



Government of Lesotho



Lesotho 2025 Voluntary National Review

On The Implementation Of The 2030
Agenda For Sustainable Development



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Acronyms

AGOA	- African Growth and Opportunity Act
AIP	- Africa Investment Platform
ASYCUDA	- Automated System for Customs Data
BoS	- Bureau of Statistics
CAFI	- Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion
CBL	- Central Bank of Lesotho
CGD	- Citizen-Generated Data
CMA	- Common Monetary Area
CMS	- Continuous Multi-Purpose Survey
DDPR	- Directorate of Dispute Prevention and Resolution
DFA	- Development Finance Assessment
DSSI	- Debt Service Suspension Initiative
ESOs	- Enterprise Support Organisations
EU	- European Union
FDI	- Foreign Direct Investment
GAP	- Graduate Apprenticeship Programme
GBV	- Gender Based Violence
GDP	- Gross Domestic Product
GoL	- Government of Lesotho
IBSA	- India, Brazil and South Africa
ICAP	- Investment Climate Action Plan
ICT	- Information and Communication Technology
IDA	- International Development Association
ILO	- International Labour Organization
IMF	- International Monetary Fund
INFF	- Integrated National Financing Framework
IOM	- International Organization for Migration
ITC	- International Trade Centre
LDCs	- Least Developed Countries
LEAP	- Lesotho Enterprise Assistance Programme
LEHSFF	- Lesotho Entrepreneurship Hub and Seed Financing Facility
LFS	- Labour Force Survey
LHDA	- Lesotho Highlands Development Authority
LHITC	- Lesotho Horticulture Incubation and Training Centre
LHWP	- Lesotho Highlands Water Project
LMPS	- Lesotho Mounted Police Service
LNDC	- Lesotho National Development Corporation
LNOB	- Leaving No One Behind
LTEA	- Lesotho Textile Exporters Association
M&E	- Monitoring and Evaluation
MDAs	- Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MoEF	- Ministry of Environment and Forestry
MoET	- Ministry of Education and Training
MoFDP	- Ministry of Finance and Development Planning
MoLE	- Ministry of Labour and Employment
MoLG	- Ministry of Local Government

MoNR	- Ministry of Natural Resource
MSMEs	- Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
MTIBD	- Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Business Development
NDSP II	- National Strategic Development Plan II
NEET	- Not engaged in Employment, Education, or Training
NGOs	- Non-Governmental Organizations
NRM	- National Referral Mechanism
NSDP II	- National Strategic Development Plan II
NSDS II	- National Strategy for the Development of Statistics II
NSS	- National Statistical System
NUL	- National University of Lesotho
OBFC	- One-Stop Business Facilitation Centre
ODA	- Official Development Assistance
OECD	- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSH	- Occupational Safety and Health
PARIS21	- Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century
PCGF	- Partial Credit Guarantee Fund
PEPFAR	- U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PIM	- Public Investment Management
PPD	- Public-Private Dialogue
PPPs	- Public-Private Partnerships
PYWIEG	- Putting Youth and Women at the Centre of Inclusive Economic Growth
RoW	- Rest of the World
RSL	- Revenue Services Lesotho
SACU	- Southern African Customs Union
SADC	- Southern African Development Community
SDG	- Sustainable Development Goal
SDGs	- Sustainable Development Goals
SEZ	- Special Economic Zones
SMME	- Small, Micro and Medium Enterprise
STEM	- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TIRP	- Textile Industry Revitalisation Plan
TVET	- Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UIF	- Unemployment Insurance Fund
UN	- United Nations
UNDP	- United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNIDO	- United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
US	- United States
USAID	- United States Agency for International Development
VAT	- Value Added Tax
VNR	- Voluntary National Review
YAP	- Youth Apprenticeship Programme
YDP	- Youth Development Programme
GHG	- Greenhouse Gas

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Acknowledgements

The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho wishes to convey its sincere gratitude to all stakeholders who contributed to the preparation of the Lesotho 2025 Voluntary National Review report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude is also extended to all individuals and organisations including government ministries, departments, and agencies, civil society organizations, the private sector and academia for their leadership, advocacy and contributions in compiling data, analyses, and insights. Furthermore, we commend our Task team made up of different Development Partners and relevant Ministries for their work and commitment to this exercise.

Special thanks go to United Nations agencies and PARIS21 who contributed selflessly both technically and financially to ensure that this process becomes a success.

This report reflects a collective national effort and commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We recognize and thank all individuals and institutions whose expertise, dedication, and collaboration made this review possible.



Executive Summary

Lesotho's 2025 Voluntary National Review (VNR) reaffirms the country's unwavering commitment to sustainable development, aligning national aspirations with the transformative frameworks of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Building on the foundations laid in the 2019 and 2022 VNRs, the 2025 report provides a comprehensive assessment of progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It highlights both the achievements, and the persistent challenges encountered in policy implementation, service delivery, and institutional coordination. The review further outlines strategic interventions aimed at accelerating SDGs attainment in line with national development priorities, particularly those articulated in the extended National Strategic Development Plan II (2023/24–2027/28).

The report has been developed through a participatory and inclusive process that brought together government institutions, civil society organisations, the private sector, and development partners. Particular attention was given to ensuring the representation of marginalised populations, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, thereby embedding the principle of leaving no one behind throughout the review process.

POLICY AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Lesotho has demonstrated strong national ownership and stakeholder engagement awareness campaigns, and youth mobilisation initiatives. Key actors have contributed to implementation: the private sector is aligning investments via the SDG Investor Map; civil society ensures accountability and inclusivity through monitoring and advocacy; and development partners support policy dialogue, data systems, and capacity building. The integration of economic, social, and environmental priorities is evident in NSDP II, the National Social Protection Strategy, and climate resilience frameworks.

Lesotho upholds the “Leave No One Behind” principle through expanded social protection, increased economic participation among youth and women, and enhanced inclusion for people with disabilities. The OVC Bursary review, PSLP, and PYWIEG projects exemplify these efforts.

Despite progress, Lesotho continues to face systemic challenges, including fiscal constraints, external shocks, and weak M&E systems. To address them, Lesotho is implementing reforms in investment climate, digitalisation, and performance-based planning. Strategic priorities include AfCFTA integration, domestic resource mobilisation, SDG localisation, diaspora engagement, and disaster risk reduction.

PROGRESS ON GOALS AND TARGETS

The 2025 Lesotho VNR reviewed a total of 63 indicators on six priority Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Of these, 32 indicators (51%) demonstrated positive progress, 22 (35%) showed stagnation, and nine (14%) experienced regression.

3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING

SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being:

Lesotho has made progress in reducing maternal and child mortality. The maternal mortality ratio (3.1.1) fell by 54% since 2009, and the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel (3.1.2) reached 89%. The under-five mortality rate (3.2.1) and neonatal mortality rate (3.2.2) have also declined, supported by improved antenatal care and facility-based deliveries. The HIV incidence (3.3.1) halved since 2017, though prevalence remains high, while tuberculosis incidence (3.3.2) has stagnated. Access to reproductive health improved: the family planning coverage (3.7.1) rose, but the adolescent birth rate (3.7.2) and unmet need among youth remain high. The immunisation coverage (3.b.1) declined, and non-communicable disease mortality (3.4.1) is underreported. High alcohol consumption (3.5.2) and tobacco use (3.a.1) persist. The case fatality rate in diarrhoea and gastroenteritis (3.9.2D) stagnated. While emergency preparedness (3.d.1) and essential medicines availability (3.b.3) improved, only 54% have access to essential services and 51% face catastrophic health spending, underlining the need for stronger systems to reach Universal Health Coverage.

5 GENDER
EQUALITY

SDG 5 – Gender Equality:

SDG 5 – Gender Equality: Lesotho has taken important steps to advance gender equality, but progress remains uneven. The legal framework for gender equality (5.1.1) has improved through new laws such as the Counter Domestic Violence Act (2022)), yet enforcement is hindered by customary law exemptions and capacity gaps. While non-partner sexual violence (5.2.2) declined, intimate partner violence (5.2.1) rose post-2023, reflecting heightened vulnerability linked to economic stress. Early marriage has declined marginally, with 18.2% of women aged 20–24 married before 18 (5.3.1), but rates remain high in rural and poor communities. Women's political participation has improved at local levels (5.5.1), but representation in national leadership and managerial positions (5.5.2) remains low. Progress was recorded in women's autonomy in reproductive decision-making (5.6.1), now at 79%, yet access to sexual and reproductive health services (5.6.2) is still not fully guaranteed by law.

8 DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH


SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth:

Lesotho's real GDP growth (8.1.1) has remained below the 7% LDC target, averaging under 3%, with modest post-COVID-19 recovery. Labour productivity (8.2.1) declined by over 7% between 2019 and 2023 due to increased employment in low-productivity sectors. Informality remains high (8.3.1D), especially in domestic work, retail, and construction. Women earn on average 69% of male income (8.5.1), and unemployment stands at 30.1%, rising to 37.75% for youth, particularly females (8.5.2). Child labour persists among rural boys (8.7.1D), though joint inspections have improved enforcement. The Labour Act and Occupational Safety and Health Act of 2024 have strengthened legal protections (8.8.1, 8.8.2).

Tourism is recovering, contributing 6.1% of GDP in 2024 (8.9.1), with over 8% of jobs supported by the sector, including through rural events like the Roof of Africa and Moshoeshoe Walk (8.9.2D). Financial inclusion (8.10) improved to 87% in 2021, driven by mobile money uptake (66% of adults), though only 39% had bank accounts. Mobile phone ownership reached 82% (8.10.2). Bank branch access stagnated at 25 per 100,000 adults, while ATM density declined to 13.86 (8.10.1a, b). Only 14% of MSMEs have formal accounts and 4% access credit, though mobile money usage among MSMEs is high (65%) (8.10.1A).

13 CLIMATE
ACTION


SDG 13 – Climate Action:

Lesotho made notable gains in SDG 13, with six of eight indicators showing progress. Climate resilience (13.1.1) improved through early warning systems and disaster risk financing, while preparedness (13.1.2–13.1.3) advanced via the national DRR strategy and 93 Village Disaster Teams. Core planning targets (13.2.1, 13.b.1) were met with the updated NDC, Adaptation Plan, and Long-Term Strategy. However, emissions (13.2.2) rose by 20.4% due to limited monitoring and weak MRV systems. Over US\$100 million was mobilised (13.a.1), though access and reporting remain fragmented. Climate education (13.3.1) was mainstreamed through schools and creative awareness campaigns. These steps reflect growing climate ambition despite persistent coordination gaps.



SDG 14 – Life Below Water:

While Lesotho is landlocked, SDG 14 has been contextualised to inland water governance. This goal has shown substantial progress, with all seven indicators improving. Notable gains include a decline in nutrient pollution (14.1.1a) through organic farming and pesticide controls, while plastic waste (14.1.1b) is being addressed via fiscal tools and recycling initiatives, albeit with limitations in rural areas. Freshwater ecosystems (14.2.1) have benefited from the ReNoka programme, wetlands strategy, and LHWP safeguards. Sustainable fish stocks (14.4.1) have been maintained, with Lesotho becoming Africa's top producer of Rainbow Trout. Protected zones (14.5.1) have expanded through biodiversity strategies and Ramsar listings. Economic benefits (14.7.1) have improved through aquaculture and eco-tourism, while small-scale fishers (14.b.1) have gained access via permits and community farming support. These advances highlight the potential for the successful delivery of SDG 14 in inland waters settings.



SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals:

SDG 17 supports Lesotho's broader development through financing, trade, technology, and data capacity. While domestic revenue as a share of GDP has improved (17.1.1), domestic tax contributions remain below the 25% benchmark (17.1.2), and SACU transfers continue to dominate. Remittances are stable at over 20% of GDP (17.3.2), but FDI has declined to -1.21% of GDP in 2023 (17.3.1). ODA remains significant, reaching 6.59% of GNI in 2023 (17.2.1D).

Debt service increased to 5.5% of exports by 2023, still below stress thresholds (17.4.1). Reforms such as the Investment Climate Action Plan and SEZ Policy aim to boost investment (17.5.1), but Lesotho's share in global exports declined to 0.0037% (17.11.1).

Digital access has expanded via mobile platforms, with internet use rising from 25% in 2015 to 48% in 2023 (17.8.1), while fixed broadband remains low at 0.384 per 100 people (17.6.1D). Macroeconomic conditions have improved modestly post-COVID, though volatility remains (17.13.1).

On data systems, Lesotho has aligned statistical legislation with global standards (17.18.2) and is implementing NSDS II (17.18.3), but faces funding gaps. The 2016 census met benchmarks, while civil registration—especially death data—remains weak (17.19.2D).

NEW AND EMERGING CHALLENGES – LESOTHO VNR 2025

Lesotho's development trajectory has been significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed and deepened existing structural vulnerabilities. While the health impact was limited, the socio-economic fall-out was severe, disproportionately affecting informal workers, MSMEs, women, and youth, reversing earlier gains in poverty reduction, education, and gender equality. In response, the government mobilised over M700 million (2% of GDP) in emergency support. However, delivery was hindered by weak coordination, limited data systems, and exclusion of vulnerable groups, prompting a renewed focus on inclusive social protection reform. Currently, Lesotho faces a convergence of structural and external shocks. These include the likely imposition of 50% US tariffs on textiles (threatening 43% of export earnings and 20,000 jobs), and the withdrawal of key development assistance such as MCC Compact II and USAID. Food insecurity is also rising sharply, affecting 22% of rural households.

Unemployment remains high, with youth and women disproportionately affected. Most youth are trapped in low-productivity informal work, and the youth NEET rate remains elevated. MSMEs, though employing around 120,000 people, are under-capacitated and excluded from finance and digital infrastructure. Rural women and adolescent girls continue to experience intersecting forms of exclusion, especially in access to sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), transport, and technology.

In response, Lesotho has adopted a resilience-focused strategy. Key interventions include the establishment of a national social registry, development of special economic zones (SEZs), and implementation of the SDG Investor Map. Youth-focused reforms include revamping the tertiary bursary scheme and launching leadership and civic engagement programmes. Climate and disaster resilience efforts are being scaled up through the Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (2020–2030), with investments in early warning systems and decentralised preparedness structures.

MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Lesotho's SDG implementation relies on strengthening domestic financing, leveraging international support, building institutional capacity, improving data systems, and promoting partnerships and volunteerism.

Domestic Resource Mobilisation has improved through tax digitalisation, enforcement, and reforms targeting SMEs and non-tax revenues efforts include dividends from state-owned enterprises and user fees. However, the tax base remains narrow, and dependence on SACU revenues persists.

International Financing remains vital, with over US\$460 million received through concessional funding (e.g., World Bank, EU). Key projects support health, education, and water infrastructure. However, weak donor co-ordination, data reporting mechanisms remain challenges, and alignment challenges persist, limiting efficiency. Partnerships with CSOs, the private sector, and development partners are growing, aided by platforms like the SDG Forum and Youth Power Hub, though engagement levels remain modest.

Capacity-building is supported by IMF, MEFMI, and others, but decentralised institutions face human resource and infrastructure constraints. Statistical Systems are improving via NSDS II and PARIS21, with innovations in citizen-generated and gender data. Gaps remain in environmental and disaggregated statistics. Volunteerism is promoted through youth apprenticeship programmes, community health initiatives, and CSO-led projects. Formal recognition and policy coherence are still evolving.

KEY CHALLENGES

Lesotho's SDG progress remains constrained by several structural and systemic challenges:

- **Youth Unemployment and Skills Mismatch:** With nearly 50% of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET), a significant disconnect persists between the outputs of the education and training systems and the demands of the labour market. Job creation remains concentrated in low-productivity sectors, limiting meaningful youth participation in economic transformation.
- **Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** Despite progressive legislation, GBV prevalence remains high at 44%, exacerbated by underreporting, weak institutional response, and limited-service coverage—particularly in rural communities.
- **Disaster Risk Financing Gaps:** Lesotho's response to climate shocks remains reactive, reliant on post-disaster aid. The Disaster Risk Financing Strategy (2024–2029) is yet to be operationalised or funded, leaving the country vulnerable to escalating climate risks.
- **Health System Weaknesses:** Persistent shortages of health workers, limited surveillance, and response capacity for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and inadequate infrastructure in rural and mountainous areas continue to undermine access to quality and equitable healthcare services. Weak governance structures and fragmented health financing characterised by heavy reliance on donor support and limited domestic fiscal space further constrain progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 3) on health and well-being.
- **Data and Coordination Deficits:** Fragmented data systems, limited inter-sectoral coordination, and insufficient statistical capacity—particularly at district level—continue to constrain effective planning, monitoring, and evidence-based decision-making across SDGs.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

To accelerate SDG implementation, the report outlines clear actions for government, private sector, development partners, civil society, and academia:

- **Government of Lesotho** is urged to operationalise the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), institutionalise gender-responsive budgeting, and strengthen district-level SDG localisation. Enhanced investment in disaggregated data systems and the establishment of a National Statistics Coordination Council are also recommended to support evidence-based policy and planning.
- **The Private Sector** should align investment with the SDG Investor Map, adopt ESG principles, and support youth employment through internships, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship partnerships—especially for women and underserved groups.
- **Development Partners** are encouraged to channel support through national sector strategies, promote joint programming, and provide technical assistance to strengthen public finance, statistical systems, and climate risk management.
- **Civil Society and NGOs** should intensify public engagement and accountability through shadow reporting, civic education, and community mobilisation, with a strong focus on the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle.
- **Academic and Research Institutions** are called upon to strengthen national data ecosystems, support forecasting and policy analysis, and integrate SDG themes into curricula while facilitating student participation in localised implementation and VNR processes.



Government of Lesotho



1. Introduction

Lesotho 2025 Voluntary National Review



1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Lesotho's 2025 Voluntary National Review (VNR) represents the third national progress report submitted to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This review provides a comprehensive and integrated account of national progress, challenges, and transformative actions towards implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It reflects Lesotho's continued commitment to the principle of "Leaving No One Behind" and places special focus on aligning national priorities with global frameworks amid compounding crises, including climate change, economic fragility, and the withdrawal of key development financing.

Lesotho's 2025 VNR reflects a comprehensive evaluation of national progress across six priority Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). In total, 69 indicators were assessed across the six SDGs.

The 2025 VNR comes at a pivotal moment in Lesotho's development trajectory. The country faces structural economic vulnerabilities, including reliance on volatile SACU revenues, limited export diversification, and youth unemployment. These challenges are compounded by external trade shocks (e.g., AGOA uncertainty), reduced Official Development Assistance (ODA) inflows (notably the cancellation of MCC Compact II and the withdrawal of USAID funding), and increasing climate risks. Despite these headwinds, Lesotho has made notable progress in strengthening social protection, digitising governance, and embedding resilience into national planning frameworks.

In line with the overarching principle of the 2030 Agenda, "Leaving No One Behind", the review places a strong focus on vulnerable and marginalised groups, including youth, persons with disabilities, women and girls, and rural communities. The objectives of the 2025 VNR are fourfold:

- to assess national progress on selected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- to reflect on systemic challenges and transformative actions undertaken;
- to foster national dialogue and ownership through broad stakeholder consultations; and
- to strengthen the alignment between national development planning and global commitments.

The 2030 Agenda is fully embedded in Lesotho's policy architecture. The extended National Strategic Development Plan II (NSDP II) (2023/24–2027/28) serves as the central planning instrument for integrating SDGs into national development, linking goals to outcomes, results frameworks, and medium-term expenditure ceilings. The Lesotho Investment Climate Action Plan (ICAP) and SDG Investor Map further reflect how financing, sector prioritisation, and institutional reforms are guided by sustainable development imperatives. These instruments align national public and private investments with inclusive and green growth objectives.

The policy and institutional architecture supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda includes the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MoFDP) as the national coordinating body, supported by a Multi-Stakeholder Coordination Structure. This mechanism facilitates inter-sectoral alignment and promotes accountability through oversight by Parliament and the Cabinet. Local governments are increasingly engaged

through decentralised development planning, and the Bureau of Statistics (BoS) leads data harmonisation via the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics II (NSDS II).

Lesotho's commitment to the SDGs is pursued in synergy with other international frameworks. The SDGs are implemented in conjunction with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which is integrated into national policy frameworks. Lesotho's Agenda 2063 country reports (2021, 2023) and presentations at the HLPF Africa Day (2022) reaffirm this alignment. The extended NSDP II aligns with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda through domestic resource mobilisation strategies and public investment management reforms. Climate adaptation and mitigation priorities are addressed through the Paris Agreement, National Adaptation Plan, and Renewable Energy Access Strategy. The Sendai Framework is implemented via multi-hazard early warning systems, while migration and diaspora engagement strategies align with the Global Compact for Migration. Lesotho ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and is implementing protocols to enhance regional market access.



1.2. Country context

Lesotho is a mountainous country with only 14.1% of its land arable and more than 80% of the country above 1,800 meters in altitude. Approximately 2,007,201 individuals live in private households in Lesotho. Roughly 58% of the population resides in rural areas. The Basotho population is quite youthful, with over 40% aged under 25. Over 90% of inhabitants are Basotho, along with a few ethnic minorities of Nguni descent. Lesotho comprises four ecological zones and 10 administrative districts, with Maseru, the capital, being the most populous, accounting for 17% of the national population and 62% of the national GDP.

Lesotho is a constitutional monarchy with a King as Head of State, and a parliament comprising a Senate and National Assembly. The Human Development Index (HDI) value grew steadily from 0.483 in 1990 to 0.550 in 2023, with a ranking of 167 out of 193 countries and territories on the 2025 Human Development Report, which put the country for the first time in the medium human development category.

Lesotho is classified as a lower middle-income country with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of \$1,250 in 2024. Growth has been low over the past decade, owing to structural weaknesses and external shocks. Expanding employment opportunities is key to reduce Lesotho's high unemployment rate, estimated at 22.5% in 2019, and to alleviate widespread poverty, as an estimated 36.3% of the population was living on less than \$2.15 international poverty line in 2024 and 58.7% under the lower income \$3.65 poverty line. Poverty is particularly severe in the rural highlands, where limited access to essential services and market opportunities ex-

acerbates economic hardship. Limited dynamism of the private sector coupled with heightened uncertainty in trade policy have limited potential growth. Efficiency gains and private investment have remained low because of the dominant role of the public sector in the economy, complex and unclear business regulations, limited competition, and challenges in accessing credit and skilled labour. Growth increased by 2.3% in 2024, owing to public investment that also generated positive spillover effects in the local services industry.

Lesotho reported a high fiscal surplus of 8.8 percent of GDP driven by increased Southern African Customs Union (SACU) revenues (from 14.4 percent in 2022 to 27.8 percent of GDP in 2024) and higher water royalties (from 3.7 percent in 2022 to 7.2 percent of GDP in 2024). Meanwhile, existing rigidities in capital spending and some restraint in recurrent spending public expenditures limited the increase in expenditure. Despite fiscal surpluses, public debt rose to 59% of GDP in 2024 as the government continued to borrow from both domestic and external markets. The current account balance shifted from a deficit of 6.4% of GDP in 2023 to a surplus of 4.3% of GDP in 2024, supported by higher remittances, increased interest income and SACU revenue. The trade deficit also improved, driven by water exports.

Concerning SDGs achievement, globally, challenges remain. According to the SDGs Report 2024, Lesotho has an index score of 55.5 (rank 144 out of 167), little less than in 2023 (57.9), but more than the 2024 African average (53.7). Ten of the 17 SDG are considered with major challenges, with declining trends.

Table 1: Lesotho key economic indicators

Indicators	Year	Value	Source
Economic growth	2024	2.3%	IMF
GNI per capita	2023	\$US 1,250	WB
Gini inequality index	2016	0.47	WB
International poverty rate (\$ 2.15)	2024	36.3%	WB
Lower middle-income poverty rate (\$ 3.65)	2024	58.7%	WB
SDG score card index	2024	55.5	UN SDGs report 2024
Human development Index (HDI)	2023	0.550	UNDP, HDR 2025

To face these development challenges, the government developed with UNDP support, the extended National Strategic Development Plan (NSPD II) 2023/24-2027/28. The Extended NSPD II's four priorities are enhancing inclusive and sustainable economic growth and private sector-led job creation, strengthening human capital, building enabling infrastructure, and strengthening national governance and accountability systems. The Extended NSDP II is declined into sectoral policies and strategies, including on Education, Health, Environment, Gender, Technology.

¹BoS, Report on 2016 Population and Housing Census (PHC)

² World Bank. 2024. Territorial development in Lesotho: accelerating economic growth and development. Washington, DC: World Bank.

1.3. Structure of the report

This report is structured into eight main sections. Section 1 introduces the report by outlining the background, national context, and the overall structure and purpose of the 2025 VNR. Section 2 presents the methodology and participatory processes used in the preparation of the review. It explains how stakeholders were engaged, the data sources consulted, and the analytical frameworks applied, underscoring the inclusive and consultative nature of the VNR process. Section 3 assesses the extent to which the SDGs have been integrated into national plans and policy frameworks, and also explores existing coordination mechanisms, and the alignment of budgets with SDG priorities. Section 4 focuses on the policy and enabling environment for sustainable development, which includes awareness and ownership of the SDGs, the integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions, and transformative actions. Section 5 provides a detailed account of progress on goals and targets. Section 6 identifies new and emerging challenges, including economic shocks, climate risks, and geopolitical shifts, and examines their implications for national development and SDG implementation. Section 7 highlights the means of implementation, with emphasis on financing strategies, institutional capacity, partnerships, and data systems. Section 8 outlines the Recommendations and the Way Forward.

1.4. Methodology and Process for the Preparation of 2025 VNR



Image: Stakeholders attending the VNR validation session in Maseru: 27th May 2025

The development of Lesotho's 2025 Voluntary National Review (VNR) was led and coordinated by the Government of Lesotho through the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) within the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MoFDP). Oversight of the process was provided by a multi-institutional technical committee composed of representatives from key government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), United Nations agencies, academic institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs), and the private sector. This committee played a central role in shaping the report's development by reviewing and endorsing all technical elements of the VNR process, including the roadmap, report structure, thematic focus areas, methodology, and sources of data.

The preparation of the 2025 VNR report was grounded in both quantitative and qualitative evidence. Quantitative data was primarily drawn from official national statistical sources, including national surveys, administrative data from MDAs, and sectoral reports. This information was complemented by international datasets and

CSO reports to enhance comparability and ensure alignment with global SDG monitoring frameworks. To complement the quantitative data, qualitative evidence was gathered through extensive consultations with a broad range of stakeholders. These consultations included in-person meetings, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Participants included government officials, development partners, academia, civil society actors, private sector leaders, and representatives of vulnerable and marginalised groups such as youth, persons with disabilities (PWDs), women, and rural communities. These engagements provided rich contextual insights, grounding the report in lived experiences and ensuring that the principle of “Leaving No One Behind” was embedded throughout the review.

