



Annual report  
May 2020 - April 2021

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A cooperative year  
in review



SUPPORTING  
AND  
ENLIGHTENING  
THE FUTURE OF  
COOPERATIVES  
ON OUR  
CONTINENT



President

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**Jean-Louis Bancel**



For Cooperatives Europe and its members, 2020 has been a year like no other. Despite the suddenness and magnitude of the shock of the pandemic, I want to highlight the commitment, and dedication, that we have witnessed in our cooperatives to adapt and to keep life going, to try to mitigate the effects of this upheaval for our members and stakeholders of our enterprises. In these moments, with the mobilisation of its permanent team, Cooperatives Europe has focused on our essentials: bringing together, supporting and enlightening the future of cooperatives on our continent.

At no time, never, we have wavered in this direction. Even if meetings with physical presence were no longer possible, virtual meetings were invigorating, crystallising our belonging to a community useful to each of the European cooperative enterprises.

2020 will also be the last full year of activity

for the strictly gender-balanced Board that you elected in Malta in 2016. On behalf of all my colleagues, we thank you for the trust you have placed in us. In accordance with our democratic principles, we will report on our term of office at the next elective General Assembly. We are relying on you to demonstrate our commitment to democracy by voting, whatever the difficulties we are going through. By voting, you will demonstrate that for our cooperatives building a better Europe remains our shared ideal.

Jean-Louis Bancel  
President

Despite the challenge of the past year and working through screens, we have been able to live up to our commitment of promoting the cooperative model thanks to the support of our members.

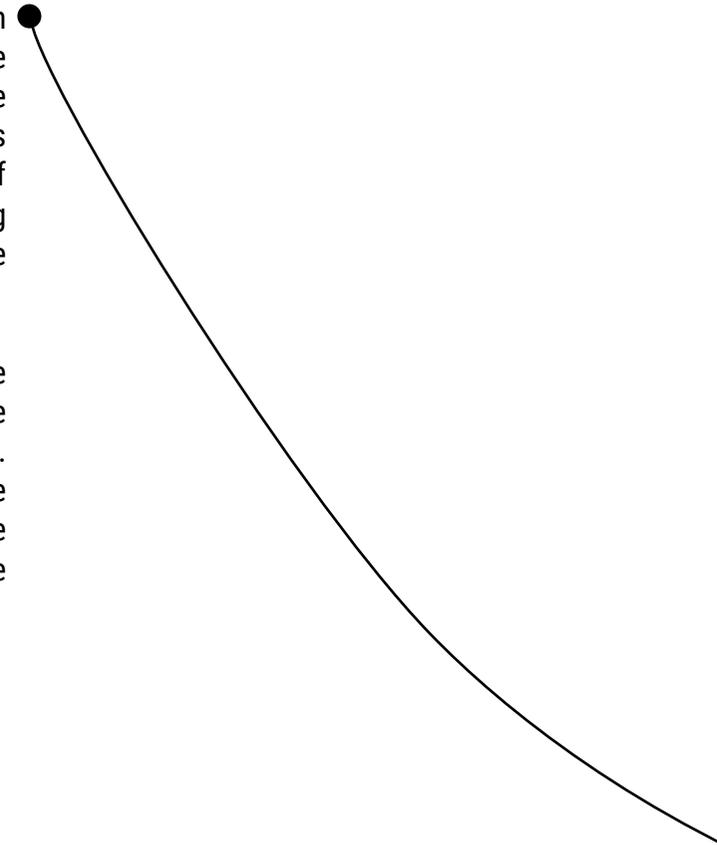
I am proud to highlight just some of the achievements of the past year. In the framework of the ICA-EU Partnership, six reports were published on the current cooperative legislation in the EU. Our involvement in the European Commission's Erasmus+ projects has boosted our actions involving the academic world and youth networks. Thanks to the practical tools developed, we are now able to influence real transformation on the ground through collaborative spaces, whilst Coopedia Knowledge Base will inspire a new generation of cooperators by providing centralised access to resources on cooperative entrepreneurship.

These tools and actions support our advocacy efforts, largely focused on EU's

policy for SMEs and the future EU action plan for social economy. Our expertise is also valued within EU's Fit for Future Platform on European regulation. In this context, communication has been of primary importance acting as a sounding board for the vital strength of the movement.

