



# Action Lesotho

32, The Mall, Tralee, Co. Kerry. Charity No: 17838

# Volunteer Manual



Web: [www.actionlesotho.ie](http://www.actionlesotho.ie) and [www.facebook.com/ActionLesotho](https://www.facebook.com/ActionLesotho) Email: [info@actionlesotho.ie](mailto:info@actionlesotho.ie)

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## Section 1: Introduction to Action Lesotho and Volunteering

### 1. Introduction

Action Lesotho works in four main areas: skills & training, enterprise development, agriculture and delivery of humanitarian aid.

We are committed to ensuring that volunteer placements are a useful, rewarding and enjoyable experience for both the volunteer and the group they are working with. Action Lesotho will also ensure that placements are planned and resourced e.g. money allocated in annual budgets. Safety of volunteers and the people they are working with is of utmost importance. Action Lesotho is a signatory to the Comhlámh Code of Good Practise for Volunteer Sending Agencies and this guides our approach to working with volunteers.

### 2. Who does what?

Action Lesotho's work is funded almost exclusively from Ireland with the Board of Directors in Ireland being ultimately responsible for directing the programmes and ensuring accountability in relation to use of the funds. However, the work on the ground is delivered primarily by our staff in Lesotho and our In-Country Director. The involvement of volunteers is encouraged where there is a specific role that has been identified that meets local needs and where a volunteer from Lesotho or overseas can be found that has the required set of skills.

### 3. The role of volunteers

Our basic requirement is that volunteers have a skill/s which are relevant to one of our programmes and that they have the experience and ability to pass those skills onto local people in Lesotho. This could either be training/mentoring one of our own staff members or running a course for students drawn from the community or one of our supported groups e.g. Nyenye Crafts. Typically, our volunteers, who have come from Ireland, UK, USA, Lesotho and South Africa, are either professionals or post-graduate students. All have specific relevant expertise which they are able to pass on. These are the type of skills which may be useful: transferable skills in the areas of crafts, trades, agriculture, health, business, management, community arts, innovation & entrepreneurship and Training for Transformation.

**These are examples of volunteer placements from the last three years:**

A business woman and accounting technician from Ireland who trained our staff in book-keeping.

A retired prison officer and TEFL teacher from Ireland who ran a 6-week 'Train the Trainers' course to train a group to teach English to other members of their community.

An unemployed IT postgraduate from Lesotho who developed a computer course which she is delivering at Ha Maqele on an ongoing basis.

A retired teacher and dressmaker from England who spent 4 weeks working with Nyenye Crafts on product designs & development plus training in the use of electric sewing machines

An International Development Masters student from Ireland, who had previous experience of volunteering in Lesotho, who mentored our Centre Manager in Ha Maqele for 6 weeks.

A carpenter from Ireland who has delivered three annual wood work courses to a small group at Ha Maqele.

## Section 2: Volunteer placement - before, during & after

**NB:** For volunteers based in Ireland, the organisation Comhlámh offers advice and support at all stages of volunteering for a development organisation overseas, from before leaving to post-placement [www.comhlamh.org](http://www.comhlamh.org)

### **Recruitment & selection:**

Generally, we will advertise for volunteers if we have a specific positions/roles which we have available. However, queries about volunteering for Action Lesotho can also be directed to our In-Country Director (who also acts as Volunteer Coordinator & Supervisor in Lesotho). See Appendix II for contact details.

Volunteers will be selected based on the skills & experience they can bring to the position. Almost all roles we have for volunteers require specific skills and experience of working in overseas development is an advantage.

Action Lesotho has a Diversity and Equality policy which applies to recruitment i.e. all applicants will be treated fairly and will not be discriminated upon in relation to their gender, race, religious beliefs or age.

Action Lesotho is committed to ensuring volunteers are effectively screened and trained in order to protect any vulnerable children or adults they may be working with.

### **Before:**

Once you are offered a place as a volunteer you will work out the exact details of your placement with the Volunteer Coordinator/Supervisor in Lesotho and any relevant member of staff and/or partner organisations in Lesotho. Depending on the placement, Board members in Ireland may also be directly involved e.g. with pre-visit briefing. You can contact the Volunteer Coordinator/Supervisor in Lesotho via email and set up Skype contact (see Appendix II for contact details). The Volunteer Coordinator/Supervisor is also in Ireland twice a year & most volunteers meet with him/her in Ireland to plan their placement. Working together, you will set clear objectives, timeframe, etc. so that you are clear about what to expect from us and what is expected of you.

Before confirming your placement you must complete & sign the application form, get medical clearance and obtain references. You must also read and sign the following documents: Codes & Ethics, Child & Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and the Comhlámh Volunteer Charter. Garda clearance may also be required.

This Volunteer Manual includes FAQs about volunteering in Lesotho, country facts, practicalities, health & safety information, incident reporting form, copies of all our codes & policies and an application form.

Induction training based on the manual and will be tailored to the particular role of each volunteer. It is provided by the Volunteer Coordinator/Supervisor and staff in Lesotho

### **During:**

Supervision, support & mentoring will be provided by the Volunteer Coordinator/Supervisor in conjunction with the Action Lesotho staff members and/or partner organisations in Lesotho.

Placements will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and adapted as necessary to ensure the best experience and outcomes for everyone involved.

If you have any issues that you cannot resolve at a local level you should contact the Chairman of the Board in Ireland or the Company Secretary (see Appendix II).

Action Lesotho normally requires volunteers to meet all their own expenses, including travel to Lesotho, insurance and in-country expenses. However, Action Lesotho will usually provide basic self-catering accommodation.

### **After:**

You will be expected to take part in a feedback session with the Volunteer Coordinator/Supervisor and relevant staff and/or partner organisations in Lesotho at the end of your placement. This is a two way process which helps everyone learn from the experience so future placements can be adapted as necessary. Volunteers usually find this a very useful in terms of having their voice heard.

