Wellness
The new world of wellness
Comment by Javier García.

Keeping connected
Tight-knit communities meet on Instagram.

All set for summer sports
Fun in the sun with ISO standards.

Cycling for life
Two wheels to wellness.

One step ahead with mobile apps
How to keep track of your health data.

6 ways to wellness
ISO standards for a balanced life.

New trends for medical spas
Have yourself a healing holiday.

Healing powers of the sea
Embrace Tunisia’s thalassic experience.

High hopes for medical tourism
Why health abroad is well worth a trip.

Virtual meetings get thumbs up
Empowering communities
ANSI spotlights sanitation
UNECE gender declaration: one year on
Goals and priorities for China
Business continuity at ISO
The COVID-19 pandemic is leading the tourism sector into its worst crisis in history. Tourism is so much more than just leisure. It’s freedom, health and culture, but also one of the main economic drivers for wealth and employment worldwide. To address this situation, the fundamental challenge is to rebuild confidence in the sector’s workers and in all of us, its customers, so that we can once again enjoy the virtues of tourism in a safe and healthy way as soon as possible.

ISO must play a key role in tackling this global challenge, most notably through its technical committee ISO/TC 228 on tourism and related services, which operates under Spanish leadership. The committee develops best-practice standards to improve service delivery and help tourists to make informed decisions based on objective evidence.

The fact is that this crisis has completely changed our priorities, with health and safety becoming our main concerns right now. However, we must not forget that this nightmare will eventually come to an end and, when it does, we will value other things such as the well-being of people. Well-being is understood not only as the absence of disease, but as a comprehensive concept that combines the physical, mental and spiritual state. While this is not a new concept, we will see its benefits more clearly once this serious health and economic crisis is over.

Well-being is not just about having a healthy lifestyle linked to diet, exercise or being in touch with nature. It also forces us to look within ourselves in order to find good health, happiness and strength. Whether it’s connecting or disconnecting, well-being takes on many forms and the growing interest it raises suggests profound changes in consumer behaviour, which in turn impact a wide range of businesses. According to the Global Wellness Institute, the health and wellness industry totalled USD 4.5 trillion in 2018.
To address these needs, ISO has a number of standards associated with wellness and well-being, which it has been working on for some time. One example is ISO 21426, which specifies the service requirements for medical spas. Initiated by the Spanish Institute for Quality Tourism (ICTE), this standard puts the emphasis on the health properties of mineral medicinal water treatments. What’s more, with ISO 17680 for thalassotherapy centres, we discover the benefits of seaweed treatments or seawater baths, while ISO 17679 for wellness spas promotes physical, mental, emotional and social balance.

We are also fortunate to be able to combine traditional medicine with high-tech tools for virtual care, such as apps, wearable technology or chatbots, as well as other innovations that help us to better manage health, loneliness or anxiety. In this regard, a new technical specification is underway that will focus on the quality and trust of apps dedicated to health and wellness.

But wellness is not static; it is the result of good lifestyle habits such as walking or playing sports. For example, cycling has become an essential means of transport in sustainable cities and future ISO guidelines will specifically promote the safety of electrically power-assisted bikes. What’s more, the safe practice of diving and other adventure tourism activities is the subject of its own international reference standards. Finally, standards on sports equipment and recreational facilities, including summer toboggan runs and floating leisure articles, are developed under the umbrella of technical committee ISO/TC 83.

Ultimately, ISO standards have an active role to play in managing and overcoming the crisis; and they must become, now more than ever, the reference for safe, quality services once it is finally behind us.

Well-being is understood as a comprehensive concept that combines the physical, mental and spiritual state.
Keeping connected

Keeping people informed, safe and supported on social media has been a priority since our #COVID19 campaign began in March. Over the last few months, we have been working quickly to make pertinent information readily accessible, along with reinforcing messages of support and solidarity as we wade through these choppy waters together.

One example comes from our @myisolife Instagram account. As many of us have been working from home during this time, we tapped into the lives of ISO Central Secretariat staff as they #WFH. Showing the more human side of teleworking, our page boasts lots of smiles, kids and fur babies!
In an additional effort to connect people with meaningful content during this time, we have also relaunched our @isostandards Instagram account. As the COVID-19 outbreak evolves, we will continue to closely monitor the situation and regularly share updates, also available on ISO.org.
ALL SET

for summer sports
After the long winter, getting outside and moving around is a great way to stay healthy and enjoy the warmer weather. But summer is also peak time for outdoor sports injuries. Here’s how ISO’s technical committee for sports and other leisure pursuits keeps you safe and active in the sun.
Summer time means time off work and more opportunity for leisure, which provides not only the break you need but the chance to get outdoors, have fun and improve your health. The World Health Organization (WHO) says that a lack of physical exercise is one of the leading risk factors for conditions such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes. Its findings also reveal that 25% of adults are not getting enough exercise, rising to 80% in teenagers.

Studies have shown that regular outdoor activities have significant benefits for health. WHO states that the benefits of being physically active far outweigh the risks of accident or injury and can improve muscular and cardiorespiratory fitness, improve bone strength, increase energy and help with weight control. Brain health improves too. In 2018, British medical journal The Lancet published a study on over 1.2 million Americans that found that exercise provided a noticeable improvement to mental health, thereby reducing treatment expenditure from 12% to 22%.

The arrival of summer is an excellent time to take stock of the safety standards that can help you maximize the fun of your favourite sports while preventing serious injuries. On an international level, these standards are developed by ISO’s technical committee ISO/TC 83, Sports and other recreational facilities and equipment, which sets the basic safety requirements for protective equipment and sporting facilities. So, with summer now upon us and statistics encouraging us to get outside and move, it’s good to know ISO has got you covered.
Fitness in the park

Tai chi is a good introduction to exercising outdoors and was developed in China many centuries ago. It can involve martial arts and competitive wrestling, but for most people, it is undertaken with slow and deliberate movements to help focus on breathing, meditation and balance. The Chinese Wushu Association says that practising tai chi takes up little space. “The best place should be in a beautiful outdoor environment, with fresh air, which is in line with the concept of ‘nature and harmony’ advocated by the principles of tai chi,” says a staff member of the association.

There are a growing number of studies that suggest that tai chi can help people of all abilities and ages improve their body flexibility, nervous system, immunity, digestive and cardiovascular systems. It can also prevent and relieve symptoms relating to depression, Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease and is widely used in sports rehabilitation and recovery from surgery.

