ECOO Blue Book
Data on optometry and optics in Europe
The European Council of Optometry and Optics - 2017
Introduction:

Welcome to this third edition of the ECOO Blue Book, which follows-on from its 2008 and 2015 editions with updated information on the professions of Optometry and Optics in Europe.

Purpose and objective of the Blue Book

The “Blue Book” is a valuable aggregation of data relating to the professions of Optometry and Optics in countries across Europe. The aim is to provide comparable and comprehensive data for professionals, politicians and academics and to foster understanding of these two professions, its differences and similarities between countries.

The information gathered covers data on the number of professionals in the field of optics and optometry, the scope of competence of the professionals in their respective countries as well as the regulatory and educational environment.

As the data suggests, the professional landscape is scattered and each country has its particularities, which provides a fruitful basis to identify best practices and to learn from the different systems in place. This also showcases the benefits of ECOO working on achieving its mission:

- To improve eye health and vision for all and eliminate avoidable blindness and visual impairment in Europe.
- To create a harmonised professional and educational system for optometry and optics based on the European Diploma in Optometry and Optics.
- To develop the scope of practice for optometrists and opticians to the degree that the same high standards apply and are mutually recognised in all European countries.

Methodology

A survey, facilitated by the World Council of Optometry (WCO) has been circulated to ECOO members, who are national professional associations. For countries where ECOO does not have a member, a national association has been identified to provide the information.

The geographic scope extends beyond the EU Member States and covers countries of the European continent.

Disclaimer

The data of the Blue Book has been entered by ECOO members using their respective sources of information. In this sense, the data has not been collected by a single person using the same criteria at the exact same time. Variations in terms of data used can therefore be expected and should be taken into account when using the data.

Terminology

Given that the scope of practice of optometry and optics varies across countries, members have been asked to fill-in the information at the highest competence of their country. The answers therefore reflect the highest competence and may not be a reflection of the majority of professionals in that country. For this reason, the data in the Blue Book should be seen in its entirety, which provides a holistic picture of the profession.
What the Blue Book tells us

With the rising cost of medical care and decline of the number of ophthalmologists in some countries of Europe, primary eye health care is transferred increasingly to optometrists and opticians.

The ability of optometrists and opticians to develop beyond their traditional handcraft activities and to offer primary eye health care is not uniform, it varies according to the circumstances of their country.

Optometry and optics are linked professions and in some countries of Europe considered to be one profession. In other countries, they reflect separate areas of professional activity and are considered as separate professions. Optometry is concerned with the clinical assessment of the human eye and the prescribing and after care of optical appliances (spectacles or contact lenses) to correct defects of sight. Optics (or services provided by opticians) focuses on assembly and dispensing such appliances.

In some countries, professionals combine the two functions. In other countries, they restrict their assessment to refracting the patient and then dispensing the corrective appliances. Beginning with the lowest level of training, we can say that in Europe we have dispensing opticians, followed by refracting opticians, followed by optometrists who are trained to detect pathology. In some countries optometrists also use diagnostic drugs to enhance examination of the eye, and a few optometrists have the capacity to manage ocular disease by the prescription of therapeutic drugs.

The varied scope of practice of optometrists and opticians in Europe is the result of the extent of available training, the law, the organisation of the profession, and the relative size, political weight and the independence of optometry relative to ophthalmology.

Education and training are recognised as the key to the advancement of the profession. A general trend is emerging, whereby opticians continue to be trained from the age of 16 onwards through a mixture of study and practical work experience; while optometrists are increasingly trained at university, having an element of supervised training in clinical practice.

Developments since the Blue Book 2015

Comparing the picture of 2017 to the Blue Book 2015, we are pleased that the data has been updated by all countries, providing us with an updated snapshot of the professional landscape in Europe.

Noteworthy developments include:

- There has been a slight increase in most countries in the number of optometrists and opticians as a percentage of the population. The population data has also been updated based on the latest WHO data.

