



# Lesotho

## KEY FACTS

**Joined Commonwealth:** 1966

**Population:** 2,074,000 (2013)

**GDP p.c. growth:** 2.8% p.a. 1990–2013

**UN HDI 2014:** World ranking 162

**Official languages:** Sesotho, English

**Time:** GMT plus 2 hrs

**Currency:** Loti, plural maloti (M)

## Geography

**Area:** 30,355 sq km

**Coastline:** none

**Capital:** Maseru

The Kingdom of Lesotho is a small landlocked country entirely surrounded by South Africa. It is known as the 'Mountain Kingdom', the whole country being over 1,000 metres in altitude. The country's lowest point of 1,400 metres above sea level is the highest lowest point of any country in the world. It has relatively very little forest, covering only one per cent of the land area.

Lesotho is divided into ten districts, each named after the principal town: Berea, Butha Buthe, Leribe, Mafeteng, Maseru, Mohale's Hoek, Mokhotlong, Qacha's Nek, Quthing and Thaba-Tseka.

**Topography:** Lesotho has two main mountain ranges – the Drakensberg and the Maloti ranges – both running north–south from the northern high plateau. The highest mountain in southern Africa is Thabana Ntlenyana (3,842 metres) in eastern Lesotho. The land descends to the west to an arable belt, known as the lowlands, where the capital is situated and two-thirds of the population live. The country is well-watered in a generally dry region, the Orange River and its tributary the Caledon both rising in Lesotho.

**Climate:** The climate is temperate with well-marked seasons. The rainy season (receiving 85 per cent of total precipitation) is October to April, when there are frequent violent thunderstorms. Rainfall averages 746 mm p.a. Temperatures in the lowlands range from 32.2°C to -6.7°C; the range is much greater in the mountains. From May–September, snow falls in the highlands with heavy frosts occurring in the lowlands.

**Environment:** The most significant issue is overgrazing, resulting in severe soil erosion and desertification.

**Vegetation:** Mainly grassland and bushveld, with forest in ravines and on the windward slopes of mountains. Forest covers one per cent of the land area and arable land comprises nine per cent. Forest cover increased at 0.5 per cent p.a. 1990–2010.

**Wildlife:** The Drakensberg Mountains are the last stronghold in southern Africa of the huge bearded vulture, the lammergeier. Large mammals have largely been eradicated by stock farming, and indigenous ground-living species are now restricted to small antelope, hares and the mountain-dwelling rock-rabbit (dassie).

**Main towns:** Maseru (capital, pop. 178,345 in 2011), Teyateyaneng (61,578), Maputsoa (48,243), Mafeteng (30,602), Butha Buthe (30,115), Mohale's Hoek (25,308), Hlotse (18,840), Quthing (14,177), Qacha's Nek (9,417) and Mokhotlong (8,784).

**Transport:** There are 5,940 km of roads, 18 per cent paved. South African Railways runs a short freight line into Lesotho, terminating at the Maseru industrial estate. The international airport, Moshoeshe I Airport, lies 20 km south of Maseru; there are 31 airstrips around the country for domestic flights.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2013

**Population per sq km:** 68

**Life expectancy:** 49 years

**Net primary enrolment:** 82%

**Population:** 2,074,000 (2013); 26 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 1.1 per cent p.a. 1990–2013; birth rate 27 per 1,000 people (43 in 1970); life expectancy 49 years (49 in 1970 and 59 in 1990).

The people are mostly Basotho, with a few thousand expatriate Europeans and several hundred Asians.

**Language:** Sesotho and English are official languages; Zulu and Xhosa are also spoken.

**Religion:** Mainly Christians (Roman Catholics 56 per cent, and Lesotho Evangelicals and Anglicans 24 per cent); the rest hold traditional beliefs, which often coexist with Christianity (2006 census).



**Health:** Public spending on health was nine per cent of GDP in 2012. Some 81 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 30 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2012). Infant mortality was 73 per 1,000 live births in 2013 (137 in 1960). Lesotho is vulnerable to AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; a high proportion of young men work in other countries with serious AIDS problems. In 2013, 23 per cent of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

**Education:** Public spending on education was 13 per cent of GDP in 2008. Primary school comprises seven years and secondary five, with cycles of three and two years. Some 66 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2010). The school year starts in March.