If you want more from tai chi than stretching and relaxation, you can graduate to using swords as well. The Chinese Wushu Association has worked with ISO/TC 83’s subcommittee SC 6, Martial arts, to develop a standard – ISO 20740 – on the Wushu Taiji sword used in the martial arts area of tai chi. With specifications on the materials used and dimensions of the hilt, blade and hand guard, greater user safety and consistent product quality can be ensured for anybody interested in going beyond bare-handed tai chi exercises. However, don’t forget that you must have mastered the basics of tai chi first.

Clothing, too, is subject to an ISO standard. Designed with manufacturers in mind, ISO 20739 specifies the classifications, requirements and test methods of clothing for performing the Wushu Taiji sport. “The clothing is made in accordance with the traditional Chinese folk clothing style and is mandatory for formal competitions or performances. It embodies people’s respect for tai chi and recognition of our culture,” the Wushu Association explains.
In at the deep end

Moving from the park to the water, for many people, holidays feature swimming. To ensure poolside safety, computer vision systems are available and in wide use by public swimming pools or pools that are larger than 150 m². ISO 20380, *Public swimming pools – Computer vision systems for the detection of drowning accidents in swimming pools – Safety requirements and test methods*, covers the safety requirements and methods needed to continuously scan pools, mathematically detect a solid mass at the bottom of the pool and activate an alarm, saving precious time.

ISO/TC 83 developed this standard to help lifeguards prevent drowning and accidents in public pools. “Our studies have shown that due to architectural designs, organization issues or personnel restraints, lifeguards alone are not always enough to prevent accidental drowning,” committee member Joanna Laurent says. Even with the computer vision system in place, vigilance by not only trained lifeguards but parents remains vital. “This system is only to be used by appropriately trained experts and cannot be the only safety precaution taken,” she says.

“With data showing that drowning occurs despite the presence of lifeguards, it is important that swimmers have received appropriate lessons and parents are always on hand to keep an eye on their children. No system is perfect and enhancing safety by every means available will always be essential.”
Floating safe

With safety in mind, swimming will always be a highlight of outdoor summer play and exercise. Novelty inflatables have become increasingly popular in recent years with shapes, designs and purposes expanding beyond life jackets and paddling pools. They all aim to enhance the fun to be had in or on the water but can present a heightened risk of accidents or drownings. Known as “floating leisure articles for use on and in the water”, ISO has developed seven individual standards, under the ISO 25649 series, that cover the requirements for safety in design, use, stability and load capacity. “It’s important that we examine an inflatable item made for the water and do a very thorough examination to find out every possible risk associated with it,” says Enrico Ticozzi, another expert member of ISO/TC 83.

“A risk analysis allows us to ensure that each item is made to rigid technical standards so that users can feel assured that the product they’re using – anything from an inflatable arm band for their child, a blow-up ride-on llama or a canoe – is safe for them to use.” To ensure that the inflatable meets these ISO requirements, each item has the standards printed on the packaging of the product and the product itself. “They are very visible. It might ruin the graphics of some of the designs but they are unmissable. You should avoid buying inflatables from casual sellers at the beach and instead go to your regular retailers or online to get the quality and compliance required by ISO,” advises Ticozzi.
Studies have shown that regular outdoor activities have significant benefits for health.
If riding a large floating llama isn’t exciting enough, maybe kiteboarding is the summer sport for you. This water sport is an extreme blend of surfing, windsurfing and paragliding and uses a board harnessed to a large hand-controlled kite to ride across the water. Kiteboarding is a relatively new sport, gaining popularity after the first competition was held in Hawaii in 1998, and is planned to debut at the Olympic Games in Paris in 2024. Not surprisingly, however, a new sport creates new hazards and the rapid rise of kiteboarding saw people suffer from hundreds of accidents due to equipment failure and weak release systems. ISO/TC 83 published ISO 21853, Kiteboarding – Release system – Safety requirements and test methods, to specify the minimum standards needed for a release system that safely reduces the pulling force of the kite and a quick-release system that immediately disconnects the user from the kite.

Jörgen Vogt of the Global Kitesports Association was part of the team that developed this standard. “It’s a hugely exciting sport, but it’s still regarded as an extreme sport as there are risks associated with speed, water and variable weather conditions. Although modern kiteboarding equipment is very safe to use when you know how, kites can develop enormous amounts of power and, when handled incorrectly, can be very dangerous,” he says. Enrolling on a course with a fully qualified instructor is the best way to start, Vogt recommends. New kiteboarders need to be educated on safety systems and correct techniques and should start by learning how to fly a small kite on land first. “When you are properly trained, kiteboarding is a sport that can be enjoyed by men, women, children and people with disabilities. In a short period of time, anyone can learn to safely kiteboard and enjoy an invigorating outdoor experience.” There are many more options for getting outside into the fresh air and making the most of your summer. If you’re still looking for safe-but-fun ideas on how to spend your time exercising, ISO also has standards on stepping machines, sleeping bags and tennis rackets. And when the sun finally withdraws its cheering beams, winter sports are also under ISO’s watchful eye. So, if you’re looking to get fit at any season, there will always be a safe and fun activity for you.
Looking after our own and each other’s health and well-being has never been more important. Commuting remains an essential part of our everyday lives and offers us an efficient way to increase physical activity daily. Luckily, electrically power-assisted cycles, or EPACs, are on the rise – paving the way for us to do just that. Here’s everything you need to know about this technology and how ISO helps ensure that we pedal towards wellness in the safest way possible.
The world’s smartest cities recognize that cycling promotes simple and healthy lifestyles and sustainable commuting. The global market for this technology is projected to witness rapid growth due to its increasing consumer preference as an eco-friendly alternative for getting around. The technology is so popular that in Asia, the world’s largest e-bike market, there are currently two hundred million of them in use, followed by Europe and the Americas. The market is still comparatively small for the rest of the world, and yet, as more people become aware of its countless benefits, the adoption rates are set to increase over time.

But first, what exactly is an EPAC? It is a vehicle which has at least two wheels and is propelled by the muscular energy of the person on that vehicle, in particular by means of pedalling, with added assistance provided by an electric motor. Simply put, it is a bicycle with an electric motor, rechargeable batteries, and some gadgetry integrated into them for momentum. So when you’re tempted to ride, but your legs or knees don’t feel they are up to the challenge, don’t fret! As we age, we may have less capacity to exert more power, but an EPAC will still get us out there, making it easy to start exercising again.

Scared that your recreational ride will end in tears and sweat? No problem! When you ride, the motor is your buddy and will take you where you’re supposed to be. Once you start pedalling on an e-bike, a small motor engages giving you an extra boost. You have the freedom to control your speed with your feet, but with some assistance, you just feel more powerful, accelerating easily. Tough terrains along your route? Work that electric boost to your advantage. Is your destination too far away and you don’t want to endure the usual traffic? Pedal your way there without breaking a sweat. This will save you time and energy.

