

# Copper Mining in Zambia:

## Assessment of Business Climate at the Regional Level



### Project Description

*Copper Mining in Zambia: Assessment of Business Climate at the Regional Level* is a World Bank Group's project that adapts the Subnational Business Ready methodology to the copper mining sector. The project has developed a comprehensive quantitative dataset, producing new primary data on the regulatory and administrative processes faced by **artisanal, small, and large companies** operating in Zambia's formal mining sector. The project analyzes regional business climate, focusing on regulatory requirements, public services, and procedures for obtaining exploration and mining licenses. It covers both established firms and new entrants, centered on active copper mines and stakeholders in the Copperbelt and North-Western provinces.

Findings are structured around the three pillars: regulatory framework, public services, and process efficiency. By mapping administrative procedures and identifying bottlenecks, the project highlights and addresses obstacles to industry growth and broader private sector development. This brief presents only a glimpse of the findings from the forthcoming report.

### Regulatory Framework

Zambia's mining sector is governed by a comprehensive regulatory framework currently undergoing major reforms. In June 2025, the Minerals Regulation Commission Act of 2024 (MRCA) replaced the Mines



and Minerals Development Act of 2015 (MMDA) as the sector's primary legislation. The MRCA established the independent Minerals Regulation Commission (the Commission), which now oversees regulatory activities previously performed by the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Development, and replaces the former Mining Licensing Committee (MLC) to improve regulatory oversight and streamline licensing. The Environmental Management Amendment Act of 2023 further strengthens environmental governance and promotes sustainable resource management.

However, the transition has created uncertainty: although the MRCA is in force, full implementation is delayed due to the Commission not being formally established and the absence of implementation regulations (General Regulations). As a result, the MLC continues to process license applications without legal authority. Additional reform came with the Geological Minerals Development Act of 2025, which sets out a framework for geological mapping, mineral exploration, and development.

## Public Services

Legislative reforms are part of Zambia's broader push to modernize its mining sector and enhance public services. Key initiatives include the Zambia Integrated Mining Information System (ZIMIS), a nationwide geophysical survey, and the Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Fund to support smaller mining operators. Despite progress, challenges remain in meeting international standards for digitization, inclusiveness, and transparency.

Digitizing license applications via the Mining Cadaster Portal is a positive step, but the system is not fully functional, with frequent technical issues affecting registration, submissions, payments, and reporting. Users often need multiple attempts or direct contact with Cadaster officers. ZIMIS, launched in early 2025 to streamline licensing and inter-agency collaboration, was discontinued soon after due to technical issues.

A major constraint is the limited and outdated geological data: only 55% of Zambia is geologically mapped. In August 2024, the government began a nationwide high-resolution aerial geophysical survey to support mineral exploration, but much of the country's mineral potential remains unexplored. Expanding public geoscience data and adopting modern sampling techniques are urgently needed to assess resources, detect hazards, and locate groundwater—essential for sustainable development and responsible resource management.

