

Basotho increasingly favour legalizing dual citizenship, unifying with South Africa

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 205 | Mamello Nkuebe, Libuseng Malephane, and Thomas Isbell

Summary

Lesotho's Constitution prohibits Lesotho citizens from holding the citizenship of any other country. Basotho who want to become citizens of another country must renounce their Lesotho citizenship, giving up certain rights and benefits to which Lesotho citizens are entitled.

Advocates have argued for years that legalizing dual citizenship – particularly dual citizenship between Lesotho and the Republic of South Africa, Lesotho's only direct neighbour – would benefit the country (Lesotho Times, 2015; Namasasu, 2016). Among their arguments, they have pointed to the more than 400,000 Basotho living in South Africa due to high unemployment in Lesotho; harassment that Basotho who travel to South Africa face at the border; and the strong historical, cultural, and economic bonds that exist between the two countries

Noting that Lesotho is losing social and economic benefits by not allowing dual citizenship, the government has submitted to Parliament a bill to amend the Constitution to allow for dual citizenship (Post, 2018; Sunday Express, 2017). The World Bank (2017) estimates that remittance inflows to Lesotho have dropped from a high of U.S. \$647 million in 2011 to \$367 million in 2017, including \$331 million from South Africa.

As Lesotho embarks on a highly anticipated multi-sectoral reform process called for by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in an attempt to bring lasting peace and stability to Lesotho, dual citizenship counts among constitutional issues that will be debated.

Results of a new Afrobarometer survey show strong – and increasing – public support for legalizing dual citizenship with South Africa, as well as a clear preference for legalizing dual citizenship in general.

Moreover, the number of Basotho who say their country must become part of South Africa in order to realize meaningful development has grown to a majority. Among the four in 10 Basotho who have considered emigrating, most say they would most likely move to South Africa to find work.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys are being conducted in 2016/2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Lesotho, led by Advision Lesotho, interviewed 1,200 adult Lesotho citizens between 25 November and 11 December 2017. A sample of this size yields country-

level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Lesotho in 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2014.

Key findings

- More than seven in 10 Basotho (72%) say the Constitution should be changed to allow citizens of Lesotho to hold dual citizenship with any other country. Even more (77%) favour legalizing dual citizenship with South Africa, up from 48% in 2014.
- A slim majority (52%) of Basotho say Lesotho can only realize meaningful development if it becomes part of the Republic of South Africa. This proportion has increased from 40% since 2014.
- Two-thirds (65%) of Basotho find it “difficult” or “very difficult” to cross international borders to work or trade in other countries.
- More than four in 10 Basotho (44%) say they or their relatives have gone to live in another country for more than three months during the past three years – a higher proportion than in six other Southern African countries.
- Almost four in 10 Basotho (38%) say they have considered moving to another country, including 20% who have given “a lot” of thought to the idea.
- Among those who have considered emigrating, 80% say their most likely destination is South Africa.
- By far the most common reason that Basotho consider emigrating is to find work (cited by 74% of those who have considered moving to another country).

Dual citizenship, joining South Africa

As a landlocked country, Lesotho is in many ways dependent on good ties with South Africa. Both countries have substantial interests in the other, including Lesotho’s exports of fresh water and energy to South Africa (Hitchcock, Inambao, Ledger, & Mentis, 2006) and South Africa’s exports of consumer goods and industrial materials to Lesotho. Their close ties are also apparent in the movement of people, with many Basotho moving to South Africa in search of employment and South Africans visiting for leisure and business (Ashton, 2012; Weisfelder, 2014). A significant number of Basotho have called for South Africa to annex Lesotho to help develop the country (Smith, 2010).

