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# Checklist For Assessing Gender, Equity and Rights Inclusion in Developing Digital Health Strategies

**The World Health Organization (WHO) Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020-25 (now extended to 2027) promotes a more robust digital health governance system, including through the development of national digital health strategies. Strategic Objective 4 of the Strategy advocates for 'people-centred health systems that are enabled by digital health' through the advancement of 'digital health literacy, gender equality, women's empowerment and inclusive approaches to adoption and management of digital health technologies.' However, a 2024 review of national digital health strategies, conducted by researchers at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies (CIM) at the University of Warwick in collaboration with WHO found these critical areas were overlooked in many strategies<sup>1</sup>**

National digital health strategies serve as important frameworks for the advancement of human rights, gender equity and universal health coverage, particularly for historically marginalised and excluded populations. They offer guidance to countries in navigating the risks and opportunities associated with digital technologies, helping to ensure inclusivity, equity and responsiveness to diverse needs.

As part of our participation in the Digital Health and Rights Project (DHRP) Consortium, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies (CIM) at the University of Warwick drafted this checklist in response to the need for tools and guidance on gender equality, human rights and equity in digital health strategy development. To support national conversations that address this gap, we drew on our review of digital health strategies and other guidance, with input from experts at WHO and STOPAIDS, to draft this checklist on gender equality, rights and inclusion in digital health strategies.

### Who should use this checklist

This checklist may be used by officials and consultants supporting development of national digital health strategies; by strategy advisory and reference groups; individuals invited to participate in strategy consultations; and civil society and community-led organisations advocating for digital rights and inclusion in health.

### How to use this checklist

The checklist is designed to spark reflection and debate, and to encourage review of evidence and consultation. It is structured around six key thematic areas that our review of national digital health strategies identified as forming the foundation of many national digital health strategies:

- a) Methodology for developing the strategy
- b) Situational analysis and evidence generation
- c) Foundational framework: vision, mission, principles
- d) Setting strategic objectives
- e) Implementation and Digital Public Infrastructure for Health (DPI)
- f) Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

<sup>1</sup>Serra, F, West, T, Simms, S, Davis, SLM (2024) Towards people-centred approach to digital health strategies: Gender, equity, rights and inclusion. Narrative Report. Digital Health and Rights Project Consortium, University of Warwick. [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross\\_fac/cim/research/digital-health-rights/publications/dhrp\\_2024\\_-\\_gender\\_equality\\_rights\\_and\\_inclusion\\_in\\_digital\\_health\\_strategies.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/research/digital-health-rights/publications/dhrp_2024_-_gender_equality_rights_and_inclusion_in_digital_health_strategies.pdf)

Each section includes a set of questions to guide discussions and efforts that ensure strategies are people-centred and grounded in human rights. These questions were selected to maximise efforts to strengthen gender equality, equity and rights inclusion and should inform targeted actions and ongoing consultations with communities and other stakeholders during the strategy development process. In some cases, information to answer these questions may not be published online, but other ministries, university researchers, independent experts, and civil society and community-based organisations working with diverse populations may have insights. We include a list of published guidance from WHO, UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UNWOMEN; human rights standards; and other reference materials, to help inform the strategy development process and spark deeper reflection. These are suggestions only; the lists may spark other ideas of national, regional or global strategic information or expertise needed for a specific country context.

### Definitions

We define digital health in line with the WHO's Classification of digital interventions, services and applications in health as "the systematic application of information and communications technologies, computer science, and data to support informed decision-making by individuals, the health workforce, and health systems, to strengthen resilience to disease and improve health and wellness".<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> World Health Organisation (WHO) (2023), Classification of digital interventions, services and applications in health. <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/bb20354e-ebee-44aa-8a58-7b1da85c6f95/content>

# The Checklist: Guiding Questions

## A. Methodology for developing the strategy

*This section seeks to ensure that the strategy is informed by the expertise and lived experiences of a diverse range of stakeholders, and that their priorities and recommendations are meaningfully reflected throughout its development, implementation and review.*