Cooperatives are known to show resilience in spite of crisis, as proven by our tangible achievements despite this difficult year. We now look forward to restoring the human link in our activities and propose a cooperative road to recovery for the future.

Agnes Mathis  
Director





# COOPERATIVES SHOW RESILIENCE IN SPITE OF CRISIS



Director

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**Agnes Mathis**

# 1

## Building back better, with cooperatives

With new waves of Covid-19 affecting communities, the crisis has obliged cooperatives to face the economic and social consequences while preparing the road to recovery. Building back better is now translated into political priorities, largely focusing on green and digital transformation. As a consequence, we have seen an increase of collaborative projects developed with 'people first' in mind - many of them involving cooperatives. Cooperatives Europe has been actively working to turn the coronavirus situation into a long-term opportunity for cooperatives.

### Supporting Covid-19 recovery at EU level

To support the recovery of our enterprises across Europe, a cooperative survey report ['Covid-19 crisis and its economic and social impact on cooperatives'](#) was released to

gather experiences from members and cooperatives on the ground. The survey revealed endangerment of businesses and standstills for some sectors, but also an amplification of existing issues before the crisis, such as exclusion from grants, unlike other business models. However, cooperative values and principles were key in activating concrete cooperation among cooperatives, seeing businesses band together to produce masks, innovate within communities and ensure Europe-wide trade continuation.

Through this report, Cooperatives Europe provided concrete recommendations for policymakers at the EU and Member State level and continues to use it as a valuable advocacy tool when meeting with EU officials to advocate for adequate policy, funding and services measures to help cooperatives overcome the impact of the pandemic.

### A sustainable and democratic future that works for all – with cooperatives.

The European Commission's ambition is to ensure that Europe's industry leads the twin transitions towards climate neutrality and digital leadership. Cooperatives

Europe contributed to the European Green Deal, EU's flagship policy, through its [common statement](#) with its sectoral organisations released on the occasion of the 2020 European Green Week.

The document outlines the necessity to consider cooperatives as key partners for the green transition as their sustainability is embedded in the business model and governance. Regarding digitalisation, Cooperatives Europe advocates for a level playing field to foster innovation, growth and competitiveness for all economic actors.





# PREPARING A COOPERATIVE ROAD TO RECOVERY

# 2

## Entrepreneurship

Cooperatives are key economic actors of the entrepreneurial policy at the EU level. Our unique business model's focus on empowering people not only attracts increasing interest but is also a central factor in times of crisis. A large part of cooperatives are SMEs, which are the primary focus of the European Commission when dealing with entrepreneurial policies. Cooperatives Europe advocates for addressing cooperative issues in transversal EU policies.

### Key achievements

- Advocated for cooperatives on EU policies and draft regulations during the SME Envoy meetings on non-financial reporting, SME strategy and targeted support for cooperative SMEs.
- Showcased the cooperative contribution in achieving the objectives set up by the SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe through SBA follow-up meetings.
- Supported inclusive entrepreneurship through incubation and business services promotion under the LIAISE project as a member of its advisory Board.
- Achieved several references to cooperatives and their importance in the EU economy in the report of the ITRE Committee of the European Parliament – “A new strategy for European SMEs.”



- SME Assembly: Represented cooperatives at the yearly conference with the presence of Commissioner Breton (Internal Markets) and highlighted cooperatives' importance for a people-centred recovery.
- EU Industry Days: Showcased citizens' ability to take ownership and be focal actors of their economic development through cooperatives and shone the light on the importance of worker integration in digitalisation.

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## Events



Fit for Future Platform is a high-level expert group that will help the Commission in its efforts to simplify EU laws and to reduce related unnecessary costs, ensuring they do not hinder people and business, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises. Agnes Mathis, Director of Cooperatives Europe was selected as an expert to the platform, achieving favourable actions for cooperatives in collaboration with other business organisations.

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## Fit for Future Platform

## 2.1 Promoting cooperative culture in entrepreneurship

Cooperatives Europe joins EU funded partnerships to develop projects with an impact on local territories as well as the European region. Cooperating directly with our members, cooperative enterprises and relevant stakeholders, we establish lasting international relations that foster the growth of the cooperative movement as a whole.

