



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination

against Women

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**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties
under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

Replies of Sao Tome and Principe to the list of issues and questions in relation to its combined initial and second to fifth periodic reports*

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



I. Introduction

1. It is now recognized at the international level that sustainable development, and in particular poverty reduction, cannot be achieved without the elimination of inequalities between men and women. This conviction is based on respect for the fundamental principle of equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex, without which it is not possible to build just, peaceful and developed societies.
2. These principles, enshrined in binding international legal instruments, give States a responsibility to respect, protect and promote universal human rights. This means that States must take appropriate measures in all areas of life – particularly in the political, social, economic and cultural spheres, and including legislative measures – to ensure the full participation and advancement of men and women. The objective is to guarantee the exercise and enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms on an equal footing, without discrimination.
3. Conscious of this requirement, the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 3 June 2003. Since then, it has committed to take a series of steps to eliminate discrimination against women in all its forms, beginning with the effective implementation of the principle of gender equality in the national legal system. It also committed to abolish all discriminatory laws; adopt laws prohibiting discrimination against women; establish courts and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women's rights against discrimination; and eliminate all acts of discrimination against women by individuals, organizations or businesses.
4. When Sao Tome and Principe ratified the Convention, it immediately committed to comply with its obligations thereunder, including the obligations to submit national reports at the established intervals and to implement the provisions of the Convention.
5. In order to fulfil its commitments in this regard and to meet the deadline established in article 18 of the Convention, the Government of Sao Tome and Principe is submitting its fifth periodic report as scheduled.

II. Methodology

6. The present report covers the period 2019–2022. It is based on contributions from a multisectoral technical team composed of representatives of the following institutions:

- Ministry of Women's Rights
- Office of Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Human Rights
- National Institute for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity
- Domestic Violence Advisory Centre
- Department of Social Protection, Solidarity and the Family
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communities
- Ministry of Health and Social Affairs
- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
- Ministry of Youth, Sport and Entrepreneurship
- Ministry of the Presidency and the Media

- Ad hoc Interministerial Commission on Human Rights in Sao Tome and Principe
- Platform for Human Rights and Gender Equity
- Association of Women Lawyers of Sao Tome and Principe
- Sao Tome and Principe Association for the Promotion of the Family

7. The team worked in accordance with the general guidelines established by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in close collaboration with the ad hoc Interministerial Commission on Human Rights, to prepare the report. It received technical assistance from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

8. The drafting process promoted a participatory approach and consultation with the various stakeholders involved in the promotion of human rights, including governmental, non-governmental and civil society organizations, at both the national and international levels.

9. Data were collected, documents were reviewed and information provided by the Advisory Committee, whose duties and responsibilities included participation in the collection of information and in the report analysis sessions, was processed.

10. The process culminated in a broad-based workshop with the multisectoral team, during which the fifth report was elaborated.

III. Responses to the list of questions from the Committee

11. The responses to the questions from the Committee regarding the combined initial and second to fifth periodic reports of Sao Tome and Principe regarding the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are provided below, in the order of the questions.

Visibility of the Convention and the Optional Protocol thereto

12. In order to promote the rights of women as set out in the Convention and the Optional Protocol thereto, the Government of Sao Tome and Principe is working in close collaboration with the National Institute for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity, the National Institute for Youth, the National Police, the Office of Human Rights and the Domestic Violence Advisory Centre, as well as various civil society organizations, including the Association of Women Lawyers of Sao Tome and Principe, the Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations of Sao Tome and Principe, SOS Women, the Association of Women Entrepreneurs, the Mama Catxina Association, the Platform for Human Rights and Gender Equity, the Forum of Women of Sao Tome and Principe, the Sao Tome and Principe Association for the Promotion of the Family, the Association of Blind and Visually Impaired People of Sao Tome and Principe, the Association of Persons with Disabilities of Sao Tome and Principe, Caritas and the Union for the Promotion of Sao Tome and Principe, among others. With the support of UNFPA, these organizations have carried out training and awareness-raising at the national level in order to ensure that everyone has access to knowledge about women's rights and that, in the medium term, men and women in Sao Tome and Principe will have equal rights and responsibilities.

