

United Nations Compilation on Sao Tome and Principe – Contributions for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) 4th Cycle

Prepared by the United Nations Country Team in Sao Tome and Principe

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Background

This submission is a consolidated report by the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Sao Tome and Principe and includes input from specialized agencies, funds, and programmes. The information reflects progress and challenges in implementing recommendations from the third UPR cycle and other international human rights obligations. It draws from programmatic activities, analytical reports, field engagement, and technical cooperation between the UN and national counterparts. The report emphasizes issues related to ratification of instruments, the rule of law, climate justice, gender equality, children's rights, inclusive development, and protection of vulnerable groups.

Implementation of International Human Rights Obligations

In 2019, OHCHR supported the creation of an interministerial committee to coordinate engagement with international human rights mechanisms. This led to the timely submission of reports and enhanced institutional ownership of treaty obligations, including those under the Universal Periodic Review. In July 2025, OHCHR organized two information sessions in São Tomé with the participation of key UN agencies and civil society actors to coordinate contributions to the fourth cycle UPR report. A commitment was made by the Minister of Justice to submit the final report to the Council of Ministers by 15 September 2025.

OHCHR recommends the establishment of a National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-Up (NMIRF) to ensure consistent follow-up on international recommendations and integration with SDG monitoring frameworks.

Ratification of International Instruments

In 2024, Sao Tome and Principe made notable progress in expanding its international human rights obligations by ratifying four key international legal instruments. These include the 1969 OAU Convention on Refugees, which provides a regional framework for the protection of refugees tailored to African realities; the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, which establishes standards for the treatment and rights of individuals who are not recognized as nationals by any state; the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, aimed at preventing and reducing statelessness through safeguards in nationality laws; and the 2009 Kampala Convention on Internally Displaced Persons, which is the first binding regional instrument in Africa dedicated to the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons.

These ratifications represent a significant milestone in Sao Tome and Principe's commitment to strengthening international protection frameworks. They reflect the country's growing engagement with global human rights standards and contribute directly to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17

(Partnerships).

Technical and strategic support from UNHCR was instrumental in enabling these ratifications, including stakeholder engagement, legal harmonization, and roadmap development. The Government has also worked with OHCHR and UNDP to increase its reporting capacity to treaty bodies. A draft Treaty Registry is under development to systematically track obligations and compliance with international and regional instruments.

National Human Rights Framework

The Government of Sao Tome and Principe has reaffirmed its commitment to establishing a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) that fully complies with the Paris Principles. In partnership with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), significant steps have been taken toward this goal. A comprehensive roadmap was adopted following a national consultation held in February 2025, which brought together key stakeholders from Parliament, civil society, the justice sector, and security services. To advance the legislative process, a draft law committee was established, comprising representatives from the government, the legislature, the Public Prosecutor's Office, and civil society organizations.

OHCHR is providing technical support to facilitate inclusive participation and ensure that the process is guided by international standards and expert advice. Sao Tome and Principe is on track to submit a Paris Principles-compliant NHRC bill to Parliament in the last quarter of 2025, ahead of its HR75 pledge deadline—provided that remaining challenges, such as legislative scheduling, budget allocation, and gender parity in committee membership, are addressed.

Equality and Non-Discrimination

Sao Tome and Principe has achieved near-universal birth registration for children under one year of age, following the 2017 decree and national digitalization of maternity wards, with UNICEF support. However, children from migrant families and remote communities remain at risk of exclusion. Continued efforts to extend digital registration platforms and targeted outreach are recommended to achieve full coverage.

Children with disabilities face enduring barriers to accessing essential services. UNICEF supports inclusive policy development, early screening initiatives, and multisectoral capacity building. The Case Management Protocol and its implementation roadmap are being developed in partnership with national stakeholders.

With support of the UN Partnership on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNPRPD), the country prepared a situational analysis on disability inclusion and a draft National Strategy for greater inclusion.