### Coop4Edu

[Coop4Edu](#) project, co-financed by Erasmus+, aimed to better include cooperative entrepreneurship within university and further education curricula. As the project came to an end, the final conference hosted by Cooperatives Europe and KU Leuven presented project outcomes to the wider academic and policy-making communities. In two years, partners developed a set of [three learning modules](#) on cooperative enterprises released as open education resources available to all.

### CoopStarter 2.0

The [CoopStarter](#) 2.0 project, co-financed by Erasmus+, supported the development of tools and reference material for mentoring young entrepreneurs interested in starting new cooperatives. After three years, the project has come to an end. Due to the global pandemic the live events, which included young cooperators presenting their projects, were held online. All materials developed to help mentor young cooperators, as well as recommendations for policy makers are available at [starter.coop](#). The CoopStarter mentoring methodology continues to inspire the Global Cooperative Entrepreneurs programme developed by #Coops4dev.

### SE4Ces

Cooperatives Europe is a partner of a new Erasmus + project seeking to create an enabling environment for social economy to thrive by bringing together Higher Education, social economy organisations and enterprises, and community stakeholders. It is now in the first research phase developing an overview of the current state-of-the-art of social economy

education in Europe and beyond. The project will facilitate the co-creation of an international Masters programme on social economy and community development strategies.





# ADDRESSING COOPERATIVE ISSUES IN EU POLICIES

## Sharing, Collaboration, Cooperation (SCC)

Sharing, Collaboration, Cooperation (SCC) is a partnership among collaborative spaces, innovation communities and higher education institutions co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme. In 2020 the [Caracol Toolkit](#) was released - an interactive resource intended as a general guide, a checklist to follow during the design process of a new collaborative space. It includes tools for designing processes for community engagement, space, services and learning offer. It targets communities willing to involve academic institutions, students, citizens, organisations in the set up and creation of collaborative spaces.



## 2.2 Coopedia: a collaborative search engine on cooperative entrepreneurship

Coopedia Knowledge Base is a collaborative search engine listing resources (guides, videos, books, and much more) on cooperative entrepreneurship. It aims to give young entrepreneurs worldwide the support and tools they need to set up cooperative businesses, further develop them and provide learning for actors interested in the cooperative business model. It allows to find various types of materials, in a variety of languages, based on topics of interest.

- Based on 5th cooperative Principle: providing education, training and information.
- Encourages cooperation between cooperatives and key actors like universities, training centres, local authorities and civil society organizations interested in cooperatives.
- Built as an open-source technology based on interoperability and modularity, Coopedia's code is free to use. Members and

partners are invited to install their versions of Coopedia and contribute to cooperative knowledge sharing worldwide.

### Access coopedia



[coopedia.starter.coop/en/](https://coopedia.starter.coop/en/)

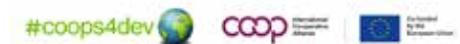
### Learn more



[edu4all.coop/coopedia/](https://edu4all.coop/coopedia/)

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The Knowledge Base is developed by Cooperatives Europe under the ICA-EU Partnership (#coops4dev). The idea emerged via the CoopStarter 2.0 project led by Cooperatives Europe and was implemented and upscaled via the Global Cooperative Entrepreneurs (GCE) programme, an activity of #coops4dev





A global community built around cooperation and entrepreneurship, bringing together:

## Contributors

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## Searchers

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### Who are they?

- Cooperative mentors and experts

### What do they do?

- Reference existing materials on cooperative entrepreneurship
- Peer-review content before making it available to all users

### Who are they?

- Entrepreneurs, students or anyone interested in learning more about cooperative businesses and how to start them

### What do they do?

- Search for and find useful materials in a matter of seconds
- Suggest contributors to index specific resources

# 3

## Social economy

Cooperatives Europe works to ensure that social economy policies and initiatives at the EU level duly consider cooperatives. The European Commission has committed to propose an EU action plan for social economy to enhance social investment, support social economy actors to start-up, scale-up, innovate and create jobs. For the past year, Cooperatives Europe has been ensuring that cooperatives receive recognition as an essential tool for Europe's recovery and growth.

