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## “Every child has the right to education”

Stefanie Schock



**Jugend Eine Welt** helps disadvantaged children and adolescents and supports education and street children worldwide. Stefanie Schock, ESG analyst with Erste AM interviewed Reinhard Heiserer of *Jugend Eine Welt* on the topic of child labour.

**Schock:** Mr. Heiserer, what is the goal of *Jugend Eine Welt*, and how do you operate?

**Heiserer:** On the basis of the motto “Education overcomes poverty”, *Jugend Eine Welt* supports education and training initiatives for disadvantaged children and adolescents in the global South. We cooperate with the Don Bosco Centres, which have an active network in more than 130 countries across the world. They manage the projects locally.

**Schock:** What relationship has your association to the issue of child labour?

**Heiserer:** We clearly focus on education and the support of children and often also their families. Our main fight is against abusive child labour and for its termination. Even in countries that offer free primary school education, many children from poor families leave school before graduating in order to earn a living for themselves and their families. It is our goal to help those children go to school who would normally not have access to education due to poverty or other social hindrances.

**Schock:** With regard to aid projects – what countries do you perceive as the most problematic ones in terms of child labour, and how do you operate in those countries?

**Heiserer:** Exploitative child labour has been on the decline in recent years. India in particular has made a lot of progress, where laws protecting minors are now implemented more consistently than before. Still, the problem remains a substantial one. An issue often kept quiet is child labour in the form of human trafficking and prostitution. This one is on the rise and often happens in secrecy, at worst even within the family. For example, we cooperate with a rehabilitation centre on the Philippines where traumatised girls can get help. A situation that makes minors susceptible to forced prostitution and human trafficking is flight and migration. Many underage refugees simply disappear and are forced to work as prostitutes and experience massive forms of abuse. Child labour also constitutes a big problem in the field of raw materials and their production for electronic devices in Africa. Here, *Jugend Eine Welt* supports a project in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where children working in a coltan mine can get help.

**Schock:** Do companies also play a role in aid projects, and if so, which ones?

**Heiserer:** Without the support from companies many projects administered by *Jugend Eine Welt* would not be possible. We lobby intensively in order for more companies to get involved, because such initiatives come with a signalling effect.

**Schock:** How affordable is school education in such countries?

**Heiserer:** In lots of countries poor families cannot afford to send their children to school – even if they are free or affordable per se. The costs for school material, transport, and sometimes school uniforms come on top. In addition, the children are then unavailable to help at home, on the field, or to get water. In order to give such children a chance as well, many *Jugend Eine Welt*-partners offer afternoon classes to ensure that working children can keep up.

**Schock:** Child labour is often important for the financial survival of families. Are there any initiatives that support families financially?

**Heiserer:** For children without means, access to Don Bosco schools is free or made affordable. In rural Congo, for example, the meals can be paid for in kind. This way the children receive at least a meal a day, which helps families. In some projects, the families of the children attending school also receive support: for example, they can participate in training initiatives; many of them are aimed at the empowerment of women. This enables families to achieve higher income.

**Schock:** What options do companies have to rule out illegal child labour in their production process and how massive is the pressure on companies in this respect?

**Heiserer:** The public lacks the awareness of the fact that child labour is involved in many products. This means that unfortunately the pressure is not as strong as it would need to be. Here, people need to be made aware especially of the conditions under which the raw materials for electronics are produced and that this production often involves child labour. *Jugend Eine Welt* often initiates and supports such campaigns, for example “Make chocolate fair” or the “clean clothes” campaign.

**Schock: Is the labelling and verification of “child labour-free” products sufficient, and how credible are these labels?**

**Heiserer:** *Jugend Eine Welt* is one of the bodies responsible for FAIRTRADE Austria. Labelling fair products is very important. Everybody can contribute to the decline of child labour by buying fair products that come with the guarantee of not containing child labour. In order to exterminate child labour in the long run, children and adolescents have to be given the opportunity to graduate from school and to learn a profession. Otherwise the vicious circle of poverty and child labour is perpetuated. Every child has the right to education – this is a big concern to *Jugend Eine Welt*.

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