Environment and health — focusing on stakeholders

The close connection between the quality of our environment and human health is indisputable. Extreme weather events caused by climate change are resulting in the spread of new and existing diseases and threatening lives and livelihoods worldwide. The oldest and youngest generations are inevitably the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

The Italian Trust Fund (ITF), through its support to the activities of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), is involved in the WHO European Region in working towards better public health and living conditions. Activities supported by the ITF are implemented with a variety of stakeholders. In 2004, the REC was involved in the organisation of the Healthy Planet Forum for representatives of civil society. The forum took place in Budapest in parallel with the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, the focus of which was commitment to the four priority goals of the Children’s Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE) — clean water and sanitation; healthy living conditions; clean air; and the reduction of exposure to hazardous chemicals. As part of the preparations for the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, to be held in Parma, Italy in 2010, the REC hosted the 22nd meeting of the European Environment and Health Committee in November 2006 with the support of the ITF.

The Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health will see the launch of new activities by the REC, including capacity building, roundtable discussions for media experts and journalists, awareness raising among citizens, and information dissemination among teachers and health experts. The ITF and the REC will organise a side event during the conference to disseminate the results of the international research project SEARCH (School Environment and Respiratory Health of Children), implemented between 2006 and 2009. The side event will focus on indoor air quality in European schools; the prevention of respiratory diseases; and the implementation of CEHAPE priority goal 3 (on air quality) in eight European countries — Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia, Italy, Austria and Norway.

Environment and health issues need to be handled both sensitively and urgently, and efforts such as those being supported by the ITF are making a vital contribution to raising the awareness of all stakeholders.