Back in Ireland, debriefing is on offer in a variety of forms. You can meet with two Board Members at a time/place of mutual agreement, meet the whole Board at one of the monthly meetings in Killarney and/or go for independent debriefing which is offered by Comhlámh <http://www.comhlamh.org/>

If you feel you need counselling you should contact the Chairman of the Board in Ireland ([see](#) Appendix II) or, if you prefer not to involve Action Lesotho, you can contact Comhlámh.

### **Ongoing**

We would be delighted if you stayed involved with Action Lesotho. Options include giving talks to schools or local groups, volunteering in the Tralee bookshop, setting up a local group, organising fundraising events and joining one of the policy & planning subcommittees.

### **Recognition**

Action Lesotho recognises the commitment given by each volunteer and the valuable contribution made. Action Lesotho is happy to provide written and verbal references for volunteers.

We also recognise volunteers' work through photographs & articles in our newsletter, on our website and on our Facebook page.

### **Monitoring & Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation 'are an important means of measuring the effectiveness of any programme that feed into programme improvements and organisational learning' (Comhlámh). Action Lesotho will carry out monitoring and evaluation of all placements, including feedback from volunteers and partners, and ensure this learning is reflected in future programmes. Action Lesotho recognises that it is important to ensure that any volunteer placements are appropriate, useful and achievable.

## Section 3: Health & Safety in Lesotho

### Section 3 - Part One: Health

Action Lesotho's highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every volunteer. Fortunately there is good access to well-equipped doctors and hospitals in South Africa. Action Lesotho does not cover the medical insurance of volunteers so must have your own health & travel insurance with adequate cover for medical expenses etc. You should also visit your GP beforehand to check whether you are medically fit to travel and to have any relevant inoculations he/she recommends e.g. Hepatitis, Tetanus, and/or Rabies.

**If you need emergency medical assistance during your trip, dial 121 (or 112 from cell phones in South Africa, Toll Free on 10177) and ask for an ambulance. You should contact your insurance/medical assistance company promptly if you are referred to a medical facility for treatment.**

#### Health Issues in Lesotho

Lesotho is a relatively healthy country for volunteers, with none of the exotic or tropical illnesses or diseases common to most other parts of Africa. **The exception to this is HIV/AIDS**, which is prevalent in Lesotho at a rate of nearly 25%. TB is also common. We have policies and practices to help protect volunteers and staff from transmission of HIV/AIDS, but it is each volunteer's responsibility to take steps to avoid infection.

The most commonly experienced diseases are diarrhea from amoebas and giardia; high fevers from varied causes; skin infections from fungus, bacteria, or insect bites; upper respiratory symptoms; and allergies from dust and dryness. Drinking water in Ficksburg is safe, but make sure any water you drink in Lesotho has been boiled for at least three minutes (avoid offers of diluted orange squash etc). Other diseases are related to poor hygienic conditions, so make sure to wash your hands before eating (some people find a small antibacterial hand wash spray handy). Only eat well-cooked food and peel any fruit.

#### Helping You Stay Healthy

Prevention rather than cure is best. Although health conditions in Lesotho are generally quite good because of the high elevation and dryness, immunizations are still required to travel to Lesotho and must be kept current during your visit.

We have supplies to take care of most mild illnesses and first-aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed below. If you are on any prescription medication, make sure to bring an adequate supply with you, as it may not be readily available in Ficksburg. If you have any pre-existing medical conditions or allergies please make sure you let us know in case there is an emergency.

If you wear glasses, you might want to bring a spare pair. If you normally wear contact lenses you should consider wearing glasses for your visit as Lesotho is a very dusty country and the dust can easily cause eye irritation.

## Maintaining Your Health

As a volunteer, you must accept a certain amount of responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness and or injury. The most important of your responsibilities in Lesotho is to take the following preventive measures:

**Adherence to recommended standards for food and water preparation.** Many diseases are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These diseases include food poisoning, parasitic infections and hepatitis A.

**Prompt reporting to your supervisor.** You must immediately report any significant illnesses or injuries to Action Lesotho, including any possible exposure to rabies. Rabies exposure can occur through animal bites, scratches from animals' teeth, and contact with animal saliva. Medical assistance should be sought **immediately** if you receive an animal bite or scratch.

**Safe sex.** Use of condoms to protect against the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STDs is essential. Volunteers are expected to use condoms in every sexual encounter in which bodily fluids might be transferred.

**Pregnancy:** You are not advised to travel to Lesotho if you are pregnant.

## Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

Taking care of your health while you are in Lesotho is an extremely high priority of Action Lesotho. Because of the conditions in Lesotho we can only accept volunteers whose healthcare needs can be met in Lesotho/South Africa. You should therefore have medical clearances from your GP before travelling.

Following is a list of things to take care of before you leave:

- Make sure you have a dental and medical check-up & have any work required done before you leave.
- Obtain medical clearance from your GP.
- Obtain a spare pair of prescription glasses if applicable.
- Obtain an adequate supply of any prescription medication you take and an adequate supply of any alternative medication(s) you take.
- Complete the confidential Action Lesotho volunteer form with details of who to contact in an emergency (e.g. family members in Ireland) and details of any pre-existing medical conditions.

## Factors that Contribute to volunteer Risk

Volunteering overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy foreigner are some of the factors that can put a volunteer at risk. Property thefts and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault can also occur. There are several factors that can heighten a volunteer's risk, many of which are within the volunteer's control.

## Section 3 – Part Two: Safety

### Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of theft or assault:

- Become familiar with the environment and choose safe routes/times for travel
- Travel with someone whenever possible
- Do not go out on foot after dark
- Avoid high-crime areas
- Know the vocabulary to get help in an emergency and make sure you have emergency contact numbers with you
- Carry valuables in different pockets/places
- Carry a "dummy" wallet as a decoy
- Do not take irreplaceable items to Lesotho e.g. heirloom jewelry
- Make local friends
- Make sure your appearance is respectful of local customs; don't draw negative attention to yourself by wearing inappropriate clothing
- Get to know local officials, police, and neighbors
- Limit alcohol consumption. Do not take other drugs.
- Always make sure someone knows where you are going and when you are expected back.