UNDP has supported Sao Tome and Principe in advancing inclusion and tackling discrimination, with a strong focus on women, youth, and persons with disabilities. In the last election, it supported the electoral process with a strong emphasis on combating discrimination and promoting gender equality, worked alongside the Electoral Commission and civil society to ensure compliance with the legal requirement for 30% female

representation on party lists. These efforts contributed to the historic election of the country's first female President of Parliament. Additionally, UNDP supported the "Rede de Mulheres Parlamentares" in collaboration with the Association of Women Lawyers and the Institute for the Promotion of Gender Equality to push forward a parity law, reinforcing women's political participation and leadership.

With support from UNDP, Sao Tome and Principe advanced its commitment to inclusive governance by ratifying and preparing the implementation of six key AU treaties that aim to strengthen human rights, promote the participation of women and youth in democratic processes, and foster inclusive governance and sustainable development contributing directly to Aspirations 3 and 4 of the African Union's Agenda 2063 and to SDGs 5, 11, and 16.

UNDP supported the Government of Sao Tome and Principe in applying a gender-sensitive approach to public budgeting, resulting in the integration of a gender-sensitive budget in the water and sanitation sector within the 2022 State Budget, marking the first time such an approach was implemented nationally.

In the justice and security sectors, UNDP facilitated technical capacity-building initiatives aimed at improving the transparency, accessibility, and gender-responsiveness of justice services. In line with recommendations to enhance access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence, UNDP rehabilitated and equipped a specialized office for medical-legal examinations at the Central Hospital. This infrastructure investment was complemented by targeted training for doctors, nurses, social workers, magistrates, court clerks, and police officers, focusing on the handling of sexual violence cases with sensitivity and legal rigor. Work is underway toward the operationalization of courts in Príncipe and Caué, which is expected to significantly enhance women's access to justice in areas related to domestic violence, family law, and inheritance rights.

UNDP also emphasized the importance of inclusive economic development, supporting a business incubator and accelerator that primarily benefits youth and women entrepreneurs, aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5, 8, and 9. Furthermore, through its public finance management programme, facilitated the 'Women in Leadership' exchange initiative, promoting knowledge-sharing among women in senior roles within Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs), and encouraging good practices in diversity, inclusion, and equity.

UNCT recommends that Sao Tome and Principe continue institutionalizing gender-responsive planning and budgeting, enhance capacity across the justice sector with a gender lens, and expand inclusive economic empowerment programmes for women and youth. Sustained investment in localized legal infrastructure and social services remains essential to ensuring equitable access to justice and protection from gender-based violence.

Development, Environment, Business and Human Rights

Climate Action and Environmental Governance

UNDP has served as a key technical partner in Sao Tome and Principe's climate and environmental agenda, supporting the Government in operationalizing its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). UNDP led the establishment of national Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems and is currently supporting the development of NDC 3.0, with integrated cost adaptation measures under the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF). This approach aims to unlock sustainable climate financing, particularly for vulnerable populations.

UNDP has further supported the Ministry of Environment to enhance institutional capacity in mobilizing and coordinating climate finance, including through the country's first Biodiversity Finance Plan and the operationalization of a Conservation Trust Fund—a mechanism to facilitate debt-for-nature swaps and access to carbon markets.

UNEP, in alignment with recommendations 106.29 and 106.39 of the previous UPR cycle, underscored that climate change and pollution are aggravating hydrological extremes, with coastal flooding and landslides impacting communities up to ten times annually. These phenomena threaten basic rights and highlight the urgency of climate-adaptive governance. UNEP supported the country in advancing NDC implementation and recommends further investment in clean energy infrastructure, waste circularity, and green public finance instruments.

Pollution, Nature-Based Solutions, and Sustainable Energy

Environmental health indicators demonstrate significant concern: only 36% of the population has access to safely managed drinking water, and only 4.2% uses clean cooking fuels. UNEP reports high mortality rates linked to air and water pollution—underscoring systemic violations of the right to health and a healthy environment.

UNEP supports action on ozone-depleting substances (ODS) and recommends policy incentives for ODS-free solar-powered cold storage solutions. These would mitigate post-harvest losses (up to 50% in agriculture and fisheries), enhance food and nutrition security (SDG 2, SDG 3), reduce emissions (SDG 13), and create income-generating opportunities (SDG 1, SDG 8, SDG 9).

