



# Diaspora engagement mapping

## LESOTHO

### Facts & figures

#### Political rights



Dual citizenship<sup>1</sup>



Right to vote in national elections for citizens residing abroad<sup>2</sup>



Voting from abroad

Yes but limited In practice



#### Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **23.67%**

Remittances inflow (USD million): **484.39**

#### Data disclaimer

As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from UNDESA (2024) and remittances from the World Bank (2023).

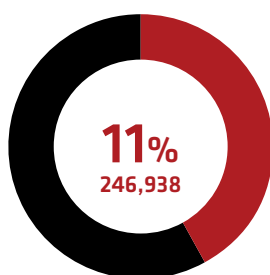
#### Emigration



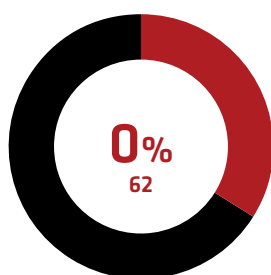
% of emigrants in total population



% of which in the EU



♂ 42.2%  
♀ 57.8%



♂ 33.9%  
♀ 66.1%

#### Top countries of destination



South Africa	237,718
Mozambique	8,173
Botswana	292
Eswatini	226
Australia	157

### National Diaspora Policy 2021



The National Diaspora Policy draws inspiration from global (Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, GCM) and regional frameworks such as the African Union Migration Policy Framework for Africa. The policy recognises the diaspora as an untapped resource – from remittances to cultural ties – and aims to actively engage Basotho communities abroad for socio-economic development within the country, whilst acknowledging the importance of diaspora welfare. Key objectives include strengthening institutional capacities, diaspora mobilisation and empowerment for active participation in Lesotho's development through investment, knowledge, and skill transfers, as well as a coordinated approach to diaspora engagement.

<sup>1</sup> The 8th amendment to the Constitution and the 2018 Citizenship and Immigration Bill allow for dual citizenship.

<sup>2</sup> The laws regulating voter eligibility are available online on the Lesotho Independent Electoral Commission. The National Assembly Electoral Act of 2011 stipulates that citizens of Lesotho have the right to vote from abroad for the National Assembly Elections, however due to limited resources and or institutional willingness, this right has been exercised mainly by Basotho diplomats.

## Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 2018** ● **The Lesotho Remittance Strategy** resulted from a multi-stakeholder effort that involved the IOM and the Central Bank of Lesotho (CBL). The strategy which has been recently validated but not yet published, aims to strengthen Lesotho's remittance system through digital and regulatory channels and address financial inclusion by reducing transfer costs, among others.
- 2021** ● **The Lesotho National Migration Development Policy** aims to streamline migration into development. It includes provisions that safeguard Basotho migrants (i.e. against trafficking) whilst improving access to benefits and information regarding labour rights. The policy also addresses the reintegration of Basotho nationals into the labour force and their communities.

### » Trends & Achievements

The Government of Lesotho (GoL) has developed or is in the process of developing policy frameworks for diaspora engagement (such as the National Diaspora Policy, the Diaspora Trade and Investment Strategy or the Diaspora Communication Strategy) to leverage the potential of migrants and harness diaspora contributions in reducing inequalities and achieving sustainable development. This process was largely facilitated by international development partners/agencies (i.e. the IOM) contributing to capacity building, more effective institutional coordination, data gathering protocols and methodologies (including diaspora profiling exercises) and evidence-based policies.

The community development processes underwriting diaspora engagement are not yet fully-fledged in 2023. However, the phased approach ensures that sufficient knowledge and institutional resources are in place for effective policy implementation and trust building. Two forums were so far organised in South Africa and Lesotho, with a variety of governmental, civic, diaspora and private sector stakeholders, which helped improve the government's situational awareness and knowledge of the Basotho diaspora, the great majority residing in South Africa, whilst bringing to light its most salient issues. As such, affordable remittances and cross-border access to social protection form a significant part of the policy agenda. The latter is likely to translate into bilateral agreements that enable the portability of benefits for potential returnees and their reintegration.