Cycling for leisure and recreation also fosters a sense of solidarity within local communities. It gives us freedom unlike any other mode of transportation. Freedom to roam around places and never worry about the gas. Freedom to navigate and pedal anywhere without having to sit in much traffic. Most importantly, freedom to have fun! Given the increasing interest in this technology, studies emphasize its potential to promote physical activity of a sufficient intensity to gain numerous health benefits.
Riding towards wellness

Cycling provides countless benefits to riders. Since bicycles are accessible and convenient, people will be more inclined to ride and exercise. Not only is it good physical exercise, simultaneously working the heart and the muscles, it is also a great way to regain a sense of well-being. PeopleForBikes, an industry consortium of bike manufacturers and riders in the United States, provides a series of studies and statistics which reflect the increasing awareness of the usage and benefits of e-bikes as well as their growing markets in different corners of the world.

Stefan Berggren, Senior Product Compliance Engineer at Trek Bicycle, a worldwide bicycle and cycling product manufacturer, states that, contrary to popular belief, this technology does not rob us of our human-powered way of life; in fact, it enhances it. “The rise of electrically power-assisted cycles opens up new doors of opportunities and gives people more freedom in terms of commuting. This revolution allows people to utilize bicycles for transportation or recreation,” he says.

Cycling on a regular basis also improves our immune system and stimulates the secretion of endorphins and dopamine in the brain, hormones that boost our morale and help maintain psychological health – no wonder everyone smiles after a good bike ride, despite the intense yet satisfying cardio workout!

Assisted cycling is also good for the muscles from head to toe. It develops the power of muscles of the lower limbs, refines and tones those of the legs and glutes. Also, cycling develops qualities of proper skill and balance. Furthermore, it promotes blood and lymphatic circulation by working the deep muscles and allows a better distribution of lean mass compared to fat mass.

Most importantly, getting on that bike reduces the risk of more serious and chronic illnesses, the likes of diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and even Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s. Research suggests that e-biking contributes to one’s improvement of physical health and mental well-being. In essence, a cycle a day definitely improves the prognosis of cardiovascular and respiratory, neurological, oncological, metabolic and rheumatological diseases. And after all this effort cycling, you will definitely have a good night’s sleep, too.
Safe in the saddle

As cycling rose to popularity being a competitive, sports or leisure tool, trends reflect e-bikes as an emerging market towards sustainable transportation. Research from Portland State University suggests that e-bikes encourage new people to ride, get those who already ride to ride more often, and notes that people feel safer when riding e-bikes than standard bikes. The same study suggests that e-bikes are replacing car trips as well. However, with higher levels of adoption, the rise of electrically power-assisted cycles also raises more safety concerns. With normal speeds topping out around 16 km/h to 30 km/h (depending on national regulations on maximum speed for which the electric motor gives assistance), are EPACs more prone to crashes and accidents than regular bicycles? A study published in the journal Transportation Research suggests that electrically power-assisted cycles do indeed carry a specific set of safety implications. In Europe alone, more than two thousand cyclists die every year in traffic accidents, mainly attributed to the technology’s high speed and growing prevalence, therefore increasing the risks for cycle-related incidents.

So, how exactly does ISO come into the picture? International Standards for bicycles have come a long way, with the first series on bicycle safety – the ISO 4210 series – being published way back in the 1980s. Philippe Legrand, Chair of subcommittee SC 1, Cycles and major sub-assemblies, the expert group that developed the standards under technical committee ISO/TC 149, Cycles, states that they are established keeping in mind all safety considerations for bicycles: “We want our riders to not just have a good experience, but more importantly a safe experience, and that comes down to ensuring a robust quality regime for our bicycles,” Legrand adds. Developed in response to a demand throughout the world, these standards are designed to ensure the strength and durability of individual parts as well as the bicycle as a whole. Ultimately, the aim is to ensure that bicycles manufactured in compliance with International Standards will be as safe for riders as practically possible.

Several decades on, these standards have stood the test of time by constantly evolving to meet the ever-changing needs of consumers, authorities, industry, and the shifting city landscapes. Today, ISO’s contribution to the development of cycling as an efficient mode of transport for sport, leisure and tourism is slowly extending to e-bikes with the development of a new technical specification, ISO/TS 4210-10, covering safety requirements for electrically power-assisted cycles.

Cycling provides countless benefits to riders.
Brave new wheels

Adapting to change is what life and standardization are all about. For example, the world has changed significantly since the coronavirus outbreak in ways no one really expected. With the World Health Organization’s advice that we should stay at least two metres away from other people to minimize the spread of infection, public transportation or even carpooling, wherein direct contact with others cannot be avoided, may be deemed too risky for a period of time.

With all things considered, e-bikes seem to be an obvious and favourable choice of transportation as they are definitely easier to navigate and mean that you are riding alone. Weighing in on people’s perception of this mode of transportation during and after the pandemic, Berggren adds, “It’s definitely a wake-up call to some extent. The outbreak opened our eyes to things we somehow took for granted before, bringing a much-needed change in how we see this technology.” While most of us have had our fair share of staying at home to prevent the further spread of the virus, EPACs present us with an alternative way of going out to feel the breeze against our skin, get some sunshine and a shot of endorphins without expending too much effort.

The benefits of riding an electrically power-assisted cycle by far outweigh its risks. And where there are risks, ISO helps ensure these are managed and mitigated. Cycling gives us so many things – aside from better health and well-being, it reduces our stress and gives us more fun and freedom. We should not miss the chance to utilize such technology, especially when it also promises a better environment for all. It’s initiating this endeavour that takes confidence and determination.

Now, pick a destination. One thing is for sure: regardless of where you want to go, electrically power-assisted cycles can take you there in fun and healthy ways no other vehicles can.
One step AHEAD with mobile apps

We all know prevention is better than cure, so with the expansion of mobile apps and the rapidly evolving functionalities that they offer, our chances of improved health are looking stronger. But what are the pitfalls, and how can manufacturers iron out the creases and make them even safer, more secure and packed with healthy goodness?
Calories consumed, calories burned, blood pressure or blood sugar, steps walked or metres climbed... there’s seemingly no end to what we can measure from the comfort of our wrists. As we are increasingly used to having everything we need at the swipe of a finger, the developers of apps are meeting this desire and helping to fuel the trend, with estimates showing that the number of health and fitness apps has risen from around 325,000 in 2017 to somewhere between 400,000 to 500,000 in 2019, according to specialist research consultancy R2G.

