

SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE*

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Summary

The 2024 Population Census in São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) reports a total population of 209 607, with 48 per cent male and 52 per cent female. The census data, however, inadequately represents persons with disabilities, estimating a prevalence of 2-4 per cent, similar to the 2012 Census. While the 2024 Census focuses on visual, hearing, and motor disabilities, it lacks data on other disabilities, hindering a comprehensive understanding of the situation.

São Tomé and Príncipe ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), but its practical implementation remains limited. While the CRPD automatically becomes part of the national legal system upon ratification, specific legislation and policies are needed to ensure its full application. The existing Basic Law for the Protection of People with Disabilities, enacted in 2012, needs to be updated to align with the CRPD's standards and obligations.

A review of disability rights in STP reveals a lack of progress towards a human rights-based approach, ten years after ratifying the CRPD. Existing laws still favour substitution decision-making over supported decision-making for persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities face numerous challenges across various domains, including inadequate government support, and barriers to education, employment, and justice. A Disability Strategy is currently being drafted, and if approved, it will provide a useful framework for addressing these challenges. This process presents also an opportunity for broader legal reforms to ensure that other national laws align with the CRPD.

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STP's government has not designated a CRPD monitoring body (article 33), and the responsible ministry lacks capacity. While women and youth are represented in parliament, persons with disabilities are not, and disability rights are rarely addressed. The disability movement in STP is relatively small and nascent, with three dominant disabled people's organisations (DPOs), representing physical, visual and hearing disabilities. The umbrella DPO, Federação das Associações de pessoas com Deficiência de São Tomé e Príncipe (FADSTP), was recently established. There is a need to invest in the expansion and diversification of the movement with a view to include emergent and marginalised groups and infuse youth leadership and ideas.

1 Population indicators

1.1 What is the total population of São Tomé and Príncipe (STP)?

According to the preliminary results of the 2024 Population Census, the total population of the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) is 209 607, comprising 99 820 males (48 per cent) and 109 787 females (52 per cent).¹

1.2 Describe the methodology used to obtain the statistical data on the prevalence of disability in STP. What criteria are used to determine who falls within the class of persons with disabilities in STP?

In July 2025 the National Statistical Office (INE) published census data on the 2024 Population and Housing Census. From the Report, which is generic and not focused solely on disability, it is not immediately clear which methodologies and questions were used in the 2025 Census.² However, the report states that 'each resident was asked whether they were affected by certain types of disability, including visual and hearing disabilities, as well as difficulties in being able to move around independently'.³ For the purpose of the Census, INE considered persons with disabilities those who responded that: i) they have great difficulty seeing or cannot see; ii) they have great difficulty hearing or cannot hear; and iii) they have great difficulty moving or cannot move at all.⁴ This approach represents a slight change in the manner in which the 2012 Census was conducted. The methodology adopted to collect data in the 2012 Census, is based on the question: 'Do you have a disability?' and requires a 'yes/no' answer.⁵ Both the 2012 and 2024 Census methodological approaches are inadequate and are widely acknowledged for their tendency to underrepresent persons with disabilities, consequently leading to inaccurate estimates that typically range between two and three per cent.⁶ Indeed, similar to the 2012 results, data generated in 2024 is limited to specific types of disabilities. While the 2012 Census data focuses on visual disability, hearing disability, physical disability, and 'mental disability', the 2024 Census only focuses

1 National Institute of Statistics 'Preliminary global results of the Fifth General Population and Housing Census' (2025) <https://www.ine.st/index.php> (accessed 29 October 2025).

2 As above.

3 INE 'Report of the Fifth General Population and Housing Census' (2024).

4 As above.

5 Instituto Nacional de Estatística 'Fourth General Population and Housing Census – 2012: Population with disabilities' (2013).