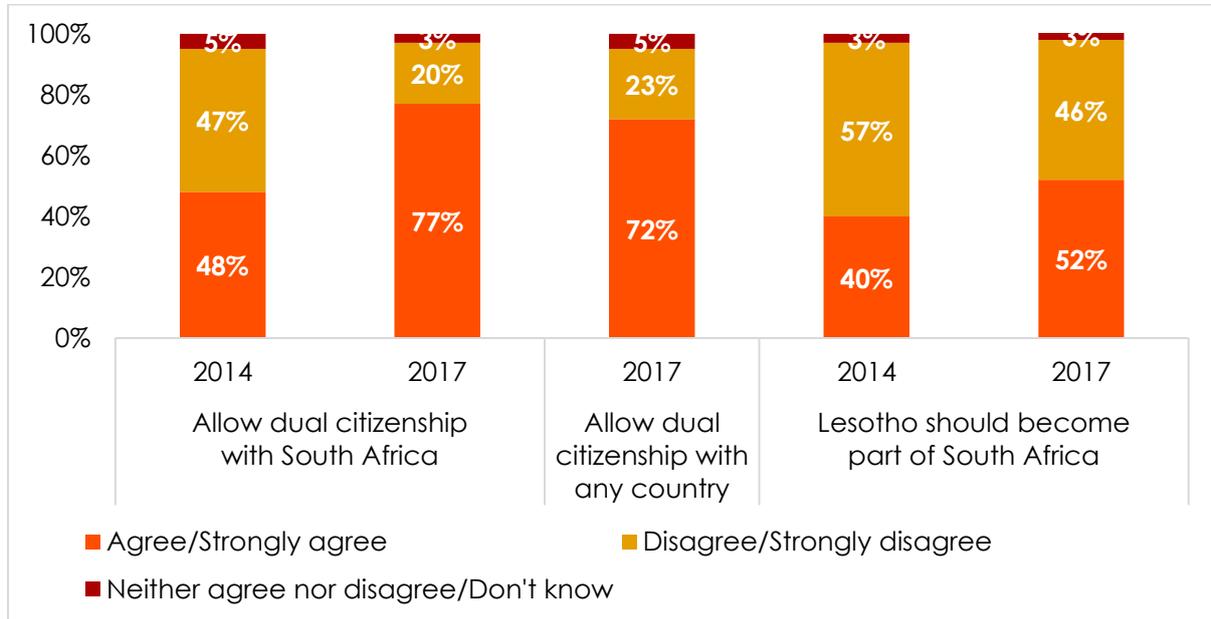
According to Afrobarometer survey results, the proportion of Basotho who support legalizing dual citizenship with South Africa has increased considerably, from fewer than half (48%) in 2014 to more than three-quarters (77%) in 2017 (Figure 1).

Support for dual citizenship with any other country is also high, at 72%. (This question was not asked in the 2014 survey.)

Agreement with the idea that Lesotho can only realize meaningful development if it becomes part of South Africa has also increased but remains lower than support for dual citizenship. A slim majority (52%) of Basotho “agree” or “strongly agree” that their country needs to unite with South Africa, up from 40% in 2014.

Support for legalizing dual citizenship with South Africa is strong across all major socio-demographic groups (Figure 2). It is particularly strong among rural residents (86%) and younger respondents (83% of those aged 26-35).

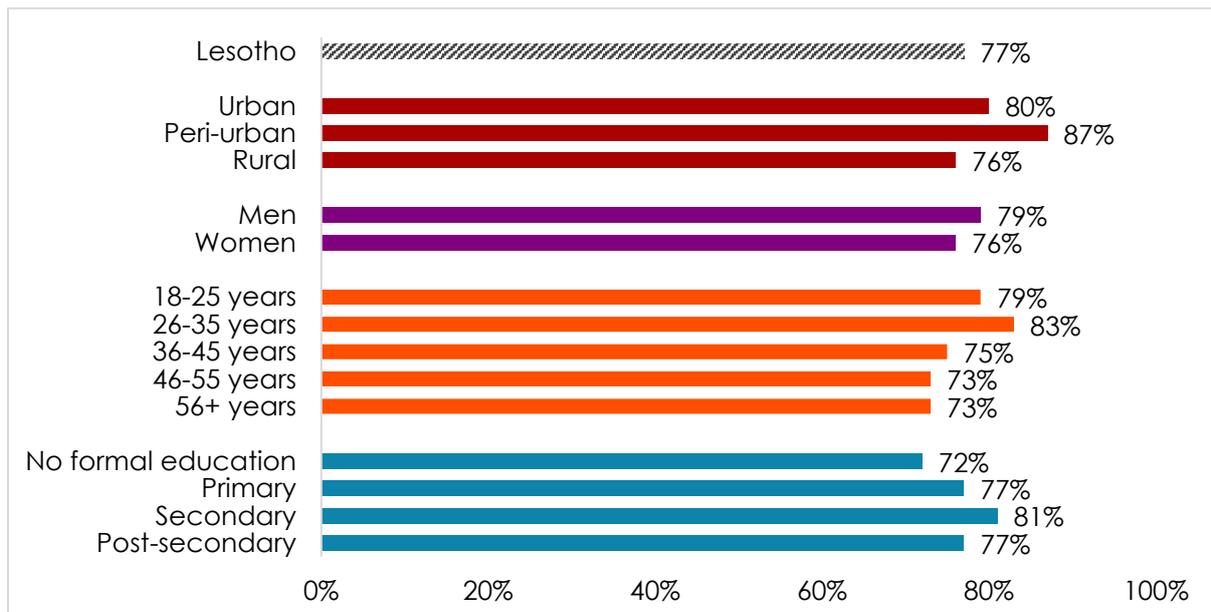
Figure 1: Views on allowing dual citizenship and becoming part of South Africa
 | Lesotho | 2014–2017



