



Annual report

June 2021 - May 2022

A cooperative year
in review



President

Susanne Westhausen

Director

Agnes Mathis

Cooperation, more necessary than ever

The past year was turbulent. Our movement gradually moved toward a post-pandemic world seeking together new solutions to deal with the economic and human impact. In the midst of this recovery process, we saw the developments in Ukraine unfold. The events shocked us and the rest of the world. But it also, not surprisingly, triggered wonderful solidarity within the movement with numerous initiatives to help taken by our members already.

In this context of strong economic and social challenges, the value of sustainable business is now widely promoted. But we still have a long way to go if we want to build a solid economy with people at the centre, according to our values and principles. This is what Cooperatives Europe has been working on under the leadership of a new board and Presidency.

After 5 years of many great achievements, the EU-ICA partnership that allowed us to drive activities on cooperative development ended. We do of course work on the possibility of a continuation of this important activity.

2021 was also marked by the adoption of the European action plan for the social economy, long-awaited by the sector, in which we and our members and partners are particularly invested. Through its mandates in different expert groups, such as GECES on the social economy or Fit for Future, on better regulation, Cooperatives Europe also shares proposals and recommendations on the different topics tackled with a cooperative approach.

Cooperatives Europe must be a place of convergence, of exchange and discussion.

In this period where online communication has been the only possibility due to the pandemic, the revision of our communication tools has been focused on a better interconnection with our members.

An organisation such as Cooperatives Europe must also constantly anticipate its place and position in a rapidly changing environment. To be better equipped for that we have started to work with all our members on a multiannual strategy.

Taking care of the present, preparing for the short term, and positioning ourselves for the future will lead to a better cooperative future together.

President Susanne Westhausen
Director Agnes Mathis





1

Cooperative impact in Europe

Ensuring an influential voice towards policymakers

The year 2021-2022 was eventful, to say the least. In the midst of several Covid-19 waves, the European Union has focused its efforts on recovery and has begun to “rebuild back better” with a certain number of legislative initiatives underway. With a work programme revolving around the idea of “making Europe stronger”, the political agenda has been predominantly dedicated to the Green Deal, the digital transition as well as a fair economic recovery leaving no one behind.

In light of these priorities, Cooperatives Europe has focused its advocacy work on promoting cooperatives as transversal key economic actors, capable of combining economic, social and environmental performances while participating in the digital transition. Reaching out to

policymakers of all EU institutions, we advocated for an enterprise and industrial policy that does not further burden SME cooperatives but one that supports them in their digitalization journey.

Improving knowledge of cooperative solutions for a twin transition

In order to promote a just and sustainable twin transition using the untapped resources and know-how of cooperatives, Cooperatives Europe carried out two actions in the field of research in the last twelve months.

In July 2021, we organized a roundtable at the Committee on Cooperative Research (CCR) conference, the annual research conference of the European section of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). Dedicated to “Cooperatives in transition facing crises”, this 2021 edition allowed us

to bring out in the roundtable the diversity of European cooperative solutions in the field of transitions and to emphasize the responsibility of researchers and practitioners alike in working together to create more inclusive and supportive solutions.

July 2021 also saw the publication of a report entitled “Cooperation for the transition to a green economy”. Produced within the framework of the ICA-EU partnership on international development (#coops4dev) and in collaboration with the Cooperatives Europe Development Platform (CEDP), this research explores how cooperatives are acting to protect the environment, mitigate and adapt to the impact of climate change.

Supporting and promoting cooperative solidarity

Ukrainian citizens, cooperators included,

have seen their life heavily impacted by the war in their country. During this time we have remained in close contact with COOP Ukraine to track the situation for cooperatives on the ground. Cooperatives Europe issued [a statement](#) on the events on March 1.

We supported COOP Ukraine with their appeal for donations and continue to encourage members to send financial support or humanitarian aid. Cooperatives all over Europe have expressed their solidarity with their Ukrainian counterparts and have taken numerous initiatives to help them rebuild their movement. All the initiatives are documented on our [website](#). We will continue to communicate and share initiatives on our various communication channels to amplify their impact.



2

Social Economy

The social economy has gained increasing attention in the past few years, both in EU Member States and in the institutions. This was translated into the recently-published Action Plan for the Social Economy which was one of our main focuses this year. We also paid particular attention to ensuring that all characteristics of social economy enterprises would be included in the Commission's vision, including governance aspects that are at the core of the cooperative model. Cooperatives Europe has been involved in various political and representative bodies (SIEG, GECES, EESC Civil Society Liaison Group) where we actively worked towards better recognition of cooperatives and their specificities in social economy policies.

