



#COOPANNIVERSARYAWARDS

Meet the finalists

Six cooperatives, six incredible stories.

Meet six cooperatives shortlisted for the #CoopAnniversaryAwards, created to mark twenty years of Cooperatives Europe.

Presented in Brussels on 15 and 16 October 2026.

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- Ecopower · Belgium
 - ORCAB · France
 - OurCoop · United Kingdom
 - Genç İşi Kooperatif · Türkiye
 - Humana Nova · Croatia
 - Cooperativa Sole · Italy



Foreword

Twenty years ago, cooperatives across Europe decided they would be stronger speaking together than apart. That decision created Cooperatives Europe. It is the same decision, that every cooperative in this publication took at some point in its own history.

When we launched these awards, we asked for stories: beacons of the cooperative movement. What came back were applications from every corner of the movement: energy, housing, retail, textiles, building crafts, youth work, cultural initiatives, tech, agriculture, and many more. Different sectors, different sizes, different countries, and the same conviction that people who own their enterprise together can do things none of them could do alone.

The six finalists in these pages were shortlisted by our Award Committee, and each of them presents their own unique story.

Some of these cooperatives have been at work for thirty-five years, one for more than a hundred and fifty, and one for barely a decade. All six are answering questions that Europe is asking right now: who owns the energy, who can afford a home, who gets offered a job, and who decides.

The Cooperatives Europe Secretariat will continue to promote more than just these six finalists, because we believe each story is worth keeping. Each story is a step towards building a better world.

Read them carefully. They are worth it. And keep an eye on our social media for more stories to come.

Giuseppe Guerini
President, Cooperatives Europe

Agnes Mathis
Director, Cooperatives Europe



About the awards

The awards mark twenty years of Cooperatives Europe by putting the spotlight on cooperatives themselves rather than on the organisation.

The call was open to cooperatives and cooperative initiatives based in the European region as defined by the International Cooperative Alliance, and closed on 15 July 2026. The Award Committee (academic, external partners, board members, youth representative) scored every eligible entry against a shared set of criteria such as: the strength of cooperative governance and member participation, the significance and breadth of the impact achieved, the contribution to the wider movement, and the clarity of the evidence provided.

Category	What it rewards	Finalists
● Cooperative Stewardship	Cooperatives that have stayed true to cooperative values and principles while growing, adapting and strengthening the movement for the next generation	Ecopower (BE) ORCAB (FR) OurCoop (UK)
● People and Community Impact	Cooperative initiatives that make a measurable difference in people's lives and in their communities	Genç İşi Kooperatif (TR) Humana Nova (HR) Cooperativa Sole (IT)

A note on order

Finalists appear in alphabetical order within each category, and the two categories carry equal weight. Nothing in this publication implies a ranking.



Award for Cooperative Stewardship

Stewardship is the least visible cooperative virtue. It rarely makes headlines, because it is about what a cooperative protects rather than what it launches.

The three finalists in this category are long-standing enterprises: thirty-five years, thirty-five years and more than a hundred and fifty. Each has grown considerably, was resilient, and each has had chances to loosen member control along the way. None of them took those chances. What they did instead, in three very different sectors, is the subject of the next pages.

Ecopower · Belgium

ORCAB · France

OurCoop · United Kingdom

Finalists are listed in alphabetical order. The order carries no ranking.

Ecopower

A citizen energy cooperative owned by more than 73,000 people in Flanders.



One of the cooperative's wind turbines.

Ecopower began in 1991 with a group of citizens and an old mill in Rotselaar, which still produces electricity for more than 100 households. In 2003, when the Belgian energy market was liberalised, the General Assembly decided the cooperative should not only generate green energy but supply it directly. That decision turned a production cooperative into a citizen-owned energy supplier, and today more than 60,000 households buy their electricity from a company they own.

Ownership has stayed deliberately hard to concentrate. A share costs €250 and can be paid in instalments, so joining does not require savings. No member may hold more than twenty shares. Founders and partner organisations have no reserved seats on the board. That principle is tested by scale: a general assembly of 73,000 people is a real governance problem.

In 2023 Ecopower introduced online voting, and participation rose from roughly 400 people to roughly 5,000. It shows outside the assembly too: members use around 2,000 kWh a year, against a Flemish average of about 3,500. Its stewardship extends beyond its own membership. Ecopower co-founded REScoop.eu and REScoop Belgium, helped build the Flemish network Coopkracht, and takes part in a shared fund that helps energy cooperatives elsewhere in Europe get started.



The Ecopower team.

SECTOR

Renewable energy production and supply

FOUNDED

1991

EMPLOYEES

55

WEBSITE

ecopower.be

73,000+

members

60,000+

households supplied

€21.7M

returned to members and communities

Democratic citizen ownership is the very reason for its existence.

Ecopower, award application

ORCAB

A cooperative of 40 cooperative members owned by 9,600 independent building craftspeople (56.000 workers).