UNDP supports the green energy transition to expanding solar access across all districts, including in schools, health centers, and public institutions. In Principe, solarization of the regional hospital is improving service delivery. These efforts contribute to reduction of emissions, macroeconomic stability, and fulfillment, especially in underserved areas.

Biodiversity, Forests, and Nature Conservation

UNDP supported community-led conservation initiatives under the Liqueza Tela Non project, promoting sustainable charcoal production and livelihood alternatives in forested areas. In Principe, contributed to the management of the OBO Regional Park and identification of high conservation value areas, while preparing a GEF-funded urban flood resilience project.

FAO provided strategic and technical assistance to the Directorate of Forests and Biodiversity to develop the National Plan for Forest and Landscape Restoration, aligned with international ecosystem restoration goals. Activities included reforestation, mobile

sawmill deployment, and alternative income generation to reduce deforestation pressures. The introduction of a solar-powered National Forest Monitoring System further enhanced oversight and biodiversity protection.

UNEP recommends policy reforms that promote land degradation neutrality (LDN) and community incentives for mangrove restoration and clean cooking enterprise development. These actions support the realization of rights to land, food, and protection from environmental hazards.

Sustainable Agriculture, Blue Economy, and Coastal Livelihoods

FAO supported adaptation measures such as terracing, irrigation systems, and Farmer Field Schools to reduce soil erosion and improve climate-resilient agriculture in rural communities. These efforts contribute to the right to food and sustainable livelihoods.

In the marine sector, FAO facilitated the development of the Fisheries Management Plan, the National Strategic Plan for Fisheries and Aquaculture, and the Blue Economy Strategy—each with investment and action frameworks. These instruments advance equitable resource governance and promote rights-based approaches to coastal ecosystem management.

The FISH4ACP project, also led by FAO, supported sustainable tuna fishing, value chain development, and women's economic empowerment through the creation of cooperatives like the Palaiês self-help group. These efforts foster inclusion, cultural rights, and gender equality within the blue economy.

Children's Rights and Climate Resilience

UNICEF supported the Government in validating the Climate Landscape Analysis for Children (CLAC) and the 2025–2029 Climate Action Plan, which emphasize child-centered adaptation strategies. Priorities include safe water access, resilient schools, and clean energy for vulnerable communities.

UNICEF underscored that climate change disproportionately impacts children through food insecurity, disease, and displacement. UNICEF recommends the integration of child protection concerns into national climate frameworks and increased investments in climate-resilient social services to fulfill the rights of children as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Civil and Political Rights

Justice, Rule of Law, and Anti-Corruption

OHCHR and CARO have contributed to efforts to combat impunity for serious human rights violations. Following the November 2022 incident involving allegations of torture and extrajudicial killings by military personnel, OHCHR highlighted that accountability must be pursued through independent civilian courts, in accordance with Article 7 of the Convention against Torture (CAT) and recommendations by the Committee against Torture. Concerns remain due to delays in judicial proceedings. OHCHR has reiterated that military courts lack sufficient guarantees of independence to adjudicate such cases and called for adherence to international obligations.

OHCHR emphasized that impunity for acts of torture undermines the credibility of the justice system. In line with General Comment 3 of the Committee against Torture, serious human rights violations should be prosecuted in independent, impartial civilian courts to uphold victims' rights and reinforce the rule of law.

Through the support by the Peace Building Fund and based on the UN Strategic Assessment of the Justice and Security Sector, the UN has played a leading role in supporting Sao Tome and Principe's justice sector reform through the launch of a multi-year Justice Modernization Programme in 2024, implemented by UNODC, UNDP and OHCHR. This initiative aims to advance the right to access justice by strengthening the transparency, efficiency, and inclusiveness of judicial institutions—particularly for rural populations, women, and youth.

UNDP supported the development and deployment of a digital Case Management System (CMS) for criminal proceedings, now operational across key institutions including the Supreme Court, trial courts, public prosecution, judiciary and national police, and prison services. UNDP highlighted that the CMS is expected to be scaled nationally, with the potential to reduce procedural delays, enhance data accuracy, and lower the cost of accessing justice.

