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# Data in Focus

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**NISSA, The National  
Social Registry**

## Key Highlights

Despite progress, about half the population of Lesotho still lives in monetary poverty, which is about a million people. Child monetary poverty also stands at 44.8% and multidimensional poverty at 45.5%.

The government of Lesotho has been enhancing its social protection system, strengthening the integration, efficiency and credibility of the system.

A social registry, NISSA, that contains up-to-date data on 90% of the Lesotho household, can be used directly for targeting. Currently, some of the key programmes use NISSA, such as the Child Grants Programme, OVC-Bursary and the Public Assistance programme.

NISSA includes a process called Proxy Means Test, through which the vulnerable households are categorized into four poverty levels. These poverty categories for each households are vetted by the community and it allows any social assistance programme to target and enroll the most vulnerable into their programmes without any additional cost and time in targeting.

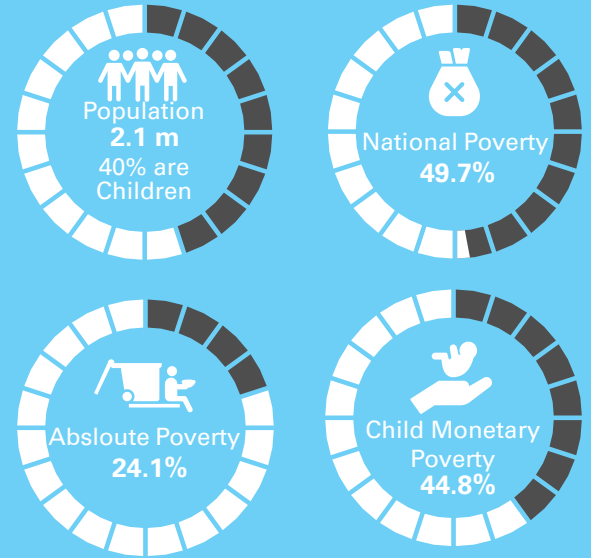


# Data in Focus

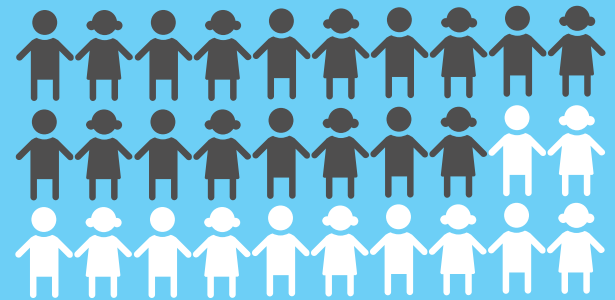
Lesotho is a small, mountainous, landlocked country located in Southern Africa. Lesotho has a population of 2.1 million and GDP per capita of \$1,118 and is classified as a lower-middle-income country<sup>i</sup>. With increase in GDP and the expansion of social protection systems, poverty rate decreased from 56.6% in 2002 to 49.7% in 2017<sup>ii,iii</sup> and the Gini index, a measurement of income inequality, fell from 51.9 in 2002 to 44.6 in 2017<sup>iv</sup>. Despite these progress in reducing poverty, a striking 1 million people are still living in monetary poverty with half of those in absolute poverty, making Lesotho still one of the poorest countries in the world. Similarly, Lesotho ranks 165 out of 189 countries and territories on the 2022 Human Development Index<sup>v</sup> indicating a low level of development in the aspects of having a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living. For example, HIV prevalence for those 15 and older in Lesotho is at 22.7%, one of the highest in the world<sup>vi</sup>.

