



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

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Item 4 of the provisional agenda

**Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under
article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of
Discrimination against Women**

**Replies of Lesotho to the list of issues and questions in
relation to its combined fifth to seventh periodic reports***

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



Introduction

1. Lesotho presents its responses to supplement information that was provided regarding the combined 5th – 7th periodic report on the implementation of CEDAW and the strides the country has made, in line with Lesotho's commitments to international and regional instruments including SDGs and the Beijing Platform for Action and Declaration, among others.

Replies to the list of issues ([CEDAW/C/LSO/Q/5-7](#))

Process for preparation of the responses

2. Upon receipt of the List of Issues, an action plan was developed with clear targets and timelines. The National Mechanism on Reporting, Implementation and Follow-Up (NMRIF) subcommittee convened to draft this report led by the Department of Gender. For further inputs, the draft responses were circulated amongst the members of the NMRIF, other line ministries and relevant stakeholders not represented in the mechanism. The process ensured inclusive stakeholders' engagement and validation reinforcing national accountability to international gender equality standards before approval for submission.

Women's rights and gender equality in relation to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, recovery efforts and global crises

Reply to paragraph 1

3. The Government adopted inclusive socio-economic measures targeting women and vulnerable groups. Women's access to COVID-19 vaccines was prioritized, and preventive protocols were enforced. Digital tools enabled continued education and other services, especially benefiting girls. Lockdowns were implemented with gender-sensitive humanitarian support. Social safety nets from the Government and partners provided critical aid to women and girls. GBV services remained operational, including hotlines, referrals, and awareness campaigns. To build climate resilience women farmers were trained in climate-smart agriculture.

Legal status and visibility of the Convention and its Optional Protocol

Reply to paragraph 2

4. Although Lesotho has not domesticated CEDAW through as a single law, its principles are embedded in the Constitution and implemented through sector-specific legislations. These include the Labour Act 2024, which prohibits workplace discrimination; the Administration of Estates and Inheritance Act 2024, guaranteeing gender-equal inheritance rights; and the Harmonization of Rights of Customary Widows Act 2022, safeguarding widows' rights.

5. There is no disaggregated data on number of court decisions referring to provisions of the Convention. However, recent court references to CEDAW include *Lethakha & Others v LHDA* (CC/0006/2023), where a gender-discriminatory policy was successfully challenged. Relevant line ministries and local committee structures continue to disseminate and train stakeholders on new gender-related laws and policies. The trainings have extended to the judiciary, law enforcement, and civil society organizations.

Reservations

Reply to paragraph 3

6. Public consultations are required to amend relevant customary law and discuss withdrawal of the reservation.

Definition of equality and non-discrimination

Reply to paragraph 4

7. As stated in paragraph 2 above, recent laws now grant women married under customary law and girls equal rights to inherit property and administer estates. Key anti-discrimination measures include the Administration of Estates and Inheritance Act 2024, which guarantees equal inheritance rights, and the Harmonization of Customary Widows' Rights with the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act 2022, removing barriers to widows' access to and control over productive resources.

8. Other laws and policies addressing discrimination include the Persons with Disabilities Equity Act 2021; prohibits discrimination, Labour Act 2024; bans gender discrimination at work, and Counter Domestic Violence Act 2022; criminalizes abuse and protects victims. The Gender and Development Policy remains central in protecting marginalized groups in line with the Constitution and law.

9. Though the Constitution permits customary law exceptions in marriage, divorce, and inheritance, major reforms include the enactment of LCMPA which removed gender-based restrictions in marriage and divorce, and the Harmonization of Customary Widows' Rights with the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act 2022 which align widow rights under civil and customary law, and the Administration of Estates and Inheritance Act 2024 ensuring equality in inheritance.

10. Administration of Estates and Inheritance Act 2024 grants men and women equal inheritance rights. Beyond a 30% quota, other measures include strengthening women's leadership skills, promoting women's participation in political parties, and raising awareness about gender equality. Moreover, sensitization workshops for officials have been conducted. For example, Human Rights Unit for head of departments and community councilors. The data collection tool for 2026 census has been improved to include disaggregation of data by sexual orientation, and IEC forms have also been updated to include sexual orientation. The Department of Gender and IEC train leaders on women's political inclusion, aligning the Gender and Development Policy 2018–2030 with IEC's Gender and Social Inclusion Policy 2018–2023.

