

# cooperative manifesto

## Europe's Sectorial Cooperative Agenda

Sectorial policy priorities  
for the 2024 European  
Parliament elections.





A cooperative vision for Europe

Sectorial policy priorities for 2024 European Elections

# Cooperatives in Europe

## **The power of cooperation**

Cooperatives are people-centred businesses that put the power back into the hands of the citizens. They are collectively owned and democratically governed by their members (consumers, producers, employees or local communities) who have an equal say in the business management and the way the profits are shared. Cooperatives constitute a valuable alternative to traditional businesses and exist in all sizes, from micro enterprises to major companies, operating in all sectors of the economy, from industry to services, healthcare to housing, agriculture to banking and energy to culture.



## **Cooperatives at the heart of inclusive innovation**

The cooperative business models support a vision of Europe where its enterprises are pioneering inclusive, impactful and value-generating innovations. With citizens' ownership and empowerment at the core of their DNA, cooperatives are championing inclusiveness and social cohesion in their communities, while supporting the economic interests of their members. Through their social, technological, or organizational innovations, they create long-term value by generating sustainable solutions to societal and community challenges in all economic sectors

## **A vehicle for sustainable development and prosperity**

Cooperatives benefit not only their members but also play an active role in reinforcing the social and economic fabric of Europe and its immediate neighbours. In times of crisis, they prove to be particularly resilient and helpful in making sure local communities and disadvantaged areas can thrive through democratic participation, cooperation, solidarity, and good governance. As a driving force for democracy and dialogue, cooperatives' real potential must be unleashed to secure sustainable development and democracy across the continent and beyond.

# Sectorial priorities





# our priorities

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## **Support the competitiveness and resilience of cooperative enterprises in the Single Market**

Cooperative enterprises substantially contribute to our economies and their employment rates. They, for instance, hold up 60% of the market share in the agri-food sector in Europe and employ 35% of the workforce in the health and social care sector in Italy. Yet, cooperatives' resilience and competitiveness are being challenged by additional legal and administrative barriers compared to traditional businesses. We call for the cooperative model to be duly recognised by policymakers in all legislations, sectors, and countries as well as for an enabling and supportive regulatory environment considering their specificities such as their distinct auditing and reporting, special governance structure, specific financial management and funding instruments.

## We particularly call for:



Boosting **agri-cooperatives'** competitiveness and their contributions to sustainable growth by increasing their access to the market through promotion policies and balanced trade agreements, while developing measures to address vulnerabilities in the value chains, especially in times of crisis.



Ensuring access to finance for **energy cooperatives** from EU funds and specific measures in national support schemes for renewables through the implementation of the Guidelines on State Aid for Climate, Environmental Protection and Energy (CEEAG). The full transposition of the provisions on energy communities included in the Renewable Energy Directives (RED II and III), the Internal Electricity Market Design, and the Energy Efficiency and Energy Performance of Buildings Directive must also be ensured.



Establishing a supportive regulatory and financial framework at local, national and EU levels for **housing cooperatives**, which are effective vehicles to help citizens tackle the lack of affordable energy-efficient housing (both through delivery and renovation).



Safeguard the **cooperative banking** business model and its competitiveness by promoting a level-playing field with non-EU players operating under less stringent prudential regimes. Similarly, the introduction of digital euros must set holding limits in a way that protects cooperative banks from the risk of deposit outflows and strengthens their capacity to finance their communities.



Ensure efficient and competitive supply chains by avoiding excessive burdens on **consumer cooperatives** and SME retailers. To this end, we call for the maintenance of the EU acquis on the responsibilities of economic operators, which distinguishes between the obligations of importers placing products on the market and those of retailers making them available, thus avoiding extending the responsibilities of the former to the latter.

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# our priorities

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## **Support the twin transition in a way that is workable for cooperatives**

While many cooperatives across different sectors are fully engaged in supporting the twin transition, others are also at risk of being left behind, confronted with long-term investments and major changes in their legal requirements. To accelerate the green and digital transition, new rules must be ambitious but also feasible with a realistic timeline for cooperatives across Europe to meet their objectives while strengthening their capacities and risk management measures. Sustainability regulations must consider existing obligations (reporting, accounting, etc.), avoid excessive burdens and contain simplified procedures for SMEs. Similarly, digitalisation efforts must be met with increased funding and training to allow cooperatives to uptake or develop responsible, transparent, and human-centred digital innovations.

## We particularly call for:



Regulations, public investments, access to finance and support schemes shall support **agri-cooperatives** in their transition to more sustainable and less fossil-dependent value chains, particularly in the fields of biodiversity, energy efficiency, climate actions and digital infrastructure for rural communities. Policies must be innovation-driven and science-based to realise cooperatives' potential in delivering sustainable initiatives, projects, and products.



Boosting long-term financial support through grants, low-interest loans or guarantees towards **cooperative housing projects**, community-led housing or Community Land Trusts. These initiatives play a crucial role in the EU renovation wave and in achieving fossil-fuel-free buildings by 2050 while maintaining affordability and protecting low-income communities against 'renovictions'.



Developing support measures for business transfers to employees under a **worker cooperative model** in the industrial and service sector to preserve existing enterprises that would otherwise disappear. Similar dispositions with a community-based approach must be established for cooperatives providing long-term care, a sector facing a demographic challenge resulting in increased demand and labour shortage.



Creating a regulatory environment for **digital banking and sustainable finance** that allows innovation and fair competition while ensuring coherence in implementation and compliance with prudential and financial conduct rules. The right balance needs to be achieved for cooperative banks to harness the benefits of digitalization while also accompanying their local communities in a just and green transition.



Ensuring channel neutrality between offline and online trade platforms operating within the EU in terms of regulations and standards. This will not only ensure fair competition for SMEs and **consumer cooperatives**, but it will also protect consumer rights while allowing the EU to achieve its ambitions for a more sustainable food system.

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# our priorities

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## **Foster inclusion and social rights**

From consumer rights to social and sustainable housing, from worker cooperatives to energy communities, cooperative enterprises help rethink the traditional business model by putting values at the core of their activities: solidarity, decent work, democracy, and citizens' empowerment. To further promote such business models and their positive externalities, the European Pillar of Social Rights must remain a political priority under the next mandate with ambitious leadership from the new Commission to implement the Social Economy Action Plan until 2030. In addition, a true paradigm shift is needed in EU economic governance and Member States' budgetary policies to integrate the principles of the Pillar and therefore ensure the recognition of social returns on investments in negotiations.

## **We particularly call for:**

- Ensuring the renewal of the social economy intergroup in the European Parliament for the next mandate. This group safeguards the recognition of social economy in European Institutions and provides an essential platform for social economy organisations across Europe.
  - Unleashing the potential of local community energy projects and energy communities in cooperation with cooperative housing to address social challenges such as energy poverty or lack of affordable housing in both urban and rural areas.
  - Promoting among Member States the worker-ownership model such as worker cooperatives, cooperatives among freelancers or self-employed as a way to ensure quality working conditions while maintaining autonomy and security for non-standard workers.
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### **What is Cooperatives Europe?**

Cooperatives Europe is the European cross-sectoral organization promoting the cooperative business model. On behalf of its 84 member organisations from 33 European countries across all business sectors, we promote the cooperative business model in Europe.

### **Talk to us**

We are keen to discuss how our recommendations can be developed and implemented together towards the strengthening of Europe's economy and society. We encourage Candidates and Parties to approach us directly to collaborate and work together.

You can contact Cooperatives Europe or our sectoral organisations at the contacts on the next page.

# Talk to us

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