



Migration Profile

SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

A. Executive Summary

São Tomé and Príncipe is an African country that includes several islands located in the Gulf of Guinea. The country gained its independence from Portugal in 1975ⁱ, and since then, it has experienced different migration flows. Immigration comes mainly from Cape Verde, Angola, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and Portugal.ⁱⁱ Emigrants from São Tomé and Príncipe, instead, are about 20% of the population,ⁱⁱⁱ and their main destinations are Portugal, Angola, Gabon, Cape Verde, and Equatorial Guinea.^{iv}

Regarding asylum, although the country is a party to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees,^v there is no national legislation concerning persons in need of international protection.^{vi} Therefore, the country does not grant any asylum or refugee status, nor has it established a system to protect refugees.^{vii}

São Tomé and Príncipe faces many challenges affecting the country's economy,^{viii} and the most critical one is lack of jobs, which prevents it from developing efficient production of goods and services on the scale needed to meet the demand of local and export markets.^{ix} Because of its geographical location, export expenses are also high, preventing the diversification of its economy and making it more vulnerable to change.^x

In 2021, São Tomé and Príncipe's GDP amounted to 547,092,915^{xi}, with an annual growth rate of 1.8%.^{xii} In 2020, foreign investment (FDI) net inflows represented 10% of the country's GDP.^{xiii} Instead, in 2018 the inflation rate was 7.9%.^{xiv}

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

In 2021, São Tomé and Príncipe had 223,364 inhabitants.^{xv} Covering an area of 1,001 sq. km, it is the smallest African country. It is divided into two provinces: São Tomé (to the south, the largest island) and Príncipe (north).^{xvi} The country includes several islands in the Gulf of Guinea, sharing maritime borders with Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon.^{xvii} The capital is São Tomé and is the most populated city, with 73,000 inhabitants.^{xviii}

The official language is Portuguese, but Creole and other local languages are also spoken.^{xix} Regarding religion, most of the population (around 70%) is Catholic. Only 5% belong to the Pentecostal Church, 3% to the Evangelical Church, and 2% to the New Apostolic Church.^{xx} As

far as ethnic groups, most of them are *mestiços* (a mix of Portuguese settlers and enslaved Africans). In addition, there are Angolares (descendants of enslaved Angolans), Forros (descendants of formerly enslaved people), and a minority of Europeans (less than 1,000).^{xxi} Its economy is based on the service sector and cocoa exports.^{xxii}

II. International and Internal Migration

In 2020, the number of immigrants living in the country was 2,139 people, representing less than 1% of the whole population.^{xxiii} A breakdown by gender among the international migrant population does not reveal any significant difference, as women and men represent 49.9% and 50.1%, respectively.^{xxiv}

Migrants in São Tomé and Príncipe mainly arrived from Cape Verde, as registered in 2020 (57.04% of the total migrant population). Other international migrants came from Angola (14.91%), Gabon (9.82%), Equatorial Guinea (6.03%), and Portugal (4.86%).^{xxv}

Immigration in São Tomé and Príncipe is relatively low due to its economic and social conditions. There is a high rate of inflation, as well as a considerable lack of trading opportunities with neighbouring countries.^{xxvi} These barriers hinder the stability and willingness of potential foreign investors to immigrate into the insular state. Moreover, the country is neither a member of CEMAC (Economic and Monetary Union of Central Africa) nor WTO (World Trade Organization).^{xxvii}

São Tomé and Príncipe gained its independence from Portugal in 1975, but Portuguese is still the official language on the island.^{xxviii} Angolans, Cape Verdeans, and Mozambicans moved to the archipelago looking for more significant opportunities and were pulled there because of a common language and colonial heritage.^{xxix}

National policies have promoted the establishment of important services such as education, health, and infrastructure development.^{xxx} For this reason, some professionals and experts immigrated into the state as part of the international cooperation processes. For instance, doctors, engineers, and technicians who were part of Nigeria's Technical Aid Corps have been sent to provide assistance in the fight against food diseases, waterborne diseases, and malaria.^{xxxi} Local stakeholders have justified their presence and involvement, since more than half of the population still have no access to water and hygiene installations.^{xxxii}