Furthermore, the recently validated Remittance Strategy acknowledges that remittances are vital to Lesotho's economy, representing a substantial portion of most household incomes. Therefore, future policies and/or schemes may likely target the formalisation of remittances, cost reduction for transfers, enhanced financial inclusion, a broader use of formal channels, and digital payments.<sup>3</sup>

Another emerging trend is the gradual institutionalisation of diaspora participation in national consultations. To this end, the Basotho Diaspora Association is a body that brings together diaspora organisations and members from around the world with the view of consolidating advocacy capacities in relation to the government.

The National Diaspora Policy also serves as a guiding framework for mid to long-term endeavours, including the Lesotho Diaspora Support Programme targeting skills transfers (a prior focus was healthcare), the Lesotho Leads Network aimed at providing access to key diaspora leaders, and various outreach forums, the first taking place in 2019, in Johannesburg. In terms of diaspora-led investment, spin-off initiatives such as Lesotho Learns, the Diaspora Trust Fund and Linked Lesotho would further garner impact from expertise, knowledge/

<sup>3</sup> Lira Peter Sekantsi (2018). "International remittance markets in Lesotho: Implications for economic and social development" in *Journal of Payments Strategy and Systems* 12(2). Pp.: 166-184.

professional networks, and diaspora philanthropy. The government recognises that such steps are aimed at a renewed “relationship between Lesotho and the Basotho diaspora, through effective trust-building, and greater institutional accountability, in the hope of fostering a culture of investment among diaspora members.

In a relatively short time span and with support from international development partners, the GoL has demonstrated openness and political commitment towards institutionalising diaspora engagement, through policy frameworks, strategies, and the creation of a dedicated unit for diaspora affairs. Aimed at recognising and facilitating diaspora contributions, as well as ensuring continuity and coherence in implementation, these processes were underwritten by training/learning initiatives for government officials, extensive consultations (spearheaded by the National Consultative Committee), and diaspora mapping exercises providing knowledge of the Basotho diaspora. To further demonstrate its proactive approach, in 2018 the government recognised dual citizenship, making significant headway towards enabling access to social benefits. In general, Lesotho takes a holistic and inclusive approach towards engaging the Basotho diaspora, targeting its skilled/professional members as well as vulnerable groups.

## Obstacles



- **Right to vote:** Although the National Assembly Law makes provisions for citizens residing abroad to vote in National Assembly elections, in reality, due to a lack of resources, only diplomats have exercised this right. To be able to cast a ballot, other citizens are required to be physically present in Lesotho.
- **Trust:** Political instability and high levels of corruption associated with overall governance in Lesotho may hinder the Basotho diaspora from developing a culture of engagement through philanthropic and/or investment contributions, particularly if there is a perceived lack of institutional accountability.
- **Consular capacity:** An operational challenge identified by the National Diaspora Policy is that the provision of consular services remains inadequate which impacts the assistance and protection capabilities for vulnerable and other diaspora groups.
- **Information availability:** Diaspora participation in government-led programmes, including in investment, is limited by lack of information and dedicated information portals because of poor digitalisation. Additionally, the programmatic documents (policies, strategies) are available only in English (not translated into Basotho) and cannot be easily accessed from government websites. There is no online portal for the Diaspora Affairs Directorate.
- **Remittances:** Initiatives such as mobile money services and Shoprite cash-to-cash have the potential to improve regulation, but there is a need for greater interoperability between commercial banks and mobile network operators, as well as financial literacy, one challenge being the high preference for cash and the vast use of informal channels.

## SPOTLIGHT: effective practices

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### NETWORKING

#### The First Inclusive Diaspora Outreach Forum (2019)

Organised in Johannesburg (SA) the outreach event addressed salient topics for the Basotho diaspora residing in South Africa including dual citizenship (permitted through the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution), the portability of social security which remains a key issue for potential foreign retirees, affordable remittance schemes and diaspora-led investment opportunities.