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- Given Lesotho's links with South Africa, the law should be changed to allow Basotho citizens to hold dual South African citizenship?
- The law should be changed to allow Basotho citizens to hold dual citizenship with any other country?
- Given her unique geographical position, Lesotho can only realize meaningful development if it becomes part of the Republic of South Africa.

Figure 2: Support for dual citizenship with South Africa | by socio-demographic group | Lesotho | 2017



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: Given Lesotho's links with South Africa, the law should be changed to allow Basotho citizens to hold dual South African citizenship? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

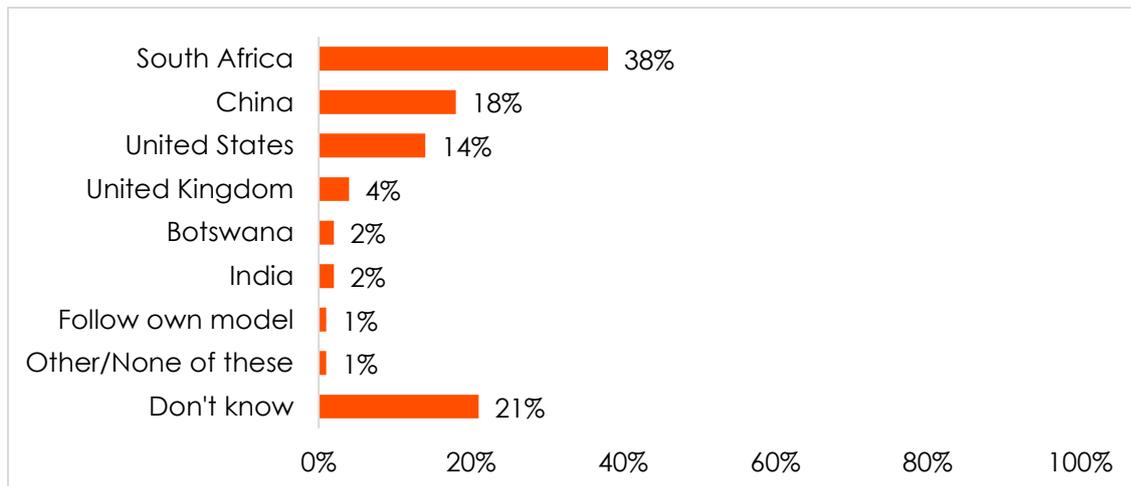
Unemployment, cross-border movement, and emigration

Unemployment, which was estimated at 28.97% in 2017 (Global Economy, 2018), is Lesotho's most important problem in the eyes of its citizens. When Afrobarometer asked respondents to identify up to three national problems they considered most important for the government to address, 57% cited unemployment, well ahead of infrastructure (42%), electricity (30%), and water supply (29%).

While looking to the government for action on job creation, many Basotho also look elsewhere for employment opportunities. One obvious option is the economic powerhouse next door, which many Basotho see as a model for development. When Afrobarometer asked in 2014 which country would be the best model for the future development of Lesotho, the most frequent response was South Africa (38%), followed by China (18%) and the United States (14%) (Figure 3).