Children’s situation is also dire. 44.8% are monetarily poor and 45.5% of children are found to be multidimensionally poor<sup>vii</sup>. This means that almost half of the children are deprived of at least 3 dimensions out of housing, health, nutrition, water, sanitation, education, protection from violence, access to information. This affects younger children disproportionately, with 68.8% and 44.2% of those between 0 – 24 months and 25 – 59 months multidimensionally poor respectively. Geographical disparities also exist, with those in the rural areas been more likely to be deprived than those in the urban area<sup>viii</sup>. As deprivation experienced during childhood may leave a permanent negative impact on the person, poverty including child poverty and child multidimensional poverty needs to be tackled to ensure children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

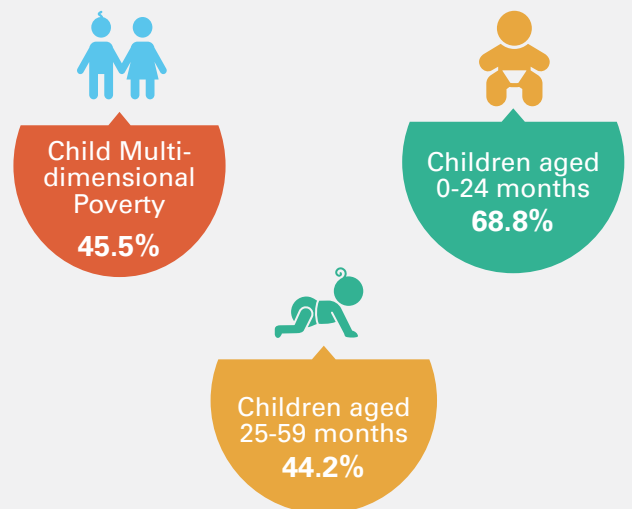
## Data in FOCUS



## People living in poverty



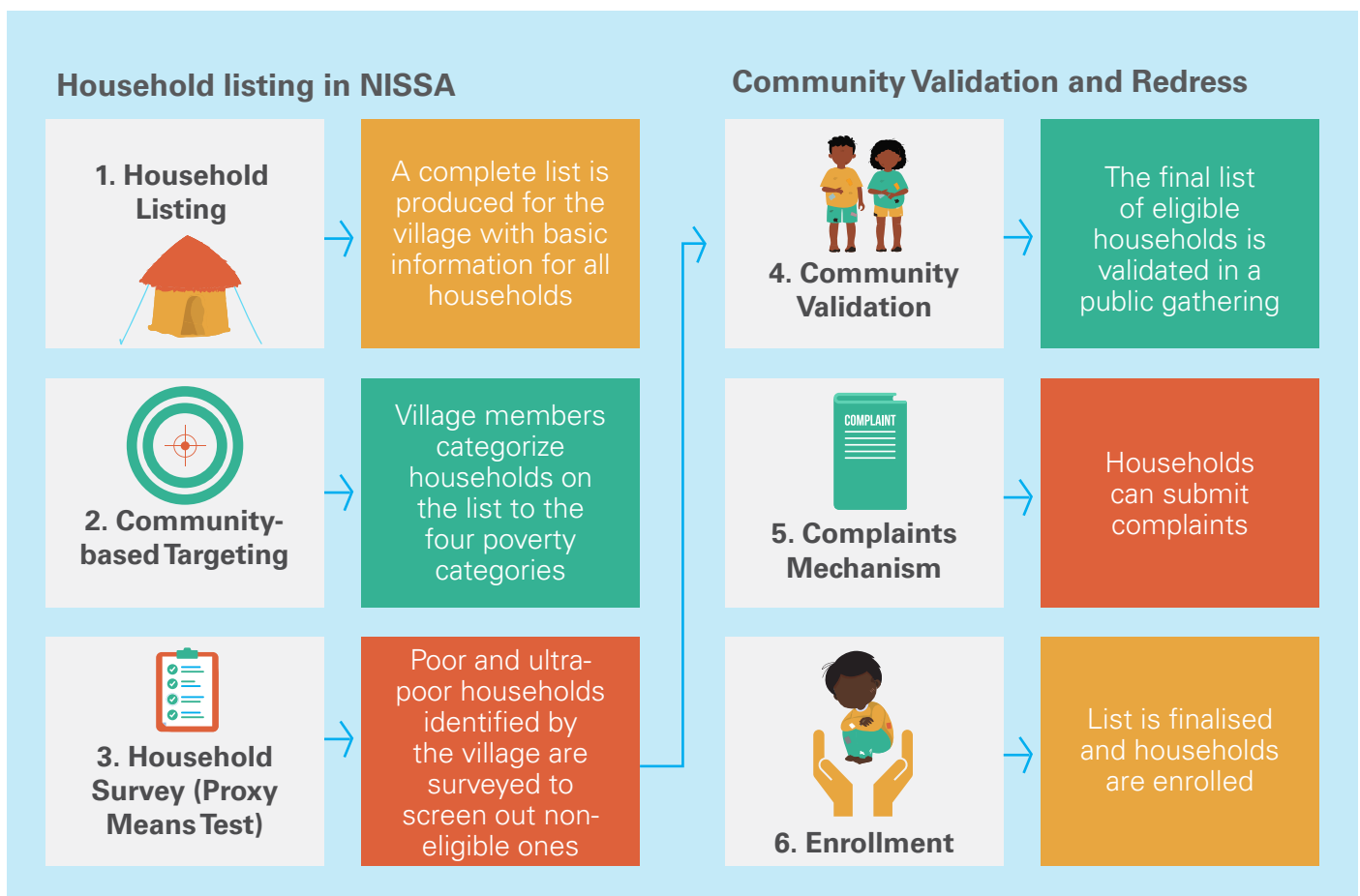
**(1 Million out of 2.1 Million)**



# What are We Doing About It:

To tackle poverty, the Government of Lesotho has been expanding and improving its social protection systems. In 2009, the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), with the financial support from European Union (EU) and technical support from UNICEF, launched the National Information System for Social Assistance (NISSA), a database or social registry designed to identify Lesotho's most vulnerable households with children in order to enroll them into the Child Grant Programme (CGP). In time, NISSA has evolved to become a social registry containing information for 488,309 households taken from all of the rural and urban community councils. This is about 90% of the total households. This level of registration is the highest proportion in Africa Region and one of the highest globally.

## Steps for Registry in the NISSA



NISSA's role has also expanded outside of the CGP to be used in targeting in the Orphan and Vulnerable Children Bursaries (OVC-B) and the Public Assistance (PA) programme. In addition, the NISSA is not merely a repository of data for current social assistance beneficiaries, but it can also be used for programmes to quickly reach any household in the future, should the need arise. This includes during humanitarian situations such as natural disasters or crisis, where there may be