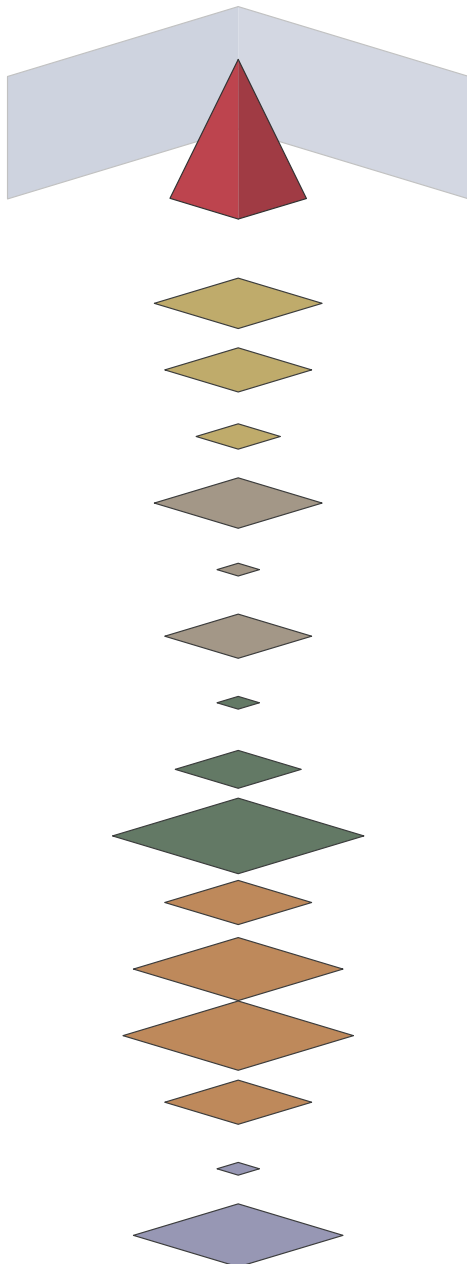




LESOTHO



3.92 CRIMINALITY SCORE

50th of 54 African countries
11th of 13 Southern African countries



CRIMINAL MARKETS **3.43**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	4
HUMAN SMUGGLING	3.5
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	2
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	1
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	3.5
FLORA CRIMES	1
FAUNA CRIMES	3
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	6
HEROIN TRADE	3.5
COCAINE TRADE	5
CANNABIS TRADE	5.5
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.5
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	1
FINANCIAL CRIMES	5



CRIMINAL ACTORS **4.4**

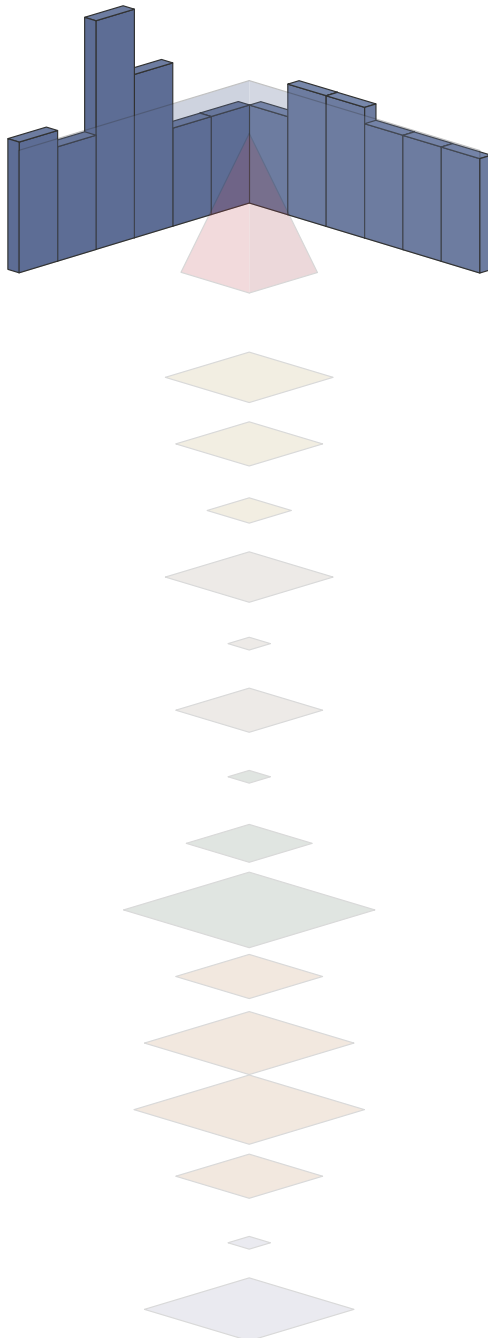
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	3
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.5
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	6
FOREIGN ACTORS	5
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5