- The ratio between Optometrists and Opticians has largely remained the same, with countries like the Nordics, UK, Ireland and the Netherlands having more optometrists than opticians and the majority of the other countries having more opticians than optometrists. It should also be noted that in Spain, the professions are combined in one, so there is no split in the figures.

- A positive development is also the number of qualifying student optometrists, which has also increased slightly over the past two years.

- The number of people wearing contact lenses has largely remained the same. The data the contact lenses has been questioned in the past as it seemed too low in some countries, however the question refers to people who wear contact lenses only, it thus excludes the people who wear both contact lenses and spectacles.

- The scope of practice picture illustrates the scattered landscape and also showcases the work some of ECOO members engage in to achieve recognition of the profession and to expand the scope of practice. Overall, the dominant colour green showcases that a wide range of activities are well established.
**Primary eye care guidelines**

ECOO has established guidelines for optometric and optical services in Europe, which are accessible through our website [www.ecoo.info](http://www.ecoo.info).

**Optometrists and Opticians in Europe**

The profession of optometry and optics has evolved at varying speeds within Europe and remains at different stages of development. Thus, it is difficult to paint a uniform picture of the profession, easily perceptible at a glance.

Generally, optometry has emerged from optics, as the education of opticians has expanded to include clinical subjects and as their scope of practice has been enlarged as a consequence. Some opticians have become optometrists.

Opticians continue to make and fit corrective spectacles, according to the prescription of an ophthalmologist (a medical practitioner) or an optometrist, depending on whether optometry is practised in that country. Such opticians are sometimes called dispensing opticians.

Optometrists perform full eye examinations on patients, resulting in the prescription of corrective optical appliances if necessary and the detection of signs of possible disease, injury or abnormality of the eye. In such cases the optometrist refers the patient to a medical doctor for further investigation and possible treatment.

Some opticians have evolved to the stage of performing partial eye examination, consisting mainly of refracting and prescribing corrective optical appliances, but not searching for or detecting pathology of the eye. Such opticians may be called refracting opticians.

In some countries optometrists and dispensing opticians are regarded as distinct professions, either in law or de facto. In other countries, the profession is considered as a single profession, the optician optometrist, irrespective of the professional’s scope of practice and the day-to-day activities.

**Beyond Europe - Global data**

Following the success of the ECOO Blue Book in 2008, the World Council of Optometry (WCO) has adopted the idea and rolled-out the survey on a global basis. For data from non-European countries, please visit the website of the WCO: [http://worldcouncilfooptometry.info](http://worldcouncilfooptometry.info)

**Contents of the Blue Book**

- The number and size of the profession
- The status of the profession
- The scope of practice of the profession
- The profession’s role in public health
- The education and training of the profession
Countries surveyed
The number and size of the profession

Number of optometrists per 10K of population (Pr. 10K)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number per 10K</th>
<th>Change from Blue Book</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain (ES)</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark (DK)</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway (NO)</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland (FI)</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>(0.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom (GB)</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany (DE)</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>(0.28)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estonia (EE)</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greece (GR)</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Portugal (PT)</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland (IE)</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland (CH)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
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<td>Austria (AT)</td>
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<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic (CZ)</td>
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<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary (HU)</td>
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<td>(0.19)</td>
</tr>
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<td>(0.16)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Latvia (LV)</td>
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<td>(0.03)</td>
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<td>Romania (RO)</td>
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<td>Slovakia (SK)</td>
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<td>Italy (IT)</td>
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<td>Cyprus (CY)</td>
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<td>Belgium (BE)</td>
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<td>Slovenia (SI)</td>
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<td>(0.05)</td>
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<td>Serbia (RS)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine (UA)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average: 1.25

Comment:
The professions of Optometry and Optics in Spain and the Nordic countries are combined in one, which is why only one figure has been included under Optometrists and not under Optics.
The figures in the brackets represent the variation compared to the value from the Blue Book 2015.
The number and size of the profession