Internal and international migrants are especially vulnerable in the country. Many of them work in the cocoa production field and are subject to abuse.^{xxxiii} Cases of child labour, sexual abuse and exploitation of minors have been also reported by the Bureau of International Affairs.^{xxxiv} Several governmental and non-governmental programs target child labour, but despite that, their efforts have been insufficient to eradicate this problem, especially in the agriculture industry.^{xxxv}

Internal migration is mainly a rural to urban movement. More than 50% of the households have at least one family member who has migrated into the big cities looking for a better job and income.^{xxxvi} Migrant workers usually send money and food back to their families,

especially those originally from Água Grande, Cantagalo, and Lobata districts.^{xxxvii} Many children and young people also move away to access formal education.^{xxxviii}

Furthermore, fishermen migrate seasonally. The government is aiming to develop this sector with international French assistance programs. Since 1993, these programs have sought the support of fisher migrants to provide them with more efficient and modern equipment.^{xxxix}

Migration flows from Príncipe to São Tomé are limited due to the remote geographical position and lack of transport infrastructure in the archipelago.^{xl} São Tomé and Príncipe islands are divided by 150 kms of high sea waters, while the Gabon coast is located 300 kms away. Moreover, there is no reliable option by air connecting both islands. Infrastructure in Príncipe is basic and limited,^{xli} and the high concentration of people on São Tomé island creates additional challenges, such as pollution, and electricity and water procurement.^{xlii}

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

In 2020, São Tomé and Príncipe registered 39,608 emigrants (18.1% of its total population), of whom 52.5% were women.^{xliii xliiv} The main destination countries were Portugal (51.9%), Angola (17.3%), Gabon (16.5%), Cape Verde (4.6%), and Equatorial Guinea (4.5%). In Portugal, the Santomeans live mostly in Lisbon and Setubal.^{xliv} Since the 1970s, after a marked process of urbanisation (and abandonment of the agricultural economy), the male population began to seek better working conditions and a better standard of living abroad.^{xlvi} Therefore, the net migration rate remained positive, and its number (especially women) increased.^{xlvii}

Santomean emigrants, including the second generation, have very strong ties with their national identity. Likewise, those who remain in the country see the diaspora as an integral part of the nation, regardless of their immigration status or citizenship.^{xlviii} There is a long-distance nationalism that encompasses emigrants and their descendants, as well as those who remain in the archipelago, forming a single transborder citizenry.^{xlix}

Conversely, the conditions in which Santomean women live in Portugal are pretty precarious.^l Despite their special legal status due to their colonial past, shared language and religion, Santomeans are still considered outsiders in the Portuguese tradition.^{li} Emigrants in Cape Verde also face issues, like the high cost of passports and their validity, the connection between the archipelago and the mainland, as well as the support for the diaspora's higher studies.^{lii} São Tomé and Príncipe has committed to addressing these issues in a tripartite manner together with Angola.^{liii} In addition, it has announced a legislative package of tax incentives for emigrants and entrepreneur emigrants.^{liv}

IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced Persons)

UNHCR currently has a Cameroon Cluster Office (UNHCR MCO) covering Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Gabon as well as São Tomé and Príncipe, which focuses on the protection needs of people fleeing their own countries, handles their documentation, and promotes self-reliance for refugees and IDPs.^{lv}

Although São Tomé and Príncipe is a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees,^{lvi} it is not a party to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or the 1961 Convention regarding the Status of Stateless Persons.^{lvii} Nor has it ratified the 1969 OAU Convention. It also has no national legislation concerning persons in need of international protection.^{lviii}

In this regard, the country does not grant asylum or refugee status, nor has it established a system to protect refugees. In 2021, UNHCR did not register any persons with refugee status in the country or asylum seekers.^{lix} Instead, six refugees from São Tomé and Príncipe and 19 asylum seekers in Brazil were registered in Gabon in 2022.^{lx}