Key actions

- Published a position paper on the Action Plan for the Social Economy, laying out its shortcomings and our expectations for an implementation respectful of the diversity of the cooperative movement
- Actively contributed to the report of the EMPL committee of the European Parliament on the EU Action Plan for the Social Economy and to the EESC opinion on the Action Plan by sharing proposals for amendments.
- Advocated for cooperatives' interests in several political and representative bodies such as the Social Economy Intergroup in the Parliament (SIEG), the European Commission Expert Group on social economy and social enterprises (GECES), the EESC Civil Society Liaison Group
- Contributed to [the report on clusters of social and ecological transition](#) published by the GECES



- **Civil Society Days**

The 2022 edition of the annual EESC two-day event putting civil society in the spotlight had the theme “The EU as a driver of shared prosperity – civil society for an economy that works for people & the planet”. Cooperatives Europe co-organized on 16 March a workshop on building a democratic economy for a just transition, in cooperation with Social Economy Europe, SOLIDAR, and the European Environmental Bureau. We had the pleasure to invite our president Susanne Westhausen to speak at the event. The fruitful discussions led to a set of three recommendations, highlighting the need to build alliances, value meaningful participation of stakeholders and finally, support and scale up existing solutions for the EU to truly achieve a fair, democratic and sustainable transition.

- **EP online public hearing on the Council Recommendation on the framework for social economy**

The Parliament’s social economy intergroup (SIEG) organized on 4 March an online public hearing where our President Susanne Westhausen was invited to discuss the upcoming Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions, expected for 2023. We took the opportunity to remind MEPs of the great opportunity this Recommendation represents to clarify the legal definition of social economy, build a common understanding across Member States and thus, ensure effective implementation.

- **International Conference on social entrepreneurship in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.**

On 29 September, Cooperatives Europe participated online in the European Conference on Social Entrepreneurship in Plovdiv which laid its focus this year on Sustainable development. Cooperatives Europe provided input about the impact of different initiatives to promote and develop the social economy at the European and national levels. The event raised opportunities to better understand national actors and also to connect with many members present.

Key events

2.1. GECES

Initially created in 2012, the Commission Expert Group on social economy and social enterprises (GECES) provides expertise to the Commission on the elaboration and implementation of policies strengthening the social economy and social enterprises ecosystems in Member States and in the international arena. The group is also a forum for Member States to coordinate on existing legislations and exchange of practices.

The main topic of discussion within GECES this year was the Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP). Additionally, Cooperatives Europe presented its recommendations on other topics such as international development of social economy and state aid regulation, both based on our [position paper](#). Cooperatives Europe put into question the lack of concrete actions regarding gender policy and social economy.

2.2. OECD Peer Learning Partnership

The OECD and EU Commission launched a Peer Learning Partnership (PLP) made up of 6 consortia with participants from the EU and outside. Cooperatives Europe participated as partner in two of them, one on legal ecosystems and one on internationalization of the social economy. The purpose was to bring cooperative expertise through workshops, written contributions and by presenting recommendations to the OECD. The legal ecosystems partnership was focused on the identification of different legal trends in frameworks and concluded with a set of findings that underlined the need to share and agree on a series of values. In this context Cooperatives Europe also highlighted the importance of the application of cooperative principles, their European dimension, and the dangers of insufficient implementation of them in different national legislative contexts. The partnership forms an excellent environment for continued cross-pollination between national authorities and other partners active in the social economy.

2.3. A strong role for cooperatives in the Social Economy Action Plan

With cooperatives being historic members of the social economy (SE) and one of the most significant economic actors in this ecosystem, it was only fair that the recently published Action Plan for the social economy recognizes their crucial roles and highlights their contribution to a fair and sustainable economy. The Action Plan clearly acknowledges cooperatives in the definition of the social economy and addresses certain topics that particularly affect them, such as for instance workers' buy-outs or youth entrepreneurship and education.

In a [position paper](#) released on 31 March, Cooperatives Europe calls, however, for the Commission to go one step further namely, to recognize all cooperatives as transversal key economic actors in order to promote a true level-playing field and remove the specific barriers to their development (access to funding, visibility, limited digitalization and skills). Cooperatives'

role could also be further strengthened provided the Commission works on better defining the social economy and building a common understanding across Member States. The paper was the result of a close collaborative process with our members and was promoted to the European Parliament, European Commission, European Economic and Social Committee, and other institutions to maximise its impact.



3

Entrepreneurship

Environmental and social concerns are increasingly taken into consideration in various layers of entrepreneurship policy. Cooperatives are better recognised but paradoxically that makes it even more necessary for better recognition of their specificities. The activities of cooperative businesses nowadays go beyond purely social objectives but entail a wider array of models and formats that require attention in policy work. One of the main goals for Cooperatives Europe is to make sure the specificities of these cooperatives are recognized and taken into account.