Higher education institutions include National University of Lesotho; Lesotho Institute of Public Administration and Management; Lesotho College of Education; Lerotholi Polytechnic; and Lesotho Agricultural College. Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 92 per cent (2010).

**Media:** There are several independent weekly newspapers in English, including *Lesotho Times*, *Public Eye* and *Sunday Express*, and *Makatolle* and *MoAfrica* in Sesotho.

Radio is the most important source of information. Public broadcasters Radio Lesotho and Lesotho Television provide national services. There are several private commercial and faith radio stations. South African radio and TV are received in Lesotho.

Some 13 per cent of households have TV sets (2006). There are three personal computers per 1,000 people (2005).

**Communications:** Country code 266; internet domain '.ls'. Mobile phone coverage is confined to the main towns.

There are internet cafes in Maseru. Post office branches can be found in all the main cities.

For every 1,000 people there are 28 landlines, 863 mobile phone subscriptions and 50 internet users (2013).

**Public holidays:** New Year's Day, Moshoeshoe's Day (12 March), Workers' Day (1 May), Africa/Heroes' Day (25 May), King's Birthday (17 July), Independence Day (4 October), Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday, Easter Monday and Ascension Day.

## Economy

### KEY FACTS 2013

**GNI:** US\$2.9bn

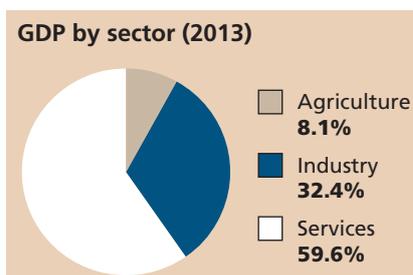
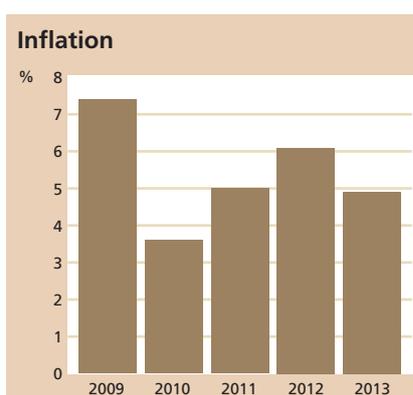
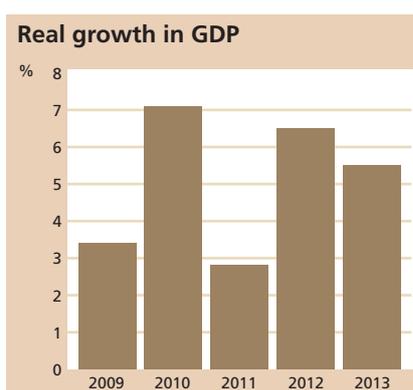
**GNI p.c.:** US\$1,550

**GDP growth:** 5.0% p.a. 2009–13

**Inflation:** 5.4% p.a. 2009–13

The economy of this landlocked and mountainous country is inseparably linked with that of its much bigger and more developed neighbour, South Africa. A large number of Basotho work in South Africa – around 100,000 in the mid-1990s, falling to 40,500 in 2010 – and most of the government's income comes from Southern African Customs Union import tariffs. Economic swings in South Africa are the biggest single influence on Lesotho's economy. Moreover, the country has one of the world's highest HIV infection rates.

Measures to diversify the economy have included encouragement of manufacturing, particularly of clothing, textiles, leather goods and footwear, and of tourism, including establishment of a ski resort in the Drakensberg. Manufacturing output grew by some ten per cent p.a. during the 1980s and by more than seven per cent p.a. in the 1990s; it surged in the early 2000s but declined during the rest of the decade. The manufacturing sector's contribution to GDP fell from 22 per cent in 2006 to 12 per cent in 2012. With the support of the IMF,



economic policy has focused on investment in education, developing the private sector and more effective revenue collection.

From 2005 exporters of textiles and clothing faced stronger competition in the US market from Asian producers, as their quotas were raised. But in 2006 measures under the US African Growth and Opportunity Act underpinned a recovery in the clothing industry and diamond production rose.

