Voices from the Field | Consorzio Nazionale CGM — Italy

Our greatest strength is also our greatest risk. At CGM, we bring together around 500 social enterprises and local consortia, mostly in Northern and Central Italy, providing education and care services and work for disadvantaged people. That spread lets us produce a wide variety of services on the ground. It also means fragmentation is never far away.

So more and more of our work is about connection: building local service networks with public bodies and other third-sector organisations. Italy's Third Sector reform helps, because it allows "shared administration" models in which policies and services are co-constructed. Our digital platform, welfareX, does the same on a practical level. It links different providers into a single local system and reaches people beyond those covered by public welfare.

After a period without new initiatives in care for older people, our strategic plan has brought investment back into the sector, and LeTs-Care has helped reopen the conversation across the network. Partly thanks to the project, around fifteen of our social enterprises now form a community of practice on new models of care and assistance, training together and working from the project's documents. LeTs-Care has also given us a stronger voice with national institutions on the reforms of policies for dependent persons and support for caregivers.

Our role in the research has been to carry its findings to the people who need them: social entrepreneurs who manage complex local welfare systems alongside public bodies, other third-sector organisations, active citizens and care businesses.

What we hope to take away are local strategies that combine specialised care services with community resources. In practice, that means rethinking the residential facilities, day centres and home care services our social enterprises run as "hubs and spokes". The need is urgent. Italy's post-pandemic recovery plan (PNRR) has funded many new care facilities, the Community Houses among them, but how best to manage them as centres of community services and resources is still an open question.

A particularly significant moment was a partners meeting in Venice, where we came to appreciate the hybrid nature of our partnership, which brings together practitioners and researchers. This has enabled us to develop knowledge that can be transferred both to the work of our social enterprises and to policy, particularly at the local level."
— Flaviano Zandonai, Open Innovation Manager, Consorzio Nazionale CGM