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Replies of Sao Tome and Principe to the list of issues in relation to its combined fifth and sixth reports*

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



Part One

Reply to paragraph 2 (a) of the list of issues (CRC/C/STP/Q/5-6) in relation to the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Sao Tome and Principe

1. The National COVID-19 Vaccination Implementation Plan (NDVP) has ensured the protection of children's rights against COVID-19. The plan provides for the vaccination of children from 5 to 18 years old, which has already been integrated into the Routine Program, covering 48,483 children.
2. During the pandemic, the Ministry of Education and UNICEF implemented several measures to mitigate the impact on education. These include broadcasting 32 classes through radio and TV, distributing activity books for pre-school, support booklets for primary school, educational materials for vulnerable families, providing nutritional support through school canteens, and delivering educational kits to over 7,000 children including masks, books, pencils, notebooks, backpacks, and uniforms.
3. Visors were given to deaf children for lip-reading during the pandemic. Awareness campaigns were conducted to educate schools, the media, and distribute food and hygiene kits to vulnerable families. These measures helped to reduce the impact of the pandemic on education.
4. After implementing these activities, families experienced reduced economic burden for acquiring books and there was a significant increase in student attendance rates. Pre-school and primary education grew by 36% and 30%, respectively, demonstrating improved access and quality of education. A ministerial decree in 2019/2020 allowed for automatic progression of students in the education system, resulting in a promotion rate of 97% and a reduction of the repetition rate from 17% to 2.6% in the following academic year (2020/2021), minimizing negative impacts of school retention on student motivation and dropout rates.

Reply to paragraph 2 (b) of the list of issues

5. In the context of legislative reform, several national laws were harmonized to meet the requirements stipulated in the convention, as the table following:
 - Decree-Law No. 6/2018 National Health Service Statute;
 - Law No. 01/2018 Organic Law of the Judicial Police;
 - Law No. 2/2018 Public Function Statute;
 - Law No. 3/2018 Law Against Terrorism and its Financing;
 - Law No. 4/2018 Basic Law of the Education System;
 - Law No. 9/2018 Basic Health Law;
 - Law No. 15/2018 Prevention, Treatment and Control of HIV/AIDS Law;
 - Law No. 19/2018 Family Code;
 - Law No. 20/2018 Code of Organization of Child Protection;
 - Law No. 2/2019 Defense and Armed Forces Law;
 - Law No. 9/2019 Labor Code;
 - Law No. 15/2021 Amendment of the Penal Code/Law No. 6/2012;
 - Law No. 11/2022 Parity Law.

Reply to paragraph 2 (c) of the list of issues

6. With regard to the ratification of international legal instruments related to the protection of children's rights, we are pleased to inform that the country has ratified the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

7. However, the remaining two Protocols, namely, the Optional Protocol on the Communications Procedure and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, have not yet been ratified. The Government recognizes the importance of ratifying these Protocols as soon as possible.

Reply to paragraph 2 (c) of the list of issues

8. São Tomé and Príncipe, as a signatory to major international instruments for child protection, has been taking steps to ensure the well-being of children in various realms. However, due to insufficient financial resources, there are still gaps in child protection. To address this, the government is revising the Multisectoral Protocol for Child Protection, with a special chapter on adaptation in schools and the Autonomous Region of Príncipe.

9. A National and Multisectoral Action Plan for Child Protection will be developed from 2023-2025, with specific deadlines for protocol operationalization. The government is also considering a Human Resources Retention and Expansion Strategy, along with a corresponding action plan, to mobilize necessary resources.

10. With a commitment to meeting established deadlines, the government is working to ensure effective implementation of measures by the end of 2023 to fully comply with commitments made for the protection of children's rights and promote their well-being.

Reply to paragraph 3 of the list of issues

11. The Ministry of Women's Rights implements and monitors the Convention on the Rights of the Child and plans to operationalize the National Commission on the Rights of the Child (CNDC) composed of members from government departments and civil society. The Ministry hosts a program called "Flá di Mina Anzu" on National Radio, presented by children, discussing topics related to children's rights. Investment in strengthening the Children's Parliament continues, with capacity-building sessions for young parliamentarians supported by the Government and UNICEF.

Reply to paragraph 4 (a) of the list of issues

12. Efforts are underway to strengthen planning, budgeting, and monitoring processes in São Tomé and Príncipe, with a focus on social protection. These include training parliament members on Public Finance for Children, sensitizing district councilors to promote child-centric planning and budgeting, and a General State Budget (OGE) Diagnosis by the Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations in São Tomé and Príncipe (FONG). The diagnosis aimed to identify the portion of the OGE allocated to the social sector to better utilize resources for social programs and projects benefitting vulnerable children and families.

13. Additionally, a joint Government/UNICEF budget was developed for key sectors in social protection, including Health, Education, and Social Protection, with support from FONG. To further strengthen these processes, this year will see the creation of a Multisectoral Committee led by the Budget Directorate to monitor progress. The government has also prioritized strengthening information systems and capacity building for evidence-based planning, which will help identify vulnerable children and families and allocate resources more efficiently and effectively.

Reply to paragraph 4 (c) of the list of issues

14. The Government, with the support of partners such as the World Bank and UNICEF, is implementing the following actions:

- The Vulnerable Families Program (VFP), which provides conditional cash transfers to vulnerable families;
- The Parental Education Program (PEP), which aims to strengthen the capacity of parents and guardians in positive parenting practices based on the CRC themes. The PEP is a requirement for the VFP;
- Revision of the National Social Protection Strategy, which can be considered a means of protection for children, given that it will be aligned with CRC themes and child sensitive.

Reply to paragraph 4 (d) of the list of issues

15. São Tomé and Príncipe has not yet created an independent National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) in accordance with the Paris Principles. However, to address some of the requirements in this regard, the Intersectoral Human Rights Commission (IHRC) was created.