6 D Mont 'Measuring disability prevalence' World Bank Social Protection Discussion Paper 0706 (2007); ME Loeb, AH Eide & D Mont 'Approaching the measurement of disability prevalence: The case of Zambia' (2008) 2 *Alter* 32.

on the first three types of disabilities. Finally, the definition used in the 2012 Census is not human rights based as it focuses on person limitation without consideration of the environment – it is not clear which definition was used for the 2024 Census.⁷

1.3 What is the total number and percentage of persons with disabilities in STP?

The recently published report with data from the 2024 Census, does not indicate the prevalence of disability in STP, presenting instead data disaggregated by three types of disabilities (see 1.6). However, our estimates, based on available data, suggest that the disability prevalence in STP is between two and four per cent. Data from the 2012 Census, indicates a disability prevalence of 3,5 per cent, equivalent to 6 274 people. Regionally, disability prevalence varies with some countries with data like those of STP (Togo 1,3 per cent; Gabon 2 per cent) while others present figures at significantly higher rates (Nigeria 7 per cent,⁸ Cameroon 10 per cent).⁹

1.4 What is the total number and percentage of women with disabilities in STP?

According to the 2024 Census, 2,37 per cent (4 968) of the total population are women with disabilities, while 1,63 per cent of the total population (3 417) are men.¹⁰

1.5 What is the total number and percentage of children with disabilities in STP?

In the overall results of the Fifth General Population and Housing Census, it is not possible to extract these data. However, based on data from the 2012 Census, STP has a total of 62 291 children aged between 0 and 11. According to the UNICEF study, 709 children in this age group were identified as being at risk of developmental issues and/or disabilities, which represents 1,14 per cent of the total population in this age group. More recent data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2019) reveals that 18 per cent of children aged between two and 17 have functional difficulties in at least one domain.¹¹

1.6 What are the most prevalent forms of disability and/or peculiarities to disability in STP?

An analysis of the incidence rates by type of disability, based on national data from the 2024 Census, reveals the following:

Visual disability

- Almost one in every 100 people (0,95 per cent) has difficulty seeing.

7 Global Disability Fund 'Situational analysis on the rights of persons with disabilities in São Tomé and Príncipe: Country full report' (2025).

8 National Bureau of Statistics 'Water, sanitation and hygiene: National outcome routine mapping: A report of findings' (2020).

9 UNRPD 'Situational analysis of the rights of persons with disabilities in Cameroon: Country Brief' (2023).

10 INE (n 3).

11 UNICEF 'Multiple indicators cluster survey 2019' (2020).

- Seven (7) in every 1 000 people (0,07 per cent) cannot see and are considered blind.
- Highest proportion of blindness: Lemba (0,13 per cent) and Caué (0,11 per cent) districts.
- Lowest proportion: Príncipe (0,04 per cent), Lobata (0,06 per cent), and Mé-Zochi (0,06 per cent) districts.

Hearing disability

- Twenty-one (21) in every 1 000 people (0,21 per cent) have difficulty hearing.
- Five (5) in every 1 000 people (0,05 per cent) cannot hear (deaf).
- Deafness affects men (0,07 per cent) more than women (0,04 per cent).
- Most prevalent in Lemba (0,14 per cent) and Lobata (0,09 per cent) districts.

Motor disability

- Affects men and women almost equally at the national level.
- Fifty (50) in every 1 000 people (0,50 per cent) have mobility difficulties.
- Twenty-four (24) in every 1 000 people (0,24 per cent) are unable to move.
- Most prevalent in Lemba (0,36 per cent), Mé-Zochi (0,32 per cent), and Cantagalo (0,29 per cent) districts.

In the publicly available document presenting the global results of the 2024 Census, only data related to three categories (visual, hearing, and motor) is presented, and it is not possible to determine whether data related to other types of disabilities such as psychosocial and intellectual disabilities was captured during the Census. Therefore, the existence of such data, its scope, and any related prevalence rates cannot be confirmed from the version of the results made public.

2 São Tomé and Príncipe's international obligations

2.1 What is the status of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in STP? Has STP signed and ratified the CRPD? Provide the date(s).

STP ratified the CRPD on 5 November 2015.

2.2 If STP has signed and ratified the CRPD, when is/was its country report due? Which government department is responsible for the submission of the report? Has STP submitted its report? If not, what reason does the relevant government department give for the delay?