Number of opticians per 10K of population (Pr. 10K)

Average: 1.7

Comment:
The professions of Optometry and Optics in Spain and the Nordic countries are combined in one, which is why only one figure has been included under Optometrists and not under Optics.
The number and size of the profession

Number of Optometrists VS Opticians

Comment:
The professions of Optometry and Optics in Spain and the Nordic countries are combined in one, which is why only one figure has been included under Optometrists and not under Optics.
The number and size of the profession

Number of ophthalmologists per 10K of population (Pr. 10K)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Ophthalmologists</th>
<th>Pr. 10K</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic (CZ)</td>
<td>3.79 (0.04)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece (GR)</td>
<td>2.56</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland (CH)</td>
<td>1.93 (0.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania (RO)</td>
<td>1.28 (0.13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus (CY)</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine (UA)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy (IT)</td>
<td>1.15 (0.08)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria (AT)</td>
<td>1.12 (0.34)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland (PL)</td>
<td>1.09 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia (LV)</td>
<td>1.07 (0.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.95 (0.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bulgaria (BG)</td>
<td>0.95 (0.29)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium (BE)</td>
<td>0.93 (0.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France (FR)</td>
<td>0.92 (0.04)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia (EE)</td>
<td>0.91 (0.02)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.82 (0.28)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany (DE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spain (ES)</td>
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<td>Slovenia (SI)</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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<td>Sweden (SE)</td>
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<td>Denmark (DK)</td>
<td>0.62 (0.01)</td>
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<td>Hungary (HU)</td>
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<td>Turkey (TR)</td>
<td>0.46 (0.13)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands (NL)</td>
<td>0.42 (0.01)</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom (GB)</td>
<td>0.38 (0.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland (IE)</td>
<td>0.32 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average: 1.03
The number and size of the profession

Number of qualifying students per 10K of population (Pr. 10K)

Average: 0.09

Comment:
Answers refer to the grand total of students qualifying each year in Optics and Optometry.
The number and size of the profession

Number of retail outlets per 10K of population (Pr. 10K)

Average: 1.36
The status of the profession

How many of the total refractions/primary eye exams are done by ophthalmologists? (in %)

- **75-89 (2):** Belgium, Bulgaria
- **50-74 (6):** Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Ukraine
- **25-50 (6):** Austria, Germany, Finland, Italy, Portugal, Romania
- **>90% (6):** France, Greece, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey
- **Less than 25% (8):** Switzerland, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, United Kingdom, Ireland, Norway, Sweden
The status of the profession

Do practices refract, examine eyes, prescribe and sell products?

No (3):
Greece
Hungary
Turkey

Yes (27):
Austria
Belgium
Bulgaria
Switzerland
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Germany
Denmark
Estonia
Spain
Finland
France
United Kingdom
Croatia
Ireland
Italy
Latvia
Netherlands
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Serbia
Sweden
Slovenia
Slovakia
Ukraine
The status of the profession

How is the profession generally regulated?

- **By local health authority (1):** Switzerland
- **By a national regulatory board (2):** United Kingdom, Latvia
- **By law (11):** Austria, Cyprus, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Turkey
- **By national government (12):** Belgium, Czech Republic, Spain, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, Slovakia

**Comment:**

Answers are given for the highest level of qualification of the profession in a given country.
The status of the profession

Is the profession closely monitored (must licensing be renewed)?

80.8% No
19.2% Yes

Comment:

Answers are given for the highest level of qualification of the profession in a given country.
The status of the profession

Is the profession protected by law?