UNDP further recommended the decentralization of justice services as essential to improving equitable access to legal remedies. In this regard, UNDP supported the construction of the first-ever Court of First Instance in the Autonomous Region of Principe—representing a landmark step toward institutional presence in remote areas. With support from the Peacebuilding Fund, the court is currently being expanded to handle cases related to gender-based violence and other sensitive legal matters. UNDP is also equipping the court with mobile outreach capabilities and videoconferencing systems to extend legal services to remote communities.

To strengthen legal empowerment, particularly among women and marginalized populations, UNDP underscored the importance of legal literacy and is supporting forthcoming public awareness campaigns on rights and access to justice.

Recognizing the link between justice reform and institutional integrity, UNDP is also providing technical assistance under the PROPALOP-TL project to enhance transparency in public finance management. Key actions include supporting results-based budgeting, reinforcing parliamentary oversight mechanisms, and promoting anti-corruption practices.

UNDP additionally supported the establishment of a national Treaty Registry database to enable systematic tracking of multilateral and bilateral treaty commitments, including those related to gender equality and human rights. This measure complements UNDP's advocacy for the ratification and domestication of core African Union instruments on democracy, governance, and anti-corruption.

The number of children in institutional care has increased, primarily due to parental migration and economic hardship. UNICEF advocates for the expansion of family-based care options such as foster care, kinship support, and subsidized guardianship, in line with national child protection workshop outcomes.

Domestic violence remains prevalent, notably in Mé-Zóchi and Lembá. Although intersectoral training and public awareness campaigns have been conducted, additional investment is needed to shift entrenched norms and reinforce survivor-centered protection systems. UNICEF recommends strengthening dedicated human, financial, and legislative resources to guarantee the full operationalization of the child protection network.

Strengthening treaty compliance mechanisms and aligning national frameworks with regional and international human rights obligations remain critical for long-term rule of law consolidation.

Combating Trafficking and Exploitation

Violence against children, including corporal punishment, sexual abuse, and early marriage, continues to seriously compromise child development in Sao Tome and Principe. UNICEF has supported the implementation of case management protocols and mobile protection units aimed at improving both outreach and response mechanisms.

Efforts should be aligned with the commitments undertaken by Sao Tome and Principe during the World Conference to End Violence against Children, held on 7–8 November 2024 in Bogotá, Colombia, and fully integrated into national planning and budgetary frameworks.

Data from the 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) indicates that approximately 10.5% of children aged 5 to 17 are engaged in child labor, particularly in informal sectors such as agriculture and fisheries. Revitalizing the national action plan to combat child labor remains a priority, with particular focus on the enforcement of legislation, awareness-raising campaigns, and school reintegration initiatives.

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Within the scope of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the FAO has directly supported vulnerable families and community groups to promote sustainable socioeconomic development in Sao Tome and Principe through various interventions. The FAO assisted 44 displaced families from the Terra Prometida community in the Autonomous Region of Príncipe (RAP). The interventions included the construction of an FTT oven for the production of smoked fish with improved quality, greater food safety, and reduced environmental impact; the installation of irrigation systems for horticultural producers to increase productivity and diversify income sources; and the rehabilitation of the only slaughterhouse in RAP, ensuring adequate sanitary conditions and strengthening the local livestock sector. Support also encompassed the acquisition of boats, engines, and safety equipment for fishermen, the provision of agricultural inputs, technical assistance, and training in good agricultural and animal husbandry practices. Livestock breeders were organized into cooperatives and received support for project and business plan development, as well as facilitation of access to financing.

FAO also supported the formulation of the National Strategy for Youth Employment in the Agricultural Sector, which aims to create decent work opportunities for rural youth, contributing to reducing youth unemployment and strengthening the agricultural sector. The

implementation of the General Agricultural Census (RGA) is another key initiative, providing essential data to guide effective public policies in the fight against extreme poverty and food insecurity.

Nevertheless, the interventions face significant financial limitations and challenges in strengthening value chains and market access, which are essential factors to ensure the sustainability of the actions carried out.

Despite progress in access to improved water sources, open defecation persists, particularly in rural areas (43 % of the population still practice open defecation).¹ UNICEF supports community-led sanitation campaigns and hygiene education in schools. To accelerate impact, sustained behavioral change strategies should be expanded across vulnerable regions.