STP's Initial Report to the CRPD Committee was due to be submitted in 2017. Regrettably, the country has yet to fulfil this obligation. The limited capacity and the apparent lack of prioritisation of disability appear to be the reasons for the delayed submission of the Report. The Human Rights Office (GDH), which is part of the Ministry of Justice, advises the government on the implementation of human rights treaties, and takes the lead in preparing reports to the UN treaty bodies. However, in the years since ratification of the CRPD, the drafting and submission of the Report has not been treated as a priority by the São Toméan state. The lack

of technical expertise, human and financial resources compromise the ability of this office to adequately fulfil its functions.

- 2.3 While reporting under various other UN instruments, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, or the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, has STP also report specifically on the rights of persons with disabilities in its most recent reports? If so, were relevant concluding observations adopted? If relevant, were these observations given effect to? Was mention made of disability rights in STP's UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR)? If so, what was the effect of these observations/recommendations?**

Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

On 27 January 2021, STP was examined during the third UPR cycle of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The review report highlights the ratification of the CRPD as a significant advance. However, the UPR documents mainly focus on gender-based violence, children's rights and labour codes, without explicit reference to persons with disabilities.¹² Although the ratification of the CRPD is highlighted and welcomed, there are no specific recommendations related to the rights of persons with disabilities.

CRC Committee

In 2023 the CRC Committee issued its Concluding Observations which resulted from the Fifth and Sixth Periodic Reports of STP. In it the CRC Committee dedicated a full section with recommendations on children with disabilities. Briefly, the Committee recommended to STP:

To adopt a human rights-based approach regarding children with disabilities and review its legislation and policies accordingly...; b) To improve data collection, analysis and disaggregation¹³... conduct a study on the situation of children with disabilities and ... develop a policy and a strategy on children with disabilities, with the participation of children ... (c) To establish a system for disability assessment and the referral of persons with disabilities and ensure its uniform and harmonized application across different sectors ... (d) To strengthen support for the parents of children with disabilities and ensure the right of those children to grow up in their family environment ... (e) To ensure access to high-quality health care, including by providing early identification, intervention and rehabilitation programmes and training ... (f) To allocate adequate financial, human and technical resources and seek international cooperation and assistance to develop an inclusive education system ... (g) To address cases of violence and abuse and strengthen awareness-raising activities to combat stigmatization and promote a positive image of children with disabilities as rights holders.¹⁴

12 Human Rights Council 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: São Tomé and Príncipe' A/HRC/47/16 (15 April 2021).

13 By 'age, sex, ethnicity, nationality, disability, geographical region, socioeconomic status and form of care'.

14 CRC Committee, Concluding Observations on the Combined Fifth and Sixth Periodic Reports of São Tomé and Príncipe, 23 June 2023, UN Doc CRC/C/STP/CO/5-6 (2023) 10.

CEDAW Committee

The Concluding Observations on the Combined Initial and Second to Fifth Reports of STP noted, with concern:

The inadequate resources allocated to preventing and addressing gender-based violence against women and girls, limited access to legal aid for victims of domestic violence, the lack of adequate shelters ... and the lack of victim support services, in particular for women belonging to ethnic minorities and women with disabilities.¹⁵

However, no recommendations include women and girls with disabilities.

2.4 Was there any domestic effect on STP's legal system after ratifying the international or regional instruments in 2.3 above? Does the international or regional instrument that has been ratified require STP's legislature to incorporate it into the legal system before the instrument can have force in STP's domestic law? Have STP's courts ever considered this question? If so, cite the case(s).

At the moment, the line ministry through the national directorate of social action, and support from UNICEF, is implementing two recommendations of the CRC Committee, namely:

b) conduct a study on the situation of children with disabilities and ... develop a policy and a strategy on children with disabilities, with the participation of children"; (c) establish a system for disability assessment and the referral of persons with disabilities and ensure its uniform and harmonized application across different sectors.¹⁶

According to article 12(2) of the Constitution of STP:

International treaties and agreements duly ratified and approved shall enter into force in the internal legal order after their official publication and for as long as they are internationally binding on the State of São Tomé and Príncipe.¹⁷

This means that ratified international treaties – including the CRPD – automatically become part of the national legal system once they have been ratified and published, without the need for a new national law to incorporate them. These treaties have infra-constitutional and supra-legal legal force, which means that they are below the Constitution but above ordinary laws. However, although they formally enter the national legal order, their practical application often depends on the adoption of specific domestic legislation, regulations or public policies to give effect at the administrative, judicial and social levels.