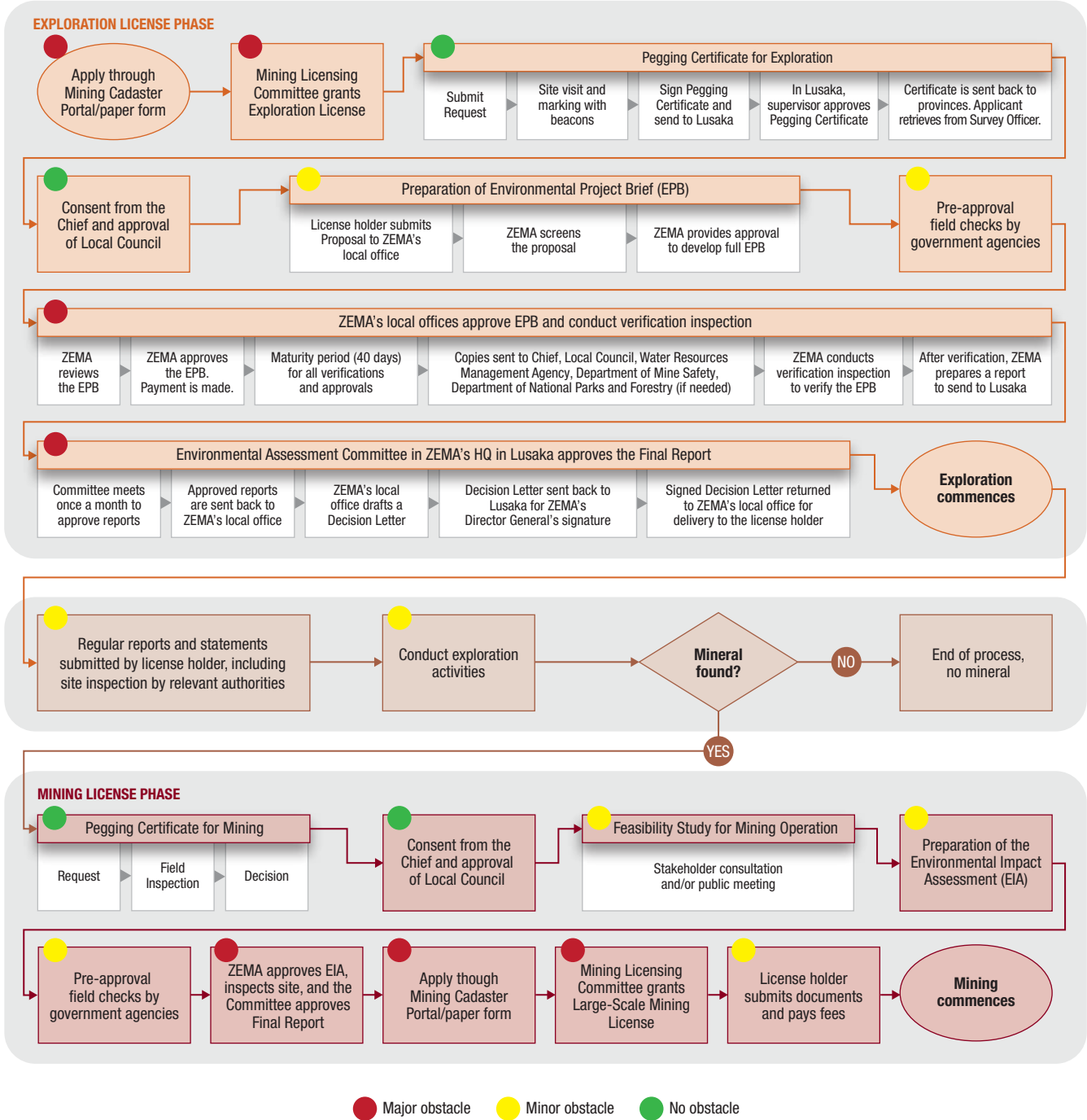
## Efficiency of Processes for Obtaining Exploration and Mining Licenses

Copper production in Zambia is dominated by large-scale mining operations with the resources and expertise for industrial-scale exploration and extraction. Securing a large-scale exploration and mining license involves a complex, multi-stage process requiring extensive documentation and coordination with multiple government agencies (Figure 1).

Applications must be submitted both online via the Mining Cadaster Portal and in hard copy. The Cadaster Department of the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Development conducts an initial review, after which qualifying applications are forwarded to the MLC for further evaluation. Key steps include obtaining a pegging certificate, preparing an Environmental Project Brief (EPB), conducting a Feasibility Study, and completing an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Only after fulfilling these requirements is a mining license issued to the exploration license holder.

Obtaining exploration and mining licenses in Zambia is often slow and inefficient (Figure 2). Applicants typically wait 68 days in Copperbelt Province and up to 248 days in North-Western Province for a decision from the MLC. While exploration licenses are usually issued within two to three months, delays can result from application backlogs and the timing of monthly MLC meetings.