16. The IHRC is responsible for preparing international reports on human rights and monitoring the implementation of recommendations resulting from these reports. In addition, some measures have been taken regarding human rights issues, including:

- Creation in 2007 of the National Institute for the Promotion and Protection of Women's Rights (INPG);
- Institutionalization of the National Commission for the Protection of Children's Rights;
- Adoption within the government structure of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, which subsequently created the Human Rights Office, which coordinates the activities of the Intersectoral Human Rights Commission (IHRC). The IHRC is an observer member of the Network of Ombudsmen, Human Rights Commissions and other NHRI of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) and is recognized by the NHRI of the African Union;
- Finally, in 2022, the Ministry of Women's Rights was adopted within the current government structure to support issues related to Family, Women, Children and Gender.

17. In conclusion, we emphasize that the creation of an NHRI is a commitment made by the Santomean State and, for this reason, actions are underway to materialize it in São Tomé and Príncipe in the short term.

Reply to paragraph 5 (a) of the list of issues

18. In response to this concern, the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe, as part of the legislative reform, expressly included in article 6(a) of Law No. 20/2018 - Code of the Tutelary Organization of Minors - the principle of the best interest of the child and youth as a guiding principle for intervention to promote the rights and protection of the child.

19. In addition, various provisions related to the same principle were safeguarded in other legal instruments, such as the Family Code, the Penal Code, the Labor Code, the Basic Law of the Education System, among others.

20. The Children and Youth Parliament was also institutionalized as a platform for the dissemination and defense of children's rights.

Reply to paragraph 5 (b) of the list of issues

21. The aim of ensuring children's participation in judicial or administrative processes is addressed by the Law 20/2018 - Code of Tutelary Organization of Minors, which establishes a set of provisions in article 6, paragraphs a), c), i) and j).

Reply to paragraph 5 (c) of the list of issues

22. The CDC recognizes the importance of hearing the opinions, interests, and concerns of all children (0-17 years old) in order to achieve a more effective resolution of the main social problems that affect them. In this regard, several actions have been developed, such as:

- Institutionalization and training of the Children & Youth Parliament;
- Installation of the U-REPORT STP platform in partnership with UNICEF;
- Legislative reforms mentioned above;
- Institutionalization of the Civil Court of Family and Minors.

Reply to paragraph 6 of the list of issues¹

23. Although birth registration rates for children in São Tomé and Príncipe are relatively high, challenges remain regarding access to birth certificates. According to data from the National Institute of Statistics (INE) and the 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS6), while 98.6% of children are registered at birth, only 84% of them have a birth certificate. Many birth registrations in São Tomé and Príncipe are made with only the mother's name, which can negatively impact children's access to basic rights, such as inheritance and child support.

24. The government and civil society organizations are working to improve birth registration by raising awareness and encouraging paternal participation, but more efforts are needed to ensure all children have the right to birth registration with both parents' names.

Reply to paragraph 7 (a) of the list of issues

25. The measures taken are:

- Law No. 1/2003, the Constitution of the Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, including:
 - Article 23, which states that the moral and physical integrity of individuals, including children, is inviolable, and that no one can be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
 - Article 26, which states that spouses have equal rights and duties regarding the maintenance and education of their children;
 - Article 36, which states that all individuals have the right to physical freedom and personal security;
 - Article 52, which states that children have the right to be respected and protected by society and the state;
- Law No. 07/2004, Social Protection Legal Framework;
- Law No. 11/2008 on Domestic and Family Violence;

¹ CRC/C/STP/5-6.

- Law No. 12/2008 on the Mechanisms for Strengthening the Legal Protection of Victims of Domestic and Family Violence;
- Law No. 6/2012, Criminal Code.;
- Law No. 19/2018, Family Code;
- Law No. 20/2018, Code of Guardianship for Minors;
- Law No. 2/2003, Basic Education System Law.

Relevant national policies

26. São Tomé and Príncipe developed the National Policy for Child Protection in 2016 to combat domestic violence, child labor, and sexual abuse/exploitation of minors. The policy aims to prevent all forms of violence against children and reduce their prevalence, aligning with other development plans, including the National Poverty Reduction Strategy.

27. National Commission for the National Policy for Child Protection established in 2020 to coordinate the implementation of the National Policy for Child Protection, based on its Action Plan focused on prevention, services to victims, legal protection, and functionality of the child protection system.

28. Protocol for the care of child victims, November 2021, under review by a multisectoral committee led by the Public Prosecutor's Office.

Reply to paragraph 7 (b) of the list of issues

29. The Ministry of Women's Rights has plans to create a gender and child-related database, while the DPSSF has already created a database for collecting information on children at risk and in danger at the national level. UNICEF is providing support to strengthen mechanisms for collecting and processing administrative data on violence against children. Additionally, the justice reform process, supported by UNDP, includes the information system component of the sector.

30. These initiatives align with the government's prioritization of evidence-based planning, as accurate and up-to-date data collection and analysis are critical to developing more effective policies and strategies for promoting and protecting children's rights. It is essential to regularly update these databases and to work collaboratively to ensure their effectiveness and usefulness in combatting violence and other forms of child rights violations.

Reply to paragraph 7 (c) of the list of issues

31. The criminal code and domestic violence laws in São Tomé and Príncipe cover actions that may harm a person's health, including children, but there is no specific law prohibiting corporal punishment.

32. Harmful behaviors persist, and a qualitative study is being prepared with UNICEF to understand the community's attitudes towards violence in schools and families.

33. The government is implementing a parental education program in vulnerable families, with UNICEF's support, to promote positive parenting practices.

34. Ongoing initiatives to prevent and combat violence against children need to be continued and monitored.

Reply to paragraph 7 (d) of the list of issues

35. São Tomé and Príncipe is revising the Protocol of Procedures for the Care and Follow-up of Children and Adolescents Victims of Sexual Abuse, Mistreatment, Neglect and Abandonment to strengthen reporting mechanisms and ensure more efficient and appropriate care for victims of violence.