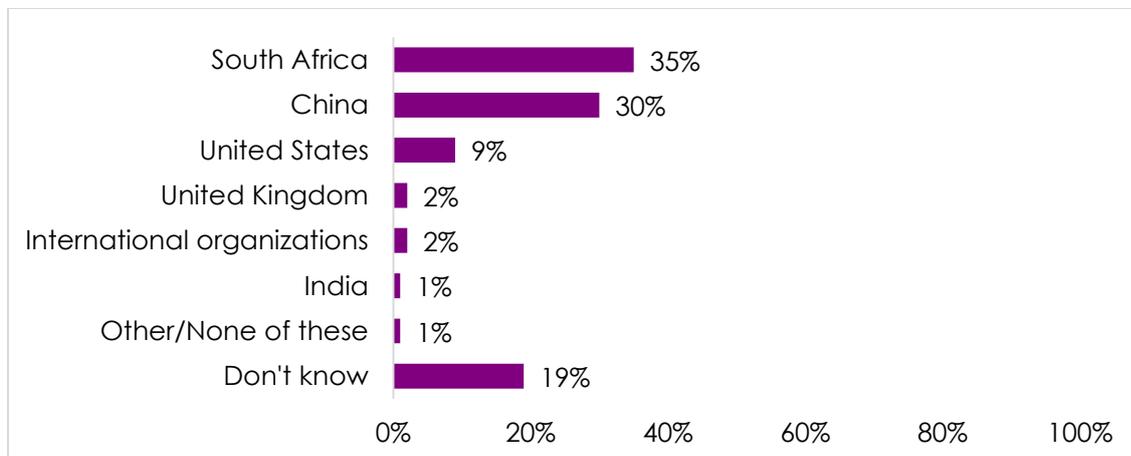
Basotho also feel that South Africa is the country with the greatest influence in Lesotho (35%). China is a close second (30%), followed by the United States (9%) (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Model for development | Lesotho | 2014



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, which of the following countries, if any, would be the best model for the future development of our country?*

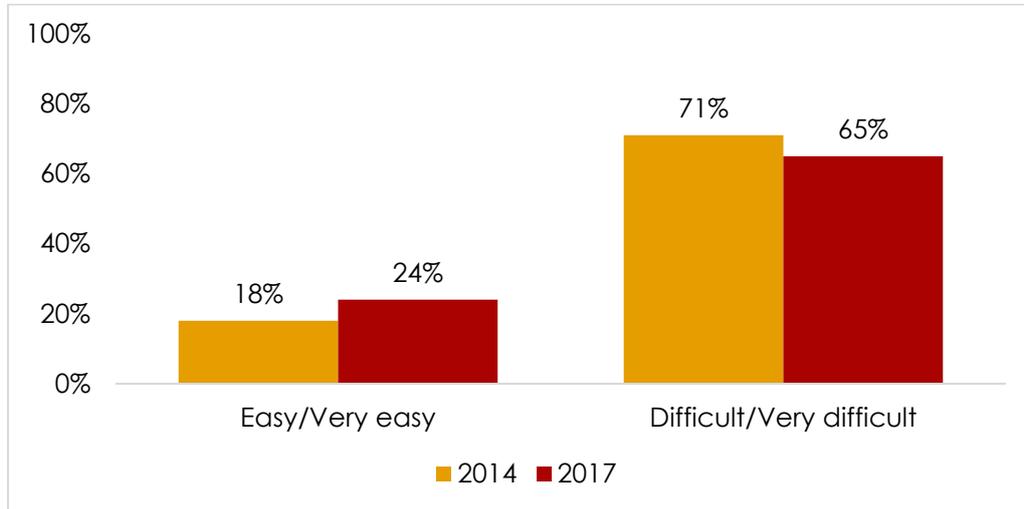
Figure 4: Most influence on Lesotho | Lesotho | 2014



Respondents were asked: *Which of the following do you think has the most influence on Lesotho, or haven't you heard enough to say?*

Despite these perceptions of their powerful neighbour, most Basotho (65%) say they find it “difficult” or “very difficult” to cross the border – a slight improvement from 71% in 2014. Only one in four (24%) say it’s easy to cross the border (Figure 5).