Women's rights and gender equality in relation to the pandemic and recovery efforts

13. The Government of Sao Tome and Principe has taken several measures to address the needs resulting from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, including the following:

- Establishment of the Resilience Fund, by Decree-Law No. 7/2020, for certain emergency activities.
- Granting of financial aid to certain categories of workers, particularly those in the tourism, hotel and informal sectors.
- Issuance of a banking moratorium on the payment of taxes, social security contributions and other charges for all customers.
- Suspension of water and electricity payments and shut-offs for non-payment for a period of two months.
- Restoration of all water and electricity services that had been suspended for customers with outstanding payments, at no cost.
- Authorization of the payment of 85 per cent of the “overall value” of the salaries of private-sector workers through the Resilience Fund of the social security system, in order to avoid mass layoffs of private sector workers.
- Granting of payments in the amount of 600 dobras to workers outside the social security system.
- Delivery of training in mask-making to women from fishing communities, resulting in the production of 14,300 reusable masks.
- Adoption of the Socioeconomic Emergency Response Programme, which benefited 15,325 vulnerable families, including 2,543 families already in the Vulnerable Families social programme. Women comprised 78.5 per cent of these beneficiaries.
- Distribution of basic food packages, worth 600 dobras, to approximately 25,000 vulnerable families.

Health-related measures

- Increased distribution of condoms nationwide, in anticipation of an increase in unwanted pregnancies due to the lockdown.
- Organization of training to promote rural women's rights and sustainable food systems, with the aim of strengthening the technical and organizational capacities of rural women leaders in relation to the rights of women in rural areas, networking and the dissemination and use of agroecological notebooks, with the support of cooperation partners.
- Widespread distribution of masks, in collaboration with various civil society organizations, etc.

Legislative framework and definition of non-discrimination

14. Sao Tome and Principe, as a democratic State governed by the rule of law, has always adopted measures to prevent social discrimination. These measures are enshrined in article 15 of the Constitution, which provides that:

“1. All citizens are equal before the law, enjoy the same rights and are subject to the same duties, without distinction as to social origin, race, sex, political leaning, religious belief or philosophical conviction.

2. Women are equal to men in rights and duties, and their full participation in political, economic, social and cultural life is guaranteed.”

15. In order to guarantee respect for the principle of non-discrimination, many laws and legal regulations of São Tomé and Príncipe contain provisions on the prohibition and punishment of acts of discrimination. These include the Criminal Code (in particular, article 210, para. 2, and article 214), the Labour Code (articles 15–17, etc.), the Family Code (article 79, etc.), the Basic Act on the education system (article 2), the Basic Act on health (article 2) and the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Act (articles 15 and 25–29, etc.). Furthermore, in order to strengthen its efforts to combat against all forms of discrimination against women, São Tomé and Príncipe recently adopted Act No. 11/2022 on gender parity, which entered into force in November 2022, in accordance with its article 12.

16. Thus, the country has an adequate body of law to combat discrimination against women. However, the lack of human and financial resources to ensure effective implementation of these laws is a constraint.

Access to justice and legal complaint mechanisms

17. In order to improve women’s access to justice, measures have been taken to strengthen the institutional and technical capacities of the mechanism for combating gender-based violence. The following achievements have been made:

- Awareness-raising campaigns have been conducted to inform women, men, boys and girls about gender-based violence.
- Police officers, health-care workers and judicial officers have received training and capacity-building in assisting victims of domestic violence.
- The Association of Women Lawyers provides free legal aid to victims of gender-based violence.
- The process of establishing a common database (integrated system) for the collection of data on crime, including domestic violence, has begun.
- The Rede Vida network has been strengthened to accelerate the case resolution process, reduce revictimization, promote the protection and safety of victims and encourage the handling of their cases by the Prosecution Service.
- Services for victims of domestic violence have been decentralized in all districts and in the Príncipe autonomous region.
- A victim hotline, available during working hours, has been set up for communication with the Domestic Violence Advisory Centre (number 150), the police (number 113) and the fire department (number 112).
- The process of harmonizing Act No. 11/2008, on domestic and family violence, and Act No. 12/2008, on protection mechanisms for domestic violence victims, with the Criminal Code is under way.
- Rehabilitation and construction work was carried out on the courthouse in the city of Angolares, in the district of Caué, in order to bring justice services as close to the community as possible.

18. These measures are aimed at improving women’s access to justice and strengthening efforts to combat gender-based violence.

National machinery for the advancement of women

19. In 2017, training was carried out at the national and regional levels in order to raise awareness of gender-responsive budgeting and budget preparation methodologies among Budget Department staff, the leadership of the National Institute for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity and civil society.

