

Eye Health Guidance for

Voluntary National Reviews

Guidance for Reporting National Status & Progress on Eye Health to the
High-Level Political Forum through VNRs



Eye Health Guidance for Voluntary National Reviews

As part of follow-up and review for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States of the United Nations are encouraged to "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven" (paragraph 79). These Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are presented annually in New York under the auspices of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF).

Purpose of Guidance

More than 2.2 billion people, almost one-third of humanity, are living with vision impairment. 1.1 billion people live with preventable sight loss because they don't have access to basic services. Vision is a global development challenge largely shaped by geographic, social, and economic circumstance, but one that can be solved in the next decade. The integration of national progress towards eye health into VNRs will accelerate action towards the achievement of the SDGs and fulfill Member State' central, transformative commitment of the 2030 Agenda to "leave no one behind".

This document provides Member States with supplementary guidance for reporting on national status and progress of eye health and the implementation of the [UN General Assembly resolution 75/310 Vision for Everyone: accelerating action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals](#) in their VNRs. It offers support to national coordinators in identifying existing tracking outputs, national plans, policies, and agendas that address eye health's link to the SDGs and to help integrate them into the review and drafting process. Utilizing this guidance will help Member States to maximize the synergies between eye health and SDG reporting processes, increasing not only efficiencies but also effectiveness of interrelated efforts.

The Guidance covers:

- [How is Eye Health Essential to Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals?](#)
- [Why Should Eye Health be Included in a VNR?](#)
- [How do Member States Report on Eye Health?](#)
- [Good Practice Examples](#)
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How is Eye Health Essential to Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals?

More than 2.2 billion people, almost one-third of humanity, are living with vision impairment. At least 1.1 billion people suffer the consequences of sight loss which is easily preventable; they simply don't have access to basic eye care services. This poses a considerable financial and societal burden, obstructing a state's ability to eradicate poverty, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind. Global eye care needs are projected to increase substantially, with half the global population expected to be living with a vision impairment by 2050 if no action is taken.

There is compelling evidence from across health and development research, including the [Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health](#) (2021) and the [WHO World Report on Vision](#) (2019) to prove that eye health is a cross-cutting development issue and that improving access to eye health services will contribute to achieving many of the SDGs.



SDG 1 No Poverty: Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of poor eye health. A staggering 90% of unaddressed vision loss occurs in low- and middle-income countries, with the poor and extreme poor among the furthest left behind.



SDG 2 No Hunger: Improved eye health can increase household income which in turn reduces hunger. 46% of households moved up an income bracket following cataract surgery.



SDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing: Eye health is critical to achieving Target 3.8 on Universal Health Coverage by ensuring good health, mental health, and wellbeing. Poor eye health increases the risk of mortality up to 2.6 times and has been linked to depression and other health conditions.



SDG 4 Quality Education: Eye health has a positive impact on school enrolment, educational attainment, and learning. Glasses are one of the most effective health interventions for children, reducing the odds of failing a class by 44%. Children with vision impairment are 2–5 times less likely to be in formal education in low- and middle-income countries.



SDG 5 Gender Equality: Women and girls are more likely to have sight loss and experience additional barriers to eye care services. 55% of people with vision loss are women and girls, and overall women are 8% more likely to be blind.



SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth: Annual global productivity loss from vision impairment is US\$411 billion. Good eye health promotes inclusive economic growth, employment, and improved living standards. Glasses can increase work productivity by 22% and cataract surgery has been shown to increase household per capita expenditure by 88%.



SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities: Poor eye health is driven by inequality. Women, older people (73% of people with vision loss are above age of 50), persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants are among those affected.



SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities: Eye Health is critical to reducing road traffic deaths and injuries. Unoperated cataract can increase the chance of a motor vehicle accident by 2.5 times.



SDG 13 Climate Action: Climate change increases the risk of eye conditions and climate emergencies disrupts access to eye care services. The eye health sector also contributes to a global health care contribution of 4.4% to greenhouse gas emissions.

Why Should Eye Health be Included in a VNR?

