

# NEWSLETTER



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# A year of Progress, Partnerships, and Resilience

**Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra**  
WHO Representative in  
Sao Tome and Principe

In 2025, São Tomé and Príncipe made notable progress toward a stronger and more resilient health system. Working with the Ministry of Health and partners, WHO supported efforts to reinforce equity, preparedness, and national leadership in public health.

A major milestone was the approval of the first National Health Financing Strategy, which sets a clear path toward greater financial autonomy and stronger Primary Health Care, and now serves as a reference for other Portuguese-speaking countries. This achievement was complemented by another key step in strengthening financial governance: the presentation of the National Health Accounts, which enhanced transparency and evidence-based decision-making by providing clear insights into how health resources are mobilized and spent. Together, these initiatives mark a decisive shift toward more efficient and accountable health sector financing.

The country also completed the Joint External Evaluation of the implementation of International Health Regulations, confirming significant progress and outlining priorities for the future National Multisectoral Action Plan for Health Security.

Immunization remains a national priority; with the financial support of Gavi, more emphasis was put in how to reinforce community engagement in order to reach the country historic coverage levels, including among the zero-dose children, and expanding HPV protection. Important advances were also made in noncommunicable diseases, with the validation of the 2026–2030 strategic plan, and in mental health, which is integrated into primary care services. The country further strengthened measures to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment, fully aligned with WHO's zero-tolerance policy.

As São Tomé and Príncipe prepares to host the Small Island Developing States Health Ministerial Meeting in 2026, WHO remains committed to supporting the country in transforming challenges into opportunities and ensuring that no one is left behind.

## São Tomé and Príncipe concludes Joint External Evaluation of the International Health Regulations with positive assessment



The Joint External Evaluation of São Tomé and Príncipe's capacities to implement the International Health Regulations (IHR) was officially concluded on December 12. The exercise, which involved 47 national experts from multiple sectors and 9 international experts, followed the standard methodology of the World Health Organization (WHO), evaluating 19 technical areas through 56 indicators and producing a strategic diagnosis of national capacities to prevent, detect, and respond to health emergencies.

The main findings of the evaluation confirmed consolidated progress in areas such as vaccination coverage, epidemiological surveillance systems, and strategic planning for emergencies. Simultaneously, a clear agenda of priorities for continuous strengthening was outlined, focused on reinforcing the IHR legal framework, consolidating the national laboratory system, integrated surveillance under the One Health approach, and emergency logistics.

The immediate operational result of this

process will be the development of a National Multisectoral Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS), which will translate the recommendations into concrete initiatives, timelines, and institutional responsibilities. The closing ceremony was chaired by the Minister of Labor, Solidarity, and Social Security, Jocerli Tiny, representing the Minister of Health, and by the WHO Representative in São Tomé and Príncipe, Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra. Both highlighted the constructive nature of the evaluation and the unequivocal commitment of all parties to follow up on its recommendations, thus marking a fundamental step in strengthening the resilience of the São Toméan health system and its alignment with the highest standards of global health security.

This process received full technical and methodological support from WHO, reinforcing its commitment to supporting Member States in assessing and strengthening their core. ■

## Country completes it's International Health Regulations self-assessment



Between November 3 and 7, São Tomé and Príncipe completed a rigorous self-assessment process of its core capacities under the International Health Regulations (IHR). This initiative, coordinated by the Ministry of Health in close partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the East, Central, and Southern Africa Health Community (ECSA-HC), mobilized a broad range of professionals from multiple areas and sectors.

The exercise represents a fundamental preparatory phase for the subsequent Joint External Evaluation, scheduled for December, in which a team of international experts will independently verify the country's level of preparedness and resilience. The IHR is the central international legal instrument for global health security, establishing a coordinated system for prevention, early warning, and rapid response to public health events that may constitute a public health emergency of international concern.



The successful completion of this self-assessment demonstrates São Tomé and Príncipe's firm commitment to strengthening its national health architecture, not only to protect its population but also to fulfill its collective responsibility in safeguarding global health security.

This process has received technical and strategic support from WHO, which accompanies Member States at all stages of IHR implementation, aiming to strengthen collective defenses against public health threats at local, regional, and global levels. ■

## Minister of Health and WHO Representative closely monitor vaccination recovery actions in the field

The Minister of Health, Dr. Celso Matos, and the WHO Representative in the country, Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra, conducted a field visit to monitor the Supplementary Vaccination Activity (SIA) aimed at recovering zero-dose children or those with incomplete vaccination schedules.

The initiative is part of the national effort "Achieve at least 90% vaccination coverage for the last dose of all EPI antigens, with the participation of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)," funded by the Gavi Alliance with assistance from the WHO country office in STP. This work complements the country's commitment to strengthening the Expanded Program on Immunization, whose vaccination coverage estimate was 87% according to the 2024 WUENIC report.

