

**OPENING SPEECH FOR THE JOINT FAO/WHO CONFERENCE
ON SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS FOR HEALTHY DIETS IN EUROPE AND ASIA**

Your Excellencies, Director General, Regional Director, Deputy Regional Director, Head of NCD Office, State Secretary, and Esteemed Delegates and Colleagues, on behalf of the Ministry of Human Capacities, State Secretariat for Health, it is my pleasure to greet all of you at this conference.

Achieving healthy diets, adequate nutrition, good health and wellbeing for all in a sustainable manner are at the core of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. Out of the seventeen goals, SDG 3 calls for ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. This goal focuses primarily on maternal and child health, prevention of chronic, non-communicable diseases, mental health, universal health coverage, chemicals and environmental pollution.

Malnutrition in all forms, and diet-related non communicable diseases pose a major public health challenge not only in the European region, but globally as well. As the health status of the Hungarian population is fairly unfavourable, public health and in particular nutritional-health is a priority on the agenda of the Hungarian Government. Over the past years, the State Secretariat for Health has shown its commitments to address these public health issues by initiating several interventions, or launching important legislative changes in the area of nutrition. In accordance with the basic public health principles of the health strategy “Healthy Hungary 2014-2020”, these actions aim to promote healthy food environment and offer a healthy option or choice for all ages, especially for children and the vulnerable. The most important legislative elements of the package are the public health product tax, affecting foodstuffs containing components (sugar, salt, caffeine) with proven adverse health effects, introduction of daily physical activity lessons at schools, the legislation limiting the daily dietary intake of trans fatty acids, the legislation forbidding selling of foodstuffs under the public health product tax at school events, as well as the ministerial decree providing healthier school meals and healthier diets in hospitals.

School-based interventions, such as the one promoting water consumption over the consumption of sugar sweetened beverages (the so-called HAPPY Program), or the national School Fruit and School Milk Programs are also fine examples and models for sustainable good national practices, serving also for healthy nutrition.

Current food systems are highly challenged to provide all population groups with foods in sustainable way that also contribute to healthy diet and, at the same time, meet the physiological or special dietary needs of certain consumer groups, for example children, pregnant women, the elderly, or people suffering metabolic or other diseases. This is of utmost importance, because healthy nutrition as such not only directly impacts the health status of each individual, but has many indirect effects, such as the effect on the physical and mental performance of children at school and the number of missing days, has economic effects on the productivity by falling out of work, and not least affects the competitiveness of the nation in a broader context.

According to recent national childhood obesity surveillance data, which is based on WHO methodology, the so-called COSI survey, no further increase in the prevalence of overweight and obesity could be observed amongst 7 years old children, compared to previous results from 2010. The fact that Hungarian patterns do not follow the global increasing trend and stagnation with a so-called plateau is observed, is a great achievement, to which the recent governmental public health interventions and legislation changes have surely contributed.

Tackling childhood obesity demands multisectoral engagement due to the complexity of the problem. With this in mind, the WHO in cooperation with the National Institute of Pharmacy and Nutrition and the State Secretariat for Health, initiated recently a Policy Dialogue on the topic, involving relevant actors of the governmental sector, professional associations and academia. This is just an initiating step on the way to enhance multisectoral cooperation, and strengthen a health-sector-driven coordination mechanism that hopefully and ultimately leads to the improvement of the national childhood obesity prevalence rates. In this context, the existing collaboration between the health and the agricultural sectors is wished to be further enhanced through sustainable solutions, with the aims of improving nutritional habits, promoting healthy environment and healthy choices, and overall leading to better health of all us.

I wish you a gainful discussion, sharing a number of good regional examples, experiences and knowledge that help us to go further on this way and support to reach our common goals.

Thank you.