2.5 With reference to 2.4 above, has the CRPD or any other ratified international instrument been domesticated? Provide details.

As per the Constitution of STP once international treaties and agreements are ratified and approved, they become part of the national legal system. However,

15 CEDAW Committee, Concluding Observations on the Combined Initial and Second to Fifth Reports of São Tomé and Príncipe, 31 May 2023, UN Doc CEDAW/C/STP/CO/1-5 (2023) 7.

16 CRC Committee (n 14) 10.

17 Constitution of the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, Law 1/2003, published in the Official Gazette 2 of 29 January 2003.

although from a legal-formal point of view, the CRPD domestication took place with the ratification, the practical implementation of its provisions is still limited. The country already had a Basic Law for the Protection of People with Disabilities, approved in 2012, even before the Convention was ratified, but this law was not updated to reflect the international standards and obligations introduced by the CRPD. The Law needs to be revised and brought into line with contemporary human rights principles.

In addition, the Constitution of the Republic as well as the Labour Code (Law 6/2019) establish general principles of equality and non-discrimination, applicable to all citizens, including persons with disabilities. However, it does not include specific provisions on reasonable accommodation, accessibility measures or other material guarantees provided for in the CRPD. In short, despite the automatic domestication provided for in the Constitution, STP has not yet materialised the material domestication of the CRPD through legislative, administrative and public policy measures that guarantee its full application. There is therefore an urgent need to update the national legal framework and implement effective mechanisms to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities.

3 Constitution

3.1 Does STP's Constitution contain provisions that directly address disability? If so, list the provision, and explain how each provision addresses disability.

The Constitution of STP does not make any direct reference to the rights of persons with disabilities, although it recognises other groups such as children, youth and older persons.

3.2 Does STP's Constitution contain provisions that indirectly address disability? If so, list the provisions and explain how each provision indirectly addresses disability.

Article 15 of the STP Constitution enshrines the principle of formal equality, guaranteeing that 'all citizens are equal before the law, without discrimination'.¹⁸ However, one of the main challenges of constitutional law is to ensure material equality, which requires specific measures to combat real inequalities. For groups in vulnerable situations, such as persons with disabilities, the effective application of this principle implies the adoption of inclusive policies and affirmative action, in order to guarantee true equality and not just theoretical equality.

18 As above.

4 Legislation

4.1 Does STP have legislation that directly addresses issues relating to disability? If so, list the legislation and explain how the legislation addresses disability.

In 2012, STP passed a specific disability law (*Lei de Base para as Pessoas com Deficiências*).¹⁹ The Law generally prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities. However, it encompasses a limited set of rights, including education, healthcare, and employment; while excluding rights such as access to justice, equal recognition before the law, and accessibility, among others. In the law, 'disability' is defined as 'any permanent or transitory loss or abnormality of a psychological, physiological or anatomical function that generates an inability to perform an activity, within the standard considered normal for human beings'. The Law, places greater importance on rehabilitation of persons with disabilities (see articles 8, 9, 10 and 11), and prevention (see articles 7 and 26). Rehabilitation is conceived with a view to 'fixing' or 'compensat[ing] for loss of function or functional limitation'. Moreover, the Law adopts a restrictive view of who persons with disabilities are, and in doing so goes against the provisions of the CRPD by not recognising that 'disability is an evolving concept'. In doing so, the Law also leaves other groups of persons with disabilities unprotected, such as those with albinism, short stature, deaf-blindness, intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, among others. The legal approach to disability bears a resemblance to the medical model, which posits that persons with disabilities are incapable and necessitate intervention to 'correct' their condition. This understanding of disability is not grounded in the human rights approach enshrined in the CRPD.²⁰

4.2 Does STP have legislation that indirectly addresses disability? If so, list the main legislation and explain how the legislation relates to disability.