Focused especially on communities with least access to health services, the active search strategy showed significant results. Penta 3 coverage rose to 96%, while the RR2 vaccine evolved from values below 90% to 96.2% (administrative data). It is noteworthy that all districts achieved coverage levels above 90%. In total, six CSOs were involved in implementation—five on the island of São Tomé and one in the Autonomous Region of Príncipe (RAP).

During the mission, the delegation also monitored the supplementary vaccination campaign against Human Papillomavirus (HPV) in schools, reinforcing the protection of 10-year-old girls.

These actions reflect the ongoing commitment of the Ministry of Health, WHO, and international partners to strengthen the Expanded Program on Immunization, ensure equity in access to vaccines, and reinforce essential vaccination services across the national territory, leaving no one behind. ■



## São Tomé and Príncipe validates Strategic Plan to Combat Noncommunicable Diseases



São Tomé and Príncipe held the presentation and validation session for the Multisectoral National Strategic Plan for Noncommunicable Diseases, which will guide the national strategy for the prevention, management, and control of these diseases for the period 2026–2030. The document was developed with technical support from the World Health Organization, both at the national level and through its Regional Office for Africa.

The validation session, held on October 28, brought together health professionals and representatives from various sectors, emphasizing the need for an integrated and multisectoral approach to ensure the effective implementation of the plan. The event was attended by the Minister of Health, Dr. Celso Matos, who actively participated and integrated into the working groups for a detailed analysis of the main lines of intervention.

This direct involvement reflects the strong commitment of the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe to strengthening a more resilient and results-oriented public health system.

Through this collective effort, the country reaffirms its commitment to improving the quality of life of the population, establishing solid foundations for a healthier and more sustainable future. WHO's support for this strategic process is part of its mandate to support Member States in developing and implementing robust policies for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases, a central priority of the global public health agenda. ■



## District Health Teams in São Tomé and Príncipe prepare 2026 action plan



The District Coordination Teams of São Tomé and Príncipe met to develop the Health Areas Action Plan for the year 2026. This initiative of the Ministry of Health, with technical and financial support from the World Health Organization (WHO), represents an important step in consolidating a process initiated in 2024, with the objective of institutionalizing a standardized health planning model at the district level.

The workshop focused on reinforcing a culture of continuous planning cycles, highlighting the national commitment to more strategic, participatory, and results-oriented management. This exercise is fundamental to improving the organization and effective implementation of locally defined health priorities, ensuring that interventions respond to the specific needs of each community. By strengthening district planning and management capacities, the process contributes to the sustained improvement of health indicators and the provision of more efficient, equitable, and resilient services.

This activity is part of WHO's ongoing support for strengthening decentralized health systems, promoting institutional capacity building and data-based governance as essential pillars for achieving health outcomes.



## Minister of Health and WHO Representative review cooperation in São Tomé and Príncipe



The Minister of Health of São Tomé and Príncipe, Dr. Celso Matos, received in audience the Representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) in the country,

Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra, accompanied by his team, for a working meeting dedicated to analyzing the main areas of ongoing cooperation.



During the meeting, participants reviewed the findings and strategic recommendations from the recent technical support mission to the pharmaceutical sector, carried out by a team from the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ), a WHO collaborating center. Discussions also focused on furthering preparations for the upcoming Interministerial Health Meeting of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which São Tomé and Príncipe will host in 2026, as well as planning the national implementation of the joint medicines procurement initiative for SIDS. The discussion provided an opportunity to take stock of progress across key ongoing dossiers and to strengthen strategic alignment between the Ministry of Health and WHO.

This meeting reaffirms WHO's ongoing commitment to supporting Member States through regular political dialogue, qualified technical assistance, and strategic partnerships, with a view to strengthening their health systems and achieving public health objectives. ■

# São Tomé and Príncipe validates National Health Emergency Communication Strategy



An important step was taken with the technical validation of the National Strategic Plan for Risk Communication and Community Engagement (2026–2032) of São Tomé and Príncipe. A workshop organized by the Ministry of Health brought together representatives from government, non-governmental organizations, and partner agencies, ensuring that the plan is aligned with the requirements of the International Health Regulations (IHR), in which this area constitutes one of the 19 fundamental pillars.

The document, developed with technical support from the World Health Organization (WHO), is structured around four main strategic axes: internal communication and partner coordination; strengthening community communication; improving risk communication and community engagement; and strengthening public communication. After incorporation of final comments, the plan will proceed for final approval by the Minister of Health, prior to its operational implementation. This initiative represents a significant advance in building a more prepared, informed, and participatory public health system, capable of generating trust and responding effectively to future health emergencies.