Women, peace and security

Reply to paragraph 5

11. With ACCORD and the SADC Secretariat's support, Lesotho is developing its first Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan using international WPS toolkits. The participatory approach in the development of the action plan ensures a gender-transformative plan reflecting Basotho women's diverse realities. Consultations involved local structures such as traditional leaders, healers, faith groups, chiefs, and councilors.

Access to justice

Reply to paragraph 6

12. Legal aid services have been decentralized and expanded with psychosocial support. Disability Rules of Procedure 2023 ensure court access for persons with disabilities. Women's cases are also handled by restorative justice structures and reformed court procedures. The judiciary is increasingly gender-balanced, with women holding over half of judicial positions. Abortion remains illegal while safe abortion guidelines are being developed in line with the Penal Code 2010.

National machinery for the advancement of women

Reply to paragraph 7

13. In 2025/2026, the Ministry allocated M1.5 billion, with 0.45% covering Gender Department operations. The Department has 10 district officers, 8 head office staff, and 4 officers at the Lapeng Shelter. Two GBV shelters (in Maseru and Leribe) were established, with 2 more in Maseru. Gender-responsive budgeting was piloted in 2023, and Parliament received related training with UNDP support. The GBV Coordination Forum and District Gender Technical Committees were revived. They include ministries, civil society, private sector, and academia. Six Gender Mainstreaming Manager positions have been created in line ministries to integrate gender into national planning. Training is provided by development partners, regional bodies, and NGOs.

National human rights institution

Reply to paragraph 8

14. Lesotho's Human Rights Commission Bill, currently at its third reading in Parliament, aligns with the Paris Principles. The Commission will include a dedicated women's rights unit, reinforcing institutional commitment to gender equality and protection of women's human rights.

Temporary special measures

Reply to paragraph 9

15. The Department of Gender, in collaboration with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), is driving structural change within political parties by integrating the Gender and Social Inclusion Policy 2018–2030 and the Gender and Development Policy. These efforts aim to enhance women's meaningful and inclusive participation in political leadership. Development partners support legal reforms.

Gender stereotypes

Reply to paragraph 10

16. With GIZ support, Lesotho promotes gender equality through platforms like the Nokaneng App, Men Engagement Programme, and gender-responsive agriculture. Media training and the 2022 Consumer Complaints Guidelines support ethical reporting. Campaigns like 16 Days, HeForShe, and MenEngage, along with community

dialogues and school-based gender education, are shifting norms and promoting women's leadership.

Harmful practices

Reply to paragraph 11

17. Legal reforms are underway to eliminate child marriage through amendments to the Children's Protection and Welfare Act, setting the marriage age at 18 without exceptions. The Child and Gender Protection Unit (CGPU) and Ministry of Social Development support survivors through rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration. Though no centralized disaggregated data exists, about 200 reported cases of child marriage (ages 13–17), with 50% prosecuted and 30% resulting in convictions.

Gender-based violence against women and girls

Reply to paragraph 12

18. Lesotho has taken substantial steps under the Counter Domestic Violence Act (2022) with support from development partners to prevent and respond to GBV, including: Capacity-building for police, judiciary, and service providers; expansion of Lapeng Care Centres and GBV shelters; strengthening the CGPU and introducing gender desks. A GBV Strategic Information System is in development, alongside improved referral systems and police gender desks.

19. Legal aid has been decentralized to the northern region while the Southern region is provided with mobile units, though rural access remains limited. The Interpol Maseru office houses a dedicated GBV and child protection desk. Nationwide sensitization campaigns are conducted to end the practice of marrying girls to rapists after *lobola* payment, alongside continued awareness on laws criminalizing rape and the use of GBV referral pathways. UNFPA has supported parliamentary training, emergency GBV baselines, and comprehensive sexuality education for Grades 4–10. Male-led NGOs like Khotla Lesotho promote male engagement.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

Reply to paragraph 13

20. To enhance efforts on data collection systems, the Government has put in place 65 community-based protection committees. In addition, it increased labor inspections from 75 (2022) to 191 (2023). With IOM and US Government support, anti-trafficking implementation funding totaled \$850,000 in 2022–2023 and \$29,140 in 2024, while a draft National Action Plan undergoing review and costing.