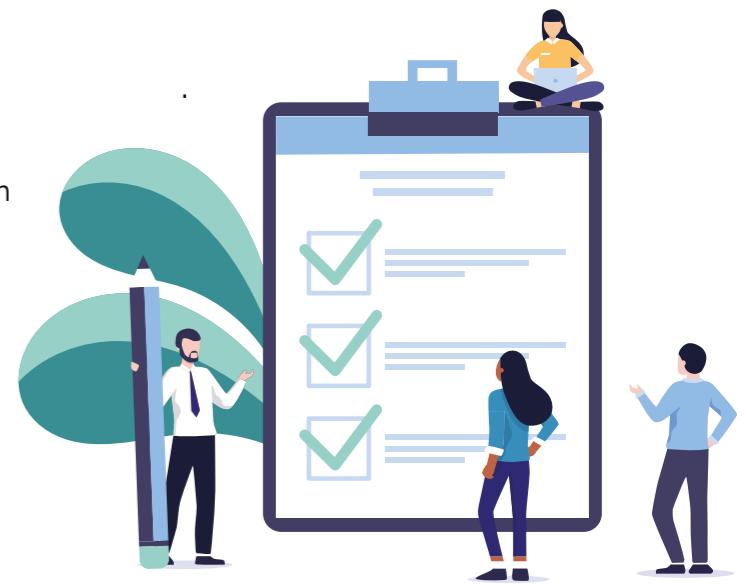
- Will consultations be held to inform the strategy, including diverse stakeholders, other government ministries with related mandates (such as the Ministry of Women, or Ministry of Youth, for example, if they exist in the country), civil society organisations working on digital health and digital rights, gender experts, young people, and community-based organisations?
- If yes, are minutes, documentation or reports from stakeholder mapping exercises and consultations available to decision-makers to ensure their concerns and recommendations are considered?
- Does the strategy development team include experts in gender equality, human rights and youth participation, with clearly defined roles that ensure their active involvement in the design, implementation, and oversight of the strategy?

## B. Situational Analysis and Evidence Generation

*This section aims to ensure strategy developers are equipped with the data and evidence required to identify and assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the broader digital health landscape, while simultaneously addressing governance gaps-particularly those that disproportionately affect people based on sex, age, and other social stratifiers reflecting people facing discrimination, exclusion, and/or disadvantage in the country context.. If no data currently exists, you are encouraged to collect this data as soon as possible. All evidence gathered in this section should be used to advance gender equality, equity and human rights outcomes in the strategy.*

- Have you compiled existing data on barriers and inequalities in connectivity, digital inclusion and uses of digital technology across geographic country regions (e.g in rural, urban, peri-urban)?
- Have you collected and assessed data on the barriers to accessing health services and associated user needs, to determine whether digital health tools could help address them?
- Do you have data on how digital technologies and platforms for health, such as mobile phone apps, wearables and web-based search engines, are used and accessed in the country by different population groups, disaggregated by sex, age and other social stratifiers reflecting those facing discrimination, exclusion and disadvantage in the country context?

- Is there evidence on how and which population groups in the country use social media to access health information and support, if so, have you identified ways to address associated risks to human rights such as misinformation and technology-facilitated abuse (TFA)?
- Have you reviewed the clinical, public research and data sources used to build digital health systems for sex and gender bias?
- If bias of any kind was identified in data used to design digital health systems, have you identified mitigation strategies to prevent this bias from being reinforced during system design and implementation?
- Have you collected and reviewed relevant evidence-based research, guidelines and measures developed by United Nations agencies, health professionals, legal, gender and human rights experts, non-governmental organisations, civil society and academic institutions?
- Are there other regional or national strategies on gender equality, youth inclusion, equity and diversity or human rights with which national or sub-national digital health strategies could align?
- Is there evidence that establishes whether and how social, cultural and/or religious norms on gender roles might negatively affect implementation of the strategy? If so, have you consulted with national experts to identify actionable recommendations that can mitigate that risk?
- Have the existing gender equality, human rights and equity gaps in ICT, Artificial Intelligence (AI), broadband, data protection, health and digital transformation laws, strategies and policies in the country been identified and recommendations developed for targeted resolution in the strategy?
- Have you determined whether and how to address gaps in protections to health data found in national data protection laws and regulations in the strategy (e.g. proposing the establishment of additional health data protection policies or the review of existing data protection laws)?
- Have you generated or reviewed data on the gender equality, human rights and equity implications of harnessing emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and, assessed your readiness for adoption based on ethical and regulatory preparedness, public awareness and engagement-particularly of underrepresented groups-and alignment with international human rights standards to prevent harm to end users?
- Have you assessed the current knowledge of data protection and digital rights among healthcare workers and decision-makers, and identified any gaps that may need to be addressed with interventions?