No (3):
- Bulgaria
- Poland
- Portugal

Yes (23):
- Austria
- Belgium
- Switzerland
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Germany
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Spain
- Finland
- France
- United Kingdom
- Greece
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Slovenia
- Slovakia
- Turkey

Comment:
Answers are given for the highest level of qualification of the profession in a given country.
**The status of the profession**

How many people (approximately) wear contact lenses? (in %)

- **Average:** 5.05
- **Comment:** This figure is based on the number of people wearing contact lenses only. It excludes people who wear both contact lenses and spectacles.
The status of the profession

How many people (approximately) wear spectacles? (in %)

Average: 48.34
How many people (approximately) wear both CL and spectacles? (in %)

- Latvia (LV): 65%
- Austria (AT): 55%
- Serbia (RS): 30%
- Cyprus (CY): 30%
- Switzerland (CH): 16%
- Ukraine (UA): 12%
- Netherlands (NL): 11%
- Poland (PL): 10%
- Greece (GR): 10%
- Belgium (BE): 10%
- Bulgaria (BG): 8%
- Denmark (DK): 7%
- Norway (NO): 6%
- Slovenia (SI): 6%
- Portugal (PT): 6%
- Italy (IT): 5.4%
- France (FR): 5.1%
- Czech Republic (CZ): 5%
- Finland (FI): 3%
- Romania (RO): 3%
- Germany (DE): 3%
- Hungary (HU): 0%
- Spain (ES): 0%

**Average:** 14.34%
The scope of practice of the profession

Professions Scope of practice: What is permitted, prohibited and what is prohibited, but practised

Permitted
✔

Practised
✔

Prohibited
✘

Sell optical appliances
Examine exterior eye
Examine interior eye
Subjective refraction
Objective refraction
Check binocular vision
Ophthalmoscopy
Tonometry
Perimetry
Prescriptions for spectacles
Prescriptions for CLs
Fit CLs
Use diagnostic drugs
Test drivers sight
Test VDU users sight
Fit optical appliances for VDU users
Test sight of low vision patients
Prescribe low vision aids for partially sighted
Refer to medical doctor
Refer directly to eye hospital
Detect ocular pathology
Inform medical doctors of Pxs pathology
Use therapeutic drugs
Pre and post monitoring of refractive surgery
Orthoptics
Sports vision
Test vision and prescribe spectacles to children
Fit and supply spectacles to children

Austria (AT)
Belgium (BE)
Bulgaria (BG)
Switzerland (CH)
Cyprus (CY)
Czech Republic (CZ)
Denmark (DK)
Estonia (EE)
Spain (ES)
Finland (FI)
France (FR)
United Kingdom (GB)
Greece (GR)
Croatia (HR)
Hungary (HU)
Ireland (IE)
Italy (IT)
Latvia (LV)
Netherlands (NL)
Poland (PL)
Portugal (PT)
Romania (RO)
Serbia (RS)
Sweden (SE)
Slovenia (SI)
Slovakia (SK)
Turkey (TR)
Ukraine (UA)
The profession’s role in public health

Does the social system pay for eye exams in children? (<16 years)

No (3):
- Denmark
- Finland
- Italy

Partly (7):
- Switzerland
- Estonia
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Latvia
- Portugal
- Sweden

Yes (19):
- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Germany
- Spain
- France
- United Kingdom
- Greece
- Croatia
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Poland
- Romania
- Serbia
- Slovenia
- Turkey
- Ukraine

No 10.3%
Partly 24.1%
Yes 65.5%
The profession’s role in public health

Does the social system pay for eye exams in the elderly? (> 50 years)

- **No (6):**
  - Cyprus
  - Germany
  - Denmark
  - Finland
  - Hungary
  - Italy

- **Partly (10):**
  - Switzerland
  - Estonia
  - United Kingdom
  - Ireland
  - Latvia
  - Netherlands
  - Norway
  - Portugal
  - Romania
  - Sweden

- **Yes (12):**
  - Austria
  - Belgium
  - Bulgaria
  - Czech Republic
  - Spain
  - France
  - Croatia
  - Poland
  - Serbia
  - Slovenia
  - Turkey

Ukraine
The profession’s role in public health

Does the social system pay for eye exams in adults with low vision?