36. The possibility of revitalizing the "Green Line" telephone reporting mechanism is also being considered. It is essential to widely and clearly disseminate these mechanisms to ensure victims and their families have access to accurate and reliable information on reporting cases of violence and obtaining appropriate help and protection.

Reply to paragraph 7 (e) of the list of issues

37. The country has legislation for care and rehabilitation of child victims of violence, but mechanisms need to be regulated and operationalized. The government plans to review the Multisectoral Protocol for Assistance, involving different actors and sectors, to improve and strengthen mechanisms for child victim care and protection. This review should include more effective assistance, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms. Technical cooperation from UN agencies and NGOs is being sought to support this process.

Reply to paragraph 7 (f) of the list of issues

38. São Tomé and Príncipe currently lacks a legal framework that specifically addresses prevention of stigmatization and re-victimization of child victims of exploitation and sexual abuse. However, children are not held responsible for any acts committed as a result of their victimization. The government must develop a legal framework that comprehensively protects child victims of violence and prevents stigmatization and re-victimization. Additionally, professionals in this area must receive training to ensure appropriate and respectful care for victims.

Reply to paragraph 7 (g) of the list of issues

39. The government of São Tomé and Príncipe has a zero-tolerance approach towards the phenomenon of "catorzinhas/papoite" and initiates administrative and/or criminal sanctions when such cases are reported in the context of education. Punitive measures against sexual abuse and exploitation of minors have been introduced as part of the amendment of the Penal Code, and the government is committed to their rigorous and effective application.

40. The "Vulnerable Families Program" funded by the World Bank includes a component that supports the creation of jobs for parents to improve their families' living conditions. The "Parental Education+" program raises awareness about the issue through media and community actions.

41. UNICEF is supporting Government to conduct a qualitative study on violence (focused on families and schools) will help in understanding and designing more effective prevention and response actions.

Reply to paragraph 7 (h) of the list of issues

42. The São Tomé and Príncipe government has taken legislative measures to prevent and punish harmful practices affecting children's lives, including setting the minimum age for marriage at 18, imposing stricter penalties for sexual abuse and domestic violence, and consulting children on relevant matters. They have also collaborated with various organizations to carry out awareness campaigns to change attitudes and behaviors towards these practices.

43. In 2020, the Ministry of Education in São Tomé and Príncipe removed Article 36 from the disciplinary regulations of secondary education that prohibited pregnant girls and boys involved in the pregnancy from attending classes. This step fights against discrimination and stigma related to teenage pregnancy and allows pregnant adolescents to access education and continue their studies. The government has also launched awareness campaigns to change attitudes and behaviors towards teenage pregnancy.

Reply to paragraph 8 (a) of the list of issues

44. Regarding the progress made, we would like to mention the following points:
- In 2016, the National Child Protection Policy was developed, aligned with the National Poverty Reduction Strategy 2012-2016, with the aim of improving living conditions and combating domestic violence, child labor, abuse, and sexual exploitation of minors;
 - In 2020, the National Commission for the National Child Protection Policy was established;
 - In 2020, the Child Protection Department was created within the DPSSF, leading a multisectoral team focused on child protection, including combating child labour;
 - In November 2021, the Protocol for the Care and Follow-up of Children and Adolescents Victims of Sexual Abuse, Ill-treatment, Neglect, and Abandonment in STP was signed, currently being revised by a multisectoral committee led by the Public Prosecutor's Office;
 - There has been an increase in pre-school infrastructure in both the public and private sectors;
 - Residential institutions for the care of children at risk and in danger have been installed.

Reply to paragraph 8 (b) of the list of issues

45. The government of Sao Tome and Principe (STP) has adopted several measures to prevent and combat violence against children. One of these measures is the Parental Education Program (PEP+), implemented by the Social Protection department in collaboration with various institutions, aimed at promoting positive parenting practices to combat neglect, abandonment, and sexual abuse of minors. The program includes national-level awareness-raising and training activities.

46. In the legislative field, the Penal Code provides punitive measures against situations of exposure or abandonment of children, as stated in articles 1 to 5 of article 136.

47. Additionally, with the aim of avoiding the breakdown and degradation of family values, the Family Code regulates preventive measures in articles 81, 295, 303, 306, and 313 concerning the duty of spouses, parental responsibility, education of children, abandonment of the home, and the hearing of minors, among other aspects.

Reply to paragraph 8 (c) of the list of issues

48. The entity responsible for coordinating matters related to children who are without parental care is the Public Prosecutor's Office, as established in article 3(a) of Law No. 13/2008, known as the Statute of the Public Prosecutor's Office, and in article 128 of the Code of Organization and Procedure of the Juvenile Court (COTM).

Reply to paragraph 8 (d) of the list of issues

49. Previously, the admission of children into care institutions was done informally, without involving relevant institutions such as the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Courts, National Police, Judiciary Police, Directorate of Social Solidarity and Family Protection (DPSSF), Ministry of Justice, hospitals, among others. Today, this procedure requires notification of these institutions for the proper effects, especially the Public Prosecutor's Office, the institution that authorizes the institutionalization of children in care centers, as well as the DPSSF for monitoring and controlling the children's development, with the aim of preventing child trafficking and other forms of violation of children's rights.

50. The country has legislation that provides for alternative care for victimized children, but it is necessary to regulate and operationalize these mechanisms. This is a priority for the government in the coming years and we count on South-South cooperation with Brazil and Portugal, as well as technical assistance from UNICEF to achieve this goal.

Reply to paragraph 8 (e) of the list of issues

51. According to articles 172, 173, 352, and 364 of the Code of Organization and Procedure of the Court of Minors (COTM), appeals are allowed for decisions that result in the institutionalization of minors. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the DPSSF to monitor the institutionalized minors and prepare a report to be submitted to the Public Prosecutor's Office for assessment and decision-making. In addition, there is a Complaints Resolution Mechanism (MRR) in the institutions, as well as a toll-free telephone line (8001020) available to receive suggestions to improve the quality of services.