The development of this plan reflects WHO's continued support to Member States in strengthening core IHR capacities, placing strategic communication and community participation at the center of public health crisis preparedness and response. ■



## National Health Accounts 2022–2023 was officially presented in the country



The Ministry of Health of São Tomé and Príncipe publicly presented the National Health Accounts for the 2022–2023 period. This strategic report provides a comprehensive overview of financial flows in the health sector, detailing the origin of resources, their allocation, and the areas in which they are invested. The data show relevant progress, including an increase in total health expenditure and a strengthening of the State's role as the main financier of the sector, an essential step towards building a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable health system.

The document also highlights the economic importance of investment in disease prevention, emphasizing that keeping the population healthy is, in terms of cost-effectiveness, more advantageous than treating established chronic diseases. At the same time, it warns of the burden of out-of-pocket payments borne by households, which can generate significant financial difficulties, making the monitoring of these expenses a central issue of equity and social justice. The analysis also shows that health challenges go beyond the exclusive scope of the Ministry of Health, requiring an intersectoral approach. The example of diarrhea illustrates this interdependence, since its effective prevention depends on coordinated actions between the health, water, sanitation, and hygiene sectors.

The publication of the National Health Accounts, with technical support from WHO, reflects the country's commitment to transparency, sound financial governance, and the strategic use of data to inform more effective and equitable public policies, in alignment with the goal of universal health coverage. ■

# São Tomé and Príncipe shares Health Financing Strategy in WHO international webinar



São Tomé and Príncipe participated in an international webinar on Health Financing, organized by the World Health Organization (WHO), which brought together more than 450 participants from various countries. During the session, Hugo Silva, Coordinator of the Health System Strengthening Office of the Ministry of Health of São Tomé and Príncipe, presented the country's experience in developing its first National Health Financing Strategy.

Developed with technical support from WHO and launched in July 2025, the strategy represents a significant milestone in strengthening a more resilient and progressively autonomous health system. The plan provides for the gradual replacement of external financing and out-of-pocket payments by households with sustainable domestic public financing mechanisms. The strategy is based on two operational pillars: "More health with available resources," focused on improving efficiency and optimizing the use of existing resources; and "More resources for health,"

focused on mobilizing additional domestic financing.

One of the central elements of the strategy is the prioritization of investment in Primary Health Care, recognized as the most effective and equitable approach to improving health outcomes and reducing the financial impact on households. By sharing its experience, São Tomé and Príncipe established itself as a relevant example for other developing countries seeking to strengthen the financial sustainability of their health systems. This initiative aligns with WHO's global commitment to support Member States in achieving universal health coverage through sustainable, equitable, and results-oriented health financing mechanisms. ■

## World Mental Health Day was celebrated with focus on access in emergencies

The central commemorations of World Mental Health Day in São Tomé and Príncipe were presided over by the Minister of Health, Dr. Celso Matos, and were attended by representatives of the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, partners, and health professionals. During the event, Minister Celso Matos emphasized that the country faces specific challenges in mental health and that it is imperative to adopt policies capable of responding to the current needs of the population.

On behalf of the WHO Representative in the country, the official message of the WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr. Mohammed Janabi, was delivered, reinforcing the importance of this year's theme: "Access to services: Mental health in disasters and emergencies." The ceremony highlighted the collective and urgent responsibility to protect and promote mental health before, during, and after crisis situations, reaffirming that mental health care constitutes an essential component of health systems and a fundamental lifeline, especially in periods of heightened vulnerability. This initiative demonstrates WHO's continued support to Member States in integrating mental health services into primary health care and emergency responses, promoting community resilience and well-being. ■



## São Tomé and Príncipe promotes safe work environment in the Health Sector



As part of the ongoing strengthening of health systems, São Tomé and Príncipe took a significant step by holding an advocacy and information session dedicated to the Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PRSEAH). The meeting, which was attended by the Minister of Health, Dr. Celso Matos, and his directors and department heads, had as its central objective the dissemination of the World Health Organization's (WHO) zero-tolerance policy regarding any form of sexual misconduct. The meeting served to lay the

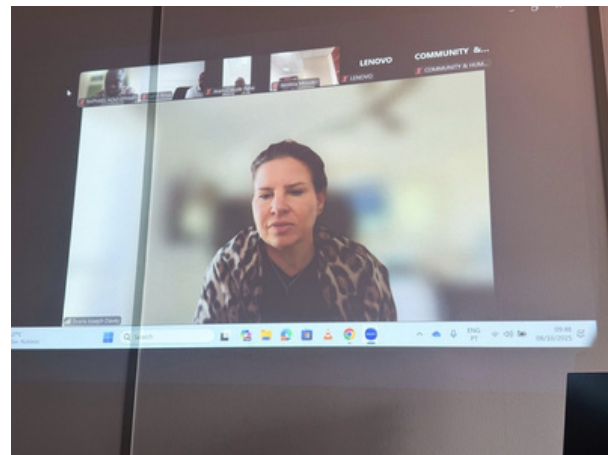
foundations for an integrated and robust approach to this issue in the country's health sector. This initiative marks the beginning of a reinforced commitment to protect the rights and dignity of all, with a view to fostering an institutional culture of prevention and effective response. The common goal is the construction of a more ethical, safe, and harassment- and abuse-free health sector, aligned with international standards and values promoted by WHO. This action is part of WHO's ongoing support to its Member States in promoting safe, respectful work environments free from all forms of exploitation and abuse, which are fundamental for the provision of quality health care. ■



