

Sustainable Economies Due diLigence: good EXamples and the role of social dialogue

Project nr. 101126464

SUMMARY OF THE NATIONAL PEER LEARNING EVENT - ITALY

13 March 2025

9.30 -16.30

Milano - CGM

Framework: Side event within the CGM Network Meeting

Participants: ~30 (SEDLEX session); ~600 (overall CGM Convention)

Organisers: Diesis Network, CGM (Consorzio Gino Mattarelli)

1. Context and Objectives

As part of the SEDLEX project's national peer learning action, a dedicated event was organised on 13 March 2025 in **Milan**, in the framework of the **CGM Network Meeting** CGM is one of the largest Italian networks of social cooperatives, promoting innovation in welfare, work inclusion, and territorial development through solidarity-based enterprise models. The broader convention gathered **around 600 participants** from across Italy, representing **social economy organisations, cooperatives, foundations, financial institutions, and mainstream businesses**.

The SEDLEX peer learning session aimed to:

- Disseminate the project's initial findings and methodology.
- Promote dialogue around **corporate sustainability**, with a focus on the **role of social cooperatives** in key economic sectors.
- Collect feedback and good practices from Italian stakeholders for the comparative European analysis of the project.

2. Agenda and Format

The full-day session featured a combination of **presentations, moderated discussions, and peer exchange**, with an emphasis on interactive learning. The agenda included:

- **Welcome & Project Overview**

Anna Voltolini (General Director, CGM) welcomed participants and presented the event's aims within the SEDLEX framework.

- **Session 1: Corporate Sustainability for Social Cooperatives**

Led by *Gianluca Pastorelli* (Executive President, Diesis Network), this session explored the concept of corporate sustainability and how social economy actors - particularly cooperatives - integrate social, environmental, and democratic dimensions into their models. The discussion also addressed the **latest EU regulatory developments**, particularly the **Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)** and the **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD)**. These directives are expected to have a growing impact on both mainstream and social economy enterprises, influencing how they report and conduct due diligence on sustainability risks and impacts across their operations and value chains. Participants discussed how social cooperatives - already grounded in principles of transparency and accountability - could act as frontrunners in meeting these obligations.

- **Session 2: Cooperatives in the Value Chain – Focus on Agrifood and Finance**

Participants analysed how Italian social cooperatives actively contribute to national value chains, especially in **agrifood** and **financial services**, where their impact is increasingly recognised by foundations, banks, and mainstream enterprises.

- **Wrap-Up & Conclusion**

The day concluded with a session moderated by *Sabina Bellione* (CGM), summarising the lessons learnt and highlighting follow-up actions at national and EU levels.

3. Key Findings and Takeaways

a. The Scale and Relevance of Social Cooperatives in Italy

Italy is home to approximately **12,000 social cooperatives**, employing over **500,000 people**. These cooperatives are embedded in local territories and operate across diverse sectors including health, social care, environment, and sustainable production. Their size, reach, and community-based governance make them strategic partners in advancing the EU's sustainability goals.

b. Corporate Sustainability as an Integrated Practice

Italian social cooperatives exemplify the integration of **corporate sustainability**, encompassing:

- **Social objectives**, such as inclusion of disadvantaged groups;
- **Environmental responsibility**, including local, low-impact value chains;
- **Democratic governance**, ensuring accountability and stakeholder participation.

Participants highlighted the **added value of cooperative models** in embedding sustainability as a core business strategy - not merely as compliance. These characteristics align well with the EU's legislative priorities under CSRD and CSDDD, where transparency, stakeholder engagement, and long-term impact are central pillars.

c. Strategic Role in Agrifood and Financial Sectors

The event spotlighted two sectors where collaboration between social and mainstream economy actors is increasingly evident:

- In **agrifood**, social cooperatives contribute to **short supply chains, organic production, and local development**, aligning with the Farm to Fork Strategy.
- In **financial services**, foundations and banks often rely on cooperatives to implement initiatives with measurable social and environmental returns. This aligns with **impact investing** trends promoted at EU level.

d. Social Circular Economy as a Key Opportunity

A dedicated discussion explored the “**Social Circular Economy**”, a concept promoted by the **European Commission** to integrate circular principles with inclusive social practices. Italian cooperatives are pioneering models in:

- **Textile recycling and reuse**, fostering local employment, and reducing waste.
- **WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment)** management, combining environmental impact with job creation for vulnerable groups.

This highlights the potential for **scaling up social circular models** that combine green innovation with social inclusion, a strategic area within the **Green Deal Industrial Plan** and **Transition Pathways for the Proximity and Social Economy ecosystem**.

4. Lessons Learnt and Implications for SEDLEX

- The event confirmed that **multi-stakeholder dialogue** is critical for embedding sustainability in cooperative ecosystems.
- Social cooperatives are not only implementers but also **co-designers of sustainable value chains**.
- The examples shared in Italy offer valuable insights for the broader SEDLEX goal of identifying **best practices in social dialogue**, especially in enabling inclusive, sustainable business models.

5. Next Steps

The outcomes of the event will be synthesised into the upcoming SEDLEX knowledge outputs, contributing to:

- The final project report;
- Policy recommendations at EU level;
- Enriched methodologies for capacity building and peer learning.

Participants were encouraged to stay engaged in the project’s future phases and to continue sharing experiences that demonstrate the **transformative power of the social economy** in fostering sustainability and social dialogue.