ORCAB team photo.

A plumber or an electrician running a small business buys at higher prices, holds less stock and has less bargaining power than any large construction group. ORCAB exists to remove that disadvantage without removing the independence that made these people set up on their own. It began in 1976 with a single purchasing cooperative. In 1990 twelve of them federated to create ORCAB. Thirty-five years later the network holds €200 million of stock across 850,000 m² of warehouses, has agreements with nearly 800 suppliers, and runs 42 showrooms under a shared brand.

The craftspeople remain in charge throughout: each cooperative is governed by a board of working craftspeople elected by their peers, and seventeen national product committees decide what the network buys. The benefit returns in cash and in time. A KPMG study found that a member buying 80% of their materials through the cooperative saves the equivalent of one working day a week. General assembly attendance regularly exceeds 50%, and rises above 80% in the most established cooperatives.

In hard times the model shows its worth. While most French building merchants closed for around six weeks during the pandemic, ORCAB's cooperatives stayed open. Every year around €2 million goes into a solidarity fund for cooperatives in difficulty and for new ones being set up.

SECTOR

Purchasing and services for building crafts

FOUNDED

1990, first cooperative 1976

TURNOVER

€1.3 billion combined

WEBSITE

orcab.coop

40

member cooperatives

9,600

artisan businesses

85%

of profit returned to members

Nobody is born a cooperator. You become one.

ORCAB, award application

OurCoop

The UK's largest independent cooperative society, owned by more than a million members.



The President and CEO with members at the Co-op Milk sign in Derby, relit by OurCoop in 2025.

Mergers usually happen because someone is struggling. This one happened because three healthy societies, Central Co-op, The Midcounties Co-operative and Chelmsford Star, concluded that cooperative ownership in the UK would be better protected by one strong society than by three separate ones. OurCoop is the result: more than 500 food stores plus funeral, travel, childcare, and utilities services, from Essex to Northumberland with 12,000 colleagues.

Membership is not a loyalty scheme. More than 4,350 members took an active part in shaping the society last year, and almost 17,000 voted on the national charity partnership. Members earned over £4.2 million through the rewards app, and £290,000 went to 992 local community organisations.

What distinguishes OurCoop for this category is how much of its effort goes outward. Its collaborative procurement and energy programme saves other independent co-operative societies around £30 million a year, benefiting competitors as much as itself. Its Malawi partnership trades with producer co-operatives rather than donating to them, and has supported clean water for 37,000 people.

Closer to home, the society runs employability programmes for people the labour market overlooks, from young adults facing barriers to work to survivors of modern slavery.



A new community store opens in Desford, celebrated with local school children.

SECTOR

Food retail, funerals, travel, childcare, energy

TRADING HISTORY

150+ years

COLLEAGUES

12,000

WEBSITE

ourcoop.co.uk

1M+

members

12,000

colleagues

£30M

saved each year for other societies

Stewardship, for OurCoop, means leaving the movement stronger than we found it.

OurCoop, award application



Award for People and Community Impact

This category asks a blunt question: who is better off because this cooperative exists?

The three finalists answer it in three different registers. One creates jobs for people the labour market rejects. One turns empty flats into a household where nobody lives alone. One builds the knowledge and the networks that let other cooperatives start at all. They have twelve, nineteen and twenty-seven members between them, and their reach is considerably larger than their size suggests.

Genç İşi Kooperatif · Türkiye

Humana Nova · Croatia

Cooperativa Sole · Italy

Finalists are listed in alphabetical order. The order carries no ranking.

Genç İşi Kooperatif

Youth Deal Cooperative

A worker-owned cooperative founded by young people in İzmir, and still run by young people.



Post-earthquake recovery workshop.

Genç İşi was set up in İzmir in 2015 by young people who wanted decent work on cooperative terms rather than in spite of them. Eleven years later it is still worker-owned and still young: many of its current worker-owners joined first as volunteers and became co-owners from there.

The cooperative has carried 66 national and international projects with 37 partner organisations, built capacity for 2,626 people and run research involving 2,505 participants. The most durable result is KoopDestek, the largest open-access cooperative resource platform in Türkiye, published in Turkish and Arabic and used by hundreds of thousands of people in Türkiye and across the MENA region. Knowledge that used to sit inside consultancies is now free to anyone starting a cooperative.

The work is deliberately aimed where the need is greatest. The "I Am Learning My Job" programme brings young refugees and young people from host communities into the same training and into formal employment. Other programmes support women-led social cooperatives, young people not in education, employment or training, and cooperatives recovering after the 2023 earthquakes.



Partners and experts of Genç İşi Kooperatif.

SECTOR

Cooperative development, youth employment, research

FOUNDED

2015

MEMBERS

12 worker-owners

WEBSITE

gencisi.org

12

worker-owners

66

projects

2,626

people trained

Young people are at the centre of Genç İşi Cooperative, as founders, decision-makers, professionals, researchers, volunteers, and community leaders.