21. To strengthen trafficking victim identification, Lesotho trains transport, immigration and border management personnel; disseminates information through IEC materials and media. There is also a toll-free hotline for reporting and a National Referral Mechanism for victim support. Pre-departure orientations for migrant workers. Further, the Government plans to expand shelter services to better support trafficking victims.

22. At the shelter, victims of TiP are protected and provided with access to legal aid, free and immediate access to temporary residence permits, medical care, psychosocial and trauma counselling, rehabilitation and reintegration services, irrespective of their ability or willingness to cooperate with the prosecution authorities. Government

continues to train law enforcement officials, judiciary, social workers and legal practitioners on TiP and the gendered dimension of it.

23. The LMPS established the Anti-Trafficking and Migrant Control Unit (ATMCU), working with the CGPU and local NGOs to conduct anti-trafficking campaigns. The Unit receives funding, which increased by 35% in 2023 Successful prosecutions include *R v Sam Madumera* and *R v Thukulula Smite [2018] CR 0346*, resulting in 10- and 50-year prison sentences respectively.

24. To address the root causes of trafficking such as poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity, particularly among rural women and migrant women, the Government is advancing gender-responsive economic programs, entrepreneurship, and climate adaptation measures to reduce women’s vulnerability to trafficking.

Equal and inclusive representation in political and public life

Reply to paragraph 14

25. The decline in women’s representation in public office is largely due to societal norms that discourage women from pursuing or remaining in leadership roles. While no formal policy guarantees 50:50 gender parity, efforts are made to promote gender balance in appointments, as seen in sectors like diplomacy and the judiciary. To address this issue, the Government is supporting women through leadership training, mentorship, and campaign assistance; conducting gender audits and promoting inclusive recruitment; holding public dialogues to challenge gender stereotypes; exploring a national mechanism to monitor progress toward gender parity, among other efforts.

26. The table below indicates representation of women in decision making positions of key institutions as at 2024.

Table A

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Parliament	32 (including deputy speaker)	88
Cabinet	3 (including deputy PM)	17
IEC	1	2
Judiciary	8	7

Nationality

Reply to paragraph 15

27. The Immigration and Citizenship Bill (2019) is at an advanced stage. To fully align with CEDAW Article 9, the Bill must be harmonized with existing laws like the 1966 Aliens Control Act. In 2018, the Constitution was amended to allow dual citizenship, improving women’s rights to nationality.

Education

Reply to paragraph 16

28. Lesotho has adopted inclusive, gender-responsive education reforms. The Menstrual Health and Hygiene Strategy (2025–2030) and School Health Policy (2005)

protect girls' right to education, helping them remain in school, in line with the Children's Protection and Welfare Act (2011) and SDG 4. Gender equity in STEM is promoted through the National TVET Policy and the STI Strategy.

29. The Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy Policy ensures pregnant, and parenting learners continue their education. The National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan (2018/2019–2022/2023) includes youth-focused campaigns that combine sports with health and life skills education. For example, those that are run by Kick4Life. Also, WASH infrastructure has been improved to support girls' attendance and comfort in schools.

30. Vulnerable learners, including girls, benefit from scholarships provided by Government, private sector, NGOs, and development partners. LBSE challenges gender stereotypes and promotes inclusive learning. Assistive technologies, Braille, and audio materials enhance access for learners with disabilities, especially girls. The 2024 Basic Education ICT Policy aims for full ICT integration by 2034, ensuring equitable access for marginalized groups, including children with disabilities and those in rural areas.

31. Policies outlined under above aim to ensure a safe, inclusive, and non-discriminatory learning environment for all children. The School Feeding Scheme supports children from low-income households, reducing stigma and absenteeism. Community-led transport associations and regulated school transport systems enhance learner safety. To promote secure online environments, development partners such as USAID, WB, and GIZ support safe digital spaces, while the Nokaneng App empowers girls to report GBV and share reflections.

