

# Half of vision impairment in first world is preventable

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Around half of vision impairment in Western Europe is preventable, according to a new study published in the *British Journal of Ophthalmology*.

The study was carried out by the Vision Loss Expert Group, led by Professor Rupert Bourne of Anglia Ruskin University, and shows the prevalence and causes of vision loss in high income countries worldwide as well as other European nations in 2015, based on a systematic review of medical literature over the previous 25 years.

A comparison of countries in the study shows that, based on the available data, UK has the fifth lowest prevalence of blindness in the over 50s out of the 50 countries surveyed, with 0.52% of men and women in that age group affected. Belgium had the lowest prevalence at 0.46%.

However, in terms of the percentage of population with moderate to severe vision impairment (MSVI), the UK ranked in the bottom half of the table with 6.1%, a higher prevalence than non-EU countries such as Andorra, Serbia and Switzerland.

Cataract was found to be the most common cause of blindness in Western Europe in 2015 (21.9%), followed by [age-related macular degeneration](#) (16.3%) and glaucoma (13.5%), but the main cause of MSVI was uncorrected refractive error - which is a condition that can be treated simply by wearing glasses.

This condition made up 49.6% of all MSVI in Western Europe. Cataract was the next main cause in this region, with 15.5%, followed by age-related macular degeneration.

The research also predicts that the contribution of the surveyed countries to the world's [vision](#) impaired is expected to lessen slightly by 2020, although the number of people in these nations with impaired sight will rise overall to 69 million due to a rising overall population.

Professor Bourne, Professor of Ophthalmology at Anglia Ruskin University's Vision and Eye Research Unit, said: "Vision impairment is of great importance for quality of life and for the socioeconomics and public health of societies and countries.

"Overcoming barriers to services which would address uncorrected [refractive error](#) could reduce the burden of [vision impairment](#) in high-income countries by around half. This is an important public health issue even in the wealthiest of countries and more research is required into better treatments, better implementation of the tools we already have, and ongoing surveillance of the problem.

"This work has exposed gaps in the global data, given that many countries have not formally surveyed their populations for eye disease. That is the case for the UK and a more robust understanding of people's needs would help bring solutions."

The work by the study team contributes to the wider Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Study, a comprehensive regional and global research program of disease burden that assesses mortality and disability from major diseases, injuries, and risk factors.

**More information:** Rupert R A Bourne et al, Prevalence and causes of vision loss in high-income countries and in Eastern and Central Europe

in 2015: magnitude, temporal trends and projections, *British Journal of Ophthalmology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1136/bjophthalmol-2017-311258](https://doi.org/10.1136/bjophthalmol-2017-311258)

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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