

# The slaves of Tech

Dorsen is 8 years old and she works 12 hours a day to extract cobalt from our smartphones and computers.

*Ial. March 13th, 2017.*

A shocking video shows children working in the cobalt mines of the Democratic Republic of **Congo**. For their work they receive €0.09 per day.



Children as young as 4 years old are working in the mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo where cobalt is mined for our smartphones and electric cars, warns a Sky News investigation, whose team visited several Congolese mining operations and came across a "legion of children" working in each of them.

Many of the workers who mine this ore —an essential component of smartphone and laptop batteries from brands such as **Apple** and **Samsung**— receive only €0.09 a day for hard work done in dangerous conditions.

In one of the mines, the team found children working without shoes in the pouring rain, carrying heavy bags.

One of the children, Dorsen, 8, told reporters that she has not been able to get enough money in the last two days to eat, despite working about 12 hours a day.

"There are thousands of unofficial, unregulated and uncontrolled mines where men, women and children work in conditions that can only be described as slavery," said Alex Crawford, special correspondent for Sky News.

"Every day when I wake up, I feel so bad that I have to go back to the mine. My whole body hurts," said Richard, 11, a friend of Dorsen's. "I feel like a slave. At another mine, reporters saw a four-year-old girl separating cobalt stones.

Tunnels in mines are dug with rudimentary tools by miners without protective equipment. With the rain and the lack of supports, these tunnels often collapse. In one of the mines visited by the team, the collapse of a tunnel had recently claimed a victim among the miners.

Workers do not wear masks or gloves, although the World Health Organization warns that exposure to cobalt and its vapours can lead to long-term health problems.

One of the miners, Makumba Mateba, believes that the tumour in his throat is due to contamination

of his village's water by cobalt mining. "We drink the water that comes from the mines, after all the minerals have been washed out," he says. "It passes through our village and I drink it, and I'm sure that's what made me sick.

Becha Gibu, the doctor of one of the patients, complains that the babies he helped to be born have mysterious illnesses. "They are born with many infections, sometimes with rashes, sometimes their bodies are covered with spots," he says, adding that "it's all a consequence of mining".

Despite being one of the poorest countries in the world, the Democratic Republic of Congo is rich in mineral resources and produces 60 per cent of the world's cobalt.

One fifth of this cobalt is mined by hand or by artisanal miners and sold, for the most part, to Chinese traders, who seek the best price and do not question the origin of the ore or the identity of the person who mined it.

In return, the traders sell it mainly to **Congo Dongfang International**, a subsidiary of **Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt**, a supplier to most of the world's major battery manufacturers.

In 2016, Amnesty International discovered that **no country legally requires companies to identify their cobalt supply chains**, making it easy for them to evade prosecution.

#children #children-s-work #congo #human-rights #slavery #tech