A deliberate effort was made to incorporate the voices of young people in the VNR process. A dedicated session was conducted with 65 youth participants from the Youth Power Hub (YPH), a joint initiative supported by the European Union (EU), UNICEF, and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). During this session, the youth representatives were divided into five groups, each tasked with discussing the progress, challenges, and gaps related to two indicators under each of the six SDGs that were related to them. Table 1 provides the list of indicators discussed by the youth during the Pitso sessions, and subsection 5.2 presents the contributions of the youth.

Table 2: List of indicators discussed by Youth

SDG	Indicator
SDG 3: Health and Wellbeing	Teen Pregnancy
	Tobacco Prevalence and Use
SDG 5: Gender	Teen Marriage
	Women Empowerment (Own Decision-Making)
SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	Youth Unemployment
	Youth Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET)
	Youth Businesses and Entrepreneurship
SDG 13: Climate Change	Land Conservation and Drought Mitigation
SDG 14: Life Below Water	Water Resource Protection
SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals	Debt Management
	Resource Mobilization – Funding and Financing the SDGs



Government of Lesotho



2. Approach of Integration of SDGs into National Public Policies

Lesotho 2025 Voluntary National Review



2. Approach of Integration of SDGs into National Public Policies

2.1. Integration of SDGs into national strategic frameworks

Lesotho has successfully aligned the SDGs with its extended National Strategic Development Plan II (NSDP II) 2023/24 - 2027/28. The NSDP II's four Key Priority Areas (KPAs) directly correspond to economic, social, and institutional objectives outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). KPA I promotes inclusive and sustainable economic growth (aligned with SDG 8), KPA II focuses on strengthening human capital (SDGs 3, 4, and 5), KPA III targets enabling infrastructure (SDGs 6, 7, 9), and KPA IV addresses governance and accountability systems (SDG 16 and 17). The extended NSDP II results framework is broadly compatible with both the SDGs and the African Union Agenda 2063, although some thematic gaps remain, such as climate change adaptation, disability inclusion, and disaster risk management.

This integration ensures that the SDGs are contextualised within the country's broader development agenda and are embedded into national planning, and accountability systems. The Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) and the Performance-Based Budgeting system operationalise this alignment by requiring MDAs to justify expenditures based on SDG-linked outcomes. The Mid-Term Review (MTR) of NSDP II highlighted that only 13 out of the 84 NSDP indicators explicitly referenced SDG targets, suggesting a need for greater specificity in mapping NSDP indicators to SDG targets.

Prioritisation of SDG Targets

In line with UN guidance and practices adopted by peer countries since 2016, Lesotho undertook a structured prioritisation of SDG targets based on national development context, resource availability, and data readiness. The prioritisation was informed by multi-stakeholder consultations and national planning cycles. It emphasised indicators with transformational potential, high policy relevance, data availability, and alignment with existing national commitments. A prioritisation framework, drawing from UNDP's Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) methodology, was used to classify SDG targets into: (i) fully aligned; (ii) partially aligned; and (iii) not aligned. This process informed sectoral implementation strategies, particularly in health, education, employment, and environmental governance.

The 2019 SDG Baseline Report indicates that Lesotho selected 152 priority indicators. Of these, 81 (53%) were measurable with available national data.

The prioritised targets focus on core development deficits, notably:

- SDG 1.3: Implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems;
- SDG 5.5: Ensuring women's full participation in leadership;
- SDG 8.5: Employment creation for youth and vulnerable groups;
- SDG 13.1: Strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards.

The MTR advised that implementation of these targets required a costed and results-based approach, tailored to post-COVID-19 resource realities and supported by realistic expenditure projections.

³Government of Lesotho. (2023). Final Report: Mid-Term Review of the National Strategic Development Plan II (NSDP II). Ministry of Development Planning.

Mapping and Availability of SDG Statistics

A key constraint in implementing the SDGs is the limited availability of quality, disaggregated, and timely statistics. According to the 2017 Data Gap Analysis, Lesotho's SDG indicator landscape reveals significant gaps across key thematic areas. Gaps are most pronounced in SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities) and SDG 12 (Consumption and Production), as well as in SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Institutions), and in disaggregated indicators under SDG 4 (Education) and SDG 5 (Gender).

To address these constraints, the Government, through the Bureau of Statistics (BoS) and the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, is implementing the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS II). Key actions include upgrading statistical infrastructure, leveraging administrative data, enhancing the use of digital tools for data collection and analysis, and improving coordination between producers and users of statistics. Efforts are also underway to grant the Bureau of Statistics operational autonomy through a revised Statistics Act, which would improve independence, responsiveness, and statistical governance across the National Statistical System. A demonstrably independent Bureau is crucial for producing data that accurately reflects the realities of the nation. This independence, fostered by clear legal frameworks and transparent processes, will build public confidence in the integrity and objectivity of the collected and disseminated data, ultimately bolstering the credibility of the National Statistical System as a whole.

2.2. Institutional steering, coordination and monitoring mechanism on SDGs

Lesotho's institutional architecture for implementing the SDGs is a decentralised but structured coordination mechanism that integrates the SDGs into existing national development systems, promoting ownership across ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs).

The National SDGs Forum, chaired by the Prime Minister, provides strategic direction and multisectoral alignment, engaging senior policymakers, Parliament, private sector, CSOs/NGOs, and vulnerable groups. Oversight is reinforced by the Cabinet and the Parliament Oversight Committee for SDGs, which scrutinises legislation and budgets through an SDG lens.

The Policy Coordination Committee (PCC), led by the Minister of Finance and Development Planning, ensures cross-ministerial integration and works with Technical Working Groups (TWGs) and the Local Government SDG Committee. The Steering Committee, chaired by the Government Secretary, includes senior officials, UN agencies, and partners. The Technical Coordination Committee (TCC) leads day-to-day operations, including indicator tracking and VNR preparation.

Localisation is championed by District SDG Working Groups, co-led by administrators and non-state actors. Monitoring is coordinated by MoFDP's M&E Department and the Bureau of Statistics, guided by NSDS II. However, the effectiveness of this monitoring function is constrained by limited coordination and communication between the MoFDP and MDAs. Despite MoFDP issuing standardised reporting templates, cooperation from MDAs remains inconsistent. Many institutions fail to submit timely and complete progress reports, undermining data accuracy and accountability. Additionally, the M&E Department lacks a dedicated Statistics Unit, which hampers its ability to collect, verify, and analyse data related to SDG implementation. This is further exacerbated by weak data management systems across several MDAs.

2.3. Budgeting for SDGs

The Government of Lesotho (GoL) utilises the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) as its core budgeting mechanism, which serves as a vehicle for operationalising national priorities. MTEF was strengthened to ensure that MDAs align their budgeting processes with specific indicators and targets outlined in the extended NSDP II. This alignment fosters coherence between national development strategies and fiscal planning.

The integration of NSDP II and MTEF ensures that budgeting processes are geared towards measurable development outcomes. It creates a more effective framework for policy implementation and accountability, thereby enhancing Lesotho's ability to deliver on its national and global commitments, including the SDGs.

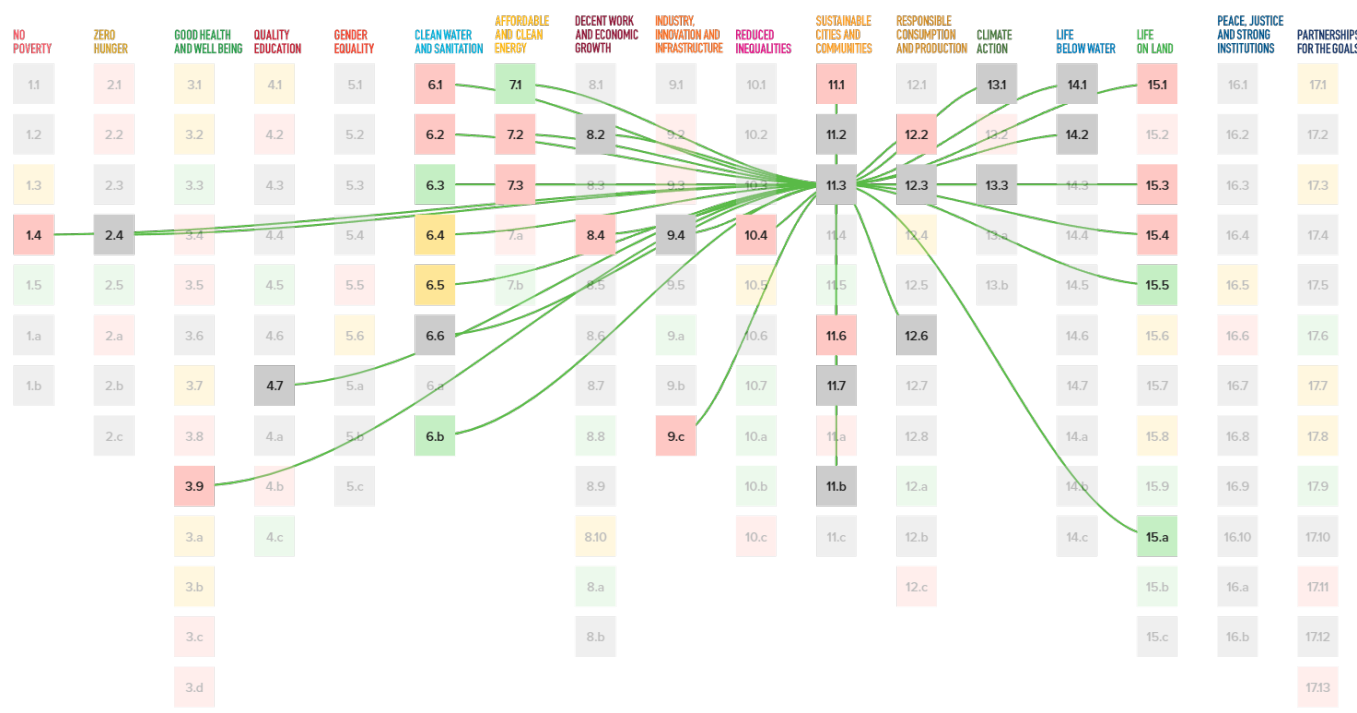
The NSDS II Financing Strategy (2022) provides a structured costing model for statistical production and highlights the funding gap (estimated at 54%) that must be bridged to support reliable, disaggregated, and policy-relevant data systems.

2.4. The SDGs Push Diagnostic (2023)

The SDG Push Diagnostic, conducted in 2023 with UNDP support, is a tool which helps countries practically advance transformative pathways. It integrates multiple data sources and digital innovation to establish a rapid landscape analysis of national priorities, current trends, potential futures, and interlinkages. The SDG Push Diagnostic is the foundation for a tailored 'Integrated SDG Insights' report that helps member states assess areas where they are making investments with biggest multiplier effects, and chart transformative pathways as part of their national commitments at the SDG Summit which took place in September 2023.

The SDGs do not exist in silos; understanding how the goals are interconnected, both positively and negatively, is essential to understanding the mechanisms for achieving the targets. A better understanding of patterns of synergies and trade-offs can support strategic decision making and promote game-changing interventions for the SDGs.

Within SDG 8, Target 8.5 has the highest potential for a positive multiplier effect as it's connected with the most targets across the SDGs. It focuses on achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all, including young people and persons with disabilities. Lesotho's unemployment rate, particularly for youth, is among the highest globally, with youth unemployment estimated at 48.75%. This high unemployment rate contributes significantly to the country's stark inequality. Supporting the growth of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), particularly in key sectors, will be pivotal in creating job opportunities, driving trade, and fostering economic diversification. Encouraging private sector participation and investment will have a ripple effect on broader development objectives, including poverty reduction and addressing income inequality. By focusing on job creation, Lesotho can make significant strides in improving the livelihoods of its people and fostering sustainable economic growth.





Government of Lesotho



3. Policy and Enabling Environment

Lesotho 2025 Voluntary National Review



3. Policy and Enabling Environment

3.1. Awareness and Ownership of SDGs

Since adopting the 2030 Agenda, Lesotho has consistently demonstrated strong national and regional ownership of the SDGs, reflected in its 2019 and 2022 VNRs. From 2016, the Government—through the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MoFDP)—has led awareness campaigns to engage stakeholders including government, Parliament, civil society, academia, private sector, and the public. Activities such as workshops, radio programmes, and public dialogues have fostered inclusive participation and national commitment.

Ahead of the 2025 VNR, MoFDP conducted a series of sensitisation workshops, culminating in a multi-stakeholder consultation with over 100 participants from central and local governments, civil society, academia, private sector, development partners, and persons with disabilities.

Youth engagement remains central to SDG advocacy. Initiatives like the Youth Power Hub and school-based SDG Clubs have equipped young people with tools to track SDG progress. The 2025 SDG Pisto workshop gathered youth perspectives on implementation and challenges across six SDGs.

3.2. Roles of Key Stakeholders in Advancing the 2030 Agenda

A range of non-state actors has played a pivotal role in supporting the domestication and implementation of the SDGs in Lesotho. This section outlines the distinct and complementary contributions of the private sector, civil society, and development partners in operationalising sustainable development across Lesotho.

Private Sector

Through platforms like the Lesotho Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), the private sector has driven job creation and innovation, particularly in agribusiness, renewable energy, and manufacturing. The SDG Investor Map has highlighted 12 priority investment opportunities, encouraging alignment with national development goals. Increasingly, businesses are adopting Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles and participating in policy dialogues and co-financed development initiatives.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

CSOs have strengthened community engagement, accountability, and service delivery for vulnerable groups. Organisations such as the Lesotho Council of NGOs and thematic networks have contributed shadow reports, monitored SDG localisation, and flagged exclusion risks. Their advocacy under the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) process has highlighted 12 governance challenges, including electoral reform and decentralisation. Additionally, a 2023 scoping study on Citizen Generated Data (CGD) by CSOs revealed that they can contribute to indicators on poverty reduction, social protection, education access and gender parity, child labour, gender equality, women's empowerment, reproductive health, disability inclusion, health outcomes, nutrition, food security, environmental sustainability, inequalities, governance, and social justice. Their efforts align with SDGs Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13, 16, and 17, thereby enhancing the accuracy and comprehensiveness of national SDG reporting.

Development Partners

Development partners have supported Lesotho's SDG efforts through technical assistance, policy dialogue, and financial cooperation. UN agencies, PARIS21, the European Union, the World Bank, and bilateral donors have provided targeted support to enhance national capacity in areas such as statistics, governance, climate resili-

ience, and health systems strengthening. Multi-donor support has underpinned the development of the National Social Protection Strategy and the National Adaptation Plan. Furthermore, development partners continue to support data harmonisation under the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS II), ensuring that SDG tracking is consistent and evidence-based.

Specifically, the UNDP played a key role on the SDGs formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), implemented since 2022 in Lesotho, is a tool designed to overcome the financial international constraints to implement the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (FFD3) outcome.

It was created to help governments, in collaboration with their development partners, better understand the national development finance landscape and coordinate efforts to mobilise and align a wide range of financing sources (public and private, domestic and international, etc.) to their sustainable development priorities, using the full potential of all financial and non-financial resources. The INFF support included:

The Development Finance Assessment (DFA): The DFA mapped and analysed development finance flows (domestic/external, public/ private), assessed the possibilities of using existing financial flows and identify future sources, including innovative financing for national development priorities and the SDGs implementation, and assessed the existing institutional capacities and coherence to mobilise, allocate and absorb financial flows towards the NDP and the SDGs implementation. The DFA developed policy recommendations for a roadmap for greater coherence and effective use of financial flows towards the SDGs in Lesotho.

The SDGs Investor Map: The SDGs Investor Map identified 5 SDG-aligned investment opportunity areas to be funded by the private sector (agriculture, manufacturing, renewable energy, health, and financial services). An investor forum will take place in Maseru in 2025, with the projects identified to be presented.

The Integrated Finance Strategy (IFS): The IFS, under finalisation, will articulate the financing architecture needed to drive the required institutional and financing reforms, incorporate the design of a robust monitoring and accountability framework for results, and formulate recommendations to mobilise additional development financing, from public and private, national and international sources, to achieve the national priorities, including innovative financing mechanisms.

Furthermore, The United Nations supported the Government of Lesotho in the preparation of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4) which will take place on June in Spain, in order to provide a unique opportunity to reform financing at all levels, including to support reform of the international financial architecture and addressing financing challenges preventing the urgently needed investment push for the SDGs.

3.3. Integration of the Economic, Social and Environmental dimensions

Lesotho continues to advance the integration of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development through its national planning, sectoral strategies, and institutional reforms. The extended National Strategic Development Plan II (NSDP II) 2023/24–2027/28 and related frameworks such as the National Social Protection Strategy II 2021–2031, and the National Resilience Strategic Framework (2017–2030) reflect this integrated vision by linking economic growth and investment to social equity and environmental sustainability.

From an economic perspective, the NSDP II promotes private sector-led growth in high-potential sectors (agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and tourism) while aligning these priorities with inclusive job creation and

⁴International Labour Organization. (2014). Enabling environment for sustainable enterprises in Lesotho.

⁵UN Lesotho. (2024). Annual Results Report 2023. <https://lesotho.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/One%20UN%20Lesotho%20Results%20Report%202023%20FIN.pdf>

climate-smart diversification. Tools like the SDG Investor Map and the Disaster Risk Financing Strategy help direct investments toward inclusive and resilient growth.

Social protection is being scaled through a unified registry, cash transfers, and productivity-linked programmes like the Seasonal Employment Guarantee Scheme. Initiatives such as the Youth Power Hub and National Gender Policy aim to reduce exclusion and build social capital. Gender-responsive budgeting and support for informal workers further embed social equity into economic planning.

On the environmental front, policies such as the ReNoka programme and the Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (2020–2030) drive integrated catchment and land management, renewable energy, and climate-resilient agriculture. Environmental safeguards in projects like the CAFI initiative reinforce climate action and biodiversity protection.

In 2025, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) theme, “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises”, resonates strongly with Lesotho’s current context. The convergence of external shocks (e.g. US trade tariffs, aid withdrawal), climate variability, and macroeconomic stress have tested the country’s development systems. In response, Lesotho has prioritised integrated responses that build resilience at both institutional and community levels. The establishment of the Disaster Risk Management Fund, reforms to improve public investment management, and digitisation of social transfers illustrate how the integration of economic, social, and environmental strategies is being realised to respond to complex and interconnected development challenges.

Through these ongoing initiatives and reforms, Lesotho continues to strengthen the synergies among economic empowerment, social protection, and environmental resilience, thus reinforcing its commitment to a holistic, inclusive, and sustainable development path.

3.4. Leave No One Behind

Lesotho continues to demonstrate a commitment to the principle of Leave No One Behind (LNOB) by ensuring that development outcomes are inclusive, equitable, and accessible to all, particularly the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

With support from the United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office (UN RCO), a national LNOB assessment in 2024 identified rural residence, gender, disability, poverty, and age as drivers of marginalisation. It found that education acts as a strong protective factor.

As part of the VNR process, Lesotho assessed how the LNOB principle has been implemented by highlighting some of the key initiatives targeted at engagement and empowerment of the most vulnerable groups.

- **Review of the Orphans and Vulnerable Bursary (OVC-B) Scheme:** A review of this scheme revealed exclusion gaps for over-age children, repeaters, and those with disabilities. Implementation of reforms is underway to improve targeting and inclusion.
- **Pathways to Sustainable Livelihoods Project (PSLP):** Funded by the World Bank, this project supports ultra-poor, labour-constrained households in rural districts with life-skills training, climate-resilient agriculture, and financial linkages.
- **Youth and Women Economic Participation:** The EU-funded PYWIEG project empowers youth and women-led CSOs to influence policy and strengthen SMMEs, with a focus on civic engagement and inclusive resource allocation.
- **Disability Inclusion:** Lesotho signed the African Disability Protocol in 2024, affirming rights to bodily autonomy and inclusion, especially for women and girls with disabilities. The Persons with Disability Advisory

Council (PDAC) has been established to guide policy and oversee enforcement of disability rights. World Vision International Lesotho in collaboration with the Child and Gender Protection Unit under the Lesotho Mounted Police Service became instrumental in ensuring creation of child and disability friendly spaces in the courts of law and police stations in Lesotho in line with the African Disability Protocol.

3.5. Systemic issues and transformative actions

Lesotho faces persistent structural constraints in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Key challenges include fiscal reliance on SACU revenues, a narrow export base, underdeveloped infrastructure, and limited institutional coordination. External shocks — such as the anticipated US export tariff, cancellation of MCC Compact II, and USAID withdrawal — further threaten development gains.

Domestically, progress is constrained by limited fiscal space, weak data systems, and underutilised monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The NSDP II Mid-Term Review (2021) flagged poor sectoral alignment, excessive indicators, and lack of accountability. The 2023 SADC Investment Climate Scorecard ranked Lesotho below regional averages, reflecting gaps in regulatory clarity and institutional coordination.

To address these issues, Lesotho has launched several reforms:

- **Investment Climate Action Plan (ICAP):** Targets legal and regulatory reforms to attract diverse FDI and enhance public-private dialogue.
- **SDG Investor Map:** Identifies 12 investment opportunities in sectors like renewable energy, agribusiness, and health.
- **Digital Transformation:** Includes fibre-optic rollout, e-governance platforms, and a National Payment Switch for financial inclusion.
- **Social Registry:** Consolidates safety net beneficiary data for better targeting.
- **Financial Inclusion Project:** Supports MSMEs, youth, and women entrepreneurs with DRF strategies and partial credit guarantees.
- **Textile Industry Revitalisation Plan:** Developed with IFC and World Bank to boost competitiveness and job creation.

Lesotho is also strengthening institutional structures through NSDP Technical Committees, decentralised M&E units, and youth-led platforms such as the Youth Power Hub. Alignment with global standards, including ILO conventions and the EU-funded SUSTAIN project, is enhancing workplace safety and labour inspection.

Strategic entry points for transformation include AfCFTA-driven regional integration, domestic revenue mobilisation, decentralised SDG localisation, diaspora engagement, and disaster risk reduction. These reforms are designed to unlock resilience, inclusivity, and sustainable development.

⁶Government of Lesotho. (2021). National Social Protection Strategy II 2021–2031. Ministry of Social Development.

⁷Government of Lesotho. (2019). National Resilience Strategic Framework and Theory of Change. Ministry of Development Planning.



Government of Lesotho



4. Progress on Goals and Targets

Lesotho 2025 Voluntary National Review



4. Progress on Goals and Targets

4.1. Introduction

Lesotho's 2025 VNR reflects offers a comprehensive evaluation of national progress across six priority Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). In total 69 indicators were assessed across the six (6) SDGs, with 15 for SDG 3, eight (8) for SDG 5, 13 for SDG 8, eight (8) for SDG 13, seven (7) for SDG 14 and 13 for SDG 17.



4.2. SDG 3: Ensure Healthy Lives And Promote Well-Being For All At All Ages

SDG 3 Goal 3 seeks to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all. Among others, the goal aims to reduce maternal and child mortality, end epidemics of diseases such as AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, and combat non-communicable diseases like cancer and diabetes among all. It also targets reducing premature mortality, reducing deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents, and ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health services.

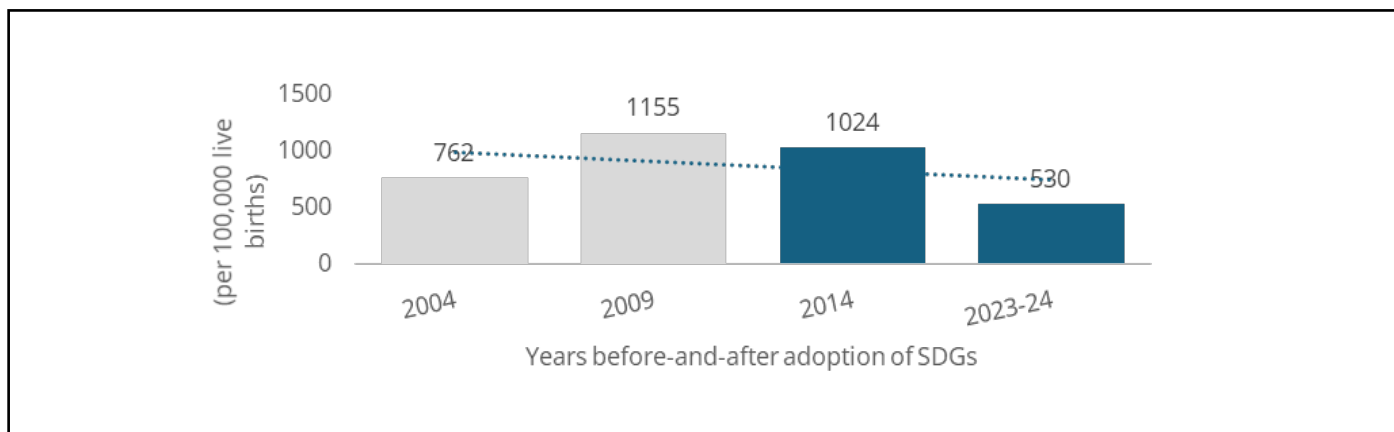
SDG 3 encompasses a broad range of health targets, and Universal Health Coverage (UHC), measured through the UHC service coverage index and financial risk protection. It is the overarching indicator reflecting health system performance and equity. According to the WHO Global Report 2022, Lesotho has achieved 54% on the UHC service coverage index, indicating that just over half of the essential health services are accessible to the population. In terms of financial risk protection, data from the 2018 National Household Expenditure Survey show that 51% of households are exposed to catastrophic health spending, highlighting significant gaps in protecting citizens from the financial burden of healthcare.

Target 3.1: Reduce maternal mortality

Indicator 3.1.1: Maternal mortality ratio

Lesotho has demonstrated gradual, albeit insufficient, progress towards reducing maternal mortality over the past two decades. The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) declined from an alarming 1,155 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2009 to 530 per 100,000 in 2023/24. This trend was further collaborated by the LDS and Census data from a few years before and after the adoption of the SDGs. This represents a 54% reduction, which demonstrates a committed effort towards achieving SDG 3 targets for maternal health. However, the current rate remains significantly above the national target of 300 per 100,000 and far from the global SDG target of fewer than 70 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030. While the downward trajectory is notable, the pace of reduction remains too slow to meet the global goal unless substantial acceleration occurs.