The evolution of this technology is moving as fast as our thirst for such information is growing. And so is the recognition of its usefulness. Germany, for example, is expected to pass a law sometime this year that will allow doctors to prescribe health apps, and other countries are expected to follow suit.

So, what exactly is health and wellness? The World Health Organization defines it as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Todd Cooper, an international expert in standards-based health informatics and medical device technology, and Chair of the US Technical Advisory Group (US/TAG), believes the surge in apps related to health and wellness has been driven by this desire for a more holistic approach to health.

Health and wellness are largely based on nutrition and lifestyle factors – things that are outside the traditional medical setting. “This fits perfectly into the world of apps,” says Cooper, “and there is a greater use of health apps as people become more aware of their health, more intrigued by technology, and look for alternatives to have more control over their destiny.”
There are a number of different kinds of app technology currently on the market. Some feature internal sensors that measure what is going on inside our bodies, others measure external sensory information such as temperature. Some sensors, like those used in the medical field, can sense changes to our health even before we do. Then, of course, there are all the algorithms and the calculations they can do in a way that we can’t – well, not easily, at least. This covers the whole parade of features including calorie counting, distances covered, body mass index, progress we make in terms of weights and reps, and so on.

Commonly used apps include Headspace for meditation, MyFitnessPal for counting calories and Endomondo Sports Tracker, which integrates the GPS on your phone with your physical activity to track movements and measure distance and calories. There are also sleep apps that measure sleep cycles and wake you up at the right moment, others that help you quit smoking by tracking your cravings and progress, and yet others that enable you to perform an ECG on an Apple Watch and share with your doctor.

Add the above to the profusion of motivational apps on the market that provide tailored recommendations based on the plethora of information we are able to provide and you could argue that, if used correctly, apps have the power to change the world. So what’s the catch?
Assessing the risks

As with any trend, when an industry grows, so too do the potential risks. It’s about real risk and perceived risk, notes Cooper. “Wanting to use an app to find the lowest-priced gasoline within five miles is one thing. If it isn’t accessible or gives me bogus guidance, oh well, better luck next time,” he says. “However, when health is involved, the risks become much more personal, ranging from a slight inconvenience to having to call the emergency services, to even death. If an app for medication dosage gets it wrong by putting the decimal point in the wrong place, for example, the effect can be disastrous.”

Gora Datta, an international expert on e-health and mobile ICT to ISO/TC 215, ISO’s technical committee for health informatics, says risks also lie in the fact that health apps can have access to highly detailed, personally identifiable and clinical information about the user. “This clearly raises questions about privacy, security, permission control and confidentiality, as well as the integrity of the infrastructure,” he suggests.

“There is also a need to clarify how to ensure practicalities of data storage and management, availability and maintenance of the network, not to mention compatibility and interoperability.” Some standards and regulations already exist to help. For example, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recognizes many of the benefits of health information technology but requires that risk assessments are carried out and risks appropriately managed.

In its report titled *FDASIA Health IT Report – Proposed Strategy and Recommendations for a Risk-Based Framework*, the FDA states: “A nationwide health IT infrastructure can offer tremendous benefits to the American public, including the prevention of medical errors, improved efficiency and healthcare quality, reduced costs, and increased consumer engagement. However, if health IT is not designed, developed, implemented, maintained, or used properly, it can pose risks to patients.” So, while there is a strong public health case for the use of mobile health apps, the identification, development and adoption of standards and best practices are a key aspect of a health IT framework that promotes innovation and protects patient safety.
Standards to the foreground

So what does the standards landscape look like? Well, in recent years, many organizations have been looking into the thorny issue of health IT. The International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), for instance, goes part of the way to guiding app developers. Published in 2010, its International Standard IEC 80001-1, *Application of risk management for IT-networks incorporating medical devices – Part 1: Roles, responsibilities and activities*, defines the functions a responsible organization must accomplish to identify, mitigate and manage the risks associated with putting medical devices and systems on the IT network.

However, there is currently no established and dedicated mobile health app certification process that can ensure apps are safe, reliable and secure. In 2015, ISO’s member for the UK, BSI, published PAS 277, *Health and wellness apps. Quality criteria across the life cycle. Code of practice*. Well received in the UK, and taking into account the fast-growing market of health and wellness apps and the concerns about their quality and reliability, this publicly available specification provides guidance on key issues to be aware of when developing medical apps. Given its positive reception, it was clear there was a need for guidance at the international level that would draw on harmonized national-level efforts and combined expertise from all over the world. To that end, ISO/TC 215 is working in collaboration with technical committee CEN/TC 251, *Health informatics*, of the European Committee for Standardization, to develop a dedicated technical specification for health and wellness apps for international use.

In addition, Health Level Seven International (HL7), a not-for-profit standards development organization accredited by ANSI, ISO’s member for the USA, made some inroads into this area when, in June 2018, it released for trial use its *Consumer Mobile Health Application Functional Framework* (cMHAFF), a standard that provides guidance to mobile health app developers.
Trust your app

Currently in the making, future technical specification ISO/TS 82304-2, Health software – Part 2: Health and wellness apps – Quality and reliability, which is to be used alongside IEC 82304-1, Health software – Part 1: General requirements for product safety, intends to provide confidence in health software products such as apps. It is being developed by ISO/TC 215’s joint working group JWG 7 in collaboration with CEN/TC 251. In addition, the document focuses on “those aspects of health, wellness and healthcare, that are increasingly being used by individuals and being integrated into healthcare informatics,” explains Nicholas Oughtibridge, Co-Convenor of JWG 7. ISO/TS 82304-2 will provide requirements for the development of health and wellness apps designed to meet the needs of healthcare professionals, patients, caregivers and the wider public. “It will contain a set of quality criteria and cover the app project’s life cycle through the development, testing, release and updating of an app, including native, hybrid and web-based apps, apps associated with wearable and other health equipment and apps that are linked to other apps,” he details.

The potential impacts are many. The technical specification will provide guidance to any company that develops apps and will be useful not just for technology companies but for national health technology regulators and government healthcare providers. Cooper adds that its use will also benefit consumers, consumer advocacy organizations and healthcare researchers, among others. What’s more, it is poised to contribute directly to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) and 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure). Born out of international consensus, ISO/TS 82304-2, which is due to be published sometime next year, is tipped to be a unique platform for innovation in the health sector, allowing for safer, more effective technologies to be developed. With the rise in ageing populations and the increasing number of chronic illnesses linked to lifestyle choices, effective mobile apps, developed and used correctly, cannot come soon enough. What’s more, they will put the responsibility of health back into the hands of the consumer, with safety and privacy at their core. Here’s raising a glass to their good health!
6 WAYS TO WELLNESS

How standards contribute to a healthier, happier you.