Article 138 of the Civil Code states that:

All those who, due to psychic abnormality, deafness-muteness or blindness, are incapable of governing their persons and property may be interdicted from exercising their rights, and who, after being decreed an interdict by court judgement, are treated as minors.²¹

Article 21 of the Family Code states, among others, that the following constitute impediments to a marriage if the person concerned has: 'a) Notorious dementia, even during lucid intervals, and [a person] interdicted or declared incapacitate due to mental condition'.²²

Article 211 of the Penal Code states the following, in relation to discrimination:

19 Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities, Law 7/2012, published in the Official Gazette 110 of 12 September 2012.

20 As above.

21 Civil Code approved by Decree-Law 47 344 of November 1966.

22 Family Code, approved by Law 19/2018 of the National Assembly on June 29, 2018.

Anyone who publicly discriminates against a disabled person, a person with an infectious or contagious disease or a sick person because of their disability or illness shall be punished with imprisonment of up to 2 years or a fine of up to 200 days.

The same penalty applies to anyone who, for the same reasons, does not grant a job to a disabled person, provided that their disability is not incompatible with the job in question.²³

This review confirms that the medical/pathological view of disability informs law and policy making in STP, and that a paradigm shift toward a human rights approach is yet to happen ten years after the ratification of the CRPD. Moreover, the review also confirms that existing laws continue to promote the substitution decision-making model in the exercise of legal capacity by persons with disabilities rather than the supported decision-making model with necessary safeguards, provided for in contemporary human rights standards.

5 Decisions of courts and tribunals

5.1 Have the courts (or tribunals) in São Tomé and Príncipe ever decided on an issue relating to disability? If so, list the cases and provide a summary for each of the cases with the facts, the decision(s) and the reasoning.

No.

6 Policies and programmes

6.1 Does STP have policies or programmes that directly address disability? If so, list each policy and explain how the policy addresses disability.

There is an ongoing process of adoption of the National Strategy for the Inclusion and Participation of People with Disabilities in STP. The Strategy, which was developed with the support from United Nation Country Team, is a planning instrument that aims to guide the implementation of concrete and structured actions for the direct benefit of persons with disabilities. The Strategy prioritises legal reforms, including the review and regulation of the *Lei de Bases*, improvements in data collection (statistic and administrative data), accessibility, and civic participation. The Strategy, which has span of five years, ultimate goal is to ensure the full inclusion and citizenship of São Toméans with disabilities.

6.2 Does STP have policies and programmes that indirectly address disability? If so, list each policy and describe how the policy indirectly addresses disability.

The Government of STP, with support from World Bank, implements the *Programa Família*, which aims to guarantee schooling for families in vulnerable situations. It

23 Penal Code approved by Law 6/2012, published in the Official Gazette 95 of August 2012.

includes a bi-monthly transfer – 1300STN (\$58). The programme benefits 5 000 families and more than 16 000 children. The amount was established based on the 2017 Family Budget Survey and corresponds to 20 per cent of the expenses of an average family. These transfers are primarily to support children's education (purchase of materials, etc). However, the programme does not take into consideration disability specific costs, and in the programme administration, there is no distinction between families with children with disabilities and those without. For instance, a child with albinism to be able to go to school, it is essential that they have access to sunscreen to protect their skin against the sun. Failure to do so may result in skin cancer. In fact, it can be argued that promoting education of children with disabilities without consideration of disability cost, is detrimental to their inherent dignity, wellbeing, and in this case to the life of persons with albinism.

7 Disability bodies

7.1 Other than the ordinary courts and tribunals, does STP have any official body that specifically addresses violations of the rights of persons with disabilities? If so, describe the body, its functions and its powers.

The Government of STP has not formally designated any CRPD monitoring body to comply with article 33 of the CRPD. Parliament has a crucial role in monitoring human rights processes, and in the implementation of treaties and existing legislation at the national level. While women have secured representation in parliament, and there is a child-youth parliament that meets annually, there are no known representatives of person with disabilities in parliament. In fact, it is uncommon to see actions from members of parliament on disability rights issues.

