

COVID-19

June 2020

Community Foundations in Action

Italy - Recovery time will be long



*Giacomo Pinaffo, Project Manager,
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Slowly, Italy is freeing itself from the stranglehold of Covid-19. The citizens of the European country that was hit first and very hard by the pandemic can finally breathe again - literally. After weeks of lockdown, people in Messina, Sicily, are allowed to go out again - without completing a certificate first. It is a relief, but it's still burdensome. "Wearing a facemask, keeping 1.5m distance between you and your friends. It's weird", Giacomo Pinaffo says with regret. But of course, as Project Manager at Community Foundation of Messina (Fondazione Comunità di Messina), he knows for certain, that the crisis will not be over with the drop of the

facemask. "Recovery time will be long", he predicts, "Especially here in Sicily, where the situation has already been bad before". The region which is loved by tourists for its beautiful architecture, world-class food and beautiful beaches suffers from high unemployment, out-migration of young people, and poverty. "Covid-19 just made it worse".

The range of issues the community foundation is looking at has already been wide. Now it has got even wider and more urgent. Fondazione Comunità di Messina is trying to provide support and alternatives to those in need. At the moment, this is happening for instance with a new programme of microcredits and grants. The programme was realised in collaboration with other community foundations of the South of Italy such as San Gennaro, Val di Noto, Salernitana, Centro Storico di Napoli, and Agrigento and Trapani. It targets people in situations of poverty: small and medium entrepreneurs, self-employed, or people who just tried to move from a shanty in the slum to a house and have to pay their loan. "The situation here is very dangerous", Giacomo explains, "The crisis is opening new potential markets for the Mafia economy". That is what the community foundation tries to prevent. "When an enterprise is not able to work anymore, it has no money, but needs to survive. For the Mafia, which has a huge amount of liquidity, it's easy to intervene. The same happens with families who need help: someone will offer it and we need to be those

helpers”. Giacomo expects financial support to stay a main focus for a long time. “In the first weeks of the crisis, many people and enterprises could use up their savings to make ends meet. After that period, the real struggle begins”. For Giacomo, the crisis put basic human rights in danger: decent work, decent housing, decent medical attendance. And Fondazione Comunità di Messina is fighting for all of them by providing support to projects and organisations addressing those needs.

Giacomo is confident that the community of people who are fighting for those rights in Sicily is getting bigger. “A new awareness is being developed in terms of human rights”, he explains, “that the healthcare system in Lombardy collapsed at the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis made people think about how this could have happened, how we could have let privatisation impinge upon our right to have decent medical provision”.



Slums of Messina

For Giacomo it is clear: human development and socio-economic approaches must be promoted. Working on the pressing issue of healthcare in the beginning of the crisis with a network of small 3D printing enterprises was great evidence: by providing technical support and access to the community foundation’s network, together, the stakeholders were able to provide medical equipment much faster than big corporations - or the government. Now this new network is willing to join the foundation and experiment a new form of widespread and resilient factory. In the upcoming months, Fondazione Comunità di Messina will focus on creating more partnerships of local actors, communities, national and international actors, who are willing to support each other and work together. “That way, there’s a bigger scale of change. Because now, there is the space to do it. Otherwise things will be back as usual - just worse.”



The [Community Foundation of Messina](#), Sicily/ Italy was founded in 2010. The foundation achieves its goal by going beyond the logic of traditional philanthropies: it designs finances and implements policies to support social innovation. In 2019, the Foundation distributed €1m. The foundation has a board of 13 people, six employees and engages a number of volunteers.



The Community Foundation of Messina is one of 39 Community Foundations in Italy. [Assifero](#) is the national support organization that has provided thoughtful leadership to the community foundations in Italy since the beginning of the crisis - from encouraging a shift to core funding to contributing to the development of an online portal mapping needs of the sector with the initiatives of philanthropic institutions. For more information see [Assifero](#) on our website.