The adoption in 2021 of the [UN General Assembly resolution 75/310 Vision for Everyone: accelerating action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals](#) reframed vision as a foundation for sustainable development and committed the international community to improve vision for the 1.1 billion people living with preventable sight loss by 2030. As part of its implementation, Member States are expressly encouraged to consider addressing the situation of eye health in their VNRs. The [two eye health targets for 2030 adopted at the 74th World Health Assembly](#) in 2021 address the two leading causes of blindness and vision impairment, refractive error and cataracts, and are a vital mechanism to monitor and report progress on eye health and support national efforts towards achieving Universal Health Coverage and other SDGs.

Eye health does not currently feature within the 169 targets and 232 indicators of the SDG monitoring framework. However, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) 'Handbook for the Preparation of VNRs' (2023) provides a reminder as to the "integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Goals" and recommends that VNRs "draw on existing reports" and "use existing national platforms and processes that could contribute to the VNR writing and analysis process."

How Do Member States Report on Eye Health?

Member States and national coordinators can identify and integrate existing tracking outputs, national development plans, policies and documents into the review and drafting process that address eye health and how it serve as the foundation for sustainable development.

Relevant country data and supportive language can be accessed through:

1. World Health Organization's Report of the 2030 Targets on Effective Coverage of Eye Care

The [World Health Organization's Report of the 2030 Targets on Effective Coverage of Eye Care](#) presents the first estimates of effective cataract surgical coverage and effective refractive error coverage to serve as a reference point to commence monitoring progress towards the 2030 global targets. It can serve as a mechanism for monitoring and reporting on progress towards Vision for Everyone and its contributions to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Member States can access a complete list of all individual data sources, and their characteristics in the [supplementary online annex](#) for the 2022 WHO Report.

2. The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness Vision Atlas

[The Vision Atlas](#) collates national data to inform and track progress, including data on the WHO Global Action Plan and links to IAPB members with in-country offices. Includes important estimates on the causes, magnitude and projections of vision loss from The Vision Loss Expert Group (VLEG), as well as key evidence from The Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health.

3. International Agreements

The UN's VNR Guidelines suggest that Member States should include mention of the international agreements it is party to in the context of how the country's policy architecture reflects the three dimensions of sustainable development.

- [UN General Assembly resolution 75/310 *Vision for Everyone: accelerating action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*](#) affirms vision's crucial contribution to the 2030 Agenda, achieving sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and development, and ensuring that no one is left behind. The resolution commits Member States to ensure access to eye care services for their population and to mobilize the necessary resources and support in this regard.
- The [2019 Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage "Universal health coverage: moving together to build a healthier world"](#) commits Member States to strengthen efforts to address eye health as part of Universal Health Coverage.
- The 2022 [Political Declaration of the High-Level Meeting on Improving Global Road Safety "The 2030 horizon for road safety: securing a decade of action and delivery"](#) calls on governments to ensure that road infrastructure improvements and investments are guided by an integrated road safety approach that takes into account the connection between road safety and visual impairment.
- The [2023 Political Declaration on the High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage "Universal health coverage: expanding our ambition for health and well-being in a post-COVID world"](#) included significant discussion about the importance of integrating eye health into UHC policies, emphasizing the need for accessible and inclusive eye care services as a crucial component of achieving "health for all" by 2030.
- The [2024 Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS \(ABAS\)](#) commits to establishing an integrated and whole-of-government approach to address the growing challenges of vision impairment, including integrating comprehensive eye care services as part of Primary Health Care and UHC.

4. Progress on Goals and Targets

Vision and eye health support many SDGs in a direct and unique way, and together these links give a systems view for how vision provides a cross-cutting foundation for the 2030 Agenda. In discussing the progress of each SDG and their targets in the VNR, Member States should consider and reflect on the role that vision and eye health play in reaching targets, including Universal Health Coverage (3.8), equal access to quality education (4.5), full and effective participation of women and girls (5.5) and achieving higher levels of economic productivity (8.2). This will provide Member States with the opportunity to describe efforts toward mainstreaming eye health into planning and policy in national and sub-national governments, civil society, and the private sector. Member States can also include how any difficulties encountered could be mitigated or how any successes achieved could be further leveraged for transformative change.