In 2021, 500 internal displacements^{lxi} caused by heavy rainfall and consequent floods were recorded, triggering significant material and human losses. On December 30, 2021 the government of São Tomé declared a state of emergency due to the natural disasters that had occurred, and asked for international aid.^{lxii}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

São Tomé and Príncipe was not included in the 2019 U.S. Department of State TIP report, and only a few comments were reported in the 2020 issue.^{lxiii} There is no available information to confirm that São Tomé and Príncipe is the origin, destination, or transit country for victims of human trafficking.^{lxiv} However, national law prohibits forced labour, including child labour.^{lxv} At the same time no cases of forced labour have been found in this small island country, either in 2016^{lxvi} or in 2020.^{lxvii}

Women and children are the main victims of human trafficking in São Tomé and Príncipe. Children are often forced into cheap labour, domestic work, as street vendors or farm workers, and subject to child marriages. They have difficulties accessing school.^{lxviii} There are criminal international networks involved in human trafficking. The police intercepted one trafficking network in Libreville-Gabon involving Santomean victims, including one girl. Interpol got involved in this case, and after the investigation the police detained four persons (three of them women).^{lxix}

Furthermore, the minimum age to have a job considered non-hazardous is 14 years old, while for more dangerous tasks it is required to be at least 18.^{lxx} Nonetheless, the law does not define hazardous work, which makes effective enforcement of the law somewhat challenging.^{lxxi} In general, it has been reported that employers in the formal sectors of the economy respect child labour laws, but in the informal sector it is quite common to find children employed in small farms and domestic jobs.^{lxxii} Finally, the work of minors as street vendors in large urban areas has also been reported.^{lxxiii}

VI. National Legal Framework

Citizenship in São Tomé and Príncipe is based upon the Law of Nationality,^{lxxiv} dated September 13, 1990, and the Constitution from 2003.^{lxxv}

The asylum reference is barely included in the Constitution^{lxxvi} and there is no national legislation helping people in need of international protection.

The country is a State party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (from now on jointly referred to as the 1951 Convention). It incorporated the 1951 Convention and its Protocol into its national legislation to strengthen the protection framework for UNHCR's persons of concern in case they are identified.^{lxxvii} São Tomé and Príncipe signed the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. In addition, two Protocols relevant to international migration supplement the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, namely the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children and the 2000 Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land.^{lxxviii}

São Tomé and Príncipe has neither ratified the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, nor the 2009 African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention).

The country signed, but has not yet ratified, the ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies Convention, nor the ILO 97 Migration for Employment.^{lxxix} The most relevant conventions in this regard that, in addition to being signed, are in force are ILO 29 (Forced labour), ILO 105 (Abolition of Forced Labour), ILO 138 (Minimum Age), and ILO 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour).^{lxxx} Lastly, STP is not part of the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.^{lxxxi}

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe and its respective ministries work together with international organisations to develop the country.

No national legislation handles specific issues involving asylum-seekers, refugees, or stateless persons. UNHCR provides support to the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe in developing a sound national asylum system, including drafting national refugee legislation and reinforcement of the capacities of key stakeholders.

The Ministry of Defence and Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration, and Human Rights take care of the freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. The army and coast guard are in charge of external security.^{lxxxii}

Regarding human trafficking, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration, and Human Rights are responsible for enforcing child labour and forced labour laws. The public security police and judicial police maintain internal security.^{lxxxiii}

The army coast and the public security police report to the Ministry of Defence and Internal Affairs. The judicial police report to the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration, and

Human Rights. Civilian authorities, in turn, maintain effective control over the security forces.

