

Quarterly Road Safety Briefing

Q1 2026, 01 January to 31 March

About this briefing

This is the first edition of the ZRST Quarterly Road Safety Briefing. It is written for the people whose decisions move the numbers: policymakers, regulators, fleet operators, employers, insurers, development partners, researchers and the media.

The numbers in this document come from the Zambia Police Service Q1 2026 road traffic accident press statement, issued on 15 April 2026 (Zambia Police Service, 2026). Multi-year context draws on peer-reviewed research, earlier Zambia Police Service releases, RTSA reports and global Safe System guidance (Road Transport and Safety Agency, 2020; World Health Organization, 2023).

A note on data completeness: a three-source capture-recapture study in Lusaka estimated police-record completeness at 19 per cent, while combining police, hospital and civil registration sources raised completeness to 37 per cent (Mwale, Mwangilwa, Kakoma, & Iyach, 2023). The official figures should therefore be read as the recorded minimum, not the full public health burden.

Section	
01	Executive summary
02	The Q1 2026 numbers
03	What the evidence tells us
04	Four failures behind the numbers
05	Business and fleet implications
06	Policy and institutional observations
07	Priority recommendations
08	ZRST perspective and conclusion
09	References

01 · Executive Summary

The Zambia Police Service published its Q1 2026 road traffic figures on 15 April 2026. Total accidents rose 10.9 per cent against Q1 2025. Fatal crashes rose 28.5 per cent. Deaths rose 36.7 per cent (Zambia Police Service, 2026).

Deaths rose nearly four times faster than crashes. That divergence does not simply say Zambia is driving more. It says that when people crashed this quarter, they were more likely to die than they would have been twelve months earlier.

Indicator	Q1 2026
Total accidents	9,772
Fatal accidents	527
People killed	681
Serious injuries	1,674
Child casualties	363
Children killed	52

Source: Zambia Police Service Q1 2026 road traffic accident press statement, issued 15 April 2026.

Child casualties are central to the quarter. Fifty-two of the 681 people killed were children. Another 131 children were seriously injured and 180 sustained minor injuries. The Zambia Police Service records that most of the 363 child casualties were pedestrians or passengers. They were not behind the wheel.

The enforcement question is equally serious. Recorded offences rose 32.1 per cent, while fines collected rose only 3.6 per cent. Either fines are too small to change behaviour, or most recorded offences never turn into paid fines. Both possibilities point to a deterrence failure.

Priority actions for Q2 2026

No.	Q2 priority action
01	Restore real traffic enforcement and publish what it produces. A 32.1 per cent rise in recorded offences against a 3.6 per cent rise in fines collected is a deterrence failure.
02	Prioritise the roads and corridors that are killing people. Lusaka accounts for 53.6 per cent of all recorded accidents.
03	Treat child road safety as a national protection issue. Fifty-two children died in 90 days.
04	Make fleet safety a corporate governance requirement. Employers cannot outsource road risk.
05	Link police, hospital and civil registration data so the country can see the real road death burden.

The recommended response is practical, not rhetorical. It needs visible enforcement, safer corridors, school-zone action, stronger fleet governance, better crash data and better post-crash response.

02 · The Q1 2026 Numbers

Every figure in this section is drawn from the Zambia Police Service Q1 2026 press statement, issued on 15 April 2026 (Zambia Police Service, 2026).

Indicator	Q1 2025	Q1 2026	Change
Total accidents	8,809	9,772	+10.9%
Fatal accidents	410	527	+28.5%
Fatalities (deaths)	498	681	+36.7%
Serious accidents	832	891	+7.1%
Serious injuries	1,550	1,674	+8.0%
Slight accidents	1,814	2,006	+10.6%

Source: Zambia Police Service Q1 2026 road traffic accident press statement, issued 15 April 2026.

Provincial distribution and child casualties

Lusaka Province recorded 5,241 accidents, representing 53.6 per cent of the national total. No other single province was above 13 per cent.