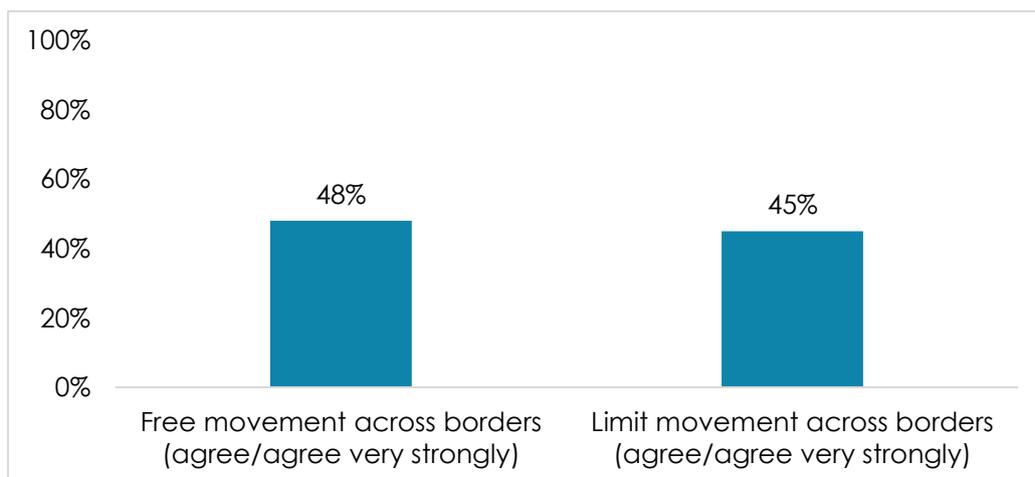
Figure 5: Difficulty of crossing borders | Lesotho | 2014-2017



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how easy or difficult is it for people in Southern Africa to cross international borders in order to work or trade in other countries, or haven't you heard enough to say?*

In the past, Basotho themselves have expressed mixed feelings about allowing people to move freely across international borders; in the 2014 Afrobarometer survey, 48% favoured free cross-border movement of people and goods, while 45% opposed it (Figure 6). Since this question was not asked in the 2017 survey, we do not know whether these attitudes have changed alongside Basotho preference for dual citizenship and for becoming part of South Africa.

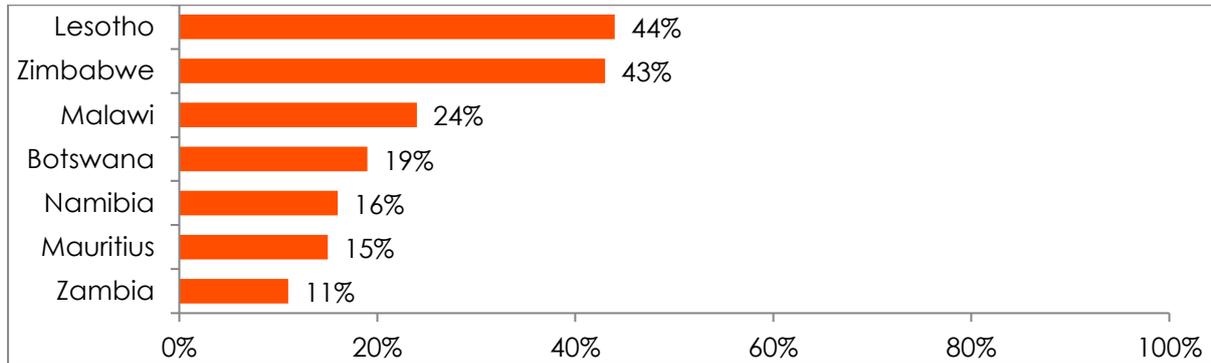
Figure 6: Free movement across borders vs. limit movement | Lesotho | 2014



Respondents were asked: *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*
 Statement 1: *People living in Southern Africa should be able to move freely across international borders in order to trade or work in other countries.*
 Statement 2: *Because foreign migrants take away jobs, and foreign traders sell their goods at very cheap prices, governments should protect their own citizens and limit the cross-border movement of people and goods.*

But Basotho clearly avail themselves of opportunities to cross borders: More than four in 10 (44%) – the largest proportion among seven Southern African countries – say they or their relatives have lived in another country for more than three months in the past three years (Figure 7).

