



Diaspora engagement mapping

SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE



Facts & figures

Terminology: Documents use “Comunidades Santomenses residentes no estrangeiro”, meaning Santomean communities living abroad.

Political rights



Dual citizenship¹



Right to vote in national elections for citizens residing abroad²



Voting from abroad

At embassies/ consulates



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **1.66%**
Remittances inflow (USD million): **10**

Data disclaimer

As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from UNDESA (2024) and remittances from the [World Bank](#) (2023).

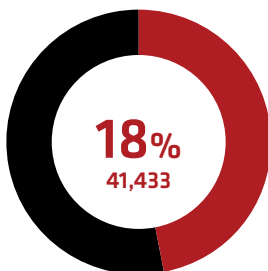
Emigration



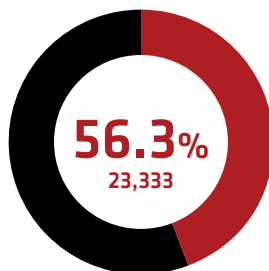
% of emigrants in total population



% of which in the EU



♂ 47.8%
♀ 52.2%



♂ 44.4%
♀ 55.6%

Top countries of destination



Portugal	23,121
Angola	7,062
Gabon	7,058
Equatorial Guinea	1,936
Cabo Verde	1,893

Sao Tome e Principe does not have a diaspora engagement policy.

¹ The 2003 revised Constitution and Nationality Law (Lei No.7/2022), allowing double citizenship, are available online [here](#) and [here](#).

² São Tomé and Príncipe permits nationals living abroad to vote in general elections since 2021. Based on Article 7 of Law 8/2021 “enrolment in the electoral register is also compulsory for all Santomean citizens in the diaspora, (...) in coordination with the diplomatic and consular missions.” Electoral legislation available online at: <https://www2.camara.leg.br/saotomeeprincipe/legislacao/eleitoral>.

Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 2003** ● The revised **Constitution of São Tomé and Príncipe** stipulates under Article 16 that Santomean citizens residing overseas enjoy the care and protection of the state.
- 2019** ● **The National Sustainable Development Plan 2020-2024**, under section 4.4.3.1. stipulates the diaspora's inclusion in the Santomean development process, to better safeguard the interests of Santomean citizens residing abroad, while strengthening and promoting their contributions through a set of measures, including further developing the technical assistance project in partnership with the IOM to monitor the diaspora and its evolving needs; the restructuring of diplomatic and consular networks with greater participation from women in key position, and improving capacities to effectively respond through assistance and support; the regular organisation of a Santomean Diaspora Forum, a consultation mechanism aimed at bolstering the protection of overseas citizens and their participation in development processes; or developing financial mechanisms for the diaspora, among others.

» Trends

Although the country lacks an overall diaspora engagement framework, the Constitution stipulates that Santomean citizens residing abroad enjoy the same rights and duties as other citizens. In the past few years, there has been some progress in the government's recognition of diaspora communities, which translated into several reforms and closer coordination with Santomean diaspora associations on integration, social assistance, and development. There is a noticeable drive to boost the investment climate, with tax incentives and business facilitation opportunities targeting foreign capital, but also adaptable to diaspora contributions. In 2022, with support from international development partners, the government also established a business incubator and accelerator for start-ups and SMEs (REINA). Despite their currently limited outreach, such initiatives have the potential to augment diaspora engagement through entrepreneurship and the repatriation of capital from abroad.

Furthermore, despite certain inconsistencies, the revised electoral legislation purports to enfranchise the diaspora, by enabling voting from abroad through two new electoral districts in Africa and Europe. Several Santomean diaspora organisations effectively lobbied for electoral reform, which shows that civic advocacy is a significant vector in community mobilisation. In effect, overseas Santomeans were able to cast a ballot in the 2022 legislative elections, following an ample voter registration exercise coordinated by representative organisations, the National Electoral Commission (CEN), and Santomean diplomatic missions. Due to limited institutional resources/capacities, the electoral census witnessed the active participation of diaspora associations in conducting community outreach or facilitating liaisons with statistical institutes from countries of residence.