### Support from Staff

If a volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Action Lesotho will provide support. Action Lesotho has procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure that the volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed.

After assuring the safety of the volunteer, Action Lesotho staff will provide support by reassessing the volunteer's work site and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a cessation of the volunteer's visit. Action Lesotho will also assist volunteers with pursuing legal sanctions against the perpetrators of the crime. It is very important that volunteers report incidents as they occur, not only to protect their peer volunteers, but also to preserve the future right to prosecute. Should volunteers decide later in the process that they want to proceed with the prosecution of their assailant; this option may no longer exist if the evidence of the event has not been preserved at the time of the incident.

When anticipating volunteer service, you should review all of the safety and security information provided to you, including the strategies to reduce risk. Once in-country, use the tools and information shared with you to remain as safe and secure as possible.

### Security Issues in Lesotho

When it comes to your safety and security in Lesotho, you have to be willing to adapt your behavior and lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target of crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime does exist in Lesotho. Recent increases in unemployment have led to increases in crime in Maseru. It is mostly street theft and of a nonviolent nature, and those who are obviously not Basotho are often targets. Volunteers are advised to come to Maseru only when necessary and, when there, to be wary of their location and activities. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that make you feel uncomfortable and by taking precautions. Crime in villages and rural communities is less frequent than in cities. Tourist attractions in large towns, for instance, are favorite work sites for pickpockets. But we cannot foresee every safety problem that might occur during your service. Your safety is ultimately your responsibility.

Young men and women are likely to be asked about their marriage plans. It is common for female volunteers to be proposed to by Basotho men. Volunteers must use good judgment when forming relationships with locals. Intimate relationships, or those perceived as intimate, may put volunteers at risk and cause them to lose credibility in the eyes of their peers, counterparts, and community members.

### **Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime**

You must be prepared to take on a large responsibility for your own safety. Only you can make yourself less of a target and develop relations in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. In coming to Lesotho, do what you would do if you moved to a new city: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Action Lesotho policies and procedures. Volunteering safely and effectively in Lesotho may require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Volunteers attract a lot of attention, but they are likely to receive more negative attention in highly populated centers than at their sites, where "family," friends, and colleagues look out for them. While whistles and exclamations are fairly common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, avoid eye contact, and do not respond to unwanted attention. In addition, keep your money out of sight by using an undergarment money pouch, the kind that hangs around your neck and stays hidden under your shirt or inside your coat. Do not keep your money in outside pockets. It is advisable not to use backpacks in Maseru, as local thieves look for them.

If you were in Dublin, would you leave your house unlocked while you were at work? Would you walk alone at night in a new area? Would you get into a car with a drunken driver? Would you invite strangers into your house? Use common sense while at your site, in Lesotho, or traveling in Africa. After learning some more about the Basotho culture, it will be your responsibility to draw your personal boundaries with regard to your safety. .

### **Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and volunteer Support in Lesotho**

Action Lesotho will keep volunteers informed of any events that may impact on volunteer safety. For example, political unrest and violence can be associated with events such as national elections, strikes or student protests. You should avoid demonstrations, rallies and large public gatherings as a precaution. Any warnings from the Irish Embassy in Pretoria should be heeded e.g. curfews. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you may be advised to leave the country.

The Action Lesotho team in Lesotho works closely with local groups to help prepare them for a volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting the volunteer. We will try and ensure that any placement is appropriate and safe. The Action Lesotho team will help & support you in any way they can.

Finally, in order for Action Lesotho to be fully responsive to the needs of volunteers, it is imperative that volunteers immediately report any security incident. Action Lesotho has established protocols for addressing safety and security incidents in a timely and appropriate manner, and it evaluates safety and security data to develop strategies to minimize risks to future volunteers.

## Section 3 –Part 3: HIV and AIDs

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is present worldwide but Lesotho has one of the highest levels of infection. It is caused by the virus known as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). There is not a vaccine or cure for either, and people with HIV remain infected all their lives.

### *HIV/ AIDS can be contracted through:*

- unprotected sex with an infected person, who may not know they are infected
- the use of infected syringes, medical and dental instruments or anything else that punctures the skin, such as needles
- transfusions of HIV infected blood
- passing from an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy, childbirth or breast-feeding.

It cannot be passed on through the everyday type of social contact that you are likely to experience as a volunteer, including insect bites or dirty food and crockery. Nor can it be passed on through kissing, coughing and sneezing.

### *Protecting yourself against HIV/AIDS*

- ensure you use condoms with new sexual partners. It is advisable to pack your own as standards may differ from those in Europe or they may not readily be available
- don't share needles and syringes
- be aware that some countries do not have the same medical standards as in Europe. Equipment may not be adequately sterilised, nor blood screened for HIV and hepatitis B or C
- if you require self-administered injections, take an adequate supply of your own needles
- don't have a tattoo, acupuncture treatment or body piercing unless you can be sure the equipment is sterile.
- If you are administering first aid to someone with a blood wound (including nose bleed) always wear latex gloves and wash thoroughly with a disinfectant afterwards.
- Always make sure any cut or abrasion on your own skin is covered.