Reply to paragraph 8 (f) of the list of issues

52. The country lacks information systems that collect such data.

Reply to paragraph 8 (g) of the list of issues

53. Institutions that provide shelter and care for children provide follow-up for a period of 180 days when children transition from the residential institutions to their biological or foster families. During this period, school kits, food baskets, and medical and medication assistance are provided to families as a form of support for the reintegration of children into society.

Reply to paragraph 8 (h) of the list of issues

54. International adoption is not provided for in the Code of Organization of Minors' Guardianship. However, domestic legislation is applied to make international adoption effective.

Reply to paragraph 8 (i) of the list of issues

55. Regarding this issue, in STP, when the mother is deprived of her liberty, the children are separated from her and placed in care institutions (such as Cáritas) or with a family member, upon notification by the Public Prosecutor's Office. There is no record of children being kept in detention together with their mothers due to lack of adequate infrastructure in the prison facilities.

Reply to paragraph 9 (a) of the list of issues

56. The Government, with UNICEF's support, prioritizes inclusive special education in the Educational Policy Charter for 2019-2023, and is developing a proposal for the Special Education Framework Law.

57. UNICEF is also supporting the regulation of the Legal Framework for Special Education and the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities.

58. Pilot classes for children with disabilities were implemented in 4 schools and materials/equipment were purchased. However, there is only one specialized teacher in speech therapy and a special education project in a private institution.

59. The Government, with UNICEF's financial support, trained 3 members of the Association of the Blind and Amblyopes in Braille in Cape Verde.

Reply to paragraph 9 (d) of the list of issues

60. In regard to the stigma associated with disability and violence, the government has implemented awareness programs on Special Education on television. However, there are limitations in addressing cases of violence due to a lack of specialized training centers, specialized mechanisms to assist children and adolescents with disabilities, and lack of differentiated attention for women and girls with disabilities who are victims of gender-based violence (GBV).

61. It is important to note that, despite the lack of specialized mechanisms to deal with this population, there is no differential treatment in terms of medical and drug assistance, as well as judicial assistance, compared to other children. However, it is crucial to create special procedures to better serve children with disabilities.

Reply to paragraph 10 (a) of the list of issues

62. The maternal mortality rate has been decreasing in the last two decades, going from 179/100,000 live births in 2000 to 130/100,000 in 2017.

63. Neonatal mortality was reduced from 22.6/1,000 in 2000 to 14.1/1,000 in 2019, as well as infant mortality from 55/1,000 in 2000 to 24/1,000 in 2019 and in children under 5 from 84/1,000 in 2000 to 29.8/1,000 in 2019.

Reply to paragraph 10 (b) of the list of issues

64. The government has achieved important results in immunization, including the continuation of a zero rate of transmission of poliomyelitis, the elimination of neonatal and maternal tetanus, and an increase in the coverage of immunization against COVID-19.

65. The coverage of immunization against COVID-19 reached 73% of the target group (population from 12 years old and above), which represents 47.5% of the total population. Additional efforts invested in COVID-19 coverage have resulted in a slight decrease in the coverage of the three doses of the Pentavalent vaccine, which dropped from 96% in 2021 to 90% in 2022. Despite this, we consider the results achieved in this area as positive.

Reply to paragraph 10 (c) of the list of issues

66. Sexual and reproductive education is integrated into the secondary school curriculum, starting from the 9th grade since the 90s. It is worth noting that at the beginning of this year, 210 primary and secondary school teachers were trained nationwide, with 88 male teachers and 122 female teachers in Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

Reply to paragraph 10 (d) of the list of issues

67. The prevention of the transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is integrated into the national program to combat HIV/AIDS, with the support of various partners such as the Global Fund, UNICEF, WHO, some bilateral cooperation partners, and NGOs. This support has contributed to the control of the disease, resulting in low transmission rates (0.5% since 2009), prevention of mother-to-child transmission, HIV testing, distribution of antiretroviral drugs, and development of normative policies and protocols. The low rates indicate elimination by 2030.

68. In 2022, 100% of all pregnant women were tested for HIV, with one testing positive for HIV, corresponding to a transmission rate of 0.3%. Despite ongoing efforts to maintain the zero vertical transmission achieved in 2021, two children tested positive for HIV due to vertical transmission. Both newborns have started Antiretroviral Therapy (ART). Currently, both cases are being reviewed by the Ministry of Health to learn lessons and make improvements.

Reply to paragraph 10 (e) of the list of issues

69. Maternal care services, including for adolescents, are available in all health facilities with a coverage of 100%. These services are provided without any form of discrimination and are free of charge.

Reply to paragraph 10 (f) of the list of issues

70. The entry and stay of minors under 18 in establishments that sell alcoholic beverages, as well as the sale of alcoholic beverages in the vicinity of schools, is prohibited by Law No. 3/2012.

71. In addition, the government has implemented various preventive actions, including awareness campaigns in schools and communities, led by various institutions such as the Institute of Drug and Drug Addiction, Youth Institute, National Institute for the Prevention and Management of Risks and Disasters (INPG), Communication Social, Network of Women Parliamentarians, São Toméan Family Promotion Association (ASPF), and the Commission for Monitoring, Coordination and Drug Surveillance (CACVD), as well as the placement of informative signs in commercial establishments. However, there has been a worrying increase in alcohol consumption among young people of both sexes, despite these efforts.

Reply to paragraph 10 (g) of the list of issues

72. The practice of exclusive breastfeeding without the addition of water or other liquids has been strongly promoted through annual awareness campaigns. Campaigns to promote exclusive breastfeeding have been intensified in all districts with the support of UNICEF, reaching 7,010 mothers and 23,011 children aged 6 to 59 months, who were supplemented with vitamin A.