7.2 Other than the ordinary courts or tribunals, does STP have any official body that though not established to specifically address violations of the rights of persons with disabilities, can nonetheless do so? If so, describe the body, its functions and its powers.

The National Institute for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity (INPG) was established in 2007 as the public entity responsible for the execution of government gender policies. INPG is under the Ministry of Justice and is also tasked with advising the government in implementing gender related policies. In this capacity, INPIEG played a significant role in the adoption of the parity law, a gender sensible budget, and advocacy for ratification of the Maputo Protocol. Notwithstanding these achievements and the strategic role, the INPIEG plays, the institute does not have the same protagonism when it comes to promoting the rights of women and girls with disabilities.

8 National human rights institutions, Human Rights Commission, Ombudsman or Public Protector

- 8.1 Does STP have a Human Rights Commission, Ombudsman or Public Protector? If so, does its remit include the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities? If your answer is yes, also indicate whether the Human Rights Commission, Ombudsman or Public Protector has ever addressed issues relating to the rights of persons with disabilities.**

There is not an independent human right monitoring body as per the Paris Principles in STP at the time of writing. Nonetheless, with the support from United Nations Country Team, there is ongoing work to establish an independent human rights monitoring mechanism as per the Paris Principles.²⁴ Potentially, this mechanism will be designated to fulfil the state obligations under article 33(2) of the CRPD.

9 Disabled peoples organisations (DPOs) and other civil society organisations

- 9.1 Does STP have organisations that represent and advocate for the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities? If so, list each organisation and describe its activities.**

The disability movement in STP is relatively small and nascent, with three dominant DPOs, namely:

- *Associação dos Cegos e Ambliopes de São Tomé e Príncipe* (ACASTEP): established to represent persons with visual disabilities and advocate for their inclusion in society.
- *Associação dos Deficientes de São Tomé e Príncipe* (ADSTP), established to represent persons with physical disabilities, promote their rights and inclusion in society; and
- *Associação dos Surdos de São Tomé e Príncipe* (ASSTP), representing persons with hearing disabilities, and promoting their rights and inclusion in society.

Recently, however, few groups are emerging, including the *Associação Santomense de Apoio a Pessoas com Albinismo* (ASSAPA), representing persons with albinism, and their plans to establish an organisation of women with disabilities.

The umbrella DPO organisation, *Federação das Associações de pessoas com Deficiência de São Tomé e Príncipe* (FADSTP), was recently established, and aims to unite the movement and present a unique front in the fight for inclusion for persons with disabilities in STP. There is a need to expand and diversify the movement with

24 M Lourenço 'São Tomé and Príncipe moves forward in creating an independent body for the defence of human rights (São Tomé e Príncipe Avança na Criação de Órgão Independente para Defesa dos Direitos Humanos)' *Zunta TV* 26 February 2025 <https://zuntatv.st/sao-tome-e-principe-avanca-na-criacao-de-orgao-independente-para-defesa-dos-direitos-humanos/> (accessed 12 July 2025).

a view to include emergent and marginalised groups and infuse youth leadership and ideas.

9.2 In the countries in STP's region (West Africa) are DPOs organised or coordinated at national and/or regional level?

FADSTP is the national umbrella DPO and aims to unite the movement and present a unique front in the fight for inclusion of persons with disabilities in STP.

9.3 If STP has ratified the CRPD, how has it ensured the involvement of DPOs in the implementation process?

As mentioned above, STP is yet to establish the coordination, implementation and monitoring bodies under article 33 of the CRPD. DPOs have reported dissatisfaction with the way consultation processes are carried out, which are often conducted in inaccessible venues without the support and accommodation for persons with disabilities – such as sign language. They reported that to participate in consultations only the established groups are invited, and the process usually takes place late in the process and in a hurry.²⁵

9.4 What types of actions have DPOs themselves taken to ensure that they are fully embedded in the process of implementation?