## Section 3 - Part 4: Irish Government Advice and Assistance

There is no longer an embassy in Lesotho so you should register instead with the Irish Embassy in South Africa: <http://embassyireland.org.za/home/index.aspx?id=72244>

Embassy of Ireland  
2nd Floor  
Parkdev Building  
Brooklyn Bridge Office Park  
570 Fehrsen Street  
Brooklyn 0181  
Pretoria  
Main Tel:(012) 452 1000

Office Hours: Mon - Thurs: 8:30–13:00 & 14:00-16:30    Fri: 8.30 - 13.00

Consular Hours (Passport, Visa, Citizenship): Mon - Fri: 8.30 - 13.00

### ***Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin***

*Travel advice is available on the Department of Foreign Affairs website and you always check this before travelling to obtain the latest information*

<http://www.dfa.ie/home/index.aspx?id=8571>

*Below is the current information on the website (November 2013):*

### ***TRAVEL INSURANCE***

The Department of Foreign Affairs strongly recommends that comprehensive travel insurance, including medical insurance, is obtained before travelling to Lesotho. Travellers should note that the Irish government does not provide funds for emergency medical repatriation or for repatriation of remains.

### ***ENTRY REQUIREMENTS***

For entry requirements for Lesotho, please contact the [nearest Embassy or Consulate for Lesotho](#).

It is advisable to take a number of photocopies of your passport with you. During your stay you should carry a photocopy of your passport at all times.

### ***SAFETY & SECURITY***

You should be aware of the global risk of indiscriminate terrorist attacks, which could be against civilian targets, including places frequented by foreigners.

### ***CRIME***

Most visits to Lesotho are trouble-free. You are advised to take normal, sensible precautions to avoid mugging, bag-snatching and pickpocketing. Do not carry all your money at once.

Do not walk around Maseru after dark & avoid driving in rural areas at night. When driving in urban centres, especially Maseru, keep doors locked, windows shut & valuables out of sight.

There have been recent incidences of armed attacks on pedestrians. If you have no alternative but to walk around Maseru, avoid taking the same route repeatedly and be vigilant. If you are attacked, or your car is hijacked, do not resist.

### ***ROAD SAFETY***

Driving standards in Lesotho are poor and you should drive carefully.

### ***HEALTH***

There is a high incidence of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho. You should be alert to the danger

## Section 4: FAQs and Practicalities

### Travel

Flight options from Ireland include KLM (via Amsterdam), British Airways (via Heathrow), Air France (via Paris), Eithad (via Dubai), Virgin Airways, etc. Most volunteers fly into Johannesburg although there is a small airport near Maseru. All the airlines have baggage size and weight limits and excess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds those limits. Generally check-in bag weight allowed is around 23kg plus 7-10kg hand baggage. The total flight time is around 15-20 hours depending on route and stopover times. The drive from Johannesburg to Ficksburg is 4 to 5 hours. Arrangements will be made in advance about when and where you will be collected.

### Passport/VISA

There is no requirement to obtain a Visa before you travel but you need at least two blank pages in your passport before entering the country. Your passport will be stamped every time you cross the border between South Africa which can quickly fill up your passport – you will use 4-6 pages in your passport/month. If you are staying for more than 3 months an extension will be required to the holiday visa you receive on entering the country. The extension requires bank statement, a letter of motivation, police clearance and a form available from Home Affairs in South Africa.

### Accommodation

Accommodation will normally be fairly basic but comfortable with facilities such as indoor toilet, shower, cooker etc. Action Lesotho has an apartment in Ficksburg, South Africa where volunteers normally stay. Other volunteers have stayed at a guest cottage in the grounds of St Luke's Mission; this is at the discretion of the Mission. Alternatively, B&Bs and self-catering cottages are available to rent in Ficksburg and some parts of Lesotho.

### Electricity

Electrical appliances run on 240 volts. The plugs are round three-pin so you will need an adaptor to use any appliances you bring from Ireland.

### Money

The currency in Lesotho is Maloti (singular Loti) which maintains parity with the South African Rand. The current exchange rate (August 2014) is about:

1.00 EUR = 14 ZAR

However it is constantly changing so it is worth checking online.

You can get money from ATMs in Lesotho and South Africa so there's no need to bring much cash, though it can be handy to get some Rand (e.g. €100) from your local bank in Ireland before you travel. You can spend Maloti in most shops in Ficksburg but they will not be accepted in non-border towns/cities e.g. Johannesburg.

It is worth letting your bank at home know you will be in South Africa and Lesotho so your Credit/Debit card doesn't get blocked by them. To help avoid Credit Card fraud never let your card out of your site e.g. in restaurants.

### Insurance

Action Lesotho does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects, medical expenses, etc. You should therefore take out comprehensive travel insurance before you leave.

Insurance for working volunteers is offered by companies such as World Nomads (for under 40s). AIB offers quite good insurance for over 40s, but look around to find what suits you best.

### **Transport within Lesotho**

Bring an International driving licence (see Appendix II for details of how to obtain one) so you can drive one of the Action Lesotho vehicles if necessary. If you are driving be aware that some of the road rules are different from Ireland e.g. you cannot set down passengers at the side of the road and you must carry two red triangles in case of emergencies. Always make sure the vehicle you are driving has up-to-date vehicle registration, tax and road worthiness test. As in Ireland, you must always wear a seat belt. If you are stopped, the police may threaten you with arrest unless you pay them a bribe. If asked for a bribe refuse & if threatened with arrest contact one of the Action Lesotho staff immediately.

Public transport is also available (buses and crowded minibuses) but many people in Lesotho also use car/minibus taxis to travel. Walking can be the best way to get around in the villages!

### **Phones/Internet**

Action Lesotho has a phone with a local sim card for use by volunteers. Skyping is a handy and cheap way of contacting people back home. Internet access is available at the Phukalla Office, at the Ha Majele Community Development Centre and Action Lesotho flat in Ficksburg. Access to social networking sites e.g. Facebook can be limited on the Action Lesotho networks as some sites are blocked during working hours.

### **Sanitation**

There are western-style toilet facilities and running water at Phukalla and Ha Majele, but if visiting in the villages be prepared to use the pit latrines and no access to a tap. It is therefore advisable to carry tissues and a small hand sanitizer at all times.