Nominally, diplomatic missions ought to assist Santomeans facing hardships, however, lacking appropriate infrastructure and resources, diaspora associations perform most of the community support functions, through fundraising appeals, distribution of in-kind donations, social inclusion activities, as well as healthcare provision (i.e. psychological support, mobile medical caravans). An agreement between the Portuguese and Santomean Medical Boards enables Santomean patients to receive treatment in Portugal, primarily for chronic conditions. However, once abroad, patients and their families often face extreme hardship, lacking the financial means to purchase medicines or provide for themselves. To this end, diaspora organisations in Portugal offer wide-ranging support, from finding appropriate accommodation and supplying food baskets to setting up mobile clinics and offering free medical consultations, including psychological support.

The Santomean diaspora exhibits strong integration with other African communities, particularly from Cabo Verde, participating in forums, and advocacy platforms, at times pooling resources to deliver community assistance. While not all diaspora organisations are formally registered, coordination also occurs on social media channels through informal discussion groups or pages. Overall, there is a robust networked dimension, as well as a sense of community solidarity, which in the absence of an institutionalised framework for engagement, acted as the main drivers for domestic reform and social inclusion abroad.



Achievements

At an institutional level, São Tomé and Príncipe is gradually developing a diaspora engagement approach, through forums, structured dialogue, and certain incentives aimed at bolstering diaspora contributions. The electoral census presents a unique opportunity for such mapping efforts to continue and concretise in a unified policy that responds to the diaspora's accruing needs. Policy development will likely stem from the diaspora's proactive mobilisation, as was the case with voting rights and registration. The resilience of the Santomean diaspora is evident in the numerous initiatives its associations are undertaking from advocacy to healthcare, integration, and social inclusion, in many respects assuming the state's functions in providing community relief. One particular aspect of the associative environment is the focus on women's rights with organisations such as Men Non actively campaigning for social welfare, whilst bringing to the fore the plight of domestic violence and structural marginalisation, both at home and abroad.

Obstacles



- **Limited coordination:** The Santomean government does not have a unified approach to engagement, nor a coordinated institutional mechanism for diaspora affairs. Poor institutional coordination also hinders effective outreach, and the opportunity to leverage skills, resources, and diaspora contributions across multiple agendas (i.e. sustainable development, investment, remittances, or return migration).
- **Weak digitalisation:** The government's web pages are often inaccessible and relevant information is difficult to access. There is no integrated portal consolidating relevant information for Santomeans living abroad. In the absence of adequate data systems, voter registration abroad was carried out on-site, which to some extent hampered wider participation.
- **Institutional capacity:** The diplomatic missions as the main interface for the diaspora often lack the resources to carry out such a substantial mandate, which by law includes the protection of overseas citizens. Diaspora inclusion into political processes remains limited, as there are no institutionalised mechanisms for consultation and oversight.
- **Communication infrastructure:** Public authorities (including the Electoral Commission) have been criticised by overseas constituencies for failing to disseminate information of interest, which also negatively impacted voter turnout during the legislative elections. In general, the government fares poorly in maintaining ongoing communication channels with its overseas citizens.



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Collecting reliable population statistics and conducting voter registration abroad 2020

DATA

Voter registration was mandated prior to the legislative elections of 2022. However, data and accurate statistics on Santomeans living abroad were scarce, if not absent. To this end, census offices were established in embassies and consulates, and registration appeals launched through community outreach. This considerable data-gathering effort, the first of its kind, proactively involved diaspora associations in multiple countries, including Portugal and Spain. Experts from the Santomean National Electoral Committee participated in extensive consultations with statistical institutes from abroad and diaspora representatives, enabling local intelligence.

NETWORKING, DEVELOPMENT

Diaspora Forums 2020

The XVII Santomean Government organised the 2nd diaspora forum, a platform for dialogue, consultation and elaboration of public policies. Some of the topics approached diaspora contributions to socio-economic development, empowerment, brain gain, and integration into host countries. The diaspora has been an active campaigner through its representative associations petitioning the government for inclusive diaspora governance and greater participation in policy development.

