



Responsible mining  
**Gold**

Fact sheet based on SOMO report:  
**Gold from Children's hands**  
April 2016



## What is the problem?

Artisanal gold mining is extremely dangerous; miners go underground without proper safety measures into mines that are often not safe; there have been numerous reports of mines collapsing, killing adults and children working inside. Mines can lack ventilation, suffocating adults and children at work. The dust can cause lung diseases, not only for miners but also for children working in the vicinity of mineshafts. Children are not only involved in the actual mining of soil that contains ore, but also participate in tasks such as pulling up sacks which are carried to a processing area, crushing and grinding soil, washing or panning gold. All of this is often physical, strenuous labour. They might use highly toxic materials such as mercury to separate the gold from all other material. Children can also be found doing other chores near mining sites, such as selling water or cooking and selling food. According to the International Labour Organization, gold mining is one of the worst forms of child labour.

## Mercury poisoning

In artisanal and small-scale gold mining, mercury is often used to separate gold from other materials. When burned, the mercury in the gold-mercury amalgam evaporates, leaving just the gold. Although this is an effective method to extract gold, the poisonous nature of mercury also makes it a highly dangerous one. Studies show that mercury can damage the digestive, immune and nervous systems, as well as the lungs and kidneys. Such damage can be fatal, and children are known to be more vulnerable to mercury poisoning than adults.

