Education for sustainable development — focusing on policy makers

Over the last two decades, sustainable development has become a key objective globally. In order to achieve sustainability, a balance must be found between the demands of the environment and those of the economy. We must find a way to achieve economic growth while protecting the environment and ensuring social justice.

In response to the urgent need to support the quest for sustainable solutions, the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea launched the Course for Sustainability, which was implemented under the supervision of the Italian Trust Fund (ITF). In its inception phase, this educational programme exclusively targeted those senior government officials from Central and Eastern Europe — Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Serbia and Turkey — with responsibility for the “three pillars” of sustainable development: economic growth, social progress and environmental protection. The goal was to provide an opportunity for officials from various ministries, not just ministries of environment, to explore the main approaches to sustainable development.

The resounding success of the Course for Sustainability encouraged the ITF to expand the programme to Central Asian and Black Sea countries. In order to achieve its objectives, the focus was on the training of senior officials from municipal-level government as well as central government, and also senior representatives from the business sector. Recognising that environmental protection, and sustainable development in particular, are global issues that transcend national borders, discussions to expand the reach of the programme are now under way with Mediterranean, North African and Latin American countries.

Renowned professors and experts are invited to act as facilitators for the various modules, which cover areas such as the global environmental situation and strategies for sustainable development; the development of policies, laws and institutions; the administration of sustainable development; energy; water; and environmental management and practices for sustainable development.

The Course for Sustainability is implemented in partnership with a number of prominent academic institutions — Venice International University, Agroinnova and the Central European University — led by experienced experts from the Regional Environmental Center. Since 2003, four courses have been implemented reaching close to 250 participants. This international alumni network represents a major source of input on sustainable development at both regional and national level, helping to integrate sustainability issues into strategic decisions.