Key actions

- Advocated for cooperatives' approach within the European Commission's SME strategy
- Contribution to [the 2021 report of the SME Envoy network](#) to the competitiveness Council.
- Advocated for cooperatives specificities to be recognised and considered in EU enterprise policies, especially regarding sustainability requirements. We support reaching a balance between adequate levels of administrative burden and accurate sustainability reporting against green and social washing.
- Contributed to the [Commission's survey](#) on the transition pathways for the proximity and social economy ecosystem, outlining the obstacles to overcome that cooperatives face in the green and digital transition. 3.1.



- SME Assembly 2021 (Slovenia)

Cooperatives Europe participated in the SME Assembly, the main event of the SME week, alongside entrepreneurs, public authorities, and SMEs networks. The event was centered around “Togetherness + Resilience = Recovery” with topics such as new ways of working, the role of SMEs in Placed-based industrial policies and tackling late payment. Cooperatives Europe took the floor in the plenary session on sustainability, reminding all attendees about the necessity for an SMEs strategy that captures the full potential of cooperatives.

- EU Industry Days

From 8 to 11 February, we attended the EU Industry Days, Europe’s flagship annual event which highlights industrial frontrunners, ongoing industrial policy discussions and improves the knowledge base of European industry. Especially interesting for European cooperatives was the dedicated session on the proximity and social economy ecosystem on Tuesday 8 hosted by our member CECOP and local cooperatives that we have promoted.