The strong growth of the 1990s was interrupted by the outbreak of political unrest in late 1998. There was large-scale damage to property and loss of an estimated 4,000 jobs. The economy was plunged into recession and contracted by nearly five per

cent in 1998, compounded by rising unemployment due to the return of migrant mine workers.

It only recovered in 2000, with a resumption of good growth in 2001 and this was sustained through the 2000s, until it slowed slightly in response to the global economic downturn in 2008–09, picking up again in 2010 (with growth of 7.1 per cent), continuing with growth of at least four per cent p.a. in 2012–15.

## Energy

The Highlands Water Development Project, undertaken jointly with South Africa and launched in 1986, has made the country self-sufficient in electricity and is providing income by supplying South Africa with water. The project comprises a series of dams and tunnels, to take water from the Orange River and tributaries in the Maloti mountains northwards to the Vaal industrial basin in South Africa. The first phase included construction of a 185-metre dam at Katse – the highest in Africa – and was completed in 1996. The whole scheme is projected to be completed by 2020 and has already provided substantial spin-off benefits of improvements in infrastructure and employment.

## History

Lesotho was settled by the Sotho people sometime in the 16th century, mingling peacefully with the earlier Khoisan whose history can be traced in rock-art in various sites in the mountains. The Basotho were welded into a nation relatively recently by one outstanding leader. Around 1820, Moshoeshoe I, a minor chief of the Bakwena, gathered a following among the tribes who had retreated to the north-western borders of present-day Lesotho to protect themselves against Zulu and Matabele raids. Despite his limited military power, Moshoeshoe's diplomatic skills allowed the kingdom he created to long outlive those of his much stronger rivals. After successful resistance from his stronghold at Thaba Bosiu near Maseru in 1824, Moshoeshoe became chief of the local Basotho and other tribal groups, his following then numbering some 40,000. He was also successful at establishing good relationships with missionaries, especially French Catholics, whom he encouraged to establish missions and schools, and to advise him on negotiations with Europeans.

A new threat then emerged: the emigrant Boers set out on their Great Trek in 1834, in search of new territory. Moshoeshoe sought the protection of the British Crown – an alternative he preferred to annexation by the Boers, then establishing their Republic of the

## Lesotho on the international stage

Lesotho footballer Tsotleho 'Sunny' Jane plays as a forward for the Wilmington Hammerheads in the USA. Mafeteng-born Lehlohonolo Seema captained South African side Orlando Pirates, before turning to coaching. Both men have played for the Lesotho national football team.

Orange Free State. In 1868 Basutoland (as the country was then called) was granted British protection. The frontiers, substantially unchanged today, were laid down in 1869.

Moshoeshoe died in 1870 and disputes over the succession divided the country. From 1870, migrant Basotho workers had begun working in the Kimberly diamond fields of the Cape. In 1871 Basutoland was annexed to the Cape Colony but, in 1884, it was removed from Cape control and came under direct British rule. It resisted incorporation into the proposed Union of South Africa in 1910; division along racial lines was already entrenched and Basutoland preferred to remain a British colony. The Basutoland Council was then set up as an advisory body and included 99 nominated members, around half of whom subsequently became elected members.

In 1960, a legislature, the Basutoland National Council, was formed and five years later a new constitution came into operation. Moshoeshoe II, Paramount Chief from 1960, became king. The legislature, until then unicameral, became bicameral.

Elections were held in 1965, in which the Basotho National Party (BNP) led by Chief Leabua Jonathan, narrowly defeated the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP). Lesotho became independent on 4 October 1966 with Chief Jonathan as Prime Minister, and joined the Commonwealth.

Relations between the King and the country's first Prime Minister soon became strained, and in 1970, Chief Jonathan annulled the country's second elections and suspended the constitution. He exiled the King (later allowing him to return but not to become involved in politics) and repressed opposition; but he was himself overthrown in a military coup in 1986, led by Major-General Justin Lekhanya. Lekhanya then reinstated the King, who was to govern on the advice of a military council; but in 1990 Lekhanya had half the military council arrested and nine ministers dismissed. The King was sent into exile and, *in absentia*, deposed in favour of his son, Letsie III, who was sworn in as monarch in November 1990.