### Key achievements

- Represented cooperatives during the European Social Economy Summit and its preparatory events, showcasing specificities of the cooperative model and its potential for communities. This included an intervention during a session on digital and platform cooperatives where Coop4Edu education resources were highlighted.
- Advocated for an inclusive EU action plan for social economy going beyond traditional businesses through the Social Economy Intergroup at the European Parliament.
- Contributed to the European Commission's expert group on social economy and social enterprises (GECES) addressing the social economy action plan, providing recommendations on external development policies, and inserting entrepreneurship angle along with employment policies.
- Selected for two Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) calls on global action for "Promoting Social and Solidarity Economy Ecosystems."



The European action plan for social economy aims to provide a coherent set of measures and create enabling conditions for the social economy to fulfil its potential to contribute to sustainable and inclusive growth and a fair recovery while achieving the green and digital transitions. Cooperatives Europe provides a notable contribution to this action plan since cooperatives are the main actors of the social economy sector, but also competitive enterprises on the European market which pursue societal objectives and contribute to social cohesion.

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## EU action plan for social economy



Civil Society Days is a public forum bringing together European citizens, civil society organisations and the European institutions for a debate on the essential components of a sustainable recovery for the Future of Europe's citizens. As members of the Liaison Group (EESC), Cooperatives Europe and Social Economy Europe co-organised a workshop titled "Social economy and youth entrepreneurship for a sustainable recovery" which gathered experiences from young entrepreneurs in the social economy and cooperatives, brought knowledge from educational institutions and sparked an exchange on EU initiatives aimed at supporting youth entrepreneurship in the social economy.