### INVESTMENT + TRADE

#### The LNDC (Lesotho National Development Corporation) Diaspora Trade and Investment Strategy (2021)

The strategy aims to foster economic collaboration by emphasising Diaspora Direct Investment (DDI) for international cooperation and economic diplomacy, recognising the diaspora's pivotal role in facilitating trade, investment, and technology transfers. The strategy also emphasises the need for a conducive business environment and transparent financial sector, thereby paving the way for more targeted reforms.

### DATA

#### Lesotho Diaspora Communication Strategy (2021)

The upcoming strategy, as outlined in a call for applications, is premised on a data-gathering effort and an ongoing process of understanding Lesotho's diaspora to enhance engagement for social cohesion and economic development. Moreover, the programmatic document would complement the National Diaspora Policy and diaspora strategies, thereby strengthening the coordination role of the newly formed Diaspora Directorate.

### ADVOCACY, NETWORKING

#### The Basotho Diaspora Association, BDA (2021)

Became formalised with the launch of the National Diaspora Strategy and functions as a platform connecting businesses, Basotho communities/organizations abroad, NGOs and the government. It leverages diaspora contributions for development and social inclusion. The first Homecoming Event organised in December 2023 identified diaspora-led investments, skill transfers and affordable remittances as paramount for development and a "renewed relationship between Lesotho and the Basotho diaspora".

### DIGITALISATION + COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION

#### Basotho Diaspora Online Platform

Officially launched in 2024 by Basotho Diaspora Association (BDA), in collaboration with the Government of Lesotho, UNDP and IOM, this online platform serves as a central hub for diaspora members to exchange knowledge and engage on matters pertaining to their connections with Lesotho, as well as foster networking opportunities amongst themselves. It also provides information regarding investment opportunities, employment, and other essential issues of the nation.



## Lesotho Youth Power Hub 2024 - 2029

The Lesotho Youth Power Hub is a joint initiative of the EU, UNICEF, and IOM, designed to foster an inclusive, empowering environment for Lesotho youth, both at home and abroad, to actively participate in national decision-making processes. Focusing on adolescent girls, young women, youth living with disabilities, youth living in rural areas and youth living in the diaspora, this initiative aims to support 27 grassroots youth-focused CSOs in expanding their network and engaging in policy and budget processes. The Hub will be available both on-site, in ten target districts, and online to ensure involvement of young Basotho around the world.

YOUTH

## Annex:

# List of Actors

### Diaspora related institutions

- **National institutions**
  - At ministerial level

#### Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Relations, MFAIR 1966

According to the official website, the Ministry aims “to project, promote and protect Lesotho’s interests and image globally, through innovative diplomacy and contribute towards a just, peaceful and equitable world.” The International Cooperation directorates target bilateral and multilateral cooperation and are responsible for managing Lesotho’s relations with other countries and regional/international organisations.

- At sub-ministerial level

#### **Diaspora Affairs Directorate 2021**

The establishment of a Diaspora Directorate under the remit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Relations seeks to “facilitate a committed engagement of the diaspora to the development of the country through their knowledge, capital and skills.” The unit is the key institutional deliverable of Lesotho’s diaspora policy.

#### National Labour Migration Committee for Lesotho (NLMCL) 2024

The NLMCL serves as a state-led regular information sharing and policy dialogue aimed at shaping national governance of labour migration, strengthening complementary, national-level policy approaches through inter-ministerial policy dialogue and ultimately ensuring effective protection of the rights of Basotho abroad.

### Diaspora organisations in Europe

Approximately 90% of the Basotho diaspora is located in South Africa due to geographical proximity. Presence in Europe is somewhat limited, with no known diaspora organisations that are active on either integration or development agendas.

Read more about diaspora organisations in “[Starting guide: What is a diaspora organisation](#)”

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