20. Within the framework of the Programme for the Consolidation of Economic Governance and Public Finance Management Systems in African countries using Portuguese as an official language (Pro PALOP) project, the fifth parliamentary committee implemented a training and awareness-raising process on gender-responsive budgeting for members of parliament. In-house training has also been delivered to public administration employees, in particular those in administrative and financial departments, to ensure and monitor the application of this approach in the State budget.

21. In 2023, the Government, with financial support from the European Union, held a workshop to assess the status of gender mainstreaming in the management of the country's public finances. The new PEFA¹ gender module was used at the workshop. This module complements the diagnosis made in the standard PEFA assessments, which were conducted in Sao Tome and Principe in 2009, 2013 and 2019.

22. The objective of the workshop was to gather information on the capacity of the public financial management system of Sao Tome and Principe to meet the Government's objectives in relation to taking into account the different needs of men and women, as well as the needs of various subgroups of men and women. To that end, an analysis was conducted using the PEFA gender framework indicators. The differential impact of public policies on men and women as a result of their gender was also assessed at the workshop.

23. As a result, efforts were undertaken to include a gender-responsive budget for the water and sanitation sector in the general State budget for 2022, as indicated in chapter V.² In the proposed State budget for 2023, also in chapter V,³ gender indicators are included for all projects and programmes contributing to national development.

24. In partnership with various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Government has implemented capacity-building activities to promote the rights of rural women and foster sustainable food systems. These actions are aimed at strengthening the technical and organizational capacities of rural women leaders.

National human rights institution

25. The Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe has not yet established an independent national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles.

26. However, in order to meet certain human rights standards, it has established an Intersectoral Committee on Human Rights, which is responsible for elaborating reports on human rights required at the international level and following up on the implementation of the resulting recommendations.

27. The Office of Human Rights was established within the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Human Rights to coordinate the activities of the Intersectoral Committee, among other things. The Intersectoral Committee is an observer member of the network of human rights ombudspersons, commissions and other national human rights institutions of the Community of Portuguese-speaking

¹ Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability.

² Documents (gov.st).

³ <https://www.financas.gov.st/index.php/publicacoes/documentos/category/231-proposta>.

Countries. It is also recognized by the national human rights institutions of the African Union. In 2007, the National Institute for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity was created to promote and protect women's rights. In 2022, the Government incorporated the Ministry of Women's Rights into its organizational structure in order to strengthen its support for issues relating to the family, women, children and gender.

28. In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the establishment of a national human rights institution is an external commitment made by the State of Sao Tome, and that measures are currently under way to make this commitment a reality in the short term in Sao Tome and Principe.

Women human rights defenders and civil society

29. In Sao Tome and Principe, several NGOs are mobilizing to defend women's rights, such as the Association of Women Lawyers, the Platform for Human Rights and Gender Equity, the Association of Persons with Visual Impairments of Sao Tome and Principe, the Association of Persons with Physical Disabilities of Sao Tome and Principe, SOS Mulher, the Mama Catxina Association, the Women's Association and the Women Police Officers Network. Individual activists have also contributed, to a certain extent, to the increased visibility of women's issues and gender equality in the country.

Temporary special measures

30. The Government of Sao Tome and Principe has implemented a number of measures to accelerate the achievement of real equality between women and men, such as:

Political measures

- Election of a woman as President of the National Assembly
- Appointment of four women ministers
- Appointment of the first woman Inspector General of the National Police
- Gender parity in the collegial bodies of the public administration and public enterprises
- Launch of several awareness-raising campaigns on women's rights throughout the country

Legislative measures

- Legislative reforms to harmonize national laws with international standards on women's rights, including the adoption of new laws, such as the Family Act, the Labour Act, the Civil Service Regulations and the Parity Act, as well as other separate provisions
- Ratification of several international and regional conventions on human rights, including women's rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Optional Protocol thereto and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa
- Promotion of gender parity in the collegial bodies of the public administration and public enterprises
- Organization of several awareness-raising campaigns on women's rights throughout the country

Institutional measures

- Institutionalization of Committee IV and Committee V of the National Assembly
- Establishment of the Ministry of Women’s Rights
- Establishment of the Regional Secretariat for Social Affairs
- Establishment of the Institute for the Promotion of Gender Equality
- Establishment of the Domestic Violence Advisory Centre
- Establishment of the Family, Gender and Domestic Violence Advisory Office in the Principe autonomous region
- Establishment of the Youth Institute
- Establishment of the Department of Social Protection, Solidarity and the Family
- Establishment of the Office of Human Rights

Discriminatory stereotypes

31. Sao Tome and Principe is part of the wider world and, as such, cannot be entirely free of certain situations of discrimination against women. However, in comparison with other countries, there are no blatant gender stereotypes. If stereotypes exist, they are less visible.