an urgent need to scale up or implement social protection programmes to reach and support vulnerable households quickly. For example, in the wake of the El Nino induced drought of 2015-2016, the CGP was scaled up to provide top-up transfers to existing beneficiaries in 33 community councils with NISSA coverage. In 2021, NISSA was also used in targeting social assistance beneficiaries in rural areas affected by COVID-19.

Table 1 Overview of some the social assistance programme currently under NISSA

Social Assistance Programmes	Number of Beneficiaries (as of August 2021)
<b>Child Grant Programme</b> The Child Grant Programme (CGP) aims to improve children's health, education, and nutrition. It is an unconditional social cash transfer programme targeted to poor and vulnerable households with children aged 0-17 years.	48,000 households
<b>Public Assistance</b> The Public Assistance (PA) programme provides cash transfers to destitute households or individuals (including orphans and vulnerable children [OVCs]; people with severe disabilities; the chronically ill; and the elderly). Poor and ultra-poor household without children.	12,741 beneficiaries
<b>Orphans and Vulnerable Children Bursary</b> The Orphans and Vulnerable Children Bursary (OVC-B) provides educational support to OVCs and beneficiaries of the CGP to improve their access to secondary education.	26,610 students

Together with creating a single registry, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) to put together a Proxy Mean Test (PMT) process for targeting through the NISSA, as well as the set up and operationalization of the Management Information System for Social Assistance (MISSA). The PMT is an automated process in NISSA where the households are categorized into poverty levels through a range of household indicators, including household income, employment status, ownership of assets and livestock such as cars and goats, if any member is abroad, disability status and others. The results of the PMT are reconciled with the results of the Community Based Categorization (CBC) process, where the community sits together and categorizes the households into poverty categories. The community will then meet again to validate and reconcile poverty categories of the households whose PMT score and CBC score are different. A redress mechanism is also included in the process for households who do not agree with the results.

