



Lesotho



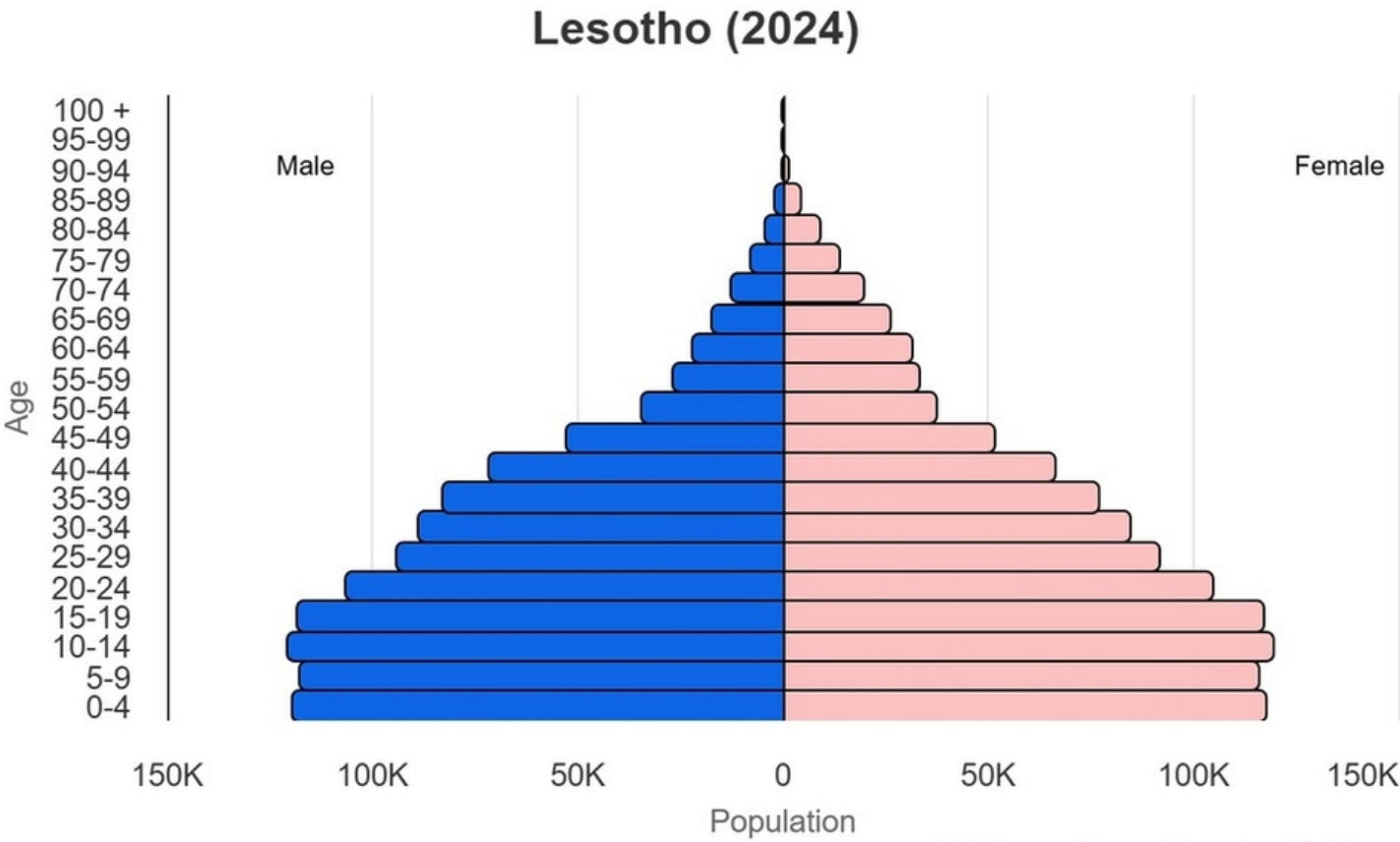
Background Paramount chief MOSHOESHOE I consolidated what would become Basutoland in the early 19th century and made himself king in 1822. Continuing encroachments by Dutch settlers from the neighboring Orange Free State caused the king to enter into an 1868 agreement with the UK that made Basutoland first a British protectorate and, after 1884, a crown colony. After gaining independence in 1966, the country was renamed the Kingdom of Lesotho. The Basotho National Party ruled the country during its first two decades. King MOSHOESHOE II was exiled in 1990, returned to Lesotho in 1992, was reinstated in 1995, and was then succeeded by his son, King LETSIE III, in 1996. Constitutional government was restored in 1993 after seven years of military rule.