Genç İşi Kooperatif, award application

Humana Nova

A non-profit social cooperative that collects, sorts, repairs, upcycles, and recycles textiles, while promoting sustainable production, work integration and environmental and social awareness-raising activities.



Textile sorting: collected textiles are sorted by hand according to their condition and their potential for reuse, redesign or recycling.

Europe throws away millions of tonnes of clothing a year, and millions of people with disabilities never get a serious job offer. Humana Nova was built on the observation that these two facts can solve each other.

Since 2011 the cooperative has collected, sorted, reused, upcycled, recycled and produced textiles, keeping more than 5,000 tonnes out of landfill. It employs 62 people. Thirty-eight are persons with disabilities, and twenty-one come from other groups that are routinely passed over: Roma communities, older workers and the long-term unemployed. These are proper jobs in a working business, not occupational therapy.

The business case matters here. In 2025 the cooperative's revenue passed €2.4 million, with more than 80% earned on the market rather than from grants, and all profit reinvested in the work and in new jobs. That independence is what allows it to keep hiring.

Under development are a digital product passport system, a work integration centre and an expanded sorting facility, which put the cooperative ahead of coming EU rules on textile waste. Humana Nova is a member of RREUSE and ENSIE, and reaches hundreds of children and young people each year through upcycling workshops and placements.



Team members of Humana Nova.

SECTOR

Circular textiles and work integration

FOUNDED

2011

EMPLOYEES

62

WEBSITE

humananova.org

5,000+ t

textiles diverted from landfill

60

employees, 38 with disabilities,
19 from vulnerable groups

80%+

of income earned on the market

Economic success, environmental responsibility and social impact can be achieved together, creating long-term benefits for individuals, communities and the planet.

Humana Nova, award application

Cooperativa Sole

A social enterprise in Bolzano turning empty flats into shared homes.



Lunch with the residents.

Founded in 2013, Cooperativa Sole works across health, social care and community-based services. Its work is guided by Human 360, a certified model combining innovation, community welfare, healthy lifestyles and solidarity to put people, their autonomy and their relationships at the centre of care.

In Bolzano, Sole is applying this approach to collaborative and intergenerational housing. In a neighbourhood where more than one resident in ten is over 75, six social housing flats had stood empty for years. Working with the public housing institute IPES and the city's social services, Sole renovated them and created Living Together, Living Better: a shared home for single mothers, university students and an older resident, with a community manager living on site.

Residents are not simply tenants: individual pathways and shared commitments encourage autonomy, solidarity, participation and mutual support, while students contribute to generate a community sense through activities such as babysitting, accompanying older residents and design cultural event in the neighbourhood. The vision is to generate a solidarity and active ecosystem in the Oltrisarco-Aslago neighbourhood. This approach builds on Sole's experience with the Human 360 collaborative housing model, where multidisciplinary teams, community-based support, technology and everyday solidarity actions are used to strengthen wellbeing and social networks that became also a case study of Horizon 2020 project ASSETs. Previous Human 360 housing projects have shown improvements in wellbeing, quality of life and perceived social support, while SROI analysis has demonstrated measurable social and economic value for the wider community.



Cooking together in the shared kitchen.

PROJECT

Living Together, Living Better

SECTOR

Social housing and social care

MEMBERS

19

WEBSITE

solecooperativa.com

14

residents

345

hours of solidarity given

296

professional support sessions

Young people are not a footnote in this model, they are structural partners in making it work.

Cooperativa Sole, award application

Six stories, one model

Read together, the six applications say something about where cooperation in Europe stands in 2026.

These cooperatives show that cooperation is not a single-issue answer. Each of them began with several issues and realised they could be solved together. Humana Nova could not take on textile waste without also taking on who is offered a job. Sole could not address the cost of housing without also addressing who grows old alone. Ecopower could not decarbonise electricity without deciding who owns it. Their work is cross-sectional and multilayered because the problems are. Read against Europe's own agenda, the overlap is hard to miss. Housing costs pushing working people out of the cities they work in. Energy prices, and the unsettled question of who owns the transition. Labour markets that leave disabled people, older workers, refugees and less fortunate communities outside.

Ageing populations and the isolation that comes with them. Rural regions losing their young. Textile waste arriving on the statute book. Europe's energy dependency. In each case the cooperative answer keeps ownership, democratic decision-making and value in the place where the work happens, rather than extracting them from it. That is competitiveness, strategic autonomy and territorial cohesion described from the ground up, and it is the same ground the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals cover from above: clean energy, decent work, reduced inequalities, sustainable communities and responsible production, reached through partnership.

This is what economic democracy looks like in practice. The next chapter is about giving them and all other cooperatives more space to grow as they build a better world.

Our supporters

Cooperatives Europe thanks the organisations whose support made the twentieth anniversary and these awards possible.

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This event 20th anniversary is organised *in partnership with the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group*.

#CoopAnniversaryAwards