### **Food and Diet**

The main meal of the Basotho includes papa, made of maize flour; moroho, or vegetables (mainly cabbage); and nama, or meat, which could be beef, pork, mutton, or chicken. Dairy products are not common. Because of the prevalence of tuberculosis and brucellosis in Lesotho, do not consume raw milk: powdered milk or 'coffee creamer' is used by most people. Please read the Health & Safety document for general guidance on safe eating & drinking in Lesotho.

In Ficksberg the supermarkets have most types of food you'll be familiar with. Prices of food in the shops in South Africa is similar to Ireland. However, eating out is usually cheaper than it would be in Ireland. Alcohol is much cheaper.

### **What to bring to Lesotho**

There is no perfect list! In the past, many Volunteers have regretted bringing half of what they packed. Almost everything you could want or need is available in-country, so do not load up on a lot of basic items. Do prepare yourself for the time of year you are visiting. It is up to 40°C in January and below freezing at night in winter (May-Sept). Sweaters and coats are a must in winter because there is no central heating, and buildings get very cold when nighttime temperatures drop below freezing. Some buildings have fireplaces or heaters, but they typically heat only a small area. All clothes should be washable and comfortable. There is a lot of wind, dust, and dirt, and clothes need to be washed frequently. See list below:

## Packing suggestions

### General Clothing

- Comfortable shoes or sandals plus durable walking shoes (with good tread), or good-quality hiking boots
- Sweatshirt/fleece and sweaters
- Warm jacket or coat and light jacket
- Items for cold weather, including thermals, tights (for women), hat, gloves & scarf.
- Items for hot weather, including hat, scarf to cover shoulders & sunglasses. Buying a cheap umbrella in Lesotho is very useful for keeping off the sun, especially during long outdoor meetings!
- Underwear
- Rain gear, including boots
- At least one fairly smart outfit if you will be meeting Govt officials etc.
- Shirts/blouses and T-shirts
- Light trousers and one or two pairs of jeans.
- Older women in Lesotho mostly wear skirts/dresses so women volunteers might want to wear these too.
- Dark-colored socks (white ones are difficult to keep clean!)
- One pair of shorts (for time off only - older people will frown upon you for wearing shorts in many areas of Lesotho and you shouldn't wear shorts at work)
- Warm nightwear during winter

### Other items

- ✦ Any favorite brands of toiletries & suntan lotion (but most items are available in South Africa and are cheaper than Ireland)
- ✦ An adequate supply of any prescription medicine you take
- ✦ Towels
- ✦ Health food items – supply of these is very limited in Ireland so if you have any special dietary requirements it is advised to bring supplies.

### Miscellaneous

- A daypack/bag with water bottle
- You will be able to charge your electronics (intermittently at times!) so bring your mobile phone/laptop/ipod, Kindle etc, but remember to bring your own chargers. Internet access available.
- Pictures of your home, family, and friends (Basotho LOVE pictures)
- ATM card and Credit card (American Express, Visa, or MasterCard)
- Camera, memory card and charger
- Passport
- International driving licence (for driving one of the Action Lesotho vehicles or hiring a car) – see Appendix II for details of how to obtain an International Licence.
- Head torch or other small torch

Small personal first aid kit (larger kits will be available onsite)

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## Section 5: Codes and ethics

### 1. Volunteer Charter

An important document to read and sign up to the Comhlámh Volunteer Charter which sets out the guiding principles by which Action Lesotho volunteers should abide. A copy of the document will be given to you but you can also view it on their website: <http://www.comhlamh.org/support-for-development-workers-before-going-overseas-volunteer-charter-and-code-of-practice.html>

**Travel in a spirit of humility** and with a genuine desire to learn more about the people of Lesotho.

**Be keenly aware of the feelings of others**, thus preventing what might be offensive behaviour on your part. This is especially applicable when taking photographs.

**Cultivate the habit of listening and observing**, rather than merely hearing and looking. Realise that often the people in the country you visit have time concepts and thought patterns different from your own; this does not make them inferior, only different.

Instead of the western practice of "knowing all the answers" **cultivate the habit of asking questions** and listening to the replies.

**Remember** that you are only ONE of many tourists visiting this country.

**Acquaint yourself with local customs** -people will be happy to help you.

Do not expect special privileges.

When you are shopping, remember that the "bargain" you obtained was possible only because of the low wages paid to the maker.

Do not make promises to the people in your visited country unless you are certain you can carry them through.

Locals always appreciate receiving photographs that you have taken of them, but if you promise to send photos, then do so.

Spend time reflecting on your daily experience in an attempt to deepen your understanding.

## 2. Child Protection Policy

Action Lesotho has a Child Protection Policy document but this is a summary of the principles you should adopt when working with children or vulnerable adults:

### Principles of Good Practice when working with Children or Vulnerable Adults

Your volunteer experience is about more than work, throughout your experience you will interact, to varying degrees, with the Action Lesotho team, the local community, and other volunteers.

Interaction with local children is usually a key component of the trip. Whenever you have contact with any child it is important that you always adhere to the following guidelines and to ensure that the safety and welfare of any child is a priority in all your dealings with them.

Health and safety in the workplace is of paramount importance, children should not be allowed to take part in dangerous work activities.

You should not give lifts to children in the Action Lesotho vehicles without special permission from Action Lesotho.

You should be thoughtful about your language and tone of voice.

You should never participate, with children, in games of either an aggressive or sexual nature. Corporal punishment is common in Lesotho but you must never hit a child.

You should never invade the privacy of children or make any unnecessary physical contact with a child or group of children.

You should never be alone with an individual child or any group of children. You should not spend excessive amounts of time with any one child.

You should not make any demeaning remarks or gestures to or about a child.

Before taking photographs of children, team members should always ask the permission of their parents or guardians and abide by the Dochas Code of Conduct (see below)

If you suspect any child is being abused you should report it to a member of the Action Lesotho staff.

