

# **ADVOCACY FACT SHEET**

#### **Greece Overview**



- 1. **Growing Demand in Eye Care in Greece:** Vision impairment in Greece has increased by 33.6% since 1990, with over 680,000 people affected in 2020. Studies reveal 29.3% of Greek myopic children do not wear necessary spectacles, and 23% of those who do, have inadequate correction. Myopia is the most common refractive error among adults (as high as 42.67%) and children (as high as 46.9%). Geographic disparities exist in eye care access, especially in rural areas indicating unmet vision care needs.
- 2. **Urgent Eye Care Needs for Refugees:** The health situation is challenging for refugees and migrants in Greece. Refugees face significant barriers to accessing eye care, with long wait times and high costs. About 60% of refugees need eye care after arriving.
- 3. **Policy and Healthcare Access Challenges:** Due to high out-of-pocket costs, regional disparities, and limited access for low-income and remote populations, enhanced policies and collaborations are necessary. Addressing rural and migrant health disparities, integrating services, expanding workforce, and leveraging digital tools are required, supplemented by public-private partnerships to scale up.

#### The Global State of Vision

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes uncorrected refractive error (URE) as the primary cause of vision impairment (VI), the second cause of blindness, and the largest unaddressed disability worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

Globally, 2.7 billion or 1 in 3 people live with poor vision caused by URE<sup>2</sup>



(URE includes myopia, hyperopia, astigmatism and presbyopia. It results in reduced visual acuity, leading to blurred vision and, when severe, visual impairment).<sup>3</sup>



Vision impairment costs the global economy
US\$411 billion in yearly productivity losses.4

Without action, half the global population, roughly **4.8 billion**, is set to have a VI, primarily myopia, by **2050.**<sup>4</sup>



**Over 90%** of VI cases **are preventable**, and/or **treatable** with existing, cost-effective interventions.<sup>4</sup> Globally, only 36% of people with distance VI due to refractive error (RE) have access to the appropriate care they need.<sup>5</sup>



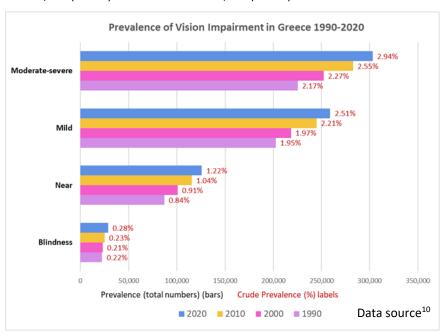
With this baseline (36%), the 74<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly (WHA) endorsed a global target for a **40% increase in effective coverage of refractive errors** (eREC) by 2030.<sup>6</sup>

The WHO SPECS 2030 Initiative<sup>7</sup>, building on WHA8/UNGA9 resolutions and particularly the eREC target, assists countries and stakeholders in addressing the unmet need for spectacles while ensuring the delivery of quality eye care.



## **Vision Needs in Greece**

Prevalence of vision impairment (near, mild, and moderate-severe) was: 515,053 (4.96%) in 1990 571,708 (5.15%) in 2000 643,152 (5.80%) in 2010 687,947 (6.67%) in 2020.10



- 2001 study: Identified 36.8% myopia among 15–18-year-olds, more common in females, correlated with family history and near-work.<sup>11</sup>
- 2009 study: Compared 10–15-year-old Greek and Bulgarian school children, finding higher refractive error (myopia- 28.9% at primary and 46.9% at secondary levels; 37.2% average) among Greeks. 23% wear spectacles with inadequate correction. 70.7% of myopic children wore spectacles (75% at secondary level), leaving 25-30% children with unmet needs. More frequent screening is recommended.<sup>12</sup>
- 2012 study: Refractive errors affect about 57% of the population (40 years+) in Athens' north suburbs, myopia being most common (42.67%), and hypermetropia (14.40%) increasing in those 70+. Emmetropia was 42.33%.<sup>13</sup>
- 2015 study: Myopia levels are higher among older groups in Greece and the rest of Southern Europe, as compared to Northern and Western Europe.<sup>14</sup>
- 2020 study: High refractive error on Crete Island, higher among <20 years
  (35%) and 60+ years (23%). Distribution was heterogenous, despite a
  homogenous population spread. These are higher risk rural and remote areas
  with accessibility difficulties and insufficient ophthalmological coverage. <sup>15</sup>

World Health Organization. (2019, October 8). World report on vision. Www.who.int; Geneva: World Health Organization. https://www.who.int/publications/i/tem/9789241516570 [2] Essilor: (2019, November 5). Eliminating Poor Vision in a Generation. What Will it Take To Eliminate Uncorrected Refractive Errors by 2050; (3) WHO TEAM Moncommunication of February (2015). The Common Comm



