

SÃO TOMÉ E PRÍNCIPE

PROMOTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The EU EOM deployed in São Tomé e Príncipe encouraged action to ensure full and effective participation of women in public life and promote gender equality.

An European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) deployed in 2022 to observe the 25 September general elections in São Tomé e Príncipe called attention to the limited participation of women in the political life. The women remained underrepresented in public decision-making bodies, and institutional and societal norms still limiting opportunities undermining women's participation in public affairs.

While the 2021 electoral reform in São Tomé e Príncipe introduced a mandatory 30 per cent gender quota, there was no provisions to place women in eligible positions at all electoral levels. As a consequence, despite having attained 36 per cent of the overall number of candidacies, only eight women were elected to the National Assembly in 2022.

«*Aside from the President, only eight out of 55 deputies in the Assembly are women*», said Vera Cravid, the former president of the Association of Women Jurists of São Tomé e Príncipe and, since early 2025, the Minister of Justice, Parliamentary Affairs and Women's Rights.

In 2022, the EU EOM offered a recommendation encouraging proactive measures to ensure the full and effective participation of women in public life and to create more opportunities to promote gender equality.

The EU EOM recommended: "*Increase affirmative measures to ensure that at least 40 per cent women representation in all elected positions can be fully implemented. Complement the application of the zipper rule for the next legislative elections with a horizontal alternation placement rule, should a plurality-majority system be chosen at any electoral level.*"

The new Parity Law, including a 40 per cent gender quota for all elected and appointed positions, and comprising the zipper system, entered into force in November 2022. The

new Parity Law will apply to future elections. It foresees that candidate lists should present a gender balance with alternation in the first two names in the candidate list: the zip-per rule.

«Our association [Women Jurists of São Tomé e Príncipe] was directly involved, because some of our members worked closely with the European Union to this end. We played a major role in the approval and implementation of the parity law, which was backed by one of the EU EOM's recommendations, aiming to promote women's participation in the entire electoral process», added Ms Cravid.

An EU Election Follow-up Mission deployed in 2024 to São Tomé e Príncipe considered that the recommendation has been fully implemented as it was translated into law.

Nevertheless, despite the improvements in the legal framework, female leaders considered social pressure exerted on women to still constitute an obstacle to a more inclusive political participation.

The Association of Women Jurists of São Tomé e Príncipe is currently developing a project funded by the European Union for the democratic empowerment of women and young girls in elections.

«A lot of work still needs to be done to raise awareness and reverse the lack of women's participation in the entire electoral process», alerted Ms Cravid.