COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

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Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2023 to implement the outcomes of the WSIS

Submission by

World Health Organization

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 27th session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

World Health Organization
Department of Digital Health and Innovation
Invitation to contribute to annual WSIS reporting WHO

Part One: An executive summary (half a page) of activities undertaken by all stakeholders, progress made, and any obstacles encountered.

In 2023, Global Strategy on Digital Health (2020 – 2025), approved by all WHO Member States in 2020, reached it's mid term. Thus, since the endorsement, WHO Secretariat has launched several initiatives to meet the four strategic objectives set out therein, which are as follows: (i) promote global collaboration and advance the transfer of knowledge on digital health; (ii) advance the implementation of national digital health strategies; (iii) strengthen governance for digital health at global, regional and national levels; and (iv) advocate for people-centred health systems that are enabled by digital health. Key areas of effort included digital health capacity building for Member States and partners, digitization of WHO normative products into computable formats (SMART Guidelines), a Global Digital Health Certification Network (cross-border trust architecture managed by WHO to facilitate person-mediated sharing of certified health information), guidance on the Ethics, Governance and Regulatory considerations of Artificial intelligence for health, mobile health strategies to combat non communicable diseases, and the prioritization of WHO health content on major global 'search' platforms.

Following the mid term report, the WHO, worked with the India G20 presidency and G20 Member States to launch a Global Initiative on Digital Health[1], to coordinate global and regional efforts towards the implementation of the final term of the global strategy on Digital Health, and to fast track progress in achieving the health related SDGs by 2030, through focused, quality-assured country technical and financial assistance.

The Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH)[2] is a WHO managed network of stakeholders organized to facilitate the implementation of the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020-2025 and other WHO norms and standards for Digital Health System Transformation. The Initiative will serve as a platform to enable a wide global ecosystem to work collectively to promote country capacity and strengthen international cooperation in digital health.

Part Two: A brief (1–2 pages) analytical overview of trends and experiences in implementation at the national, regional and international levels and by all stakeholders, highlighting achievements and obstacles since WSIS and taking into account the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This could include information on the facilitation process of implementation, monitoring and cooperation among stakeholders.

Based on the four objectives of the global strategy on Digital Health, the WHO and partners have conducted the following :

1.   Pursuant to the first objective, the Secretariat, together with development partners and sister United Nations agencies, has trained over 1600 government officials from over 100 Member States in digital health and artificial intelligence. In addition, over 10 000 health workers and policy-makers from 171 countries have taken part in the WHO online course on ethics and governance of artificial intelligence for health,[3] and five

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[1] https://www.who.int/news/item/19-08-2023-who-launches-a-new-global-initiative-on-digital-health-at-the-g20-summit-in-india

[2] https://www.who.int/initiatives/global-initiative-on-digital-health

[3] For more information on the course, see the OpenWHO website (https://openwho.org/courses/ethics-ai, accessed 24 February 2023).

round tables were convened to garner support among Member States, civil society and nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector for global coordination on digital health. Together with the Global Digital Health Partnership and other communities of practice, the Secretariat has supported government-to-government knowledge sharing and collective learning in support of digital transformation. The ITU-WHO Focus Group on Artificial Intelligence for Health convenes over 100 stakeholders on a monthly basis to develop benchmarking on artificial intelligence for health

2.   The Secretariat has developed SMART (Standards-based, Machine-readable, Adaptive, Requirements-based, and Testable) Guidelines on the digital documentation of COVID-19 certificates, comprising recommendations on the data, digital functionality, ethics, and trust architecture needed to ensure the interoperability of immunization and health records globally. It also made available WHO COVID-19 and other health recommendations through a living catalogue (Recmap)[4] for clinical, public health and health policy.The WHO Secretariat is implementing an end-to-end digital publishing and dissemination system to make all WHO normative and standard-setting guidance available in digital formats.

3.   Pursuant to the second objective, the Secretariat has published guidance to support Member States in the implementation of their national digital health strategies. It has also helped Member States in the WHO African, European, Eastern Mediterranean, and Western Pacific Regions, and the Region of the Americas, to conduct needs assessments, digital health surveys and standardized digital ecosystem maturity assessments, in order to develop and launch reusable tools and templates in support of government-led digital health transformation.

