

COUNTRY LEVEL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR LESOTHO 2023 - 2026

1. Context for EU action gender equality and women's empowerment in the country

As indicated in the most recent Country Gender Assessment conducted by the World Bank and the Ministry of Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation in April 2022, Lesotho is a lower-middle-income country with high rates of poverty, income inequality, and unemployment and with notable gender gaps across these indicators. With the national poverty rate of 49.7 percent in 2017, poverty also has a strong gender and rural dimension. Female headed households, particularly those headed by single women, experience acute levels of poverty at 64 percent. While gender disaggregated data are not systematically available, the depth and severity of poverty in rural areas are characterised by marked gender gaps.

The Global Gender Index score for Lesotho in 2021 was 0.681, which places it 92nd out of 156 countries in terms of distance to achieving gender parity. This is a drop of more than 80 places since 2010, when Lesotho ranked 8th out of 144 countries with a score of 0.7678. Key factors accounting for the drop in the score is persistent discrimination leading to differences in human endowments, unequal remuneration for equal work, low labour force participation of women, low representation of women in senior positions and management, and women's limited participation in the political system.¹

After the COVID-19 pandemic, some gender gaps are expected to have widened. Adolescents and young women have become more vulnerable to gender-based violence, early and unwanted pregnancies, and child marriage. About 42.8 percent of Basotho women report having experienced physical or sexual violence in their lives, more than 52.4 notably during and after COVID-19 pandemic.

Significant Legislative Progress

In 2022, the government of Lesotho enacted two key pieces of legislation, namely: the **Counter Domestic Violence Act, Act No. 14 of 2022** and the **Harmonisation of the Rights of Customary Widows Act, 15 of 2022**. The two Acts were enacted as a result of extensive advocacy, undertaken by civil society organisations, international organisations, human rights defenders and development partner, which support initiatives by the Ministry of Gender in order to address persisting gender inequality and complement the existing gender sensitive legislation such as the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act, the Sexual Offences Act, and the Land Act.

Legislative progress on gender has been significant but women continue to experience structural barriers, especially due to patriarchal gender norms and customary laws generally being discriminatory against women. Patriarchal norms permeate all levels and areas of Basotho society, relegating women primarily to the household.² Population at large, and rural population in particular, still have little to no knowledge of the two new legislative acts and the possibilities to effectively use the rights enshrined therein. Their effective and widespread implementation constitutes a very important opportunity to be seized – since March 2023, the Ministry of Gender, in partnership with CSOs and development partners, including the EU³, started taking action to disseminate the new acts and take steps for their concrete implementation.

The Government of Lesotho is committed to the promotion of gender equality and empowerment, as demonstrated in the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) II that makes it mandatory for all sectors to address gender concerns and issues through their development programmes. This position is further emphasised by the Lesotho Gender and Development Policy 2018-2030, that outlines areas of intervention in the advancement of gender equality and reinforces gender-positive legislation. Promoting gender equality as a key political objective also accelerates progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are at the core of the 2030 Agenda.

MIP 2021-2027 Priorities

¹ [Lesotho: Gender Assessment](#) : WB 2022, pg.7

² [Lesotho: Gender Assessment](#) : WB 2022, pg.8

³ EU supported the translation of the acts in Sesotho, as well as their printing and dissemination

The Lesotho-EU Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2021-2027 outlines that EU partnership with Lesotho will concentrate on two priority areas, with a potential to significantly transform the country's economy in the medium term:

- 1) Green and resilient economy
- 2) Good governance, peaceful and just society.

Under the first priority, EU cooperation aims to facilitate Lesotho's move towards a circular economy, that becomes increasingly sustainable and self-sufficient with regard to energy generation and consumption and that provides access to all to energy, water and sanitation. All EU assisted actions will aim at adaptation of climate change and promote gender sensitive and transformative outcomes and results. Under the second priority, EU support aims to overcome years of political instability, to reduce adverse practices and improve democratic structures and the Government's service delivery to the citizenry. A specific component of this priority intends to improve access to justice for all, in particular for women, children and other vulnerable and marginalised groups, as well as fight against Gender Based Violence. The support measures for Civil Society provides for at least one action with gender equality as principal objective.

The present update of the CLIP is based on the Lesotho Gender Assessment 2022 carried out by the World Bank in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, on the priorities set out in the EU Roadmap for engagement with civil society as well as on the consultations held.

The EU Delegation consulted with the Government of Lesotho (represented by the Department of Gender from the Ministry of Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation), civil society organisations working on women's and LGBTIQ+ rights⁴, UN Agencies⁵, and the EU Member States accredited to Lesotho.

2. Selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives

As outlined in the Gender Action Plan III, the EU has selected gender equality and women empowerment as significant or principal objectives of the Lesotho MIP. The **main objectives (G2)** within gender equality are: ensuring freedom from all forms of gender based violence, strengthening economic and social rights and empowering women and gender minorities, and integrating women and gender minorities in the peace and security agenda. A **significant objective (G1)** of the MIP is to advance equal participation and leadership of women and of gender minorities in political spheres.

The EU will work on the following **areas of engagement** for gender equality and women empowerment:

- For **Green and Resilient Economy**, the EU undertakes to promote women's and other marginalised groups' access to and control over productive resources, including land, information, technology, safe water, energy, and finance. Further, promote gender-parity and gender sensitisation at all economic-decision making levels;
- Under **Good governance, peaceful and just society**, the EU undertakes to promote the dissemination and implementation of specific legislation on gender equality and domestic violence, and improve access to justice and curb impunity for GBV crimes by strengthening the justice system and raise awareness in the communities. It will also encourage political participation and engagement in the democratic process by women, youth and gender minorities.