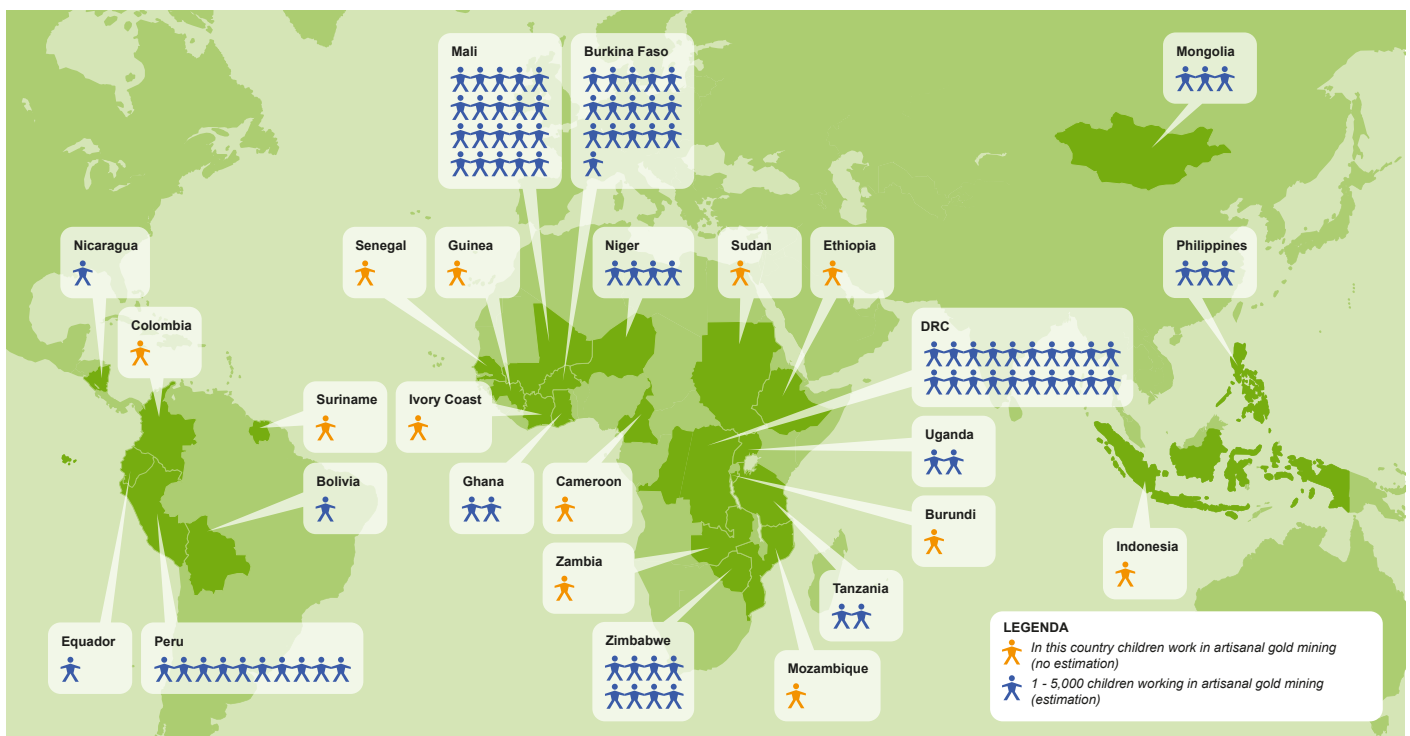
## Gold and electronics companies

Artisanal gold produced with the involvement of children ends up in the electronics supply chain. Although child labour is rampant in gold mining, and despite the fact that the working conditions can be very harmful to children, the electronics industry currently has no mechanisms to ensure child labour does not occur in the mining phase of its supply chain.

Many electronics companies have accepted the Electronic Industry Citizenship Coalition (EICC) code or have specified their own code of conduct, all of which describe the labour, human rights and environmental conditions for all products in the supply chains of these companies. The codes are intended to cascade down the production chain, each tier imposing conditions on the next tier, up to and including the minerals. Efforts so far, though, have concentrated on the first production tier, in several instances the second or even third tier. The codes of conducts of companies – all of which include, without exception, a ban on child labour – do not however reach the mining sites. Nor are any efforts taken by electronics companies to combat child labour in artisanal gold mines.

The electronics industry is the third largest user of gold, mostly for printed circuit boards and electrical connectors. On average, a smartphone contains 30 mg of gold. Against a price of €33,096 per kg this small amount of gold used in a smartphone is already worth almost €1 for each phone. In 2014 1.9 billion mobile phones were sold worldwide of which more than 1.2 billion units were smartphones. The more than 1.2 billion smartphones alone contain 37,347 kgs of gold.

## Child labour in artisanal gold mining worldwide - an estimated 1 million children in total



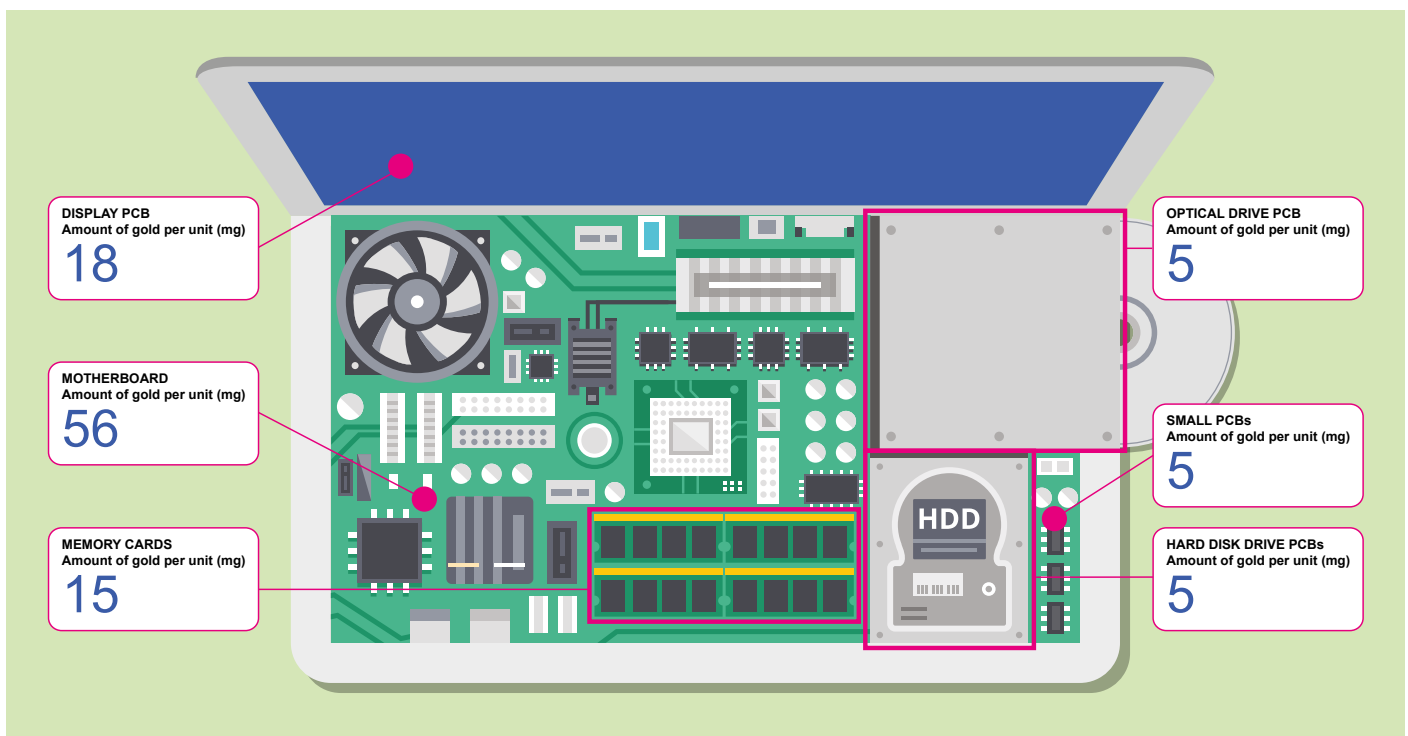
## International framework for responsible business conduct

