



Photo Submitted by: Héctor Ochoa Díaz López to the IAPB World Sight Day Photo Competition

# Focus on Gender Equity

# Report 2022

## Foreword

To end inequality and discrimination against women and girls, and with time running out to achieve the ambition of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, there must be a channeling of collaborative effort from the broadest coalition of actors moving towards a common goal.

We want to see a world in which all people have access to high quality, affordable eye health and because we know that women and girls are disproportionately affected by eye health – this access is crucial.

Evidence shows that:

- Women and girls are more likely to develop vision impairment and less likely to get treatment. Women and girls often face significant cultural barriers and gender discrimination, which means they are less likely to receive services or treatment with the same frequency as men.
- Currently, 55% of people with vision loss are women and girls and 90% of vision loss is in lower- and middle-income countries.
- Most significantly, up to 9 out of every 10 women don't need to be blind, as the most common eye conditions, cataract and refractive error, can be easily treated.
- Where girls are blind or significantly vision impaired, they are often left out of accessing education and girls generally are often charged with care giving for adults with vision impairment impacting their ability to gain an education.

- Women and girls with blindness and vision impairment are often disempowered from conversations and decision-making that affects their health and wellbeing and those of their families.
- Women occupy most domestic or unpaid care roles and women with blindness are often locked out of paid employment, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and disadvantage for women with vision-related disability.
- Women play a critical role in the advancement of global health, both in formal roles and informally within their families and communities. They make up 70 percent of the global healthcare workforce yet occupy less than 25 percent of the most influential leadership positions. Women are also under-represented in leadership positions within the eye health sector and this disparity becomes greater at higher levels of leadership.

Eye health, by virtue of the scale of the problem, its reach across every corner of the globe and intensity in low- and middle-income countries, its direct gendered inequity, and its impact across the social and economic fabric of society, has a catalytic role to play in unlocking opportunity towards achieving an equal world for women and girls.



**Jennifer Gersbeck**

Executive Director,  
Global Advocacy at  
The Fred Hollows Foundation  
and Co Chair, IAPB Gender  
Equity Work Group

## Overview

'Focus on' is IAPB's in-depth series looking into specific issues in eye health including eye conditions and related areas of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2022, we delivered Focus on Gender Equity, supported by Santen presenting eye health and gender equity as important agenda items the development sector needs to highlight. The program was supported by the IAPB Gender Equity Work Group and several members.

[The 2030 In Sight strategy](#) seeks to end avoidable sight loss and make eye care and rehabilitation services accessible, inclusive, and affordable to everyone, everywhere, whenever they are needed.

With 'Focus on Gender Equity', we aimed to highlight that gender should not determine access to health, education, or future opportunity and;

- **Women and girls have a disproportionate burden of vision loss, particularly in Low- and Middle-Income settings.**
- **Eye care for women and girls is integral to improving health & well-being, education, employment and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.**
- **Certain individuals and groups face discrimination that intersect with gender equity and compound inequities to health and eye care services. An Intersectional approach can be used as an approach to address these inequities.**
- **Organizations need to urgently embrace frameworks and actions to achieve gender equity within its leadership and gender equitable employment.**

## Focus on Gender Equity included:

- A UN Friends of Vision event delivered by the IAPB advocacy team with support of the IAPB Gender Equity Work Group
- A webinar led by IAPB Gender Equity Work Group discussing gender inequity and resulting inequalities and addressing it through an intersectional lens. Experts also discussed opportunities and challenges from the 2021 IAPB Gender Equity in Eye Health survey and resources available in the gender equity toolkit
- Two video blogs by gender experts – Jennifer Gersbeck, Co-Chair of IAPB Gender Equity Work Group and Mathilde Umuraza, Light for the World
- Release of the 2021 IAPB Gender Equity in Eye Health survey during World Health Day – April 7<sup>th</sup> 2022.
- Curated expert opinion pieces that focused on this critical issue
- Yearlong promotion of Focus on Gender Equity through IAPB social media channels, featuring weekly content