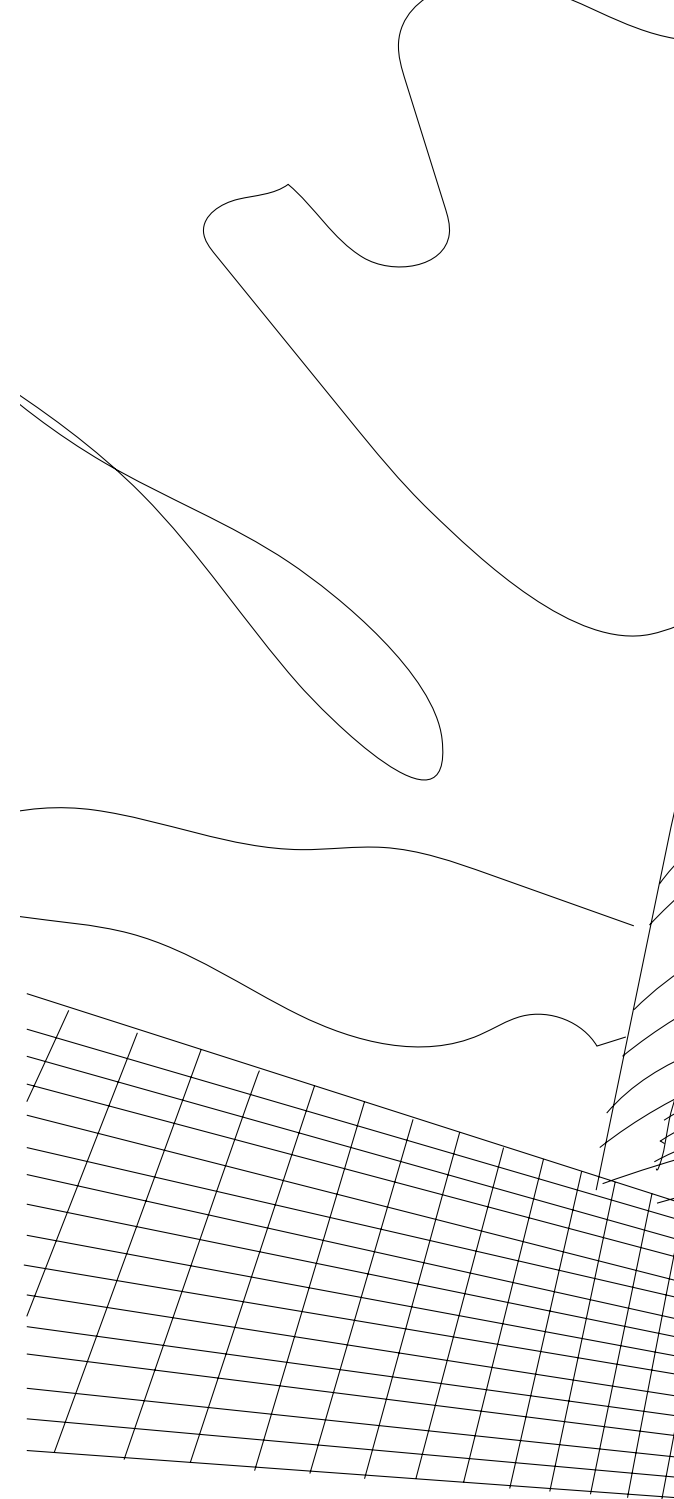
Key events



3.1. SME Envoy

The SME Envoy is a high-level expert network with representatives from EU Member States (SME ambassadors), business organizations, and the European Commission to which Cooperatives Europe participates. The SME Envoy acts as a policy advisory group on all topics that could impact SMEs. This allows Cooperatives Europe both to advocate for a cooperative SME policy and to establish contact and coordination with other business organizations and representatives from Member states.

Cooperatives Europe played the role of sounding board towards the European Commission for these actions and their knowledge, amplifying the decisions made in common agreement.





3.2 Promoting cooperative culture in entrepreneurship

Promoting youth entrepreneurship in education

SE4Ces Erasmus+ partnership

[SE4Ces project](#) Erasmus+ partnership entered the second phase in the spring of 2022 with the coordination of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Partners have hosted the first living labs in Greece, Spain, Italy, and the UK involving students, educators, and practitioners. Co-creation workshops will take place in May to go further in the development of the project outputs that will be included in the design of an International Master's programme to mainstream Social Economy in Higher Education.

The first European community of practice on Social Economy is growing and Cooperatives Europe members will be more involved after summer when

cooperators will be called to in the preparation of the first learning mobility workshops, planned for January 2023 in Forlì, Italy.

Promoting innovation

CO-FRESH Horizon partnership

The Horizon2020 project CO-creating sustainable and competitive FRuits and vEgetableS' value cHains in Europe ([Co-FRESH](#)) is reaching the end of the first research phase. In October 2021 Cooperatives Europe participated together with Euro Coop and the other partners, in the first General Assembly of the project hosted in Barcelona, Spain.

The project will ensure sustainable innovation in value chains with a specific focus on economic, social, and environmental performances. Cooperatives are involved in every stage of the value-chains in all 6 involved countries and will be present in several of the scientific publications that will be released during the lifecycle of the project.

SCC Erasmus+ partnership

Sharing, Collaboration, Cooperation (SCC) Erasmus+ partnership ended in August 2021. It involved collaborative spaces, innovation communities and higher education institutions that produced, among other materials, the Caracol Toolkit which is an interactive resource intended as a general guide, a checklist to follow during the design process of a new collaborative space, including tools for designing community engagement, space, services and learning offer.

The project was heavily impacted by the pandemic and most of the dissemination activities had to be postponed, cancelled or hosted online, but the partners managed to adapt the contents to the new situation and deliver a successful end product. All materials are freely available on the [project's website](#).



4

Level playing field for coops

It is important that cooperatives have the right framework not only to develop their activities but to do so in a way that is consistent with their values and governance principles. Together with its members and partners, our association has been following various issues with these objectives in mind.

4.1. Fit for Future platform

Chaired by the vice-president of the Commission Maros Sefcovic, this high-level platform works on simplification, burden reduction and new challenges with regard to EU legislation. As a member of the platform, Cooperatives Europe successfully presented amendments to the report on:

- The Banking Union, with support of

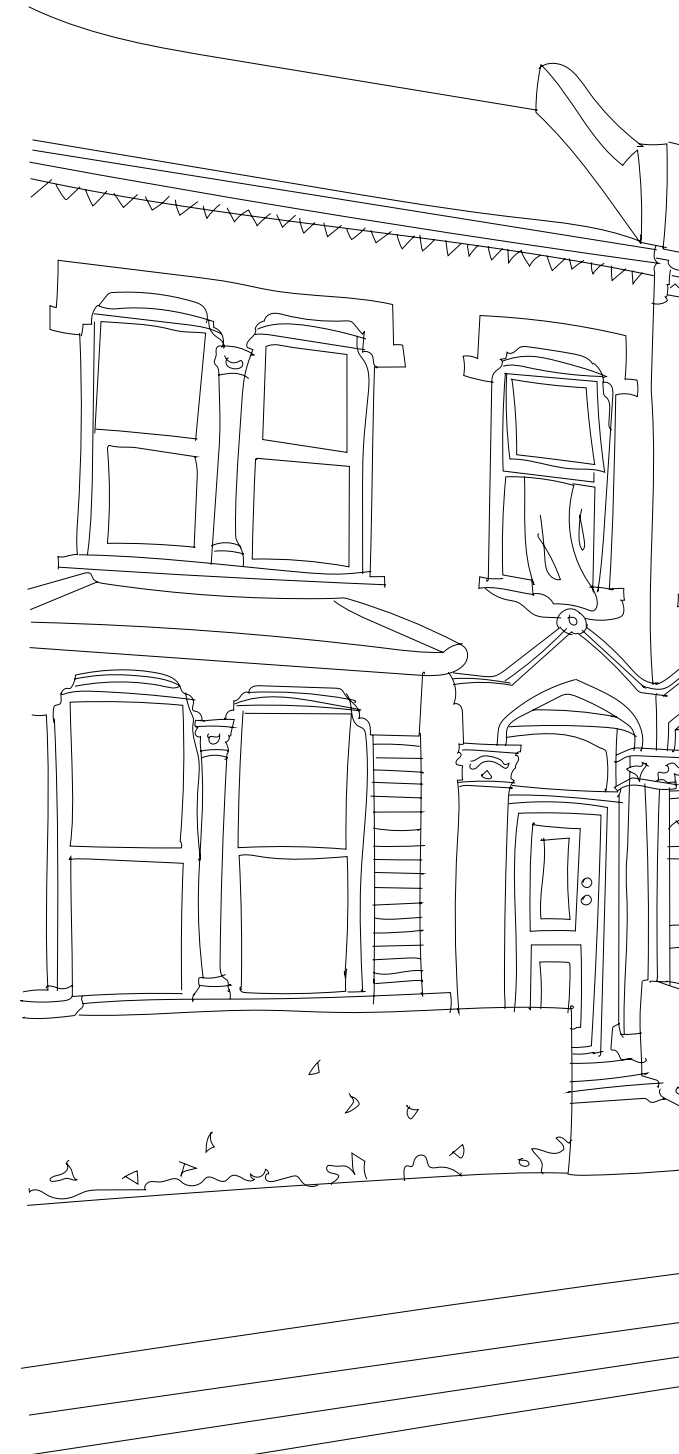
the European Association of Co-operative Banks (EACB).

- The Late Payment Directive
- State aid to the Agricultural and Forestry Sectors, with support of Cogeca, the EU association of agri-cooperatives.

The platform is currently producing a new working programme where Cooperatives Europe's involvement will be necessary on topics like access to capital for SMEs, food waste donation, and business-friendly VAT systems.

4.2. Sustainable business and governance regulations

Sustainability-related policies within the EU have gained more and more political





attention in the past year. The Commission's ambition to promote a more sustainable way of doing business is aligned with cooperatives' DNA. Sustainable governance has become a core mission at Cooperatives Europe. We, for instance, provided feedback to the Commission's Proposal for a Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence and highlighted the need to take into account cooperatives' specificities. When it comes to the proposal for the Corporate Sustainable Reporting Directive (CSRD), we supported our members in advocating for the dismissal of certain amendments in a draft European Parliament report that could have negatively impacted cooperatives' accounting system.