Reply to paragraph 10 (h) of the list of issues

73. In spite of the challenges that the country still faces in implementing norms for the treatment and control of malnutrition, it is important to highlight the progress made. The proportion of children under 5 years of age with low weight decreased from 9% to 5% between 2014 and 2019, which is a significant advancement.

74. However, in 2020, 8.4% of children under 5 years of age in poorer families still had low weight, compared to 3.4% of children in richer families.

75. Similarly, the proportion of children under 5 years of age with stunted growth decreased from 17% to 12% between 2014 and 2019 but continued to be highly prevalent among children in poorer families (16.3%) compared to children in richer families (6.9%). (MICS6 2019).

Reply to paragraph 10 (i) of the list of issues

76. Access to safe drinking water is guaranteed for 98% of the population. However, in some communities, mixed consumption of treated and untreated water is still reported. According to WHO data (highlighted in yellow), in 2020, only 36% of households had access to safely managed drinking water, while 42% had access to basic improved water sources.

77. Similarly, in 2020, only 13% of households had basic sanitation services, and 55% of the population used a facility for handwashing with soap and water. Only 76% of schools in the country have access to basic sanitation services. However, there are significant data gaps for schools and other facilities.

Reply to paragraph 10 (j) of the list of issues

78. Fortunately, STP has not had any cases of mortality attributed to atmospheric pollution and is among the least polluted countries in the world. According to the World Bank data 2016, on average, mortality rates attributed to household and outdoor air pollution were 162 per 100,000 inhabitants in STP, which is lower than the average of 187 per 100,000 inhabitants for Sub-Saharan Africa, but much higher than the global average of 115 per 100,000 inhabitants.

Reply to paragraph 10 (k) of the list of issues

79. To combat the effects of climate change, the government has implemented a set of measures, including

- Construction of community protection works for schools in the Iô Grande community as part of the project to adapt to climate change in coastal areas. These works were necessary because the protective wall had been destroyed by the sea, putting students at risk of river flooding;
- Identification and resettlement of residents in coastal areas affected by climate change;
- Establishment of a ban on tree cutting;
- Prohibition of sand mining on beaches.

80. However, it is important to note that these measures were insufficient to prevent the floods that occurred at the end of 2021 and beginning of 2022, causing humanitarian crises and resulting in the death of three people, including two children, and the displacement of many families.

Reply to paragraph 11 (a) of the list of issues

81. The primary education enrollment rate is high, with 93% of primary school-age children enrolled and an 87% completion rate in 2019. However, access to early childhood education is not inclusive, with only 50% of children aged 3 to 4 enrolled in pre-primary education, and inequalities exist in access to lower and upper secondary schools. Basic education has the highest number of students, but only 40% of teenagers from poorer families attend lower secondary education, compared to 73% from wealthier families.

82. The government and development partners have made significant efforts to improve education in recent years, and according to the Educational Policy Charter 2012-2022, progress has been made in enrollment and completion rates for girls, children in rural areas, and those from low-income families and regions.

83. Over the past three academic years, pre-school enrollment in São Tomé and Príncipe increased from 11,970 in 2019/2020 to 13,744 in 2021/2022. In the first cycle of secondary education, enrollment decreased from 25,962 in 2019/2020 to 24,066 in 2020/2021 but increased slightly to 24,283 in 2021/2022. In the second cycle of secondary education, enrollment increased from 13,647 in 2019/2020 to 13,604 in 2020/2021 but decreased to 12,712 in 2021/2022.

84. In 2022, the government, with support from UNICEF, invested in strengthening the Early Childhood Education Improvement Program, involving the expansion of spaces to ensure access for 66 children from the poorest families in the community's quintile. Additionally, the itinerant education initiative, also implemented with UNICEF support, served 89 children, contributing to facilitating their transition to basic education.

85. School interventions in Água Grande and Mé-Zochi districts created inclusive and learning conditions for children with special educational needs. They rehabilitated and equipped specialized rooms with suitable resources and materials, enabling greater access to education for these students. These interventions aimed to guarantee access and inclusion for

all students, regardless of their physical or cognitive conditions, and included investments in teacher training, pedagogical resources, and school infrastructure for quality education.

Reply to paragraph 11 (b) of the list of issues

86. Regarding the strengthening of education and teaching quality, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (MECC) has adopted significant measures to improve educational provision in São Tomé and Príncipe. These measures include:

- Reducing the number of students per class to provide more personalized teaching and meet individual students' needs. Additionally, curricula were enriched, and conditions were created to ensure children and young people's longer stay in school;
- Continuing the expansion of basic education up to the 6th grade, which allows for more comprehensive and extensive training for students. Similarly, there has been an expansion of professionally qualifying secondary courses in all districts of the country, such as Educational Action, Early Childhood Education, Management and Administration, Environmental Tourism, Humanities, and Law.

Reply to paragraph 11 (c) of the list of issues

87. Several measures have been implemented to improve the quality of the public education service and learning in São Tomé and Príncipe. These include:

- Teacher training, equipment and transportation acquisition, revision and creation of regulations and instruments for the functioning of structures and services, learning evaluation, specialization of national staff, technical assistance, school health, and rehabilitation of educational establishments have been implemented to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools;
- 21 school gardens were revitalized and gas stoves were implemented in three schools;
- Continuous training of canteen staff and training in monitoring for school canteen managers through PNASÉ with financial support from the World Food Program (WFP) and the People's Republic of China;
- Distribution of school material kits for the most vulnerable children, hygiene kits for schools, and tele and radio classes for reinforcement and continuity of learning;
- A resilient system was created with the construction and installation of a recording studio and reprography of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (MECC);
- A digital education program implemented in partnership with support from donors and UNICEF.