32. The Life Skills-Based Sexuality Education (LBSE) Teachers' Guides are being implemented in 69 hard-to-reach schools, covering themes such as self-awareness, human rights, gender equality, SRHR, STIs including HIV/AIDS, and substance abuse. While teacher training is still ongoing, Masters' Clubs promote peer learning on GBV, supported by trained peer educators. Police and child helplines actively support the initiative, reinforcing a gender-responsive, child-friendly learning environment.

33. The Child and Gender Protection Unit (CGPU), in collaboration with CSOs, conducts awareness campaigns in schools on identifying and reporting sexual harassment. Efforts to eliminate gender stereotypes are also embedded in the curriculum through inclusive, non-discriminatory textbook content. However, harmful cultural norms continue to limit effective reporting and justice for survivors.

Employment

Reply to paragraph 17

34. The Labour Act 2024 strengthens constitutional protections by mandating equal pay for men and women doing the same work or work of equal value. It also expands safeguards against discrimination based on sex, pregnancy, or marital and family status, though implementation gaps persist. Pursuant to international and national labour standards binding upon Lesotho, the practice is that salary structures are predetermined before recruitment hence men and women receive equal pay for equal work.

35. The Act addresses indirect discrimination, prohibiting the denial of job opportunities based on gender and safeguarding women from dismissal due to pregnancy or childbirth. It also ensures maternity and paternity leave, promoting shared caregiving roles. Recognizing that women are disproportionately affected by

the extractive industries, the law calls for gender-sensitive protections in these high-risk sectors.

36. The Persons with Disabilities Equity Act ensures equal employment rights for persons with disabilities, including women and girls, by mandating non-discrimination, equal pay, and reasonable workplace accommodations. While Lesotho's informal sector remains under-regulated, reforms under the Labour Act 2024 and OSH Act 2024 aim to improve protections especially for women, who dominate this sector. However, enforcement and gender-sensitive policies remain limited. The National Social Security Bill is in its final stages. This law will address the challenge of unprotected terminal benefits for vulnerable workers, especially in the clothing and textiles sector.

37. Legal and policy reforms promote women's leadership in the private sector. The Companies Act 2011 permits women to serve as directors and company promoters. Government initiatives further support gender parity in STEM and business leadership through inclusive training and innovation platforms like the NUL Innovation Hub.

38. To reduce the burden of unpaid care on women and promote shared parenting, the Government has introduced paternity leave. It also supports women's workforce participation through early childhood care programs, including food provision and teacher remuneration in ECCD centres.

Health

Reply to paragraph 18

39. Lesotho's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Strategy (2019–2030) guides national interventions, with mid-term progress supported by UNICEF. In 2022/23, 579 outreach sites provided maternal and reproductive health services. The M-Mama Programme, a public-private partnership with Vodacom, has provided emergency transport for nearly 3,000 cases, with over 90% related to maternal health.

40. Although abortion remains legally restricted under the Penal Code Act (2010), the Ministry of Health is developing safe abortion guidelines within legal limits. No confirmed cases of forced HIV testing or sterilization have been reported. Health professionals are bound by codes of conduct that require informed consent, safeguarding women's bodily autonomy and rights.

HIV/AIDS

Reply to paragraph 19

41. To address HIV among adolescent girls, the National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan (2018/19–2022/23) includes youth-led, gender-sensitive campaigns. The Kick4Life program uses sports to educate youth including girls on sexual health. The Prevention Package for Adolescent Girls and Young Women provides rural girls with SRHR knowledge and empowerment. The Government demonstrates commitment by funding 70% of ARVs and fully subsidizing first-line HIV/TB treatments. In addition, The Government is enhancing its eRegister HIV/AIDS program to improve case monitoring and treatment retention.

Economic empowerment of women

Reply to paragraph 20

42. Recognizing systemic attitudinal and institutional gender-based barriers, the Government has enacted reforms to improve women's access to land, credit, education, markets, and decision-making. National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2022–2027) and NSDP II prioritize financial access for women and informal workers. Currently, 76% of women use financial services and are increasingly acquiring ownership of land. The Public Procurement Act 2023 reserves tenders under M200,000 for women, youth, and disability-owned businesses. The Economic Empowerment Forum, under the Gender and Development Policy, ensures cross-sectoral support for women's entrepreneurship.