5

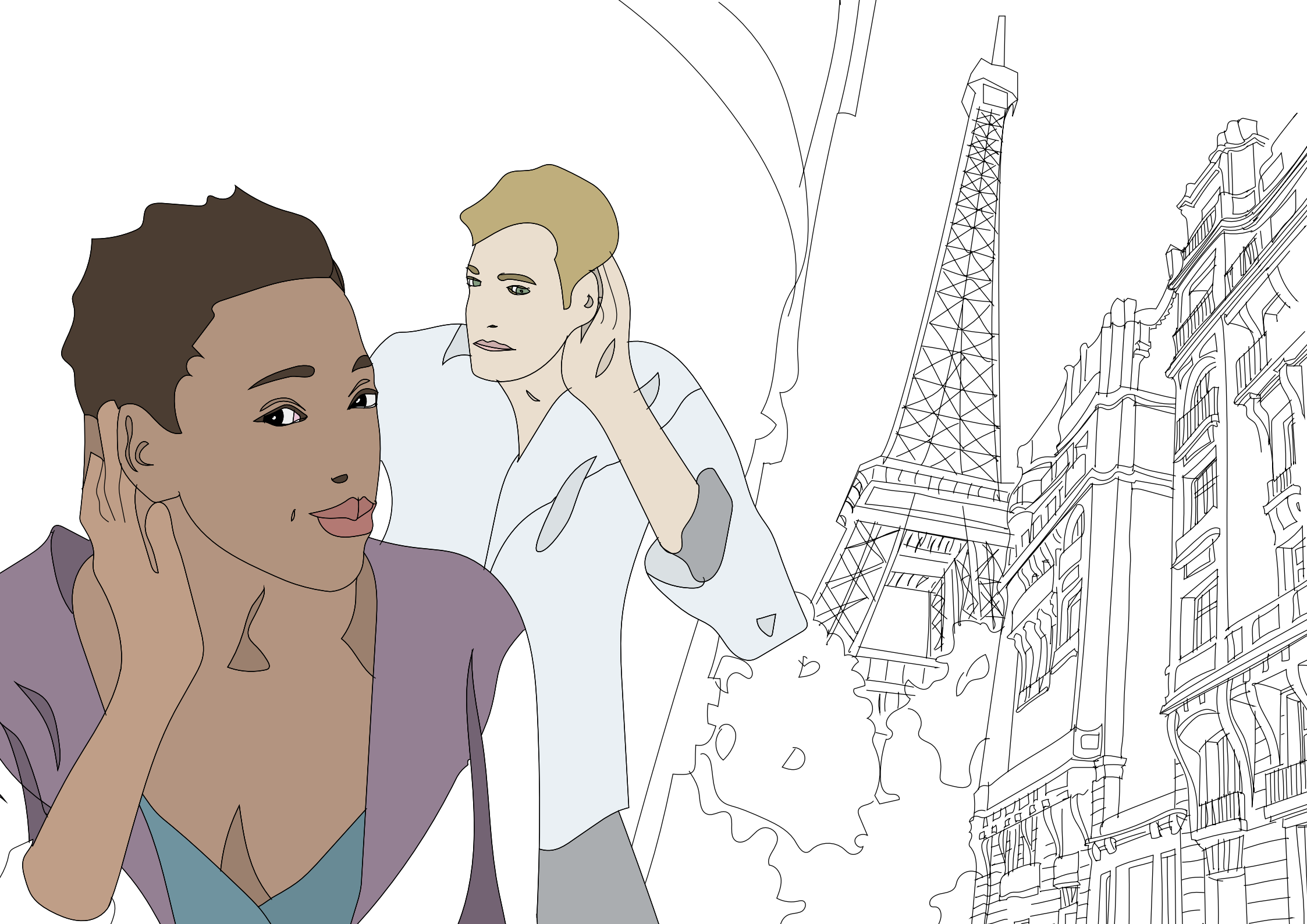
Gender equality: build back together

Over the past year, gender equality policy remained high on the European Union's political agenda. The impact of the Covid-19 crisis put in jeopardy many of the achievements made. But Cooperatives Europe continues to work to achieve recognition of cooperatives in European policies on gender equality.

In 2021 and 2022 Cooperatives Europe focus its actions on Gender Equality on the promotion of actions to reduce gender inequalities within coops themselves. On 16 June we showcased with the Gender Equality Working Group our actions and discussed the issue of gender equality in a post-covid world in an online webinar with three roundtables. The webinar was an enormous success in that it gathered more than 80 participants from the Commission, Parliament, and many different prominent business organizations. Additionally, on 16

February Susanne Westhausen was invited to Coops Women's Voices webinar to share her story and vision for a more gender-balanced future. Finally, Cooperatives Europe provided input at the ICA's Gender Equality Committee [webinar](#) via Vice-Chair Marjaana Saarikoski from member SOK Group in Finland.





6

International cooperative development

5 years of intense collaboration in coops4dev

This year we celebrated the end of the partnership with the European Union on international cooperative development [#coops4dev](#). During five and a half years, it has contributed to cementing worldwide the role of the cooperative model as a key international development actor and weaving a solid network of partners and stakeholders. Through the EU partnership, we have been advocating for the recognition of cooperatives as contributors to sustainable development, to climate-resilient green growth, the achievement of the SDGs and the creation of prosperity and decent jobs within the EU's external action.

This year we finalised all actions with a widely followed and successful final event and presented final reports that were

accepted by the European Commission.

Base for future European actions in external policies

Even though the EU partnership was focused on external actions, it proved to be very useful and successful for us. Thanks to a devoted team, it set a baseline for future work on cooperative development and provided invaluable materials for the movement. The partnership gathered impactful research materials on legal frameworks, especially its key [database research and legal report](#) of cooperatives in 16 European countries.