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## Civil Society Days 2021

# 4

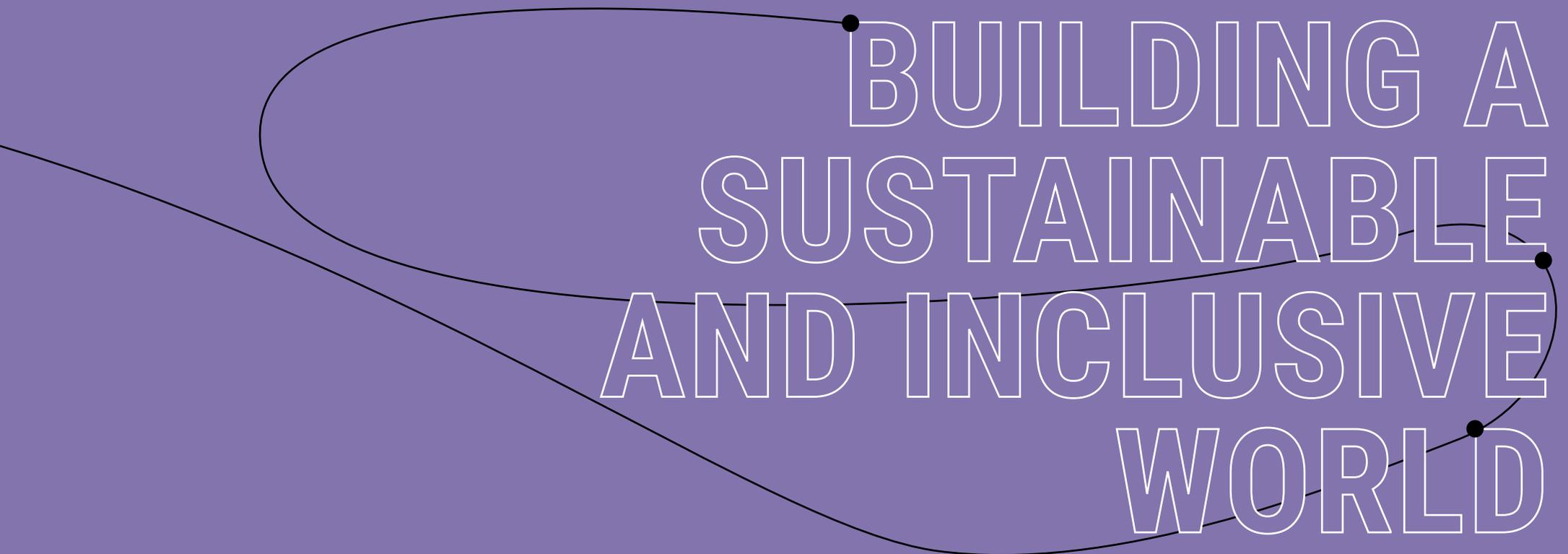
## International development

We are actively engaging to increase cooperatives' recognition as key international development actors, in order to build a sustainable and inclusive world that puts people before profit. As the ICA-EU Partnership on International Cooperative Development, shortly [coops4dev](#), has entered its' final phase, the past year saw further milestones achieved, such as the publication of the Youth and Cooperatives research and a significant increase in country reports on cooperative legislation. The [coops4dev.coop](#) platform content has been expanded to data from over 90 countries across the globe and a new platform gathering all education and learning tools [edu4all.coop](#) has been launched. The last year marked also the conclusion of the documentary series [aroundtheworld.coop](#), with a last documentary on sustainable food-chains in Poland.

### Key achievements

- Promoted the inclusion of cooperatives in the new EU International Development Programming through continued engagement with the Policy Forum on Development and meetings with Jutta Urpilainen, Commissioner of International Partnerships.
- Cooperatives Europe Development Platform (CEDP) advanced international cooperative presence via position papers, knowledge exchange, trainings and research.
- Released a joint report with Fair Trade Advocacy Office and CONCORD 'Mind our business: Amplify the transformative power of sustainable and inclusive business models through EU external action' with specific recommendations to better support such business models and help shape the international dimension of EU policies.
- Published national reports on cooperative legislation, available through an interactive map on [coops4dev.coop](#). Based on these reports, a research paper titled 'Legal Framework Analysis and the ICA-EU Partnership: an update on ensuring a level playing field for people-centred organisations' was published with a view to support an enabling environment for cooperatives.





BUILDING A  
SUSTAINABLE  
AND INCLUSIVE  
WORLD

## 4.1 Promoting youth entrepreneurship globally

### **'Young People and Cooperatives: a Perfect Match'**

Coops4Dev's publication 'Young people and cooperatives: A perfect match' gathered direct input from over 400 young people in 20 countries. Organised into five chapters, the report analyses the five E's of Employment, Education, Equalities, Engagement and Entrepreneurship, and how the relation between young people and cooperatives can be improved. The findings from this large-scale research were the focus of online events such as a webinar hosted by St Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia and the 2021 Global Youth Forum.

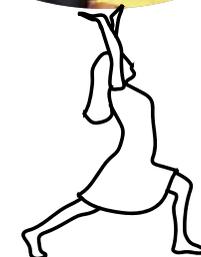
### **Global Youth Forum - Cooperative Entrepreneurship**

This year the Global Youth Forum on Cooperative Entrepreneurship 2021 (GYF21) took place online, bringing together over 650 young people. Plenary sessions and parallel training sessions covered a variety

of topics, such as cooperative identity, gender equality, digital tools for cooperative entrepreneurship, policy, business planning and more, inspiring a new generation of cooperatives.

### **GCE - Global Cooperative Entrepreneurs**

Inspired by the methodologies developed by CoopStarter 2.0, the global mentoring programme for young cooperative entrepreneurs is a joint collaboration between all ICA regional offices. The GCE implementation has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the planned offline multiplier events have been transformed into virtual meet-ups for mentors and ambassadors, supported by a new online roadmap and a guidebook with tips and tricks on how running successful online events.



## 4.2 Coops4Dev: Five years of strengthening the cooperative movement as key actor in international development

The ICA-EU Partnership (coops4dev) between the European Commission and the cooperative movement it is the formal recognition by the EU that cooperatives are a key actor in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

This partnership has been valued by a close collaboration between EU Commission DG International Partnerships and the cooperative movement, resulting in strong policies acknowledging the cooperative model at international level, and a secured place in the next programming cycle.