Province	Recorded accidents	Share of national total
Lusaka	5,241	53.6%
Copperbelt	1,194	12.2%
Central	896	9.2%
North-Western	571	5.8%
Southern	526	5.4%
Muchinga	368	3.8%
Eastern	337	3.4%
Luapula	250	2.6%
Northern	202	2.1%
Western	187	1.9%

Source: Zambia Police Service Q1 2026 road traffic accident press statement, issued 15 April 2026.

Child casualty indicator	Q1 2026
Children killed	52
Children seriously injured	131
Children slightly injured	180
Total child casualties	363

The Zambia Police Service statement notes that most child casualties were pedestrians or passengers. This puts school-zone safety, passenger protection, public transport safety and child pedestrian infrastructure at the centre of the Q2 response.

03 · What the evidence tells us

The Q1 2026 data is shaped by the same causes the Zambia Police Service has cited for a decade: over-speeding, poor judgement of distance, failure to keep nearside and improper overtaking. None of that is new. What is new is how much more lethal the same behaviour became.

01. Deaths rose faster than crashes

8,809 accidents produced 498 deaths in Q1 2025. 9,772 accidents produced 681 deaths in Q1 2026. If the road environment, vehicle stock, response system and driver behaviour had held constant, the two numbers would move together. They did not.

02. Lusaka is more than half the national count

Lusaka Province recorded 53.6 per cent of all accidents in Q1 2026. ZRST's iRAP star-rating work has shown that Lusaka's highest-risk corridors sit at one or two stars when a three-star minimum would be appropriate for the traffic mix. ZRST programme monitoring has shown that speed compliance on school approaches can move from below 20 per cent to above 90 per cent where the right intervention set is applied. These programme figures should be retained as internal ZRST monitoring data for audit and partner due diligence.

03. Enforcement volume rose, enforcement effect did not

A 32.1 per cent rise in recorded offences with a 3.6 per cent rise in fines collected suggests either that fine levels are too low to change behaviour or that a large share of recorded offences never converts into a paid fine. Both imply the same practical consequence: a deterrence failure.

04. The data system still undercounts the problem

681 deaths in Q1 2026 is what the Zambia Police Service recorded. Capture-recapture evidence from Lusaka Province suggests police records cover only a fraction of actual road deaths (Mwale et al., 2023). Until Zambia's police, hospital and civil registration systems are linked and routinely reconciled, the country is making road safety policy against a partial picture.

Key takeaway

Q1 2026 is not evidence of a new road safety problem. It is evidence that known road safety problems are producing more severe outcomes.

04 · Four Failures Behind the Numbers

Four system failures. Four institutional owners.

Post-crash care gap

The gap between the rise in crashes and the rise in deaths is the clearest signal that Zambia's post-crash response needs attention. When a seriously injured casualty arrives at a functioning trauma unit within the first hour, survival outcomes improve. When ambulance reach is slow, when the nearest facility lacks trauma capability, outcomes collapse. The Ministry of Health belongs at the centre of the road safety response, not at the end of it.

Deterrence gap

The Q1 2026 offence-to-fine pattern suggests that Zambia has enforcement activity without sufficient enforcement consequence. Deterrence requires visible enforcement, a fine schedule that imposes a real cost on dangerous behaviour, and a collection pipeline that actually converts offences into paid penalties.

Safe System framing gap

The Zambia Police Service statement attributes most accidents to human error. Each cause is real at the moment of crash. The framing, however, stops short of the policy question: why do those errors keep producing deaths at this rate, year after year? Human error is predictable. The job of the road system is to ensure that when error happens, no one dies.

Child road safety accountability gap

Fifty-two children died on Zambian roads in 90 days. The Zambia Police Service statement notes that most child casualties were pedestrians or passengers. They were not drivers. School siting, school-zone speed, passenger protection, school transport oversight and local enforcement are institutional issues, not child behaviour issues.