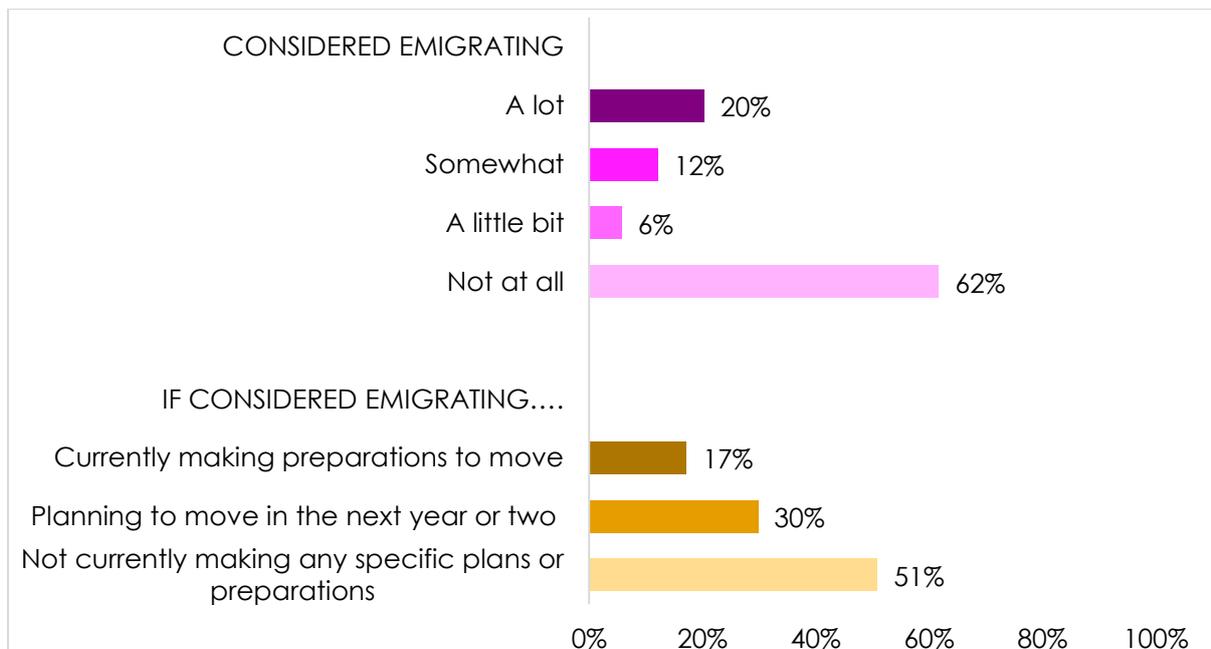
Figure 7: Have gone to live in another country for more than three months
 | seven countries in Southern Africa | 2017



Respondents were asked: During the past three years, have you or anyone in your household gone to live in another country outside [your country] for more than three months? (% who say “yes”)

About four in 10 respondents (38%) say they have considered moving to another country to live. This includes 20% who have given the idea “a lot” of thought (Figure 8). Among those who have considered emigration, 17% say they are currently making concrete preparations to leave, such as getting a visa, while 30% say they are planning to leave within the next year or two but not yet taking specific steps, and 51% say they’re not yet making specific plans.

Figure 8: Considered emigration | Lesotho | 2017

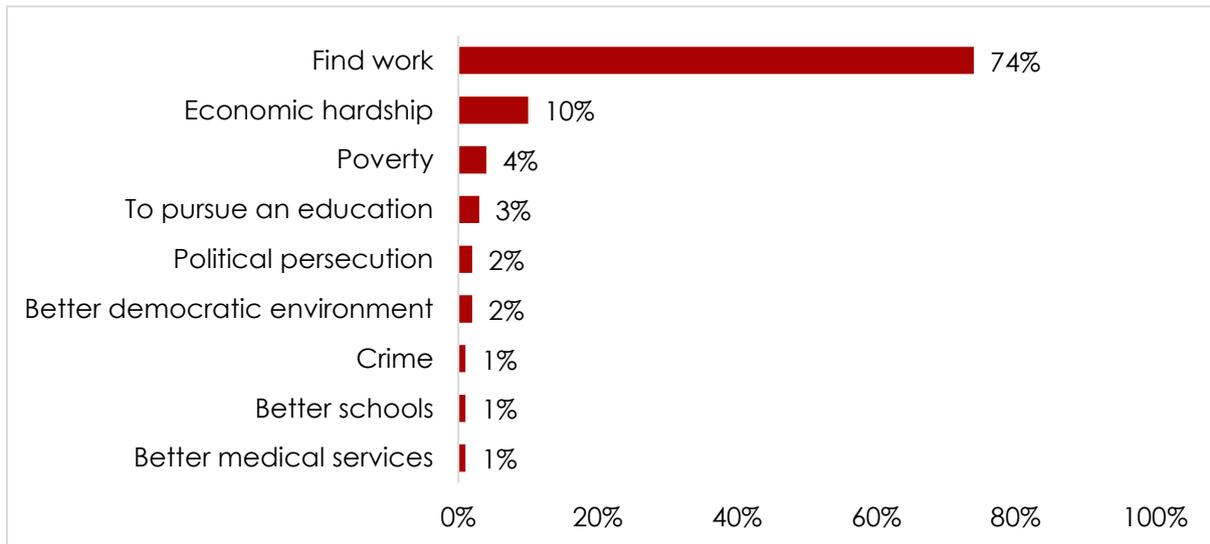


All respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live?