Malnutrition remains a significant concern. Over more than six out of ten children aged between 6 and 59 months (67%) in Sao Tome and Principe suffer from anemia with the highest prevalence among low-income households². UNICEF continues to promote exclusive breastfeeding and supports the formulation of a multisectoral national nutrition strategy through community health platforms.

UNDP established REINA, the National Network of Business Incubators and Accelerators. This platform has expanded access to business development services for youth, women, and persons with disabilities.

Through the STPitch initiative, UNDP facilitated training and seed funding for emerging entrepreneurs. A dedicated legal regime is under development with the Association of Women Entrepreneurs and Jurists, and a “formalization window” under REINA will support informal actors in transitioning into the formal economy—thus ensuring access to legal protections, finance, and public services.

To strengthen the legal framework for economic rights, UNDP has supported the revision of Sao Tome and Principe’s commercial legislation and civil code. Legal modernization is considered essential for safeguarding the right to work, promoting investment, and improving business confidence.

UNDP facilitated the establishment of an Arbitration Center, providing infrastructure rehabilitation, arbitrator training, and technical assistance. This alternative dispute resolution mechanism is expected to significantly improve access to justice in commercial matters, contributing to a more transparent and reliable business environment.

The ILO has provided long-standing support to institutionalize labour dispute prevention and resolution mechanisms in Sao Tome and Principe, including training for tripartite stakeholders (workers, employers, government). These efforts have focused on improving access to labour justice and promoting social peace through the creation of an alternative commercial dispute resolution system, recently adopted by the Government.

¹ Joint Monitoring Program, 2022

² Biometrics data report, MICS 2014

In support of the right to economic participation and trade, UNDP assisted in the development of an External Trade Portal and supported the General Customs Authority in drafting an External Trade Manual and funding technical expertise to populate the platform with national trade data. These efforts are intended to increase trade transparency and market access—particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through digital streamlining of customs procedures.

UNDP has provided long-term support to public finance management through the PROPALOP-TL project, including enhancing budget transparency, implementing gender-sensitive budgeting, and improving citizen oversight mechanisms. Currently supporting the formulation of Sao Tome and Principe’s first Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF)-aligned Development Financing Strategy, which aims to ensure that public and private, domestic and international resources are aligned with national development priorities.

UNDP through support to the Conservation Trust Fund and the Liqueza Tela Non project, promoted the integration of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage into biodiversity conservation efforts. These activities recognize the intrinsic link between environmental stewardship and cultural rights and reinforce the importance of community-led approaches in protecting both natural ecosystems and intangible cultural assets.

Right to Work and Youth Employment

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) encouraged and promoted the training of out-of-school young people and their integration into the labour market through several programmes in partnership with the National Institute of Youth and the Union of Youth Associations.

The Government’s inability to generate employment, conditions, in many cases, the most vulnerable segment of the population, posing a potential challenge to political stability and economic prosperity.

In response, the launch of the *National Youth Policy Strategy 2023–2025*, spearheaded in 2025 by the Minister of Environment, Youth and Sustainable Tourism—with the technical and strategic support of UNFPA, UNDP, and UNICEF—represents a significant step forward. This strategy focuses on three key pillars: *employment and vocational training*, *entrepreneurship*, and *women’s empowerment*. Through the comprehensive implementation of this Strategy it is expected to address the country’s development needs, by reducing poverty and empowering women, enhancing their quality-of-living conditions.

In alignment with SDGs and human rights standards related to participation, employment, and non-discrimination, UNDP supports youth empowerment across five strategic pillars: entrepreneurship and innovation, digital skills and employability, formalization and financial inclusion, decent job creation, and civic engagement.

To foster economic inclusion, UNDP supported the establishment of REINA, the National Network of Business Incubators and Accelerators, which expands access to business development services for youth, women, and persons with disabilities. Innovation challenges launched through this platform have enabled the adoption of 140 inclusive

business solutions in the blue, green, and circular economy sectors, with a national target of 300 by 2027.

On youth employability, UNDP supported the launch of Sao Tome and Principe's first Digital Academy in 2024, a flagship initiative addressing the digital divide and improving access to market-relevant skills. In parallel, is supporting the development of a digital employability platform to connect youth with job opportunities and vocational training.