### C. Foundational Framework: Vision, Mission and Principles

*This section seeks to embed human rights, gender equality and equity as core values and guiding principles, ensuring the strategy aligns with and supports international, regional and national commitments to human rights, gender equality, equity and inclusion. Please note the answers to the questions below may not be yes or no answers.*

- Do the vision and mission statements of the proposed strategy identify human rights, gender equality and equity specifically as priority areas?
- Do the principles in the proposed strategy incorporate human rights, gender equality, and equity concerns either explicitly or implicitly?
- Are there existing national commitments on human rights and gender equality through the United Nations or regional human rights systems that should inform or be reflected in the vision, mission and principles of the strategy?

### D. Setting Strategy Objectives and Goals

*These questions assess whether the strategy explicitly integrates human rights, gender equality and equity considerations into its objectives and priorities, including commitments to address digital health governance gaps, inclusive and accessible design of digital health technologies, the use of human rights and gender impact assessments. They further assess whether the strategy will advance gender equality in the health workforce and equip end users with the knowledge and capacity to understand and exercise their human rights in digital health.*

- Do the general objectives or priority outcomes of the strategy explicitly reference the importance of addressing human rights, gender equality and equity concerns?
- Do the strategy objectives commit to measures to tackle governance gaps related to digital health such as technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) through proposed interventions such as the development of human rights-based health legislation and policy, ethical guidelines, standards or dedicated working groups?
- Has the need to make health information and services available in diverse local languages and culturally acceptable formats been discussed, including assessing social norms that may create access barriers and identifying ways to address them?
- Do the strategy objectives require or encourage human rights and gender equality impact assessments in the development, implementation and oversight of digital health infrastructure?

- Do the objectives promote regular capacity building and training for all healthcare workers on promoting human rights, data protection and gender equality in the use of digital health tools and systems?
- Do the objectives to include clear interventions to promote gender equality in the health workforce, including women's equal representation in digital transformation leadership?
- Have you discussed how to ensure digital literacy or human rights-based education for end users, including those facing barriers to accessing digital tools due to various forms of discrimination, gender norms, socio-economic status or other inequalities is provided?



## E. Implementation and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for health

The questions in this section explore whether digital health interventions and the data they produce are appropriately and securely governed to promote equitable access and mitigate risk of harms for all population groups.

- Have adequate resources and implementation mechanisms been considered for laws and policies designed to protect the privacy, confidentiality and personal data of end users, including those with concerns about surveillance, data breaches and nonconsensual data commercialization?
- Have you considered specific ethical and legal privacy protections to the human rights of end users disaggregated by sex, age and other social stratifiers reflecting those facing discrimination, exclusion and disadvantage in the country context?
- Have you discussed how the strategy implementation plan will include interventions to reduce gender inequalities within the wider population, including initiatives to strengthen STEM skills and educational opportunities for women and girls?

- Do you aim to include clear interventions to promote gender equality in the health workforce, including women's equal representation in digital transformation leadership, employment opportunities, and access to digital training?
- Have you discussed how to address coordination with government ministries and agencies responsible for human rights and/or gender equality?
- Have you considered the possibility of data leaks or cyber-attacks and the need to protect privacy, confidentiality and data of end users? If so, will the strategy include measures to address and mitigate negative outcomes, including those that disproportionately affect certain population groups?
- Does the strategy underscore the importance of Universal Design<sup>3</sup> and Design Justice<sup>4</sup> to ensure interventions work for all people, including persons with disabilities?