## 2022 Highlights

- More than ten opinion pieces published including videos, 84% from female voices in the field
- IAPB member organisations contributed expert pieces to Focus on Gender Equity
- Support from IAPB Membership online - this was in the form of using the hashtag #FocusOnGenderEquity, cross promoting our events and expert content and re-sharing
- Santen contributed a quote for the press release as well as nominated a speaker for the UN Friends of Vision event. They also promoted the content on their LinkedIn profiles. Additionally, Santen offered one member from IAPB an opportunity to join their One Young World Summit delegation in Manchester
- Several media mentions of our UN Friends of Vision event

## Events

### 1. Advocacy – How Can Eye Health Contribute to Achieving Gender Equity and the Empowerment of all Women and Girls in the Context of Climate Change

On 16 March 2022, The UN Friends of Vision hosted an official side event at the 66th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on the links between eye health, gender equality and climate change. CSW is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and is instrumental in promoting women's rights. The expert panel discussion, [How Can Eye Health Contribute to Achieving Gender Equity and the Empowerment of all Women and Girls in the Context of Climate Change](#), was co-sponsored by UN Women and the World Health Organization (WHO). A global audience representing over 55 different countries heard from notable speakers, including UN Women Deputy Executive Director and Assistant Secretary-General Asa Regnér, Director of the WHO office in New York, Werner Obermeyer, and IAPB Global Ambassador HRH The Countess of Wessex.



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## 2. Knowledge – 2030 In Sight for Gender Equity Webinar

The 2030 In Sight for Gender Equity webinar on 6 June, discussed the tools, resources and approaches to walk the talk to Gender Equity and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The webinar included presentations on intersectional approaches to gender equity and the fact sheet on intersectionality from Light for the World, the gender equity toolkit and how organizations can use the information and resources included to kick start and/or continue promoting gender equity. The panel then discussed more on the importance of moving beyond gender equity in programming to prioritizing it organizationally. The discussion also covered opportunities and challenges from the 2021 IAPB Gender Equity in Eye Health survey and resources available in the gender equity toolkit.

The panellists wrapped up the discussion with the below messages as top tips to those advocating for gender equity.

- Make the gender equity in eye health case, an argument beyond gender, because it is about women and girls having equality throughout the whole social fabric of society – including their human rights.
- Include lived experience, tell real stories that highlight the different layers of disadvantage women and girls (beyond the single lens of gender).
- Celebrate the successes and don't give up when the challenges feel overwhelming.

The webinar was moderated by Jennifer Gersbeck, Executive Director – Global Advocacy at The Fred Hollows Foundation; Co Chair, IAPB Gender Equity Work Group. Panelists included, Sumrana Yasmin, Senior Global Technical Lead for Refractive Error, Sightsavers, Mathilde Umuraza, Gender expert, Light for the World International, and Elizabeth Kishiki, Childhood Blindness and Low Vision Coordinator, Kilimanjaro Centre Community Ophthalmology, KCCO; Co Chair, IAPB Gender Equity Work Group.



### 3. Knowledge – Knowledge Pieces

Starting in February 2022, we were able to curate and deliver more than ten expert opinion pieces relating to [Focus on Gender Equity](#).

Here are some examples of the specially curated expert opinion pieces

- On the International Day of Women and Girls in Science as part of our year-long Focus on Gender Equity, [Brooke Blanchard on the role of women and girls in science](#), not only as beneficiaries, but also as agents of change.
- Dr. Sara Wester, Women In Ophthalmology, Heidi Chase, Seva Foundation, Clare Szalay Timbo and Dr Maria Montero, Orbis International [elaborates partnering together to create opportunities for the ophthalmic community to collectively #BreakTheBias in eye health](#).
- Louisa Syrett pens a short review of the United Nations 66th Commission [on the Status of Women \(CSW\)](#).
- A case study from Mission for Vision on [Narrowing the gender divide through novel eye health interventions](#).



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## 4. Social Media/Communications

A suite of resources were developed and curated to support Focus on Gender Equity, and its events that included UN Friends of Vision Event, the webinar and World Health Day that coincided with the release of the 2021 IAPB Gender Equity in Eye Health survey and a press release. We had dedicated pages for Focus On Gender Equity, developed social tiles to promote our events, and made use of the hashtag #FocusOnGenderEquity.