Figure 1: Maternal Mortality Ratios in Lesotho: an overview of a 20-year period



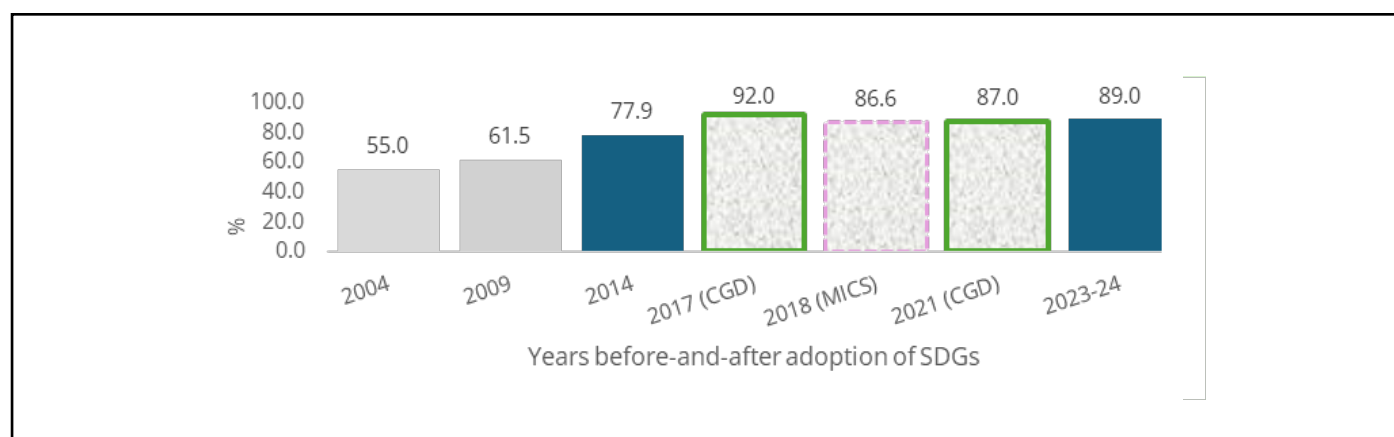
Source: LDHS (2004, 2009, 2014, 2023-24)

Indicator 3.1.2: Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel

The proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel increased from 55% in 2004 to 89% in 2023/24, positioning Lesotho close to the 90% global benchmark set under the Ending Preventable Maternal Mortality initiative. However, the persistently high MMR despite increased skilled birth attendance indicates that improvements in service coverage have not been matched by commensurate improvements in the quality of care.

The Human Resources for Health Strategy (2020–2030) aims to raise the health worker density from 20.7 to 44.5 per 10,000 population, but its slow implementation undermines progress. Health sector reform pilots in four districts showed positive results, with facility-based delivery capacity rising from 3% to 95% between 2014 and 2022. National replication is essential to meet the SDG target by 2030.

Figure 2: Births attended by skilled health personnel in Lesotho: An overview of a 20-year period



Source: LDHS (2004, 2009, 2014, 2023-24; MICS 2018 and CGD [2017 and 2021])

Target 3.2: End preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5

Indicator 3.2.1: Under-five mortality rate

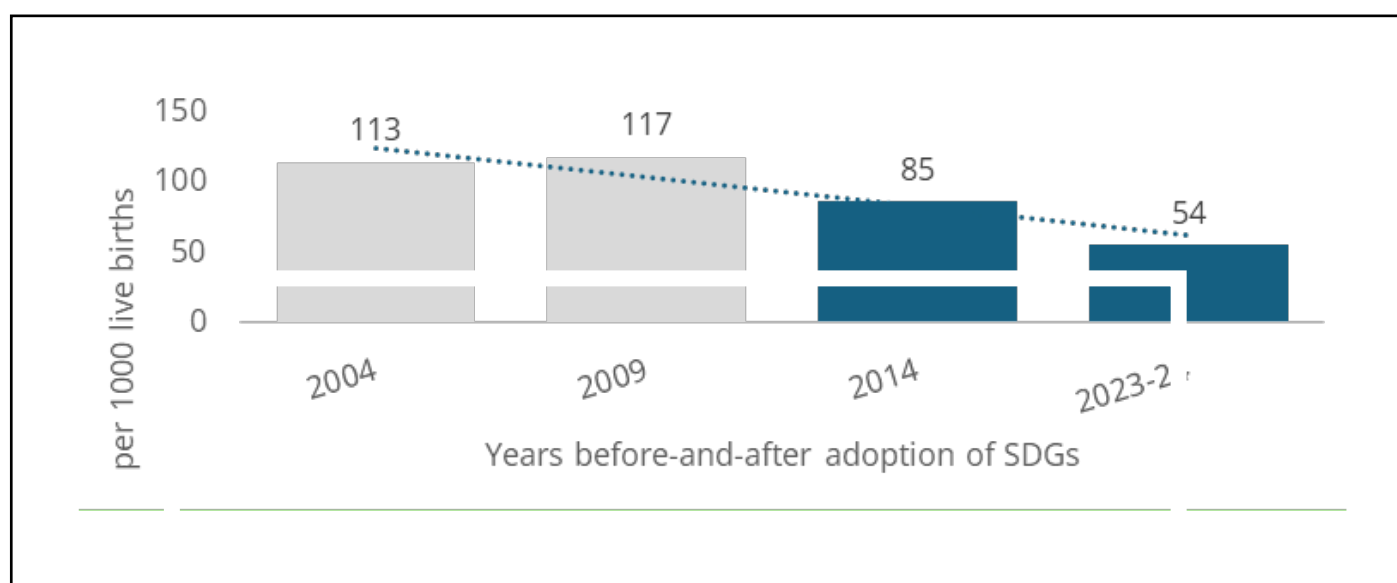
Lesotho has made commendable progress in reducing the under-five mortality rate, which declined from 85 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2014 to 54 per 1,000 live births in 2023/24. Key contributing factors include the expansion of antenatal care (ANC) services, improved immunisation coverage, and an increase in facili-

⁸<https://www.afro.who.int/photo-story/lesotho-provides-digital-lifeline-mothers-and-newborns>

⁹The 2011 Lesotho Demographic Survey (LDS) reported an MMR of 1,143, while the 2016 Population Census reflected a further decline in MMR, reaching 618. The 2021 LDS indicated a continued long-term decline, with the MMR reaching 540 per 100,000 live births.

ty-based deliveries, which rose from 77% in 2014 to 91% in 2023/24. Moreover, the percentage of home births fell drastically to just 8% in the same year, demonstrating the impact of maternal health education and service accessibility. Under-five mortality is significantly higher in rural areas (61/1,000) compared to urban settings (44/1,000), indicating geographical inequities in health service coverage and access. Furthermore, children born to mothers under 20 years of age, from poor households, and those with no formal education experience higher mortality risks. deliveries, which rose from 55% in 2004 to 91% in 2023/24. Moreover, the percentage of home births fell drastically to just 8% in the same year, demonstrating the impact of maternal health education and service accessibility. Under-five mortality is significantly higher in rural areas (61/1,000) compared to urban settings (44/1,000), indicating geographical inequities in health service coverage and access. Furthermore, children born to mothers under 20 years of age, from poor households, and those with no formal education experience higher mortality risks.

Figure 3: Under-Five Mortality in Lesotho: an overview of a 20-year period



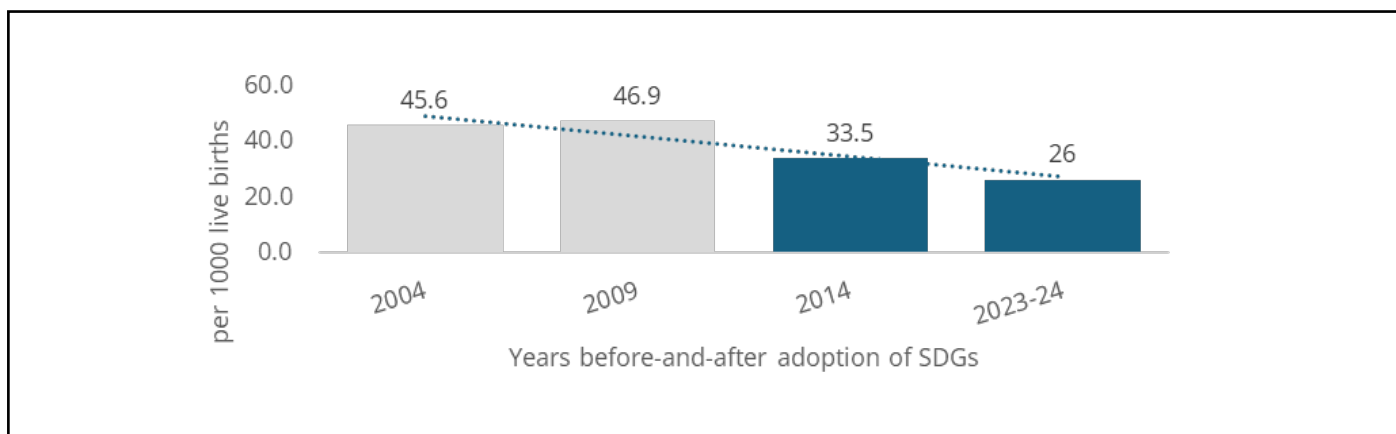
Source: LDHS 2004, 2009, 2014 2023-24

Indicator 3.2.2: Neonatal mortality rate

Neonatal mortality, which accounts for a large share of under-five deaths, has declined from 34 per 1,000 live births in 2014 to 26 per 1,000 live births in 2023/24. Although the progress is notable, it falls short of the global target of 12 per 1,000 live births by 2030.

Several interventions have supported this reduction. These include the scale-up of skilled birth attendance, where the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel increased from 78% in 2016 to 89% in 2023/24, and early initiation of breastfeeding. In addition, vaccination campaigns, including against neonatal infections such as tetanus, and wider coverage of ANC and postnatal care services, have contributed to improve neonatal outcomes.

Figure 4: Neonatal Mortality in Lesotho: an overview of a 20-year period



Source: LDHS (2004, 2009, 2014, 2023-24)

Target 3.3: End epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases

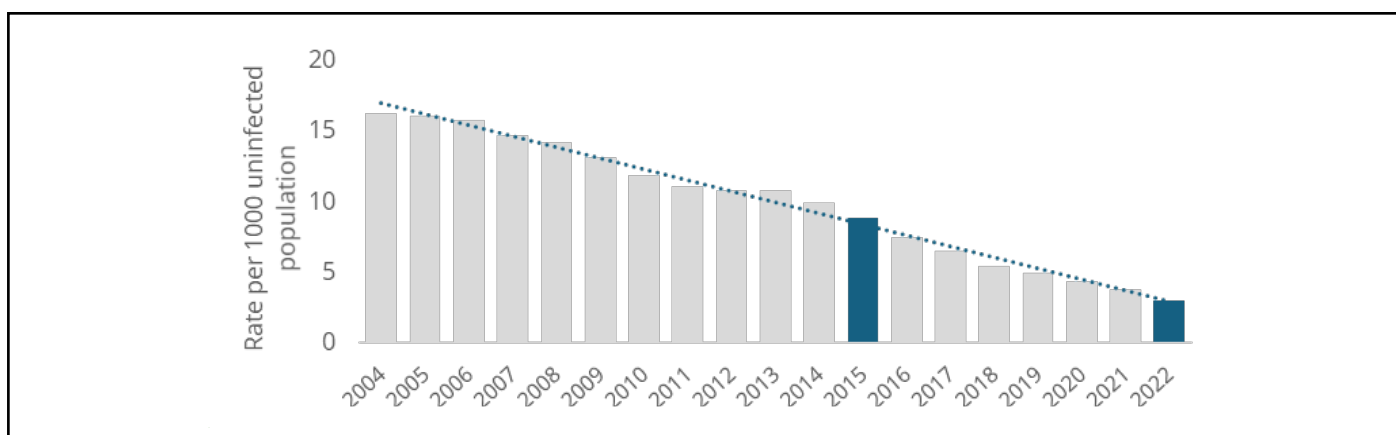
Indicator 3.3.1: Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population

Lesotho remains one of the countries most affected by HIV/AIDS, with a stable adult prevalence of 25%. The highest burden lies among women aged 35-44 and men aged 40-49. Between 2017 and 2023, the annual HIV incidence among adults (aged 15-59) declined from 1.1% to 0.45%, which equates to approximately 5,000 new infections each year, representing a 50% reduction from 2017 levels. Despite this progress, HIV prevalence remains among the highest globally, particularly affecting women and adolescent girls.

Progress has been made towards the UNAIDS 90-90-90 targets: 90.1% of PLHIV know their status, 96.9% of those are on treatment, and 95% have suppressed viral loads.

The 2017 incidence patterns model revealed that over 68% of new infections occur among never-married females, uncircumcised males, and sero-discordant couples. Furthermore, adolescent girls and young women aged 15-24 are 2.5 times more likely to contract HIV than their male counterparts, reflecting structural gender and age-related vulnerabilities. Transactional relationships, poverty, and intergenerational sex are significant risk drivers.

Figure 5: Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population, by sex, age and key populations



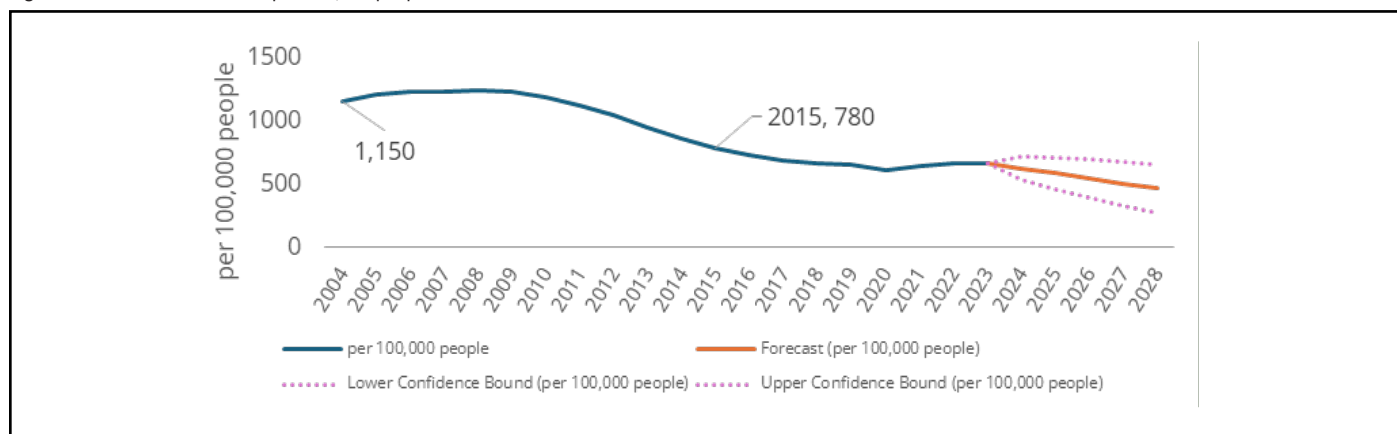
Source: WHO (<https://data.who.int/indicators/i/49AC786/77D059C?m49=426>)

Indicator 3.3.2: Tuberculosis incidence per 100,000 population

Tuberculosis (TB) remains a significant public health challenge in Lesotho, driven by its high co-infection rate with HIV. Between 2004 and 2016, TB incidence declined from 1,292 to 852 per 100,000 population, but progress has since plateaued. The most recent data for 2021 indicates a rate of 592 per 100,000, which is still among the highest in the world and 2.9 times higher than the regional average.

The National Tuberculosis Strategic Plan (2018–2022) set ambitious targets to reduce TB incidence by 50%. However, this has not been met due to inconsistent implementation and the resurgence of TB in 2019.

Figure 6: Tuberculosis incidence per 100,000 people

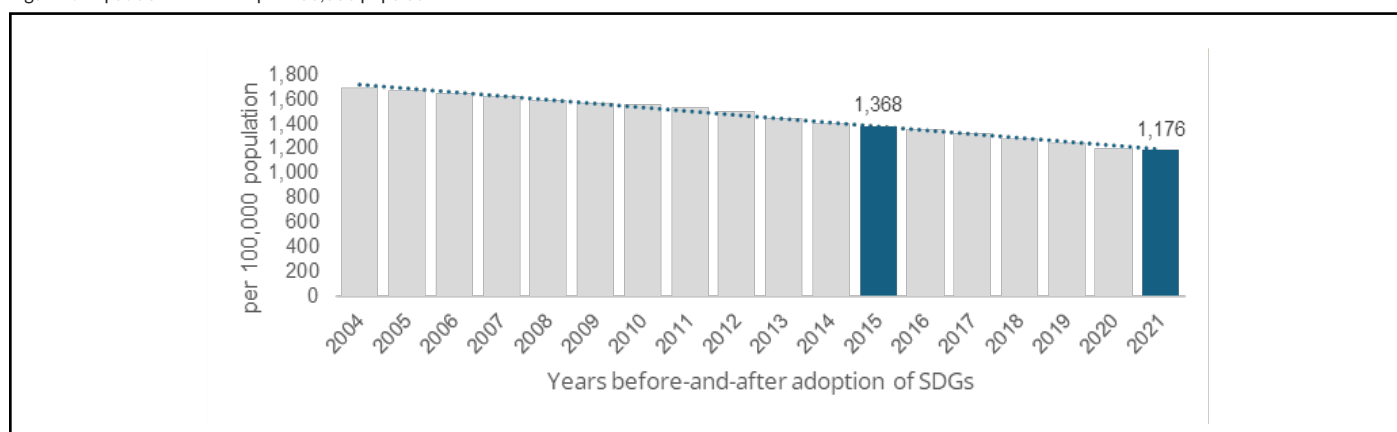


Source: World Bank (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.TBS.INCD?locations=LS>); forecasts by the author

3.3.4 Hepatitis B incidence per 100,000 population

Hepatitis B incidence in Lesotho declined steadily from 1,684 per 100,000 in 2004 to 1,176 in 2021 (Fig 7). Despite fluctuations, the overall downward trend persisted before and after the SDGs' adoption in 2015, indicating that health and vaccination efforts have effectively reduced the disease's burden and improved public health outcomes. Regarding children under 5 years, the prevalence of hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) decreased from 1.6% in 2015 to 1.2% in 2020.

Figure7: Hepatitis B incidence per 100,000 population

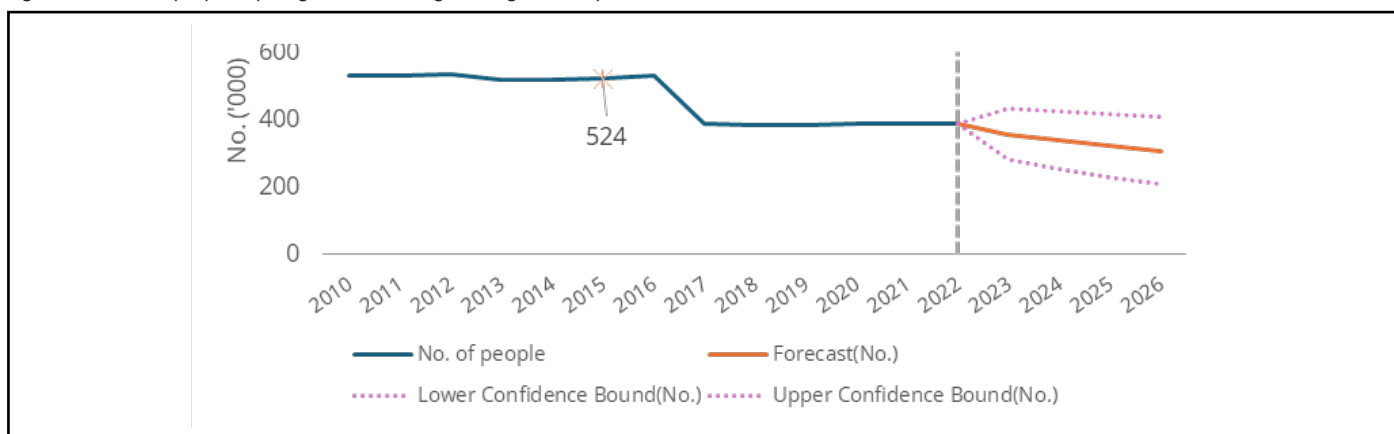


Source: Our World in Data (<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/hepatitis-b-incidence-sdgs?tab=chart&country=~LSO>)

3.3.5 Number of people requiring interventions against neglected tropical diseases

The number of people requiring interventions against neglected tropical diseases in Lesotho has generally fluctuated over the years, peaking around 534,996 in 2012 and declining sharply after 2017, reaching 356,613 in 2023 (Figure 8). Forecasts for 2023 to 2026, based solely on exponential triple smoothing, project a continued decline to approximately 340,379 in 2024 continuing to 307,912 in 2026. These projections rely solely on historical trends and do not account for potential shocks or policy interventions that could alter these numbers.

Figure 8: Number of people requiring interventions against neglected tropical diseases



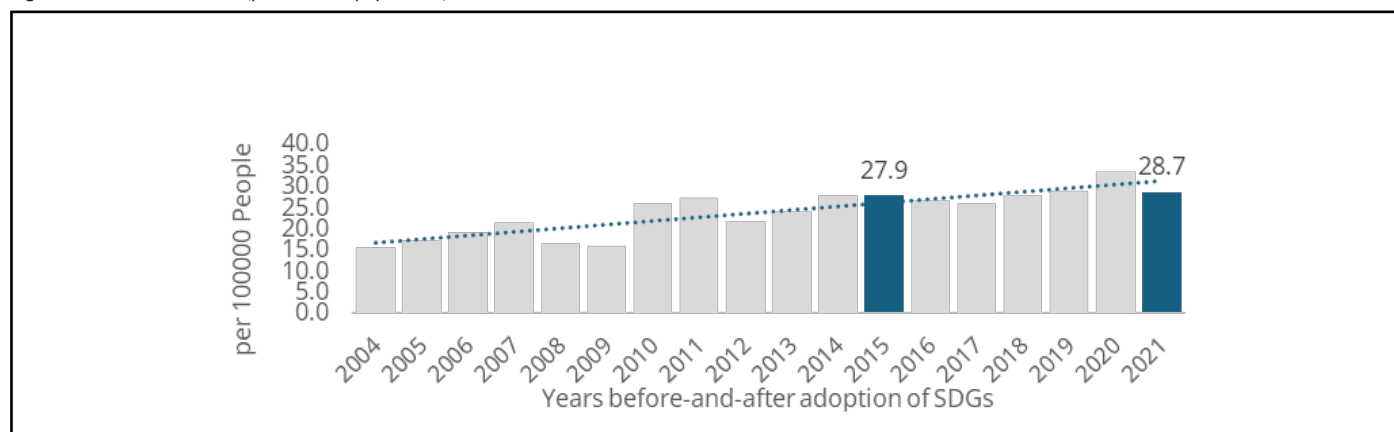
Source: WHO (<https://data.who.int/indicators/i/95935F3/2D6FBE4>); forecasts by the author

Target 3.4: By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being

3.4.2 Suicide mortality rate

Before the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, crude suicide rates in Lesotho showed a fluctuating upward trend, increasing from 15.5 per 100,000 in 2004 to a peak of 27.96 in 2014 (Figure 9). Post-2015, rates remained high and volatile, fluctuating around the mid-20s to low 30s, with a notable spike to 33.38 in 2020 and decline to 28.7% in 2021. Despite some fluctuations, the overall trend indicates persistent high suicide rates before and after SDG adoption, underscoring ongoing mental health challenges that require targeted interventions. While this upward trajectory suggests growing autonomy among women in making informed reproductive choices, an unmet need for family planning persists at 13%, increasing to over 21% among adolescents.

Figure 9: Crude suicide rates (per 100 000 population)



Source: WHO (<https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/mental-health/suicide-rates>)

Target 3.5: Strengthen prevention and treatment of substance abuse

Indicator 3.5.2: Alcohol per capital consumption

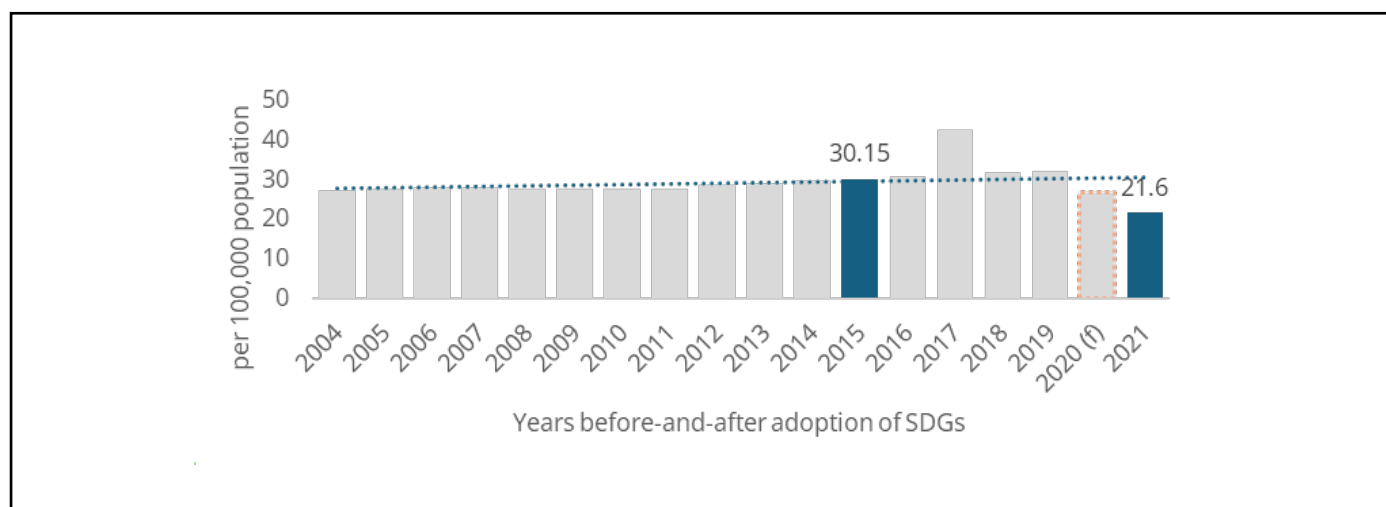
Alcohol consumption in Lesotho remains high, particularly among men aged 25–49. According to the Lesotho DHS 2023–24, 45.7% of men and 28.2% of women aged 15–49 reported consuming alcohol in the past month. Among male drinkers, daily or near-daily consumption was reported by 8.2%, and by 3.1% of female drinkers. Notably, alcohol use was highest among men aged 25–39 and women aged 30–39, with patterns of regular drinking more prevalent in urban areas. These figures point to persistent harmful consumption practices, despite the enactment of the Tobacco and Alcoholic Products Levy Act of 2023, which imposes a 30% levy but lacks behavioural control provisions.

Target 3.6: By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents

3.6.1 Death rate due to road traffic injuries

Road traffic deaths in Lesotho from 2004 to 2021 shows relative stability until 2016, with rates around 27–30 per 100,000, but there was a sharp spike in 2017 (Figure 10). Since then, the numbers have declined, reaching 21.6 in 2021, suggesting progress towards the SDG goal of halving traffic fatalities by 2030. However, the increase in 2017 highlights the need for sustained efforts to reduce fatalities consistently, and ongoing interventions are essential to meet the target. When compared to the SDG target of halving road traffic deaths by 2030 – which would mean reducing the 2016 figure of 30.78 to approximately 15.39, the recent figures suggest progress, especially in 2020 and 2021.

Figure 10: Traffic deaths per 100,000 population



Source: WHO ([https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/estimated-road-traffic-death-rate-\(per-100-000-population\)](https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/estimated-road-traffic-death-rate-(per-100-000-population))); 2020 is a forecast by the author, missing from WHO.

Target 3.7: Ensure access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services

Indicator 3.7.1: Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15–49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods

Lesotho has made substantial progress in expanding access to family planning services, as reflected by the consistent increase in the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) among married women aged 15–49. Between 2004 and 2023–24, CPR rose from 37% to 67%, with modern method usage reaching 65% among married women and 67% among sexually active unmarried women. Notably, there has been a positive shift in rural areas, where

66% of married women now use modern contraceptives—surpassing the 65% in urban areas. Method preferences vary, with injectables, male condoms, and pills being dominant among both married and unmarried women, though the use of condoms is declining in favour of injectables and pills.

