

Copper, cobalt and the metals of the energy transition

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Central and southern Africa supply a significant share of the world's copper and cobalt, with the Democratic Republic of the Congo dominating the production of cobalt, which is indispensable for batteries, and occupying, together with Zambia, the leading African positions for copper.¹ These metals are extracted by international mining groups, some of which are also traders, such as Glencore, and by artisanal operations, and are then traded on to the smelters and manufacturers of Asia and Europe.

The trade in African metals has given rise to emblematic cases. The conviction of Glencore in Switzerland, in August 2024, concerned the acquisition of shareholdings in two Congolese mining companies by a business partner who had bribed public officials, as Part H described.² The conditions of artisanal cobalt mining, in particular child labour, have been the subject of investigations and legal proceedings. They fall within the scope of the due diligence obligations of the Code of Obligations.³

The energy transition increases the importance of these metals and, with it, the importance of Africa for the Geneva trading business. Demand for copper, cobalt, lithium, manganese and graphite, of which the continent holds considerable reserves, is expected to grow strongly, which opens up prospects for traders and imposes on the producing countries choices concerning local processing, taxation and governance. Part K will return to this dimension.

1 Notes

1. Democratic Republic of the Congo: around 74% of the world's cobalt in 2025 (makanisi.org, 8 March 2026, cited above) and second largest copper producer in the world with 3.4 million tonnes in 2025, behind Chile ("La RDC toujours 2ème producteur mondial de cuivre en 2025")

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(The DRC still the world's second largest copper producer in 2025), makanisi.org, 5 March 2026). ↩

2. Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland, press release of 5 August 2024, [admin.ch](https://www.admin.ch). ↩
3. Amnesty International, “This is what we die for”: Human rights abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo power the global trade in cobalt, January 2016 (AFR 62/3183/2016); Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, “Lawsuit against Apple, Google, Tesla, and others (re child labour, DRC)”: complaint filed on 15 December 2019 by International Rights Advocates on behalf of 14 families against Apple, Alphabet, Dell, Microsoft and Tesla on the basis of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, dismissed by the District Court for the District of Columbia on 2 November 2021 and by the Court of Appeals on 6 March 2024 (no participation in a “venture” within the meaning of the Act). ↩

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