32. Nevertheless, the Government has taken steps to prevent stereotyping and eliminate gender inequality in all aspects of social life. Such social awareness is essential to ensure that all people, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to succeed in life.

33. It is therefore necessary to continue to provide support for the efforts of the Government and civil society to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and promote gender equality. Such efforts should include policies and programmes to promote girls’ education and women’s access to health care, employment and leadership positions, as well as measures to combat violence against women.

34. In the media, the programmes “*A voz da mulher*” and “*Bem estar familiar*” have been produced.^{4,5}

35. As part of the “Smile for Life” project, the Youth Institute, in collaboration with UNFPA, conducted capacity-building for youth community leaders in all districts of the country.

36. The Ministry of Education, with support from UNFPA, organized two sex education training sessions for secondary school teachers. Other public and private institutions have implemented additional awareness-raising activities.

Gender-based violence against women

37. As mentioned above, several governmental and non-governmental institutions have developed training and awareness-raising activities to raise public awareness regarding the prevention of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. The objective is to raise societal awareness of women’s rights and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. As a result of these activities, there has

⁴ “Women’s voices”.

⁵ “Family well-being”.

been a significant increase in public denunciations of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women.

38. In collaboration with the competent entities, it has also been possible to improve the quality of legal frameworks and criminal laws concerning crimes of violence against women.

39. However, the country still faces difficulties in this area, particularly since there is no dedicated shelter for victims of domestic violence.

40. The Government has adopted a number of measures aimed at eliminating intimate partner and spousal violence, including:

- Support for victims and referral to the judicial authorities provided by the Domestic Violence Advisory Centre
- Awareness-raising regarding cardiovascular disease prevention and behaviour change in communities and schools, specifically targeted at youth, adolescents and couples
- Training and capacity-building to enable police officers and health technicians to identify cases of sexual violence and abuse
- Implementation of the Rede Vida action plan to prevent revictimization by ensuring the protection and safety of victims
- Decentralization of victim support services
- Initiation of the process of establishing a database for an integrated criminal data recording and transmission system

41. These measures have led to an increase in the number of reports at all points of contact with the relevant authorities throughout the country (district police stations, the judicial police, the Domestic Violence Advisory Centre, SOS Mulher, the Prosecution Service and the main hospital).

Trafficking and sexual exploitation

42. Trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation severely affect the life, personal freedom, sexual self-determination, and physical and moral integrity of the persons concerned. These acts are strictly prohibited and punishable under the laws in force in Sao Tome and Principe, including the Constitution and the Criminal Code. Articles 153–181 of the Criminal Code provide for criminal penalties for those who engage in trafficking in persons and the exploitation of prostitution.

43. In order to prevent and combat these practices, the country has ratified several international and regional conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; and the United Nations Convention against Corruption. The country also collaborates with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and other similar international institutions with a view to preventing and combating these practices.

44. Although there are no alarming signs of trafficking in persons in Sao Tome and Principe, specific training and awareness-raising actions have been carried out to prevent it.

Equal participation in political and public life

45. Articles 15, 57, 58 and 59 of the Constitution guarantee the participation of women in public life in a comprehensive manner. These articles recognize the equal rights and duties of men and women before the law and in terms of participation in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the country. They guarantee women the freedom to participate in political life and the running of the country's affairs, the right to vote, and access to public office under conditions of equality and freedom.

46. The Parity Act, No. 11/2022, specifically strengthens the right of women to participate in political and public life. It is aimed at promoting active gender equality policies that ensure the effective application of the principles of human dignity, justice and equality referred to above.

47. In order to promote the participation of women in political and public life, Sao Tome and Principe has ratified the main relevant international and regional conventions, as mentioned above. However, the simple existence of the Parity Act is not sufficient; training, information, awareness-raising and empowerment actions for women are also needed. These actions should be implemented gradually over time.

48. In conclusion, the presence of women in different areas of the civil service and a variety of social organizations is growing.

