

Lesotho

This small landlocked country was one of the first African countries to implement sector reform that included establishing a regulator, privatizing the incumbent and introducing competition. This has resulted in some of the highest levels of mobile-broadband coverage in Africa.

Mobile services: There are two mobile providers: Vodacom Lesotho (VCL), a subsidiary of the South African mobile group, which launched in 1996; and Econet Telecom Lesotho (ETL), the country's incumbent telecommunications operator, which launched in 2002. Penetration is relatively high for the region, with the State of ICT in Lesotho survey reporting that 79 per cent of individuals owned a mobile phone in 2016, including 87 per cent in urban areas and 72 per cent in rural areas. One factor is relatively high 2G coverage that reaches 98 per cent of the population, one of the highest levels in sub-Saharan Africa. The universal service fund has played a role in extending mobile coverage to underserved areas. Mobile-broadband was introduced relatively early in Lesotho, when Vodacom launched its 3G network in 2008. This early start has also resulted in one of the highest 3G coverage rates in Africa, at 100 per cent of the population. LTE was introduced in 2014 and population coverage is high by regional standards, at 69 per cent of the population.

Fixed services: The incumbent fixed line operator Telecom Lesotho was partly privatized in 2000, when 70 per cent was sold to a consortium comprising Econet Wireless International, Eskom Enterprises and Mauritius Telecom. Econet Wireless International, a South African-headquartered mobile group, bought the shares of the other consortium members in 2008. ETL provides fixed telephony using copper lines (subscription-based) and wireless local loop (prepaid). The copper line network has declined due to the popularity of mobile phones. ETL offers fixed-broadband using fixed ADSL (up to 16 Mbit/s) and optical fibre (up to 100 Mbit/s), as well as fixed wireless LTE (up to 150 Mbit/s). Five ISPs also offer fixed wireless broadband. The national fibre backbone has been progressively expanded. This is particularly important for landlocked Lesotho to access undersea fibre-optic cables. There are several cross-border connections with South Africa to access submarine cables in that country. Lesotho is a participant in EASSy, which went live in 2010, and lands on the East Coast of South Africa. The universal service fund is used to support the operations of the Lesotho Internet Exchange, launched in 2011, and

Key indicators for Lesotho (2017)	Africa	World	
Fixed-telephone sub. per 100 inhab.	0.5	0.9	13.0
Mobile-cellular sub. per 100 inhab.	106.6	74.4	103.6
Active mobile-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	49.0	24.8	61.9
3G coverage (% of population)	98.0	62.7	87.9
LTE/WiMAX coverage (% of population)	80.0	28.4	76.3
Individuals using the Internet (%)	29.8	22.1	48.6
Households with a computer (%)	8.9	8.9	47.1
Households with Internet access (%)	30.4	19.4	54.7
International bandwidth per Internet user (kbit/s)	4.7	11.2	76.6
Fixed-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	0.2	0.6	13.6
Fixed-broadband sub. by speed tiers, % distribution			
<i>-256 kbit/s to 2 Mbit/s</i>	-	38.7	4.2
<i>-2 to 10 Mbit/s</i>	52.7	37.2	13.2
<i>-equal to or above 10 Mbit/s</i>	47.3	24.1	82.6

Note: Data in italics are ITU estimates. Source: ITU (as of June 2018).

was used to acquire infrastructure for the national domain name registry (.ls).

Government policy: The Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology is responsible for sector oversight. Lesotho's Vision 2020 guides the sector, where technology is identified as a key pillar, with the goal of 90 per cent of households having access to communication and development technology. The country's Communications Policy has four strategic goals: (a) strengthen regulatory capacity; (b) promote the convergence of services and networks based on the Internet; (c) foster universal access to a diverse range of high-quality communications services at affordable prices; and (d) promote a competitive communications market. The Lesotho Communications Authority (LCA) (formerly Lesotho Telecommunications Authority) is responsible for the regulation of telecommunications, broadcasting, radio frequency and postal services. The Lesotho Communications Authority carries out its functions in relation to the Communications Act of 2012. The Universal Access Agency administers the Universal Access Fund (UAF) which, as noted, has been instrumental in expanding mobile coverage and supporting the IXP and domain name system. The UAF receives 25 per cent of LCA's surplus funds at year end and 1 per cent of annual net operating income of the main operators.

Conclusion: Lesotho's early reform efforts have paid off in terms of a high level of mobile-broadband coverage. The results are particularly impressive given that Lesotho is both landlocked and a least developed country.