Reply to paragraph 11 (d) of the list of issues

88. The national digital learning program in São Tomé and Príncipe aims to provide students with modern education for the 21st century. Financed by UNICEF with support from various donors, the program includes:

- Acquisition of 515 tablets and additional devices for the digital learning program, which aims to improve literacy and numeracy results;
- Training of 264 teachers as digital literacy trainers;
- Equipping 60 young volunteers with skills to support teachers in using technological resources;
- 372 teachers accessed the Akelius and Learning Passport platforms, and 268 participated in awareness-raising activities, registering for digital resources such as elementary and secondary textbooks available on the platform;

- UNICEF providing technical assistance to strengthen the education system in São Tomé and Príncipe through the optimal use of digital resources in the classroom;
- The School Management Reactivation Action System (SIGE) project aims to computerize classrooms and create databases throughout the education system.

Reply to paragraph 11 (e) of the list of issues

89. In São Tomé and Príncipe, the government encourages entry into secondary, technical, professional, and higher education through scholarships and supports equitable and inclusive access to education. The government, with support from UNICEF, the World Bank, the European Union, the GPE, United Nations agencies, and civil society, aims to prevent school dropout, early pregnancy, and violence and create alternative learning opportunities for adolescents through multisectoral measures and flexible learning pathways.

Reply to paragraph 12 of the list of issues

90. The minimum age for admission to work is 15 years, according to Article 268(2) of the Labor Code. However, paragraph 3 of the same article stipulates that a minor from 14 years of age who has completed compulsory education may perform light work, provided that the conditions established in the aforementioned provision are met.

91. According to the DPSSF/UNICEF report on the identification and monitoring of street-involved children in the context of the COVID-19 response, conducted in São Tomé in 2020, the minimum age for admission to work is 15 years, according to Article 268(2) of the Labor Code. However, paragraph 3 of the same article stipulates that a minor from 14 years of age who has completed compulsory education may perform light work, provided that the conditions established in the aforementioned provision are met.

Reply to paragraph 13 (a) of the list of issues

92. The age of criminal responsibility in São Tomé and Príncipe is from 16 years of age, as provided for in Article 19 of the current Penal Code. However, Article 9 of the same legal instrument provides that those over 16 years of age and under 21 years of age are subject to rules established in special legislation.

93. The Code of Juvenile Guardianship (Article 283) outlines the situations in which a minor can be detained, such as flagrante delicto or psychiatric evaluation. The judicial authority or any police entity may carry out the detention. If the minor cannot be presented to the judge immediately, they may be entrusted to their legal representative or institution where they are interned.

94. The Organization of Juvenile Guardianship Code allows for the detention of minors under certain circumstances, including flagrante delicto, presentation to the judge, application of precautionary measures, or psychiatric examination. Precautionary measures may include entrusting the minor to their legal representative, placing them in a reception institution, or an educational center, and are reviewed by the judge every two months.

Reply to paragraph 13 (b) of the list of issues

95. The Basic Law of the Judicial System provides, in article 57(b), for the possibility of creating family and juvenile courts, listing among their competencies the intervention in the decreeing of measures for minors aged between 12 and 16 who have been involved in acts qualified by criminal, contraventional, or administrative legislation. In this sense, there is a Civil Court for Family and Minors, in the Court of First Instance, specialized in these matters.

Reply to paragraph 13 (c) of the list of issues

96. The Code of the Organization of Minors' Protection includes a set of rules that aim to promote and protect the rights of children and youth in order to ensure their well-being and integral development, guided by the principles of the best interests of the child and youth, privacy, early, minimal, proportional and up-to-date intervention, parental responsibility, the prevalence of the family, mandatory information, mandatory hearing and participation, and subsidiarity.

Reply to paragraph 13 (d) of the list of issues

97. The alternative measures to detention provided for in Article 238 of the Code of Juvenile Organizational Law include a range of options. These include:

- Admonition;
- Delivery of the minor to parents, guardians, or persons responsible for their care;
- Deprivation of the right to drive mopeds or to obtain permission for such, reparation to the victim;
- Performance of economic services or tasks for the community;
- Imposition of conduct rules;
- Imposition of obligations;
- Attendance at training programs;
- Educational monitoring;
- Internment in an educational centre.

98. It is important to note that these measures are an alternative to detention and aim to protect the rights and interests of minors, providing them with opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration.

Reply to paragraph 13 (e) of the list of issues

99. According to the law, detention and custody measures are carried out in a semi-open or closed regime in an educational centre, preferably in a residential unit specially designated for this purpose, and minors are not detained together with adults. However, currently there is no educational centre designated for the detention of minors, resulting in the need for courts to order the custody of the minor by the legal representative.

Part two

Reply to paragraph 14 (a) of the list of issues

100. In São Tomé and Príncipe, new draft laws are being implemented to strengthen the judicial system and protect citizens' rights.

- The Witness Protection Act aims to ensure the safety and anonymity of witnesses during the judicial process, protecting them from retaliation or threats;
- The Asset Recovery and Asset Forfeiture Law aims to prevent corruption and ensure the recovery of assets acquired illegally;
- The revision and update of the Basic Law of the Judicial System aims to modernize and make the country's judicial system more efficient;
- The update and revision of the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure aims to ensure justice and equality before the law, as well as protect the rights of the accused;

- The update and revision of the Anti-Money Laundering and Counterterrorism Financing Law aims to combat these crimes and prevent money laundering.
101. Regarding regulations, the following stand out:
- The Framework Law on Special Education, Law No. 2/2021, aims to ensure access to quality education for all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities;
 - The Basic Law on Persons with Disabilities, Law No. 7/2012, aims to guarantee the protection of the rights of people with disabilities, promoting social inclusion and equal opportunities.

Reply to paragraph 14 (b) of the list of issues

102. Regarding the subject matter at hand, we would like to inform that proceedings are underway for the creation of a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), in accordance with the Paris Principles.