To promote economic rights and financial inclusion, UNDP is assisting the Government in the formalization of informal youth-led businesses, which constitute a significant portion of the national economy. A legal regime is under development—co-designed with the Association of Women Entrepreneurs and Jurists—to streamline the transition to the formal sector. A dedicated "formalization window" is set to open to provide legal and financial assistance to informal youth operators. In addition, UNDP is advancing digital payment systems and mobile money access, ensuring youth entrepreneurs can access financial services and participate in the formal economy.

On youth civic engagement and environmental rights, UNDP, in partnership with UNICEF, the Youth Institute, and the Directorate of Environment and Climate Action, supported the creation of District and Regional Youth Committees for Climate Action across all districts and the Autonomous Region of Principe. These structures enable youth participation in community-based climate governance. Training on sustainable energy and biodiversity has further empowered young people to lead local initiatives.

UNDP also supported the Climate Champions programme, STP YouthConnekt, and the implementation of the National Youth Strategy, all of which contribute to fostering a new generation of youth leaders actively engaged in environmental advocacy and democratic participation.

The national social protection framework has expanded via the Programa Família, now reaching 5,000 families and impacting over 23,000 individuals—more than half of whom are women. UNICEF has advocated broadened selection criteria to ensure that children's rights are central to eligibility mechanisms.

UNICEF continues to support the development of cross-sectoral and sustainable strategies to promote the inclusion of families living in extreme poverty, individuals with disabilities, and other marginalized groups.

Youth unemployment remains high, compounded by limited vocational training and the absence of a national employment policy. UNICEF recommends aligning youth skill development with labor market needs and expanding entrepreneurship opportunities. The National Youth Strategy (2025–2030) emphasizes empowerment and should be closely integrated with gender equality and climate resilience initiatives.

Sao Tome and Principe has ratified all ten ILO Fundamental Conventions, including those related to child labour, forced labour, freedom of association, and non-discrimination. With ILO's technical assistance, significant progress has been made in aligning legal frameworks and promoting labour rights in practice.

Following the adoption of the 2019 Labour Code, São Tomé and Príncipe initiated a reform process—still ongoing—to incorporate ILO’s comments and align national legislation with international labour standards. This includes strengthening protections for freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.

The ILO also supported the development of the Employment Action Plan and the introduction of a digital employment platform that connects job seekers with employers. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Vocational Training Centre of Bodo Bodo in 2023, leading to the creation of approximately 400 jobs through HIMO (labour-intensive) training programs, particularly targeting youth and women.

Inclusive and rights-based youth programming must remain a priority to achieve long-term social cohesion, economic resilience, and environmental sustainability.

Right to Health and Sexual and Reproductive Rights

UNFPA stated that misconceptions, stigma, and limited access to information continue to restrict individual autonomy in relation to contraceptive use, family planning, and informed reproductive decision-making hindering the realization of rights to health, dignity, and gender equality.

To address these gaps, UNFPA supported the Government in strengthening the delivery of adolescent SRHR services across all 39 health units nationwide. This included digital upgrades and staff training, alongside the supervision and monitoring of all maternity wards. Two maternity facilities were equipped with upgraded medical equipment. UNFPA emphasized that access to comprehensive, youth-friendly SRHR services is essential for upholding reproductive rights and reducing early and unintended pregnancies.

As part of the "Girls' Empowerment and Quality Education for All" project, and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, UNFPA developed and rolled out a Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) curriculum in 15 schools across the country during the 2023–2024 academic year. This initiative reached 1,500 students through 75 Girls’ and Boys’ Clubs. In support of this, 35 condom dispensers were installed in schools, 3,200 condoms were distributed, and 145 youth communities were identified at the district level to serve as extended distribution points.

UNFPA highlighted a positive outcome with the registration of 1,967 new family planning users in 2024 but underscored the continued need for strengthening access to SRHR services and combating early pregnancy. UNFPA further recommended broadening awareness-raising initiatives beyond health and education sectors to foster social acceptance and promote informed, rights-based reproductive choices across all segments of society.