Partly (11):
- Switzerland
- Estonia
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Norway
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Sweden

Yes (17):
- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Czech Republic
- Germany
- Denmark
- Spain
- Finland
- France
- United Kingdom
- Greece
- Croatia
- Netherlands
- Serbia
- Slovenia
- Turkey
- Ukraine

Partly 19.3%
Yes 80.7%
The education and training of the profession

What is the highest qualification offered?

- Diploma in refracting (1): Slovenia
- Diploma in dispensing optics (1): Turkey
- Diploma in Optometry (2): Estonia, Slovakia
- Doctor of optometry (5): Czech Republic, Spain, United Kingdom, Norway, Portugal
- Bachelor of Science (8): Belgium, Switzerland, Finland, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Serbia
- Master of Science (9): Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Denmark, France, Greece, Poland, Romania, Sweden
The education and training of the profession

How is education funded?

By student (4):
- Croatia
- Poland
- Serbia
- Slovenia

By state (7):
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- Greece
- Norway
- Slovakia

A mixture (17):
- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Switzerland
- Germany
- Spain
- France
- United Kingdom
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Netherlands
- Portugal
- Romania
- Sweden
- Turkey
The education and training of the profession

How many students qualify each year?(Nr.)

Average: 284.67
Acknowledgements:

ECOO thanks its members and partners for providing the data for the Blue Book:

**Austria:** Wirtschaftskammer Österreich, Bundesinnung Gesundheitsberufe (WKO)

**Belgium:** Association Professionelle des Opticiens et Optometristes de Beligique (APOOB)

**Bulgaria:** Bulgarian Association of Optometrists (BAO) and National Association of Bulgarian Optometrists and Opticians (NABOO)

**Croatia:** Hrvatsko Drustvo Opticara i Optometrista (HDOO)

**Cyprus:** Cyprus Association of Optometrists and Cyprus Optical Association

**Czech Republic:** Spolecenstvo Ceskyh Optiku a Optometristu (SCO)

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**Greece:** Panhellenic Association of Opticians and Optometrists (PAOO)

**Hungary:** Magyar Optikus Ipartestület (partner)

**Ireland:** Association of Optometrists Ireland (AOI) and Federation of (Ophthalmic and Dispensing) Opticians Ireland (FODO Ireland)

**Italy:** Federottica and Anto Rossetti (partner)

**Latvia:** Centre of Optometry University of Latvia

**Norway:** Norges Optikerforbund, Synsinformasjon (NOF, SI)

**Poland:** Krajowa Rzemieślnicza Izba Optyczna (KRIIO) and Polskie Towarzystwo Optometrii i Optyki (PTOO)

**Portugal:** Associação de Profissionais Licenciados de Optometria (APLO), Associação Nacional dos Ópticos (ANO) and União Profissional dos Ópticos e Optometristas Portugueses (UPOOP)

**Romania:** Adrian Pascu (partner)

**Serbia:** Udruženje Opticara i Optometrista Srbije (UOOS)

**Slovakia:** Opticka unia Slovenska

**Slovenia:** Drustvo očesnih optikov Slovenije (SOOS)

**Spain:** Consejo General de Colegios de Ópticos-Optometristas (CGCOO)

**Sweden:** Optikerförbundet

**Switzerland:** Der Verband für Optometrie und Optik - L'association d'optométrie et d'optique (OPTIKSCHWEIZ - OPTIQUESUISSE) and Schweizerischer Berufsverband für Augenoptik und Optometrie - Société Suisse pour l'Optique et l'Optométrie (SBAO - SSOP)

**The Netherlands:** Algemene Nederlandse Vereniging van Contactlensspecialisten (ANVC), Nederlandse Unie Van Optiekbedrijven (NUVO) and Optometristen Vereniging Nederland (OVN)

**Turkey:** Türk Optik ve Optometrik Meslek Adamları Derneği (T.O.O.M.A.D.)

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