3.92 RESILIENCE SCORE



LESOTHO



3.92

RESILIENCE SCORE

26th of 54 African countries

8th of 13 Southern African countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	4
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	3.5
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	7
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	3
LAW ENFORCEMENT	3
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	3
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	4
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	4
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	3.5
PREVENTION	3.5
NON-STATE ACTORS	3.5



3.92

CRIMINALITY SCORE



CRIMINAL MARKETS

3.43



CRIMINAL ACTORS

4.4



CRIMINALITY

Criminal Markets

PEOPLE

Lesotho is a source country for human trafficking because of its geographical isolation within South Africa and its poor economic and social conditions. The borders between these two countries are porous and loosely managed, making human trafficking from Lesotho into South Africa easy. Exploitation of Basotho nationals occurs within and outside of Lesotho. Nationals are trafficked to the Middle East, and foreign nationals are exploited locally in sex trafficking and forced labour. Traffickers often attract victims, including the large orphan population in rural areas, with false promises of lawful employment in urban areas and in South Africa. Domestic servitude, animal herding, and sex trafficking are the most common forms of exploitation within Lesotho. Basotho women smuggled into South Africa are detained in prison-like conditions for further exploitation in sex trafficking, while Basotho men and children are often subjected to forced labour in agriculture, textile sweatshops and illegal mining industries, or are forced to commit serious crimes such as drug trafficking. To avoid paying for labour, traffickers report the victims to South African authorities.

The porous border between Lesotho and South Africa facilitates human smuggling as the absence of control in some parts means that smuggled people and smugglers can easily cross without detection. Smuggled people are frequently subjected to labour and sexual exploitation once in South Africa. The human smuggling market is profitable, leading to the emergence of infant theft and smuggling. Besides the migration of Basotho into South Africa, Lesotho is also a springboard for the irregular migration of nationals from Asian countries, notably China and Pakistan. These people are assisted by networks that include corrupt state officials and Lesotho-based brokers.

There have been incidents, including cases of extortion, attributed to gang violence in Lesotho. However, this market has limited impact.

TRADE

Although Lesotho is not a major route for arms trafficking in the region, illegal guns still find their way out of the country and are used by illegal mining groups in South

Africa. Criminal organizations in Lesotho smuggle small quantities of arms for various crimes such as robberies, hijackings, stock theft, and contract killings, as well as for territorial battles over the control of illegal mining sites in South Africa. Some firearms may have been obtained in exchange for cannabis smuggled from Lesotho. Despite seizures of illegal firearms, corruption within the police ranks allows confiscated arms to be sold to Famo gangs. Lesotho military is also a source of weapons to illegal miners. The increased availability of firearms in South Africa may potentially lead to more flows into Lesotho.

Lesotho is not a significant producer of or a relevant destination for counterfeit goods. It is believed that flows of cheap Chinese knockoffs are entering Lesotho, but reports from the government about the seizure of these products have not been made public. Conversely, the illicit trade in excise goods, specifically tobacco products and alcoholic beverages, occurs to a greater extent in Lesotho. State-embedded actors, including diplomats, have been found to be reportedly involved in the illicit trade of alcohol, with some of them reselling bottles in bars and restaurants after acquiring them without paying duties. Illicit cigarettes are also present in the country. Lesotho is believed to be a transit or ghost destination for cigarettes to be smuggled elsewhere, as import data shows a significantly higher number of cigarettes arriving in the country than what is estimated to be consumed.