**Figure 1: Necessary steps to obtain exploration and mining licenses for large-scale mines**

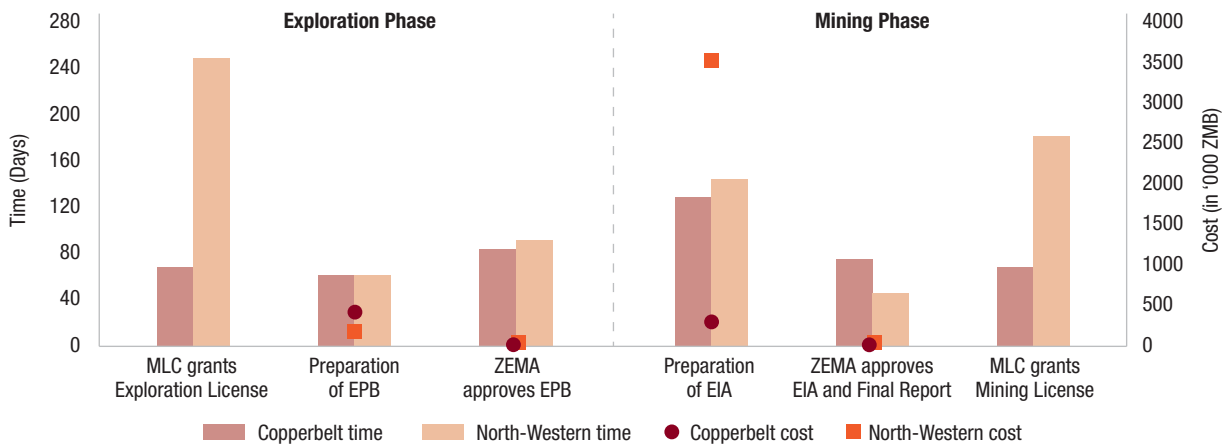


Source: Regulatory Efficiency Unit, The World Bank

Preparing and approving the EPB and the EIA are additional hurdles. EPB preparation takes about 60 days and costs ZMW 175,000 in North-Western province and ZMW 400,000 in Copperbelt province. Approval by the Zambian Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA)

involves 11 steps. Drafting the EIA costs ZMW 300,000 in Copperbelt province and nearly ZMW 3,500,000 in North-Western province. The MLC's decision on mining licenses ranges from 68 days in Copperbelt province to 180 days in North-Western province.

**Figure 2: Major obstacles in the process of obtaining exploration and mining licenses**



Source: Regulatory Efficiency, The World Bank

Note: MLC - Mining Licensing Committee, EPB - Environmental Project Brief, ZEMA - Zambia Environmental Management Agency, EIA - Environmental Impact Assessment; only substantial costs are shown.

## Main Bottlenecks and Recommendations to Improve Granting Licenses in Zambia

This assessment identified key challenges in Zambia’s regulatory framework, public services, and process ef-

iciency for granting exploration and mining licenses. Decisive policy action is needed from lawmakers and regulators to address these issues. Table 1 summarizes the main obstacles and provides short- and medium-term recommendations to help resolve current challenges in the mining sector.

**Table 1: Comparative exhibit of major challenges and accompanying recommendations**

Challenges	Recommendations
<p><b>Legal uncertainty:</b> The Minerals Regulation Commission Act (MRCA) came into effect without full implementation; the absence of a formally established Minerals Regulation Commission and supporting regulations has created legal ambiguity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accelerate the transition of the Mining Licensing Committee to the new Minerals Regulation Commission by conducting meetings on as needed rather than monthly basis.</li> <li>Enact regulations implementing the MRCA to eliminate legal and regulatory uncertainty.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cadaster:</b> Although the Mining Cadaster Portal has been digitalized, applications must be still submitted in both electronic and paper formats.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance the electronic functionality of the Mining Cadaster Portal to fully enable online applications and approval of licenses.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Administrative bottlenecks:</b> Agencies such as the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) have complex procedures, requiring 11 steps to approve and deliver environmental documents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce administrative bottlenecks by streamlining agency processes to improve coordination and expedite delivery of environmental documents.</li> <li>Simplify workflows and eliminate redundant steps to issue exploration and mining licenses. Specifically, remove unnecessary procedures, such as sending an approved EPB report to the ZEMA local office to draft a Decision Letter, and authorizing the Environmental Assessment Committee at ZEMA’s headquarters to draft a Decision Letter prior to Director General’s signature.</li> </ul>

## Acknowledgment

The project was led by the Regulatory Efficiency (DECRE) team in the Development Economics Global Indicators Department, in close collaboration with the World Bank Group’s Zambia Country Management Unit, the East Africa team in the Finance, Competitiveness, and Innovation practice, and colleagues from the Extractives Global Unit and Institutions Global Department.

The team is grateful to the Ministry of Mines and Minerals Development, Business Review Regulatory Agency, Zambia Environmental Management Agency, Zambia Development Agency, and the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprise Development for their support.

For further information please contact Valentina Saltane at [vsaltane@worldbank.org](mailto:vsaltane@worldbank.org).