While this upward trajectory suggests growing autonomy among women in making informed reproductive choices, an unmet need for family planning persists at 13%, increasing to over 21% among adolescents.

Indicator 3.7.2: Adolescent birth rate (aged 10–14 years; aged 15–19 years)

In 2023, the adolescent birth rate for females aged 15–19 stood at 70.6 births per 1,000 women, a decline from 94/1,000 in 2014, but still well above global and regional targets. The situation is more acute in rural areas, where 20% of teenagers have begun childbearing, compared to 12% in urban areas. Early childbearing is strongly associated with poverty and low educational attainment; 28% of women in the lowest wealth quintile are five times more likely to have started childbearing by age 19 compared to those in the highest quintile.

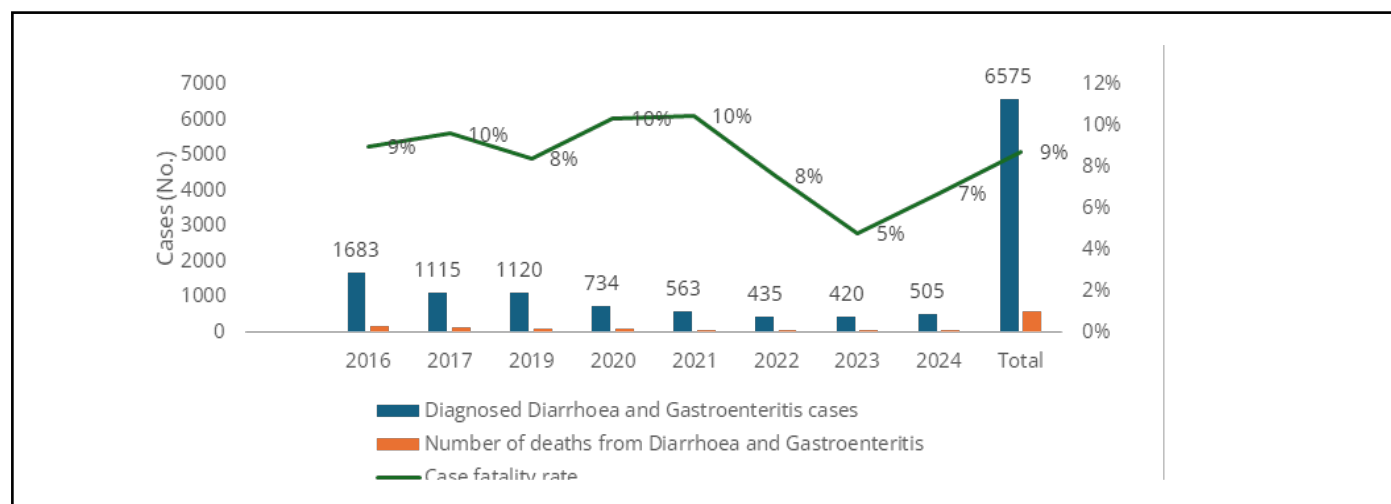
The persistence of early and unintended pregnancies is fuelled by multiple structural drivers. These include limited contraceptive uptake among adolescents (52.6%), gender-based violence (with 14.5% of girls reporting sexual violence before age 18), and entrenched patriarchal norms. While programmes such as Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and adolescent-friendly health services have been institutionalised, their impact is yet to reach scale sufficient to achieve universal access and significantly lower adolescent fertility.

Target 3.9: By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination

Indicator 3.9.2D: Case Fatality Rate in Diarrhoea and Gastroenteritis

According to the Health Information Management System (HIMS), diarrhoea and gastroenteritis were the third leading cause of hospitalisation among children aged 0–5 in 2022, accounting for 6% of admissions, and 4.1% among children aged 6–12. Notably, diagnosed cases of these diseases declined from 1,683 in 2016 to 505 in 2024. However, fatalities exhibited an inconsistent pattern, increasing from 2016 to 2021, falling sharply in 2023, then rebounding to a 9% fatality rate in 2025 — comparable to 2016 levels.

Figure 11: Case fatality rate in Diarrhoea and Gastroenteritis



Source: HIMS (2024)

public smoking. The National Tobacco Policy remains in draft, and institutional gaps in enforcement persist. Without a comprehensive legal framework aligned to WHO FCTC, Lesotho is unlikely to meet this target.

Target 3.b: Support research, development, and access to vaccines and medicines

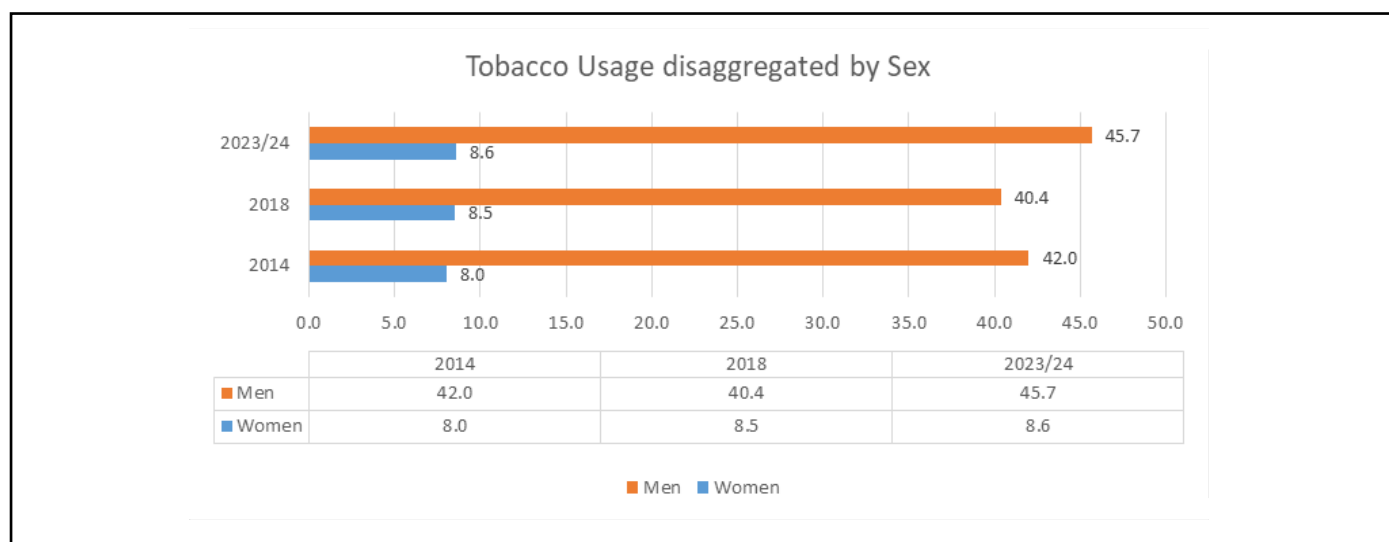
Target 3.a: Implement the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

Indicator 3.a.1: Age-standardised prevalence of tobacco use

Tobacco use in Lesotho remains among the highest in Africa. In 2023/24, 46% of men and 9% of women used tobacco. Prevalence rises with age and is higher in urban areas among women. Although the Tobacco and Alcohol Products Levy Act (2023) imposes a 30% levy, Lesotho lacks enforceable laws prohibiting public smoking. The National Tobacco Policy remains in draft, and institutional gaps in enforcement persist. Without a comprehensive legal framework aligned to WHO FCTC, Lesotho is unlikely to meet this target.

The data on the age-standardised prevalence of tobacco smoking among persons aged 15 years and older in Lesotho indicate a consistent decline from 2005 to 2022, with the prevalence decreasing from 29.4% (confidence

Figure 12: Age-standardised prevalence of tobacco smoking among persons 15 years and older (%)



DHS 2014, MICS 2018 & DHS 2023-24

Target 3.b: Support research, development, and access to vaccines and medicines

Indicator 3.b.1A: Immunisation Coverage by Type

Immunisation coverage shows mixed trends. BCG coverage remains high (99.1% in 2023/24), but full vaccination coverage for children aged 12-23 months has declined from 68% in 2004 to 63% in 2023/24. Polio and DPT3 coverage dropped due to COVID-19 disruptions and systemic weaknesses such as stockouts and poor supervision. Only 43% of children are fully vaccinated according to the expanded national schedule. Lesotho must prioritise EPI system strengthening to achieve 90% coverage for all essential vaccines.

The proportion of children fully vaccinated against four basic antigens declined by six points from 68% in 2004 to 62% in 2009 before bouncing back to 68% in 2014. Although the same percentage was maintained between 2014 and 2018, a further decline to 63% occurred in 2023-24.

Table 2: Vaccination coverage for children aged 12-24 months over a period of 20 years

SOURCE	BCG	DPT1	DPT2	DPT3	Polio_1	Polio_2	Polio_3	Measles	All	None
DHS 2004	96	95	92	83	95	90	80	85	68	2
DHS 2009	95	96	91	84	94	88	75	80	62	3
DHS 2014	98	98	95	85	96	89	76	90	68	1
MICS 2018	95.7	91.5	90.2	85.6	94.1	88.9	79.8	89.9	68.9	2.3
DHS 2023-24	99.1	97.7	94.4	84.4	94.4	87.7	70.4	86.5	63	0.2

Source: HIMS (2024)

Indicator 3.b.3: Proportion of health facilities that have a core set of relevant essential medicines available and affordable on a sustainable basis

Lesotho has improved access to essential medicines, especially for non-communicable diseases (NCDs). A study on the perception of health workers on availability of medicines for non-communicable diseases in public health facilities in Lesotho reveals the following findings. (1) The type of medicines for NCDs available in public health facilities in Lesotho were of good quality, safe, available and affordable. (2) The public health facilities in Lesotho had medicines for NCDs as per the WHO Model of Essential Medicines 21st 2019 and the Lesotho EML 2017 and infrequently ran out of medicines for NCD management.

Target 3.d: Strengthen capacity for early warning, risk reduction and management of health risks

Indicator 3.d.1: International Health Regulations (IHR) capacity and emergency health preparedness

Lesotho has improved access to essential medicines, especially for non-communicable diseases (NCDs). A study on the perception of health workers on availability of medicines for non-communicable diseases in public health facilities in Lesotho reveals the following findings. (1) The type of medicines for NCDs available in public health facilities in Lesotho were of good quality, safe, available and affordable. (2) The public health facilities in Lesotho had medicines for NCDs as per the WHO Model of Essential Medicines 21st 2019 and the Lesotho EML 2017 and infrequently ran out of medicines for NCD management.

Target 3.d: Strengthen capacity for early warning, risk reduction and management of health risks

Indicator 3.d.1: International Health Regulations (IHR) capacity and emergency health preparedness

Lesotho has partially met IHR (2005) requirements. The country established an IHR office and adapted Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) guidelines. While legal frameworks remain outdated (e.g. Public Health Order of 1970), administrative and operational mechanisms exist. Lesotho attained 42% in the 2024 IHR Core Capacity Score, below the regional average of 52%.

The country has adequate human health laboratory infrastructure but lacks formal multi-sectoral coordination and sufficient veterinary and food safety capacity. Risk mapping tools and contingency plans exist, including a COVID-19 emergency response centre and mobile surveillance units. Despite data quality issues and fragmented communication structures, the COVID-19 response showcased potential for cross-sectoral coordination.

The country has invested in public health emergency preparedness and risk mapping, which includes disease-specific contingency plans (e.g., Ebola and anthrax) as well as a multi-hazard national contingency framework. On the laboratory preparedness front, Lesotho operates 28 laboratories, including national reference laboratories, district hospitals, and Point-of-Care Testing (POCT) at health centres. However, coordination be-

tween the health and agriculture sectors in monitoring zoonotic diseases remains ad hoc, and there is an acute shortage of veterinary staff, undermining sustained surveillance of animal-to-human disease transmission.

Key Initiatives

- The M-Mama initiative, established in partnership with the Vodafone Foundation, has made commendable strides in bridging emergency transport gaps for expectant mothers, particularly in rural areas. The initiative uses mobile technology and a decentralised driver network to transport pregnant women to health facilities swiftly and affordably. Over 3,800 drivers are enrolled, significantly reducing delays in emergency care access. As of 2025, it is fully funded and operated by the Government of Lesotho.
- Additionally, maternal waiting homes supported by Partners In Health (PIH) have significantly increased access to skilled care for women in remote highland areas, contributing to safer deliveries and reduced maternal deaths in targeted districts. By 2024, over 11,600 women had benefited from care in PIH-supported facilities, improving institutional deliveries in remote areas.
- Maternal Death Reviews (MDRs) have been institutionalised to assess and learn from each reported maternal death. Supported by UNFPA and WHO, audits between 2016 and 2020 found haemorrhage and abortion as the leading causes of death, with 42.6% of cases linked to poor quality of care. The MDR process offers valuable insights, though implementation of its recommendations remains weak.

5 GENDER EQUALITY



4.3. SDG 5: ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

Goal 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls in Lesotho, and this can benefit from comprehensive measurement using statistical indicators that the country has identified as applicable to the Lesotho setting for assessing progress in this area. These include tracking rates of discrimination, violence, harmful practices, women's participation in decision-making, access to reproductive health, economic rights, and the enforcement of gender-equal policies. Monitoring progress in these areas provides valuable data to assess advancements toward gender equality and to inform policy actions.

SDG 5 addresses the structural and systemic barriers that hinder gender equality and women's empowerment, spanning legal rights, representation, violence prevention, and reproductive autonomy. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) provides an overarching measure of gender disparities, and Lesotho's 2022 GII score of 0.515 places it 135th globally, reflecting persistent inequality despite strong constitutional protections. While strides have been made in access to education and maternal healthcare, substantial gender gaps remain in economic participation, representation in senior decision-making roles, and incidence of gender-based violence.

Target 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

Indicator 5.1.1: Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex

The Constitution of Lesotho (1993), under Section 18, guarantees the right to freedom from discrimination, including on the basis of sex. The Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act (2006) abolished marital power and granted women equal status in marriage. The promulgation of the Counter Domestic Violence Act (2022) marks a significant milestone, criminalising various forms of abuse and mandating protective services. The har-

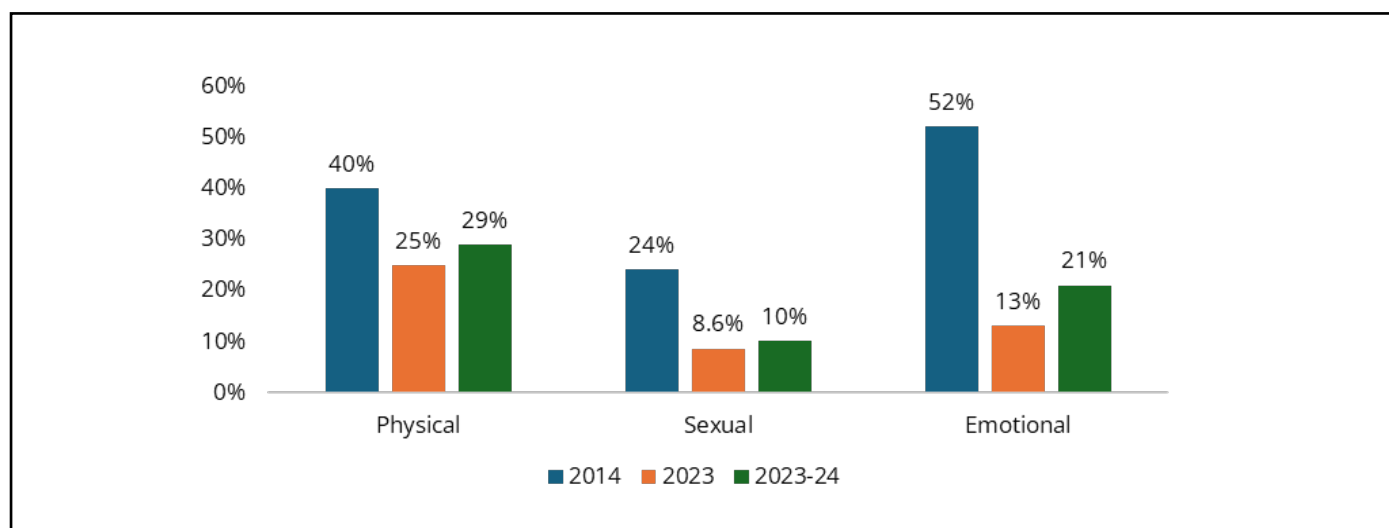
monisation of the Rights of Customary Widows with the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act (2022) grants widows in customary unions full control and ownership of estates, while the Administration of Estates and Inheritance Act (2024) ensures equal inheritance rights for all children, regardless of birth status or the marital status of their parents.

Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

Indicator 5.2.1: Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age

Eighteen per cent (18%) of ever-partnered women reported experiencing physical violence from an intimate partner in the past 12 months, 15% experienced emotional violence, and 7% reported sexual violence within the same period. The highest prevalence was noted among women aged 30–39, with 21.1% reporting emotional violence and 8.9% experiencing sexual violence. In contrast, younger women aged 15–19 and 20–24, who are often in age-disparate relationships, reported 12.8% experiencing sexual violence, revealing a worrying trend of vulnerability among adolescents and young women.

Figure 13: Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence by type



Source: Gender Links, 2014; BOS, 2023; LDHS 2023-24

The lifetime experience of IPV is even more severe. 45% of currently married women or those living with a partner have experienced physical violence since age 15, compared to 19% among those never married. Although emotional and sexual violence reportedly declined between 2014 and 2023, there was a reversal in trend post-July 2023, with emotional violence rising from 13% to 21%, sexual violence from 8.6% to 10%, and physical violence from 25% to 29%. This regression has been linked to socio-economic pressures exacerbated by post-COVID-19 unemployment.

Indicator 5.2.2: Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence

Lesotho has shown progress in reducing the incidents of non-partner sexual violence, but structural issues remain. Only 4% of women aged 15–49 reported experiencing sexual violence from a non-intimate partner throughout their lives, and less than 1% indicated such experiences within the 12 months before the survey. This represents a notable reduction from earlier years, especially from July 2023, when 4.5% of women had faced such violence in the previous year.

Women aged 20–24 were the most affected, with 7% experiencing non-partner sexual violence in their life-time. Lifetime prevalence remained relatively high for the 30–39 and 40–49 age brackets as well. However, the 12-month prevalence across all age groups remained below 1%, signalling effective recent prevention efforts. affects girls from the poorest wealth quintile (26%) and those with no formal education (32%). Only 4% of women with tertiary education reported being married before the age of 18.

Target 5.3: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

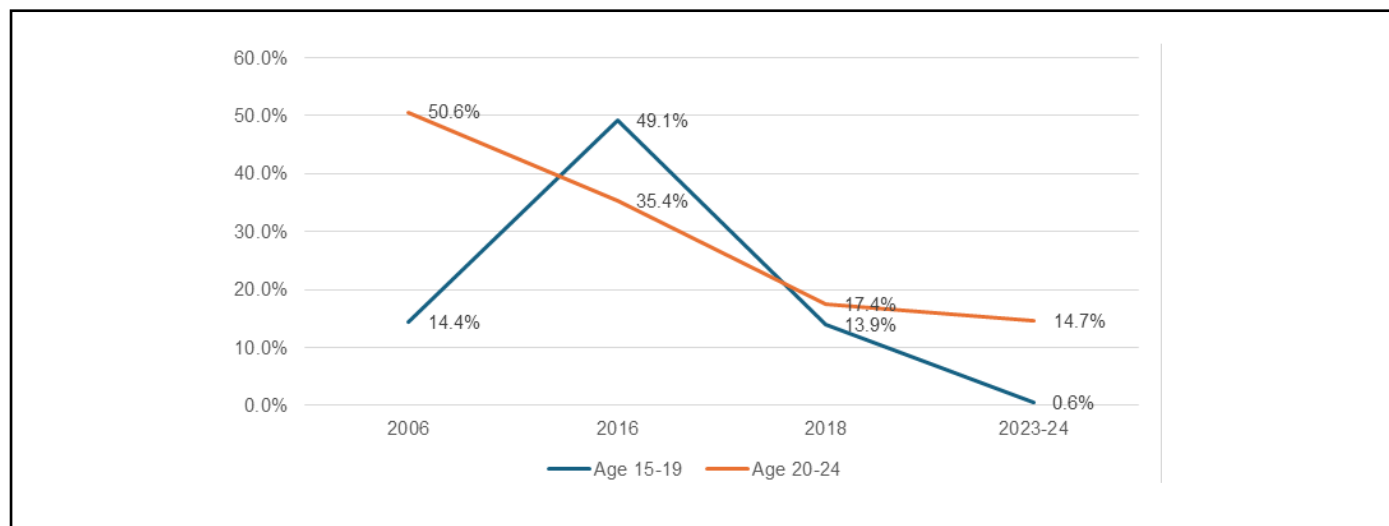
Indicator 5.3.1: Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18

The data shows that a high proportion of women in the 15–19 and 20–24 age groups were married or in a union before age 15 and 18 (Figure 14). Specifically, 14.4% of women aged 15–19 and 50.6% of women aged 20–24 experienced early marriage or union before age 15 and 18. There was a significant decline in early marriage among the 20–24 age group from 50.6% in 2006 to 35.4% in 2016. Conversely, the proportion of women aged 15–19 married early increased sharply from 14.4% to 49.1% during the same period. Since 2016, early child marriage has decreased for both groups, with the most notable reduction in the 15–19 age group, dropping from 13.9% in 2018 to just 0.6% in 2023–24

About 18.2% of women aged 20–24 were married or in a union before the age of 18, a slight decline from 19% reported in 2014. Meanwhile, the proportion of girls married before the age of 15 has remained relatively low at 1.6%, down marginally from 2% in 2014.

Early marriage is more prevalent in rural areas (21%) compared to urban settings (14%) and disproportionately affects girls from the poorest wealth quintile (26%) and those with no formal education (32%). Only 4% of women with tertiary education reported being married before the age of 18.

Figure 14: Proportion of women aged 15–19 and 20–24 who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18 from 2006–2023–24



Source: VNR 2022; MICS 2018; LDHS 2023–24

Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

Indicator 5.5.1: Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments

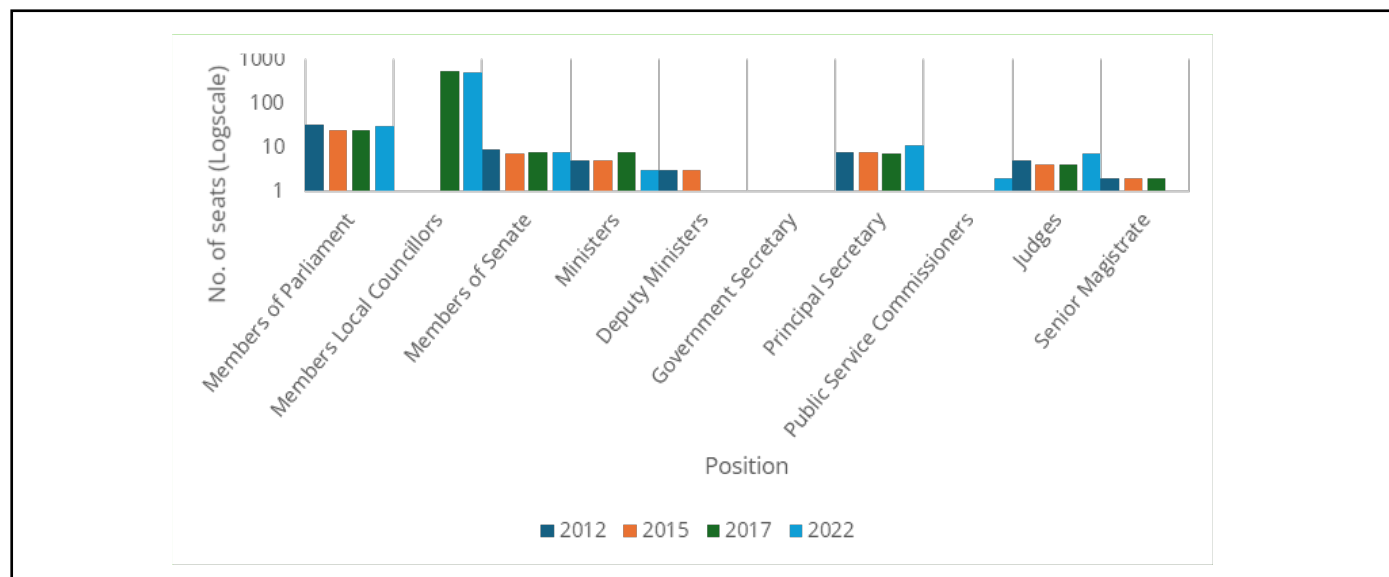
Lesotho has made moderate progress in promoting women's political participation, particularly through its adoption of mixed electoral mechanisms and quota-based systems. The number of seats held by women in parliament increased from 26.3% in 2015 to 34% in 2022. The number of women parliamentarians currently stands at 28 out of 120 (23,3%) seats in the National Assembly, while there are only eight seats out of 33 (24.2%) that are occupied by women in the Upper House of Parliament.

At the local government level, 49% of elected local councillors were women, indicating women's representation is relatively stronger, owing to the legislated quota under the Local Government Elections Act (Amendment).

Lesotho's quota system, enhanced by initiatives offering training in leadership, public speaking, and campaign management for women, along with voter education campaigns featuring gender components, remains a cornerstone of gender balance in subnational governance. However, no comparable mechanism exists for national elections.

Further analysis presented in Figure 15 shows that from 2012 to 2022, the representation of women across political and administrative roles exhibited mixed trends. The number of women in parliament remained relatively stable, ranging from 25 to 33 members. Local councillor representation surged from none in 2012 and 2015 to over 500 in 2017, then slightly declined in 2022. Senate and judicial roles experienced modest increases, with judges rising from four to seven. Ministerial positions peaked at eight in 2017 but decreased to three by 2022, while deputy ministers declined to zero. The role of Government Secretary was held by women only once, in 2022. Overall, there was some progress, particularly in local government and the judiciary, but growth across other sectors remained inconsistent.