In the domain of child health and immunization, UNICEF played a critical role in ensuring that Sao Tome and Principe remained free of polio and successfully eliminated maternal and neonatal tetanus. Despite these gains, concerns remain over a decline in routine immunization coverage. The third dose of the pentavalent vaccine among children aged 0–11 months dropped from over 90%—a two-decade standard—to 87% in 2024 (from 90% in 2023). UNICEF has responded through intensified community mobilization and supplementary immunization activities.

UNICEF also supported the extension of the country's Transition to Vaccine Autonomy strategy (now through 2030) and is assisting with the finalization of the National Immunization Strategy, expected to be validated in 2025.

In a notable advancement, UNICEF's technical and financial assistance helped raise Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine coverage to 95% among girls aged 10–14 in 2024 (from 75% in 2023), supported by improvements to cold chain infrastructure and adolescent engagement via digital platforms such as U-Report.

Despite reductions in under-five and neonatal mortality, which declined to 13.9 and 6.8 per 1,000 live births in 2023, respectively—disparities in antenatal care access and the availability of essential medicines remain. UNICEF recommends the full implementation of a national newborn survival strategy and the expansion of community health outreach to address these gaps and further reduce child mortality.

Right to Education

Access to pre-primary education remains limited, with only 36.4% of children aged 3–5 enrolled. UNICEF supports the expansion of early childhood education in underserved districts and the development of inclusive curricula.

High dropout rates in secondary school, particularly among girls, are exacerbated by policies that exclude pregnant students from full participation. UNICEF recommends urgent reforms to ensure gender-responsive, equitable education policies and practices.

Non-formal education pathways for out-of-school youth are underdeveloped. UNICEF has initiated vocational and life skills programs to support re-engagement and school-to-work transitions.

Despite progress in expanding access to education across levels, persistent challenges remain, especially for children aged 0–3, students transitioning between grades, and those with disabilities. Early pregnancy continues to lead to dropout and exclusion, underscoring the need for continued advocacy with policymakers to ensure educational continuity and inclusion.

UNFPA stated the importance of ensuring education for all children, including children with special needs and young people, in a gender-responsive education system, where pregnant girls continue to be allowed to attend school. The inclusion has to be at all levels, by the creation of policies and strategies and their implementation through awareness and dialogue.

Rights of Specific Groups

Women

Sao Tome and Principe has made significant progress in advancing women's rights and promoting gender equality. UNFPA has emphasized the importance of continued efforts to eliminate gender-based violence (GBV), ensure equal economic participation, and strengthen reproductive rights. A key development in this regard is the recent approval of the "REDE VIDA" strategy, which marks a major institutional milestone in structuring the

national response to GBV.

Both UNFPA and UNDP have supported community and institutional training on GBV, strengthened legal frameworks protecting against sexual harassment, and promoted the integration of women into policymaking, justice, and economic sectors. UNDP has further embedded gender inclusion across its projects by supporting the enforcement of a 30% quota for women on electoral lists, launching an online platform for qualified women candidates, passing a gender-sensitive state budget for the water and sanitation sector, and operationalizing forensic facilities and courts in underserved areas to improve women's access to justice.

Additionally, REINA, the national business incubator, actively supports women-led enterprises, while a legal framework for microenterprise formalization is being developed in collaboration with women's associations. At the community level, economic activities such as charcoal production and climate action have successfully ensured at least 45% female participation, reinforcing the country's commitment to gender inclusion across various sectors.

The "Get Ahead" project, implemented with ILO support, focused on empowering women through entrepreneurship training, financial literacy, and business development. It has contributed to inclusive economic empowerment and increased the resilience of women-led enterprises.

Children

The child protection system has seen gradual improvements, but UNICEF emphasizes the need to tackle persistent structural challenges. Key initiatives include the establishment of a multi-sectoral child protection committee and the expansion of family-based care options, such as foster and kinship care, to reduce the reliance on institutionalization. In addition, awareness campaigns and training programs addressing child abuse, early marriage, and parental responsibility have been implemented. UNICEF also supports the development of a National Nutrition Strategy and community health outreach efforts to combat anemia, which affects 67% of children under five. Promoting exclusive breastfeeding and improving access to clean water and sanitation are critical steps to reducing child malnutrition and enhancing early childhood development.

