

Press release: 2016 International Day of Cooperatives

## Industrial and service cooperatives: essential allies to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Tomorrow is the International Day of Cooperatives. To celebrate it, the international cooperative movement is showing how those enterprises promote the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). [‘Co-operatives: the power to act for a sustainable future’ is the slogan of the campaign](#) that emphasizes our contribution to the goals. [CECOP](#), the European confederation of industrial and service cooperatives, wants to join the celebration reminding, together with [CICOPA](#), the International organisations of industrial and service cooperatives, how industrial and service cooperatives – be they worker cooperatives, social cooperatives or self-employed producers’ cooperatives - are crucial allies in the effort to achieve these goals.

*“As democratically controlled enterprises owned and managed by their members (workers, users, self-employed producers and other stakeholders), the 50,000 cooperatives CECOP represents promote equal distribution of wealth, stable jobs, equitable access to goods and services and gender equality in Europe. They are locally rooted and concern for local communities”, declares Beppe Guerini, President of CECOP and Vice-President of CICOPA.*

Last September, the world leaders -together at the United Nation General Assembly- committed to the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), outlining an ambitious vision for a better world. They agreed on seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to wipe out poverty, fight inequality and injustice and tackle climate change over the next fifteen years. Myriads of examples demonstrate the strength of worker, social and producer cooperatives in accomplishing the goals of the 2030 Agenda. The cooperative model has sustainable development at its core, being based on ethical values and principles.

Worker cooperatives are one of the pillars of the cooperative movement, endorsed by the [Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade](#). As shown in the [Special Issue of CICOPA’s magazine Work Together](#), dedicated to the Sustainable Development Goals, worker cooperatives in particular can help “the poor and the vulnerable have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property...”, as stated in the first sustainable development goal.

### **Out of Poverty**

[CICOPA’s studies](#) indicate that this model is specifically adapted to lift people out of poverty, helping among other things the transition from the informal to the formal economy. Part of cooperative surplus is always dedicated to provide its members with social tools such as training, education, housing, and financial services, as well as care services for their own families.

In countries where some level of research exists on gender and cooperatives, the numbers indicate that cooperatives are among the best places for creating gender equality. Surveys show that women constitute 61% of the workforce of Italian cooperatives, and that 23.6% of them hold top level positions (26% including positions of responsibility in the management and control of the cooperative), compared to 16% in other companies. Gender studies carried out by the [Spanish Worker Cooperatives Confederation COCETA](#) show that almost 50% of the workers are women and that the quantity of women in high positions reaches 39%, while in other types of enterprises in Spain, this number barely attains 6%.

## Health

One of the main goals of the 2030 Agenda is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. In the midst of outsourcing services from the public sector, and private competition, cooperatives -as member-based organizations- put health and well-being ahead of profits. They play a crucial role in care for the individual, prevention of illness, and social wellbeing of members and staff. They play a key role with vulnerable populations, including disabled people, seniors, and the mentally ill, and adopt an all-inclusive membership policy. One can find many examples in Italy, Spain, the UK, among other European countries, like the [cooperative CASA](#), created in 2004 to provide quality domiciliary health and social care support services to older and disabled people in North east of England. The cooperative employs today 750 people.

According to the study "[The delivery of Services of General Interest in Europe and the role of social enterprises: a cooperative perspective](#)", by Beppe Guerini and Bruno Roelants, President and Secretary General of CECOP, social cooperatives have been able to gradually include the main stakeholders in a dynamic of democratic control regarding the service being delivered. This allowed a high level of participation in enterprise governance which, in turn, enables those enterprises to get to grips with "take the pulse" the needs experienced by the citizens. The democratic control has, as consequence, a strong impact on the quality of the services; first of all, because the users can take part in the decision-making processes, and secondly, because the providers, who also take part in the decision-making processes, are in daily contact with the users and know their needs.

## Industry

There are plenty of examples in other sustainable goals as well, like goal number nine on the UN list: to "build resilient infrastructures, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation". Worker, social and producers' cooperatives promote sustainable employment, economic growth and industrialization. They promote the long-term dimension of the enterprise. And even though some of them are going through difficult times, the general trend reported by [studies](#) shows that these cooperatives are displaying resilience to crisis situations.

Countries like France, Italy or Spain have numerous examples of worker cooperatives created by employees taking over their enterprises and safeguarding their jobs, after bankruptcies or sound companies without a successor. This is the case of the [Editoriale Zanardi](#), an artisanal printing company located in Northern Italy and transformed into a worker cooperative in 2014 saving employment and know-how.

Furthermore, in the Basque Country (Spain), there is one of the largest examples of sustainable industrialization and innovation. The [Mondragon Corporation](#), a group of more than 100 worker cooperatives, that give employment to 74,117 people, has its beginnings in 1943 in Mondragon, a poor town which then had a population of 7,000 people that had not yet recovered from the Spanish Civil War. Today it is the first entrepreneurial group in the Basque Country (where the Mondragon Corporation represents 3% of the regional GDP) and the region is the one having less unemployment (12% compared to 25% in the rest of the country). Oñati, the town with less unemployment of Spain (8,5%), manages to have such low unemployment in great part thanks to the cooperatives, which represents more than 50% of the enterprises in town.

### **Climate Change**

Cooperatives are also helping to fight climate change, in many ways. As the Special Dossier of the Work Together issue shows, there are several valuable examples in this sector, such as, the worker cooperative specializes in water purification [Atelier Reeb](#) in France created by a group of young people. The list of examples never ends. As enterprises based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity, industrial and service cooperatives (be they worker cooperatives, social cooperatives or self-employed producers' cooperatives), providing employment to an estimated 16 million people, have been working to achieve those goals for many years.

### **CONTACT:**

Leire Luengo – Communication Officer + 33 6 1336 05 29 - [leire.luengo@cecop.coop](mailto:leire.luengo@cecop.coop)

**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).