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Democratic enterprises promoting intergenerational and gender equality

Worker and social cooperatives provide youth and women a more equal access to employment and management positions

Although they might face specific discriminatory situations, for young persons and for women employment is often a path full of obstacles for equal treatment, career development and self-realization. Cooperative enterprises, through one of their core principles “one member - one vote”, put at the same level all the members, no matter their age, gender or other characteristics. Worker and social cooperatives provide to youth and women a more equal access to employment. As an example, in Spain young persons represent 43% of employment in worker cooperatives, women nearly 50% and they also allow them to reach easier managements positions.

“During the next two days, European ministers in charge of employment and social affairs will meet in Luxembourg to discuss the Youth Guarantee and gender challenges for the labour market. The democratic management and control exercise by the worker-members of the cooperatives represented by CECOP foster intergenerational and gender equality. We are asking representatives from the Members States to consider the worker and social cooperatives' contribution toward more equality in Europe. Our enterprises could contribute event better but they need favorable environment and policy measures for their development”, says the President of CECOP, Luca Dal Pozzo.

According to different national data, we can observe that young workers and women in worker and social cooperatives are better represented than in other enterprises, including in responsibility positions. In France 15,5% of worker cooperatives are managed by persons under the age of 35, compared to 11,3% of conventional enterprises. 25% of Spanish worker cooperatives are managed by women, which represents 7 points more than in other enterprises.

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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). More than a thousand worker cooperatives in the CECOP network were created as business transfers to employees of conventional enterprises in crisis or without heirs.