103. The Ministry of Women's Rights is a new institution responsible for promoting gender equality, protecting women and children's rights, and promoting social inclusion and development. Its mandate includes empowering women, mainstreaming gender in all sectors, combating gender-based violence, and promoting the rights of vulnerable groups. It also works on social protection for vulnerable families.

Reply to paragraph 14 (c) of the list of issues

104. In São Tomé and Príncipe, the Government has adopted a set of policies, programs, and action plans to ensure that children's rights are safeguarded. Examples include:

- The National Integrated Strategy for Education and Training of São Tomé and Príncipe (ENIEG) 2019-2026, which aims to improve the quality and equity of education throughout the country;
- The Child Assistance and Immunization Program (AII), which aims to improve child health through vaccination and the provision of preventive and curative health care;
- The National Social Protection Policy, which aims to provide support and assistance to vulnerable families and children at risk of social exclusion;
- The Participatory Strategy for Water and Sanitation (EPAS) of São Tomé and Príncipe for 2030, which aims to improve access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation throughout the country;
- The Educational Policy Charter (2012-2022), which defines the guidelines for the development of the education system in São Tomé and Príncipe.

Reply to paragraph 14 (d) of the list of issues

105. Instruments of international and regional law ratified by STP in 2018-2019:

- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities- Ratified pending deposit;
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography- Ratified and published in DR no. 173, of 26/11/2018 Res.114/X/10/2018;
- African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance- 27/06/2019;
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child-27/06/2019;
- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa-27/06/2019;
- African Youth Charter-27/06/2019;

- African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption-20/06/2019.

Part three

Data, statistics and other information

Reply to paragraph 15 of the list of issues

106. In São Tomé and Príncipe, the government has allocated a significant portion of its budget to social sectors such as healthcare, education, and social protection. In 2022, the healthcare sector received 16.26% of the budget, while education received 12.51%. The allocation for social protection, however, decreased to 1.88% in 2022, from 11% in 2020.

107. In terms of trends, there is an overall increase in the percentage of the budget allocated to the Health sector, which has gone from 14% in 2020 to 16.26% in 2022. On the other hand, there has been a decrease in the percentage allocated to the Education sector, which went from 11% in 2020 to 9.38% in 2021, before slightly increasing to 12.51% in 2022. The most significant decrease is observed in the percentage allocated to the Protection Social sector, which went from 11% in 2020 to 2.73% in 2021 and further decreased to 1.88% in 2022.

Reply to paragraph 16 (a) of the list of issues

108. In São Tomé and Príncipe, little is known about the leading causes of death among children aged 10-19; however, in 2019 among adolescent boys the leading cause of death was most often injuries (49%), whereas the leading cause of death for adolescent girls was most often non-communicable diseases (45%) and communicable diseases (31%). In addition, as many as one in four adolescent boys died from non-communicable diseases (27%) and communicable diseases (24%). It is notable that 8% of girls aged 15-19 died from maternal conditions. (UNICEF, Situation Analysis 2022)

Reply to paragraph 16 (b) of the list of issues

109. In São Tomé and Príncipe, there is limited data on VAC as there has yet to be a VAC prevalence study conducted in the country; thus, data that does exist on VAC comes mainly from MICS data. MICS data, however, are limited to child discipline among children aged 1-14. In 2019, 75% of children experienced some form of physical punishment and 14% experienced severe physical punishment.

110. In addition, 70% of children experienced psychological aggression. Only 9% of children aged 1-14 experienced only non-violence discipline. Boys (84%) and girls (82%) were equally likely to experience violent discipline, but boys (77%) were slightly more likely than girls (72%) to experience physical punishment.

Reply to paragraph 16 (c) of the list of issues

111. According to data released by the National Program to Fight against HIV/AIDS (PNLS), there are 39 children between 0 and 17 years old living with the HIV virus in São Tomé and Príncipe in 2022. This information emphasizes the importance of prevention and treatment policies and actions for HIV, especially to ensure the protection and guarantee the rights of children affected by the disease.

Reply to paragraph 16 (d) of the list of issues

112. According to the MICS 6 conducted in 2019, there was a 15% decrease in the proportion of women aged 20-24 who married or entered into union before the age of 18 between 2006 and 2019.

113. Teenage pregnancy is high, at 91 births per 1,000 in 2019, close to the average adolescent birth rate in sub-Saharan Africa. Teenage pregnancy is often a consequence of the challenges that adolescents face in accessing adolescent-friendly health services.

Reply to paragraph 16 (e) of the list of issues

114. We do not have specific information about cases of stateless children in São Tomé and Príncipe.

Reply to paragraph 16 (f) of the list of issues

115. We are not aware about cases.

Reply to paragraph 16 (g) of the list of issues

116. According to data from MICS 6, 2019, 13.9% of children aged 5 to 17 are involved in hazardous work, while 20.7% are involved in economic activities or domestic chores beyond the limits or in hazardous conditions. There were, however, notable differences based upon age. Adolescents aged 15-17 were most likely to engage in child labour (32%) and work in hazardous conditions (31%). Adolescents aged 15-17 were twice as likely to engage in child labour as children aged 5-11 (15%), and five times more likely to work in hazardous conditions as children aged 5-11 (6%).

Reply to paragraph 16 (h) of the list of issues

117. We do not have specific data on the number of children living on the streets, but it is evident that the trend is increasing. The government is committed to prioritizing the collection and analysis of data in this regard.

Reply to paragraph 16 (i) of the list of issues

118. The World Bank Report (2019) shows that poverty reduction in São Tomé and Príncipe has stagnated since 2010. In 2017, 30% of children under the age of 15 lived in households with per capita income below US\$1.90 per day, and 46% were among the 40% poorest of the population.

119. According to UNICEF (2021), 32.3% of the São Tomé and Príncipe population lived in monetary poverty, with 26.5% of children (0-17 years) and 30% of children under the age of five being multidimensionally poor. Poverty is more prevalent in rural areas and among female-headed households, where 32% of children live with their mothers.