- **Personal care**
- **Standards for medical tourism** (ISO/TC 228)
- **Standards for cosmetics** (ISO/TC 217)
- **Standards for food products** (ISO/TC 34)
- **Standards for traditional Chinese medicine** (ISO/TC 249)

Healthy eating

Complementary medicine
Spa and wellness

- Standards for sports and recreation (ISO/TC 83)
- Standards for bicycles (ISO/TC 149)
- Standards for adventure tourism (ISO/TC 228)
- Standards for diving (ISO/TC 228)

Standards for spas and thalassotherapy (ISO/TC 228)

Standards for occupational health and safety (ISO/TC 283)

Wellness at work
New trends
FOR MEDICAL SPAS
If you’re feeling frazzled, burnt out, perhaps need a little facial work, there’s a medical spa that will meet your needs. But how can you be sure you’re in safe hands? Here, two experts explore the growth of this trillion-dollar-plus industry and explain why the ISO standard for medical spas is a valuable tool that not only keeps the sector healthy and innovative, but also ensures quality.
Once upon a time, and not so very long ago, spas were all about manicures, pedicures, massages – lots of massages – from Swedish massage, sports massage, therapeutic massage to Eastern-inspired Ayurveda massage, hot stone massage, the list goes on. Every hotel and resort that claimed to offer luxury facilities had a spa attached, offering all of the above, and people flocked to these spas in their droves to be oiled, pummelled, pampered and swathed in fluffy towels. They were the go-to places to step out of the fast lane, to switch off, wind down and de-stress. Then the industry moved on and, along with it, the menu of therapies and treatments. The emphasis shifted more to wellness and well-being. The new thinking was that as well as the massages, facials and body wraps, why not take a more holistic approach and focus on treating the whole body? So along with beauticians and physiotherapists, medical experts were on hand to check on health and advise on procedures to improve and maintain it. The medical spa was born.

Holistic approach

When we think of medical spas and clinical treatments, countries like Switzerland spring to mind. And the Grand Resort Bad Ragaz in the foothills of the Alps near Zurich is a good example of an enterprise that built its success on thermal waters. It has since moved with the times and is regarded as one of the leading well-being and medical health resorts in Europe. On its Website, the resort’s medical health director, Teo Albarano, says: “Prevention is increasingly dominant in any approach to health, which is why the fusion of medical check-ups and wellness makes sense.” Another go-to resort for the rich and famous, the world-renowned Mayr clinic in Austria that made its name in treating problems with the gut now “holistically combines medical treatment, nutrition, exercise and awareness training”. It promises clients a better awareness of their body to enjoy “greater balance and health”.

According to the 2018 Global Wellness Economy Monitor, a research report by the Global Wellness Institute providing comprehensive data on the sector, more and more of us are combining pampering with personalized medical treatments. The institute says that wellness is now a USD 4.2 trillion global industry. And the American Med Spa Association (AmSpa), in a Medical Spa State of the Industry Report in 2019, says the industry is not only growing quickly but is also “evolving into one of the leading growth industries in the nation”. The report adds that the average medical spa brings in USD 1 million a year.

In this digital age, the age of the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution, technology is also driving the industry. According to AmSpa, technology “is key to current med spa growth” because it has made advances in non-invasive treatments such as Botox more affordable and widely available. As AmSpa says: “As long as technology allows people to turn back the hands of time in an easy and (relatively) pain-free manner, there will be a market.”
As the world becomes ever more interconnected, and people seek a healthier lifestyle, the medical spa industry looks set to continue its rapid growth. According to the *Medical Spa Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis Report*, compiled by business consultancy firm Grand View Research, the global medical spa market size “is expected to reach USD 33.9 billion by 2026, registering a compound annual growth rate of 13.8%.” And an “increasing number of aesthetic treatment alternatives is projected to be one of the key growth-driving factors.”

For the discerning tourist of the digital age, a loll on a beach lounger after a relaxing massage is no longer enough. Staying healthy today doesn’t refer simply to a lack of illness and disease, but to a more holistic state of being. João Pinto Barbosa, who has had more than 20 years’ experience in the spa and health resorts industry in Europe and South America, describes this as “a state where mental, physical and emotional health are in harmony. That’s something noticeable not only in the elderly population but also among younger generations. It is reflected in a variety of choices that include corporate wellness, personalized care, healthy nutrition, physical exercise, travel and hospitality and mental well-being.”

However, all spas, medical or otherwise – and no matter what the treatment – promise peace of mind. Somewhere to iron away the wrinkles and cares of modern life. But for those of us thinking about dipping a toe in the world of medical spas for the first time, how can we be sure that the treatment we have signed up for – be it plastic surgery, varicose vein removal, laser hair removal or even treatment for a more serious health issue – will be administered by fully qualified medical experts, thereby ensuring peace of mind? In this burgeoning industry, how can trust and safety be guaranteed?
Barbosa believes that ISO 21426, *Tourism and related services – Medical spas – Service requirements*, plays a key role in dissipating confusion for consumers as it provides a clear definition of medical spas. He was Marketing Manager and Head of Executive Committee at the European Spas Association (ESPA), which represents over 1400 medical spas and health resorts, and was ESPA’s representative at the ISO medical spas working group of experts.

He is a great advocate of the standard: “Before ISO 21426 (and also ISO 17679, *Tourism and related services – Wellness spa – Service requirements*), it was common to see many – actually, too many – definitions of ‘spa’ in Europe and worldwide. Now, because of ISO 21426, consumers know exactly what a medical spa is and what services they cover.”

In a booming, fast-growing sector, Barbosa says ISO 21426 has brought more transparency and fairer competition. The pluses for medical spas that comply with the standard’s requirements include a reduction in costs due to an improvement in processes, as well as more reliable and better-quality services. “This is a major step forward for any spa in order to gain consumer trust and preference. I’m pretty sure that by applying ISO 21426, medical spa facilities will get more satisfied guests, more economic success and more international reputation through better quality.”

He highlights the fact that, in times of uncertainty, the big challenge for medical spas is raising awareness of their many benefits, either as part of a healing process, a preventive approach or wellness programmes. ISO 21426 helps to underscore the message that all this improves the quality of life and well-being of citizens.
Consumer confidence

Technical Manager Maricruz Cádiz of ICTE, the Spanish Institute for Quality Tourism, has also been the project leader of ISO 21426 for medical spas. She, too, stresses the confidence for consumers inherent in the standard. She says that ISO 21426 “establishes the service provision requirements in medical spas, defined as legally recognized health establishments, with medical supervision, using mineral waters with therapeutic effects and other specific natural resources such as gases or peloids in health treatments.”