# São Tomé and Príncipe advances toward Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV

São Tomé and Príncipe is at a decisive stage in the certification process for the Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV. In this context, the National Committee, composed of representatives from the Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, UNFPA, INPG, and Civil Society Organizations, met with the Regional Validation Secretariat for a comprehensive review of the national program. This evaluation included the implementation of activities, community engagement, safeguarding of human rights, quality of national data, and existing laboratory capacities.

The next step in the process will be the formal presentation of the results of this technical analysis, which will be followed by a field verification mission. This commitment reflects a strategic investment and a collective effort to ensure the health of mothers and children and to build a healthier future for the nation. This milestone is part of WHO's strategic support for Member States to achieve the global goals of eliminating vertical transmission of HIV, strengthening health systems, and promoting equitable care. ■



# STP develops National Plan for pandemic influenza mobilization, distribution, and vaccination

On November 18, São Tomé and Príncipe launched the workshop to develop the National Plan for Pandemic Influenza Mobilization, Distribution, and Vaccination.

The official opening ceremony of the event was chaired by the Minister of Health, Dr. Celso Matos, and the Representative of the World Health Organization in São Tomé and Príncipe, Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra. This workshop, which runs until November 21, is an important step in strengthening the country's preparedness for public health emergencies.

The main objective is to create a detailed operational plan for a coordinated, rapid, and equitable response in vaccine distribution, protecting the population of São Tomé and Príncipe from the threat of a pandemic.

This initiative is led by the Ministry of Health, with technical and financial support from the World Health Organization, bringing together a team of three international experts and approximately 50 national technicians from various sectors. At the end of the workshop, the main outcomes are expected to include a final strategic document, complementary technical reports, and a roadmap for the development of operational guides—all crucial tools for protecting public health against future health threats. ■



## São Tomé and Príncipe Integrates African Strategy for Health Supply Chains



A delegation from São Tomé and Príncipe, including representatives from the Ministry of Health and the national office of the World Health Organization (WHO), participated in the high-level "Blue Sky" workshop in Johannesburg, South Africa, promoted by the WHO Regional Office for Africa. The event, which took place from November 25 to 27, had as its main objective the formulation of a Regional Strategy for Market Structuring and Management of Essential Health Products Supply Chains across the continent.

Strengthening the pharmaceutical sector constituted a strategic priority for São Tomé and Príncipe throughout this process. The country's active participation in this forum underscored its commitment to collaborating in the construction of collective and sustainable solutions to shared public health challenges in Africa. This initiative was directly aligned with the national and global goal of achieving Universal Health Coverage, aiming to ensure equitable, reliable, and timely access to medicines and other essential health products.

The country's presence at this strategic meeting reflects WHO's continued support for strengthening health systems in Africa, with emphasis on creating robust regional markets and resilient supply chains for health products, which are fundamental for an effective response to the needs of populations. ■

## WHO Regional Conference on Prevention of Sexual Misconduct for partners



A delegation from São Tomé and Príncipe, composed of representatives from the Ministry of Health, participated in the African Strategic Conference on Prevention and Response to Sexual Misconduct in Joint Operations, organized by the World Health Organization (WHO) in Pretoria, South Africa. The event, which took place from November 17 to 21, brought together representatives from 46 African countries where WHO is present.

Over five days of intensive work, participants focused on developing and strengthening strategies to effectively integrate the prevention of and response to these behaviors into national health systems and emergency response mechanisms. The discussions emphasized the consolidation of shared responsibility in joint operations, reaffirming the collective commitment to the highest standards of ethics, safety, and protection in all public health actions.

São Tomé and Príncipe's active participation in this important continental meeting underscores the



country's ongoing commitment to aligning with international best practices and contributing to the construction of more resilient, safe, and rights-centered health systems.

The conference is part of WHO's institutional commitment to promoting safe, respectful work and operational environments free from exploitation and abuse, strengthening the technical capacities of Member States to implement zero-tolerance policies. ■



**Thank you for your collaboration with WHO in supporting the strengthening of the National Health System in São Tomé and Príncipe.**



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