Figure15: No. of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments



Source: Gender Report, 2023 (BOS)

Indicator 5.5.2: Proportion of women in managerial positions

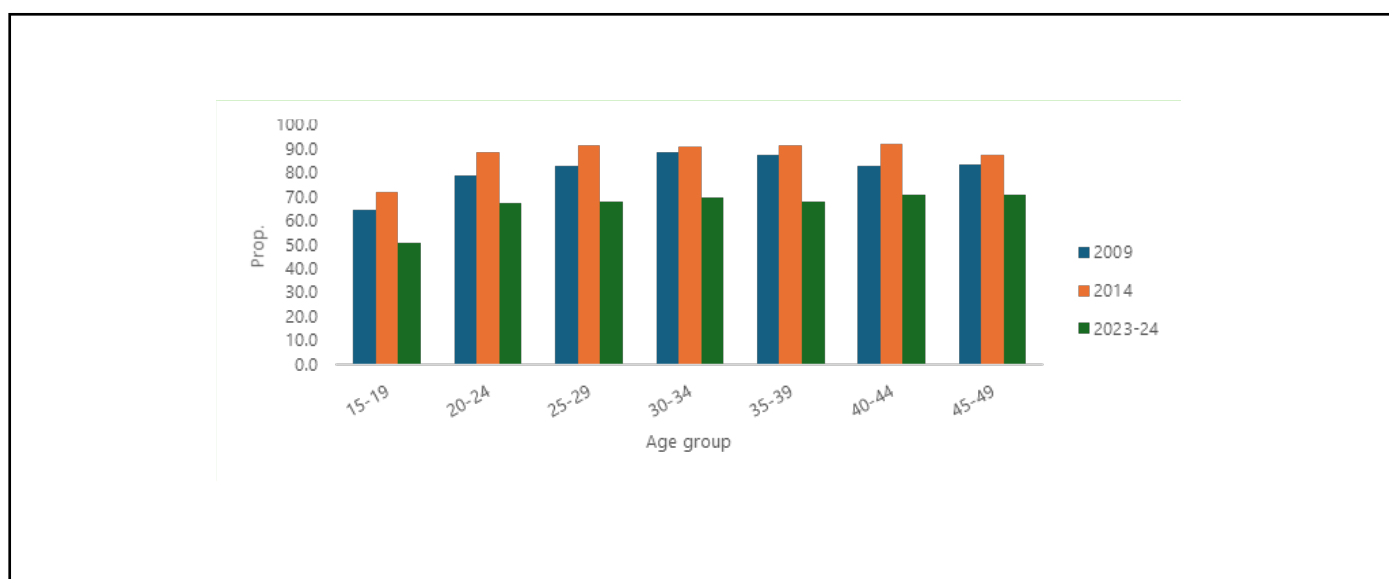
Female participation in the workforce: Women remain severely underrepresented in managerial and decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors. Women account for only 19.4% of total managerial roles but in the public sector, women's representation is stronger, accounting for approximately 35% of senior civil service positions while in the private sector, the proportion is significantly lower, with women predominantly concentrated in middle management and informal enterprises, and largely absent from executive leadership and boardrooms.

Target 5.6: Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

Indicator 5.6.1: Proportion of women aged 15–49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care

Approximately 79% of women aged 15–49 reported that they are able to make informed decisions regarding their own sexual relations, use of contraception, and access to reproductive health services. This represents a notable improvement from 68% in 2014. Young women aged 15–24, rural residents, and those in the lowest wealth quintiles report significantly lower levels of decision-making autonomy. Cultural norms, gender-based power imbalances, and limited access to youth-friendly services act as structural barriers to universal autonomy. Between 2009 and 2014, the proportion of women aged 15–49 making their own informed reproductive decisions increased significantly, supporting progress toward universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (Figure 16). However, recent data from 2023–24 shows a decline across all age groups, indicating challenges in maintaining these gains. Addressing this trend is crucial to ensure women's autonomy and access to reproductive rights in line with international commitments.

Figure16: Proportion of married women who can make decisions about own health care



Source DHS, 2014;2009;2023-24)

Indicator 5.6.2: Laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education

The situation analysis of Adolescent articulates commitments to ensuring universal access to SRH services and information for all individuals aged 15 and above, regardless of gender or marital status. This aligns with the Programme of Action from the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the Beijing Platform for Action. Despite formal commitments, there are no standalone laws that explicitly guarantee enforceable rights to access SRH care, information, and education. Instead, access remains subject to discretionary implementation, especially for minors and unmarried adolescents, who frequently encounter informal barriers such as provider bias and lack of privacy.

¹⁴UNICEF (2023), Situation Analysis of Children, Adolescents and Youth in the Kingdom of Lesotho.

Key Interventions and Achievements

- The country has ratified key international instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, the African Union (AU) Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, and the Convention on Violence and Harassment (ILO C190). However, enforcement remains uneven, particularly in rural areas where customary law practices and Section 18(4)(c) of the Constitution, which permits discrimination under customary law, continue to undermine statutory protections.
- Legal reforms include the Counter Domestic Violence Act (2022), now translated into Sesotho to enhance implementation, and the Marriage Act (1974), which prohibits child marriage under 18 without exception. The Trafficking in Persons Act (2011, amended 2021) has strengthened the legal framework against sexual exploitation and non-intimate partner violence.
- Institutional measures have included the establishment of a national referral framework for trafficking and GBV survivors (2021) and partnerships with the Lesotho Mounted Police Service and Child and Gender Protection Unit (CGPU) to support case reporting and prosecution. Despite these efforts, underreporting persists. In 2024, police records identified sexual abuse as the most reported GBV type, with hotspots in Maseru, Leribe, and Butha-Buthe.
- Preventive and empowerment initiatives have also advanced. The OVC-Bursary Scheme and adolescent girl empowerment programmes promote school retention to delay early marriage. With support from UNICEF and UNFPA, chiefs, teachers, and religious leaders have been sensitised to shift harmful social norms.
- On sexual and reproductive health rights, the roll-out of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in schools and the Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH) Strategy have expanded knowledge and access, including the establishment of youth-friendly corners in health facilities. Nonetheless, CSE implementation faces resistance, particularly in conservative areas.
- Community mobilisation and peer-led programmes, driven by NGOs such as Help Lesotho and PSI, have contributed to changing attitudes. Meanwhile, strengthened contraceptive supply chains and an expanded service delivery network have improved physical access to reproductive services, although stockouts and limited method choice remain pressing challenges.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



4.4. SDG 8:

PROMOTE SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

SDG 8 encapsulates the nexus between economic performance, labour market dynamics, and productivity. It also focuses on improving resource efficiency, decoupling economic growth from environmental harm, decent work and develop sustainable tourism to create jobs and support local culture. Strengthening financial institutions, increasing trade support, and implementing strategies for youth employment are also key components.

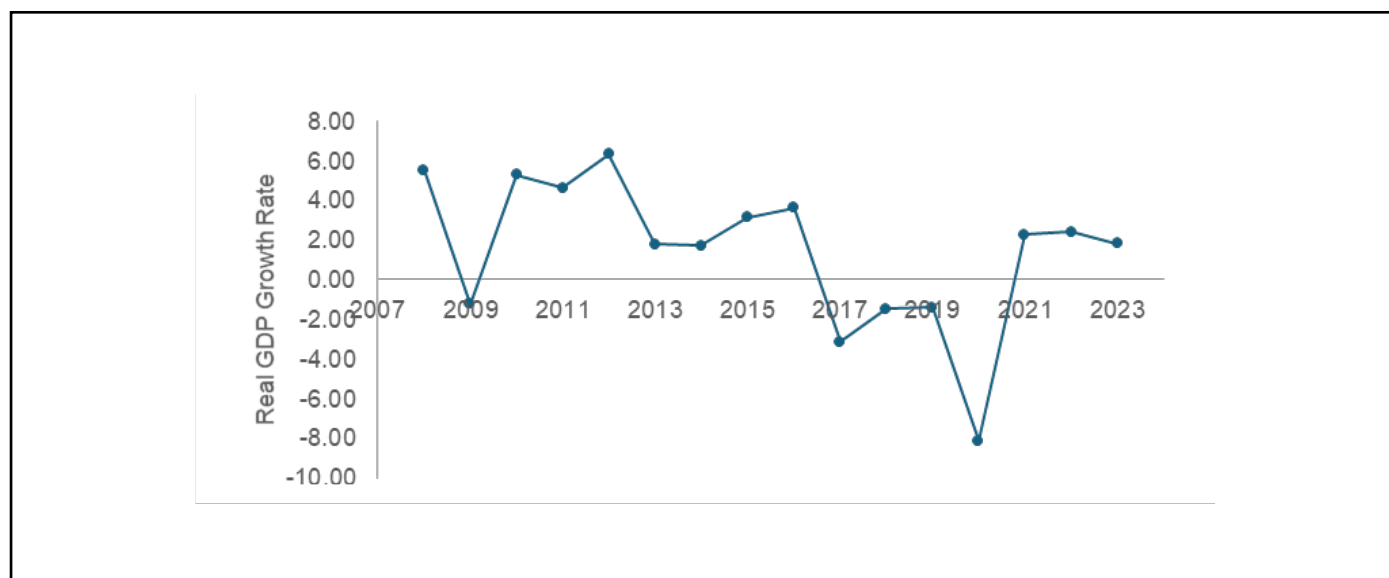
Lesotho's real GDP growth remains below the least developed country (LDC) benchmark of 7%, with average growth of just 1.9% between 2019 and 2023. The country's employment-to-population ratio remains stagnant at 42.3% (LFS 2019), and youth unemployment is particularly acute. Labour productivity declined over the reporting period, and informality dominates the jobs landscape. The overarching indicator of progress, growth in GDP per employed person—reveals limited structural transformation, underscoring the need for accelerated reforms in job creation and private sector competitiveness.

Target 8.1: Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least seven percent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries.

Indicator 8.1.1: Real GDP growth rate, GDP per capita growth rate

Lesotho's GDP growth was generally modest prior to the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, fluctuating between positive and negative values, with notable variability and periods of slow or negative growth, especially in 2013 and 2014 as shown by Figure 17. From 2016 onwards, growth began to decelerate, averaging below 3%, with frequent shocks, both domestic (e.g., fiscal consolidation, slow project execution) and external (e.g., droughts, trade disruptions). The economy experienced a sharp downturn in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with GDP contracting by 8.2%. Following this crisis, there was a partial recovery in 2021 and 2022, but growth remained subdued at around 2% to 2.4%, significantly below the SDG target of at least 7% annual growth. Lesotho has not met the 7% GDP growth target for Least Developed Countries (LDCs), as real GDP growth rate has consistently remained below 3% in recent years. From 2007 to 2015, the Lesotho economy experienced moderate growth, averaging above 3%. Significant revenues from the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), robust textile exports, public investment in infrastructure, and a thriving mining sector, particularly in diamonds, contributed positively to observed growth.

Figure 17: Real GDP year-on-year growth Rate



Note: GDP annual growth rate is the annual percentage change in the value of GDP, at constant 2012 prices, from the previous year.
Source: BOS Annual National Accounts (2023)

Target 8.2: Achieve Higher Levels of Economic Productivity through Diversification, Technological Upgrading and Innovation.

Indicator 8.2.1: Real GDP per employed person

Between 2019 and 2024, Lesotho recorded a modest decline in real GDP, falling from M21,174 million to M20,735 million. This contraction coincided with an increase in total employment, which expanded by 28,277 jobs, from 521,445 to 549,722. However, the majority of new employment was concentrated in low-productivity sectors, notably subsistence agriculture, informal trading, and low-skill manufacturing. Consequently, labour productivity, measured as real GDP per employed person, declined significantly, contracting at an average annual rate of -7.11%, underscoring a shift towards less productive forms of employment and structural inefficiencies in the labour market.

Table 3: GDP per employed persons

Year	Real GDP (million Maloti)	Employed persons	Real GDP per Employed persons	Growth rate (%)
2019	21,174	521,445	40,606.87	
2024	20,735	549,722	37,718.95	-7.11%

Source: 2019 and 2024 Labour Force Survey

Target 8.3: Promote Development-Oriented Policies that Support Productive Activities, Decent Job Creation, Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Innovation, and Encourage the Formalization and Growth of Micro-, Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs).

Indicator 8.3.1D: Informal employment in non-agricultural employment

Lesotho's labour market remains heavily informal, with 461,873 individuals in informal work, 78.8% in non-agricultural sectors, as per the 2024 Labour Force Survey. Key sectors driving this trend include household employment (19.1%), retail (14.3%), manufacturing (12.4%), construction (9.9%), and accommodation and food services (4.5%).

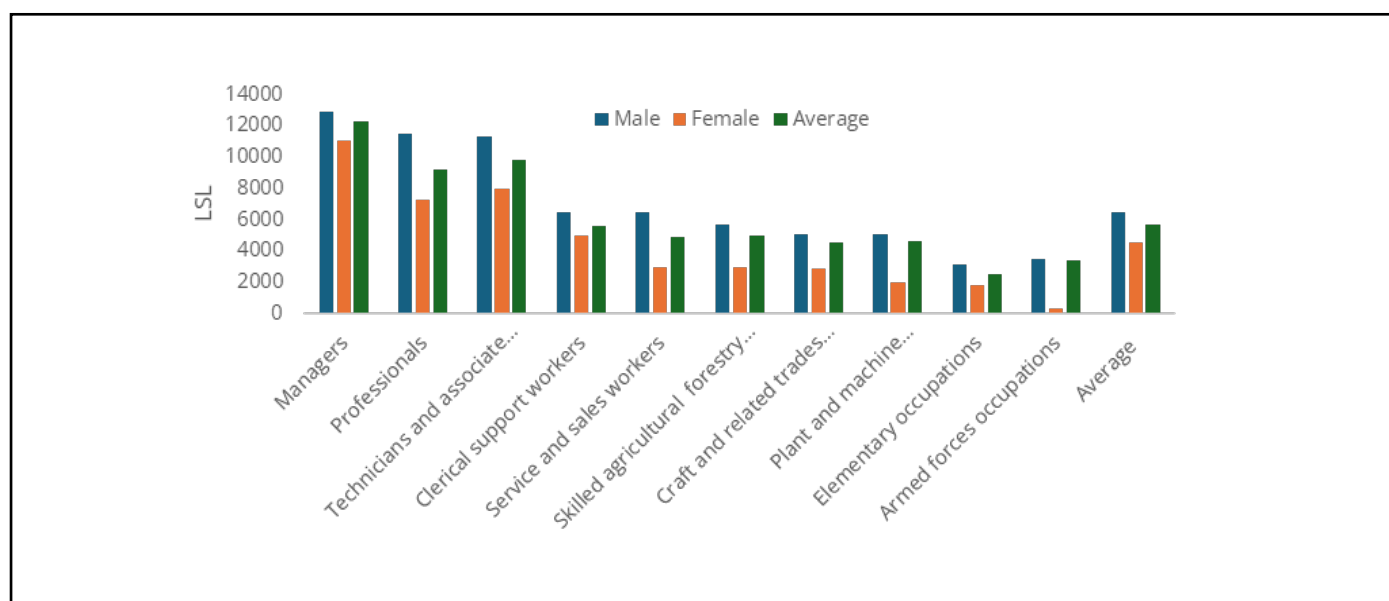
Target 8.5: By 2030, Achieve Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All Women and Men, Including for Young People and Persons With Disabilities, and Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value.

Indicator 8.5.1D: Average monthly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age and persons with disabilities

The 2024 Labour Force Survey reveals pronounced and persistent gender pay gap across all occupational categories in Lesotho, with women earning only M4,487.63 compared to M6,491.47 for men, which equates to 69% of what men earn. This disparity is especially acute in high-skilled roles, where professional women earn M7,231.84, which is 36.8% less than males (M11,450.96), and female technicians earn M7,962.68, nearly 30% less. Even in lower-skilled and elementary occupations, women continue to earn significantly less, between 57% and 60% of the wages of men.

At ages 15–19, young women earn M1,001.15 on average, while men earn M2,418.88, creating a gap where females earn only 41.4% of males. For those aged 20–24, the gap narrows, with females earning M1,710.26 compared to M2,724.53 for males, resulting in women earning 62.8% of men's earnings. Women aged 30–34 earn M5,173.10, while men earn M5,371.61, leading to a modest gap of 3.7%.

Figure 8: Mean monthly earnings (in Maloti) by occupation and Sex – LFS 2024



Source: 2024 Labour Force Survey key Indicators

Indicator 8.5.2: Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities

Lesotho's national unemployment rate increased from 22.5% in 2019 to 30.1% in 2024 which is an increase of 7.6 percentage points. Youth unemployment (ages 15–35) is 37.75%, with a pronounced gender gap: 39.8% for females and 35.97% for males. Findings further indicate that 98.08% of youth were employed in the informal sector.

Target 8.7: Take Immediate and Effective Measures to Eradicate Forced Labor, End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, and Secure the Prohibition and Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

Indicator 8.7.1D: Proportion and number of children aged 6-14 years engaged in child labour, by sex and age

Lesotho's labour market remains heavily informal, with 461,873 individuals in informal work, 78.8% in non-agricultural sectors, as per the 2024 Labour Force Survey. Key sectors driving this trend include household employment (19.1%), retail (14.3%), manufacturing (12.4%), construction (9.9%), and accommodation and food services (4.5%).

Target 8.5: By 2030, Achieve Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All Women and Men, Including for Young People and Persons With Disabilities, and Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value.

Indicator 8.5.1: Average hourly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age and persons with disabilities

Child labour in Lesotho is 3.3% in the age 10-17 of which 79.1% are boys and 20.9% are girls aged 10–17. This disproportionate representation is particularly acute at younger ages, where boys dominate employment figures, comprising 100% of employed 10-year-olds and over 90% at ages 13 and 14. Over 80% of working children reside in rural areas.

¹⁵ LFS 2019

Target 8.8: Protect Labour Rights and Promote Safe and Secure Working Environments for All Workers, Including Migrant Workers, Particularly Women Migrants, and Those in Precarious Employment.

Indicator 8.8.1: Frequency Rates of Fatal and Non-fatal Occupational Injuries, by Sex and Migrant Status

The Occupational Safety and Health Act, 2024 provides Lesotho's legal foundation for workplace safety, granting workers the right to withdraw from unsafe conditions without reprisal. It mandates employer and employee responsibilities, sector-specific safety standards, and regular inspections to reduce occupational injuries.

The Labour Act, 2024 complements this by extending protection to precarious workers, particularly women, youth, and those in the informal sector, and mandates universal minimum safety standards. Out of 124 workplace accidents reported in 2021, 25 were fatalities and 99 (76 men and 23 women) serious injuries.

Injury and fatality data are mainly sourced from Workman's Compensation Claims via the Ministry of Labour. However, data from large employers remain under validation and are not yet fully integrated into national reporting systems.

Indicator 8.8.2: Increase in National Compliance with Fundamental Labour Rights

Lesotho has made commendable progress in reinforcing compliance with core labour standards, particularly through legal reforms, ratification of ILO Conventions, and institutional strengthening efforts. The country has ratified ten (10) ILO core conventions including those on freedom of association, collective bargaining, the abolition of forced labour, the elimination of child labour, and non-discrimination in employment.

The enactment of the Labour Act 2024 and the Occupational Safety and Health Act 2024 marks a significant step in aligning national legislation with international labour standards. These Acts explicitly prohibit child labour, mandate protections for vulnerable workers, and provide for decentralised collective bargaining frameworks through sectoral councils.

Target 8.9: By 2030, Devise and Implement Policies to Promote Sustainable Tourism that Creates Jobs and Promotes Local Culture and Products.

Indicator 8.9.1: Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP and in growth rate

The direct contribution of travel and tourism to Lesotho's GDP saw a notable increase of 59%, rising from 5% in 2018 to 8% in 2019. However, it had previously plummeted by 176% in 2019 after a 167% slump in 2017. In 2017, the growth rate saw a decline of 139%, moving from 12% in 2016 to -4%. This decline was attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which had a severe impact on the sector, reducing its contribution to GDP due to global travel restrictions and declines in hospitality, transportation, and related services into national reporting systems.

Indicator 8.9.2D: Total employment created by Tourism sector

In 2023, Lesotho's tourism sector directly employed 22,395 individuals (4.07% of the workforce) in accommodation and food services. In addition to direct employment, tourism-linked sectors such as transport (3.3%), entertainment (0.29%), and retail (13.17%), also support tourism either indirectly or as part of the broader tourism value chain. Taking this broader approach, tourism-linked employment likely exceeds 8% of total jobs.

Target 8.10: Strengthen the Capacity of Domestic Financial Institutions to Encourage and Expand Access to Banking, Insurance and Financial Services for All.

Indicator 8.10.1: (a) Number of commercial bank branches per 100,000 adults works through sectoral councils.

In 2016, Lesotho ATM infrastructure was estimated at 14.72 ATMs per 100,000 adults. However, in 2021, the number slightly declined, reaching 13.86. As of 2021, there were fewer than 200 ATMs nationwide, with the vast majority concentrated in urban centres, Maseru, Leribe, Mafeteng, and major border towns. The ATM-to-adult ratio remains below the global average (39) and lags behind regional peers such as South Africa or Namibia.

Indicator 8.10.1A Percentage of financially included individuals and SMMEs

Formally served individuals increased by 27 percentage points from 60% to 87%, driven largely by the expansion of mobile money and digital financial services. Financial exclusion dropped by over half, from 19% in 2011 to just 9% in 2021. Despite these advances, 46% of adults still rely on informal mechanisms (e.g. village savings groups), reflecting continued gaps in formal access, particularly in rural and remote communities.

According to the 2023 MSME Pocket Guide, only 14% of MSMEs have a formal business bank account, and just 4% have accessed formal credit. Over 90% of MSMEs are not formally registered, limiting their eligibility for institutional financial support and inclusion in the formal credit market. The use of mobile money is more widespread among MSMEs (65%), especially for payments and business transactions.

Indicator 8.10.2: Proportion of adults (15 years and older) with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider

As of 2021, Lesotho had reached formal financial inclusion for 87% of its adult population, a substantial rise from 60% in 2011. This figure includes both banked adults and those using non-bank financial services, such as mobile money and insurance products. However, only 39% of adults (approximately 510,827 people) in Lesotho had an account with a commercial bank, highlighting the limited reach of traditional banking. A further 14% (about 187,699) had previously been banked but are now inactive users. Around 47% (620,264) have never held a bank account. Mobile financial services have played a transformative role in expanding access. As of 2021, 66% of adults (873,331 people) actively used mobile money accounts, and 82% of the population (1,081,408 people) had access to mobile phones, creating a strong foundation for digital financial inclusion. Eighty-five per cent of adults use formal non-bank financial products, such as insurance, pension schemes, or mobile savings products. This category overlaps significantly with mobile money users. Only 9% of the adult population (about 121,286 individuals) is completely excluded from both formal and informal financial services.

Key Interventions

Community-Based Livelihood Initiatives: LHDA is driving rural diversification in infrastructure-affected areas, including Mokhotlong and Semonkong, through targeted income projects, potato farming, Maluti Minnow fish farming, and small-scale beekeeping. In 2024 alone, potato farming generated M1.8 million, supporting 1,200 households, while fish farming created 150 jobs, 70% for women, highlighting strong gender and economic impact.

Lesotho Horticulture Incubation and Training Centre: Established in May 2023 with support from the IBSA Fund, the Centre is designed to build a pipeline of commercial farmers through technical, financial training and managerial skills. By August 2024, 190 farmers, of which 46 were women and 53 were youth, had completed pre-incubation training; full incubation for 10–12 finalists will begin June 2025, targeting profitability by 2030.

Agricultural and Rural Development for Inclusive Growth

- The Agricultural Productivity Programme for Southern Africa (APPSA) expanded access to climate-resilient agricultural technologies, supporting 66 improved seed varieties and 117 technologies, reaching 8,320 farmers by 2025.
- Smallholder Agriculture Development Project II (SADP II) promoted climate-smart agriculture and facilitated access to markets for over 102,000 farmers across 25,590 hectares. The project also provided 323 matching grants, with a strong focus on women and youth. Innovations include SMS-based agro-weather alerts and community nutrition clubs.
- The Regional Value Chains Lesotho Project (2023–2026) intended to strengthen agro-processing and light manufacturing value chains in alignment with the EU-SADC Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA).

MSMEs Development and Financial Access

- The Special Dispensation Project, in partnership with World Vision, supports the formal migration of domestic workers to South Africa and facilitates access to the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF).
- Labour Act 2024 modernised labour policy by recognising informal workers and extending labour protections to vulnerable groups. It promotes wage equity, inclusive hiring, and decentralised collective bargaining.
- Programmes like the Graduate Apprenticeship Programme (GAP) and LHDA's Young Professionals Programme have created pathways for youth and women into skilled employment, particularly in mining and infrastructure.

Labour Market Reforms and Inclusive Employment

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Eradication of Child Labour and Human Trafficking

- The Strategic Action Plan on the Elimination of Child Labour, supported by IOM, provides a coordinated response through prevention, enforcement, and awareness.
- A Multisectoral Committee on Trafficking brings together trained stakeholders from law enforcement, justice, and social protection sectors.
- Joint Labour Inspections in high-risk sectors (informal trade and agriculture) have identified 100 child labour cases, with 60% of affected children reintegrated into education by 2024.

Tourism as a Driver of Local Economic Development

- The Katse Tourism Festival (launched in 2024) connects cultural heritage and rural artisans to tourism markets.
- LHDA's Tourism Strategy (2023–2034) positions tourism as a commercial growth pillar, with new and upgraded facilities around Polihali, Katse, and Mohale reservoirs. The strategy targets 5% of commercial revenue from tourism by 2034.
- Flagship events such as the Maletsunyane Braai Festival, Roof of Africa Rally, and Moshoeshoe Walk generate seasonal employment and promote rural tourism. These events support over 1,000 local jobs annually, with strong youth and women participation, and increasingly adopt digital financial tools to enhance financial inclusion.

13 CLIMATE ACTION



4.5. SDG 13: TAKE URGENT ACTION TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACTS

SDG 13 measures national responsiveness to climate threats through adaptation planning, disaster risk management, and greenhouse gas mitigation. Lesotho is classified as a climate-vulnerable LDC with low historical emissions but high exposure to climate shocks. According to the Climate Risk Index 2021, Lesotho ranks 77th globally, reflecting increased frequency of extreme weather events, particularly droughts and floods.

Target 13.1: Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries

Indicator 13.1.1: Number of deaths, missing persons and persons affected by disaster per 100,000 population

The Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (LVAC) reported over 1,200 households affected by climate-related disasters, including displacement and incident of missing persons particularly during episodes of severe flooding and snowstorms in 2023 and early 2024. However, no official statistics were readily available for this indicator.

Indicator 13.1.2: Number of countries that adopt and implement national disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies in line with the Sendai Framework

Lesotho has adopted a National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy and Action Plan (2020–2030), aligned with the Sendai Framework and embedded within the broader climate governance architecture. The country also plays a leadership role within the African Risk Capacity (ARC), and has made substantial institutional gains, including legal reforms and integration of DRR into national climate policy. Through the implementation of the National Early Warning Strategic Action Plan and the Multi-Hazard Contingency Plan, the country has enhanced its capacity to anticipate and respond to climatic shocks.

Indicator 13.1.3: Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local DRR strategies in line with national strategies

Significant progress has been achieved at the community level, with 93 Village Disaster Management Teams

(VDMTs) established in high-risk areas. These efforts, driven through the Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) and Climate Smart Disaster Risk Reduction (CSDRR) projects, have enabled the mainstreaming of early action protocols, training, and preparedness measures in vulnerable communities. However, implementation remains uneven, particularly in remote and hard-to-reach districts such as Mokhotlong, Thaba-Tseka, Qacha's Nek, and parts of Mphahle's Hoek, where logistical barriers, limited infrastructure, and resource constraints hinder full rollout.

