



Dr Rahim Taghizadeh, Head of the Healthier Population Unit, and his team, sit at the first round of the workshops in the WHO country office. Photo: WHO/Islamic Republic of Iran 21 December 2021 – As part of the process to develop an adapted framework for the national Healthy Cities network in the Islamic Republic of Iran, a two-day regional workshop was held in a collaboration among the WHO Regional Office and country office, the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, and the Health Services Management Research Center at Tabriz University of Medical Sciences.

The workshop, held on 3 and 4 November, aimed to create an opportunity for focused and in-depth regional dialogue on the promotion of Healthy Cities through the establishment a network for mutual guidance, experience-sharing and advocacy.

The virtual discussion brought together senior advisers, experts and focal points from different Healthy Cities projects and community-based initiatives from Tehran, Qazvin, Yazd, Sahand, Maragheh, and Jolfa, among others, to identify existing opportunities and infrastructure that could help accelerate and expand initiatives for health and well-being in Iranian cities.

Dr Agis Tsouros, Director of the Division of Policy and Governance for Health and Well-being at the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the trainer and co-facilitator of the workshop, conducted briefing sessions on the required modalities and opportunities to create synergy.

Discussions were moderated by Dr Rahim Taghizadeh, National Professional Officer and Head of the Healthier Population Unit at the WHO country office, and included guest speakers, Ms Daisy Papathanasopolou from the Hellenic Healthy Cities Network and Mr Murat Ar from the Turkish Healthy Cities Network, who briefed the participants on the vision, structure and achievements of the networks in Greece and Turkey.

“Healthy cities are not just a health promotion project,” said Dr Tsouros. “Healthy cities are a

political project; healthy cities are essentially a vehicle to be able to work with local governments and local communities. So, in addition to creating a setting, they address a level of governance as well. In other words, a place where people live, work and play. I make this distinction because, this is where I want to start this first presentation. It is essential from the start to think what it is that we want to achieve by creating and running a national network. In other words, to articulate the vision. This vision is not always the same because the perception about healthy cities requirements, priorities and goals are not the same,” he added.

With over 30 years of experience in implementation of Healthy Cities, Healthy Villages, Safe Communities, Basic Needs Development and other community engagement initiatives for healthy settings, the Islamic Republic of Iran has a strong baseline on which to build a national network of Health Cities, tapping into the strengths of the systems currently in place.

The Islamic Republic of Iran was the first country to join the Healthy Cities Network of the Eastern Mediterranean Region in 1990, implementing the pilot in three settlements. Today, it has 22 registered cities, including Sahand, which was the first Iranian city evaluated and awarded by WHO. Sahand was the [first city in a middle-income country that to receive WHO's Healthy Cities Award](#). The other 14 certified cities in the Region are all in high-income countries.

In the opening remarks delivered by Dr Samar Elfeky and Dr Taghizadeh on behalf of WHO Representative and Head of Mission to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr Syed Jaffar Hussain, highlighted the importance of the event not only for the country, but also as providing a great opportunity for regional dialogue, collaboration and partnership.

Throughout the online event, participants engaged in group discussions and developed proposals on the structure and functions of a Healthy Cities Network in the country that could contribute to political commitment, peer-to-peer capacity-building and the promotion of the healthy settings approach.

“We are all gathered here with a unanimous agenda; to promote and scale up healthy cities in Iran, because we have the evidence and can agree that the programme works,” said Dr Taghizadeh. “For this purpose, we will need a system for guiding, mentoring, experience-sharing, evaluation and even support for accreditation of cities; a system that facilitates political support, intersectoral partnership and provides a platform for international backstopping and representation, and these are the functions for which we should plan a

structure,” Dr Taghizadeh concluded.

More details regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Healthy Cities project, its achievements and accreditation by WHO can be found in the following two videos:

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