These processes allow credible poverty categorization and minimizes inclusion and exclusion errors. The social assistance programmes, from national social protection programmes to that of NGOs', can therefore directly utilize the poverty categories in NISSA to implement programme to reach the most vulnerable households, without additional cost and time.

Once the households to be enrolled in a social assistance programmes are selected in the NISSA,

#### PMT targeting criteria includes the following:

The formula has been changed once in the past to align better with reality on the ground.

-  Household Size,
  -  Highest education level achieved by household members 18 and above;
  -  Paid employed and self-employed household members;
  -  Household members leaving abroad;
  -  Source of heating;
  -  Ownership of stove;
  -  Ownership of radio;
  -  Ownership of poultry;
  -  Ownership of cattle;
  -  Ownership of horses;
  -  Ownership of sheep;
- and others.

the data of the households will then be transferred to the MISSA. The MISSA is the management and implementation system to manages the various stages of social assistance processes, including delivery of benefits, case management, and tracking and monitoring.

Currently, CGP, OVC-B and PA use the NISSA poverty categories for targeting. In addition, the MoSD is currently designing a Disability Grant and may add a new investment line for infants under the Child Grant Programme. These programmes will also utilize the NISSA database and PMT categorization for means-targeted programmes.

Additionally, to ensure that the data in NISSA is up-to-date and continue to be credible, an NISSA updating process has been designed and piloted with support from UNICEF and EU. The update exercise ensures that any updates in the household information is reflected in NISSA including the poverty categorization. The updating exercise is done remotely where possible, ensuring cost-effective and efficient operations for the social registry.

Though not without challenge, NISSA, MISSA, and the PMT has supported the Government of Lesotho in harmonizing and consolidating the operations of the social protection system, simultaneously allowing greater efficiency, as well as credibility.

### **Development Partner Collaboration**

The European Union (EU), the Government of Lesotho, and UNICEF entered into a partnership agreement in 2007 for the implementation of a national-level initiative to address the growing challenge of children orphaned or made vulnerable as a result of the HIV epidemic in Lesotho. At the end of the four-year period ending in March 2011, the initiated Child Grant Programme was reaching 10,000 households covering 27,000 children. Then, the programme was continued from 2012-2014 in the amount of €10 million to complete the implementation and transitioning the Lesotho Child Grants Programme from EU/UNICEF to the Government. At the start of 2014, the Government took over 100% of the programme's benefit costs and 70% of its administrative costs, solidifying public ownership of the Child Grant Programme. As of February 2022, we are in Phase III of the EU-UNICEF partnership (2015 to 2022) to support the Government in building an integrated social protection system.



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This Data in Focus brief series is produced by UNICEF Lesotho using recent information and integrating data from multiple sources. The aim of the series is to encourage deeper discussion and understanding on issues important to children. To see other issues of our editorial series, visit: <https://lesotho.un.org/en/resources/publications>



## Endnote:

- i. World Bank database: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lesotho>
- ii. World Bank database: <https://data.worldbank.org/topic/poverty>.
- iii. While 2017 is the most recent official statistics for poverty headcount, UNICEF simulations estimate the poverty rate to be 51.7% in 2021.
- iv. World Population Review, accessed on 21st February 2022 from: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/poverty-rate-by-country>
- v. Human Development Report 2020, UNDP
- vi. Lesotho Population-Based HIV Impact Assessment 2020, Government of Lesotho
- vii. Multidimensional Child Poverty in Lesotho, UNICEF & Bureau of Statistics, Government of Lesotho, 2021
- viii. Ibid



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