Good Practice Examples

Azerbaijan

<https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2024/VNR%202024%20Azerbaijan%20Report.pdf>

Chapter 5: Strategic Alliance Architect: Strengthening the partnership for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Implementation

Subpoint 5.2: International Level Partnerships (Pg. 85-88)

In 2021, the donor activities of the Republic of Azerbaijan continued systematically and coordinated by AIDA, the national donor institute. Since 2012, through the “Combating Preventable Vision Loss” (AFAB) project of the Islamic Development Bank, which AIDA supports, about 350,000 people in African countries have been examined, and approximately 60,000 people have received free treatment and regained their health. In 2021, humanitarian actions under the AFAB project took place in Djibouti, Ivory Coast, Niger, and Somalia. During these actions, 88,167 people received free eye examinations, and 4,257 patients underwent restorative surgeries. Additionally, 64 medical personnel in Somalia were trained in professional development. These projects in 14 low-income countries have been recognized as best practices in several international reports, earning acclaim for Azerbaijan’s donor activities. The AFAB project supports Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, and 17.

In 2022, under the AFAB project, 1,000 patients underwent eye surgeries, and more than 5,000 received medical examinations in four African countries with financial support from AIDA.

Under the “Combating Preventable Vision Loss” (AFAB) project, implemented by the Islamic Development Bank with AIDA’s financial support, significant medical assistance was provided in two African countries. In 2023, 3,000 patients underwent eye surgery, and 12,600 received medical examinations. Additionally, 68 medical personnel in Somalia received professional development training. The AFAB project supports SDGs 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, and 17.

People’s Democratic Republic of Lao

<https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2024/VNR%202024%20Lao%20Report.pdf>

SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-Being

3. Non-communicable diseases & mental health (Pg. 56)

Another NCD which has been gaining attention in recent years is eye health which is a cross-cutting development issue and that improving access to eye health services will contribute to achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals. To help achieve SDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing, the Ministry of Health adopted its first National Strategic Plan for Eye Health (2021- 2025), which sets goals and objectives to guide eye health program delivery across the country. This plan has been in part informed by national data collected in 2007 and 2017 through Rapid Assessment of Avoidable Blindness (RAAB) surveys which were undertaken to determine the burden of

blindness and vision impairment in Lao PDR for the purpose of planning for eye care services.

Nepal

https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2024/VNR%202024%20Nepal%20Report_0.pdf

Progress on Goals and Targets

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (Pg. 31)

Nepal is accelerating its efforts to achieve SDG 3.8 through formulation and endorsement of National Eye Health Strategy 2023 and inclusion of WHO eCSC (effective Cataract Surgical Coverage) target into National Health Sector Strategic plan 2023- 2030. In order to achieve the targets, the public private partnership model has been adopted in eye health service delivery and government social health protection program includes nine eye conditions including cataract surgery and provision of glasses.

Sierra Leone

<https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2024/VNR%202024%20Sierra%20Leone%20Report.pdf>

Progress on Goals

Introduction - Goal ten: inequality (Pg. 8)

Here, we assessed the impact of social protection schemes on the welfare of people living with disabilities (PWDs) and found out that several beneficiaries have graduated from extreme Ministry of Planning and Economic Development 9 9 poverty to the level of economic independence. PWDs continue to access free healthcare services, including eye health

SDG 10 Reducing Inequalities

Update on Eye healthcare for PWDs (Pg. 47)

Sierra Leone recognizes the high prevalence of eye disease and visual loss among the low-income strata of the people, which requires strategic policy attention. Access to good-eye healthcare is a crucial element in bridging the inequality gap for PWDs. With the support of Sightsavers, the Ministry of Health in 2021 developed the first-ever National Eye Health Policy in Sierra Leone which presents a significant shift in the approach from prevention of blindness to 'eye health for all'. The policy provides a framework for universally accessible, affordability, and inclusive quality eye health services that are of acceptable standards. This policy, therefore, incorporates the need for the promotion of healthy eyes, prevention of eye diseases, early identification, and quality medical and surgical care as well as appropriate rehabilitation and provision of assistive devices.