Target 13.2: Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning

Indicator 13.2.1: Number of countries with NDCs, long-term strategies, NAPs, and adaptation communications

Lesotho submitted its second Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in 2024, which commits to a 6% unconditional and 18% conditional reduction in Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions by 2030, relative to a business-as-usual scenario. This builds upon earlier efforts and is complemented by a range of strategic documents, including the National Adaptation Plan (NAP)–Open NAP (2024), the Technology Needs Assessment (2023) and the country's three National Communications to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

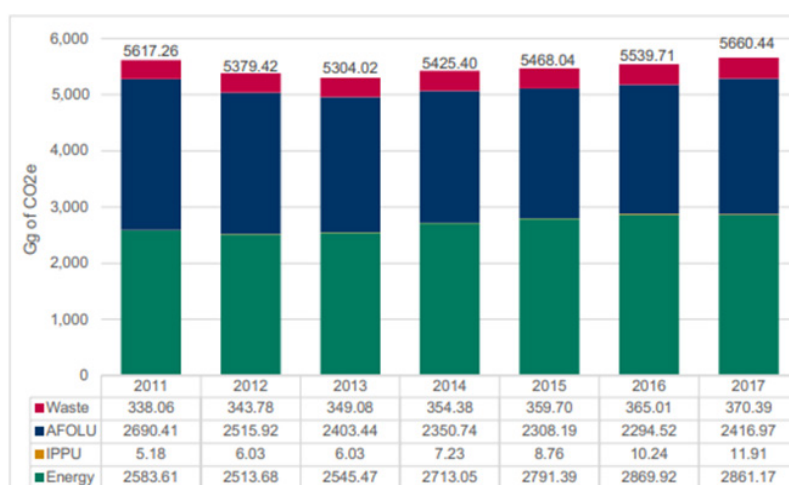
To strengthen its long-term adaptation planning, Lesotho is currently developing a comprehensive full NAP which will provide a structured framework for identifying priority climate risks, assessing structural vulnerabilities, and formulating long-term adaptation strategies.

Indicator 13.2.2: Total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per year

Lesotho's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions increased by 20.4% from 2005 to 2017, primarily due to rising residential energy demand and agricultural activities. The country has submitted four national GHG inventories and is developing a national GHG inventory management system. However, data gaps persist and the frequency of inventory updates remains insufficient. Strengthening the Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) system, increasing inventory frequency, and improving sectoral disaggregation are urgent next steps, especially in the energy and AFOLU sectors.

Though there is an increase in total GHG emissions and data gaps, especially in the frequency and sectoral granularity of inventories, still persist. The monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) system needs strengthening to meet international standards and support robust policy responses.

Figure 19: Lesotho's Net GHG Emissions by Sector (2011–2017)



Target 13.3: Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

Indicator 13.3.1: Climate change education and sustainable development integrated in curricula and education systems

Climate education and disaster risk awareness have been integrated into the Education Sector Plan (2016–2026), National Curriculum Framework, and TVET strategies. Practical climate modules are present in primary and secondary school curricula, and higher education institutions offer specialised programmes in environmental science and sustainable energy. The CAP-ESD programme has been instrumental in training educators. Lesotho has pioneered the use of comedians and entertainers to raise climate awareness, using local dialects and humour to demystify climate science and promote adaptation actions at the community level. Nonetheless, gaps persist in teacher training, curriculum coverage, and the lack of assessment tools for climate literacy. Scaling up teacher training and formalising assessment standards are priorities.

Target 13.a: Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the UNFCCC to a goal of mobilising jointly \$100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries

Indicator 13.a.1: Amounts provided and mobilised in relation to the \$100 billion commitment

Lesotho has mobilised over US\$100 million in climate finance from 2021 to 2024. Key sources include the Green Climate Fund (US\$55.6M), the Least Developed Countries Fund (US\$30.7M), World Bank climate-smart agriculture support (US\$10M), and EU-supported water and energy projects. These resources have financed clean energy infrastructure, adaptation interventions, and institutional strengthening. However, a national climate finance dashboard is needed to improve tracking and reporting.

Target 13.b: Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in LDCs and small island developing States

Indicator 13.b.1: Number of LDCs/SIDS with NDCs, NAPs and AdComs

In 2024, the country submitted a comprehensive Long-Term Climate Change Vision, articulating its ambition for a net-zero emissions and climate-resilient development pathway. This long-term vision underscores Lesotho's enduring commitment to sustainable, low-carbon development.

The country has also communicated its adaptation priorities through:

- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in 2017 and 2024;
- A draft National Adaptation Plan (NAP);
- Sector-specific long-term strategies, particularly in water and sanitation;
- Inclusion of adaptation components within its national communications, which align with the objectives of an Adaptation Communication (AdCom).

While these submissions reflect significant progress in climate planning and management, institutional coordination between climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR) remains fragmented. This gap continues to limit the full effectiveness of national resilience efforts.

Key priorities moving forward include:

- Strengthening vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms across all levels of government and sectors;

- Enhancing local-level implementation capacity, including systems for monitoring and evaluation of adaptation actions.

Key Interventions

- Through the GEF and Adaptation Fund funded projects among other interventions, the country has made recognisable progress in strengthening “Research and Systematic Observations”, thereby improving the extreme weather events predictability. This is attained through automatisaton of meteorological stations, training of personnel, acquisition of numerical weather prediction models and access to other regional and global products that contribute to early warning information.
- These systems have not only improved risk forecasting, but they have also increased lead times for emergency response, minimising exposure and casualties.
- Although no official consolidated statistics were readily available for this indicator, the Government of Lesotho has reported the occurrence of missing persons due to flooding and snow-related disasters during the review period.
- Further progress has been achieved through the work of the Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (LVAC), which has mainstreamed gender-disaggregated data into disaster analysis. A notable innovation is the launch of the Disaster Risk Financing Strategy (2024–2029), which represents a paradigm shift from reactive humanitarian aid to proactive financial preparedness. This strategy aims to stabilise government budgets in the face of climate shocks and provide predictable resources for rapid response, with a focus on shielding the poorest and most climate-vulnerable populations.



4.6. SDG 14: CONSERVE AND SUSTAINABLY USE THE OCEANS, SEAS AND MARINE RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Goal 14 aims to promote the sustainable management and conservation of marine and coastal ecosystems. It also emphasizes increasing scientific research, sharing aquatic biodiversity technologies, and enhancing the economic benefits derived from sustainable aquatic resource use. Despite Lesotho’s landlocked status, the implementation of SDG 14 remains relevant because of the country’s reliance on inland water bodies for livelihoods, biodiversity, and regional water security. As a source of major river systems that feed into the Orange-Senqu River Basin, as well as a source of key transboundary waters, Lesotho plays a critical environmental role in the Southern African region.

The country’s commitment to the sustainable management of freshwater ecosystems aligns with broader goals of climate resilience, biodiversity protection, and transboundary cooperation. However, Inland Freshwater Aquatic resources are under threat due to human activities including pollution, overfishing, overexploitation, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and trafficking of fish species.

Target 14.1: By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.

Indicator 14.1.1(a): Index of Eutrophication (Nutrient Pollution)

Lesotho has taken important steps to mitigate nutrient pollution through the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices. Government-supported conservation agriculture and organic farming initiatives have curbed

the overuse of synthetic agricultural inputs, thereby reducing nutrient runoff into rivers. In 2025, Lesotho enacted the Pesticide Control Bill, introducing tighter regulation of agrochemical use to prevent water contamination. Integrated catchment management, particularly in the highland areas, has also contributed to reducing soil erosion and nutrient-rich sedimentation into river systems, benefiting both national water quality and downstream ecosystems in the Orange-Senqu basin.

Indicator 14.1.1(b): Plastic Debris Density

The scale of plastic pollution comprises an estimated 69% of aquatic waste in Lesotho's rivers, yet only 20% of all plastic waste is formally collected and a mere 1% recycled. The national data on plastic debris density in freshwater systems is lacking. However, there are some efforts to tackle plastic pollution in freshwater ecosystems in the country. The Environment (Plastic Levy) Regulations (2022) marked a major policy milestone by introducing economic disincentives for plastic use, with revenues channelled toward environmental programmes. Urban pilot projects in Maseru and Maputsoe have begun to institutionalise waste separation and recycling, and public awareness has grown through national campaigns such as "Plastic-Free Wednesday," "Cleanest Town Competition," and "Operation Hloekisa Lesotho."

Target 14.2: By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts and take action for their restoration.

Indicator 14.2.1: Number of countries using ecosystem-based approaches to managing marine areas

While Lesotho does not manage marine areas, it applies ecosystem-based approaches in freshwater ecosystem management. These include community-driven conservation under the National Wetlands Strategy and water ecosystem protection within the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP). Environmental and Social Management Frameworks (ESMFs) are mandatory for large infrastructure projects, ensuring that aquatic ecosystems are protected from construction-related degradation.

Target 14.4: By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

Indicators 14.4.1: Proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels

The fish stock in the year 2019/20 was 1150.55 tons, increased to 2271.56 tons in 2022/23 and thereafter a slide decline to 1802.8 tons in 2023/24 was observed in order to meet improved standard market requirements.

Lesotho's inland fisheries sector is relatively small and primarily subsistence-based, with limited commercial exploitation. The government has initiated small-scale aquaculture projects, including community-managed fish farming cooperatives, especially in reservoir areas.

Lesotho is now the top producer of Rainbow Trout in Africa and hosts the continent's only Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP) certified trout farm. This certification enables Lesotho's aquaculture enterprises to access premium export markets and demonstrates compliance with global environmental and food safety standards.

Lesotho is a signatory to the SADC Protocol on Fisheries and is aligning its strategies with the African Union's Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (PFRS). These frameworks promote responsible governance of aquatic resources, regional harmonisation, and food security.

Target 14.5: Conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information.

Indicator 14.5.1D: Coverage of protected areas in relation to freshwater ecosystem

This indicator focuses on the conservation and sustainable management of wetlands, rivers, and other inland aquatic systems. These ecosystems provide essential services, including water storage, biodiversity support, flood control, and climate regulation. The protected freshwater ecosystems such as wetlands and riverine habitats are managed under the National Environment Act of 2008 and the Biodiversity Strategy. Lesotho's ecological role as the "Water Tower of Southern Africa" is recognised in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) protocols on shared watercourse systems.

Target 14.7: By 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism

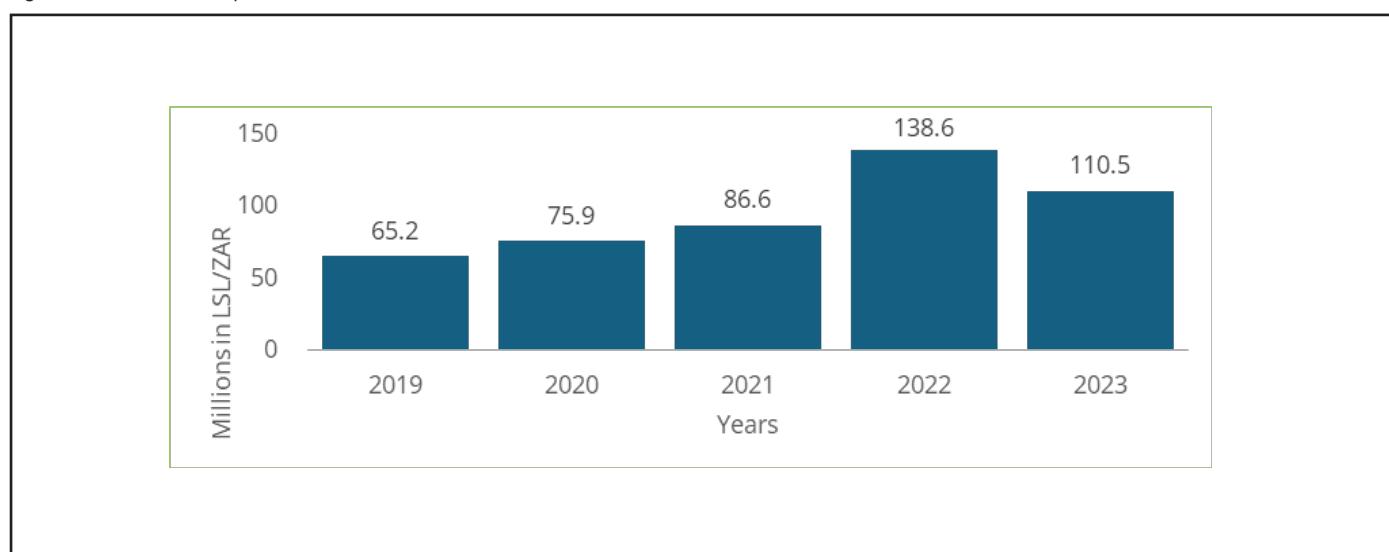
Indicator 14.7.1D: Sustainable fisheries as a proportion of GDP in small island developing states, least developed countries and all countries from use of freshwater resources including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism

Progress under this indicator is contextualised through inland fisheries, aquaculture development, and biodiversity-based eco-tourism centered around its highland water bodies.

- The National Livestock Development Policy (2020) and NSDP II explicitly prioritise aquaculture, with an emphasis on supporting smallholder fish farmers, fostering innovation in production systems, and scaling sustainable practices.
- Lesotho is also leveraging its high-altitude reservoirs, particularly Katse and Mohale Dams, as eco-tourism hubs. These areas, rich in biodiversity and scenic value, have been identified for nature-based tourism opportunities, such as fishing excursions, biodiversity-focused tours, and recreation, contributing to local income and conservation awareness.
- Efforts are underway to strengthen aquaculture value chains through localised feed production, improved post-harvest handling, and market access initiatives. Lesotho's collaboration with continental partners such as AU-IBAR and alignment with the African Blue Economy Strategy further reinforce institutional capacity and the country's role in regional aquaculture governance.

Lesotho's fish exports increased steadily from approximately M65.2 million in 2019 to a peak of M138.6 million in 2022, reflecting growing international demand and improved export capacity. Although exports declined to around M110.5 million in 2023, the overall trend indicates a strong and expanding fish export sector, positioning Lesotho as an important player in the market.

Figure 20: Lesotho's Fish Exports to the Rest of the World



Source: BOS trade data

Target 14.b: Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets

Indicator 14.b.1: Degree of application of a legal/regulatory/policy/institutional framework which recognises and protects access rights for small-scale fisheries

Lesotho has made commendable efforts to align national policies with continental frameworks and to expand inclusive access to fisheries resources. The country is actively aligning its national strategies with the African Union's Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (PFRS). The Fisheries Unit under the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security administers a permit system granting access rights to water bodies, enabling small-scale fishers to utilise public aquatic resources legally and sustainably.

Complementing this, targeted support to smallholder aquaculture producers has expanded across districts including Leribe, Butha-Buthe, Mafeteng, and Thaba-Tseka. National initiatives have distributed fingerlings, fish feed, and technical training to support sustainable production and enterprise development. Several community-managed pond projects and informal cooperatives have also emerged, allowing local fishers to pool resources, share infrastructure, and improve their access to markets.

Key Interventions and Achievements

- **Integrated Catchment Management:** The ReNoka programme, Lesotho's flagship initiative for integrated catchment management, has promoted sustainable land and water use across the Orange-Senqu Basin since 2020. It has enabled community-led watershed rehabilitation in priority catchment zones and strengthened governance systems for ecosystem stewardship.
- **River Clean-Up Campaigns:** The Ministry of Natural Resources, in collaboration with civil society organisations and private sector actors, has led river clean-up initiatives aimed at reducing plastic and organic waste inflows into major river systems while raising public awareness about pollution prevention.
- **Environmental Safeguards in Infrastructure:** Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) incorporates robust environmental safeguards through its Environmental Action Plan. These measures support the protection of wetlands and aquatic biodiversity, with active monitoring of habitats around the Polihali Dam.
- **Biodiversity and Ecosystem Conservation:** With support from development partners, the Government of

Lesotho is implementing the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). This includes targeted actions to conserve freshwater ecosystems, promote sustainable water use, and build capacity for local ecosystem monitoring. Conservation efforts prioritise endemic species such as the Maloti minnow, alongside the designation of new conservation zones around key watersheds, dams, and highland wetlands.

- **Protected Areas and Transboundary Cooperation:** The Letšeng-la-Letsie Wetland, designated as a Ramsar Site since 2004, is protected under Sehlabathebe National Park and the Maloti-Drakensberg Transboundary Reserve. These areas contribute to safeguarding sensitive alpine and riparian ecosystems. Lesotho's engagement in transboundary water governance-particularly through the Orange-Senqu River Commission (ORASECOM)-strengthens regional cooperation on shared water resources.
- **Mainstreaming Conservation in Policy:** Inland aquatic ecosystem conservation is fully integrated into national policy frameworks, including the NBSAP and climate adaptation strategies, ensuring coherence across environmental, water, and development planning instruments.



4.7. SDG 17: Strengthen The Means Of Implementation And Revitalise The Global Partnership For Sustainable Development

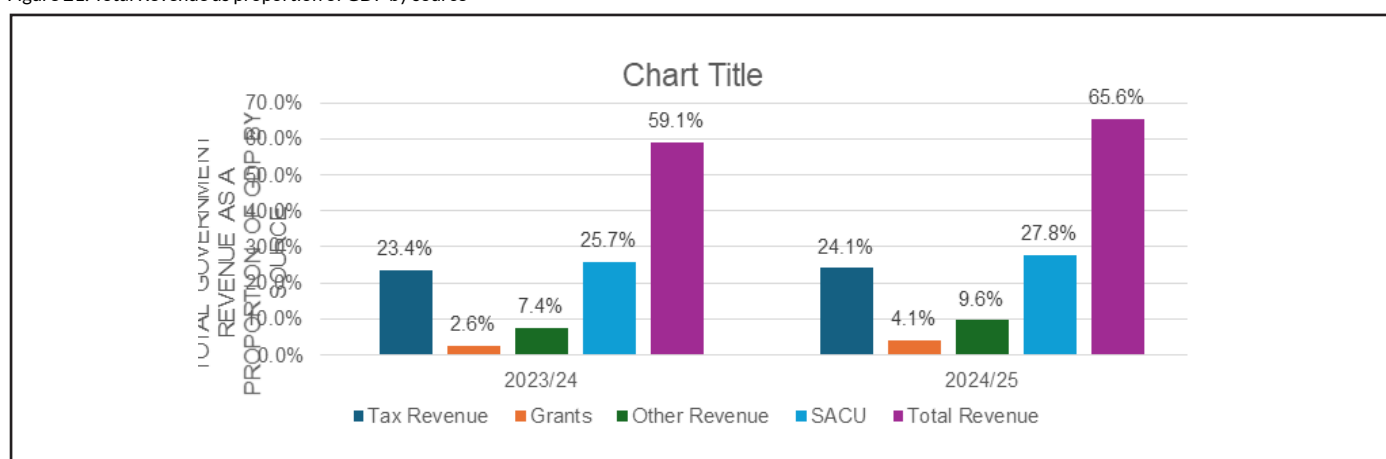
Goal 17 provides an enabling environment for all other SDGs by addressing financing, trade, technology, and capacity-building. It advocates for multi-stakeholder partnerships, data production and innovative measurement tools to monitor progress towards sustainable development in Lesotho and beyond. It also focuses on enhancing domestic resource mobilisation, through improved tax collection and international support. Lesotho remains highly aid-dependent and fiscally constrained, with SACU transfers comprising over 60% of government revenue annually. While remittance inflows contribute over 20% of GDP and represent a stable financing stream, foreign direct investment (FDI) and export competitiveness have declined markedly.

Target 17.1 Strengthen domestic resource mobilisation, including through international support to developing countries, to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection.

Indicator 17.1.1: Total government revenue as a proportion of GDP, by source

Total government revenue as a proportion of GDP increased steadily by 6.5 percentage points over the two years 2023/24 to 2024/25. Figure 13 illustrates that total government revenue increased from 59.1% of GDP in 2023/24 to 65.6% in 2024/25.

Figure 21: Total Revenue as proportion of GDP by source

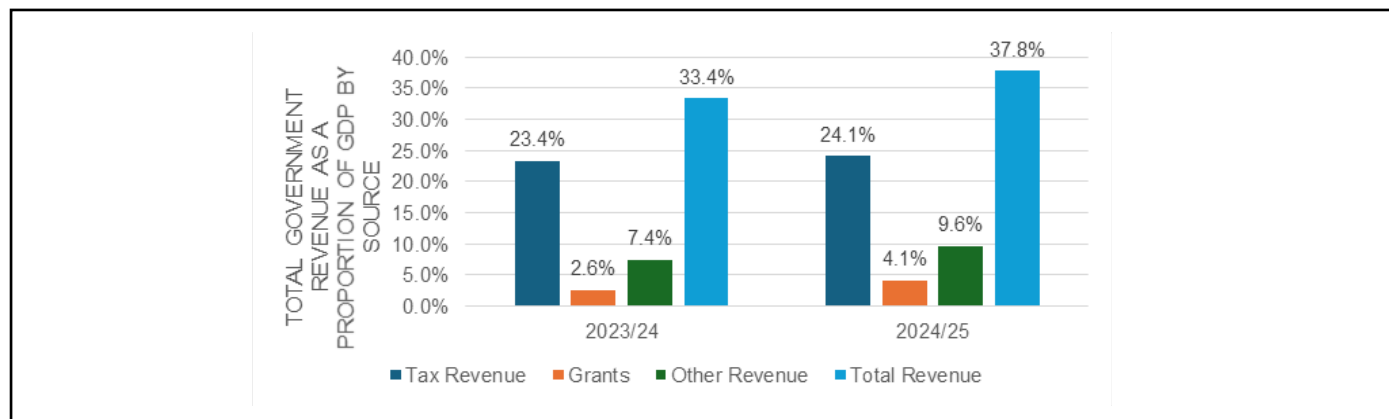


Source: Government of Lesotho Budget Speech for the 2024/2025 fiscal year

Indicator 17.1.2: Proportion of domestic budget funded by domestic taxes

The proportion of the government budget funded by domestic taxes remains below the 25% threshold. In 2023/24, tax revenue was estimated at 23.4%, while grants and other revenue contribute 10% of GDP.

Figure 22: Total Domestic Budget funded by Domestic Revenue by source



Source: Government of Lesotho Budget Speech for the 2024/2025 fiscal year

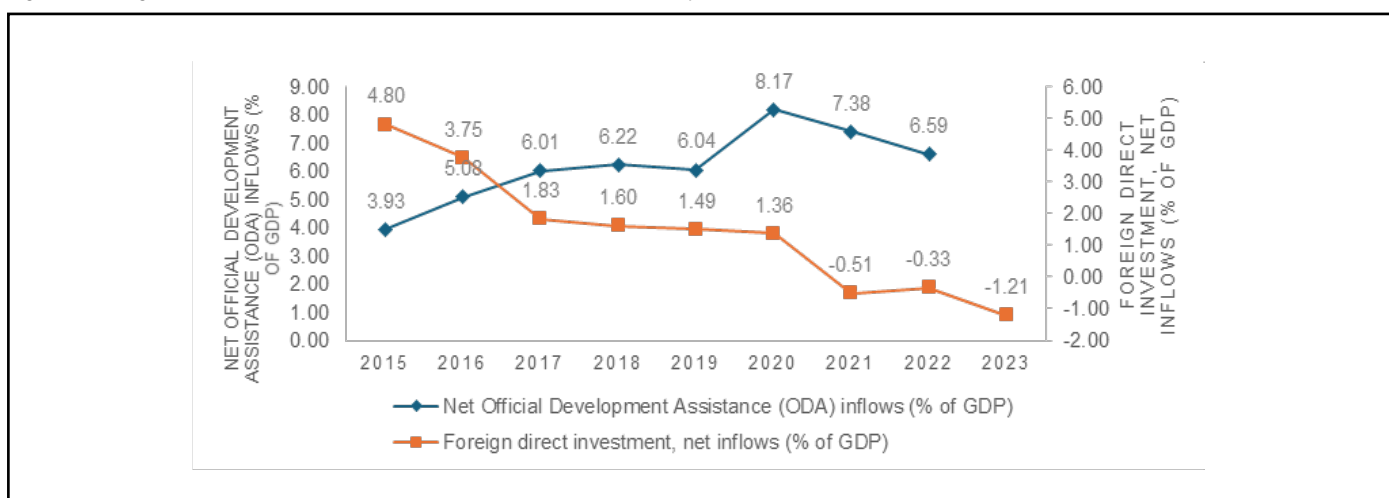
Target 17.3 Mobilise additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources

Indicator 17.3.1: Additional financial resources mobilised for developing countries from multiple sources

Net inflows of FDI relative to GDP indicate how well a country can attract external private capital. FDI inflows as a percentage of GDP decreased from 4.8% in 2015 to 1.36% by 2020. In 2021, FDI inflows dipped into negative territory, reaching -0.51% of GDP, and -1.21% in 2023.

The trend in net Official Development Assistance (ODA) inflows (% of GDP) rose from 3.93% of GDP in 2015 to a peak of 8.17% in 2020, likely reflecting increased global assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite a slight decline post-pandemic, ODA levels remained significant at 7.38% in 2021 and 6.59% in 2022, indicating that Lesotho continues to attract substantial donor support.

Figure 23: Foreign direct investment, net inflows (% of GDP) and Net Official Development Assistance (ODA) inflows (% of GDP)



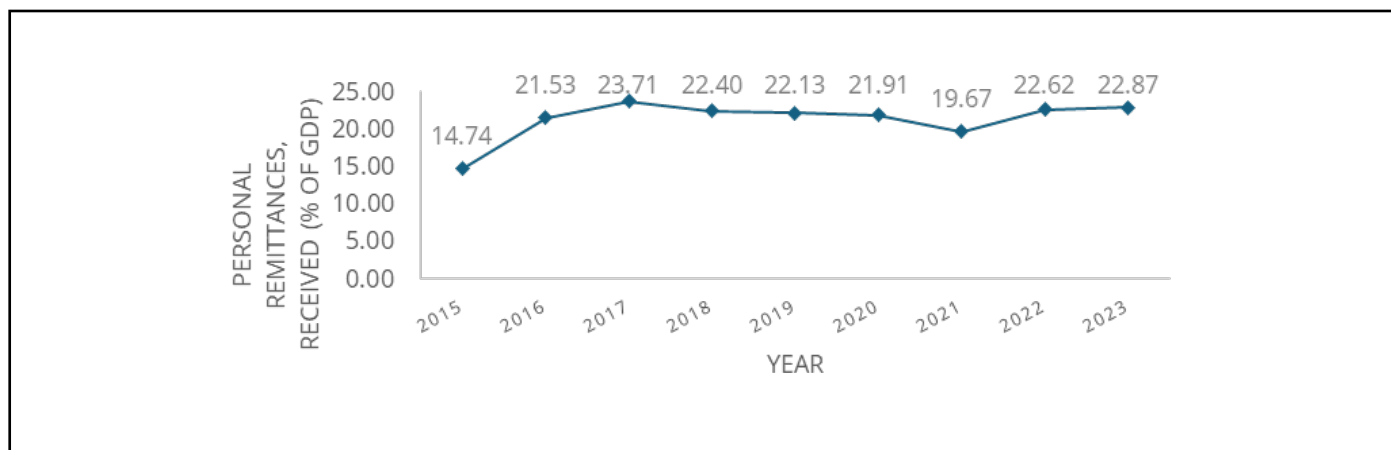
Sources: World Bank: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.WD.GD.ZS?locations=LS>

OECD: [https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?c=en&df\[ds\]=dsDisseminateFinalDMZ&df\[id\]=DSD_AFDD_STAT_ANNEX%40DF_TAB20&df\[ag\]=OECD.DEV.EMEA&dq=ODA.LSO.....A&pd=2015%2C2022&to\[TIME_PERIOD\]=false&vw=tb](https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?c=en&df[ds]=dsDisseminateFinalDMZ&df[id]=DSD_AFDD_STAT_ANNEX%40DF_TAB20&df[ag]=OECD.DEV.EMEA&dq=ODA.LSO.....A&pd=2015%2C2022&to[TIME_PERIOD]=false&vw=tb)

Indicator 17.3.2: Volume of remittances (in United States dollars) as a proportion of total GDP

The country's remittance inflows remain a critical and stable financing source, representing more than one-fifth of GDP annually, which places Lesotho in a strong position to harness diaspora finance as a transformative lever for economic resilience, complementing ODA, FDI, and tax revenue. The remittance inflows rose from 14.7% of GDP in 2015 to 23.7% in 2017. Following the peak in 2017, a gradual decline occurred from 2018 through 2021, reaching a low of 19.67%. A sharp recovery was observed in 2022 and 2023, with remittances accounting for over 22% of the country's GDP.