Nationality

49. The Directorate General for Civil Registration and Notarial Acts and UNFPA have conducted several free birth registration campaigns for children from 0 to 14 years of age as part of the "Leave No One Behind" programme. Following these campaigns, which were held throughout the country, approximately 98 per cent of the population was registered, according to the Directorate General of Registers and Notaries.

50. As part of the universal periodic review, in 2012 Sao Tome and Principe accepted the recommendations to accede to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons of 1954 and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness of 1961. However, the country has not yet taken the steps necessary to accede to these conventions. It is therefore important for Sao Tome and Principe to take concrete steps towards accession in the near future.

Education

51. Although there is no specific literacy campaign for women currently under way, the Government has planned to bring education to rural communities through the Education for All programme. In addition, access to schooling has been improved by increasing the level of compulsory education from sixth grade to ninth grade and by constructing and rehabilitating classrooms throughout the country.

52. Following a significant increase in the number of pregnancies among girls, changes have been made to the education regulations to enable pregnant girls to continue attending day school, in line with the Girls' Empowerment and Quality Education for All Project and the Education Policy Charter for the period 2019–2023.

53. There is no institutional practice designed to hinder women's participation in higher education in Sao Tome and Principe. Gender equality principles, as defined in the Constitution and other national laws, are respected. Men and women are thus free to pursue their studies in accordance with their availability and abilities.

54. The General Inspectorate of Education of the Ministry of Education is tasked with collecting all information related to cases of gender-based violence, including

sexual violence, perpetrated against children and adolescents in schools. The General Inspectorate is also responsible for taking administrative measures to punish the perpetrators and referring matters to the competent authorities for criminal prosecution, as necessary.

Employment

55. Men and women do not have equitable employment opportunities in Sao Tome and Principe, owing to historical differences in their respective levels of education, stemming in particular from sociocultural issues and the reproductive role of women, as well as a lack of support structures. This translates into significant differences between men and women in terms of occupations and workforce participation and, as a result, income. However, it is important to emphasize that, in accordance with articles 15 (paras. 1 and 2) and 43 (a) of the Constitution, there is no legalized discrimination.

56. The data from the general population and housing census of 2012, concerning the economic characteristics of the population, show that both men and women have access to formal employment in Sao Tome and Principe. This means that both women and men have the opportunity to participate in the labour market, although the proportion of women is lower. The active population aged 15 years and over comprises 56,295 people, of whom 61.8 per cent (34,813) are men and 38.2 per cent (21,482) are women. Most of these people (52.6 per cent) are under 35 years of age, with the highest concentrations in the 15–24 (19.6 per cent) and 25–34 (33 per cent) age groups.

57. Women are particularly predominant in the informal sector, where they are mainly engaged in service and sales activities. Women make up 58.9 per cent of workers in the trade sector, with men comprising only 41.1 per cent. It is worth noting that in Sao Tome and Principe, this profession does not require particular qualifications. In this regard, it is telling that women make up 71 per cent of the “unskilled workers” category.

58. Over the past five years, women’s participation in the informal sector has almost doubled. Women see this sector as an attractive option because it requires fewer qualifications and specializations. This type of work makes it easier to manage the double work day, is adaptable to financial needs and allows women to manage their time. In sum, the informal sector is a preferred source of employment for women, as it enables them to meet the increasing demands of their multiple roles, even if the income is modest (general population and housing census, 2012).

59. The Labour Code of Sao Tome and Principe does not provide for any type of wage discrimination between men and women. On the contrary, article 22 of the Code guarantees equal working conditions, including remuneration, for workers of both sexes.

60. In practice, there is no salary disparity in the public administration. Act No. 5/97, as amended in 2018, defines career paths and salary scales on the basis of categories, positions and seniority. Article 9 (b) of the Act stipulates that all workers have the right to remuneration in accordance with the law.

61. Sexual harassment in the workplace is prohibited and punishable under the laws of Sao Tome and Principe. However, combating sexual harassment in the workplace requires prevention and education measures, in addition to the punitive measures provided for under the law. Awareness campaigns are an important way to raise awareness within society and prevent this reprehensible practice.

Health

62. The public expenditure budget includes a line dedicated to reproductive health, covering mothers, newborn babies, children and adolescents, which has been included in the general State budgets submitted by successive Governments. However, it has never been possible to implement this budget line, owing to a lack of available funds. Nevertheless, related activities have been carried out with the financial support of cooperation partners such as United Nations agencies (the World Health Organization, UNFPA and the United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF]) and other bilateral partners.