In 1998, violent protests and a military mutiny following a contentious election prompted a brief but bloody intervention by South African and Batswana military forces under the aegis of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Subsequent constitutional reforms restored relative political stability. Peaceful parliamentary elections were held in 2002, but the National Assembly elections in 2007 were hotly contested, and aggrieved parties disputed how seats were awarded. In 2012, competitive elections saw Prime Minister Motsoahae Thomas THABANE form a coalition government -- the first in the country's history -- that ousted the 14-year incumbent, Pakalitha MOSISILI, who peacefully transferred power the following month. MOSISILI returned to power in snap elections in 2015 after the collapse of THABANE's coalition government and an alleged attempted military coup. In 2017, THABANE returned to become prime minister but stepped down in 2020 after being implicated in his estranged wife's murder. He was succeeded by Moseketsi MAJORO. In 2022, Ntsokoane Samuel MATEKANE was inaugurated as prime minister and head of a three-party coalition.

Capital	name: Maseru
Government type	parliamentary constitutional monarchy
Area	total : 30,355 sq km land: 30,355 sq km water: 0 sq km
Climate	temperate; cool to cold, dry winters; hot, wet summers
Natural resources	water, agricultural and grazing land, diamonds, sand, clay, building stone
Population	total: 2,227,548 (2024 est.)
Population growth rate	0.76% (2024 est.)
Ethnic groups	Sotho 99.7%, other 0.3% (includes Kwena, Nguni (Hlubi and Phuthi), Zulu)

Religions	Protestant 47.8% (Pentecostal 23.1%, Lesotho Evangelical 17.3%, Anglican 7.4%), Roman Catholic 39.3%, other Christian 9.1%, non-Christian 1.4%, none 2.3% (2014 est.)
Languages	Sesotho (official), English (official), Phuthi, Xhosa, Zulu
Executive branch	chief of state: King LETSIE III (since 7 February 1996) head of government: Prime Minister Ntsokoane Samuel MATEKANE (28 October 2022)
Legislative branch	legislature name: Parliament
Diplomatic representation in the US	chief of mission: Ambassador Tumisang MOSOTHO (since 16 September 2022)
Diplomatic representation from the US	chief of mission: Ambassador (vacant); Chargé d'Affaires Thomas HINES (since August 2024)
Economic overview	lower middle-income economy surrounded by South Africa; environmentally fragile and politically unstable; key infrastructure and renewable energy investments; dire poverty; urban job and income losses due to COVID-19; systemic corruption
Real GDP (purchasing power parity)	\$6.166 billion (2024 est.) \$6 billion (2023 est.) \$5.893 billion (2022 est.)
Real GDP per capita	\$2,600 (2024 est.) \$2,600 (2023 est.) \$2,600 (2022 est.)
Exports	\$983.027 million (2024 est.) \$885.789 million (2023 est.) \$1.07 billion (2022 est.)
Exports - partners	South Africa 31%, Belgium 26%, USA 20%, UAE 8%, India 8% (2023)
Exports - commodities	diamonds, garments, wool, power equipment, bedding (2023)
Imports	\$2.083 billion (2024 est.) \$2.077 billion (2023 est.) \$2.247 billion (2022 est.)
Imports - partners	South Africa 78%, China 10%, Taiwan 3%, Japan 1%, India 1% (2023)
Imports - commodities	refined petroleum, fabric, trucks, garments, cotton fabric (2023)

Population Pyramid



U.S. Census Bureau, International Database