Following the coup of 1986, the Lekhanya government remained in power for five years, but never achieved stability. Lekhanya was himself overthrown in a bloodless coup by his second-in-command, Elias Phitsoane Ramaema, in 1991. Ramaema repealed the ban on political activity, introduced a new constitution (effectively restoring the old one), and scheduled elections. At the elections, in March 1993, with Commonwealth and other international observers present, the BCP, led by Dr Ntsu Mokhehle, won all 65 seats in the

new National Assembly leaving Jonathan's BNP without representation in the house.

King Letsie III then abdicated in favour of his father, King Moshoeshoe II, who had returned from London following a reconciliation process assisted by the Commonwealth Secretary-General. He was reinstated as monarch in January 1995. But almost exactly one year later, King Moshoeshoe was killed in a car accident. King Letsie III was sworn in for the second time by the College of Chiefs on 7 February 1996.

The BCP lost its majority and joined the opposition in mid-1997 when many of its members including Prime Minister Mokhehle defected to the newly established Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD). In the general election in May 1998 the LCD won 79 of the 80 National Assembly seats with just over 60 per cent of the votes. The BNP took one seat with 24 per cent of the votes. Following the elections the LCD chose Bethuel Pakalitha Mosisili, the party leader, to succeed 79-year-old Ntsu Mokhehle as Prime Minister.

However, the opposition parties refused to accept the election results, alleging that there had been gross irregularities. An increasingly vigorous campaign of protest reached a peak in August 1998. Stay-away strikes were organised and crowds first gathered at and then camped in front of the Royal Palace in Maseru. Following the intervention of the then South African Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, a team of Botswanan, South African and Zimbabwean experts under the auspices of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and chaired by a South African judge, Pius Langa, was sent to Lesotho to investigate the allegations.

After conducting hearings in Maseru and a re-count of the votes, the Langa Commission delivered an inconclusive report, which failed to settle the dispute. Further talks between the governing and opposition parties were attempted. But before progress could be

made, parts of the Lesotho Defence Forces (LDF) mutinied and, with the security situation in Lesotho deteriorating, the LCD government called on SADC for assistance.

On 22 September 1998 a South African-led SADC force entered Lesotho in response to the government's appeal. After several days of fighting between the SADC force and elements in the LDF, resulting in at least 80 deaths and large-scale looting in Maseru, the situation was eventually stabilised.

The South African military contingent was reduced in size in December 1998 and completely withdrawn in May 1999. In December 1998, an inter-party committee was established to oversee preparations for new elections within 18 months. However, it then took a long time for agreement to be reached between the political parties on the number of proportional representation seats and the arrangements for voter registration, and the elections were delayed. When finally approved by Parliament, the legislation allowed for 80 seats on a first-past-the-post basis and further 40 seats by means of proportional representation.

## Constitution

**Status:** National monarchy

**Legislature:** Parliament of Lesotho

**Independence:** 4 October 1966

Lesotho is a constitutional monarchy. The present constitution came into force in 1993, shortly after the return to multiparty democracy, and was amended in 2001 to introduce an element of proportional representation. The monarch is head of state, the succession being ratified by the College of Chiefs. The Prime Minister is head of government and appoints a cabinet.

The legislature has two chambers: the National Assembly which is elected for a five-year term, with 80 seats elected on a first-past-the-post basis, and 40 by means of proportional representation; and the non-

## Further information

Lesotho Government Portal: [www.gov.ls](http://www.gov.ls)  
 Independent Electoral Commission: [www.iec.org.ls](http://www.iec.org.ls)  
 Lesotho Bureau of Statistics: [www.bos.gov.ls](http://www.bos.gov.ls)  
 Central Bank of Lesotho: [www.centralbank.org.ls](http://www.centralbank.org.ls)  
 Visit Lesotho: [visitlesotho.travel](http://visitlesotho.travel)  
 Commonwealth Secretariat: [www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)  
 Commonwealth of Nations: [www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Lesotho](http://www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Lesotho)

### Media

*Lesotho Times*: [lestimes.com](http://lestimes.com)  
*Public Eye*: [publiceye.co.ls](http://publiceye.co.ls)  
*Sunday Express*: [sundayexpress.co.ls](http://sundayexpress.co.ls)  
 Lesotho News Agency: [www.lena.gov.ls](http://www.lena.gov.ls)

elected Senate with 33 members, comprising 11 nominated by the monarch on the advice of the Prime Minister and the 22 principal chiefs of Lesotho.