43. The Productive Safety Net and Livelihoods Project (PSLP) provides financial literacy, microfinancing, and business training. Among the first 2,500 beneficiaries, 63% were women, 47% youth, and 10% persons with disabilities. Further support includes gender-sensitive financial regulations by the Central Bank and SACCOs; Digital Transformation Policy (2024) and Cybersecurity Bill (2022) to enhance digital access and safety for women; Innovation platforms like HER Empire and the NUL Innovation Hub expand access to finance and digital tools.

Rural women

Reply to paragraph 21

44. Lesotho has adopted a range of gender-responsive initiatives to expand access to essential services and economic opportunities for rural women and girls. The Environmental Health Policy (2023) and subsidized primary healthcare support safe and accessible services for women and girls. The M-Mama program improves emergency maternal care, while outreach clinics, extend health services to remote areas. HPV vaccination targets girls aged 9–14, and SRHR services promote maternal health, family planning, and HIV prevention. Under the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), over 130 health facilities and 14 outpatient departments were built or upgraded.

45. Regards access to education, Gender-focused policies such as the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy and the TVET Policy (2018) reduce school dropouts and expand vocational training for women. Girls' participation in STEM is encouraged through the Science, Technology, and Innovation Strategy (2017–2022), while the Digital Inclusion Strategy (2020) builds digital skills among rural girls. Improved WASH facilities in schools support menstrual hygiene, helping girls stay enrolled.

46. Concerning, Water and Sanitation, the MCA and national efforts expanded access to safe water through 190 km of pipelines and 166 rural water points. A M2.2 billion allocation in 2024/25 and the Lowlands Water Project Phases II and III aim to serve over 550,000 people, reducing rural-urban disparities and easing the burden on women who fetch water.

47. Enhancing access to energy transportation and housing, solar mini-grids have brought electricity to over 9,100 households, 68 schools, and 20 clinics, supporting women-led enterprises and improving quality of life in rural areas. Infrastructure improvements, including roads and footbridges, enhance mobility and access to services. In addition, Habitat for Humanity has supported rural female-headed households with decent housing.

48. The Government also enhanced economic empowerment Programs like SADP II, IFAD investments, and adult literacy and agricultural skills training improve women's access to credit and markets. The TVET Policy and initiatives like Her-Empire promote women-led businesses and climate-resilient farming.

49. Moreover, concerning, governance and participation: The government promotes women's leadership in decision-making. Support for cooperatives and financial inclusion initiatives strengthen rural women's entrepreneurship and economic participation.

Climate change and disaster risk reduction

Reply to paragraph 22

50. In Lesotho, women are increasingly recognized as crucial agents of change in climate action, particularly in adaptation and mitigation efforts. While Lesotho has a framework for mainstreaming gender in climate action, challenges remain in implementation, including a lack of specific guidelines and limited gender expertise. However, initiatives like "Women as Agents of Change for Adaptation" are empowering women to lead in their communities by promoting alternative technologies and raising awareness about climate change.

Marriage and family relations

Reply to paragraph 23

51. To address discrimination in family law, Lesotho enacted the Harmonization of Rights of Customary Widows with LCMPPA (2022), and the Administration of Estates and Inheritance Act (2024). These laws guarantee equal inheritance, divorce, and property rights for women in both civil and customary marriages. On ending forced marriage under civil and customary law, reference is made to a response on harmful practices above.

52. Awareness efforts include public campaigns on inheritance rights; legal literacy workshops and outreaches in local vernacular languages; training of legal professionals and legal aid providers and engagement with traditional leaders and community champions to challenge cultural barriers.

53. Customary marriages are encouraged to be legally registered to ensure full rights and protections for women as in civil marriages. While it permits polygamy, women's rights in such unions are protected by the principle of *malapa ha a jane* — each household is treated as an independent unit with distinct rights and property. Although most discriminatory legal provisions have been repealed, some cultural stereotypes related to burial and adoption persist. Nonetheless, awareness raising efforts aimed to transform these practices are ongoing.