63. There is no mandatory and periodic training plan; however, training on sexual and reproductive health and rights is common practice. It is carried out by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, with technical and financial support from UNFPA and the Global Fund. This training is not only for health workers but also for education system workers, youth associations, associations for key populations (men who have sex with men, and sex workers), rural communities, various professional groups, high school students, police officers and bar and nightclub operators throughout the country. For example, a training session was recently held for 210 primary and secondary school teachers (88 men and 122 women) as part of the Comprehensive Sex Education project.

64. In accordance with the users' bill of rights established by the Basic Health Act, patients have the right to freely refuse or accept medical treatment. This right is guaranteed by article 17 (b) and (g) of the bill of rights, pursuant to which users have the right to decide whether to receive or refuse the care offered to them, unless the law expressly provides otherwise. They also have the right to submit complaints about their treatment and, if necessary, receive compensation for damage suffered. However, some health-care institutions do not always respect these rights, which results in citizens being deprived of their basic rights.

65. The laws of Sao Tome and Principe prohibit all medical or scientific experiments on women without their prior consent, in accordance with article 4 (h) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which has been ratified by Sao Tome and Principe. Article 12 of the Constitution reaffirms that this prohibition has the force of law in the national legal order.

66. With regard to the question of legalizing abortion under certain circumstances, article 139 of the Criminal Code of Sao Tome and Principe decriminalizes abortion. This article also sets out the conditions under which abortion is permitted. In particular, it provides that abortions must be conducted by a physician in an officially recognized facility, that the pregnant woman must give free and spontaneous consent, and that abortions can only be performed during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

67. The State of Sao Tome and Principe does not engage in any discriminatory practices with regard to access to health care. In fact, the right to health is enshrined as a fundamental right in the country's Constitution, and all citizens are entitled to the same health benefits, without discrimination, and bear the same obligations.

68. The Ministry of Health does not currently have plans to identify fields where there are shortages of specialist doctors. However, the Ministry's national human resources policy (2019–2022) recommended the development of a training plan. This plan should be updated in the first half of 2023.

Economic empowerment and social benefits

69. The Government of Sao Tome and Principe has taken measures to eliminate the obstacles faced by women and develop their entrepreneurial skills. These measures include the following:

- In 2019, a social programme was implemented to help vulnerable families emerge from extreme poverty. This programme provides a regular (bimonthly) transfer of 1,200 dobras to families living below the extreme poverty line. This conditional transfer is intended to increase their human capital and eliminate generational poverty.
- Through the Self-employment Creation Support Initiative, which is a subcomponent of the Vulnerable Families Programme, in cooperation with the Professional Training Centre of Sao Tome, 67 beneficiaries from the Vulnerable Families Programme who had received vocational training have been given sums of money to finance their small investment projects (in the districts of Mé-Zóchi, Cantagalo and Lobata).

<i>Number of beneficiaries</i>	<i>Number of women beneficiaries</i>	<i>Age</i>
2 543	2 495	20–55

Rural women

70. Through the second Infrastructure Rehabilitation for Food Security Project (PRIASA II), the Commercialization, Agricultural Productivity and Nutrition Support Project, the Girls' Empowerment and Quality Education for All Project, the National Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme, the West Africa Coastal Areas Resilience Investment Project, the Road Maintenance Interest Group and NGOs such as the Instituto Marquês de Valle Flôr and a variety of civil society organizations, the Government of Sao Tome and Principe has implemented various actions to ensure that rural women and girls have access to basic services such as health care, family planning services, water, education, formal employment, social protection, justice, land and credit. However, women are still the main victims of poverty in the country.

Climate change and disaster risk reduction

71. With regard to climate change, there are no gender-specific laws applicable in the event of a disaster. Rather, women's vulnerability to disasters and catastrophes, as well as issues relating to women and resilience and climate change mitigation, are taken into account in policies such as the national gender equality and equity strategy, the nationally determined contribution, the participatory water strategy and the national climate change adaptation plan.

72. As part of the coastal areas climate change adaptation project, structures were built in the community of Ió Grande to protect the school, as the sea had destroyed the protective wall and the students were exposed to a flood risk from the river.