DIGITALISATION

E-Citizenship/E-Visa Portals N/A

As an innovative practice, the SMF (Migration and Border Service) introduced an online e-citizenship portal for visa, biometric passport applications, and other documents/certificates. It also facilitates access to foreign citizens from countries without Santomean diplomatic representations, who may apply for an entry permit directly on the SMF portal, at least 7 working days in advance.

São Tomé and Príncipe Investment Forum 2023

Co-hosted by Afreximbank, government agencies, and diaspora stakeholders, the forum aimed to mobilise diaspora investment in sectors like tourism, agriculture, fisheries, energy, and infrastructure under the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

Annex:

List of Actors

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 430+ institutions](#)



Diaspora related institutions



- **National institutions**

- At ministerial level

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Communities, MNECC

The Ministry elaborates, oversees, and implements the country's foreign policy as well as administers the relationship with overseas communities through its network of embassies, consulates, and honorary consuls. The census offices purporting to register Santomeans residing abroad were also coordinated by the diplomatic missions. The embassies are tasked with assisting nationals facing hardships but due to limited resources, diaspora associations play a significant role in providing community support.

- At sub-ministerial level

Migration and Border Service SMF 1991

The security service functions under the purview of the Ministry of Internal Affairs but retains administrative autonomy. The institution also coordinates the migration regime for both nationals and foreigners.



Diaspora organisations in Europe

Read more about diaspora organisations in ["Starting guide: What is a diaspora organisation"](#)



MEN NON Portugal

- ☑ **Development activities**

The organisation provides community assistance and fundraises (through benefit galas and campaigns) for a variety of causes. In drawing support from civil society networks, public administrations in both countries, as well as international organisations, MEN NON participates in transnational advocacy platforms and other international representative bodies (i.e.: the Portuguese Platform for the Rights of Women and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP)). It is embedded both locally and transnationally, with a robust communitarian component and networked outreach. Other activities include information and awareness campaigns, the provision of social, moral, financial, and psychological support, and collaborations with competent authorities and other organisations in both countries. Its remit expands beyond the statute, with assistance to vulnerable communities, facing food shortages or severe medical issues.

Associação Caué-Amigos de São Tomé e Príncipe em Barcelona Spain

- ☑ **Development activities**
- ☑ **Integration activities**

According to its statutes, the organisation is apolitical and focused on development. Through a range of activities and collaborations, it aims to promote and disseminate knowledge about the culture, economy, nature, art, and human heritage of São Tomé and Príncipe. The association was also involved in the voter registration exercise, collecting data, triangulating open-source repositories, and facilitating liaison with statistical institutes in Spain.

Associação da Comunidade de São Tomé e Príncipe, ACOSP Portugal

Integration activities

One of the most representative Santomean diaspora organisations in Portugal, ACOSP “acts as a spokesperson and promotes the integration of immigrants from São Tomé and Príncipe”, committed to strengthening the cultural and social ties of the Santomean community in Portugal. It effectively campaigned for the diaspora’s voting rights and representation, conducting community outreach for voter registration.

Associação de São Tomé e Príncipe no Luxemburgo, ASTPL 2014 Luxembourg

Development activities

Integration activities

According to its statutes, the organisation aims to collect funds and in-kind donations to assist communities in need, in São Tomé and Príncipe, to offer a network of support for the community, and to strengthen exchanges and bilateral relations.

Associação Dos Estudantes São-Tomense Em Portugal Portugal

Integration activities

The association assists Santomean students in Portugal with integration and leisure activities. It also disseminates relevant information on its social media channels.

Associação de Promotores de Saúde, Ambiente e Desenvolvimento Sócio-Cultural, PROSAUDESC 2000 Portugal

Development activities

Integration activities

The organisation is an active promoter of healthcare and supports Santomean patients receiving medical treatment in Portugal. It collaborates with other Santomean associations in fundraising and collecting donations for afflicted families, in socially vulnerable situations, who often cannot sustain themselves through treatment. Apart from solidarity activities, the association also contributes to socio-economic development in São Tomé and Príncipe, supporting schools and communities in need.

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