Given the cross-cutting nature of the interventions prescribed in the eye health policy, the Ministry of Health has established coordination mechanisms at the National and district levels to bring the different entities together for the realisation of this policy. With

the implementation of this policy, eye health indicators are now included in the Health Management Information System which will enhance data availability on these indicators. Additionally, Sightsavers Sierra Leone continues to support free eye health-related interventions across all regions of the country for PWDs and other marginalised and vulnerable persons, including the Western Area Eye Care Project at Connaught Hospital commonly known as 'Eye Clinic; the Western Area Rural Eye Care Project at Jui Government Hospital; the Northern Area Eye Care at the Government Hospital in Makeni; and Southern Province Eye project at the Bo Government Hospital; and the Eastern Province Eye Care Project at the Kenema Government Hospital. The project supports free eye care units within the headquarters towns for PWDs, including other marginalised and vulnerable persons. It also includes the deployment of cataract surgeons in government hospitals and ensures the successful mainstreaming of all eye health staff into the government service scheme to ensure sustainability. Each centre has a special fund, Patient care costs to cater for vulnerable individuals who cannot afford the cost of eye health services, including the cost of eye surgery, consultations, and medication. Since 2021, over 760,000 patients (persons with disabilities and other marginalised and vulnerable groups) have benefited from this patient care cost.

Solomon Islands

<https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2024/VNR%202024%20Solomon%20Islands%20Report.pdf>

5. Partnerships, Enabling Mechanisms, and Means of Implementation (Pg. 74-75)

Throughout their two-week stay in the Solomon Islands, the Pacific Partnership conducted more than 352 medical engagements, including 2082 dental procedures. The optometry team distributed more than 3,163 prescription glasses.

The Solomon Islands recognises the need for engagement with civil society organizations, charitable organisations and the private sector. Several CSOs and community-based organizations have been involved in the delivery of essential services and infrastructure. An example of collaboration is the Regional Eye Centre at the National Referral Hospital in Honiara, which has six consultation rooms, a two-bed operating theatre, a procedure room, and a teaching centre (Figure 23). The Centre is managed by a local team within the Ministry of Health and Medical and Services, with support from the Fred Hollows Foundation NZ, and is helping in the fight to end avoidable blindness. Their services reach large sections of the population that would otherwise have limited access to eye care. For example, in 2023, the Centre provided 8,460 consultations, 460 eye surgeries, 306 diabetic laser treatments, and 1,483 spectacles. In addition, the Centre delivered 362 surgical procedures and 1,324 diabetes eye care consultations in 2023.

Mauritius

<https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2024/VNR%202024%20Mauritius%20Report.pdf>

SDG1: End Poverty in All its Forms Everywhere

The Social Integration and Empowerment Act 2016 introduced absolute poverty thresholds calculated at 40% above the international poverty line of Rs 1,938 per person per month for developing countries. These thresholds are used to determine the eligibility of beneficiaries registered under the Social Register of Mauritius (SRM)...

Additional support to eligible households under the SRM includes...free optical glasses to those aged up to 21 years old.

Mexico

<https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2024/VNR%202024%20Mexico%20Report.pdf>

Original and the 2030 Agenda

Thus, families manage to cover needs basic health and guarantee better nutrition derived from the increase in their economic income, in addition to the fact that the program has an action focused on address specific health needs of the master craftsmen, which contributes directly to SDG 3. [Footnote 70: For example, it provides support for cataract surgery and other recurring diseases in that sector, according to the information provided by the Ministry of Culture, 2023.]

Resources

[WHO World Report on Vision](#)

Provides evidence on the magnitude of eye conditions and vision impairment globally and assists Member States and their partners in their efforts to reduce the burden of eye conditions and vision loss and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG target 3.8 on universal health coverage.

[WHO The Eye Care in Health Systems: Guide for Action](#)

Practical, step-by-step, guidance to support Member States in planning and implementing the recommendations of the World Report on Vision.

[The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness Vision Atlas](#)

Collates national data to inform and track progress, including data on the WHO Global Action Plan and links to IAPB members with in-country offices

[The Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health: VISION Beyond 2020](#)

Peer-reviewed report co-authored by 73 leading experts from 25 countries that makes the clear socio-economic case that eye care needs to be reframed as a worldwide development issue and one that is integral to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

[International Labour Organization Policy Brief: Eye Health and the World of Work](#)

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) joint brief draws attention to healthy vision as being integral to safety and productivity at work.

[UN Women Policy Brief: No women left behind: Closing the gender and inclusion gap in eye health](#)

The UN Women and Fred Hollows Foundation joint brief highlights the specific risks and challenges women face with eye health and how national partners and the international community can most effectively tailor policies and programmes to meet their needs and fulfil their rights.

Contacts

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