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The government works in partnership with the UN, the private sector, and the civil society on achieving sustainable development, paying particular attention to the social and economic sectors, promoting peace, human rights, equality, sustainability, capacity- and policy-building at the highest level. ^{lxxxv}

International Organisations

The number of migrants in São Tomé and Príncipe remains remarkably low. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is not present in the country, but it is connected to two foreign offices: the IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa that is based in Dakar, Senegal and the IOM Office in the Republic of the Congo. ^{lxxxvi}

UNHCR also works in São Tomé and Príncipe through the Cameroon Multi-Country Office (MCO) covering São Tomé and Príncipe, Cameroon, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea. UNHCR MCO Cameroon focuses on protection needs, providing documentation, and promoting self-reliance for refugees and internally displaced persons. ^{lxxxvii} Together with UNHCR, UNICEF works in São Tomé and Príncipe, contributing to offer more comprehensive responses to improve the rights of every child. UNICEF also ensures links between social protection and a multisectorial care system, both prevention and case management. ^{lxxxviii}

Ranking 137th out of 189 countries in the 2019 Human Development Index (HDI), São Tomé and Príncipe falls in the medium human development category. The World Food Programme (WFP) addresses extreme poverty, malnutrition, and socio-economic development. WFP aims to reinforce the institutional capacities of the government, national stakeholders, and local communities. ^{lxxxix} In conjunction with this agency, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) promotes food security in the country to ensure people have regular access to enough high-quality food by leading active and healthy lives. ^{xc}

NGOs and Other Organisations

Throughout São Tomé and Príncipe, NGOs and government agencies work together to address human rights concerns. The country receives support from governmental agencies geared towards reforms, and NGOs provide oversight, training and resources. ^{xcii}

The Red Cross Society of São Tomé and Príncipe, through the International Committee of the Red Cross, has been active in São Tomé since 1985, aiming to protect life, health, and respect for human beings. ^{xciii} One of their projects is a social home for the elderly, which is vital in reducing this community's vulnerability.

The local non-governmental organisation closely involved with UN agencies to enhance the country's development is *Zatona Adil*, an institution supporting communities to develop civil society initiatives. Together with residents and partners, this non-profit organisation helps to forge resilient and inclusive communities of opportunity across São Tomé.

The Catholic Church

The Episcopal Conference of Angola and São Tomé (CEAST) was created in 1967.^{xciii} Today CEAST has 20 dioceses, and one of those is the São Tomé Diocese. CEAST's social action is specifically involved in mitigating the situation faced by immigrants and refugees. Its work has mainly focused on providing hospitality and welcome, legal assistance to refugees, access to liturgical and sacramental life, promotion of job training courses, search for funding, and the involvement of donors and migrants.^{xciv} Along with Caritas and JRS, the bishops also rely on the collaboration of other faith-based organisations.^{xcv}

Comissão Episcopal da Pastoral para os Migrantes e Itinerantes de Angola e São Tomé (CEPAMI) is the coordinating body for the migration ministry. The organisation was created with the initiative of the Scalabrinian Sisters. CEPAMI aims to organise and promote the various pastoral services following the recommendations of the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for the Service of Integral Human Development of the Holy See.^{xcvi}

CEPAMI acts in different areas in the organisation and intensive training of pastoral agents to work in the various dioceses, promotion of workshops, conferences, and seminars with specific migratory themes to train public order officers, educators, university students, and other people in general.^{xcvii} It is involved with networks and associations for the development of a set of actions of a formative and professional nature, assistance and guidance derived from the needs and demands of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons.^{xcviii} They also implement different projects in the areas where these people are most vulnerable, prioritising professional training for women, as well as human, social and business enhancement. They also work on the sharing of information and on advocacy of the relevant needs of refugees. They carry out continuous outreach activities with the media to sensitise Church and society to welcome, protect and help people on the move.^{xcix} However, the practical involvement of CEPAMI was not present in the diocese of São Tomé until training sessions on migration issues for local pastoral agents were held in June 2022.^c

Caritas São Tomé and Príncipe is an organisation that from the beginning has developed food programmes to assist people most in need, an agricultural programme to encourage farming practices among young people, sewing workshops and a house for homeless children, 'Casa dos Pequenos'.^{ci} Currently, a project called 'A Bridge of Hope' is being pursued with the support of *Caritas Portuguesa*, promoting distance adoption of children at risk.^{cii}

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