**For staff members currently responsible for Child & Vulnerable Adult Protection see Appendix II**

### 3. Photography

You are welcome to take photos and publicise your visit but please make sure to follow the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages The code is summarised below but please read the full document which is available from this link <http://www.dochas.ie/code/default.aspx>

#### Guiding Principles

Choices of images and messages will be made based on the paramount principles of:

- Respect for the **dignity** of the people concerned;
- Belief in the **equality** of all people;
- Acceptance of the need to promote **fairness, solidarity and justice**.

Accordingly, in all our communications and where practical and reasonable within the need to reflect reality, we strive to:

- Choose images and related messages based on values of respect equality, solidarity and justice;
- Truthfully represent any image or depicted situation both in its immediate and in its wider context so as to improve public understanding of the realities and complexities of development;
- Avoid images and messages that potentially stereotype, sensationalise or discriminate against people, situations or places;
- Use images, messages and case studies with the full understanding, participation and permission of the subjects (or subjects' parents/guardian);
- Ensure those whose situation is being represented have the opportunity to communicate their stories themselves;
- Establish and record whether the subjects wish to be named or identifiable and always act accordingly;
- Conform to the highest standards in relation to human rights and protection of the vulnerable people.

#### 4. Gift giving policy

It is Action Lesotho policy not to give gifts to individual children or individual adults on our projects. If you feel you would like to give something it should be to a project rather than an individual. It is Action Lesotho policy that any gifts donated are distributed by our Basotho staff (or volunteer committees) rather than volunteers from Ireland.

It is acceptable to give **small** tokens of thanks to your host or staff members you have worked closely with e.g. a souvenir from Ireland. If in doubt talk to the In-Country Director or one of the Board Members before you give.

#### 5. Fundraising policy

It is Action Lesotho policy that all funds raised in our name go directly into the charities account (contact Action Lesotho's Treasurer for details – see Appendix II).

Any funds raised during fundraising activities that participants undertake for and on behalf of Action Lesotho, must be for the benefit of Action Lesotho and not used to meet the volunteer's travel/accommodation expenses, etc., in Lesotho.

It is also our policy that all funds raised go to the central Action Lesotho account for distribution by the organization i.e. volunteers must not give money directly to individual people or individual projects in Lesotho.

**I have agreed to all 5 points of the Codes & Ethics Policy as outlined above:**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: (dd/mm/yyyy)\_\_\_\_\_

## Section 6: Equality & Diversity Policy

Action Lesotho is committed to promoting equality and diversity in all aspects of our work. We recognise a clear moral obligation to promote fairness and equality in volunteering and to value all individuals and their unique and diverse backgrounds.

We will actively seek to accommodate diversity and will strive to achieve equal outcomes across the nine grounds outlined under the Equal Status Act 2002:

- Gender
- Marital status
- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Sexual Orientation
- Religious Belief
- Membership of the Travelling Community

### **What you can expect from us**

Action Lesotho is committed to achieving fairness in all its practices and ensuring respect and equal treatment for all individuals. We recognise the rights of individuals and groups to be free from discrimination and/or harassment and will not tolerate discrimination and/or harassment on any grounds.

Action Lesotho respects the dignity, individuality and freedom of each of its volunteers. We also extend that understanding to the broader community within which we work and to the individuals and groups who are the intended, beneficiaries of our work.

We commit to working in partnership with relevant individuals and groups to engender empowerment and to ensure that the views of intended direct beneficiaries and others are reflected in our decisions, policies and practices.

*If you are on the receiving end of any discrimination or harassment while volunteering with us you have a right to raise a complaint through our grievance procedure. If you cannot resolve an issue directly with the team in Lesotho you can take your complaint to the Board of Directors in Ireland.*

### **What we expect from you**

When representing Action Lesotho as a volunteer we expect you to respect our commitment to promoting equality. You must treat others with dignity and respect and not seek to discriminate against others. You are also expected to discourage discrimination by making it clear that you find such behaviour unacceptable. If an incident does occur you should report it to a member of staff in Lesotho to enable the organisation to deal with it.

*Please read our policy carefully and acknowledge that you are happy to work within its boundaries.*

*Do let us know if you have any questions or comments, as we are always refining the way in which we work*

## Section 7: Diversity & Cultural Issues in Lesotho

Most people in Lesotho are of the Basotho tribe and therefore it is a relatively united and culturally uniform country compared to some of its neighbours. Although apartheid is officially a policy of the past, and there have been great changes in neighboring South Africa, its history continues to influence the region. Many Basotho have experienced the now defunct apartheid system. Hence, relations between certain Basotho and any white person can be, at first, somewhat strained. For the most part, however, Basotho differentiate quite readily between white volunteers and other whites in the region. Foreigners are generally perceived as guests and treated with respect and care. The main problem can be that people are so polite that they won't tell you what they really think which can be problematic in discussing and evaluating projects. Also white people are associated with wealth so you may well receive requests for money or other goods.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Lesotho, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises in how you present as an individual. For example, female volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence available to them at home; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limitations.

### What Might a Volunteer Face?

#### Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

Lesotho is mostly an agrarian and traditional place, and specific gender roles are still significant in Basotho culture. Women may be expected to fulfill certain domestic duties that are not expected of men. Women may be expected to defer to men in a workplace setting. Additionally, women may receive marriage proposals, professions of love, and other unwanted attention from men. Also, be aware that the only Basotho women who go into bars are prostitutes, so if you go into a bar, expect to be propositioned. It's best to only drink at home in private. Going to bars in South Africa is not a problem.

#### Possible Issues for Older Volunteers

Older volunteers can expect to be treated with high regard. Older women are likely to encounter less harassment than younger females. Seniors often take precedence for seating on public transportation.

#### Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

Gay or lesbian people in Lesotho do not usually express this sexual orientation openly and volunteers should be discreet about their sexual orientation to avoid it becoming a security issue.

#### Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

The general perception in Lesotho is that Irish volunteers are Christian and it can be especially hard for local people to understand that you are an atheist/agnostic. There may be an initial expectation that you attend a local church; however, people are generally accepting of personal choices in religious matters. **Note: Action Lesotho has no religious affiliation.**

#### Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities

Before travelling you should make sure you are physically and emotionally capable of working in Lesotho. Unfortunately, facilities for people with disabilities are generally poor in Lesotho e.g. travelling around with a wheelchair would be extremely difficult and wheelchair accessible accommodation is hard to find.

## Section 8: Social Insurance and Pensions

Comhlámh <http://www.comhlamh.org/> offer advice and support at all stages of volunteering for a development organisation overseas, from before you go to after you get back. For example, they offer advice on social insurance and pensions (see below), have a Volunteer Charter and offer debriefing and counselling services.

Comhlámh is responsible for administering the Volunteer Development Worker Scheme on behalf of the Department of Social and Family Affairs which has special arrangements in place to protect the social welfare rights of Volunteer Development Workers (VDWs). They also administer the Public Service Pension Scheme for Volunteer Development Workers on behalf of Irish Aid (Department of Foreign Affairs). See the links below for more information:

- ⤴ [Social Insurance](#)
- ⤴ [Pensions](#)
- ⤴ [FAQs](#)

### *Special note from Comhlámh about social insurance and pensions*

'Part of preparing for an assignment overseas should include thinking about your options for remaining within the Irish [social insurance](#) system. Considering one's options for social protection may seem unimportant now, however it becomes extremely important for returning volunteers/development workers in accessing short-term benefits upon return, such as Unemployment Benefit, Maternity Benefit, and Treatment Benefits and for state pension entitlements upon reaching retirement age. The Support Services team in Comhlámh is available to provide information on current options for remaining within the Irish social insurance system. For further information please contact Janet Horner on 01-4783490 or email [janet@comhlamh.org](mailto:janet@comhlamh.org)

If you are a public servant serving as a development worker after 1 January 1995 on an authorised leave of absence or career break you may be entitled to avail of the [Public Service Pension Scheme](#). Again please contact Janet for further information.'

## Section 9: Background information on Lesotho

**Population:** 2,171,000 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_Lesotho](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Lesotho)

**Size:** 30,360 square kilometres

**Language:** Sesotho

**People:** Basotho (a person is a Masotho)

### A Short history of Lesotho

(Main source: <http://www.worldtravelguide.net/lesotho/>)

In the 1800s Southern Africa was a region of great turmoil with various tribes occupying the land and frequent battles between neighbouring clans. The indigenous tribes that occupied the area now known as Lesotho were ousted by chief Moshoeshe who established his own stronghold at Thaba Bosiu, 24km (15 miles) east of Maseru. He gained a reputation for his ability to stave off attacks from subsequent marauders and over time, the numbers under his rule increased.

However, in 1867, prompted by the increasing pressure of attacks from the Boers, Moshoeshe asked the British for protection and in doing so, Lesotho (then known as Basutoland) became a British protectorate, which meant being under control of Cape Colony. This caused considerable tension which finally came to a head with the Gun War of 1880, and resulting in the country coming under direct rule from London.

Lesotho rejected an offer to become part of South Africa in 1910 and finally gained independence in 1966, a step which has brought its own set of problems. The country became a constitutional monarchy with elected parliament, but subsequent ruling regimes have been unstable, with military coups, governmental collapses and a monarchy in turmoil, which saw King Moshoeshe II deposed twice, before dying in a car accident. His son King Letsie III is now king & the country is currently under democratic government rule. Since 2002 Lesotho has faced periodic serious food shortages with the latest declaration of emergency being made by the prime minister in August 2012.

Much of Lesotho's cultural legacy is tied up in its colonial one, with the architecture of older buildings in main towns such as Maseru bearing overtones of European influence. However, Lesotho's past is still very much visible in the present and one can still see the cave drawings of the San bushmen and fossilised dinosaur trails that date back millions of years. In the rural areas which are often only accessible by foot or horseback, people's way of life has not changed significantly for generations, with subsistence agricultural farming remaining the main source of income for families.

As in much of southern Africa, Aids and HIV are widespread throughout Lesotho, with around 23% of the adult population being infected. The government has stepped up efforts to combat the infection's spread, sometimes working in conjunction with philanthropic efforts by NGOs, but it remains an incalculable task to deal with the pandemic and its consequences.

*For a comprehensive history of Lesotho read 'A Short History of Lesotho: From the Late Stone Age Until the 1993 Elections' by Stephen J Gill*

### Religion

Around 80% of the population is Christian, mainly Anglican, Roman Catholic and Lesotho Evangelical. Indigenous beliefs account for the remaining 20% although there is also a small percentage of Muslims

## **Geography**

Lesotho is a landlocked country surrounded on all sides by South Africa. It is a mountainous kingdom situated at the highest part of the Drakensberg escarpment on the eastern rim of the South African plateau. Fact: the lowest point of Lesotho is higher than the highest point of Ireland!

Its mountainous terrain is cut by countless valleys and ravines, making it a country of great beauty. To the west, the land descends through a foothill zone of rolling hills to a lowland belt along the border where two-thirds of the population live. Action Lesotho works mainly in Leribe District which is in this lowland area.

Three large rivers, the Caledon, the Orange and the Tugela, rise in the mountain

## **Economy**

The earnings of the estimated 150,000 Lesotho nationals working in South Africa account for a substantial proportion of the country's income. In towns like Maputsoe, the clothing and shoe factories are a major source of employment for the women. A high percentage of the male workforce is engaged in agriculture. Lesotho's vulnerability to drought means that over half the country's food must be imported from South Africa.

There are reserves of ores and minerals, including diamonds and uranium, but little exploitation has taken place. Lesotho's government has historically relied on foreign aid, particularly for infrastructure programmes, the most important of recent years being the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. This delivers water to South Africa and aims to provide 60% of Lesotho's electricity supply.