ENVIRONMENT

Lesotho's low forest coverage limits flora crimes in the country. Although there are reports of overharvesting of protected medicinal plants, the extent of the issue is unclear. Lesotho's isolation and small population of large animals make it an unlikely point for wildlife trade. However, stock theft is a significant issue in the country and quite common along the border with South Africa. Cattle thieves are also known to use small arms to steal cattle. Furthermore, there is limited evidence of ivory and rhino horn smuggling.

Diamond smuggling is a significant problem in Lesotho, worsened by poverty and political instability. Seizures of diamonds have revealed the involvement of senior officials and political elites in the smuggling process. To combat the illicit market, a programme was recently implemented to collect unregistered diamonds, resulting



in the surrender of many units which were then sold at an auction. The recent legalization of small-scale diamond mining may affect the market, but expensive licensing requirements could prompt illegal mining to continue. Basotho have been involved in illegal mining activities in South Africa, with zama zamas establishing a system of criminal governance through the use or threats of violence in areas near the mines.

DRUGS

Even though a rapid spread of heroin has been reported in Lesotho along with established flows, the relatively high cost of heroin in the country, when compared to neighbouring countries, limits widespread consumption because of economic constraints on the majority of the population. Most of the heroin in the country is supplied from the city of Bloemfontein in the Free State province of South Africa, which borders Lesotho.

Lesotho is a small source and transit country for the cocaine trade, with most of the cocaine entering the country from South Africa. Corrupt officials and high-level actors are believed to facilitate the trafficking. West African dealers and Basotho middlepersons have also been identified as facilitators of the flow into the country and the drug's subsequent sale. Cocaine consumption in the country is increasing, but the market remains relatively small. The drug is more accessible in altered forms, usually as crack cocaine, and substances such as chalk are used as cutting agents to make it more affordable for the local population.

Lesotho has become a major player in the legal cannabis market, with local industries obtaining the first export licence for medicinal cannabis flowers to be issued to an African cultivator by the EU. The high-quality cannabis plants that grow in the country's highlands are in high demand, with most of South Africa's legal cannabis coming from Lesotho. However, illegal cultivation and consumption continue, driven by the complicity of corrupt officials, although anti-smuggling legalization has curbed illicit activities. The legalization of cannabis has resulted in a decreased number of illicit growers, but many small-scale farmers continue to do so because of the difficulty of obtaining a licence. Recreational use and possession of cannabis remain illegal.

Synthetic drug use and trafficking remain limited in Lesotho, even though the domestic methamphetamine market is growing. Other synthetic drugs, such as methcathinone, Ecstasy, and methaqualone, can be found in small quantities. South Africa remains the primary place from where these drugs enter the country.

Much of the synthetic drug trade is linked to the illicit flow of drugs coming from Bloemfontein. However, because of the low purchasing power in Lesotho, people prefer other synthetic products, such as glue, to achieve narcotic effects.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

There is no evidence suggesting that sophisticated cybercrimes are taking place in Lesotho because of low levels of digitization. Nevertheless, these types of crimes represent a concern for the authorities, as evidenced by the passing of a law aimed at combating cybercrimes in 2022.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes, including mobile phone scams, are increasing in Lesotho. These scams involve fraudulent job offers and fake mobile money transfers. Scammers pretend to be officials or employees of companies, organizations, or government ministries, and deceive mobile money platform users into transferring money. Despite efforts to raise public awareness, these scams persist, affecting thousands of victims, partly because of the provision of mobile financial services by telecommunication companies, which are not specialized in banking services.