Figure 24: Personal remittances, received (% of GDP)



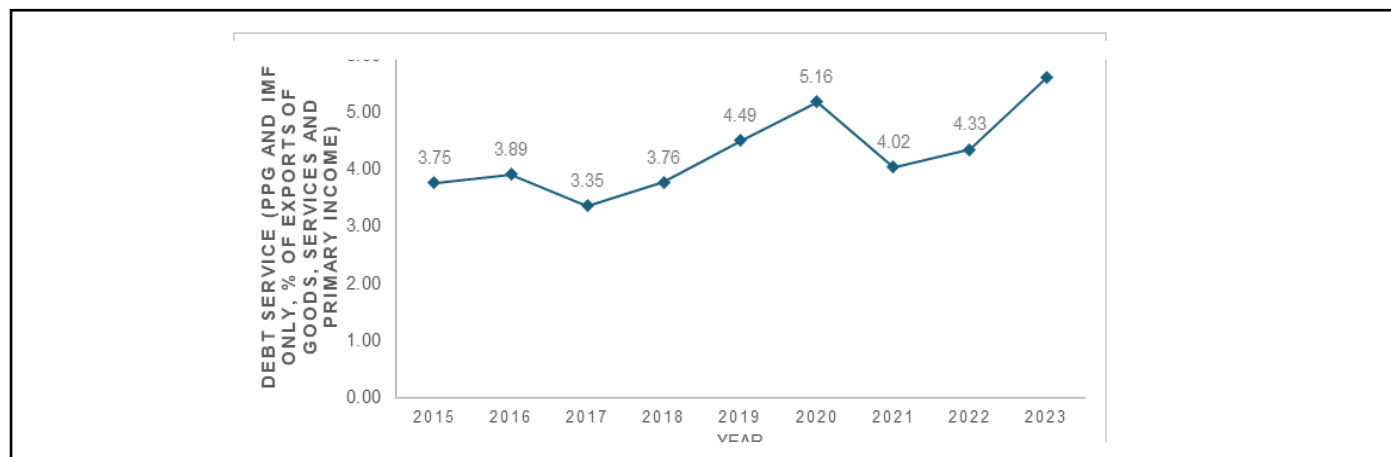
Source: World Bank (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?end=2023&locations=LS&start=2015>)

Target 17.4: Assist developing countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability through coordinated policies aimed at fostering debt financing, debt relief and debt restructuring, as appropriate, and address the external debt of highly indebted poor countries to reduce debt distress

Indicator 17.4.1: Debt service as a proportion of exports of goods and services and primary income

Lesotho has made significant progress on maintaining debt service ratios well below distress thresholds despite pandemic-induced pressures. Lesotho's external debt service as a percentage of exports of goods, services, and primary income was 3.7%. This ratio remained relatively stable in 2016 but slightly decreased to about 3.35% in 2017. Beginning in 2018, the ratio started to increase, hitting nearly 4.5% in 2019 and peaking at over 5% in 2020. It then dropped to approximately 4% in 2021. However, in 2022 it rose to 4.3% and 5.5% in 2023.

Figure 25: Debt service (PPG and IMF only, % of exports of goods, services and primary income)



Source: World Bank
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.TDS.DPPF.XP.ZS?locations=LS>

Target 17.5: Adopt and implement investment promotion regimes for least developed countries

Indicator 17.5.1: Number of countries that adopt and implement investment promotion regimes for developing countries, including the least developed countries

Lesotho founded the Lesotho National Development Corporation (LNDC) in 1967 as the primary agency for investment promotion, focusing on the development of industrial parks, providing investor services, and offering aftercare support. Current institutional reforms seek to enhance its responsiveness and efficiency.

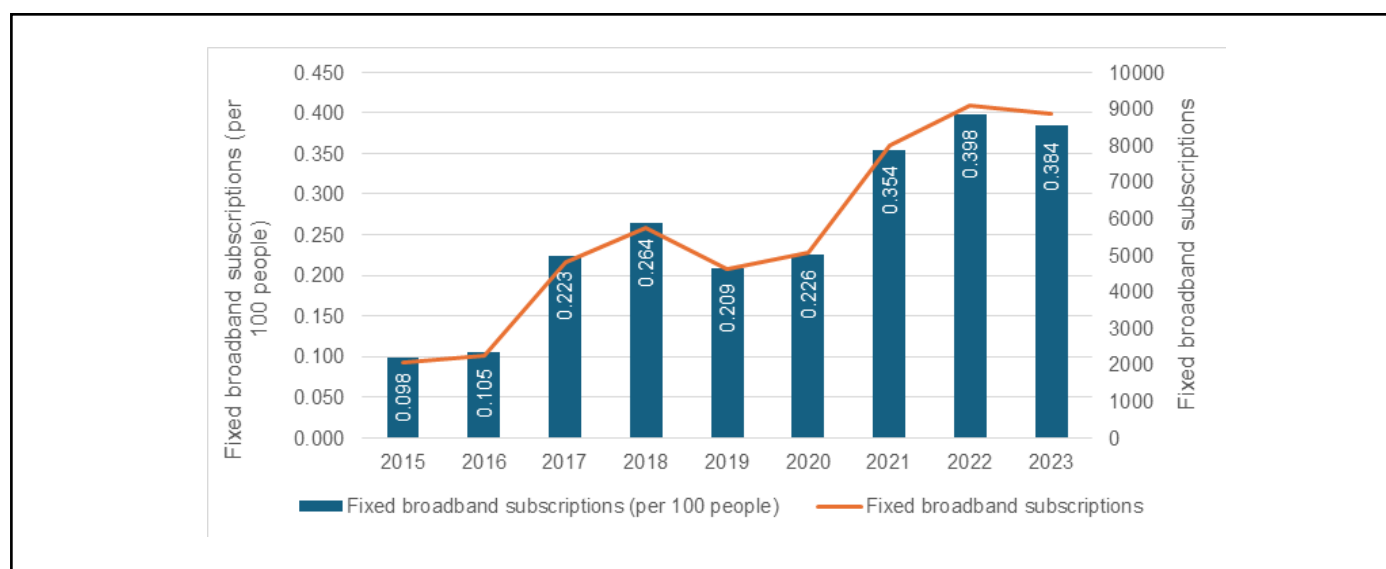
Additionally, the country has implemented the Investment Climate Action Plan (2023), the National Diaspora Investment and Trade Strategy (2020), as well as the Special Economic Zone Policy and the Public-Private Dialogue (PPD) Framework, which detail essential reforms aimed at enhancing Lesotho's legal, regulatory, and institutional framework for investors. These initiatives aim to lessen administrative burdens, strengthen investor protection, and outline priority sectors for private sector involvement.

Target 17.6: Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism

Indicator 17.6.1D: Fixed Broadband Subscriptions per 100 inhabitants

Fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants more than tripled over the period, increasing from 0.098 in 2015 to 0.384 in 2023. The largest growth occurred between 2017 and 2021, with subscriptions rising from 0.22 to 0.35 per 100 people. However, growth has plateaued since 2022, with only marginal improvement from 0.398 to 0.384, and some volatility observed in 2019 and 2020 due to affordability constraints and limited rural reach. The absolute number of fixed broadband subscriptions rose from 2,060 persons in 2015 to 8,870 persons in 2023. The 2023 penetration rate (0.38 per 100 people) remains significantly below global and regional benchmarks.

Figure 25: Debt service (PPG and IMF only, % of exports of goods, services and primary income)



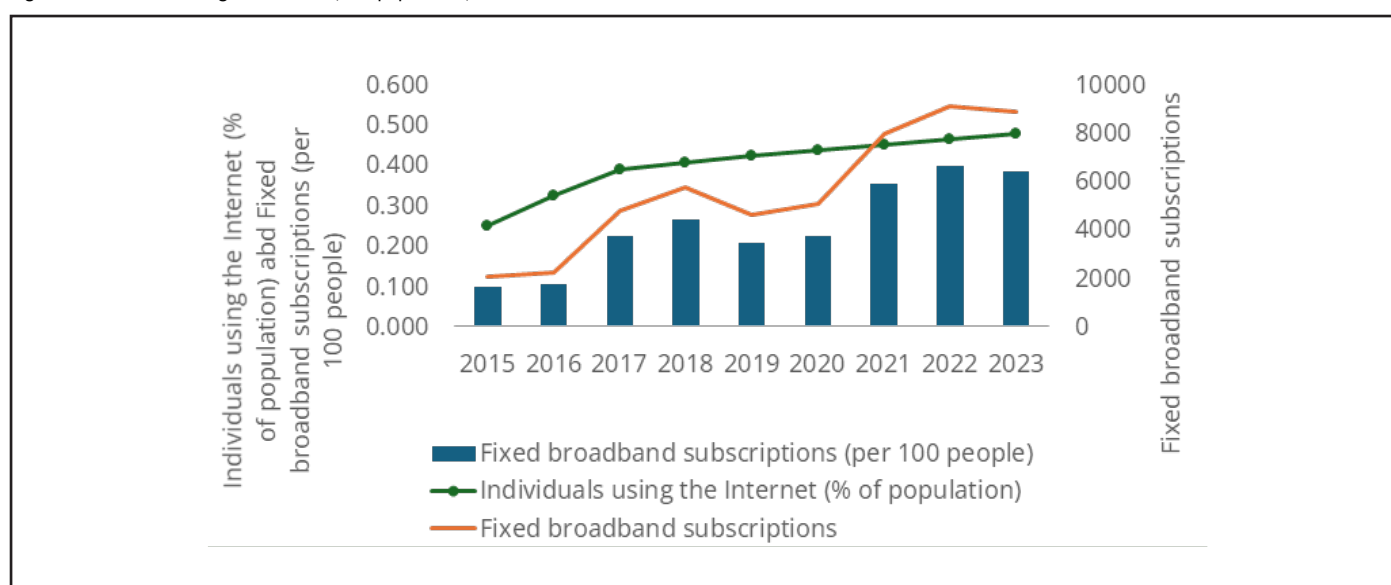
Source: World Bank WDI: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=LS>

Target 17.8: Fully operationalise the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology

Indicator: 17.8.1: Proportion of individuals using the Internet

The percentage of individuals using the Internet rose from 25% in 2015 to 48% in 2023, showing stronger progress in mobile broadband adoption. The most rapid growth occurred between 2015 and 2017, with uptake rising from 25% to 39%, driven by mobile technology expansion and initial gains in affordability. From 2018 onwards, progress continued but at a moderated pace, rising incrementally by approximately 1.5 percentage points annually, reaching 48% in 2023. The growth has been driven primarily by mobile network expansion which indicates that mobile platforms are the dominant channel for digital inclusion in Lesotho.

Figure27: Individuals using the Internet (% of population)



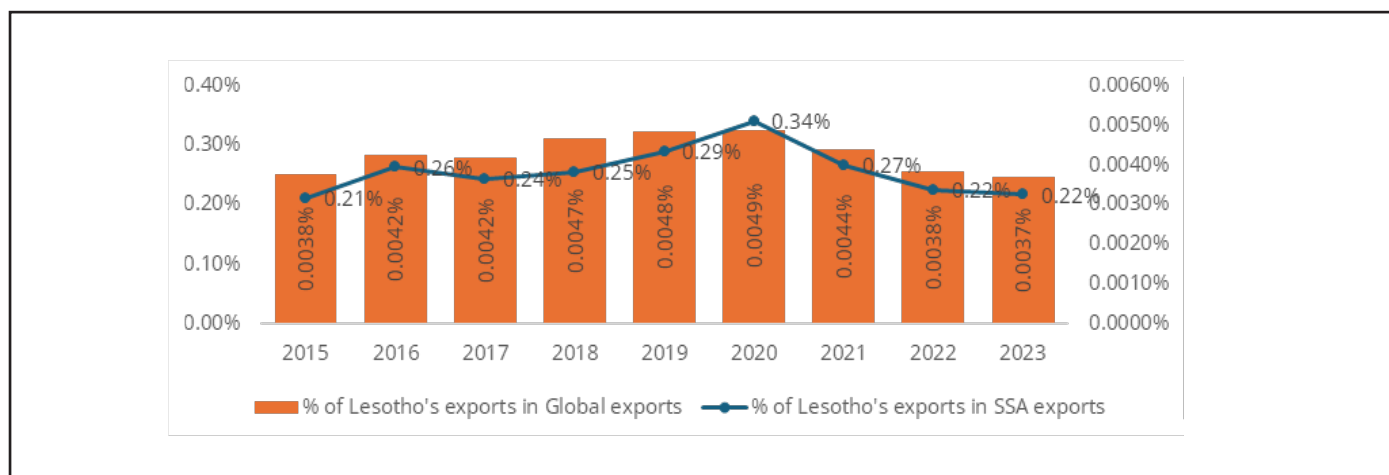
Source: World Bank WDI: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=LS>

Target 17.11: Significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports by 2020

Indicator: 17.11.1: Developing countries' and least developed countries' share of global exports

Lesotho's share of global exports fluctuated between 0.0037% and 0.0049% from 2015 to 2023. Despite a brief peak in 2020 at 0.0049%, this value has since declined, reaching 0.0037% in 2023, which is lower than its pre-pandemic share in 2018 and 2019. Lesotho's share of exports to Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) peaked at 0.34% in 2020 but dropped to 0.22% in 2023, showing weakening regional integration or competitiveness

Figure 28: Share of Lesotho's exports to Global and SSA Exports



Source: UN Comtrade (Trade data) & Nedbank SA (Exchange Rates)

Target 17.13: Enhance global macroeconomic stability, including through policy coordination and policy coherence

Indicator: 17.13.1: Macroeconomic Dashboard

Following a sharp contraction of 8.16% in 2020, the economy rebounded moderately to 2.27% in 2021 and 2.39% in 2022, before slowing slightly to an estimated 1.83% in 2023. Inflation rose from 5.2% in 2019 to a peak of 8.27% in 2022, driven largely by global food and fuel price shocks, before declining to 6.4% in 2023, with a projected moderation to 6.13% in 2024. Lesotho's fiscal balance has been volatile, swinging from a surplus of 0.34% of GDP in 2020, largely due to delayed capital spending, back to deficits exceeding 5% of GDP in 2021 and 2022. The current account balance remains structurally in deficit, reaching -11.78% of GDP in 2022, but narrowing to -4.33% in 2023, with a projected surplus of 5.9% in 2024, primarily due to improved trade and income flows. Gross international reserves have remained above the regional adequacy benchmark of three months of import cover, fluctuating between 4.4 and 5.1 months over the period.

Table 4: Dashboard of Key macroeconomic indicators

Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023e	2024*
Real GDP Growth (%)	-1,42	-8,16	2,27	2,39	1,83	2,4
Inflation (annual, %)	5,2	4,98	6,05	8,27	6,4	6,13
Budget Balance (% of GDP)	-7,21	0,34	-4,34	-5,87	-2,13	11,08
Current Account Balance (% of GDP)	-8,89	-6,56	-8,02	-11,78	-4,33	5,90
Gross Int'l Reserves (months of imports)	4,44	4,65	5,10	4,57	4,37	5,82

Source: CBL Economic Outlook (Jan 2025)

Target 17.18: By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing states, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts

Indicator 17.18.2: Existence of a national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

Lesotho has enacted the Lesotho Bureau of Statistics Act (2001), which establishes the Bureau of Statistics (BoS) as the national authority for official statistics. The Act aligns with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, ensuring professional independence, confidentiality (Sections 20 and 26), methodological soundness (Sections 4(2)(b) and 4(4)), and public data accessibility (Section 21). It also mandates legal obligations for data provision (Sections 18 and 19), empowering the BoS to collect and disseminate statistics independently and transparently, thereby strengthening data integrity and public trust. The Bureau is currently working on revising this Act to develop a new legislation that aligns with modern standards and practices.

Indicator: 17.18.3: Existence of a national statistical plan that is fully funded and under implementation, by source of funding

The Lesotho National Strategy for the Development of Statistics II (NSDS II), 2022–2027, developed with PARIS21 support, aligns national data systems with international standards and prioritises key domains such as health, labour, gender, and the environment. It builds on earlier data gap assessments (2019–2020) that identified weaknesses, especially in gender and inclusion data. While implementation is ongoing, NSDS II remains underfunded, particularly for large-scale surveys and digital infrastructure. To address capacity gaps, BoS and PARIS21 have promoted innovative approaches such as leveraging administrative data and integrating citizen-generated data (CGD). Assessments in the Ministries of Health and Labour explored data flows and infrastructure needs, aiming to enhance coordination and improve SDG monitoring through more robust, inclusive, and sustainable data ecosystems.

Target 17.19: By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity building in developing countries.

Indicator 17.19.2D: Number of population and housing censuses conducted in the last 10 years, achieved 100 per cent birth registration and 80 per cent death registration

Lesotho meets the global benchmark by having conducted a Population and Housing Census (PHC) in 2016, which falls within the 10-year reference period. Preparations for the next round of census enumeration in 2026 are underway under the coordination of the BoS.

Regarding Indicator 17.19.2 (a), Lesotho satisfies the condition of having conducted at least one census in the last decade. The 2016 PHC provided critical baseline data on demographic trends, housing conditions, and geographic distribution, and informed national planning processes such as the National Strategic Development Plan II (NSDP II), district development frameworks, and the spatial planning policy agenda.

Indicator 17.19.2 (b) Lesotho birth registration in 2022 was 66.1% as per administrative data (2022 Vital Statistics Report), and in 2023/24 it was estimated at 80% for children under 5 years as per survey (DHS 2023/24). Indicator 17.19.2 (c) Death registration as in 2022 was 86.4 % as per administrative data (2022 Vital Statistics Report).

Key Intervention

Lesotho has adopted key reforms, such as the Investment Climate Action Plan and the National Statistical Development Strategy, but gaps persist in domestic resource mobilisation, data availability, and institutional coordination for SDG tracking.



Government of Lesotho



5. New and Emerging Challenges

Lesotho 2025 Voluntary National Review



5. New and Emerging Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted Lesotho's economy, strained public service delivery, and exposed deep structural vulnerabilities, revealing pre-existing structural vulnerabilities and reversing gains in poverty reduction, gender equality, and youth employment. Although the health impact was comparatively moderate, the socio-economic fallout was profound, particularly for the informal sector, MSMEs, women, and youth. Income losses, school closures, and elevated food insecurity exacerbated existing inequalities and reversed development gains.

In response, the Government of Lesotho mobilised over M700 million (equivalent to 2% of GDP) through an emergency COVID-19 budget to support health, food security, and livelihoods. However, gaps in data, coordination, and formal registration limited the inclusivity and scalability of these measures. Informal workers, rural women, and youth-led enterprises were often excluded from formal support structures. These challenges have laid the groundwork for social protection reform and a renewed push towards inclusive recovery.

Compounding the effects of the pandemic, Lesotho now faces a confluence of structural and external shocks. Despite a brief fiscal surplus in 2024, largely driven by SACU windfalls and water royalties, medium-term macroeconomic projections are less favourable. SACU revenues are expected to decline to 20% of GDP by 2025/2026 fiscal year (FY2025/26), while public expenditure remains high. Lesotho's textile exports, previously shielded by AGOA, are likely to face a 50% tariff in the US market, threatening 20,000 jobs and 43% of export earnings. The cancellation of MCC Compact II and the withdrawal of USAID support have widened fiscal gaps in key sectors, including health, education, and governance.

The food security situation has deteriorated sharply, with 335,000 people (22% of the rural population) in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis). Climate shocks, including poor rainfall, combined with high food prices and import dependence, have weakened household resilience. Meanwhile, MSMEs, which employ approximately 120,000 Basotho and drive much of the informal economy, remain under-capacitated and most continue to operate without access to finance, digital tools, or public procurement opportunities. Rural women and adolescent girls continue to face multiple disadvantages, including limited access to SRHR, digital platforms, and transport. The 2024 key labour market indicators reveal the unemployment rate stood at 16%, with youth and women overrepresented among the unemployed. Most young people are engaged in low-productivity informal work, and Lesotho's NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rate remains high.



¹⁷UNDP. (2020). A Socio-Economic Assessment of the COVID-19 on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Lesotho.

¹⁸UNDP. (2020). A Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of the COVID-19 on MSMEs in Lesotho. Lesotho Response to Covid-19 Project

¹⁹Central Bank of Lesotho (CBL). (January 2025). Lesotho Economic Outlook Update: 2024 – 2026: Modest Growth Amid Rising Global Uncertainty and Vulnerabilities.

The food security situation has deteriorated sharply, with 335,000 people (22% of the rural population) in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis). Climate shocks, including poor rainfall, combined with high food prices and import dependence, have weakened household resilience. Meanwhile, MSMEs, which employ approximately 120,000 Basotho and drive much of the informal economy, remain under-capacitated and most continue to operate without access to finance, digital tools, or public procurement opportunities. Rural women and adolescent girls continue to face multiple disadvantages, including limited access to SRHR, digital platforms, and transport. The 2024 key labour market indicators reveal the unemployment rate stood at 16%, with youth and women overrepresented among the unemployed. Most young people are engaged in low-productivity informal work, and Lesotho's NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rate remains high.

In response to these intersecting vulnerabilities, Lesotho has adopted a resilience-oriented development strategy. Policy priorities include the establishment of a unified national social registry, operationalisation of the SDG Investor Map, and the development of special economic zones (SEZs). New initiatives for youth engagement include the reform of the tertiary loan and bursary scheme to ensure better targeting and alignment with priority sectors like ICT, renewable energy, and agri-processing. Furthermore, civic and leadership development programmes are designed to enhance youth agency and encourage their participation in national development processes. Under the Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (2020–2030), the country is also investing in multi-hazard early warning systems and decentralised disaster management structures to enhance local preparedness. These interventions are anchored in the principle of leaving no one behind and represent a strategic shift towards inclusive, climate-resilient, and regionally integrated growth.



¹⁷International Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). (2025, March). Lesotho: IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis January - March 2025.

¹⁸UNDP. (2020). A Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of the COVID-19 on MSMEs in Lesotho. Lesotho Response to Covid-19 Project

¹⁹World Bank. (2025, April). Lesotho Economic Update: Transforming Fiscal Policy into an Engine of Inclusive Growth. World Bank Group.

²⁰UNDP & Government of Lesotho. (2023). Lesotho SDG Investor Map: Narrative Report.

²¹Disaster Management Authority (DMA). (2020). National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy and Action Plan 2020–2030.



Government of Lesotho



6. Means of Implementation

Lesotho 2025 Voluntary National Review



6. Means of Implementation

Lesotho's implementation of the SDGs relies on a multifaceted approach involving both domestic and international financing mechanisms, institutional capacity, data and statistical systems, and inclusive partnerships. These instruments form the foundation for sustained progress towards the 2030 Agenda.



6.1. Domestic Resource Mobilisation

The Government of Lesotho has made deliberate efforts to enhance domestic resource mobilisation (DRM) as a critical enabler for SDG financing. On the tax revenue side, key strategies include Implementation of digital tax systems by the Revenue Services Lesotho (RSL), including e-filing and mobile payment platforms; Strengthening tax audits and enforcement; Expanding coverage of the formal tax net, particularly targeting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the informal sector; and Updating property taxation and enhancing collection of non-tax revenues.

Efforts to strengthen non-tax revenue mobilisation have focused on dividends and surpluses from state-owned enterprises (SOEs), particularly utility providers and investment entities, and user charges and service fees, including for government-issued licences, permits, and administrative services. The ongoing fiscal reforms, including the Public Financial Management (PFM) strategy and medium-term expenditure frameworks (MTEFs), aim to align national budgeting processes with SDG and NSDP II priorities.

However, challenges such as the high dependence on volatile Southern African Customs Union (SACU) receipts, narrow tax base, and limited fiscal space constrain the capacity to finance long-term development investments. The share of the national budget financed through domestic taxes fell from 22% in 2019 to 18% in 2020 (Lesotho VNR, 2019; Lesotho VNR, 2022), reflecting reduced revenue mobilisation and increased dependence on external sources.

6.2. International Financing

External development finance remains a vital component of SDG implementation. Lesotho continues to benefit from Official Development Assistance (ODA), concessional financing, and South-South cooperation. From

2016 to 2022, Lesotho received concessional financing from the World Bank –International Development Association (IDA), African Development Bank, European Union, Global Fund, and the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

The World Bank supported 11 interventions with an IDA-financed project, representing a total commitment of US\$460.4 million, of which US\$423 million was IDA financing and US\$37.4 million was in the form of grants . These projects span a diverse set of sectors including health, education, agriculture, water, energy, trade, public sector reform, and rural livelihoods. The European Union in Lesotho contributions, through budget support, project financing, and technical assistance, include the Putting Youth and Women at the Centre of Inclusive Economic Growth (PYWIEG) Project (EUR 769,854), which focuses on economic empowerment for youth and women, Renewable Lesotho (EUR 25 million) to enhance energy access and climate resilience, as well as Metsi a Lesotho and Africa Investment Platform (AIP) funding for the Lowlands Water Programme (EUR 40.9 million), addressing crucial infrastructure needs.

Despite these efforts, gaps in donor coordination, monitoring, and data reporting persist. Successful operationalisation of INFF depends on high-level political commitment, improved fiduciary systems, and development partners aligning with national results frameworks and SDG indicators.

6.3. Partnerships

Lesotho has made significant progress in fostering public-private partnerships (PPPs), particularly in the areas of infrastructure, health, and education. The Public-Private Partnership Policy (2017) outlines the regulatory framework for identifying, structuring, and implementing PPP projects, including risk-sharing mechanisms and institutional oversight roles.

