

Press release: 14 September Extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council

Worker and social cooperatives urge EU ministers to be guided by EU foundational values when discussing the humanitarian refugee crisis

Cooperatives can help both in providing services to refugees and in contributing to their work integration

3,000 migrants have died in the Mediterranean since January, mostly people who are fleeing armed conflicts in Siria, Eritrea, Sudan or Irak where they risk their lives. The European Commission has already identified 120,000 people in clear need of international protection from Italy (15,600), Greece (50,400) and Hungary (54,000). Today, the European ministers will hold an Extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council on the current refugee crisis. As it is currently demonstrated in the South of Europe, cooperatives are helping refugees having a more dignified life both in providing social and emergency services and in contributing to their integration according to the specific national regulations.

Worker and social cooperatives have a decades-long experience in providing social services and work integration to migrants. For example, the Italian social cooperative Ruah, created in Bergamo in 2009, provides primary, psychological and social assistance, linguistic mediation and professional training to a wide range of people in need, such as migrants. Only since 2014, it has sheltered 1,000 people, including refugees from different countries to which it offers social and professional services, thereby fostering their autonomy and labour integration. Cooperative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity have played a key role in building the European social model. They are people-centred enterprises rooted in the community and are putting these values in practice when responding to members' needs. They thus get very precious feedback from stakeholders and the community and benefit from a high level of legitimacy on how to answer to fundamental needs.

The management at European Union level of the humanitarian refugee crisis over the last few months is a particularly dramatic symptom of the contradictions inherent to the European project in its current setting, with a large gap between the economic and monetary dimension on the one hand, and the social dimension on the other, making it a wider problem than the refugee crisis in itself. These contradictions result in a very low level of efficiency in managing this crisis and a clash with the EU's fundamental values such as respect for human dignity, liberty and equality.

In the labour integration field, a number of worker cooperatives are being created by migrants holding an employment permit but that find themselves in an unemployment situation. This is the case of Los Cabañenses, in Málaga (Spain), a cooperative from the horeca sector founded in 2012 by 5 people from Paraguay. The creation of the cooperative has provided them with the necessary tools to facilitate their socio-economic reintegration.

“Europe has its share of responsibility in the political, military and economic circumstances that push those migrants to run away from their home countries. We urge EU ministers to be guided by the founding principles of the Union when discussing on the humanitarian refugee crisis today at the Extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council”, concludes .the President of CECOP, Luca Dal Pozzo.

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CECOP – CICOPA Europe (*European Confederation of Worker Cooperatives, Social Cooperatives and Social and Participative Enterprises*) groups national organisations in 15 countries which in turn affiliate over 50.000 cooperative and participative enterprises in industry and services, the vast majority being SMEs, and employing 1.4 million workers across Europe. Most of them are characterised by the fact that the employees in their majority are members-owners, while some of them are second-degree enterprises for SMEs. Furthermore, around 4.000 of those enterprises are specialised in the reintegration of disadvantaged and marginalised workers (disabled, long-term unemployed, ex prisoners, addicts, etc).