Most DPOs are primarily focused on providing services and peer support. While they offer valuable contributions to their members, they have limited advocacy skills, and their leaders often possess modest educational backgrounds and limited leadership abilities. Additionally, DPO leadership structures tend to be male dominated, predominantly consisting of senior individuals.

9.5 What, if any, are the barriers DPOs have faced in engaging with implementation?

Advocacy skills are constrained, and many of the DPOs prioritise providing services and distributing donations to their members. They lack full-time staff and primarily conduct work through volunteers. Some DPOs lack internal governance instruments and policies, and where they do exist, their implementation is problematic. Funding sources to support DPOs' work are severely limited. Consequently, DPOs' ability to influence policies and programmes remains constrained.

9.6 Are there specific instances that provide 'best-practice models' for ensuring proper involvement of DPOs?

The draft of the Strategy on Inclusion and Participation of Persons with Disabilities can be described as an example of meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities. The draft of the Strategy was accompanied by an extensive consultation, which included workshop, key informant interviews and focus groups with persons with disabilities in their diversity. Appropriate support and accommodation were provided, including support for transport. These consultations led to the drafting of a Situational Analysis Report on the rights of persons with disabilities. This Report

25 Global Disability Fund (n 7).

provided the evidence necessary for identifying priorities for the movement and the most effective strategies to achieve the Strategy's goals.

9.7 Are there any specific outcomes regarding successful implementation and/or improved recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities that resulted from the engagement of DPOs in the implementation process?

There are limited instances of DPOs successfully influencing policies, partly due to the aforementioned limitations in their advocacy capacity. Nevertheless, although not yet implemented, the Strategy described above, upon approval, could potentially be one of the successful outcomes resulting from engagements with DPOs. Another notable example is the advocacy carried out by ACASTEP, the DPO representing persons with visual disabilities, which led the Ministry of Health to issue a ministerial order granting free consultation exclusively to persons with visual disabilities. However, the absence of a well-defined protocol for accessing these benefits has resulted in their inaccessibility.

9.8 Has your research shown areas for capacity building and support (particularly in relation to research) for DPOs with respect to their engagement with the implementation process?

Generally, there is limited research on disability in STP, and both qualitative and quantitative data on disability to inform policy decisions are scarce. In terms of priority, there is a need to shed light on the economic, social, and political inclusion of persons with disabilities in STP. Research towards this end would contribute immensely to policy making.

9.9 Are there recommendations that come out of your research as to how DPOs might be more comprehensively empowered to take a leading role in the implementation processes of international or regional instruments?

The Situational Analysis Report has identified the following key points:

- To support persons with disabilities and their representative organisations to conceptualise and implement an advocacy and awareness raising strategy targeting key stakeholders, including public administration, service providers and development partners to promote inclusion, access to services, and information and participation in decision-making processes by all persons with disabilities (for example, deafblind persons, persons with albinism, persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities, persons with multiple disabilities, women and girls with disabilities, etc).
- To support the Federation of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities to mobilise and support the establishment of emergent and marginalised groups, and increase the capacity, including at grassroots level, to monitor the implementation of development and humanitarian programmes and policies.

9.10 Are there specific research institutes in your region that work on the rights of persons with disabilities and that have facilitated the involvement of DPOs in the process, including in research?

No.

10 Government departments

10.1 Does São Tomé and Príncipe have a government department or departments that is/are specifically responsible for promoting and protecting the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities? If so, describe the activities of the department(s).

The Government through the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MTSSS in Portuguese) to coordinate, implement, and mainstream disability inclusion in public programmes is limited. MTSSS, deal with other groups considered ‘vulnerable groups’ (children, elderly), is under-resourced and understaffed. MTSSS generally operates from a social action perspective and not from a human rights prism. State officials in key departments lack the knowledge needed to advance disability inclusion in line with CRPD obligations.

11 Main human rights concerns of people with disabilities in São Tomé and Príncipe

11.1 What are the contemporary challenges of persons with disabilities in STP?

In STP, the main contemporary challenge is poverty. Although official statistics are lacking, the structural barriers faced by persons with disabilities, coupled with the pervasive stigma and discrimination directed towards them, renders society unprepared to accommodate them effectively. Consequently, they endure a state of poverty and marginalisation, often resorting to begging in the capital, São Tomé.