“Roads do not kill. Decisions do. But a system that puts all responsibility for life and death on individual decisions, without changing the environment those decisions happen in, will keep producing these results.”

05 · Business and Fleet Implications

A 36.7 per cent rise in deaths is not an externality the employer sector can outsource.

Q1 2026 puts road safety squarely on the corporate agenda. It is a direct cost centre across insurance, logistics, workforce health and reputation. The United Federation of Employers of Zambia recognised this in February 2026 when it called for government to declare road traffic accidents a national emergency.

Duty of care

An employee travelling on company business, whether in a company vehicle, a contracted vehicle or a public service vehicle, is exposed to the Q1 2026 crash profile. Duty of care liability is increasingly connected to occupational health and safety, ISO 39001, ESG reporting and human rights disclosure expectations.

Fleet downtime

Every fatal or serious crash produces a chain of operational costs: vehicle write-off, driver unavailability, cargo loss, insurance excess, investigation time and reputational fallout.

Insurance exposure

Higher claim frequency and higher crash severity lead to higher premiums, tighter underwriting and possible coverage restrictions. Fleets with documented safety management systems are better positioned to negotiate.

Supply chain and corridor risk

Zambia sits on critical Southern African corridors for copper, agriculture, fuel and cross-border freight. Lusaka-Copperbelt, Lusaka-Kafue, the Great North Road and the Great East Road are arteries of economic activity. Road safety is therefore a supply-chain governance issue.

What to do in Q2 2026

Corporate boards and fleet operators should commission a duty-of-care review of all employee road use, adopt or refresh a written road safety policy, install telematics with active speed and fatigue monitoring, apply for independent fleet safety certification and commit to measurable annual reductions in crash frequency.

06 · Policy and Institutional Observations

Activity is up. Consequence is not.

Offered constructively, in the Safe System spirit of shared responsibility.

Observation area	What Q1 2026 reveals
Inter-agency coordination	Q1 2026 saw decisions taken by different arms of government that affect road safety outcomes. A standing, empowered national road safety coordination mechanism remains the missing institutional piece.
Enforcement performance	The Q1 2026 offence-to-fine conversion tells the story: activity is up, consequence is not. Restoring a full enforcement regime means visible deterrence, a fine schedule that imposes a real cost on dangerous driving, and a conversion pipeline that makes fines collectible.
Infrastructure policy	Infrastructure decisions directly determine crash lethality. Safe walking, cycling, school zones and corridor design must be mainstreamed, not treated as optional add-ons.
Data quality	Police, hospital and civil registration data should be routinely linked and reconciled to make policy against the real burden, not a partial picture.

07 · Priority Recommendations for Q2 2026

Stakeholder-specific, time-bound, drawn from the Q1 evidence.

Stakeholder	Q2 2026 recommendation
Minister of Transport and Logistics	Convene a National Road Safety Summit before 30 June 2026, anchored in Q1 2026 evidence, with clear institutional responsibilities and publicly tracked commitments.
RTSA and Zambia Police Service	Publish offence-to-fine conversion information, intensify speed enforcement on high-risk corridors and improve public reporting on enforcement outcomes.
Lusaka City Council and local authorities	Enforce existing 30 km/h school-zone by-laws, publish quarterly compliance data and prioritise corridor-level iRAP star-rating assessments for the highest-casualty routes.
Ministry of Health	Treat post-crash care as a road safety priority, with trauma referral, ambulance response and emergency care capacity included in the national response.
Corporate boards and fleet operators	Adopt a written road safety policy, review duty-of-care exposure, monitor speed and fatigue, and apply independent fleet safety standards.
Schools and Ministry of Education	Prioritise safe school zones, school transport standards and child pedestrian protection in all education planning.

08 · ZRST Perspective

681 deaths. 1,674 serious injuries. 52 dead children.

