

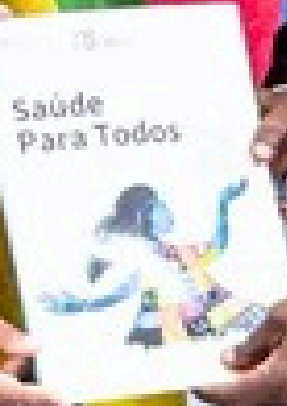
NEWSLETTER

EDITION: 05



Organização
Mundial da Saúde
São Tomé e Príncipe

JANUARY-MARCH 2026



SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE



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Building stronger foundations for health system progress

Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra

WHO Representative in Sao Tome and Principe



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As we begin the year 2026, I am pleased to share with you this first edition of the WHO Country Office Newsletter, which reflects the strength of our partnership with the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe and the collective progress we continue to make together to advance health for all.

The first quarter of the year has been marked by several important milestones. Notably, the strategic planning meeting held with the Ministry of Health in February, laid a solid foundation for the implementation of the 2026–2027 Biennial Workplan and WHO's Fourteenth General Programme of Work. This exercise reaffirmed our shared commitment to stronger alignment, improved coordination and results-oriented collaboration in addressing national health priorities.

This Newsletter also highlights key advances across a wide range of priority areas, including maternal and child health, HIV elimination efforts, noncommunicable diseases, mental health, cancer control, community health, disease surveillance and district health management. These achievements demonstrate the growing capacity of the health system and the dedication of national health professionals, with WHO continuing to provide strategic technical support grounded in evidence, equity and sustainability.

I am particularly encouraged by the country's steady progress in the validation process for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, the update of the National Mental Health Strategic Plan, and the validation of critical national strategies, including those for cancer control and community health. These efforts reflect a shared vision for a more resilient, inclusive and people-centred health system, firmly rooted in primary health care.

The signing of the 2026–2027 Biennial Work Plan further reinforces the strong partnership between WHO and the Ministry of Health. Guided by national priorities, this framework will support continued progress in health system strengthening, emergency preparedness, and improved service quality, while leaving no one behind.

As we move forward, WHO remains fully committed to working hand in hand with the Government, partners, health workers and communities to translate plans into action and deliver tangible health gains for the population of São Tomé and Príncipe.



WHO and the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe Sign the 2026–2027 Biennial Work Plan

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On March 12, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Ministry of Health signed the 2026–2027 Biennial Work Plan, reaffirming their strategic partnership to further strengthen the national health system.

The signing ceremony, held at the Ministry of Health, was attended by Minister of Health Dr. Celso Matos and the WHO Representative in São Tomé and Príncipe and their respective teams.

With a budget of approximately US\$ 2.52 million, the Plan focuses on five priority areas:

- Determinants of health and risk factors
- Strengthening primary health care and essential system capacities and data
- Improving equity and quality of health services
- Public health emergency preparedness and response
- Leadership, strategic communication, and results-based management

This Biennial Work Plan reinforces a strong and sustained partnership aimed at improving the health and well-being of the population of São Tomé and Príncipe.



WHO–Ministry of Health Strategic Planning Meeting



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From 17 to 20 February 2026, the World Health Organization (WHO), in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health, held a strategic planning meeting aimed at strengthening institutional collaboration and aligning priorities for the 2026–2027 biennium. The meeting marked an important milestone at the start of the implementation of the new Biennial Workplan and WHO's Fourteenth General Programme of Work (GPW 14).

Opening the meeting, the WHO Representative, Dr Abdoulaye Diarra, highlighted the importance of aligning WHO's technical cooperation with national health priorities to maximize impact, efficiency and sustainability of health interventions. He reaffirmed WHO's commitment to supporting the Government in strengthening health systems and advancing progress towards universal health coverage and health security.

Representing the Minister of Health, Dr. Martinho Nascimento, chef de cabinet, emphasized the value of joint planning, clearer coordination mechanisms and mutual accountability between the Ministry of Health and WHO.