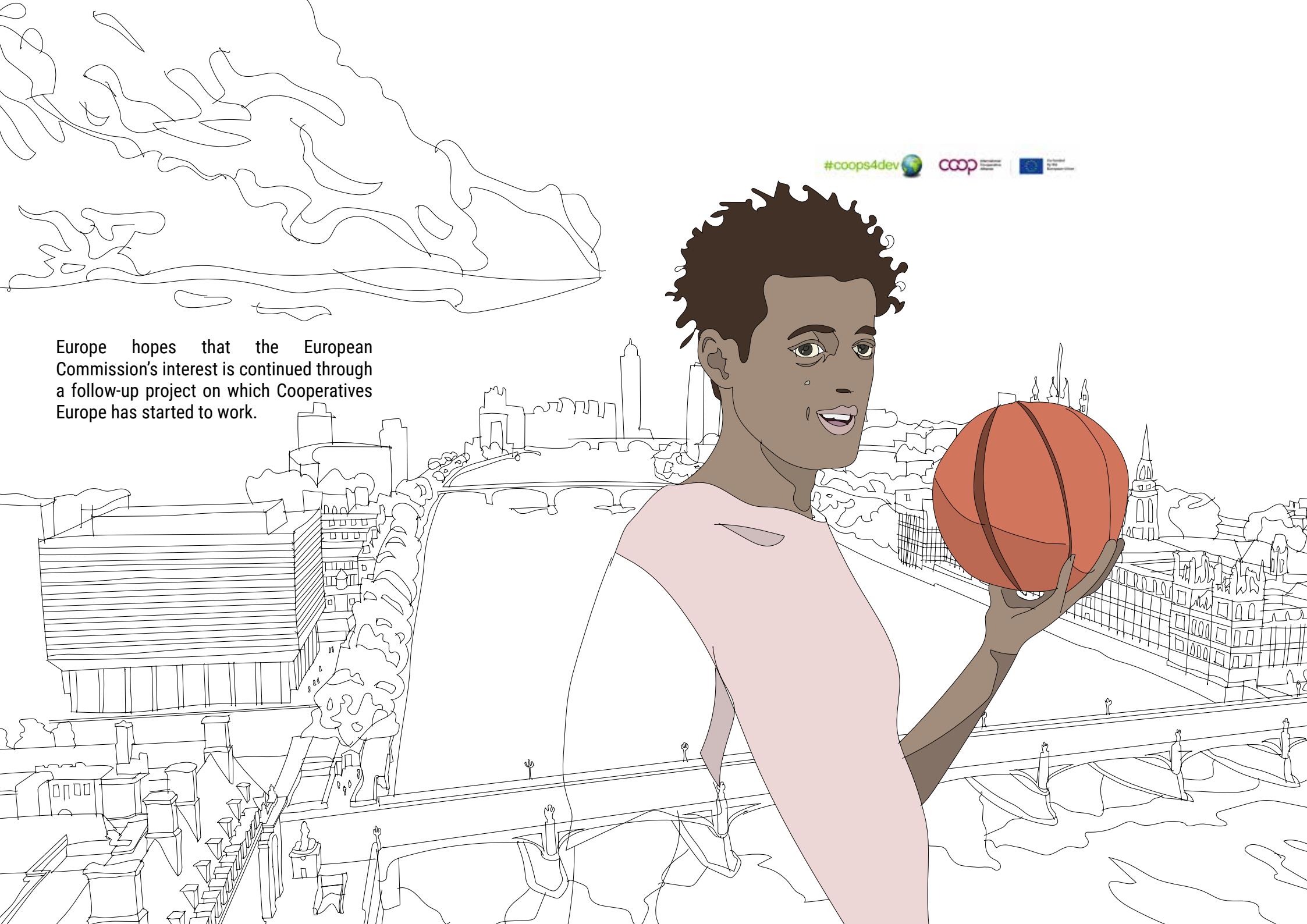
Another salient outcome has been the reinforcement of the Cooperatives Europe Development Platform (CEDP). CEDP members have collaborated in the development of many activities in the

context of research, and policy dialogues with key international institutions and capacity building initiatives, as well as setting up joint projects, and position papers.

It allows Cooperatives Europe to promote the inclusion of cooperatives in the new EU international development programming pushing for several references to the cooperative model in the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) - Global Europe.

Furthermore, it dramatically increased knowledge of the actions of cooperatives in external development policies and its European stakeholders, contributing as well to our advocacy work, and finally expanding Cooperatives Europe's international network.

Based on this experience, Cooperatives



#coops4dev



coop



Europe hopes that the European Commission's interest is continued through a follow-up project on which Cooperatives Europe has started to work.

7

Visibility for cooperatives in Europe

Cooperatives Europe has continued investing in its communication channels to strengthen the dialogue with its members and to increase the effectiveness of our advocacy work. Part of our tasks is to improve our communication channels and keep them up-to-date with the latest trends.

7.1 Widened our reach in online external communications

Renewed website

With the support of Startin'blox, and HappyDev cooperative enterprises, this year we have redesigned Cooperatives Europe website. The new website has a refreshed visual identity, which will help us position ourselves as a dynamic and professional organization across European Institutions and other stakeholders.