Q1 2026 is the worst quarterly road safety record in recent Zambian history. A 36.7 per cent rise in road deaths against the same quarter last year is not noise in the data. The national response is failing the people who depend on it.

Each of those numbers was a person, and each measures a distance: the distance between what Zambia already knows about road safety, and what it chooses to fund, enforce and implement.

Responsibility for this quarter's toll is shared. It is not shared equally. Road users carry the decisions made immediately before a crash. Governments, road authorities, regulators, enforcement agencies, insurers and employers carry the decisions that determine what happens when a crash occurs: whether there is a crossing, whether the speed is survivable, whether an ambulance arrives in time.

“The economy grows through people. Road deaths are a preventable national loss, and the cost of delay is measured in lives.”

The Q2 2026 question is whether Zambia's response will differ from the one that followed Q1 2025. ZRST believes it can. The data is severe enough to justify the shift, and the institutional partners and technical base to make it happen are available. What is missing is the decision to move at the speed the numbers demand.

09 · Conclusion

What Q1 2026 demands of Q2.

Q1 2026 produced 681 road deaths on Zambian roads in 90 days. Against Q1 2025, deaths rose 36.7 per cent while accidents rose 10.9 per cent. Fifty-two children died. Fines collected went up 3.6 per cent while recorded offences went up 32.1 per cent. Lusaka Province alone accounted for 53.6 per cent of the national accident total.

None of these numbers are estimates. None are modelling outputs. They are the Zambia Police Service's own figures, published on 15 April 2026. They describe a road safety system under stress at the point where prevention, enforcement and post-crash response meet.

ZRST will publish the Q2 2026 briefing in July. By then, Zambia will know whether the Q1 evidence triggered a national response, or whether Q2 tracked the same trajectory.

10 · About ZRST and Partners

The Zambia Road Safety Trust is a registered Zambian non-governmental organisation working to prevent road deaths and serious injuries in Zambia. ZRST operates across policy engagement, road safety evidence, school-zone safety, speed management, non-motorised transport, corporate and fleet safety, public education, post-crash care advocacy and implementation partnerships.

Programme work includes Safe School Corridors, the Arrive Alive Campaign, the Lusaka Pedestrian and Cycling Policy, 30 km/h school-zone by-laws advocacy and the ZRST Traffic Safety Institute.

Area	Reference
Registration	NGO No. 101/0503/2015
Funding and research context	EU Horizon TransSAFE Grant Agreement No. 101069525
Research collaboration	University of Zambia (UNZA)
Primary briefing source	Zambia Police Service Q1 2026 road traffic accident press statement, 15 April 2026
Economic context	UNDP Zambia Road Safety Investment Case 2023, Ministry of Health, RTSA and RTI International

For policy, research, media or corporate road safety enquiries

Email: info@zambianroadsafety.org | Phone: +260 961 475 610 | Website: www.zambianroadsafety.org

References

- Mwale, M., Mwangilwa, K., Kakoma, E., & Iyach, K. (2023). Estimation of the completeness of road traffic mortality data in Zambia using a three source capture recapture method. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 186, 107048. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2023.107048>
- Road Transport and Safety Agency. (2020). *Road Transport and Safety Status Report 2020*. Lusaka: Road Transport and Safety Agency.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2023). *Road Safety in Zambia: Investment Case*. Lusaka: UNDP Zambia.
- United Nations Road Safety Collaboration. (2021). *Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030*. Geneva: World Health Organization.
- World Health Organization. (2023). *Global status report on road safety 2023*. Geneva: World Health Organization.
- Zambia Police Service. (2026). Q1 2026 road traffic accident press statement. Issued 15 April 2026. Lusaka: Zambia Police Service.
- Zambia Road Safety Trust. (2026). ZRST programme records and monitoring data on school-zone safety, speed compliance, iRAP star-rating work and corridor observations. Lusaka: Zambia Road Safety Trust. Internal records, figures to be verified before external citation.