⁴ The People's Matrix, Gender Links, Federation of Women Lawyers Lesotho (FIDA), Sesotho Media and Development (SMD), Development for Peace Education, Solidarity Center and The Hub, with inputs from all.

⁵ UNICEF, UNDP, RCO, OHCHR, UNFPA, IOM and UNESCO, with inputs from the latter three.

During the consultations carried out with the relevant stakeholders mentioned above, the following issues emerged as key priorities where windows of opportunity should be seized in the short and medium term:

- 1) Implementation of women's and gender minority effective (political) participation;
- 2) Move to concrete implementation of the newly approved 2022 legislative instruments on countering GBV and land's rights by customary widows;
- 3) Address gender stereotypes still rampant across the society;
- 4) Ensure stronger coordination and collection of data (including GBV related crimes) by the Ministry.

There is also a potential for synergies/partnerships for the objectives mentioned above with ongoing programmes implemented in Lesotho by GIZ and the French Embassy in Pretoria, as well as with legislation, translation and dissemination activities by the Ministry and CSOs.

1. Targeted action(s) supporting gender equality and women's empowerment

Currently there is one G2 action that is being implemented – Citizens Voices Addressing Violence Against Children (CVAVAC) by World Vision Ireland. The action aims to build the capacity of youth and civil society on civic engagement and their understanding of child rights and the justice sector. Through civil application of a specific social accountability model (Citizen Voice and Action – CVA), the action aims to create a legislative and enabling environment for gender equality where barriers to justice faced by women and girls will be addressed. CVAVAC contributes to the EU Gender Action Plan III, in particular 'advancing equal participation and leadership'. The overall objective of the project is to contribute to reducing violence against children through increased awareness and improved, efficient and child-appropriate justice services. The budget for the action is EUR 444,237.00.

Under the NDICI CSO thematic programme, the EUR 2,500,000 action "Youth Power Hub" (contracting ongoing) will support CSOs working on youth empowerment, disability inclusion, and gender equality through a series of capacity building activities, incubation programmes, and a small grant scheme to support actions by grassroots organisations as well to participation in local and national dialogue and planning.

Under the 2022 Annual Action Plan, EUR 3,000,000 have been set aside to further strengthen civil society. One of the specific objective of the action is to "Strengthen the equitable participation and representation of women, men, girls and boys in all their diversity in policy- and decision-making at all levels". Among the output of the actions, it is expected that "Gender transformative policies, strategies and legislation are developed with the participation of civil society in an inclusive manner". A call for proposal in this respect is foreseen to be launched in the second half of 2024.

4. Engage in dialogue for gender equality and women

Substantial engagement with civil society organisations, line Ministries and development partners, inclusive of EU Member States, is foreseen to discuss gender sensitive matters in Lesotho and in the design of new programmes. Through this dialogue, the EU will continue to condemn violations and abuses of women's rights, and to support gender-transformative and gender-sensitive initiatives led by civil society, development partners and the state as well as women and men working for gender equality, equity and women's empowerment.

The formats of discussions will take the following structure:

- **Short Term Goals:**
 - Revive the Gender Coordination Forum in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, the UN agencies and Civil Society Organisations, and participate to the organisation of joint events, including for the 16 days of activism;
 - Participate and keep informed EU Member States on Lesotho related gender matters and initiatives through quarterly online participation to the Gender sector group organised by the EU Delegation in Pretoria.

- **Medium Term Goals:**
 - Support the Roll-Out Plan of the Ministry of Gender to disseminate the newly enacted Counter Domestic Violence Act and the Harmonization of Widows Act, through the elaboration of simplified versions and continued dissemination in English, Sesotho and translation other indigenous languages in Lesotho;
 - Support Lesotho to undertake sector specific Gender audits, lens or assessments, such as the recently approved Gender Lens investing study for Lesotho National Development Cooperation, leading to the development of a comprehensive gender strategy for LNDC, for more gender-sensitive financial operations;
 - Support initiatives to expedite the National Gender-Based Violence data collection tool to support evidence based policy-making and programming.
- **Long Term Goals:**
 - Launch calls for proposals highlighting key features of the Gender Action Plan III and ensure that at least 85% of new external actions have gender equality and women's empowerment as a principal objective.

5. Outreach and other communication/public diplomacy activities

During the **2023-2025** period, the strategic communication/high level events on gender equality foreseen are as follows:

- Gender issues will be tackled as necessary during the **political dialogue** with the government of Lesotho and EU Member States, in particular addressing the status of women and the protection of their human rights;
- **Regular sector coordination meetings and dialogue** with other development partners and actors in Lesotho to ensure joint policy dialogue, aid effectiveness and alignment of activities;
- **Three times a year** participate in the South Africa Gender Forum meetings to update the EU MS representatives on activities and developments in Lesotho;
- **Bi-annual consultations** with civil society on ongoing programmes or input on project design/initiation with gender as a main priority;
- **Ad-hoc Cultural Diplomacy** events will be held, with gender as one of the thematic areas of discussion. These will include panel discussions, receptions, day-long events on human rights and gender summits. We will also support relevant ongoing initiatives by civil society.
- **Commemoration of Gender-Sensitive/Responsive Days** together with national authorities, CSOs, other EU Member States, development actors, such as International Women's Day and the 16 days of activism against gender based violence.

6. Technical Facility and/or financial resources allocated to support GAP III implementation

As the MIP has mainstreamed gender its priority areas, we foresee to prioritise gender equality throughout all sectors. As there is no specific budget, we do note that support measures for civil society have been earmarked to 7% of the budget in the MIP (Technical Assistance through the Cooperation Facility and Support to Civil Society). As civil society implements grants with gender as principle objective, this is a significant contribution to gender.