

Global lens and frames market resilient to COVID and economic crisis, report finds.

Underpinned by solid positive and long-term trends - ageing populations and more digital lifestyles in the first place -, the global optical market emerged relatively unscathed from the COVID-19 crisis. That was one of the conclusions from the World Lens and Frames Demand report released last year by independent research company Strategy with Vision (SWV), which included lenses and frames' market data in 65 countries in 2021.

SWV has been publishing this report every two years since 2001 but, considering the sudden degradation of the macroeconomic environment triggered by the war in Ukraine, and also in reply to clients' requests, the company decided to accelerate its publishing schedule and publish a new report for 2022.

The new research, which was done between February and June this year and just came out, was conducted in a smaller number of countries (24) but they still account for over 80 percent of the global gross domestic product. The methodology - a mix of field research by SWV's team of consultants and analysis of existing industry data - and the scope of the research - over forty volume and value data points on the lens and frames' markets - were unchanged from previous reports.

One key question for SWV and its clients was to understand whether the global optical market was showing the same resilience to the 2022 macroeconomic crisis as to the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. According to the results that SWV agreed to share with us, it did, both in the lenses and frames' segments.

"Based on our research, the wholesale ophthalmic lenses market grew by 2.3 percent in volume and by 5.3 percent in value last year compared with 2021," Mark Mackenzie, co-founder of SWV told us. Based on previous reports, this would put the global wholesale ophthalmic lenses' market slightly above 1.4 billion pieces in volume and €11 billion in value. The growth was again driven by the multifocal lenses' category where volumes increased by 3.8 percent year-on-year and sales in value by 7.3 percent, he added. Variations in value are given on a constant-currency basis.

SWV calculated that the average selling prices of ophthalmic lenses increased by 3 percent year-on-year in 2022, marking an acceleration from the long-term trend observed for the 2013-2022 period during which they grew on average by 2 percent per year. According to Mackenzie, the uptick in average price growth last year was driven more by positive price-mix effects than by price increases by lens makers.

In particular, the average net selling price of single-vision lenses went up by 1.5 percent versus 2021 as myopia control and digital lenses increased their market share in value in the segment to more than 8 percent. Also, the average price of progressive lenses increased by more than 3 percent as freeform progressive lenses increased their share of the market to the detriment of conventional progressive lenses that come with a lower price tag.

While the aggregated data showed a solid progression in the volumes of lenses sold despite the war in Ukraine and the lingering impact of COVID in certain markets, the performance was not homogeneous across the 24 countries covered. In particular, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Italy all showed low rates of volume growth, Mackenzie noted. In some underperforming markets, SWV also noticed an extension of eyeglasses' repurchase cycles, from 2.47 years in 2021 to 2.62 years in 2022 in the U.K. for example.

On the other hand, some markets were relatively unaffected and continued to progress at a solid pace, driving the overall volume growth. They include the U.S. where lens volumes grew by 3 percent as a lower-than-2-percent growth in brick-and-mortar outlets was offset by fast-growing internet sales, which now account for close to 10 percent of the ophthalmic lens market in the country according to SWV. Other populous markets that performed well last year were Brazil (+ 4 percent in volume) and India (+3 percent).

As for sales of ophthalmic frames in the 24 countries researched, SWV found that they grew by nearly 2 percent in volume last year versus 2021, or one percentage point slower than ophthalmic lenses. The difference was due to an increasing number of reglazing operations - when new lenses are fitted into an old frame -, which have reached a share of between 8 and 10 percent of frames purchased across the sampled countries.

In value, the ophthalmic frames market grew by about 5 percent year-on-year and in constant currencies in 2022, reaching €9 billion. The average selling price for a pair of ophthalmic frames rose by 3 percent to €20.5, according to the report. Only seven to eight countries account for a staggering 80 percent share of the market value.