

Country Profile: Swaziland

The kingdom of Swaziland is one of the world's last remaining absolute monarchies.

HISTORY

Its king rules by decree over his million subjects, most of whom live in the countryside and follow traditional ways of life. The power of the throne, however, has not gone unchallenged. King Mswati III, on the throne since 1986, is upholding the tradition of his father, King Sobhuza II, who reigned for almost 61 years. King Sobhuza removed the constitution in 1973 and banned political parties. King Mswati has shown no enthusiasm for sharing power, but banned opposition parties and trade unions have been vocal in their demands for greater democracy and limits on the king's power.

RECENT SITUATION

With peaceful change in neighbouring South Africa and Mozambique, Swaziland has been described as an island of dictatorship in a sea of democracy. Royalists have argued that democracy creates division, and that a monarch is a strong unifying force. A long-awaited constitution, signed by the king in 2005 and introduced in 2006, cemented his rule. Swaziland is virtually homogenous, most of the population being of the same tribe. Economically, it relies on South Africa, which receives almost half of Swazi exports and supplies most of its imports. Many Swazis live in chronic poverty and food shortages are widespread. Aids is taking a heavy toll with more than 40% of the population believed infected with HIV. The virus has killed many workers and farmers and has created thousands of orphans. Life expectancy has plummeted. Thousands have lost their jobs as garment and sugar export industries have lost trading concessions. Swaziland has diplomatic ties with Taiwan rather than China.

FACTS

- **Full name:** The Kingdom of Swaziland
- **Population:** 1.1 Million (UN 2007)
- **Capital:** Mbabane
- **Area:** 17,364 sq km (6,704 sq miles)
- **Internet domain:** .sz
- **International dialling code:** +268
- **Major religion:** Christianity
- **Major languages:** SiSwati, English (both official)
- **HDI value*¹:** 142. Swaziland (0.572) [1. Norway (0.971)] (2009)
- **Human Poverty Index (HPI-1)*²:** 142. Swaziland (35.1) [21. UK] (2007)
- **Life expectancy at birth (years) :** 40 (UNICEF 2007)
- **Probability of not surviving past 40 (%):** 48
- **Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births):** 91 (UNICEF 2007)
- **HIV prevalence rate (% aged 15-49):** 26.1 (UNICEF 2007)



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Education

- **Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%):**
 - **133. Swaziland (59.8)** [1. Australia (113.0)] (2005)
- **Adult Literacy Rate: (% ages 15 and older): 80** (UNICEF 2007)

Economy and Trade

- **GDP per capita:** No. of people lived below the national poverty line. (PPP US\$):
 - **104. Swaziland (4,824)** [1. Luxembourg (60,228)] (2005)
- **GNI Per Capita:** **US \$4,960** (World Bank, 2005)
- **Gini Coefficient *³:** **24. Swaziland (50.4)** [126. Denmark (24.7)] (2007)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Lilangeni = 100 cents
- **Main exports:** Sugar, wood pulp, minerals
- **CO₂ emissions share of world total (%): 0.0 (2004)** [n/a (1990)]

Water, sanitation and nutritional status

- **Population without access to an improved water source (%): 40** (UNICEF 2006)
- **Population using improved sanitation (%): 50 (2006)** [n/a (1990)]
- **Population Undernourished (% of total population): 22 (2002-2004)** 14 [(1990-1992)]

Politics

- **King:** King Mswati III
 - on the throne since 1986 - rules by decree and says the country is not yet ready for multi-party politics
- **Year Women received right to vote:** **1968**
- **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.