4.   Pursuant to the third objective, the Secretariat has supported Member States in the use of the WHO Digital Health Atlas for country-level enumeration and governance of digital health solutions and coordination of investments, and has launched the WHO Digital Health Clearinghouse platform to evaluate and curate digital solutions against WHO specifications for interoperability and alignment with WHO recommendations.

5.   Pursuant to the fourth objective, the Secretariat has published telemedicine implementation guidance, facilitated regional workshops and conducted readiness assessments across all WHO Regions. It has launched a programme focused on the implementation of SMART Guidelines, and published several guidance documents and tools to facilitate the accurate digitalization of WHO recommendations into person-centred digital systems for primary health care and surveillance. It developed COVID-19 living guidelines as well as other living guidelines. It has released guidance on artificial intelligence-based model training and evaluation, employing cervical cancer as a use-case, and issued seven implementation guides for the "Be He@lthy, Be Mobile" initiative, to support behavioural change in respect of noncommunicable diseases. Overall, the Secretariat has made trusted health information and evidence-based guidance available to more than 1 billion people and provided 300 million users a day with life-saving information during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Secretariat hosted Member State and stakeholder consultations on the update and digitization of the International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP).

6.   Further pursuant to the cross-cutting implementation objectives of the global strategy on digital health, the Secretariat has continued to improve the specifications, interoperability, architecture and tooling surrounding the published set of Digital Documentation of COVID-19 Certificates guidance documents. The Secretariat has successfully concluded a technical feasibility study for establishing a federated global trust network, which tested the ability to interoperate the health content and trust networks across existing regional efforts (for example, the European Union Digital COVID Certificate,[5] the International Civil Aviation

Organization (ICAO) Health Master List,[6] the Digital Infrastructure for Verifiable Open Credentialing,[7] the LACPASS,[8] and SMART Health Cards[9]) using open standards and open source software compliant with WHO Digital Documentation of COVID-19 Certificates guidance. Based on the foregoing, WHO established and is currently serving as a trust anchor for a voluntary global public key infrastructure network, which enables Member States to continue to bilaterally ensure the veracity of COVID-19 certificates, and other credentialed health information, mediated by individuals when travelling within Network countries.

Between 2023 and 2025, the Secretariat will strengthen mechanisms for coordinated action and work to document progress on the actions set out in the global strategy, prioritizing Member State needs. It will refocus on strengthening regional and country capacity for digital health, artificial intelligence and innovation by developing normative products, governance and policy guidance, tools and resources, collaboration, and competency-based training, and by curating digital public goods, including reference technologies, policies and global trust architectures. The Secretariat will strengthen its internal system for the living and SMART approaches to ensure that new clinical guideline recommendations are up to date and that implementation is optimized to improve impact at country level.

Part Three: A brief description (1–2 pages) of:

(a) Innovative policies, programmes and projects which have been undertaken by all stakeholders to implement the outcomes. Where specific targets or strategies have been set, progress in achieving those targets and strategies should be reported.

In 2023, the WHO secretariate and the G20 India Presidency introduced a programme to strengthen global, regional and country actions on Digital Health called the Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH). GIDH is a WHO managed network of stakeholders organized to facilitate the implementation of the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020-2025 and other WHO norms and standards for Digital Health System Transformation. The Initiative serves as a platform to enable a wide global ecosystem to work collectively to promote country capacity and strengthen international cooperation in digital health.

GIDH will prioritize the following core areas of work: assessing and prioritizing Member States' needs, evaluating the availability and reporting of country-level digital health resources and identifying under-funded priorities, supporting technically and financially the accelerated achievement of the strategic objectives defined in the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020-2025, building capacity and converging efforts to encourage developing, maintaining and adapting digital health technologies to continuously changing needs. The Initiative will work to address variability in the quality of digital solutions and emerging technologies related to standards, data privacy, security, and interoperability, etc., by amplifying identified best practices, open standards, and quality-assured building blocks.