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) set clear standards for business enterprises to respect human rights, conduct human rights due diligence and implement measures to prevent, address and redress any human rights violations. The principles stipulate human rights due diligence, and what companies should do to identify and assess any actual or potential adverse human rights impacts, through their own activities or as a result of their business relationships. Part and parcel of improvements at artisanal mining sites are measures that are focused on ensuring internationally accepted labour rights as defined by the ILO and by the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas. Apart from eliminating child labour, these are: ensuring safe working conditions, banning forced and compulsory labour; any forms of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment; other gross human rights violations and abuses such as widespread sexual violence; and accompanying measures focused on reaching a stable family income as well as sustainable communities.

## OECD Conflict Due Diligence Guidance

The Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) has developed Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. These guidelines form the basis for the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas. This guidance is to help companies conduct conflict due diligence and provides a roadmap to help companies avoid contributing to conflict through their mineral purchasing practices. The guidance includes supplements on tin, tungsten, tantalum, as well as a supplement on gold, which outlines the recommended steps companies should take to identify and respond to risks in these particular supply chains.

### Amount of gold in printed circuit boards in a laptop (mg)



## What can electronics companies do?

It remains impossible for brand companies to tell exactly where the gold in a specific phone, laptop or washing machine comes from, or whether child labour was involved in making it. There are, however, possibilities for change. Current transparency efforts on conflict-free minerals offer an interesting starting point of disclosure. The close relationship between a substantial amount of brands and component manufacturers, and joint sustainability efforts – both current and past– open up possibilities that could pan out further.

Policies and practices should aim to eliminate child labour in gold mining, but should not be directed at eliminating artisanal gold mining. Artisanal gold mining provides income for 10-15 million artisanal miners and their families and communities, so eliminating this form of livelihood would have an enormous impact. It is important to take measures that will make the elimination of child labour an integral part of all efforts to improve overall artisanal mining and labour conditions for (adult) workers. It is crucial to involve local organisations and initiatives in both risk assessment and remediation efforts.

Electronics companies should acknowledge that their responsibility also applies to the mining phase, including the (artisanal) mining of gold.

Companies should stimulate and support their suppliers to engage in prevention and implement effective remediation measures, engaging with actors in the supply chain, as well as other local actors, to work towards progressive improvement in artisanal and small scale mining.

Companies could join in-region programmes or initiatives together with their suppliers and local stakeholders in order to improve the situation in mining regions, including working conditions in artisanal mining.

Industry organisations in the electronics sector should stimulate learning and knowledge exchange around sustainability efforts in gold mining, and request continuous improvements from their members in this respect.

## More information

- OECD Guidance: Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas, 2013
- SOMO report: Gold from children's hands, November 2015
- Profundo: Options for sustainability – strategic gold chain assessment. Report prepared for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 2015
- Berne Declaration: A golden racket. The true source of Switzerland's "Togolese" gold, September 2015

## Colophon

### Responsible mining: Gold

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The GoodElectronics Network brings together trade unions, grass roots organisations, campaigning and research organisations, academia, and activists who are concerned about human rights, labour rights, and sustainability issues in the global electronics supply chain. GoodElectronics sees it as its mission to contribute to improving corporate and public policies and practices with regard to protecting and respecting human rights and the environment in the global electronics supply chain, with a specific focus on big brand companies.

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