Training for young environmental leaders — focusing on civil society

In the early 1990s — following the change of political system in Central and Eastern Europe — thousands of civil society organisations were established in the region, as citizens strove to create democratic tools and solutions. This in turn led to a huge demand for capacity-building support from Western countries, in the form of training and education, as well as to a need for financial support.

Since 2003, Italy has been a major promoter of the long-running and popular project “Training for Young Environmental Leaders”, implemented by the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC). The objective of the training is to develop leadership, management, communications and project development skills in young adults who either work or volunteer for an environmental non-governmental organisation in Central and Eastern Europe or outside the region.

Participants spend an intensive three weeks at the REC’s head office in Hungary, where they receive training from various specialists. They are given expert training in the conservation of protected areas, national parks and reserves; water resources management; sustainable agriculture; eco-tourism; waste management; cleaner production; animal and wildlife protection; foodstuff certification; energy efficiency; air quality and pollution; and transportation. They also spend one week in Italy, visiting and learning from Italian NGOs and other organisations relevant to their environmental interests. The expertise they acquire empowers these leaders to support citizens and other stakeholders in the promotion of sustainability.

Since its inception in 1993, the project has trained and educated close to a thousand participants with the support of the Italian Trust Fund. Graduates from the courses share common management skills and a common understanding of environmental problems and sustainability solutions, creating a unique channel to the public for the REC and for its donor community. In addition, the REC organises master classes that provide an excellent opportunity not only to keep contact with course alumni, but to pass on up-to-date knowledge to leaders of significant civil society groups.