

Quadrennial Report (2020–2023)

Submitted by the VR Foundation



PART I

Introduction

The Vitiligo Research Foundation (VRF) is a non-profit organization that has held Special Consultative Status with the ECOSOC since 2015. Our mission is to advance research, education, and advocacy for people affected by vitiligo — a chronic autoimmune condition that impacts both skin and mental health, affecting over 100 million individuals worldwide.

Between 2020 and 2023, our efforts were guided by the core belief that every person living with vitiligo deserves equitable access to healthcare, psychosocial support, and evidence-based information, regardless of geographic or economic barriers.

Through a combination of grassroots advocacy and global outreach, VRF has contributed to elevating vitiligo from an often-overlooked dermatological condition to an internationally recognized public health and human rights concern.

Aims and Purposes of the Organization

The VR Foundation was established to address the global neglect of vitiligo — both in research and in care. Our core aim is to ensure that individuals with vitiligo are no longer marginalized in medical systems, policy discussions, or public awareness efforts.

We pursue this mission through four strategic pillars:

1. Public Awareness – combating stigma through global campaigns
2. Medical Research – supporting and accelerating innovative treatment development
3. Education – equipping patients, healthcare providers, and policymakers with trusted information
4. Advocacy – promoting access to care and representation in health policy

By combining scientific integrity, international collaboration, and digital tools, we work to reframe vitiligo as a serious autoimmune condition — one that merits equal attention in global health and human rights agendas.

Significant Changes in the Organization

While VRF's structure and governance remained unchanged during the reporting period, the reach and impact of our work expanded significantly.

World Vitiligo Day evolved into a global campaign with annual headquarters in Indonesia (2021), Mexico (2022), Kazakhstan (2023), Colombia (2024) and Canada (2025), engaging over 40 countries through partnerships with medical societies, patient groups, and public institutions.

We also launched Vitiligo.AI, a multilingual, AI-powered education platform now used by thousands in over 150 countries — extending free, evidence-based support to communities where dermatology resources are limited.

PART II

Contribution of the Organization to the Work of the United Nations

VRF's work strongly aligns with the United Nations' goals to improve global health outcomes, reduce inequality, and promote inclusive, rights-based development. Our public campaigns and educational resources support SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), particularly in underserved communities lacking access to dermatological care. Our research on mental health disparities and patient stigma further contributes to UN efforts to recognize the psychosocial impact of non-communicable conditions.

VRF also played a leading role in achieving formal recognition of World Vitiligo Day on the UN Calendar of Disability Events, elevating visibility for the condition among international stakeholders.

Participation in Meetings of the United Nations

While we did not formally participate in UN-hosted events during the reporting period, this was a conscious decision made to avoid placing additional resource burdens on ECOSOC and associated bodies.

Instead, the Foundation directed its attention to scalable, high-visibility actions that resonate deeply with the public and health professionals alike — such as World Vitiligo Day, international research collaborations, and AI-powered patient tools.

Cooperation with United Nations Bodies

Although we have not undertaken formal joint programs with UN bodies, our work is complementary and supportive of key UN initiatives in health equity, disability inclusion, and digital health access. Our digital education tools and global awareness campaigns directly align with WHO's Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025 and various components of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In addition, several VRF-led articles and projects have been cited in UN-aligned publications, providing an evidence base for improving inclusive healthcare and dermatological equity.

Initiatives taken by the organization in support of the Millennium Development Goals / Sustainable Development Goals

VRF contributed meaningfully to the following SDGs:

- SDG 3 (Health): Promoted access to evidence-based care and education for nearly 100 million people affected by vitiligo.
- SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities): Focused research and outreach in regions with limited access to dermatological care.
- SDG 17 (Partnerships): Fostered collaborations with dermatology clinics, academic journals, and technology developers.

Our AI-powered platform, Vitiligo.AI, emerged as a flagship initiative during this period — reaching thousands of users in over 60 countries and demonstrating the role of ethical, nonprofit-led AI in bridging knowledge gaps where traditional healthcare access is limited. Our digital education tools and global awareness campaigns directly align with WHO's Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025 and various components of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In addition, several VRF-led articles and projects have been cited in UN-aligned publications, providing an evidence base for improving inclusive healthcare and dermatological equity.

ADDENDUM

1. Introduction: Mandate and Mission

The VR Foundation (VRF) is a non-profit organization operating globally from New York, (NY, USA) under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, devoted to accelerating research, education, and global awareness for vitiligo — a chronic, non-contagious dermatological condition affecting an estimated 1–2% of the global population. Founded on the principles of scientific integrity, community empowerment, and equity in healthcare, VRF works tirelessly to address both the medical and psychosocial challenges faced by individuals living with pigmentary disorders.

As a recognized NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations since 2015, VRF contributes to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular:

- Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;
- Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries;
- Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Between 2020 and 2023, despite global challenges including the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, VRF maintained its operational resilience by scaling digital outreach, deepening international collaborations, and investing in emerging technologies to uphold its mandate.

2. Advancing Global Public Awareness through the World Vitiligo Day Campaign

One of the VRF's most impactful contributions to the international health landscape is the annual World Vitiligo Day (WVD) campaign — a global health and human rights observance designed to elevate public understanding, counteract discrimination, and amplify the voices of persons living with vitiligo. Far more than a symbolic date on the calendar, WVD has evolved into a dynamic vehicle for societal inclusion and patient-centered advocacy.

