

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA**ORIGINAL: ENGLISH**Seventy-fourth sessionBrazzaville, Republic of Congo, 26–30 August 2024Provisional agenda item 18.2**PROGRESS REPORT ON FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTING THE GLOBAL
STRATEGY ON DIGITAL HEALTH IN THE WHO AFRICAN REGION****Information Document****CONTENTS**

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BACKGROUND

1. WHO defines digital health as the cost-effective and secure use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in health and health-related fields.¹ Some digital health solutions include e-Health, telehealth, mHealth, electronic health records, telemedicine and e-Learning. In 2023, the Seventy-third session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa adopted a resolution on e-Health² urging Member States to promote the development and implementation of e-Health policies. In 2021, the Seventy-first session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa adopted the framework to guide the implementation of the WHO global digital health strategy (GSDH) in the African Region.³

2. The framework for implementing the GSDH underlined that by the end of 2023; 80% of Member States would have developed digital health strategies; 80% of Member States would have been trained in digital health governance using the WHO Regional Office for Africa-International Telecommunication Union (ITU) digital health curriculum; 60% of Member States would have completed and uploaded their digital health inventory of systems into the WHO Digital Health Atlas; and 50% of Members States would have developed and costed their national digital health architecture.

3. This first report summarizes the progress made in implementing the GSDH in the WHO African Region. The report also highlights key challenges and next steps.

PROGRESS MADE

4. To document progress in the implementation of this framework at the regional level, the use of digital health tools was assessed in order to establish benchmarks and monitor progress annually. So far, 38 Member States⁴ (81%) have developed a national digital health strategy.

5. Pursuant to milestone 2, aligned with digital health governance, the capacity of 17 Member States⁵ (36%) was strengthened in 2022 through a telemedicine workshop in Cabo Verde, where Member States presented roadmaps and were trained in telemedicine approaches for strengthening health systems. In 2023, the Secretariat trained 92 government officials from four Member States⁶ on digital health, telemedicine and artificial intelligence (AI). 18 Member States⁷ (38%) were

¹ WHO – ITU National e-Health Strategy Toolkit (<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/national-ehealth-strategy-toolkit>, accessed 3 May 2024).

² Resolution on Utilizing e-Health solutions to improve national health systems in the African Region; 2013 (AFR/RC63/R5 <https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/sessions/resolutions/afr-rc63-r5-utilizing-ehealth-solutions-to-improve-national-health-systems.pdf>, accessed 11 March 2024).

³ Framework for implementing the global strategy on digital health in the WHO African Region; 2021 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/345393>, accessed 11 March 2024).

⁴ Victor, Alegana A., et al. "Digital Health in the African Region Should be Integral to the Health System's Strengthening". *Mayo Clinic Proceedings. Digital Health* 1.3 (2023): 425. [https://www.mcpcdigitalhealth.org/article/S2949-7612\(23\)00048-2/fulltext](https://www.mcpcdigitalhealth.org/article/S2949-7612(23)00048-2/fulltext).

⁵ 17 Countries – Botswana, Benin, Cabo Verde, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zambia

⁶ Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe.

⁷ Benin, Comoros, Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zambia

trained in telemedicine using the WHO telemedicine implementation guidance^{8 9 10.11 12 13} and the facilitated telemedicine strategy development in three Member States.¹⁴ The Secretariat also trained nine representatives of Member States¹⁵ in the Region on standards-based, machine-readable, adaptive, requirements-based and testable (SMART)¹⁶ guidelines to enhance digital health interoperability. In 2023, WHO and the ITU, together with development partners and two Member States, consolidated lessons learnt and materials to further strengthen the WHO–ITU digital health learning programme.¹⁷ The Secretariat trained three Portuguese-speaking, two French-speaking and one English-speaking Member States¹⁸ on the digital health planning national systems training programme.

6. Pursuant to milestone 3, the Secretariat supported three Member States¹⁹ on the use of the WHO Digital Health Atlas for country-level enumeration and governance of digital health solutions and coordination of investments.²⁰ Pursuant to milestone 4, in 2023, the Secretariat, in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat, supported the ministries of health of two Member States²¹ to assess the level of digital health maturity in the health sector in leveraging the power of digital innovation for fortifying health care systems. These assessments help with gap identification, resource mobilization and development of costed national digital health plans, strategies and policies.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

7. Challenges persist, including proliferation of siloed digital health systems; inadequate funding; limited ICT infrastructure; low digital health skills and lack of awareness of the importance of legislation for digital health among the health workforce; and lack of involvement of health professionals in the development of e-Health applications and services.

NEXT STEPS

8. Member States will:

- (a) strengthen the enabling environment for the safe and sustainable use of digital health technologies;
- (b) strengthen the governance, legal and regulatory environment;

⁸ COVID-19 and telemedicine, PAHO, 2020; (<https://www3.paho.org/ish/index.php/en/telemedicine>, accessed 11 March 2024)

⁹ Telemedicine has clear benefits for patients in European countries, new study shows, WHO, 31 October 2022; (<https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/31-10-2022-telemedicine-has-clear-benefits-for-patients-in-european-countries--new-study-shows>)

¹⁰ Leveraging telehealth for efficient delivery of primary health care in the WHO South-East Asia Region; 2021 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/350199>, accessed 9 March 2024)

¹¹ Implementing telemedicine services during COVID-19: guiding principles and considerations for a stepwise approach; 2021 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1346306/retrieve>, accessed 8 March 2024)

¹² WHO–ITU global standard for accessibility of telehealth services; 2022 (<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240050464>, accessed 10 March 2024)

¹³ Consolidated telemedicine implementation guide; 2022 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1477410/retrieve>, accessed 11 March 2024)

¹⁴ Cabo Verde, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

¹⁵ Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

¹⁶ SMART Guidelines consisting of WHO recommended digital capabilities, digital health, interoperability standards and data content specific to each health domain; 2024 – (<https://www.who.int/teams/digital-health-and-innovation/smart-guidelines>, accessed 3 May 2024).

¹⁷ WHO – ITU Donors and Partners Digital Health Learning Meeting: Review and Strategic Planning; 2023 (<https://www.afro.who.int/media-centre/events/who-itu-donors-and-partners-digital-health-learning-meeting-review-and#:~:text=A%20review%20meeting%20has%20been,ITU%20digital%20health%20learning%20progamme>, accessed 3 May 2024).

¹⁸ Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda and Senegal.

¹⁹ Kenya, Malawi and Zambia.

²⁰ WHO Digital Health Atlas; 2024 (<https://digitalhealthatlas.org/en/-/>, accessed 10 March 2024).

²¹ Seychelles and Zambia.

- (c) establish coordinated intersectoral and sustainable mechanisms to allocate adequate funding for digital health solutions;
 - (d) conduct digital health assessments using tools provided by WHO and use findings to inform further action;
 - (e) develop national digital health strategies and establish multisectoral arrangements for implementation;
 - (f) establish coordinated mechanisms for producing digital health ready workforce; and
 - (g) review and take stock of the actions enumerated in the GSDH and prioritize implementation.
9. WHO and partners should:
- (a) strengthen mechanisms for coordinated action at global, regional and country levels;
 - (b) document progress towards the GSDH actions and prioritize activities around member-state needs;
 - (c) develop platforms for Member States to submit progress made against the GSDH actions; and
 - (d) increase support for resource mobilization to ensure adequate funding for the expansion of digital health solutions.
10. The Regional Committee is invited to take note of this report and endorse the proposed next steps.