73. The women of the community participated in the construction of the structures. Through the Integrated Water Resources Management project, training has been delivered to (i) the members of the basin committees, on the issue of gender in the context of the management of the river basins of the island of Sao Tome (Ribeira Afonso and Neves rivers) and the island of Príncipe (Papagaio river); and (ii) women living near the Provaz river, on their role in the integrated management of water resources.

Women with disabilities

74. The Basic Act on persons with disabilities (Act No. 7/2012) was passed in 2012, but its implementing regulations are still being drawn up.

75. A complaints and claims resolution mechanism has been established as part of the Vulnerable Families Programme. This enables project beneficiaries and staff to report cases of gender-based violence, with a view to resolving them and ultimately reducing their frequency.

76. Each year, the State budget provides for an allocation of 775,000 dobras to three national NGOs (the Association of Blind and Visually Impaired People of Sao Tome and Principe, the Association of Persons with Physical Disabilities of Sao Tome and Principe and the Association of Persons with Hearing Impairments of Sao Tome and Principe). The payment of this amount depends on the availability of the funds in the budget. In 2022, 70 per cent of the amount was paid.

77. In addition to the assistance provided to NGOs, the Department of Social Protection, Solidarity and the Family supports individual persons with disabilities by providing a quarterly grant of 480 dobras. This financial assistance is called a “continuing pension” and is funded by the State budget.

78. With regard to education, the conditions in the country are insufficient to promote special education for persons with special educational needs, and there are not enough specialized vocational training centres. Owing to physical and social barriers, a large proportion of persons with disabilities do not have access to education.

79. As concerns health care and social assistance, there are insufficient specialized mechanisms to help children, adolescents, women and elderly persons with disabilities, as there are no mechanisms for the prevention of disabilities or programmes on neuro-psychomotor development. Furthermore, the lack of assistive devices is an obstacle to the social integration of persons with disabilities.

80. Although there are no specialized mechanisms in place, it should be noted that national laws guarantee equal access to medical and medication assistance, education and justice for persons with disabilities.

81. There is currently no specific assistance or resolution mechanism for handling the cases of women and girls with disabilities who are victims of gender-based violence, which underscores the need to establish specific procedures to respond to such situations.

Equality in family relations

82. As indicated in article 197 of the Family Code (Act No. 19/2018), unmarried couples and married couples are subject to the same rules with regard to the impediments set forth in articles 20–22 of the Code.

83. In accordance with the Family Code, men and women have the same right to remarry after a first marriage.

84. However, article 25 of the Code, which establishes requirements that men and women must meet in order to remarry, provides that men must wait 90 days after the dissolution of their previous marriage while women must wait 300 days.

IV. Conclusion

85. The analysis carried out allows us to conclude that, despite having limited economic and financial resources, Sao Tome and Principe has, on the whole, complied with its international commitments in terms of gender equality and equity.

86. The country has made significant progress towards gender equality in the area of education. The infrastructure put in place has enabled girls and women in urban and rural areas to have access to and successfully complete quality education and develop their leadership skills.

87. Significant improvements in the country's legal framework have contributed to the promotion of women's rights. However, despite these improvements, disparities in the enjoyment of these rights remain owing to inadequate dissemination of the laws and a lack of enforcement.

88. No affirmative action has been taken to reduce gender disparities.

89. The health-care sector now has a harmonized strategic and operational framework in place for effective gender mainstreaming. The entire population has access to health-care services.

90. Weaknesses in gender mainstreaming at the institutional level are particularly evident in relation to the budget, monitoring and evaluation, and institutional capacities concerning gender. Gender issues are not yet considered to be an organizational priority and references are often general and superficial.

91. It is imperative to significantly strengthen the capacity of most sectors to effectively mainstream gender, ensuring that institutions develop a genuine culture of gender equality.

92. It is clear that much more needs to be done to effectively promote gender equality and equity in Sao Tome and Principe. This requires an operational institutional commitment that is able to effectively support the correlation between gender and development, addressing the practical and strategic needs of men and women in order to promote their active participation in development and their equitable share in its advantages. In addition, it is imperative to improve awareness and the dissemination of women's rights.

Annex

Ad hoc committee for the preparation of the fifth report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

<i>Name</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Title</i>
Gregório Santiago	Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Human Rights	Superintendent/Senior Officer
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Carlos Lopes	GDR	National Director of Policy, Analysis, Inspection and Evaluation of MDM Projects
Jailça Lima	National Institute for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity	Senior Technician Third Class
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