For more information see:

<http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/fileadmin/uploads/aeo/PDF/Lesotho%20Full%20PDF%20Country%20Note.pdf>

## **Climate** (Source: Irish Embassy in Lesotho website)

Rainfall is variable and mean annual rainfall amounts to between 700 mm and 800 mm in most parts of the lowlands. Most of it falls between October and April, but there is normally no month which has less than 12 mm. Unfortunately river discharge statistics show that most of this water is lost to Lesotho in the form of run-off.

The deciding factors from an agricultural point are whether the rain comes in steady soaking showers at intervals suited to the growth of the staple crops or whether it comes in the form of short and heavy storms, running to waste and eroding the soil.

Serious droughts have affected the country recently, and there is a large number of perennial streams, though not as many as existed some year ago. In the lowlands the temperatures vary from a maximum of 40°C or more in summer to around zero in winter. In the highlands the range is much wider with temperatures down to -18 °C in the high mountains.

## **Public Holidays**

It is worth taking note of the Public holidays when planning work/travel as most public offices will be closed on these days. Also travel across the border can be very slow on Public Holidays especially Easter when many migrants return home from South Africa. Remember that many of the Public Holidays in South Africa fall on different days which can be important to remember if planning travel/vacations there.

## 2014

January 01 New Year's Day

March 11 Moshoeshoe's Day

April 18 Good Friday

April 21 Easter Monday

May 01 Workers' Day

May 25 Africa Day / Heroes' Day

May 29 Ascension Day

July 17 King Letsie III's Birthday

October 04 Independence Day

December 25 Christmas Day

December 26 Boxing Day

Source: <http://www.worldtravelguide.net/lesotho/>

## Language

The first language of the majority is Sesotho. Many people speak some English and most education in schools is carried out through English. However, levels of English comprehension amongst the less well educated can be very limited. Everywhere you go people will very much appreciate it if you have at least a few words of Sesotho.

Ten essential phrases:

- ♣ **Lumela** --> Hello (sing.) /*doo-MAY-lah*/
- ♣ **Lumelang** --> Hello (pl.) /*doo-MAY-LUNG*/
- ♣ **U phela joang?** --> How are you? (sing.) /*oop-HEALer-jwang*/
- ♣ **Le phela joang** --> How are you? (pl.) /*lip-HEALer-jwang*/
- ♣ **Kea phela** --> I'm fine /*key-upHEALer*/
- ♣ **Rea phela** --> We're fine /*re-upHEALer*/
- ♣ **Uena?** --> And you? /*way-NAH*/
- ♣ **Kea leboha** --> Thank you /*key-ah-lay-BOO-ha*/
- ♣ **Tsamaea hantle** --> Goodbye (you're leaving) /*tsah-MY-ah-HUN-clay*/
- ♣ **Sala hantle** --> Goodbye (I'm leaving) /*SAL-ah-HUN-clay*/

The Peace Corps has a 150 page manual designed to help volunteers learn Sesotho. You can view it or download it here: [http://friendsoflesotho.org/files/puo\\_ea\\_sechaba.pdf](http://friendsoflesotho.org/files/puo_ea_sechaba.pdf)

Here are other language resources:

- ♣ <http://iteslj.org/v/sesotho/>
- ♣ <http://premiumwanadoo.com/sotho/glossary/>
- ♣ <http://www.mylanguageexchange.com/>
- ♣ [http://st.wiktionary.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://st.wiktionary.org/wiki/Main_Page)
- ♣ <http://www.sesotho.web.za/bukantswe>

## Appendix 1: Incident Form

### Action Lesotho Volunteer Incident Report Form

Date of report:

Location of incident:

Date of Occurrence:

Reporting Individual:

Method Report Received (Email, Mail, Phone, Fax, etc):

#### **Summary**

Brief summary of what happened:

**Actions Taken thus Far**

**Further Actions Required**

*Is it okay to share this incident/information with other Volunteers?*

## Appendix II: Contacts & links

1. **In- Country Director** (with responsibility for in-country volunteer coordination); Pippa Kearon [actionlesothopippa@gmail.com](mailto:actionlesothopippa@gmail.com)
2. **Chairman of the Board of Directors in Ireland:** Paul Hanrahan [paulbhanrahan@gmail.com](mailto:paulbhanrahan@gmail.com)
3. **Company Secretary & Treasurer (in Ireland):** David Buttimer [djbuttimer@eircom.net](mailto:djbuttimer@eircom.net)
4. **Child Protection Officer:** Limakatso Rantoa [actionlesotholimakatso@gmail.com](mailto:actionlesotholimakatso@gmail.com)
5. **General queries about Action Lesotho:** Clare Heardman [info@actionlesotho.ie](mailto:info@actionlesotho.ie)
6. **Information & support for volunteering overseas:** Comhlámh <http://www.comhlamh.org/>
7. **International Driving Licence:** AA Travel Services, Maryland House, 20-21 South William St., Dublin 2, Ireland. +353 (0)1-6179988 email: [aatravel@aireland.ie](mailto:aatravel@aireland.ie)
8. **Irish Embassy in South Africa:**  
<http://embassyireland.org.za/home/index.aspx?id=72244>  
Embassy of Ireland  
2nd Floor  
Parkdev Building  
Brooklyn Bridge Office Park  
570 Fehrsen Street  
Brooklyn 0181  
Pretoria  
Main Tel:(012) 452 1000  
Office Hours: Mon - Thurs: 8:30–13:00 & 14:00-16:30    Fri: 8.30 - 13.00  
Consular Hours (Passport, Visa, Citizenship): Mon - Fri: 8.30 - 13.00
9. **Medical emergency:** Dial 121 in Lesotho or 112 from cell phones in South Africa (Toll Free on 10177) and ask for an ambulance. You should contact your insurance/medical assistance company promptly if you are referred to a medical facility for treatment