People with Disabilities

Children with disabilities continue to face systemic exclusion from education and social services. To address this, UNICEF supports the development of inclusive policy frameworks, early screening for hearing and mobility impairments, and the establishment of multisectoral coordination and case management systems. The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) advocates for a rights-based approach to disability inclusion, emphasizing the importance of universal design in education, social protection, and employment systems to ensure greater accessibility and equal opportunities for all. As part of these efforts, the UNCT facilitated a high-level capacity-building workshop under the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), designed to strengthen national institutional coordination and advance the definition and implementation of a comprehensive national strategy on disability inclusion. This initiative reinforced legislative reform processes and promoted inclusive budgeting and data collection, aligning with the government's broader

development agenda for sustainable and inclusive growth.

Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups

UNFPA has emphasized that children with special needs face persistent barriers to accessing inclusive health and education services and recommended that dedicated, inclusive strategies be integrated across all national planning frameworks.

UNDP has reinforced the importance of prioritizing geographically and socially excluded populations, including persons with disabilities, rural populations, and the poorest communities. As part of this approach, the Proximity Justice initiative, supported by UNDP, is extending justice services to underserved districts such as Santa Catarina (Lembá), Porto Alegre (Caué), and the interior of São Tomé Island. This includes the deployment of Mobile Justice Units, the operationalization of courts in remote regions, and inter-institutional training for magistrates, police, and social workers to ensure that justice systems are accessible, right-based, and gender-responsive.

To advance the economic and social rights of people with disabilities, UNDP supported a pilot initiative in 2024 that enabled 11 young entrepreneurs with hearing impairments to receive training in small business development, with sign language interpretation ensuring full participation. In 2025, UNDP expanded this support through targeted institutional strengthening of the Federation of People with Disabilities, including provision of specialized equipment to establish a braille printing business. These efforts demonstrated viable inclusive business models and enhanced economic autonomy for visually impaired individuals. UNDP recommended scaling such models through integration into the national REINA entrepreneurship platform.

UNDP has also promoted inclusive participation in democratic processes, working with the Electoral Commission and civil society to ensure that persons with disabilities were fully included in the most recent electoral cycle. Support included accessible voter education materials, physical access to polling stations, and public awareness campaigns to combat stigma and promote civic agency.

In the broader economic domain, UNDP supported inclusive business development through the national REINA platform, ensuring that youth, women, and persons with disabilities access tailored services and digital financial tools such as mobile payments and formalization support. UNDP also facilitated economic empowerment in vulnerable communities through targeted capacity-building in charcoal-producing communities, reaching over 1,000 people—45% of whom were women—focused on sustainable livelihoods and gender equity.

To ensure accountability in service delivery for marginalized populations, UNDP recommended the institutionalization of community legal education, rights awareness campaigns, and post-service satisfaction surveys to measure impact and inform future outreach efforts.

Migration, Asylum, and Statelessness

Sao Tome and Principe has demonstrated a growing commitment to international protection, notably through its active participation in regional asylum and border

governance dialogues. In partnership with UNHCR, the Government contributed to a human rights-based regional approach to protection-sensitive border management through the Comité des Chefs de Police d’Afrique Centrale (CCPAC), alongside IOM and UNODC. These efforts included cross-border training, a regional training-of-trainers workshop, and a collaborative approach to identifying and referring people in need of international protection.

In September 2024, Sao Tome and Principe participated in a UNHCR-led regional workshop in Dakar, contributing to the development of a national roadmap for strengthening asylum systems. In July 2025, the country took part in the CEEAC pre-validation workshop on the draft regional asylum policy, reinforcing its commitment to regional legal harmonization and shared protection frameworks.

UNHCR welcomed Sao Tome and Principe’s efforts to align national asylum policies with regional and international standards, and emphasized the importance of ensuring that such commitments are reflected in national planning and legal frameworks. In this context, a national coordination platform, led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and supported by UNHCR, was established to guide the domestication of international instruments on displacement and statelessness, and to support the development of a national action plan for implementation.

In response to youth and labour migration challenges, ILO is currently supporting the establishment of a national mechanism to track migration flows, reinforcing the link between employment policy and human mobility.

These actions contribute to the realization of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), and reflect Sao Tome and Principe’s growing role in regional cooperation and protection governance.