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Dear Ministers,

We would like to draw your attention to an important matter, which requires your active involvement: the recognition of COVID-19 as an occupational disease for healthcare workers and other particularly affected professions. Estimates suggest that frontline healthcare workers could account for 10–20% of all diagnosed cases¹. In addition, multiple healthcare associated outbreaks have been documented affecting healthcare workers, patients, and residents of long-term care facilities².

While it is fully understood that this issue is closely linked to national social security schemes, and falls under the remit of the competent national authorities, we can all agree that these workers deserve to benefit from recognition of the occupational origin of this disease.

In general, there are large differences between Member States in how occupational diseases are dealt with in terms of recognition and compensation. As you know, at EU level, Commission Recommendation 2003/670/EC on the European schedule of occupational diseases recommends Member States “to introduce as soon as possible into their national laws, regulations or administrative provisions concerning scientifically recognised occupational diseases liable for compensation and subject to preventive measures, the European schedule in Annex I”.

Annex I includes in its section 4 “Infectious and parasitic diseases” a specific item 407 “Other infectious diseases caused by work in disease prevention, health care, domiciliary assistance and other comparable activities for which a risk of infection has been proven”. This item can certainly cover COVID-19.

¹ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(20\)30164-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(20)30164-X/fulltext)

² https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Infection-prevention-and-control-in-healthcare-settings-COVID-19_5th_update.pdf

Mr Hugo DE JONGE
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport

Mr Wouter KOOLMEES
Minister for Social Affairs and Employment

THE NETHERLANDS

We would also appreciate if you could provide us with data of cases recognised as an occupational disease in your country, specifying the professions and the scope of such recognition. In addition, any available data about which professions are the most affected would also be useful. Should the above data not be available in your country, we would strongly encourage you to consider the necessity of collecting such data for the future. In this context, Eurostat has already launched an information collection exercise, addressed to the national authorities that are producing the European Accidents at Work Statistics (ESAW) and the European Occupational Diseases Statistics (EODS), on the legal status regarding the recognition of COVID-19 as an accident at work and/or an occupational disease at national level in each Member State. We encourage you to participate in this important exercise.

One of the clear lessons to learn from the pandemic is the need of reinforcing our healthcare systems. Adequately protecting healthcare workers is a precondition for such reinforcement. The health and safety of healthcare workers and other staff is paramount, not only for their own protection but also to help prevent the spread of the virus and improve overall care. That implies not only preventing adverse outcomes due to working conditions, which is a legal and moral obligation, but also recognising and compensating staff should they fall ill as a consequence of their work.

We count on your active cooperation on this crucial and urgent matter.

Yours sincerely,

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