

## Ireland's Partner Countries

# Factsheet



# Lesotho

Lesotho is a small country in southern Africa, completely surrounded by its much larger neighbour, South Africa. It is very mountainous, with more than 80 per cent of the country at 1,800m above sea level; two of South Africa's principal rivers rise in these mountains. Lesotho's main natural resources are water and diamonds. The climate is temperate with dry, cool winters and hot, wet summers.

Formerly Basutoland, the Kingdom of Lesotho gained independence from Britain in 1966. The modern state is a liberal constitutional monarchy. After independence, the Basuto National Party ruled for two decades, but Letsie III was restored as king in 1996 on the death of his father.

Military mutiny and violent unrest followed a contentious election in 1998. Political stability was restored by constitutional reform and a new electoral system. In 2002 peaceful elections were held, but elections in 2007 were disputed. A mediation process led to an agreement on electoral reform among all parties - a positive development as the country prepares for the 2012 elections.

## Development in Lesotho

In recent times Lesotho has made some progress in access to safe drinking water, primary education enrolment and gender equality. 100 pre-school classrooms have been refurbished, increasing enrolment by 70 per cent nationally between 2008 and 2010. Additionally the number of newly qualified teachers increased from 657 in 2007 to 849 in 2009.

However, Lesotho has the third highest HIV prevalence rate in the world, with 23.2 per cent of 15-49 year olds infected. This has held back development and the fight against poverty. Between 1990 and 2011, life expectancy dropped from 59 to 48 years.

Much of Lesotho's population still depends on subsistence agriculture, especially livestock, for a living, although most of the land is poor and prone to drought. As a result, Lesotho relies heavily on imported foodstuffs and is vulnerable to price fluctuations. It is also heavily dependent on remittances from Lesotho miners working in South Africa, and these have declined in recent years.

# Irish Aid's poverty reduction work in Lesotho

2010 marked the 35th anniversary of Ireland's engagement in Lesotho which has been an Irish Aid partner country since 1975. Bilateral support was almost €12 million in 2010.

Irish Aid is working with the Government in Lesotho and other donors to improve key areas, such as education, governance, health, and water and sanitation, as well improving access to basic services. Irish Aid supports the Government there to prevent HIV and provide better antiretroviral treatment and care for those living with HIV and AIDS. The percentage of people who received antiretroviral treatment doubled between 2008 and 2010. In partnership with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the Clinton Foundation, Irish Aid has also worked to improve rural health services.

## Comparison table

Source: UNDP, 2011 <sup>1</sup>	Ireland	Lesotho
<b>UNDP Human Development Index Rank</b> (of 187 countries)	7	160
<b>Population</b>	4.5 million	2.1 million
<b>GNI (Gross National Income) per capita</b>	US \$29,332	US \$1,664
<b>Life expectancy from birth</b>	80 years	48 years
<b>Number of doctors per 100,00 people<sup>2</sup></b>	310	10
<b>HIV prevalence<sup>3</sup></b> (15-49 years)	0.2%	23.2%

<sup>1</sup>UNDP Human Development Report 2011 (November 2011)

<sup>2</sup>UNDP Human Development Report 2010 (November 2010)

<sup>3</sup>UNDP Human Development Report 2010 (November 2010)

## Facts about Lesotho Did you know...?

<b>Full name:</b>	Kingdom of Lesotho
<b>Head of State:</b>	King Letsie III
<b>Capital:</b>	Maseru
<b>Area:</b>	30,355 sq km
<b>Major languages:</b>	Sesotho (official), English (official), Zulu, Xhosa
<b>Major religions:</b>	Christian, Indigenous beliefs
<b>Monetary unit:</b>	Loti
<b>Main exports:</b>	Textiles, water, diamonds, livestock

## Find out more

[www.irishaid.ie](http://www.irishaid.ie) - Learn more here about Irish Aid's work in Lesotho

[www.undp.org.ls](http://www.undp.org.ls) – the United Nations Development Programme in Lesotho



**Irish Aid**

An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Irish Aid is the Government's programme of assistance to developing countries, and is administered through the Development Cooperation Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

You can visit the

**Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre, 27 - 31 Upper O'Connell Street, Dublin 1.**

**Phone number: 01 854 69 20**

Organised visits to the Centre, including workshops, are available for school and college groups by arrangement.

 [www.irishaid.gov.ie](http://www.irishaid.gov.ie)