From the ancient Greeks to the present day, she points out that people have sought the healing properties of mineral medicinal waters. Nowadays, she goes on to say, the interest of the general population in health and well-being, as well as the need to disconnect from the multiple obligations in our daily life, has generated special interest in services aimed at promoting well-being, some of them based on water treatments.

However, when it comes to medicinal properties, not all waters are equal. Cádiz says that, beyond the relaxing effect, only waters with mineral medicinal properties have been proven effective for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. Carbonic waters, for example, stimulate appetite and favour the proper functioning of the circulatory system; and bicarbonate waters are recommended for problems with the digestive system.

“All this shows us the importance of valuing the benefits of these mineral medicinal waters used in medical spas and, at the same time, of establishing the requirements for the provision of a quality service. That is the reason for the ISO 21426 standard for medical spas.”

As well as requirements related to the evaluation and monitoring of the properties of natural resources used in health treatments, Cádiz says ISO 21426 also establishes the requirements related to the provision of medical spa services, its facilities and equipment, hygiene, cleaning and maintenance, along with the profiles and qualifications of the personnel providing the health treatments.

Despite the boom worldwide in this sector of the wellness market – or indeed because of it – it’s not all peace and serenity. Barbosa highlights some of the risks. In Europe, for instance, medical spas are underused and, in some countries, suffer from a lack of recognition from health authorities, health funds and medical doctors. “That’s the reason why it is crucial for the medical spa industry to increase awareness among European citizens and authorities that the industry is not only an essential part of the healthcare system but also an important driver of local and regional economies,” he says.
Risks and opportunities

Another big risk for this sector is unfair competition from so-called spa services that can harm and undermine the overall reputation of the authentic medical spa industry. Barbosa says: “As I mentioned earlier, that is why the ISO standards, both for the medical spa and the wellness spa, are so important to clarify consumers’ perceptions about what is a genuine and officially recognized spa facility.”

Cádiz agrees, saying that ISO 21426 is an opportunity to differentiate and value the beneficial effects of mineral medicinal waters for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. She sees the standard as “a key tool to adapt the service, infrastructure and equipment of medical spas to the expectations of the current client” – and an increasingly informed and demanding client, who as well as the benefit of the treatment also seeks quality and detail in service.

So, what have these two experts learned about this burgeoning industry and ISO 21426? For Barbosa, one of the biggest challenges at ESPA was representing 20 countries with so many regulations, business models and views of the medical spa market. For this reason, he says, now that ISO 21426 is a reality after so many years of work, “the most valuable lesson I learned is that a single European vision and legal framework for what matters most in the medical spa business is possible to achieve.” Cádiz says: “In a world where the pursuit of well-being takes on special relevance, this standard constitutes a tool to open medical spas to all audiences and promote the benefits.”

As Barbosa points out, this current trend is here to stay and will become more and more important. “Given the nature of the services provided by the vast majority of medical spas, this 360º healthy-way-of-life approach is an outstanding opportunity to stay ahead of the curve and look to the future needs of society. Three strategic key drivers are crucial for the medical spa industry to take advantage of this trend and fulfil consumer expectations: health, innovation and quality.”
Healing powers of the sea
Tunisia is the second most popular destination in the world for thalassotherapy after France. How did it manage to achieve this? The answer lies in its implementation of ISO 17680, which has helped to build a healthy tourism sector and boost the economy.

You don’t have to be a rocket scientist or a medical expert to appreciate or understand the beneficial properties of the sea and seawater. Visit any beach in the summer and you will hear the happy cries of bathers splashing about in the water, see smiling faces, and people generally chilling out, relaxing and having a good time.

Throughout history, from the Romans and beyond to the present day, people seeking health through seawater – thalassotherapy – have been immersing themselves in seaweed baths, covering their bodies in alluvial mud to be cleansed, soothed and revitalized.

Botticelli, in his famous painting *The Birth of Venus*, depicts the goddess of love and beauty emerging fully formed from the sea. There she is, all smooth-skinned and serene, drifting gently towards shore on a giant scallop shell, her lustrous locks flowing in the breeze. She is the embodiment of health, looking for all the world as if she had spent the afternoon at a thalassotherapy resort.

It is no surprise, therefore, that thalassotherapy has become a booming sector in the wellness industry. From the cooler (and more bracing) climes of Ireland to the sun-drenched beaches of the Mediterranean, more and more of us suffering from the stresses and strains of modern life are checking into thalassotherapy centres and resorts along with those seeking relief from rheumatic pains and skin problems.

But how do you know which resort has the right equipment, qualified practitioners and high-quality, professional treatments? ISO 17680, *Tourism and related services – Thalassotherapy – Service requirements*, has the answer to this and other questions.
The case of Tunisia

Tunisia, with its year-round warm climate and plethora of sophisticated thalassotherapy resorts, is regarded as one of the most popular wellness destinations in the world. The country has no less than 60 thalassotherapy centres proudly bearing the ISO 17680 stamp, which ensures their quality of care, products and respect for the environment.

Developed by technical committee ISO/TC 228 for tourism and related services, ISO 17680 establishes requirements for the provision of services in thalassotherapy centres using the marine environment’s beneficial effects with curative or preventive purposes. Its aim is to ensure the respectful use of the thalassotherapy concept, most specifically the principles of hygiene and safety, as well as quality of service and comfort for the customer.

Published in 2015, the standard soon became the focus of a countrywide project to improve Tunisia’s spa and wellness centres. On the initiative of INNORPI, the national standards body and member of ISO, Tunisia has been at the forefront of the implementation of ISO 17680 for thalassotherapy centres worldwide.

By embedding the highest standards in one of its main tourist activities, Tunisia intended to win customers over to its quality services. This it has done in spades, attracting tourists and boosting its economy. In a further sign of its commitment, on 25 December 2019, INNORPI and the ONTH, the country’s national office for balneotherapy and hydrotherapy, signed a partnership agreement for the certification of thalassotherapy centres according to ISO 17680.

ISO 17680 has enabled centres to offer a wide range of local treatments in world-class resorts.
Benchmark for quality

Certification could be a game changer, bestowing a Tunisian seal of quality on the thalassic experience for domestic and foreign tourists. By placing quality, safety and customer satisfaction at the core of its requirements, the standard guarantees that suppliers fulfil certain conditions. As such, ISO 17680 can be described as a business-to-consumer (B2C) type of service standard, having a direct effect on the modalities of service delivery while prioritizing the satisfaction of users and their safety. For establishment owners, the standard thus becomes a badge of excellence that rubber-stamps their adherence to quality of care and products.