11.2 Describe the contemporary challenges of persons with disabilities, and the legal responses thereto, and assess the adequacy of these responses.

Education: there is need for conceptual clarity – a clear articulation of the concept of inclusive education as stated in the CRPD. Moreover, there is need of credible data of children with disabilities in and out of school, and a compressive approach to accessibility – one that goes beyond physical adjustments. In addition, personalised support for persons with disabilities is important for an effective enjoyment of an inclusive education environment. In this respect it is important to ensure that existing *Programa Família* be reviewed to ensure families with children and young adults with disabilities have dedicated disability support scheme to enable them offset specific disability cost.

Employment: interviews with persons with disabilities and representatives of vocational training centres, suggest that two primary obstacles impede employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Firstly, the barriers encountered in accessing education and vocational training result in a lack of qualifications. Secondly, the legal and policy framework (as pointed above) lacks support for facilitating employment for persons with disabilities.

Access to justice: the laws of STP (ex The Civil Code) prevent persons with disabilities from exercising full legal capacity. This affects the ability of persons with disabilities to participate in the justice system as a victim of crime, a person suspected or accused of a crime, or a witness. In terms of what needs to be done to ensure access to justice, stakeholders suggested that: i) there is need to restore full legal capacity to all persons with disabilities, through a reform of legal provision on guardianship, primarily in the Civil Code; ii) training be conducted on the rights of persons with disabilities for all stakeholders within the justice system, including judges, prosecutor, lawyers, police, among others; iii) a disability bench book be developed to assist and guide stakeholders in the justice system on how support inclusion of persons with disabilities; and iv) physical access is ensured, including information access to all person with disabilities, through adoption of standards of accessibility.

11.3 Do persons with disabilities have a right to participation in political life (political representation and leadership) in STP?

At the moment of writing, there is no legal obligation to designate members of parliament with disabilities, and there are not known representatives of persons with disabilities in parliament. As mentioned above, the women movement managed to secure representation in parliament, through the parity law. However, these benefits are not extensive to women with disabilities. There are not women with disabilities in parliament and in any other political collegial bodies. Women with disabilities have fewer opportunities to participate in decision making forums and their representative organisations are generally weak and not properly represented in the broader movement of persons with disabilities, which is still dominated by older male voices and non-disabled voice.

11.4 Are persons with disabilities' socio-economic rights, including the right to health, education and other social services protected and realised in STP?

With regard to education and other social services, see question 11.2 above.

11.5 Specific categories experiencing particular issues/ vulnerabilities.

Persons with albinism face heightened risks due to the inaccessibility of sunscreen and the limited availability of dermatological services. Sunscreen is not included in the list of essential medicines, which makes it expensive and difficult to find in the local market. At the time of the writing of the Situational Analysis Report, there was no qualified dermatologist in the country. Treatment, including preventive treatment such as screen for skin cancer, is provided through a cooperative arrangement with Portugal, which periodically dispatches specialists. This cooperative framework also encompasses the provision of dermatological services remotely through telemedicine.

12 Future perspective

12.1 Are there any specific measures with regard to persons with disabilities being debated or considered in São Tomé and Príncipe at the moment?

The primary objective of the movement at present is the implementation of the Strategy for Inclusion and Participation of Persons with Disabilities. The movement anticipates that the adoption of this Strategy will facilitate the long-awaited review of the Disability Law and its Regulations.

12.2 What legal reforms would you like to see in São Tomé and Príncipe? Why?

The process of regulation of the Disability Law (Lei de Bases), has been on for some time. This process represents an opportunity to re-think, more broadly, the rights of persons with disabilities in light of the CRPD standards. Critically, this process should start by revision of the Law itself – the law was adopted before the ratification of the CRPD – to address the gaps and generally bring it closer to the standard of the CRPD. The review of Lei de Bases, should open up discussion about much bigger reform aimed to align other national laws with the CRPD.