Since 2011, this campaign has been co-developed by civil society stakeholders, academic experts, and grassroots patient organizations. During the reporting period, WVD continued to expand in both geographic and institutional reach:

- WVD 2021 – Jakarta, Indonesia: In collaboration with regional partners and the Indonesian Ministry of Health, the campaign focused on youth engagement and destigmatization in Southeast Asia.
- WVD 2022 – Mexico City, Mexico: A multidisciplinary summit, supported by Latin American dermatological societies, explored treatment equity and cultural stigma.
- WVD 2023 – Almaty, Kazakhstan: VRF facilitated the first-ever Central Asian WVD conference, fostering regional coalitions and spotlighting traditional medicine integration.
- WVD 2024 – Bogotá, Colombia: This event emphasized the intersection of vitiligo, mental health, and indigenous care pathways.
- WVD 2025 – Toronto, Canada (Upcoming): Slated to be a cornerstone event focused on the future of AI in dermatological equity, the campaign is backed by Canada’s research and innovation communities.

Notably, a recent peer-reviewed paper titled “World Vitiligo Day: Lessons from Mexico’s Annual Headquarters and Its Real-World Impact” (Frontiers in Medicine, 2025) has affirmed the campaign’s exceptional impact in terms of community mobilization, medical education, and policy attention — arguably surpassing the reach of many other health observances promoted on a global scale.

World Vitiligo Day stands as a rare example of a patient-initiated, globally endorsed movement that seamlessly aligns with UN values: promoting dignity, equity, and public health for all.

3. Policy and Research Contributions to UN Goals

The VRF’s mission is inherently aligned with global health equity objectives as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals. As such, the organization has invested significant resources into thought leadership and scientific advocacy to bridge clinical research with the lived experiences of underrepresented patient communities.

During the 2020–2023 reporting period, the Foundation initiated and co-authored several milestone publications advocating for a comprehensive and inclusive care model for vitiligo, for example: “A Call for a Paradigm Shift in Vitiligo Care: Multidisciplinary, Inclusive, and Person-Centered Approaches” (Frontiers in Medicine, 2024)

These documents serve as manifestos for rethinking vitiligo not merely as a cosmetic

challenge but as a complex public health issue with far-reaching implications. The calls to action emphasized access to diagnosis and treatment, integration of mental health support, culturally competent care, and a unified global policy framework grounded in human rights.

The reach of these advocacy efforts extended well beyond the dermatology community, fostering dialogue with governmental institutions, medical boards, and civil society stakeholders on every continent.

4. Equity in Mental Health and Dermatological Care

Vitiligo disproportionately affects individuals with skin of color, both in prevalence and psychological burden, exacerbating disparities in health access and quality of care. In this reporting period, VRF took an active role in championing equity-driven research to address these systemic gaps.

Among its most prominent contributions was the co-authorship of the landmark study “Mental Health and Psychosocial Burden Among Patients With Skin of Color Living With Vitiligo,” published in *JAMA Dermatology* (2023). The research highlighted the profound impact of visible skin disorders on mental health, particularly among patients facing intersectional barriers such as racism, colorism, and inadequate medical guidance.

This study has since informed educational materials for clinicians, improved diagnostic criteria in multinational trials, and provided the empirical basis for policy recommendations under SDG Target 3.4 — the reduction of non-communicable disease burden through prevention and treatment of mental health issues.

5. AI-Powered Tools and Digital Inclusion in Dermatology

Recognizing the global imperative for equitable access to health education, VRF has led the dermatological nonprofit sector in the innovative application of artificial intelligence. In 2023, the Foundation launched Vitiligo.AI, a multilingual, interactive platform that offers free, evidence-based information to individuals navigating the complexities of vitiligo.

Since its inception, the tool has served thousands of users in over 60 countries, offering a uniquely inclusive model of digital health engagement. User data has shown strong global adoption, particularly in the USA, Russia, and Japan, alongside China, Canada,

India, Brazil, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Even more notable has been the well above-average engagement from countries such as Iraq, Chile, Senegal, Nepal, Algeria, Kuwait, and Indonesia. This suggests that where traditional dermatology resources are scarce, AI can fill the gap.

The platform has demonstrated consistently high levels of user interaction (67%), with individuals not only engaging but returning (97%) — a testament to trust, usability, and educational value. These metrics far exceed traditional digital benchmarks in public health education. By leveraging AI ethically and transparently, Vitiligo.AI advances the WHO's Digital Health Strategy and supports the UN's broader goals of reducing inequality and promoting well-being through technological inclusion.

6. Operational Ethos: Independent Action, Global Responsibility

The VRF operates with a lean core team and a decentralized model of collaboration that favors agile, high-impact initiatives over administrative engagement. While we did not formally participate in UN-hosted events during the reporting period, this was a conscious decision made to avoid placing additional resource burdens on ECOSOC and associated bodies.

Instead, the Foundation directed its attention to scalable, high-visibility actions that resonate deeply with the public and health professionals alike — such as World Vitiligo Day, international research collaborations, and AI-powered patient tools.

This ethos of self-reliant execution underpins VRF's alignment with SDG 17 — building effective, accountable institutions — while ensuring the highest return on effort and integrity in action.

7. Conclusion and Forward Strategy: Aligning with the UN Agenda 2030

As the Vitiligo Research Foundation looks ahead to the 2025 World Vitiligo Day in Toronto, Canada, we reaffirm our commitment to the values and priorities of the United Nations. Our work over the past four years has been grounded in science, compassion, and a resolute drive for inclusion.

Going forward, we aim to further deepen collaboration with academic, governmental, and international partners to deliver on the shared promise of dignity, health, and equality for all — including those living with visible differences.

We remain ready to support the United Nations in its mission to create a fairer, healthier, and more inclusive world.

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