The standard also provides a benchmark for an establishment to measure its performance against other service providers in the sector, ensuring fair and transparent competition for the benefit of the consumer. As a result, ISO 17680 has enabled centres to offer a wide range of local treatments in world-class resorts, at a standard that is maintained throughout the country. A quick glance at Trip Advisor suffices to confirm this, with postings that include “a definite must for all”, “incredible service” and “top-class spa”, among others.
It is no surprise that thalassotherapy has become a booming sector in the wellness industry.

Pillars of excellence

As the demand for health tourism continues to grow, so the bar for quality services will remain high. The travellers of today expect good maintenance of thalassotherapy systems along with close monitoring of seawater content. ISO 17680 is a key tool in this area and enables operators to offer a wider range of services to a broader demographic.

The standard highlights five main areas of focus for local authorities. These are: quality of infrastructure; facilities and equipment; human resources; best practice; and the transportation, storage and handling of raw materials used in thalassotherapy treatments, such as seawater, mud and algae, which are all given particular attention to minimize health risks. The safety of guests is crucial and the standard requires that a set of best practices be put in place to manage potential risks linked to thalassotherapy activities.
Reaping the benefits

Tunisia has a reputation to uphold and the standard is helping it to do just that. No matter which resort consumers choose, the standard of excellence, as laid out in ISO 17680, is maintained throughout the country. As a result, its treasured coastline has become a popular tourist destination. In turn, visitors’ positive perception of thalassotherapy services is expected to spill over on to the country’s tourist sectors, giving each of these an economic boost.

It is clear that, for Tunisia, the benefits of ISO 17680 have been far-reaching. With its state-of-the-art spa centres, impeccable service and high-quality treatments, the country has made a big splash in the wellness sector. Things are poised to change, however, as this year’s health pandemic will impact every sector of the economy.

As an industry that comes into direct, close contact with the public, the health and wellness business, in Tunisia as elsewhere, is likely to suffer as a result, but there’s hope that the quality afforded by ISO standards will help the sector bounce back to full glory over time.
Medical tourism is seeing healthy growth: almost a quarter-million patients travelled across borders for treatment last year alone. From dental checks to cosmetic surgery, to life-saving procedures, ISO 22525 holds great promise for the sector.

From knee to nose surgery, the global medical tourism market has been on the rise for several years now. In 2019 alone, it enjoyed a market size value of USD 44.8 billion\(^1\). While the coronavirus pandemic will certainly impact the market share, industry analysts predict good growth in the long term.

So why the sudden growth? Medical tourism guidebook *Patients Beyond Borders* reports that this market has been rapidly expanding as the population ages and seeks medical treatments that are cheaper, involve shorter waiting times and provide more choice in where and when they receive treatment.

To access a medical procedure abroad, potential patients can look online for private hospitals, surgeons, doctors, treatments and recovery processes without having to consult with travel agencies or local doctors. ISO recognizes the risks with this approach and is aiming to ensure that there will be International Standards to cover best-practice medical procedures, clinical risk management, safety and improved outcomes for these patients.

ISO technical committee ISO/TC 228 on tourism and related services is developing a new standard covering the service requirements of medical tourism: ISO 22525, *Tourism and related services – Medical tourism – Service requirements*.

\(^1\) Grand View Research, Medical Tourism Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis Report [online] (accessed April 2020)
ISOfocus spoke to Dr Monica Figuerola Martín about the work being undertaken and how it could potentially save lives.

**ISOfocus**: How did you get involved in the ISO technical committee for tourism and related services?

**Dr Monica Figuerola Martín**: As Head of International Business Development in Quirónsalud Hospitals in Spain, and having previously been the Managing Director of Spaincares (the Spanish Health Tourism Cluster) for two years, with a PhD in tourism, I was very interested in the work being done by ISO on medical tourism. The Spanish national standards body (UNE) suggested that I take part because of my qualifications and expertise and, more generally, my experience and interest in the international tourism industry. We first needed to define the difference between a “medical tourist”, or “medical traveller”, and a regular “tourist”. A tourist may need unplanned or emergency medical help while travelling, but a medical tourist has already planned for their treatment in another country and has prepared their travel, accommodation, surgery, treatments and recovery beforehand.
There are a lot of stakeholders in the medical tourism market with more continuing to arrive. Some are small and less well known, but they are taking on patients from all around the world. This raises the issue of whether they have the proper infrastructure, reputation or medical expertise, and how they might not be transparent in sharing the outcomes of the treatments delivered. All providers of medical services must not only adhere to best practice and clinical excellence, they must also continually build trust and offer guarantees of quality assurance by sharing their results.

We also know that we need to restrict providers who do not meet our guidelines so that patients around the world are less exposed to risk and receive the very best care. This is the only way to deliver a good patient experience and to ensure that the medical tourism sector grows in number of patients, improved outcomes and success, both financially and healthwise.

What aspects of medical tourism will ISO 22525 cover?

Our ISO working group is focusing on the whole chain of the patient experience. There are four key areas in our standard that include the arrangements around pre-travel and pre-treatment, the treatment process itself (surgical or non-surgical), the post-treatment process and recovery, and the follow-up strategies and aftercare when the patient returns home. This ISO standard means that each health centre and other medical stakeholders involved in the medical tourism industry will have reached the benchmark needed to guarantee quality care and patient safety.

Many countries are seeing the potential of participating in medical tourism as increasing numbers of patients seek treatment abroad, with the promise of a financial windfall. What is concerning, however, is that many patients have little knowledge of what International Standards are or whether the provider they have selected even meets them. While patients can access surveys or feedback from other patients about health outcomes and “satisfaction”, only the work of ISO and its partner organizations can provide effective measures and safeguards. Why, these standards might even save lives!

What are the current trends for people who travel abroad for medical treatment and surgeries?

People are searching for treatment and surgeries that they are unable to find in their home countries due to the rarity of their condition and expertise available to treat it, the expense, lack of health insurance to cover it or long waiting lists.
The most common procedures performed on medical tourists include cosmetic surgery, dentistry, cardiovascular surgery, orthopaedics (joints and spine), cancer treatments (sometimes experimental or last-resort options), reproductive treatments such as IVF and weight-loss gastric bypass surgery. A lot of people also travel to obtain a range of scans, screens, tests and second opinions. We are also starting to see interest in spa and wellness treatments, with tourism increasing around these areas as well. These tend to be less medical and more therapeutic as people look for less invasive ways of leading a healthier life.

What do you think the future trends of medical travel will be?