Reply to paragraph 17 (a) of the list of issues

120. There are currently no public residential institutions in STP. The Government understand the importance of such facilities in providing support and care for vulnerable children, and we are actively working towards addressing this gap in our services.

Reply to paragraph 17 (b) of the list of issues

121. From the available data in 2022:

- Association for the Reintegration of Abandoned and At-Risk Children (ARCAR) operates a residential center for boys between the ages of 6 and 17, which houses a total of 47 children. Additionally, ARCAR runs two socio-educational support centers for children (serving 65 children and 95 children (45 boys and 50 girls between the ages of 4 and 14) respectively;

- The Água Porca center serves as a transitional home for young people aged 18 to 24 who are preparing to integrate into the workforce or continue their studies in higher education. It currently supports five young adults;
- The Cáritas de S.Tomé organization operates the "Casa dos Pequeninos" in Obô-Longo (Mé-Zóchi), which provides shelter and support for 34 children of both genders between the ages of 0 and 9 years. Of these, 11 are girls and 23 are boys;
- The Novo Futuro Foundation provides temporary accommodation and support for children and young people who lack a stable family environment. Its center in Budo-Budo (Água-Grande) houses 16 children, including 8 boys and 8 girls;
- Finally, the Centro Social Teresiano de Promoção da Mulher operates two centers that house a total of 19 girls between the ages of 12 and 21. Twelve girls reside in the center in Angolares (Cauê), while the remaining seven live in the center on Rua Padre (Água-Grande). These girls come from various communities in different districts and are students at the center.

122. Based on the 2021 data available, there has been an increase in the number of children (49) being served by these organizations.

Reply to paragraph 17 (c) of the list of issues

123. Lack of information systems in place to gather this data.

Reply to paragraph 17 (d) of the list of issues

124. Lack of information systems in place to gather this data.

Reply to paragraph 17 (e) of the list of issues

125. Lack of systems in place to gather this data but at the 'Casa dos Pequeninos' institution, there were 2 adoptions to families abroad, 6 children were reunited with their biological families, and 7 children were placed in foster care families.

Reply to paragraph 18 (a) of the list of issues

126. According to the available data from MICS 6, 2019, 17% of children between the ages of 2 and 17 have some form of disability, with 47% being female and 53% being male, with a higher incidence in the Lobata district. The country has not data systems to track the number of children with disability living with families.

Reply to paragraph 18 (b) of the list of issues

127. We do not have this information at present.

Reply to paragraph 18 (c) of the list of issues

128. In total, there are 40 children with motor, visual, and hearing impairments, 34 in primary education and 6 in secondary education.

Reply to paragraph 18 (e) of the list of issues

129. There are no special schools in STP but special and inclusive education.

Reply to paragraph 18 (f) of the list of issues

130. According to data from MICS, with regards to school attendance, taking into account the situation by gender and age groups, the data shows that 31.3% of the age group of 3 years or older, with disabilities, have never attended an educational institution.

Reply to paragraph 18 (g) of the list of issues

131. We do not have this specific data, but according to the 2012 Census, with regard to the analysis by gender and age groups of people with disabilities living alone, those aged between 10-19 years represent less than 1%.

Reply to paragraph 19 (a) of the list of issues

132. In 2021, around 300 children had contact with the justice system and administrative bodies, with 120 subjected to a non-custodial measure. In 2022, there were 45 cases of minors in danger and 6 cases of minors who committed crimes. Only one of the 6 cases of minors who committed crimes was referred to court, and the measure applied to the male minor is currently unknown.

Reply to paragraph 19 (b) of the list of issues

133. ARCAR has a diversion program for children (11-14 years) in conflict with the law, under the guidance of the Public Ministry, to provide care, rehabilitation, education, and behavior evaluation while the legal process runs its course. Once the process is completed, if rehabilitation is successful, the charges will be dropped by the Public Ministry.

Reply to paragraph 19 (c) of the list of issues

134. Legal aid is free for children in conflict with the law, from the moment the cases are brought to the attention of the Public Ministry, which is obliged to initiate the process and forward it to the family and minor court.

Reply to paragraph 19 (d) of the list of issues

135. As mentioned in question 19.a), children are considered unaccountable under the Penal Code, 2012, Article 19. Therefore, there are no cases of pre-trial detention for children in the country.

Reply to paragraph 19 (e) of the list of issues

136. Same as per our response 13 (e).

Reply to paragraph 19 (f) of the list of issues

137. As previously mentioned, under the São Toméan legal system, children are considered unaccountable.

Reply to paragraph 20 of the list of issues

138. The government is aware of the gaps and the need to create mechanisms for planning, implementing, and monitoring measures to achieve development objectives, including children's participation and data collection. To this end, the government is working with partners such as UN agencies and the World Bank to adopt evidence-based planning

strategies, including the development of administrative data collection mechanisms. This approach will result in lower resource costs for surveys such as MICS, Family Budget Survey, and others and allow for continuous updates of data rather than waiting every 5 years for MICS updates.

Reply to paragraph 21 of the list of issues

139. The most recent data has been included in the responses of this document.

Reply to paragraph 22 of the list of issues

140. List of areas of priority with regard to the implementation of the Convention:

- Lack of national data collection and analysis system to support evidence-based planning and monitoring of child-related policies and programs.
 - Limited access to quality healthcare services, including laboratory facilities, to address the health needs of children.
 - Limited access to education at all levels and among different social groups.
 - Insufficient support and services for children at risk, such as those living in difficult circumstances or with disabilities.
 - Limited awareness and understanding of human rights and national laws, including those related to child rights.
 - Limited inclusion of children with disabilities in society and services.
 - Lack of a national institution for human rights and inadequate resources for its functioning.
 - Inadequate economic, social, and cultural conditions necessary to meet the needs of citizens, including children.
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