He stressed that enhanced collaboration and streamlined procedures are essential to accelerate health outcomes and ensure effective delivery of services to the population. The meeting focused on improving the performance of WHO's technical support, reviewing achievements and challenges of the 2024-2025 biennium, strengthening teamwork within the WHO Country Office and enhancing collaboration with key departments of the Ministry of Health. Through interactive sessions and joint discussions, participants validated key recommendations and reaffirmed their shared commitment to the effective implementation of the 2026-2027 workplan, laying a solid foundation for strengthened partnership and improved health results.



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São Tomé and Príncipe moves forward in the validation process for the Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV

São Tomé and Príncipe hosted, from March 23 to 27, 2026, a visit by members of the Regional Validation Committee (RVC) as part of the international certification process for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

At the onset of the mission, the World Health Organization (WHO) Representative in the country, Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra, met with Dr. Raphael Adu Gyamfi and Mr. Christopher Chime, members of the RVC, before the official launching of the technical verification activities, data review, and field assessment.

The mission builds on a process initiated in late 2023 and follows the first validation phase conducted online in October 2025, representing a decisive step toward international recognition of the progress achieved by São Tomé and Príncipe.

As part of the visit, the RVC delegation was received by the Minister of Health, Dr. Celso Matos, who highlighted the advances made in maternal and child health and reaffirmed the Government's strong commitment to consolidating gains in HIV control. Key operational aspects essential to strengthening the validation process were also discussed.

The main objective of the mission was to assess the country's progress, review the data and evidence presented in the National Report, and identify any areas that may still require strengthening, ensuring full alignment with WHO international standards. The dialogue reinforced strategic alignment between the Ministry of Health, WHO, and the Regional Validation Committee, creating favorable conditions for the next stages of the process.

With the conclusion of this mission, it is expected that solid evidence will be assembled demonstrating that São Tomé and Príncipe meets all the necessary criteria to formally proceed with



the validation request, reaffirming its commitment to maternal and child health and to a future free of HIV. The WHO validation mission independently concluded that São Tomé and Príncipe has made progress in meeting some of the required criteria for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, through a rigorous assessment of data, laboratories, programme implementation, and human rights principles. Program strengths and potential gaps requiring attention were identified, and the findings will serve as the basis for the next steps in the regional and global validation process.

São Tomé and Príncipe validates the National Cancer Control Strategic Plan 2026–2030



São Tomé and Príncipe took a decisive step in strengthening its national response to cancer with the validation of the National Cancer Control Strategic Plan 2026–2030 on March 12, 2026. The plan was developed with technical support from WHO and represents a significant advance in a context where cancer accounts for approximately 13% of all registered deaths.

The Plan proposes an integrated approach to strengthen prevention, screening, early diagnosis, access to essential treatment and palliative care, as well as health information systems and the cancer registry. Special emphasis is placed on primary health care and health literacy to reduce late-stage diagnoses.

In recent years, the country has strengthened its cancer response through increased political commitment to noncommunicable disease control, a nationally covered health system rooted in primary health care, and concrete advances such as HPV vaccination, establishment of cytology and pathology services, and improved diagnostic capacity. These efforts are complemented by awareness campaigns, a functioning hospital cancer registry, international technical partnerships, and telemedicine experience.

With the validation of this Plan, São Tomé and Príncipe takes a strategic step toward saving more lives, ensuring more coordinated responses, and sustainably strengthening the national health system.



Training in the Autonomous Region of Príncipe Strengthens NCD Response

The Ministry of Health, with WHO technical support, organized a training workshop aiming to strengthen the capacity of the health personnel of Dr Manuel Quaresma Dias da Graça hospital in Príncipe Island to implement the new protocols on noncommunicable disease (NCD) control.

Following the rollout of the HEARTS hypertension protocol in late 2025, new protocols for diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases (such as asthma), and early cancer detection, developed by WHO, are now being implemented by countries.

Around 20 health professionals, including doctors and nurses, participated in the training, promoting simplified, standardized, and effective clinical approaches. According to Dr Joyce Pina, head of nurse service in the hospital, “this training is the timeliest welcome as we assist to the rise of the number of patient consulting for diverse reasons linked to NCD”.