## F. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

*These set of questions promote the inclusion of accountability, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including periodic stakeholder reviews to identify and mitigate emerging gender equality, equity and human rights gaps in strategy implementation.*

- Have you considered establishing a national coordination platform that brings together multiple stakeholders including civil society and healthcare workers for monitoring, evaluation and accountability?
- Is there a plan for periodic review of the strategy to identify and respond to gender equality, equity and human rights gaps as they emerge?
- Have you included gender equality, human rights and equity as indicators to the Monitoring and Evaluation framework?
- Have you ensured that all planned activities outlined above will be supported by adequate human and financial resources?



<sup>3</sup> Universal design refers to "the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation for specialized design. "Universal design" shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed." See United Nations Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 2. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-2-definitions.html>

<sup>4</sup> Costanza-Chock, S (2020). Design Justice: Community-led practices to build the worlds we need. <https://mitpress.mit.edu/9780262043458/design-justice/>

## UN Normative Guidance on Digital Health, Gender Equality and Human Rights:

### An annotated List

1. [\*\*WHO \(2021\) Ethics and Governance of Artificial Intelligence for Health:\*\*](#) To ensure AI serves all populations equitably, this guidance recommends more inclusive stakeholder engagement in AI development for health, the adoption of measures to overcome biases related to race, ethnicity and gender, robust data protection laws and the regulation of online health services to promote safety, accountability and respect for individual rights.
2. [\*\*WHO \(2021\) Youth-centred digital health interventions: a framework for planning, developing and implementing solutions with and for young people:\*\*](#) Tailored to support digital health intervention designers, developers, implementers, researchers and funders, this document stresses the critical need to engage young people as equal partners throughout these processes, leveraging human-centred design to understand their experiences and empower them to shape solutions that address their unique health needs.
3. [\*\*WHO \(2024\) Ethics and governance of Artificial Intelligence for Health: Guidance on large multi-modal models:\*\*](#) This guidance document focuses on large multi-modal models (LMMs), a type of generative AI capable of processing and generating various types of data and content. It aims to assist Member States in mapping the benefits and challenges associated with the use of LMMs for health and provides recommendations for responsible development, governance and use—by companies, governments and through international collaboration.
4. [\*\*WHO \(2024\) Unpacking artificial intelligence in sexual and reproductive health and rights:\*\*](#) This technical brief explores the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). It outlines priority actions and considerations to mitigate the specific risks of AI in SRHR.
5. [\*\*UNDP \(2021\) Guidance on the Rights-Based and Ethical Use of Digital Technologies in HIV and Health Programmes:\*\*](#) This UNDP guidance provides essential recommendations for countries adopting digital technologies in HIV and health programmes, emphasizing the importance of balancing technological benefits with ethical, technical and human rights considerations. In line with commitments made in the Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS, this document offers practical checklists for governments, private sector actors, and donor agencies.
6. [\*\*UNDP \(2025\) Toolkit for Ensuring Rights-Based and Ethical Use of Digital Technologies in HIV and Health Programmes:\*\*](#) This Guidance document outlines key ethical, human rights and technical considerations for countries adopting digital technologies for health, detailing human rights risks, norms and standards, and provides a practical checklist for assessment. The Toolkit is practical guidance for UN staff, governments, partners, technology developers, and civil society organizations for implementing ethical and rights-based digital health solutions.
7. [\*\*UN Women \(2023\) Gender Analysis in Technical Areas: Digital Inclusion:\*\*](#) This guidance, developed in consultation with the UN Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, was designed to build the capacities of sector specialists and gender focal points in conducting gender analysis within digital inclusion efforts.
8. [\*\*UN Women \(2023\) Technology-facilitated violence against women: Taking stock of evidence and data collection:\*\*](#) Drawing on a phased scoping review of academic and grey literature, this paper presents a landscape review highlighting what is known about technology facilitated violence against women (TF VAW), who is generating this research, and how the evidence is generated.
9. [\*\*UN Women \(2024\) Placing gender-equality at the heart of the global digital compact: Taking forward recommendations of the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women:\*\*](#) This paper, prepared by UN Women and the Action Coalition on Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality, aims to help governments, policymakers, multilateral organizations, the private sector, and civil society build consensus around a gender-transformative framework to advance women's and girls' rights in the digital age.

# Resources

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