Digital health is a proven accelerator to advance health outcomes and achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and health-related Sustainable Development Goals. Over two decades, Member States have worked with WHO to leverage digital technologies to accelerate national and global health targets. Since the first Member State-driven resolution on eHealth in 2005, culminating in the comprehensive Member States'

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[6] For more information, see the ICAO webpage on the ICAO Master List and ICAO Health Master List (https://www.icao.int/Security/FAL/PKD/Pages/icao-master-list.aspx, accessed 28 March 2023).

[7] For more information, see the Digital Infrastructure for Verifiable Open Credentialing website (https://divoc.digit.org/, accessed 28 March 2023).

[8] For more information, see the Red Americana de Cooperación sobre Salud Electrónica (RACSEL) webpage on the LACPASS (https://racsel.org/en/LACPASS/, accessed 28 March 2023).

[9] For more information, see the SMART Health Cards website (https://smarthealth.cards/en/, accessed 28 March 2023).

Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020-2025, over 120 WHO Member States have developed a national digital health policy or strategy. However, fragmentation in resource allocation and alignment of solutions to Member States' needs, along with variable definitions and levels of quality of digital solutions, is slowing down effective national digital health transformation. Member States are seeking support to move from product-focused digital health initiatives to establishing national digital health systems and applications with the appropriate national competency to maintain and adapt these – a recognized need being trusted and quality-assured technical support to address national digital health priorities.

The Initiative will strive to help Member States to advance their national digital health transformation by strengthening collaboration among partners and existing networks and amplify current multi-national and regional activities.

The key components of the GIDH will leverage existing evidence, tools and learnings and will be co-created through a transparent and inclusive process. Through this evidence-based and comprehensive co-creation process, GIDH will ultimately aim to:

ALIGN efforts to support of the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025;
SUPPORT quality-assured technical assistance to develop and strengthen standards-based and interoperable systems aligned to global best practices, norms, and standards;
FACILITATE the deliberate use of quality assured digital transformation tools that enable governments to manage their digital health transformation journey.

As a WHO Managed Network ("Network of Networks"), GIDH will address challenges such as duplication of efforts and "products-focused" digital health transformation through a focus on four foundational pillars:

Country Needs Tracker - facilitating digital health investments to be informed by country priorities;

Country Resource Portal – identifying traditional as well as innovative resource opportunities, and promoting transparency, while reducing the risk of duplication for enabling a standards-based prospective and retrospective analysis of resourcing gaps in digital health.

Transformation Toolbox – advocating for quality-assured tools and resources that strengthen country capacity and autonomy to manage the national digital health transformation.

Convening and Knowledge Exchange - promoting strengthened collaboration and knowledge exchange across global, regional, and national networks in digital health.

(b) Future actions or initiatives to be taken, regionally and/or internationally, and by all stakeholders, to improve the facilitation and ensure full implementation in each of the action lines and themes, especially with regard to overcoming those obstacles identified in Part Two above. You are encouraged to indicate any new commitments made to further implement the outcomes.

In 2024, the WHO secretariat will work with partners to undertake the following actions :

(i)   Migrate to WHO servers and re-launch a Global Digital Health Maturity model called the Global Digital Health Monitor (GDHM). The GDHM is an interactive digital resource that helps countries to prioritize and monitor their digital health interventions and enablers that uses the WHO/ITU eHealth Strategy Toolkit as the underlying foundational framework. The tool consists of 23 indicators in the areas of leadership & governance; strategy & investment; legislation, policy & compliance; workforce; standards & interoperability; infrastructure; services & applications; and cross-cutting issues like emerging

technology and equity.

(ii)   Continue to grow the number of countries participating in the GDHCN, and expanding use-cases to reflect member-state requested certified information classes – such as ICVP (pending revisions to the IHR), health workforce credentials, International Patient Summaries, etc.

(iii)   Complete the final report on the implementation of the global strategy on digital health covering all the 172 actions for the WHO, Development partners and Member States. The report will be presented at the World Health Assembly in 2025.