Looking back to 5 years intense activity implementation of coops4dev, 2020 has been the year to consolidate achievements, and ensure their sustainability. More specifically for Cooperatives Europe at the

European level it gave the opportunity to initiate and implement several actions that reinforced and supported the cooperative recognition. To mention some of them:

- More than 10 national reports on legal framework
- Consolidation and development of the CEDP
- Report on Youth Entrepreneurship, Peace Building, Sustainable and Inclusive Business Models
- Mentions of cooperatives in key EU communications
- Selection to participate in European Development days

Further actions included several learning tools, seminars and trainings, such as CoopAcademy or the Global Youth Forum gathered in the edu4all.coop The partnership implementation also ensure a collaboration between all ICA regions and global office and reinforce the Alliance through numerous actions.



coops4dev



[coops4dev.coop/en](https://coops4dev.coop/en)

Youth report



[coopseurope.coop/sites/default/files/coops4devyoungpeoplereport-267264990\\_0.pdf](https://coopseurope.coop/sites/default/files/coops4devyoungpeoplereport-267264990_0.pdf)

Video



[youtube.com/watch?v=5sfzpoz1FcA](https://youtube.com/watch?v=5sfzpoz1FcA)

# 5

## Gender Equality

Over the past year gender equality policy within the European Union gained political attention largely thanks to the implementation on gender equality strategy focusing on the gender pay gap. At the same time, the particularly taxing impact of Covid-19 crisis on women in both social and economic contexts raised specific concerns and action.

### Key actions

- Cooperatives Europe Gender Equality Working Group enlarged its membership, organised the implementation the gender equality charter, and promoted notable actions on gender equality from the field.
- The Representative of the Gender Equality Working Group actively contributed to the actions and campaigns of the Gender Equality Committee of the International Cooperative Alliance (i.e. Orange the World campaign).
- Participated to the WeGate Summit – an EU online platform helping women to start and build businesses – and put forward cooperatives as an option for women’s collective business projects.





SDG 5  
PROMOTING  
GENDER  
EQUALITY



**Collect gender statistics**



**Promote work-life balance, diversity management and women in top level positions**



**Promote awareness raising on gender equality with our members**



**Promote a culture of equality at 360°**



**Ensure a gender balanced participation, visibility, communication**



**Support women's employment and cooperative entrepreneurship**



**Fight against any form of harassment and violence**



**Share and value best practices**



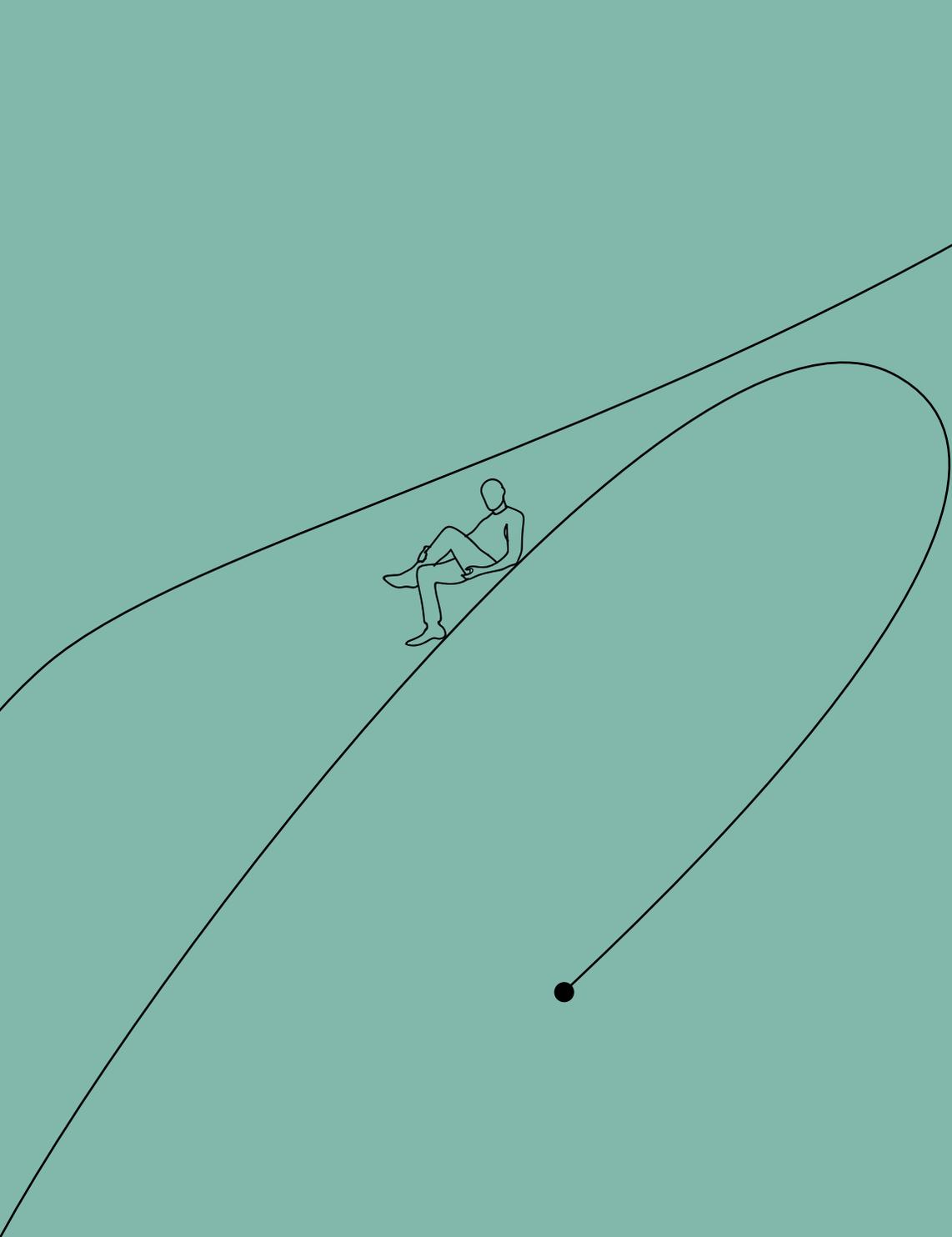
**Advocacy at national and European level to promote gender equality**