The next phase will see the protocols expanded to primary health care teams on São Tomé Island, ensuring nationwide implementation.

e national territory, leaving no one behind.



Promoting children’s heart health by providing free cardiac screening



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On January 19, the Ministry of Health, in partnership with WHO, the Ministry of Education, and the NGO Closson Non, launched a free cardiac screening campaign (echocardiograms) for children.

The campaign raises awareness about the importance of keeping good buccal hygiene, preventing the risks of untreated throat infections, which can lead to rheumatic heart disease, a preventable yet leading cause of heart disease among children and adolescents.

The pilot phase targets over 2,000 children in primary schools in Pantufo and Praia Gamboa, addressing a major public health challenge in low-income settings.



WHO Strengthens Sentinel Influenza Surveillance in São Tomé and Príncipe



WHO strengthened sentinel influenza surveillance with the delivery of IT equipment, office supplies, and laboratory consumables to the Ministry of Health on March 10.

Valued at US\$ 42,508, this support enhances national referral laboratory and epidemiological surveillance capacity, essential for early detection of respiratory viruses and other public health threats.

The materials were handed over by WHO Public Health and Disease Control Officer Jessica Veiga Soares, on behalf of the WHO Representative, to Dr. Martinho Nascimento, Director of Cabinet, representing the Minister of Health.

The supplies will improve sample processing, data management and flow, communication between the central level and the sentinel sites, and laboratory biosafety.

[Know more](#)



São Tomé and Príncipe advances in developing a new National Mental Health Strategic Plan



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São Tomé and Príncipe has taken another important step in strengthening mental health services with the launch of the update of the National Mental Health Strategic Plan. From March 16 to 27, psychologists, physicians, nurses, and Ministry of Health representatives met to review and strengthen the national strategy in this priority area with the technical support of the WHO country office.

With technical support from the World Health Organization (WHO), the initiative aims to update the previous plan (2014–2018), aligning it with the most recent global and regional guidelines and with current mental health challenges in the country.

The updated Strategic Plan will enable:

- Greater alignment with international mental health guidelines
- Strengthened promotion and delivery of mental health services within primary health care and community services
- Effective integration of mental health across all levels of the health system
- Improved data collection, analysis, and use for evidence-based decision-making

This process reaffirms São Tomé and Príncipe's commitment to a more inclusive, integrated, and people-centered health system, recognizing mental well-being as a core pillar of public health.





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São Tomé and Príncipe Validates the National Community Health Strategy 2026–2030

On March 10, the Ministry of Health validated the National Community Health Strategy 2026–2030, developed with WHO technical assistance.

The Strategy aims to strengthen the country's capacity to respond to public health needs by promoting decentralized services, community engagement, and improved access to health care, particularly for vulnerable populations.

This milestone marks an important step toward a more resilient, inclusive, and community-centered health system.

WHO and JICA Strengthen Strategic Dialogue on Maternal and Child Health

On February 10, the WHO Representative, Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra, met with representatives of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). JICA remains a key strategic partner in improving maternal and child health services, supporting technical capacity building and service quality for women and children. The discussion was about finding ways and opportunities of collaboration aiming to strengthen the health sector in São Tomé and Príncipe.

Both institutions reaffirmed their commitment to continued collaboration with the Ministry of Health, aiming for stronger coordination and sustainable health outcomes.



São Tomé and Príncipe advances in developing a new National Mental Health Strategic Plan

On March 13, a working meeting was held at the United Nations Conference Room with Regional Health Coordination Teams, aimed at strengthening the organization and management of the district health approach in São Tomé and Príncipe.

The meeting brought together representatives from the Ministry of Health national, regional and district levels and the health system cluster team of the WHO country office, fostering the exchange of experiences and joint reflection on strategies for more effective, results-oriented district health implementation and management.

Discussions focused on new approaches to district management organizations and the introduction of integrated supervision tools designed to improve health service performance and quality. The session also outlined next steps to strengthen leadership, coordination, and district-level accountability. This initiative forms part of the ongoing effort to consolidate decentralized health systems that are more efficient, coordinated, and closer to communities, reinforcing the role of districts in delivering high-quality health care.





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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