

Country Profile: Lesotho

Commonly known as the mountain kingdom, Lesotho is completely surrounded by South Africa.

HISTORY

South Africa has on several occasions intervened in Lesotho's politics, including in 1998 when it sent its troops to help suppress unrest. The former British protectorate has had a turbulent period of independence with several parties, army factions and the royal family competing for power in coups and mutinies. The position of king has been reduced to a symbolic and unifying role. Over decades, thousands of workers have been forced by the lack of job opportunities to find work at South African mines.

RECENT SITUATION

The Kingdom of Lesotho is made up mostly of highlands where many of the villages can be reached only on horseback, by foot or light aircraft. Much of the country remains untouched by modern machines, however, developers have laid down roads to reach its mineral and water resources. Resources are scarce - a consequence of the harsh environment of the highland plateau and limited agricultural space in the lowlands. Major construction work has been under way in recent years to create the Lesotho Highlands Water Project to supply South Africa with fresh water. Lesotho is completely surrounded by South Africa, and as a consequence has laden it with a heavy dependence.

Lesotho has one of the world's highest rates of HIV-AIDS infection. A drive to encourage people to take HIV tests was spurred on by Prime Minister Mosisili, who was tested in public in 2004. Poverty is deep and widespread, with the UN describing 40% of the population as "ultra-poor". Food output has been hit as many farmers have died from AIDS. Economic concerns have been multiplied by the scrapping of a global textile quota system which exposed producers to Asian competition. Thousands of jobs in the industry have been lost. Every year about 200 000 people don't have enough food and from September 2007 it was estimated that 553 000 people are likely to face acute food shortages.

FACTS

- **Full name:** The Kingdom of Lesotho
- **Population:** 2 Million (UN 2007)
- **Capital:** Maseru
- **Area:** 30,355 sq km (11,720 sq miles)
- **Internet domain:** .Is
- **International dialling code:** +266
- **Major religion:** Christianity
- **Major languages:** Sesotho, English

- **HDI value*¹:** 138. Lesotho (0.549) [1. Iceland (0.968)] (2005)
- **Human Poverty Index (HPI-1)*²:** 38. Lesotho (34.5) [1. Chad (56.9)] (2005)

- **Life expectancy at birth (years) :** 42.6
- **Probability of not surviving past 40 (%):** 47.8%
- **Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births):** 132 (2005)
- **HIV prevalence (% aged 15-49):** 23.2 (2007)



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Education

- **Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%):**
 - 115. Lesotho (66.0) [1. Australia (113.0)] (2005)
- **Adult Literacy Rate: (% ages 15 and older):**
 - 84. Lesotho (82.2) [1. Georgia (100.0)] (2005)

Economy and Trade

- **GDP per capita:** No. of people lived below the national poverty line. (PPP US\$):
 - 120. Lesotho (3,335) [1. Luxembourg (60,228)] (2005)
- **GNI Per Capita:** US \$960 (World Bank, 2006)
- **Gini Coefficient** *³: 2. Lesotho (63.2) World's 2nd Largest. [126. Denmark (24.7)] (2007)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 loti (L) = 100 lisente
- **Main exports:** Clothing, wool, mohair, food, livestock
- **CO₂ emissions share of world total (%):** n/a

Water, sanitation and nutritional status

- **People without access to an improved water source (%):** 21
- **Population using improved sanitation (%):** 37 (2004) [37 (1990)]
- **Population Undernourished (% of total population):** 13 (2002-2004) [17 (1990-1992)]

Politics

- **Head of state:** King Letsie III
- **Government:** Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD)
- **Prime Minister:** Bethuel Pakalitha Mosisili
 - The LCD won elections in Feb 2007, taking 61 of the 80 constituencies and heralding a 3rd term. The LCD campaigned to increase pensions and expand free education.
- **Year women received right to vote:** 1965
- **Internally displaced people (thousands, 2006):** n/a



*¹ The HDI provides a composite measure of three dimensions of human development: living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), being educated (measured by adult literacy and enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary level) and having a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity, PPP, income).

*² The Human Poverty Index for developing countries (HPI-1), focuses on the proportion of people below a threshold level in the same dimensions of human development as the HDI.

*³ The **Gini coefficient** is most prominently used as a measure of inequality of wealth distribution. A value of 0 represents absolute equality, and a value of 100 absolute inequality.

*⁴ Rankings are out of a total of 177.

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