Obviously, in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, making medical travel plans has been extra challenging. Despite this, I believe that the most important factors for medical tourists will continue to be how they choose their healthcare facility and their willingness to travel to get the best medical care available. In coming months, there will also be more effective information for patients and medical professionals on both prevention and protection measures regarding coronavirus. We will continue to seek guidance from the World Health Organization on how to manage the pandemic, and with healthcare facilities achieving ISO standard levels of care, patients will be able to confidently select the medical centre that suits them by looking at
the expertise and qualifications of the doctor, the cost of treatment and the comments and ratings by other patients. Interestingly, while money is a factor for some, we are finding that cost is reducing in importance for many other patients: effectiveness and safety are their main concerns and will continue to be so.

**What future hopes do you have for ISO 22525?**

Today, tourism standards have evolved into real tools that help organizations better position themselves on the market, and that goes for medical tourism as well. Firstly, the ambition is that, when it is completed, ISO 22525 will be widely shared and communicated to all relevant government and private health sectors around the world. Personally, I hope this standard will be the ultimate benchmark in the medical tourism industry, being adopted by the most prestigious healthcare institutions and private facilities in the world. We want all our patients to get the best treatment and outcomes possible, no matter where they choose to travel.

Finally, I believe there are many options available for people to improve their health and choose the medical care they receive, and there are a lot of extraordinary doctors and innovative, state-of-the-art treatments in the world. My advice is to always look for the best medical solution for each case, no matter where it is.
VIRTUAL MEETINGS GET THUMBS UP

Nearly five thousand meetings are held each year worldwide to develop ISO International Standards, bringing together experts from all corners of the globe. But when the COVID-19 pandemic was announced back in March, the standards world went completely online, literally overnight. The result: more expertise, more voices and, ultimately, better standards.

ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 42 on artificial intelligence was just one of over two thousand in-person meetings to be moved online. As a jointly managed event by ISO and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), this entailed a dramatic shift in meeting agendas to accommodate the needs and time zones of multiple working groups, whilst allowing the flexibility for participants to deal with other day-to-day work.

The feedback from more than five hundred ISO meetings held online so far has been extremely positive, with people citing higher-than-usual attendance and all objectives achieved. In the words of Wael William Diab, Chair of ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 42: “There was a great team spirit, a shared objective and the results were clear.” Who knows? Virtual meetings might even survive the pandemic.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

COVID-19 is exacerbating the risks of the most vulnerable people, but exactly who these people are can be hard to discern. In times of crisis, identifying who is most at risk and ensuring they get the help they need is the immediate challenge. That’s why ISO standards for community resilience are a vital part of effective emergency planning.

Extensive field research shows that successful disaster response for vulnerable populations is dependent upon careful planning. Developed with this in mind, ISO 22395 plays a key role in helping local governments, emergency services and community groups determine who is most vulnerable, establish what these people need and prepare them to actually be helped — and help themselves.

Community resilience also calls for greater mobilization of volunteers and that response can be made even better when communities understand how to make the most of their volunteer force. ISO 22319 can aid those organizations involved in coordinating help to manage the process of mobilizing volunteers and integrating them effectively into response activities. Crises are a normal part of life, but building community resilience with ISO standards can see us through.

ANSI SPOTLIGHTS SANITATION

ISO’s member for the USA, ANSI, recently created a video that points out the importance of toilets and proper sanitation. Released to coincide with this year’s World Water Day, the animated video — also available in French and Mandarin — demonstrates how International Standards ISO 30500 and ISO 24521 can help improve global sanitation to promote dignity, progress and prosperity in all communities.

When we think of innovation, it tends to be hi-tech that comes to mind. But it’s not just areas like 3D printing and space travel where International Standards have a role to play. By focusing on revolutionary technologies such as non-sewered sanitation systems, ISO standards can contribute to improving the health and hygiene of more than four billion people who don’t have access to proper toilets.

Worldwide, 2.3 billion people lack any form of sanitation at all, whilst over two hundred million tonnes of human waste go untreated each year. With renewed focus on the primal importance of hygiene and handwashing in keeping healthy, this animation from ANSI is timely as well as informative.
UNECE GENDER DECLARATION: ONE YEAR ON

On 14 May 2019, ISO signed the UNECE Declaration on Gender Responsive Standards. That was one year ago. Since then, we’ve worked hard to meet our commitment to achieving gender equality. The Declaration commits signatories to create and implement gender action plans (GAP) to support more gender-balanced and inclusive standards development processes, as well as to strengthen the gender responsiveness of standards themselves.

Just a few months after signing, the ISO Council approved the Gender Action Plan 2019-2021, which sets out initiatives and establishes ambitious goals towards supporting gender equality in standardization. As part of its GAP, ISO has launched the Gender Focal Point Network. This platform helps share knowledge and best practice between our global members, 48 of whom are also signatories to the Declaration.

To continue to build on our progress over the last year, we will implement effective monitoring towards the long-term objectives defined in the GAP. To this end, ISO is working to collect data on gender representation in standardization work, which will help establish a baseline and better understand the scale of the challenges.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY AT ISO

Over the past few weeks, business continuity has called for new and creative ways of working at ISO. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, all ISO Central Secretariat (ISO/CS) staff were asked to telework full time, ensuring the whole range of services to the ISO community. ISO technical meetings were also moved online to facilitate the continuation of the technical work, a situation due to last until further notice.

A business continuity strategy (based on ISO 22301:2019) was established to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the ISO work, including ISO/CS products and services, activities and resources. What’s more, inspired by our Italian member UNI, we set up a page on ISO.org where dozens of members have already shared their experiences and best practices in dealing with the crisis.

We have also compiled a list of ISO standards (with their national adoptions) that members can make freely accessible online. This action has been coordinated with ISO’s partner organization, the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), which also made complementary standards freely available. ISO/CS will continue to review the effectiveness of its business continuity strategy in the coming months.

ISO (www.iso.org/covid19) – IEC (https://go.iec.ch/covid19faq)

GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR CHINA

There is a need to adapt to a changing world, said Dr Tian Shihong, Vice-Minister of State Administration for Market Regulation and Administrator of SAC, China’s national standards body and member of ISO, as he addressed delegates at the National Standardization Work Conference. He went on to urge standards makers to reinforce participation and engagement in international standardization.

The meeting, which took place in Beijing earlier this year, was attended by Chinese officials and standards professionals to discuss the status of the country’s standardization. The annual event traditionally hosts the unveiling of China’s Standardization Work Plan, which defines the goals and priorities for the upcoming year.

While great strides were made last year to reform the standards development system and oversee the implementation of standards, 2020 was seen as a milestone for national planning, with a push for a more strategic positioning of the standardization work. Other priorities include strengthening the vitality of the standards system and stepping up participation in ISO governance activities with a view to harmonizing Chinese and International Standards.