**Cooperate with the International Co-operative Alliance, UN system, and NGOs in promoting an ever more gender balanced world**

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## Our 10 commitments



The [Gender Equality Charter](#) was developed based on the work of the Gender Equality Working Group. The charter is a commitment by Cooperatives Europe to strengthen its activities in closing the gender gap as well as a call to its members to implement the 10 commitments in their respective organisations. Taking into account SDG 5 (gender) and EU Gender Equality Strategy, it aims to promote women's empowerment and gender equality by means of cooperatives and calls for work-life balance promotion, support for women in cooperative entrepreneurship, best practice sharing, statistics collection and more.

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## Gender Equality Charter

# 6

## Cooperatives in sustainable innovation

### **Co-FRESH**

CO-creating sustainable and competitive FRuits and vEgetableS' value cHains in Europe (Co-FRESH) is a new Horizon 2020 project Cooperatives Europe is part of. Together with members Euro Coop, we represent cooperative actors in a consortium involving farmers, cooperatives and consumers as well as technological, environmental and economic experts. The project aims to improve the economic, social and environmental performance of these value chains and ensure sustainability through the smart integration of collectively developed innovations (not only technological) in 7 pilot cases in 6 European countries.



## Governance

As the Board of Cooperatives Europe completed the final year of their mandate online, the regular in-person exchanges were hampered. Despite this, the Board successfully guided the secretariat in the work plan implementation, as voted by the General Assembly, as well organised the ICA-EU partnership's (coops4dev) sustainability with a view to the future. The Board also worked on financial sustainability and the review of the statutes of cooperatives Europe, with specific involvement of Presidency. Finally, it brought the European position to the Board of the International Cooperative Alliance.

### **European Union Coordination Committee (EUCC)**

Acting as the common voice of the cooperative movement in Europe and bringing together European sectoral organisations

and national umbrella organisations, the EUCC tackled issues related to the impact of the pandemic on cooperatives, provided input to public consultations on topics including Sustainable Corporate Governance and the Non-Financial Reporting Directive and elaborated positions on the upcoming action plan for social economy.

### **Representing Europe at the International level**

Cooperatives Europe actively contributes to many committees, working groups and campaigns at the global level through the International Cooperative Alliance. As the European region, we voice our recommendations and collaborate through: membership and communications working groups, regional directors meetings, regional and international sectoral directors meetings, committees on youth, gender and G20, among others.

Cooperatives Europe, together with the International Cooperative Alliance, also make up the Coordination Unit of the ICA-EU Partnership (coops4dev), overseeing the project's work and development across the globe.





# Expenses



Personnel

66%

Project expenses

17%

Travel premises

12%

External services – IT

3%

Meetings & other

2%



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