Civil society organisations (CSOs), academia, and community-based organisations (CBOs) are increasingly engaged in SDG monitoring, service delivery, and policy advocacy.

Platforms such as the SDG Forum and the Lesotho National Youth Power Hub have enabled inclusive participation, especially among youth and marginalised communities.

Development partners provide critical support through joint programming, technical assistance, and financing aligned with national development priorities. Strategic collaboration is facilitated through sector working groups and coordination mechanisms anchored in the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit (PMDU), ensuring coherence with the extended NSDP II

6.4. Capacity-Building and Institutional Strengthening

The Government of Lesotho, in collaboration with partners, has implemented a range of capacity-building initiatives. At the national level, capacity needs across ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) are coordinated through the Ministry of Public Service (MoPS), which oversees the centralised planning, budgeting, and delivery of training and skills enhancement.

Lesotho also subscribes to a range of external capacity-building platforms, including

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF): Through the AFRITAC South technical assistance programme, public officers benefit from training in macroeconomic management, tax policy, fiscal transparency, and

²²Accessed online at <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/document-detail/P175783?type=projects>

²³Access online at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/lesotho/lesotho-and-eu-launch-metsi-lesotho-programme-promoting-clean-water-and-sanitation-rural-areas_en

²⁴Accessed online at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/lesotho/lesotho-lowlands-water-development-project-phase-ii-llwdp-ii_en

statistical methodologies.

- The Macroeconomic and Financial Management Institute of Eastern and Southern Africa (MEFMI): Lesotho is an active member and routinely nominates officers for capacity development in debt management, monetary policy, financial sector oversight, and governance.

Support is also provided through bilateral partnerships and multilateral organisations (e.g., UNDP, World Bank, EU), which fund technical assistance and training for national planning, digital public finance systems, decentralised governance, and climate resilience.

However, institutional capacity remains uneven. Local government authorities and district councils continue to face staff shortages, high turnover, and weak institutional memory. Frequent rotation of civil servants without standardised handover systems disrupts continuity, while limited digital infrastructure hampers data collection and service delivery.

6.5. Statistical Systems and Data Ecosystem

The Bureau of Statistics (BoS), under the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics II (NSDS II), has spearheaded efforts to improve data quality, coverage, and accessibility. PARIS21 and other Development Partners (UNICEF, UNDP, UNRCO, EU, IOM, ILO, etc.) have played a pivotal role in strengthening Lesotho's statistical capacity, in close collaboration with the BoS to ensure that the country's data ecosystem is responsive to the requirements of the SDGs and national development planning. PARIS21 provided technical assistance in the formulation of the NSDS II, which serves as the overarching framework for coordinating statistical production, data governance, and resource mobilisation across the National Statistical System (NSS). Recognising the importance of non-traditional data sources in addressing data gaps, PARIS21 supported a citizen-generated data scoping and quality assurance study during 2023–2024. This initiative explored the potential of leveraging community-level and citizen-generated data for official statistics, with a focus on improving inclusivity, responsiveness, and localised insights.

In addition, UN Women collaborated with the BoS in 2024 to pilot test the Femicide Statistical Framework and to estimate femicide cases for 2019–2023. This collaboration, which extended to cover statistical units at the Lesotho Mounted Police Service as well as the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Social Development, aimed to assess their capacity to generate key femicide measurements that can support Goal 5.

Despite these advances, data availability gaps remain, particularly for environmental indicators, governance metrics, and disaggregated gender data. Limited financial and human resources, weak coordination among data producers, and challenges in data sharing hinder progress. Support for geospatial data integration, open data platforms, and capacity development in data analysis will be critical to achieving full SDG reporting coverage. NSDS II aims to fill these gaps by recommending the establishment of an NSS, setting up a Coordination Division within BoS, creating statistical units in all MDAs, investing in ICT infrastructure and open data platforms, and increasing funding for gender and environment data. The estimated cost of NSDS II is LSL 873.6 million (USD 55.3 million), with 54% still unfunded. To ensure Lesotho's statistical system supports evidence-based policymaking and full SDG monitoring, sustained investments and multi-stakeholder partnerships are crucial.

6.6. Mainstreaming of Volunteerism in National Policies and Strategies

Volunteerism plays a vital role in Lesotho's progress towards the SDGs. Key policies, including the National Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Policy (2011) and the National Youth Policy, explicitly promote volunteer participation. The DRR Policy encourages the recruitment of community volunteers for preparedness and emergency response and aligns with the Disaster Management Act (1997), which established local disaster teams that work with volunteers.

The National Youth Policy supports skills development through the Youth Apprenticeship and Public Works Programme (2020), a 12-month national service programme offering stipends and practical experience to tertiary graduates. This complements the earlier National Volunteer Corps (2009), which offered work-based learning for graduates across sectors.

Initiatives like the Lesotho Youth Power Hub, supported by the EU, UNICEF, and IOM, strengthen youth and CSO engagement. NGOs such as Skillshare Lesotho recruit and train volunteers as peer educators and data collectors, contributing to health and community programmes.

Volunteerism is also integral to health service delivery. Village Health Workers (VHWs), recognised under the National Health Policy, provide essential services in rural areas and are gradually being formalised into the health system. Organisations such as Peace Corps, Carewell, and Touching Tiny Lives also engage volunteers in areas such as HIV prevention, literacy, and child nutrition.

While policy integration of volunteerism can be strengthened, Lesotho has made considerable strides. Government-led initiatives, especially at community level (e.g. District and Village Disaster Management Teams), illustrate growing institutional support for volunteerism. Expanding and coordinating these efforts can enhance the country's capacity to address challenges including poverty, health disparities, climate change, and education gaps. Volunteerism is increasingly acknowledged as a key enabler of SDG implementation in Lesotho.





Government of Lesotho



7. Conclusions and Next Steps

Lesotho 2025 Voluntary National Review



7. Conclusions and Next Steps

7.1. Summary of Findings

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



SDG 3: Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being for All at All Ages

Lesotho has made progress in reducing maternal and child mortality. The maternal mortality ratio (3.1.1) fell by 54% since 2009, and the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel (3.1.2) reached 89%. The under-five mortality rate (3.2.1) and neonatal mortality rate (3.2.2) have also declined, supported by improved antenatal care and facility-based deliveries. The HIV incidence (3.3.1) halved since 2017, though prevalence remains high, while tuberculosis incidence (3.3.2) has stagnated. Access to reproductive health improved: the family planning coverage (3.7.1) rose, but the adolescent birth rate (3.7.2) and unmet need among youth remain high. The immunisation coverage (3.b.1) declined, and non-communicable disease mortality (3.4.1) is underreported. High alcohol consumption (3.5.2) and tobacco use (3.a.1) persist. The case fatality rate in diarrhoea and gastroenteritis (3.9.2D) stagnated. While emergency preparedness (3.d.1) and essential medicines availability (3.b.3) improved, only 54% have access to essential services and 51% face catastrophic health spending, underlining the need for stronger systems to reach Universal Health Coverage.

5 GENDER EQUALITY



SDG 5: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Lesotho has taken important steps to advance gender equality, but progress remains uneven. The legal framework for gender equality (5.1.1) has improved through new laws such as the Counter Domestic Violence Act (2022), yet enforcement is hindered by customary law exemptions and capacity gaps. While non-partner sexual violence (5.2.2) declined, intimate partner violence (5.2.1) rose post-2023, reflecting heightened vulnerability linked to economic stress. Early marriage has declined marginally, with 18.2% of women aged 20–24 married before 18 (5.3.1), but rates remain high in rural and poor communities. Women's political participation has improved at local levels (5.5.1), but representation in national leadership and managerial positions (5.5.2) remains low. Progress was recorded in women's autonomy in reproductive decision-making (5.6.1), now at 79%, yet access to sexual and reproductive health services (5.6.2) is still not fully guaranteed by law.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



SDG 8: Promote Sustained, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth, Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All

Lesotho's real GDP growth (8.1.1) remained below the LDC benchmark of 7%, averaging under 3% in recent years, though construction and financial services contributed to a modest post-COVID-19 recovery. Labour productivity (8.2.1), measured as real GDP per employed person, declined by over 7% between 2019 and 2023, reflecting expansion in low-productivity employment, especially in informal sectors. Informality persists in

78.8% of non-agricultural employment (8.3.1D), with domestic work, retail, and construction being dominant. Gender wage disparities remain high: women earn just 69% of male income on average (8.5.1), with greater gaps in high-skill jobs. The national unemployment rate (8.5.2) is 30.1%, with youth unemployment exceeding 37%, disproportionately affecting women. Child labour (8.7.1D) is concentrated in rural boys under 15, while new joint inspections have improved enforcement. Legal reforms under the Labour Act 2024 and Occupational Safety and Health Act 2024 enhanced protections and aligned with ILO standards (8.8.1, 8.8.2).

The tourism sector has shown recovery since the pandemic. Tourism contributed 6.1% to GDP in 2024, up from 5.5% in 2013 (8.9.1). Direct employment in accommodation and food services accounted for 4.07% of total jobs, with broader tourism-linked activities supporting over 8% of national employment (8.9.2D). Initiatives such as the Roof of Africa, Moshoeshoe Walk, and the Maletsunyane Braai Festival have supported rural job creation and cultural promotion.

Financial inclusion (8.10) has improved markedly, with 87% of adults formally served in 2021, up from 60% in 2011. However, only 39% held bank accounts, with 47% having never engaged with formal banking. Mobile money access has surged, with 66% of adults using mobile money services and 82% owning mobile phones (8.10.2). The number of commercial bank branches stood at 25 per 100,000 adults in 2021, but ATM density declined slightly to 13.86 per 100,000 adults (8.10.1a, b). These trends highlight growing digital inclusion, but persistent rural–urban disparities remain. Despite progress in financial access, only 14% of MSMEs have formal business accounts and 4% access credit, reflecting continued barriers to formalisation, creditworthiness, and financial literacy (8.10.1A). Mobile money usage among MSMEs is higher (65%), offering an entry point for inclusive digital finance.

The overall trend under SDG 8 shows partial achievement, driven by legal, institutional, and entrepreneurial reforms but constrained by informality, youth unemployment, and sectoral productivity gaps.

13 CLIMATE ACTION



SDG 13: Take Urgent Action to Combat Climate Change and Its Impacts

Lesotho made significant progress across most climate action indicators, with six of eight indicators showing improvement. Strengthened early warning systems and the operationalisation of the Disaster Risk Financing Strategy enhanced resilience to recurrent climate shocks (13.1.1). The adoption of the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (13.1.2) and establishment of 93 Village Disaster Management Teams (13.1.3) further illustrate gains in risk preparedness, though implementation gaps remain at local level. The country submitted its updated NDC (2024), Long-Term Vision, and National Adaptation Plan, fulfilling core planning obligations under the Paris Agreement (13.2.1, 13.b.1). However, greenhouse gas emissions increased by 20.4% between 2005 and 2017 (13.2.2), with monitoring hampered by weak data systems and underdeveloped MRV frameworks. Lesotho mobilised over US\$100 million in climate finance (13.a.1), yet institutional access to funds remains limited, and reporting systems are fragmented. Climate education has been mainstreamed across school curricula (13.3.1), and community awareness campaigns, featuring cultural media and humour—demonstrate innovative outreach. Despite clear progress, challenges in vertical coordination, MRV systematisation, and climate finance tracking continue to constrain the full realisation of SDG 13 targets.



SDG 14: Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources (In-land Freshwater Context)

Despite being landlocked, Lesotho made meaningful contributions to SDG 14 through sustainable management of inland water ecosystems and transboundary water governance. Progress was observed across all six relevant indicators. Nutrient pollution (14.1.1a) declined through organic farming and pesticide regulation, while plastic waste (14.1.1b) is being addressed via fiscal tools, recycling partnerships, and public campaigns, though collection and recycling remain limited, especially in rural areas. Ecosystem-based approaches (14.2.1) were adopted in freshwater conservation through the ReNoka programme, the National Wetlands Strategy, and LHWP safeguards. Inland fish stocks (14.4.1) remained biologically sustainable, driven by aquaculture growth, making Lesotho Africa's top Rainbow Trout producer with BAP certification.

Protected freshwater zones (14.5.1) expanded under the National Biodiversity Strategy, including Ramsar-listed wetlands and transboundary reserves. Economic benefits (14.7.1) rose via eco-tourism and aquaculture, while access rights for small-scale fishers (14.b.1) were enhanced through legal permits, capacity-building, and support for community-managed fish farming. These gains underscore the importance of freshwater systems in delivering SDG 14 outcomes in landlocked contexts.



SDG 17: Strengthen the Means of Implementation and Revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

SDG 17 underpins the broader development agenda by addressing resource mobilisation, trade, technology, and capacity-building. Lesotho remains heavily aid-dependent, with SACU receipts accounting for over 60% of government revenue annually. Although domestic revenue as a share of GDP has improved (17.1.1), the contribution of domestic taxes to the national budget remains below the 25% benchmark (17.1.2). Remittances remain a stable source of external finance, averaging over 20% of GDP (17.3.2), while FDI inflows have turned negative, declining from 4.8% in 2015 to -1.21% in 2023 (17.3.1). ODA as a share of GNI remains significant, peaking at 8.17% during the pandemic, and holding at 6.59% in 2023 (17.2.1D).

Debt servicing rose from 3.35% of export earnings in 2017 to 5.5% in 2023, but remains below international stress thresholds (17.4.1). Reforms such as the Investment Climate Action Plan, Special Economic Zones Policy, and the Public-Private Dialogue Framework have been adopted to attract private capital (17.5.1), yet the competitiveness of Lesotho's exports has declined, with global export share falling to 0.0037% by 2023 (17.11.1). Technological access has improved gradually. Fixed broadband penetration remains low at 0.384 subscriptions per 100 people (17.6.1D), but mobile connectivity has driven digital inclusion, with internet usage increasing from 25% in 2015 to 48% in 2023 (17.8.1). Macroeconomic volatility remains a concern: following a sharp contraction of -8.16% in 2020, GDP growth recovered to 2.39% in 2022 and an estimated 1.83% in 2023. Inflation peaked at 8.27% in 2022 before easing to 6.4% in 2023, while the current account deficit narrowed from -11.78% to -4.33% of GDP (17.13.1).

On data systems, Lesotho has enacted statistical legislation aligned with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (17.18.2) and is implementing NSDS II (2022-2027), though funding and institutional gaps persist (17.18.3). The 2016 census met global benchmarks, and the next round is planned for 2026. However, civil registration coverage—particularly for deaths—remains below international targets (17.19.2D).

Lesotho demonstrated moderate progress on SDG 17, with advancements in domestic resource mobilisation and data systems, but challenges persist in foreign investment, internet access, and development finance. Government revenue rose from 59.1% to 67.1% of GDP between 2023/24 and 2025/26 (17.1.1), though domestic tax effort remained below 25% (17.1.2) due to persistent dependence on SACU transfers. FDI inflows declined markedly to -1.21% of GDP in 2023 (17.3.1), while remittances remained a strong and stable inflow source, exceeding 22% of GDP (17.3.2). Debt servicing ratios increased to 5.5% of exports in 2023 (17.4.1), yet remained below distress thresholds. Lesotho expanded investment promotion regimes via the LNDC, Diaspora Investment Strategy, and SEZ reforms (17.5.1). Fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 people increased from 0.098 (2015) to 0.384 (2023), though digital access remains far below global norms (17.6.2D).

Lesotho's share of global exports declined to 0.0037% in 2023 (17.11.1), suggesting constrained competitiveness. Macroeconomic indicators reflected fragile recovery: GDP growth slowed to 1.83% in 2023, inflation eased from 8.27% (2022) to 6.4%, and the current account deficit narrowed from -11.78% (2022) to -4.33% (2023), with a surplus projected in 2024 (17.13.1). Progress was more robust in statistical development. The Bureau of Statistics operates under a legal framework aligned with UN principles (17.18.2), and the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics II (2022–2027) is under partial implementation despite funding gaps (17.18.3). Lesotho fulfilled census obligations with the 2016 PHC (17.19.2D (a)), but birth and death registration coverage still lags behind global benchmarks (17.19.2D (b)).

In total, 67 indicators were assessed across the six SDGs, of which 35 (51%) demonstrated positive progress, 24 (35%) showed stagnation, and 10 (14%) reflected regression. The assessment reveals that Lesotho's most substantial progress lies in environmental governance (SDGs 13 and 14) and macro-institutional reform (SDG 17), while persistent stagnation and regression are most evident in the labour market and health system performance (SDGs 3 and 8). Despite improvements in legal frameworks, structural and behavioural constraints as well as data availability, continue to impede the pace of transformation, particularly in employment generation, domestic financing, and gender-based violence prevention.

7.2. Challenges

Youth Unemployment and Skills Mismatch: Nearly 50% of young people are not in employment, education, or training (NEET), reflecting a deep mismatch between skills produced by TVET and tertiary institutions and labour market needs. The economy continues to generate low-productivity jobs, limiting meaningful youth engagement in growth sectors.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Despite legislative reforms, GBV remains prevalent at 44%, with underreporting driven by stigma, fear, and weak enforcement. Institutional coordination is limited, especially in rural areas, and survivor support services are unevenly distributed.

Disaster Risk Financing Gaps: Lesotho relies heavily on post-disaster donor aid, with no operational pre-arranged financing tools. The approved Disaster Risk Financing Strategy (2024–2029) remains unfunded, limiting proactive climate response, particularly in high-risk areas.

Health System Weaknesses: Gaps in non-communicable disease surveillance, low health worker density, and inadequate rural service delivery continue to undermine progress in universal health coverage and equitable care.

Data and Coordination Deficits: Fragmented data systems and weak inter-sectoral coordination hinder effective SDG monitoring. Limited disaggregation and statistical capacity constrain evidence-based policymaking, particularly at subnational levels.

7.3. Recommendations

Government of Lesotho

The Government must lead in creating an enabling policy, financing, and institutional environment to accelerate SDG implementation:

- **Strengthen SDG Financing and Budget Integration:** Harmonise domestic, international, and private financing flows in line with national development priorities.
- **Empower Local Government and Improve Service Delivery:** Build the reporting capacity of District Councils to effectively implement and localise the SDGs.
- **Accelerate Data Reforms and Evidence-Based Policy:** Scale up investments in national surveys, administrative data systems, and digital M&E platforms, with full disaggregation by gender, age, disability, and geographic location.

Private Sector

- **Promote Responsible Investment and Business Alignment:** Use the Lesotho SDG Investor Map to identify commercially viable, impact-driven investment opportunities in sectors such as renewable energy, agri-processing, sustainable housing, and digital infrastructure.
- **Support Youth Employment and Skills Development:** Expand private sector-led internship, apprenticeship, and job shadowing programmes in collaboration with universities, TVETs, and employment services.

Development Partners

Development partners play a critical role in providing technical assistance, concessional finance, and institutional strengthening support:

- **Ensure Alignment with National Priorities:** Channel development assistance through sector-specific strategies (e.g., Health Strategic Plan, Climate Change Policy) to enhance effectiveness and minimise duplication. And promote pooled funding mechanisms and joint programming to improve harmonisation and reduce administrative burden on national systems.
- **Enhance National Capacity and Systems:** Provide sustained technical support to strengthen statistical systems, public financial management, climate risk modelling, and results-based monitoring and evaluation.

Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Civil society actors are instrumental in community mobilisation, rights-based advocacy, and accountability:

- **Deepen Advocacy and Citizen Accountability:** Strengthen independent monitoring of SDG progress through shadow reporting, participatory scorecards, and social audits. And expand public awareness campaigns and civic education on SDG principles, particularly the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) agenda.

Academia and Research Institutions

- **Build Data and Skills Ecosystems:** Integrate SDG-focused content into university curricula and foster student involvement in data collection, community outreach, and SDG implementation activities such as the VNR process.



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9. Annexes

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THE STATUS OF THE GOALS PROGRESS

GOAL	Indicator	Status	Comment
SDG 3	3.1.1 Maternal Mortality Ratio	Progressed	
	3.1.2 Proportion of births attended by skilled health personell	Progressed	
	3.2.1 Under-5 mortality rate	Progressed	
	3.2.2 Neo-Natal Mortality Rate	Progressed	
	3.3.1 Number of new HIV per 1000 uninfected population, by sex, age and key populations	Progressed	
	3.3.2 Tuberculosis incidence per 1000 population	Progressed	
	3.3.4 Hepatitis B incidence per 100,000 population	Progressed	
	3.3.5 Number of people requiring interventions against neglected tropical diseases	Stagnant	
	3.5.2 Alcohol per capita consumption	Undetermined	
	3.6.1 Death rate due to road traffic injuries	Progressed	
	3.7.1 Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15-49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods	Progressed	
	3.7.2 Adolescent birth rate (aged 10–14 years; aged 15–19 years)	Undetermined	
	3.9.2D Case fatality rate in Diarrhoea and Gastroenteritis	Undetermined	
	3.a.1 Age-standardized prevalence of tobacco smoking among persons 15 years and older (%)	Progressed	
	3.b.1A Immunization Coverage by type	Undetermined	
	3.b.3 Proportion of health facilities that have a core set of relevant essential medicines available and affordable on a sustainable basis	Undetermined	
	3.d.1 International Health Regulations (IHR) capacity and emergency health preparedness	Undetermined	
SDG 5	5.1.1 Whether or Not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex	Undetermined	
	5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age	Undetermined	
	5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence	Undetermined	
	5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18	Progressed	
	5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments	Stagnant	
	5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions	Undetermined	
	5.6.1 Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed	Regressed	

	5.6.2 Laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education		
SDG 8	8.1.1 Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita	Regressed	
	8.2.1 Real GDP per employed person	Regressed	
	8.3.1D Informal employment in non-agricultural employment	Undetermined	
	8.5.1D Average monthly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age and persons with disabilities	Undetermined	
	8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities	Regressed	
	8.7.1D Proportion and number of children aged 6-14 years engaged in child labour, by sex and age	Undetermined	
	8.8.1 Frequency Rates of Fatal and Non-fatal Occupational Injuries, by Sex and Migrant Status	Undetermined	
	8.8.2 Increase in National Compliance with Fundamental Labour Rights	Progressed	
	8.9.1 Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP and in growth rate	Undetermined	
	8.9.2D Total employment created by Tourism sector	Undetermined	
	8.10.1 (a) Number of commercial bank branches per 100,000 adults	Undetermined	
	8.10.1 (b) Number of automated teller machines (ATMs) per 100,000 adults	Stagnant	
	8.10.1A Percentage of financially included individuals and SMMEs	Undetermined	
	8.10.2 Proportion of adults (15 years and older) with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider	Undetermined	
SDG 13	13.1.1 Number of deaths, missing persons and persons affected by disaster per 100,000 population	Undetermined	
	13.1.2 Number of countries that adopt and implement national disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies in line with the Sendai Framework	Undetermined	
	13.1.3 Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local DRR strategies in line with national strategies	Regressed	
	13.2.1 Number of countries with NDCs, long-term strategies, NAPs, and adaptation communications	Undetermined	
	13.2.2 Total greenhouse emissions per year gas (GHG)	Regressed	
	13.3.1 Climate change education and sustainable development integrated in curricula and education systems	Undetermined	
	13.a.1 Amounts provided and mobilised in relation to the \$100 billion commitment	Undetermined	
	13.b.1 Number of LDCs/SIDS with NDCs, NAPs and AdComs	Undetermined	
SDG 14	"14.1.1(a) Index of Eutrophication (Nutrient Pollution) 14.1.1(b) Plastic Debris Density"	Undetermined	
	14.2.1 Number of countries using ecosystem-based approaches to managing marine areas	Undetermined	

	14.4.1 Proportion of Inland Fish Stocks Within Biologically Sustainable Levels	Progressed	
	14.5.1D Coverage of protected areas in relation to freshwater ecosystem	Undetermined	
	14.7.1 Sustainable fisheries as a proportion of GDP in small island developing States, least developed countries and all countries	Undetermined	
	14.b.1: Degree of application of a legal/regulatory/ policy/institutional framework which recognizes and protects access rights for small-scale fisheries	Undetermined	
SDG 17	17.1.1 Total government revenue as a proportion of GDP, by source	Progressed	
	17.1.2 Proportion of domestic budget funded by domestic taxes	Progressed	
	17.2.1D Net Official Development Assistance as a proportion of Gross National Income (GNI)	Regressed	
	17.3.1 Foreign direct investments (FDI), official development assistance and South-South Cooperation as a proportion of total domestic budget	Progressed	
	17.3.2 Volume of remittances (in United States dollars) as a proportion of total GDP	Progressed	
	17.4.1 External debt service as a proportion of exports of goods and services	Progressed	
	17.5.1 Number of countries that adopt and implement investment promotion regimes for developing countries, including the least developed countries	Progressed	(6.5 pp increase)
	17.6.2D Fixed broadband subscriptions	Progressed	Barely (0.7 pp increase)
	17.8.1 Proportion of individuals using the Internet	Progressed	
	17.11.1 Developing countries' and least developed countries' share of global exports	Undetermined	
	17.13.1 Macroeconomic Dashboard	Undetermined	
	17.18.2 Existence of a national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics	Undetermined	
	17.18.3 Number of countries with a national statistical plan that is fully funded and under implementation, by source of funding	Progressed	
	17.19.2D Number of population and housing censuses conducted in the last 10 years, achieved 100 per cent birth registration and 80 per cent death registration	Progressed	
	17.8.1: Proportion of individuals using the Internet	Progressed	
	17.11.1 Developing countries' and least developed countries' share of global exports	Undetermined	
	17.13.1: Macroeconomic Dashboard	Undetermined	
	17.18.2: Existence of a national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics	Undetermined	

	17.18.3 Number of countries with a national statistical plan that is fully funded and under implementation, by source of funding	Progressed	In existence but remains underfunded
	17.19.2D: Number of population and housing censuses conducted in the last 10 years, achieved 100 per cent birth registration and 80 per cent death registration	Progressed	"Partially, component (a) met, component (b) is on track

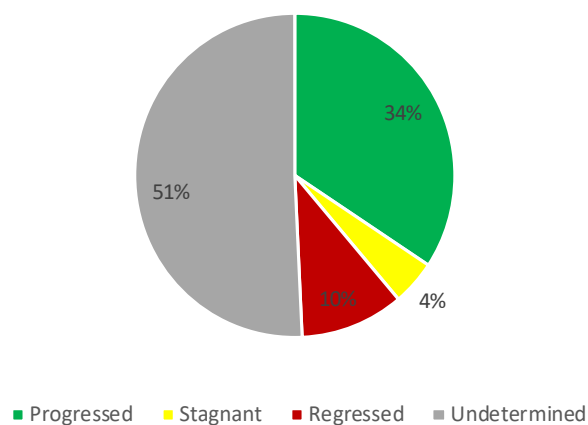
Total Indicators

67

Status Summary

Progressed	23	34%
Stagnant	3	4%
Regressed	7	10%
Undetermined	34	51%
Total	67	

SDGs Indicator Status Distribution Title





Government of Lesotho

Lesotho 2025 Voluntary National Review

On The Implementation Of The 2030
Agenda For Sustainable Development