This communication tool is conceived not only to make our communications more effective towards external audiences but also to enhance the interactions with our members.

Member organizations are now able to easily find information about the dossiers on which we are working; they can also navigate through a fully mobile-friendly renewed menu, and more easily find information about other members.

From a technical point of view, the new WordPress website will also allow us to expand on the existing infrastructure more effectively. This opens an array of new possibilities, whether for corporate communication, partnerships, or any other form of activity.

Other outreach activities

Besides the website, newsletter and social media channels our team, including our board

and President, engage in numerous external activities. For instance the publications in external newsletters such as the [Social Economy Newsletter](#) by CIRIEC with a reach of 50.000 subscribers. These outreach activities ensure cooperatives remain top-of-mind with policymakers, civil society actors and other stakeholders in the field.

7.2 Improved interactions with members

Member engagement remains at the heart of Cooperatives Europe's communications. Not only do we reach out to our members for their input on policy and governance matters but we also try to increase members' exposure.

To increase their visibility we decided to put more emphasis on the member's activities in our monthly reports. In fact, we rebranded

it to a full-fledged newsletter, detailing all activities, keeping the members updated on the work of the organization and encouraging them to actively participate in our activities. They are now encouraged to communicate their own news and achievements to foster an exchange of cooperative practices in Europe.

The effects of these changes are not yet visible in the statistics but the average opening rate remains well above the average market newsletter opening rate of 24% with a 28,5% average opening rate for Cooperatives Europe's newsletter.

7.3 Impact in numbers

Over the last years, Cooperatives Europe built a strong social media presence on various channels to showcase the power of

cooperatives and to inspire young business makers. With over 12.350 followers on Twitter, it remains one of the biggest European social economy actors active on the platform. However, the digital arena is ever-changing. With new trends rising we must remain dynamic and decided to put more emphasis on rising channels such as LinkedIn.

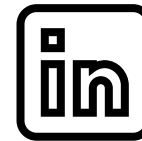
Followers



increase 5,6% **658**



2021	2022
11700	12358



increase 36,2% **508**



2021	2022
1403	1911



increase 2,2% **127**



2021	2022
5686	5813

Subscribers



Newsletter subscribers **1210**

Opening rate newsletter:

24% MailChimp's average opening rate

28,5% Cooperatives Europe's opening rate

8

Governance

Unfortunately, between May 2021 and May 2022, most meetings with members, statutory meetings and international exchanges were still heavily impacted by health restrictions. Links between members, board and secretariat were however maintained to keep the movement in active cooperation.

8.1 General Assembly and board

With the partial reopening of Europe and reduced restrictions, we met for the first in-person meeting in almost two years at the September 2021 General Assembly Elections. At this hybrid Assembly, Cooperatives Europe welcomed a new board and a new president. President Susanne Westhausen now succeeds Jean-Louis Bancel for a mandate of 4 years.

Despite the ongoing crisis and health restrictions, the board successfully executed its first tasks and guided the secretariat with the implementation of the working programme. The new board also started its work on a new inclusive strategy for Cooperatives Europe in the coming years, involving all of its members in the process. Hosted in Bulgaria the first board of 2022 took place in concurrence with Eurocoop's board meeting providing the attendees with an excellent opportunity to exchange with one of our prominent members.

8.2 European Union Coordination Committee (EUCC)

Gathering European sectoral organisations and national umbrella organisations, the

EUCC aims to develop a common voice and strategy on behalf of the cooperative movement vis-a-vis European institutions. During 2021-2022, the EUCC tackled issues related to the Sustainable Corporate Governance and the Non-Financial Reporting Directive, provided inputs to the position paper on the Action Plan on the social economy and discussed the EU survey on the Transition Pathway for the proximity and social economy ecosystem.

8.3 Contributing to international activities

As the European region of the International Cooperative Alliance, Cooperatives Europe and its members are involved in its activities, mainly in the governance of the Alliance as well as in various thematic working groups and committees; such as on gender equality

and young cooperators.

Cooperatives Europe's staff also exchanged with ICA staff from different regions in different working groups such as the communication Working Group, or meetings between regional and international sectoral directors.







Account

Incomes



Membership

56%

Project incomes

38%

Donation

0%

Others

6%

Expenses



Personnel

59%

Project expenses

18%

Travel premises

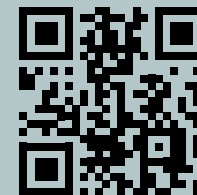
13%

External services – IT

4%

Meetings & other

6%



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Printed in May 2022 on recycled paper