Criminal Actors

Criminal networks in Lesotho are responsible for a surge in violent crime, including drug dealing, diamond smuggling, and human trafficking. These groups are particularly active in the outskirts of various provinces, where they terrorize local communities through violence and theft. The prevalence of these gangs has led to retaliatory killings and violence between groups. Many members involved in illegal mining in South Africa are fleeing to Lesotho, exacerbating the situation. Despite this, violence in the country is still considered moderate.

Corruption in Lesotho is widespread, with criminal networks often linked to political parties. These affiliations are evident in political campaigns and are used to intimidate opponents. Criminals enjoy virtual immunity from prosecution. Recent cases of complicity include authorities selling seized arms to Famo gangs and officials involved in human trafficking and pocketing of state funds. Low-level state actors can be easily corrupted, allowing criminals to avoid arrest and prosecution. Border police are easily bribed to ignore contraband passing through, with some even acting as facilitators. Criminal



groups' access to firearms is partly made possible by law enforcement officials selling state guns to these groups.

The Famo gangs share some characteristics with mafia-style groups, such as the use of violence and links to illicit activities for financial gain. However, they lack some of the key features that define mafia organizations. Some of these gangs have identifiable names and are distinguished by the colours they wear. Many of them are involved in illicit mining activities in South Africa, making them a potential threat to evolve into mafias. Currently, they can be considered to be proto-mafias.

Foreign criminal groups play a significant role in facilitating the flow of drug, vehicle, and goods smuggling in Lesotho. South African-based criminal networks are the main foreign actors involved in vehicle theft and smuggling, using the country as a hub to re-register stolen cars. They are also involved in cannabis smuggling, stock theft, attacks on farms, and other criminal activities. Nigerian groups are identified as key facilitators of the

drug trade, while Pakistani and Chinese (including Taiwanese) groups are allegedly involved in human trafficking. Exploitation mainly occurs in factories owned by Chinese operators, with cases of Chinese nationals being trafficked for sexual exploitation by Chinese groups operating in the country also reported. However, foreign criminal involvement in Lesotho remains more limited than that of local syndicates.

The most significant private actors that facilitate illicit activities are the telecommunications companies that also provide financial services to their users. Besides violating national anti-money laundering laws, as these are not specialized financial services companies, they are not able to comply with the laws. Because of this lack of control, there has been a rise in financial scams. The violation of anti-money laundering laws by telecommunications companies is likely to persist given the lack of law enforcement.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Although the country's governance structures, particularly those related to criminal justice, remain functional, they are weak. Political crises and corruption continue to undermine efforts to combat crime, and traditional leaders are trusted more than elected officials. Instability caused by infighting and uncertainty dominates the political scene, and the country's overall governance position appears to be in decline. Despite efforts to establish stability through democracy, the potential for toppling governments persists. Corruption is a significant issue in Lesotho, however increased numbers of corruption investigations have started to shift public perception in recent years. Procurement and naturalization processes are the main areas in which corruption occurs, and high-level officials have been implicated in such cases. The anti-corruption agency has faced challenges in its role, including provoked and unprovoked dismissals of staff. Although the law requires senior government officials to declare their assets annually, the declarations are treated as confidential. Nevertheless, Lesotho ranks better than most other African nations in terms of corruption perception.

Lesotho is committed to international cooperation, and it is a party to most international treaties that combat organized crime. The country has signed numerous agreements with other countries to combat human trafficking and smuggling, and to protect its foreign workers. Notably, coordination between Lesotho and South Africa has been successful in combating transnational crime, bringing officials implicated in scams to court, and facilitating the extradition of nationals implicated in murder. The government has passed laws and implemented policies to address various types of crimes, such as human trafficking, illegal diamond collection, and cybercrime. In 2021, major amendments to the anti-trafficking law brought it in line with international standards and introduced new offences and penalties. The government offered amnesty to those in possession of illegal diamonds and legalized artisanal and small-scale gem mining. However, the effectiveness of implementing laws remains a challenge because of political instability and insecurity of tenure in the government bureaucracy.



CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Lesotho is facing conflicts between political factions, which are influencing the independence of the judiciary. The Chief Justice can be dismissed and appointed at will for political gain, casting doubt on the impartiality of the judiciary. Additionally, underfunding has resulted in backlogs and hampered efforts to combat organized crime. Furthermore, conditions in Lesotho's prisons are poor, with a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS and a lack of transparency about prison conditions.

The Lesotho Mounted Police Service is the primary law enforcement body, but their lack of specialized units is a hindrance when dealing with specific types of crime. Corruption and abuse of power, including allegations of torture while in custody, have eroded trust in the police. There have been reports of friction between police and the military, linked to conflicts among political factions. Moreover, poor training in the use of force has resulted in incidents such as the killing of protesters. Concerns remain regarding insufficient law enforcement efforts against organized crime, particularly human trafficking, because of a lack of training and experience in conducting multi-jurisdictional investigations.

The porous borders between Lesotho and South Africa have resulted in frequent smuggling of vehicles, livestock, diamonds, cannabis, and people. Although the deployment of South African National Defence Force troops has tightened border security, illegal border crossings are still common. Although the Lesotho government is making progress in e-governance to provide extensive services electronically, vulnerabilities remain because of the lack of security measures, regulatory frameworks, and cyber-security awareness. Cybercriminal groups can exploit this situation and disrupt data flows.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Money laundering is a major problem in Lesotho, facilitated by corruption and insufficient safeguards. Despite having legislation in place and a financial intelligence unit to analyse financial information, the lack of a strategy is a significant weakness. Although three law enforcement agencies investigate money-laundering cases, collaboration and information sharing between them are insufficient, rendering investigation processes inefficient. Furthermore, the digitization of Lesotho's financial sector may assist in monitoring financial flows, but also makes the country more susceptible to cybercrime.

Lesotho's economic regulatory environment is liberal, which has attracted multinational investments in various sectors. However, the country's heavy reliance on trade

with South Africa makes it vulnerable to its neighbour's economic fluctuations. The legal cannabis and diamond markets with Canada and South Africa respectively are important sectors stimulating the economy, but their regulation is difficult because of the lack of control over cannabis cultivation and the easy access to diamonds. Despite the liberal framework, the private sector remains small, mainly because of the economy's size and inadequate investment. Recent developments, such as the legalization of small-scale diamond mining and the passing of legislation levying excisable goods, are encouraging. Nevertheless, progress is threatened by political instability, delayed reforms, and weak growth prospects.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The support provided to victims and witnesses of crimes in Lesotho is inadequate and limited. Although the government offers permanent residence to non-citizen victims of human trafficking, it fails to comply with standard operating procedures for victim identification and referral mechanisms. The witness-protection mechanisms in place are also considered ineffective, with authorities failing to provide effective protection and many witnesses leaving or dying under suspicious circumstances. Despite that, in terms of support to human trafficking victims, Lesotho's efforts have increased compared to the previous reporting period, with slightly more trafficking victims identified and increasing investigations and prosecutions carried out.

In general, Lesotho faces significant challenges in preventing crime because of inadequate training, corruption, and economic hardship. Although some prevention efforts have been made, such as legalizing small-scale gem mining and implementing anti-trafficking legislation, progress has been hindered by budget constraints and a lack of proactive state efforts. Cooperation with international partners has shown the importance of such partnerships in crime prevention, but lasting progress will require more significant capacity-building efforts.

Civil society organizations in Lesotho face significant challenges because of lack of funding and limited relationships with the government, leading to inactivity. The Catholic Church remains a powerful force and has exposed corruption in the diamond industry. However, civil society organizations remain cautious, and the extent of their activity is questionable. Although new legislation enhancing media freedom has been enacted, the media continue to lack independence, and journalists are often victims of intimidation and harassment, leading to self-censorship and a lack of outspokenness on politically-sensitive issues.