## **Health and Vision Care in Greece**

- Greece's centralized health service<sup>16</sup>, ESY<sup>17</sup>, is regulated by the Ministry of Health, and financed by the National Organization for the
  Provision of Health Services (EOPYY)<sup>16</sup> where citizens receive an insurance number, AMKA<sup>17</sup>. Obligatory social security payments are
  made to the digitized EFKA.<sup>18</sup> Citizens and legal residents receive near-universal coverage, with emergency care for
  undocumented.<sup>16</sup>
- In 2021, Greece's health spending was 9.2% of GDP, below the 11.0% EU average, with public financing at 62.1%, lowest in the EU.<sup>16</sup>
- Households pay 33% of health expenses out-of-pocket, second highest in the EU, often for services outside the benefits package.
   13% of Greek survey respondents in 2022 reported feeling obliged to make extra payments to providers or donations to hospitals.
- In 2022, 9.0% of Greeks reported unmet medical needs due to costs, distance, or wait times, far above the 2.2% EU average. Low-income households reported 14.3% unmet needs, over 3x higher than the 4.3% from high-income groups. 16
- Remote and island regions face significant healthcare accessibility challenges<sup>16</sup>, with regional disparities in healthcare outcomes.<sup>19</sup>
- Private insurance provides quicker access to better services, since the public system has been underfunded since the 2009
  economic crisis. A 2016 law however has permitted citizens and asylees unable to afford social insurance to access public
  healthcare.<sup>17</sup>
- Public healthcare covers eye exams and contributes to the cost of glasses<sup>17</sup> (25% reimbursed), with spectacles provision every four years, formerly every two.<sup>20</sup> Many opt for private services for faster care where an eye exam may cost US\$30-60.<sup>17</sup>
- Previously, eye care was primarily provided by ophthalmologists. After longstanding efforts to establish optometry, in Aug 2017, the Panhellenic Association of Optics and Optometry (PAOO) was a legal entity. In Sep 2017, optometry was officialized.<sup>21</sup>
- Optometrists per million 191.9 (2019)<sup>10</sup>, while WHO recommends at least 1 optometrist for every 50,000 persons (or 20 per million)<sup>22</sup>. Ophthalmologists per million 256.0 (2018)<sup>20</sup>, 183 per million in 2015, with a global estimated mean of 31.7 per million (as of 2015). Greece thus ranks high in eye health workforce.<sup>23</sup>
- **Migrants** and refugees in Greece face minimal healthcare access, with significant barriers including location, language, and long wait times.<sup>24</sup> End 2019, Greece hosted over 186,000 refugees/asylees<sup>25</sup>, total arrivals at 31,598 by Aug 2024<sup>26</sup>, many on islands with **lower access** compared to the mainland<sup>24</sup>. Asylees however are granted access to the healthcare system, and information on their access.<sup>27</sup>
- About 60% refugees need eye care<sup>28</sup>, and many live in camps with poorly rated access to health service<sup>24</sup>. Initiatives like Light Without Borders<sup>28</sup> and EssilorLuxottica's Foundation provide free eye care to refugees and residents, with mobile clinics and screenings across Greece<sup>30</sup>. Refugees otherwise would wait over 6 months for an eye test and pay full price for glasses.<sup>28</sup> The 2023 clinic in Athens, comprising the largest refugee population, is part of the ongoing effort to further vision care.<sup>29</sup>

## **Action and Policy**

- Professional bodies and associations: Hellenic Academy of Optometry (ΕΑΟ) (Ελληνική Ακαδημία Οπτομετρίας); The Hellenic Ophthalmological Society (ΕΟΕ) (Ελληνική Οφθαλμολογική Εταιρεία); Greek Optometric Association; Association of Opticians & Optometrists of Northern Greece (SOOBE) (Σύλλογος Οπτικών & Οπτομετρών Βορείου Ελλάδος ΣΟΟΒΕ); Hellenic Association of Optical Optometrists (Συλλόγου Οπτικών Οπτομετρών Ελλάδος ΣΟΟΕ); Panhellenic Association of Opticians & Optometrists PEOO (Πανελλήνια Ένωση Οπτικών & Οπτομετρών ΠΕΟΟ); Federation of Greek Opticians and Optometrists (OSOOE)
- Organizations supporting the visually impaired and blind: : ICEVI Europe Greece Chapter; Light Without Borders (LwB); Panhellenic Association of the Blind (PAB) (ΠΑΝΕΛΛΗΝΙΟΣ ΣΥΝΔΕΣΜΟΣ ΤΥΦΛΩΝ); Center for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind (C.E.R.B); "SUN" School for the Blind in Northen Greece (SBNG); The Lighthouse for the Blind (Ο ΦΑΡΟΣ ΤΥΦΛΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΟΣ); European Blind Union Greece; "AMIMONI" The Panhellenic Association of Parents, Guardians and Friends of Children with MDVI
- Research entities: Aristotle University School of Medicine; University of Thessaly; The Department of Optics and Optometry TEI of Western Greece (Το τμήμα Οπτικής και Οπτομετρίας ΤΕΙ Δυτικής Ελλάδας; Department of Optics and Optometry University of West Attica (Τμήμα Οπτικής και Οπτομετρίας Πανεπιστήμιο Δυτικής Αττικής)
- A 2020 study in Crete found high rates of ophthalmological disorders in rural areas, necessitating enhanced local policies and increased Mobile Ophthalmologic Unit (MOU) visits.<sup>15</sup> A 2022 study revealed significant health disparities in Greek migrant camps, stressing the need for better staffing, improved conditions, and policy changes.<sup>24</sup>
- Equitable eye care access requires Greece to address rural and migrant health disparities, integrate services, expand the workforce, and leverage digital tools and private sectors. The WHO's National Strategy aims to improve Greece's healthcare quality by focusing on resilience, sustainability, and tailored policies, supported by the European Commission. If Greece's National Action Plan for Public Health 2021-2025, and Recovery and Resilience Plan prioritize public healthcare reform and integration.
- Joint efforts of government, public and private actors will allow Greece to ensure access to eye care for all.