HUNGARY
Script to the video message on
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The message is delivered by **Prof Dr Ildiko Horvath**
Secretary of State for Health
Ministry of Human Capacities, Hungary

Agenda 15. Health workforce

Dear Director General, Chair, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates,

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious impact especially on the healthcare system and those working there. In the spring of 2020, the pandemic also reached Hungary. In order to stop the spread and provide care for patients, a sufficient number of qualified health professionals were needed in a short time. To meet this demand, 3 distance learning programmes with different levels and content have been developed:

- Care of ventilated patients for physicians, which can be attended by physicians/specialists less experienced in intensive care ventilation who can be involved later in the care if needed, under appropriate supervision.

- Care of ventilated patients for nurses and students in higher health education, for which nursing professionals, BSc and MSc students could apply.

- Voluntary auxiliary nursing training. We offered this programme to lay volunteers and those with non-specialized health qualifications (e.g. masseurs).

When compiling the programmes, circumstances of the emergency (closure of education institutions, ban on visits, rules on physical distancing) had to be taken into account. To adhere to these, we opted for Blended-learning programmes which became available on 6 April 2020. Out of the three target groups, most applied for the training for nurses. The programmes are recognised as validated elements in the continuing training of health workers and are still going on under the organisation of the State Secretariat for Health of the Ministry of Human Capacities.

As appreciation of the dedicated work in COVID-19 patients care 170,000 health workers received extraordinary pay in July 2020. Healthcare workers were the first to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

The Hungarian Government is committed to recognizing the work of health workers and it is a priority for us to retain them in the sector. Ensuring more predictable livelihood and career prospects are key aspect in this, therefore in November 2020 the government decided to implement a three-step increase up to 200% in doctors' basic salaries by 2023. However, we must not forget about health professionals or nurses. The government has taken several measures to adjust their salaries as well in addition nurse hostels were renovated and built. The government has been paying special attention to the purchase of new work clothes since 2014, the importance of that was especially evident during COVID-19.

In order to ensure labour supply, in 2011 the Government launched a Resident Doctor Support Programme, which includes 6 types of scholarships. In this regard the supply of nursing staff is also highly important therefore scholarship support and career guidance programmes for nursing students have been launched. The Act on the new legal status of health services employees adopted in October 2020 enables to eliminate the informal payment system in Hungary, which was one of the largest items of the health out of pocket payment burden on the Hungarian population.

The pandemic situation has shown that the above measures not only lay the foundations for a "peacetime" quality health care service, but create a reserve of power that can be mobilized in an emergency.

Thank you for your attention.