



## **Improving Lives by Improving Sight**

*Essilor International joins the Business Call to Action with a commitment to expand access to vision care in developing countries*

*New York, 1 August 2016* – Essilor International, the world’s leading ophthalmic optics company with a mission to improve lives by improving sight, has joined the Business Call to Action (BCtA) with a pledge to create 40,000 primary eye care workers in underserved regions by 2020. The company expects its broadening inclusive business models to improve health outcomes, productivity and wellbeing for more than 50 million low-income people in the next four years.

The BCtA is a global initiative that aims to support private-sector companies’ efforts to fight poverty through their core business. It is supported by several international organizations and hosted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Poor vision is the world’s most prevalent disability: while an estimated 4.5 billion people need some form of visual correction, only 1.9 billion people have received corrective care. This leaves 2.5 billion people with uncorrected poor vision – 95 percent of them in developing countries. Poor vision affects academic and job performance, jeopardizes road safety and increases the risk of injuries, in particular among elderly people.

A recent study published in the *Journal of Ophthalmology* revealed that by 2050, half the world’s population – or nearly 5 billion people – may be short-sighted (myopic), with one fifth of them (1 billion) at significant risk of blindness. Another study by the World Health Organization estimated that lost economic productivity associated with uncorrected vision problems amounts to I\$272 billion.

Essilor’s inclusive business models are based on its strategy of continuous innovation and the belief that good vision is a basic right for everyone. In 2013 the 165-year-old company launched its *2.5 New Vision Generation* (2.5 NVG) division to provide affordable vision care to low-income populations that do not have access to conventional eye care and who often lack awareness both of their vision problems and of the importance of healthy vision.



2.5 NVG goes hand in hand with the company's expansion into developing markets in Africa, Asia and Latin America, helping to create the next generation of Essilor customers with vision care that is both affordable and accessible. Among its innovations are several new business models that train local individuals to become vision entrepreneurs, and a range of attractive 'ready-to-clip' eyeglasses, which allow customers to be equipped on the spot as opposed to waiting several days for their eyeglasses.

"Through our inclusive business models, we are creating a sustainable ecosystem that is helping Essilor to penetrate new and previously inaccessible markets," said Jayanth Bhuvarghan, Chief Mission Officer of Essilor. "In the process, we expect to create 40,000 new primary eye care providers to raise awareness and improve access to affordable vision care. Not only is this ecosystem generating employment and alleviating poverty, but it is building a sustainable vision care infrastructure in underserved areas."

In India, the company has ramped up its Eye Mitra Optician program to address the drastic shortage of eye care professionals in rural areas (in India there is roughly 1 qualified optometrist for 25,000 people compared to 1 for every 3,000 in France). At the same time, the program is addressing India's critical need for jobs: Essilor trains local people in vision screening and dispensing prescription eyeglasses, then empowers them to start their own small optical shops.

An independent study of Eye Mitra Opticians' impact revealed that new eyeglass wearers created through this program saved an average of 1.5 hours a day on daily tasks such as farming and domestic chores, and lived more independent lives. The study quantified this impact – including wearers' increased productivity and revenues for rural suppliers as well as Essilor's earnings – at US\$4.4 million per year in six districts alone. If the Eye Mitra initiative was scaled up to all districts in India, this impact would total US\$487 million per year.

In addition, the company has successfully launched and developed the Vision Ambassador initiative in underserved areas across India, Brazil and China. Vision Ambassadors receive training in basic vision screening and sell glasses to supplement their incomes. The initiative is being scaled up to include 30,000 Vision Ambassadors by 2020.



“Creating sustainable business ecosystems in underserved areas is at the very heart of inclusive business”, said Paula Peleaz, Programme Manager of the BCtA. “Essilor is doing just that by training local people as entrepreneurs and offering quality, low-cost eyewear that improves lives and livelihoods. We applaud their commitment and are pleased to welcome them as a BCtA member.”

Essilor also provides glasses through direct sales to suppliers of government tenders, NGOs, social enterprises and hospitals, and works with hospitals to provide mobile vans that conduct vision screenings in remote areas. The company, which has equipped over 2 million low-income individuals since 2013, is committed to measuring its impact in developing markets and engaging in advocacy to drive mindset and policy changes. It recently launched an [open innovation challenge](#) to find low cost refractive solutions that would speed up the delivery of primary eye care in undeserved regions.

**For further information:**

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*Membership in the Business Call to Action does not constitute a partnership with its funding and programme partners, UNDP or any UN agency.*

**About the Business Call to Action (BCtA):** Launched at the [United Nations](#) in 2008, the Business Call to Action (BCtA) aims to accelerate progress towards the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) by challenging companies to develop inclusive business models that offer the potential for both commercial success and development impact. BCtA is a unique multilateral alliance between key donor governments including the [Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), [Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency \(Sida\)](#), [UK Department for International Development](#), [US Agency for International Development](#), and the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Finland](#), and the [United Nations Development Programme](#) — which hosts the secretariat. For more information, please visit [www.businesscalltoaction.org](http://www.businesscalltoaction.org) or on Twitter at [@BCtAInitiative](#).

**About Essilor:**



*With a mission to improve lives by improving sight, Essilor, the world's leading ophthalmic optics company, designs, manufactures and markets a wide range of lenses to improve and protect eyesight. To continuously bring new, more effective products to market, the company allocates millions every year to research and innovation. The success of the group, which is present in more than 100 countries, is the result of a strategy that has been driven by innovation for 165 years. Its 2.5 New Vision Generation (2.5 NVG) initiative was launched in 2013 to improve access to vision care for underserved populations through inclusive business initiatives. Fully aligned with Essilor's mission, the initiative is also helping to create the company's next generation of customers. For more information, visit [www.essilor.com](http://www.essilor.com) and [www.essilorseechange.com](http://www.essilorseechange.com).*