technologies. This 'Green Industrial Revolution' is not merely a technological challenge but a geopolitical and ethical one, as the infrastructure of the future — comprising electric vehicles, solar arrays, and wind turbines — relies fundamentally on a specific suite of critical minerals. Elements such as cobalt, lithium, nickel, copper, and rare earth elements have become the strategic commodities of the 21st century.

However, as demand for these minerals accelerates, a profound humanitarian crisis is deepening at the extraction sites. The reliance on artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) in mineral-rich but economically fragile regions has led to a resurgence of child labour, creating a paradox where the environmental salvation of the Global North is frequently achieved at the cost of the fundamental rights and physical safety of children in the Global South.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) underscores that critical mineral supply chains cannot be truly secure, reliable, or resilient unless they are sustainable and responsible. Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) risks, if unaddressed, do not merely represent moral failings but practical bottlenecks that can disrupt global supply and halt the rapid scale-up of clean energy technologies.

According to the latest joint ILO-UNICEF estimates, nearly 138 million children were engaged in child labour in 2024, including about 54 million in hazardous work likely to jeopardise their health and development. Mining and manufacturing fall under the 'industry' category, which represents around 13% of all child labour globally, but these sectors often involve some of the worst forms of child labour due to toxic exposure, cave-ins, and extreme physical risks.

As the world pursues a 'green' transition, the legitimacy of that transition is questioned if it is powered by the exploitation of children in mining communities. This is the core tension that UNICEF delegates must address: how to support urgent climate action and clean energy expansion, while ensuring that critical mineral supply chains are free of child labour and respect children's rights.

CHAPTER IV

Global Overview of Child Labour and Mining

| Scale and Trends

The ILO-UNICEF global estimates show that in 2020, about 160 million children aged 5-17 were in child labour, including 79 million in hazardous work. While overall numbers had fallen since 2000, progress stalled between 2016 and 2020 and then reversed briefly; the newest estimates show modest improvements but still 138 million children in child labour in 2024. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence and absolute number of children in child labour.

Most child labour (around 61%) occurs in agriculture, followed by services (27%) and industry (13%) which includes mining. Within industry, mining is small in numbers but severe in risk: children often work underground in narrow tunnels, carry heavy loads, and are exposed to toxic dust and chemicals.

| Child Labour in Mineral Supply Chains

Child labour has been documented in various mineral sectors that feed into global manufacturing and, increasingly, into green technologies:

- Cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and parts of Zambia
- Mica in India and Madagascar, used in electronics and automotive components
- Gold and other metals in small-scale mining globally (some of which support electronics and clean energy infrastructure)
- Lithium operations in South America's 'Lithium Triangle' (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile) — with child labour risks in associated services and informal activities

These sectors are often characterised by informality, poverty, weak state oversight, and complex, opaque supply chains in which minerals pass through multiple traders and processing hubs before reaching manufacturers of electric vehicles and renewable energy technologies.

UNCTAD has highlighted that developing countries supplying raw materials for electric car batteries often bear disproportionate environmental and social costs, while receiving limited value-added benefits from downstream manufacturing. In many producing regions, children are at the centre of this imbalance — working in mines, suffering from pollution, or losing access to education and safe environments.

CHAPTER V

Health, Development, and Environmental Impacts on Children

| Physical Health Risks

Child miners face severe physical health risks: respiratory diseases from dust (cobalt, mica, silica), heavy-metal poisoning, musculoskeletal injuries, eye damage, and high accident rates from tunnel collapses and rock falls. Long-term exposure to cobalt dust in DRC and mica dust in India/Madagascar has been linked to chronic lung disease, skin problems, and reduced life expectancy. Beyond those directly working, children in mining communities are exposed to contaminated air, soil, and water, increasing rates of diarrhoeal disease, malnutrition, and birth defects.

| Gendered Harms

Girls in mining areas are often less visible because they work in 'hidden' roles — sorting ore, washing minerals, carrying water, doing unpaid domestic work in mining camps — yet they may face equal or greater health risks from dust, chemicals, and heavy loads. They are also at heightened risk of early marriage, transactional sex, and sexual violence around mine sites, especially in conflict-affected or highly informal settings. These gendered harms reduce girls' school completion rates, reinforce discriminatory norms, and increase adolescent pregnancy.

| Educational and Psychological Consequences

Time spent mining crowds out schooling: in many mining zones, children either drop out completely or juggle long work hours with irregular attendance, leading to poor learning outcomes and high repetition rates. The ILO-UNICEF estimates underline that child labour and hazardous work are strongly correlated with lower educational attainment, which perpetuates intergenerational poverty. Hazardous, traumatic, and exploitative conditions also have psychological consequences — anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, and normalised violence — that affect children's social development and future life chances.

| Environmental and Cultural Impacts

Critical mineral extraction can degrade land, pollute rivers, and deplete scarce water resources, undermining agriculture and pastoralism that many families rely on. As crops fail or livestock die, households become more dependent on mining income, which in turn increases pressure to involve children in mining work, creating a vicious cycle. In the Lithium Triangle, Indigenous communities report loss of sacred wetlands, reduced access to traditional grazing lands, and inadequate consultation, which erodes cultural practices and Indigenous children's right to their culture and identity.

CHAPTER VI

Why Children End Up in Critical Mineral Supply Chains

1. Poverty and lack of livelihood options: In countries like the DRC, India, Madagascar, and many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, mining communities face chronic poverty. Families depend on every family member, including children, to supplement income. Studies in DRC's cobalt sector note that up to 87.8% of miners enter artisanal mining due to economic desperation.
2. Corporate demand and opaque supply chains: Downstream companies in technology, automotive, and renewable energy sectors have historically lacked visibility into lower-tier suppliers. A landmark joint ILO/OECD/IOM/UNICEF report found that between 9-26% of child labour and 4-17% of trafficking for forced labour is linked to global exports through supply chains, not only domestic markets.
3. Lack of access to quality education and social protection: Where schools are far, low-quality, or fee-charging, children may drop out or never enrol. The ILO notes that lack of free basic education and social protection is closely linked to child labour.