## Politics

**Last elections:** 28 February 2015

**Next elections:** 2020

**Head of state:** King Letsie III (1990–95; 1996–)

**Head of government:** Prime Minister Bethuel Pakalitha Mosisili

**Ruling party:** Coalition of Democratic Congress, Lesotho Congress for Democracy and five other parties

**Women MPs:** 25%

In the first elections following the introduction of an element of proportional representation, in May 2002, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) took 77 seats and 54.9 per cent of the votes, the Basotho National Party (BNP) 21 and 22.4 per cent, and eight other parties each gained seats. Bethuel Pakalitha Mosisili was again sworn in as Prime Minister. The Commonwealth observer group present for the elections said that the conditions existed for a free expression of the will of the voters.

In October 2006, Tom Thabane resigned as a minister in the LCD government to form a new political party, the All Basotho Convention (ABC). Sixteen LCD MPs and one independent defected with him, making the ABC the third largest party in the National Assembly with 18 members.

In the February 2007 general election, which was observed by a Commonwealth expert team, Mosisili and the ruling LCD were returned to power, winning 62 seats. The National Independent Party took 21 seats and ABC 17, mainly in urban areas.

After the 2007 elections a political impasse arose following a dispute on the allocation of seats in Parliament. Subsequent mediation efforts at resolving the dispute were led by a Southern African Development Community (SADC) Special Envoy, Sir Ketumile Masire, and the Christian Council of Lesotho.

In February 2012 Mosisili and 44 other members left the ruling LCD to form a new party, the Democratic Congress (DC).

A general election in May 2012, with Commonwealth observers present, resulted in a peaceful transfer of power when Pakalitha Mosisili was succeeded by ABC leader Tom Thabane, the first change of PM since 1998. Mosisili's DC won 48 seats, the ABC 30, the LCD 26 and the BNP five. Though the DC had the most seats it did not have a working majority; the three opposition parties agreed to form a coalition government; Parliament elected Thabane Prime Minister; and he was sworn in on 9 June 2012.

In June 2014, after divisions appeared in the ruling coalition and a motion of no confidence had been called against Prime Minister Thabane, he prorogued Parliament. On 30 August 2014 Thabane fled to South Africa, alleging that the army had attempted to take power and saying that he feared for his life. The South African government provided a security escort so that Thabane was able to return to Lesotho in early September 2014. SADC initiated a process of mediation between the political stakeholders, which was facilitated by South African Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa. This resulted in the signing of the Maseru Facilitation Declaration on 2 October 2014 which committed all political parties to the reconvening of Parliament on 17 October 2014; to limiting the business of the current Parliament to discussion of the budget and all matters related to the holding of elections; and to the holding of elections in February 2015, on a date to be set by King Letsie III.

In National Assembly elections that were held on 28 February 2015, which Commonwealth election observers described as peaceful and well conducted, Pakalitha Mosisili's DC won 47 seats, Thabane's ABC 46, the LCD 12 and the BNP seven. Neither DC nor ABC won a majority of the 120 seats in Parliament and, after a short period of negotiations with the smaller parties, on 4 March 2015 the DC announced that it would form a coalition government with the LCD and five other smaller parties.

## International relations

Lesotho is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, African Union, Non-Aligned Movement, Southern African Customs Union, Southern African Development Community, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

## Traveller information

**Immigration and customs:** Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of departure. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals. Prohibited imports include some fresh food.

**Travel within the country:** Traffic drives on the left. Car hire is available in Maseru with an international driving permit. Paved roads connect the main towns but outside these areas the road network is underdeveloped and the terrain often difficult.

A good bus network connects the major towns but can be slow. Minibuses are quicker but can only cover shorter distances. There is no passenger rail service in Lesotho.

**Travel health:** Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include diphtheria, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, rabies and typhoid.

There were 422,000 tourist arrivals in 2012.



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