Respondents who said they had considered emigration “a lot,” “somewhat,” or “a little bit” were asked: How much planning or preparation have you done in order to move to another country to live?

The most important reason why Basotho would leave their home to live in another country is to find work. Among respondents who say they have considered emigration, three-quarters (74%) cite employment as the reason, followed by economic hardship at 10% (Figure 9).

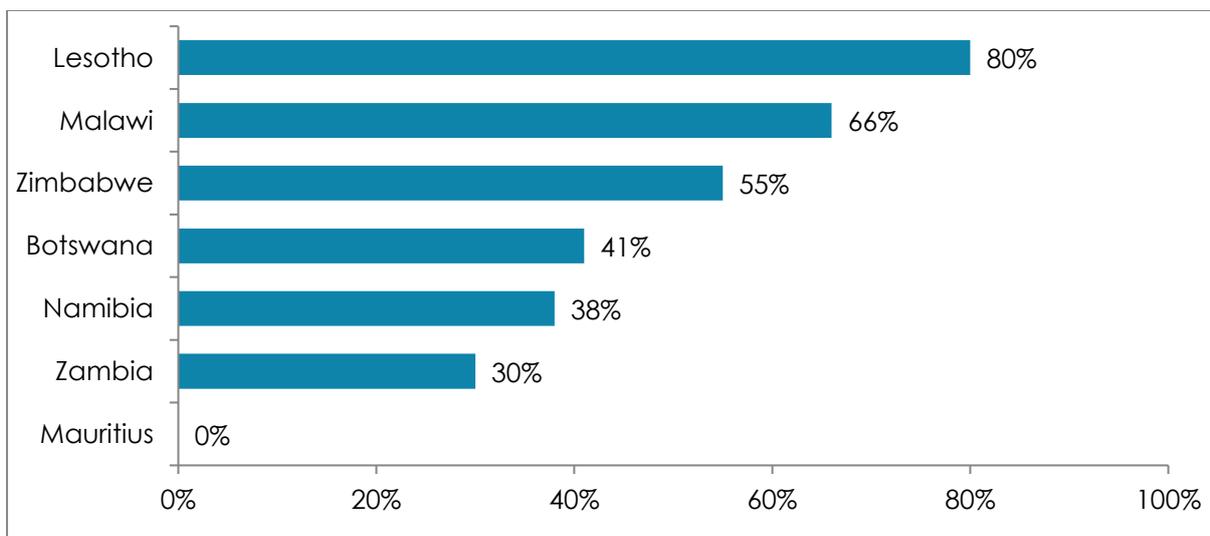
Figure 9: The most important reason for moving from Lesotho | Lesotho | 2017



Respondents who said they had considered emigration “a lot,” “somewhat,” or “a little bit” were asked: There are several reasons why people leave their home to live in another country for an extended period of time. What about you? What is the most important reason why you would consider moving from Lesotho?

And not surprisingly, most potential emigrants from Lesotho would choose to go to South Africa. Eight in 10 (80%) say they would be most likely to move to South Africa, the highest proportion citing South Africa among seven surveyed Southern African countries (Figure 10).

Figure 10: South Africa as the country of choice for potential emigrants | seven countries in Southern Africa | 2017



Respondents were asked: If you were to move to another country, where would you be most likely to go? (% who say “South Africa”)

Conclusion

In its citizens' opinions, the government of Lesotho will find clear support for allowing Basotho to hold dual citizenship. But it will also find considerable challenges in the large proportions of its citizens who see emigration to South Africa, or even unification with South Africa, as the only path to economic opportunity.

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Mamello Nkuebe is an attorney for Advision Lesotho, the Afrobarometer national partner in Lesotho. Email: mamello.nkuebe@gmail.com

Libuseng Malephane is national investigator for Advision Lesotho, the Afrobarometer national partner in Lesotho. Email: advision@ecoweb.co.ls.

Thomas Isbell is a PhD student at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. Email: tisbell@afrobarometer.org.

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