CHAPTER VII

Case Studies

| Cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The DRC holds over 50-70% of the world's cobalt reserves and currently produces about three-quarters of global cobalt supply. Cobalt from DRC is essential for lithium-ion batteries in EVs, smartphones, and renewable energy systems. An estimated tens of thousands of children work in cobalt mining, many in ASM sites in provinces like Haut-Katanga and Lualaba; some estimates point to around 40,000 children involved, including very young children. Children dig, carry ore, wash minerals, and transport loads, often for as little as a few dollars a day, without protective equipment. International initiatives, such as the Alliance 8.7-linked GALAB project backed by the U.S. Department of Labor, aim to provide monitoring and remediation services for over 6,200 identified child workers in DRC's cobalt sector.

| Mica in India and Madagascar

Mica is a shiny, heat-resistant mineral used widely in electronics, automotive components, paints, and cosmetics — appearing in thousands of parts of a single car or electronic device. India and Madagascar are leading exporters of sheet mica. Research in India's Jharkhand and Bihar states estimated around 22,000 children working in mica mines, many in illegal, unregulated shafts prone to collapse. In Madagascar, estimates suggest around 10,000 children work in the mica sector, and children can make up half of the workforce in some mines. Children and adults work without safety gear, often inhaling mica dust that can cause lung diseases such as silicosis. In response, NGOs and companies created initiatives like the Responsible Mica Initiative.

| Lithium in the 'Lithium Triangle' (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile)

The high Andean salt flats across the ABC countries contain around 50% of identified global lithium resources. Lithium extraction has generated environmental and human rights concerns: depletion of scarce water resources, damage to wetlands, and inadequate consultation and benefit-sharing with Indigenous communities. While direct evidence of large-scale child labour in lithium extraction is more limited than in cobalt or mica, children are affected indirectly through loss of livelihoods, environmental degradation, and participation in ancillary informal work and services around mining operations.

C H A P T E R V I I I

UN and UNICEF Action to Date

| Alliance 8.7 and Global Supply Chains

Alliance 8.7 is a global multi-stakeholder partnership — involving ILO, UNICEF, OECD, IOM, and others — dedicated to ending child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking by 2030. An Alliance-linked report, 'Ending child labour, forced labour and human trafficking in global supply chains', provides the first global estimates of these abuses linked specifically to supply chains and highlights sectors like mining. The Alliance 8.7 Supply Chains Action Group focuses on sectors such as cocoa, coffee, cotton, fishing, and mining.

| UNICEF's Child Rights and Mining Work

UNICEF has developed a Child Rights and Mining Toolkit to help mining companies integrate children's rights into impact assessments, stakeholder engagement, resettlement policies, environmental management, health and safety, working conditions, and social investment. This builds on the Children's Rights and Business Principles, developed by UNICEF, the UN Global Compact, and Save the Children, which guide companies on respecting and supporting children's rights in their operations and value chains.

C H A P T E R I X

Policy Recommendations

- **Formalisation of Artisanal Mining (ASM):** Rather than disengaging from high-risk areas — which can worsen poverty — stakeholders should support the formalisation of ASM. This involves registering miners, improving safety, and establishing 'child-labour-free zones' in cooperation with local authorities.
- **Alternative Livelihoods and Education:** Addressing root causes requires tackling poverty through community development, offering economic alternatives for families, and improving access to quality education, particularly in regions like the DRC where cobalt mining is prevalent.
- **Regulatory Enforcement and Collaboration:** Governments must strengthen labour laws and inspectorate capacity to monitor mines, while international bodies promote collaboration between mining companies, NGOs, and local communities to ensure fair, ethical extraction.
- **Gender-Sensitive Policies:** Because child labour is often linked to the low wages of parents, promoting fair pay and family-friendly policies is essential, especially for women in mining communities.
- **Strengthened Due Diligence and Traceability:** Companies must map supply chains, identify risks, and enforce the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Mineral Supply Chains. This includes auditing suppliers, implementing blockchain, and fostering transparent, traceable sourcing.

CHAPTER X

The Executive Board

CHAIRPERSON

Mr. Keshav Khurana

Pursuing a Bachelor of Journalism and Mass Communication at GGSIPU Delhi. His observational skills and practical understanding of on-ground issues enrich his perspective on global affairs, child rights, and development policy.

VICE CHAIRPERSON

Mr. Aryan Bhagat

'True leadership in diplomacy lies not in the volume of one's voice, but in the clarity of one's vision.' Deeply engaged with child rights, development frameworks, and institutional accountability. Characterised by composure, fairness, and procedural discipline.

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This Background Guide is a starting point for research — not an exhaustive account, and not a document that may be cited or used as evidence in committee. Delegates are expected to undertake independent research, verify facts through primary sources, and develop well-researched national positions. The quality of preparation will directly shape the depth and direction of debate.

The United Nations Children's Fund at SCIMUN 2026 is designed not merely to test knowledge of the agenda but to develop the capacity for reasoned argument, diplomatic sensitivity, and genuine engagement with the issues at hand. Arrive prepared. Argue with precision. Negotiate with principle.

SUGGESTED READING

- https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2019/11/child-labour_07b38f93/f6883e26-en.pdf
- https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/ILO_C_182.pdf
- <https://www.unicef.cn/en/documents/child-rights-and-mining-toolkit>
- <https://unctad.org/news/developing-countries-pay-environmental-cost-electric-car-batteries>

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