



## INTERVIEW WITH DIANA DOVGAN CICOPA SECRETARY GENERAL

*CICOPA is the sectoral organisation of the International Cooperative Alliance for industry and services. It gathers 49 members from 32 countries, who affiliate 65,000 enterprises employing 4 million persons across the world.*

### How are cooperatives around the world making a difference in job creation and quality of employment?

CICOPA represents mainly workers cooperatives and cooperatives of individual producers or the self-employed. They are characterised by the fact that the workers or the producers are the majority owners of the cooperative. Democratic control by the enterprise staff or producers has a strong implication on the work relation and management that characterizes these enterprises. The main motivation of a worker-member is work, while in other cooperatives, members' motivations are different (access to housing in housing coops, etc.). Very naturally, worker-members, when they take part in the governance process tend to take decisions that simultaneously ensure a long-term perspective and quality working conditions.

The First Global Report on "Cooperatives and Employment" done by CICOPA in 2014, describes – in part based on interviews with workers – that working in workers cooperatives and cooperatives of individual producers/self-employed combines a mix various aspects: participation, a family-like feeling, strong identification with one's enterprise, a sense of pride and reputation, a feeling of implementing values through one's work, while, at the same time, having a strong awareness of the economic demands of the enterprise, and the need for efficiency and flexibility. Based on our fieldwork, we obtained indications that these qualitative components of cooperative employment tend to reinforce the economic sustainability of cooperatives.

A recent report published in 2019 by EUROFOUND, "Cooperatives and social enterprises: Work and employment in selected countries", provides analysis on different aspects of work and employment in cooperatives and social enterprises based on empirical research in 20 organisations (15 of which are cooperatives enterprises) in five European countries (Italy, Spain, Sweden, the UK and Poland). The report affirms that in cooperatives "there has been a clear overall preference for creating and retaining full-time, permanent jobs, the 'standard employment' model which is often used as an indicator of good-quality jobs". It reports also that interviewed workers "rated job quality highly, both in absolute terms and in comparison to similar organisations. They also gave high ratings to the social environment, voice and representation in the workplace, work-life balance and task discretion. (...) Skills development and job security were strong and there was significant intent to provide workers with career opportunities within organisations. (...) Many of the dimensions of job quality were integral to organisational objectives and, thus, were prioritized in workplace practices".

### What are the primary challenges facing industrial and service cooperatives?

Industrial and service cooperatives share similar challenges as other cooperatives such as lack of adequate legal framework in some countries, difficulty in accessing funding adapted to their very specific ownership model, lack of recognition (or in some countries discrimination) in public policies of their specific entrepreneurship model. They also face some very specific sectoral challenges, such as the complex need to adapt to emerging industries while at the same time preserving traditional ones (manufacturing, etc.), environmental and technological transformations, the aging population (increased demand for care services), increasing societal needs unmet by public policies, and "future of work" related challenges (e.g. fragmentation of work and the increase of non-standard work).

### What innovations can industrial and service cooperatives bring to the world of work?

Worker cooperatives have existed for over 100 years and their operating principles and values haven't changed much since the beginning. Through many different historical contexts, they have demonstrated their ability to innovate and answer to new employment needs. For instance, during the Italian industrial crisis in 1980's while factories were closing down and when workers started to transform them in cooperatives through worker buyouts. We observe today new typologies of cooperatives being created based on worker ownership, answering the needs of "non-standard workers" such as cooperatives among freelancers or the self-employed.

### Can cooperatives make a difference in stopping the wave of youth unemployment rising around the world?

Cooperatives alone can't solve the complex issue of youth unemployment. But, they can certainly be a means for many young people to have access to quality employment. Worker cooperatives especially, in giving young people access to enterprise ownership, provide more than just jobs. They also empower young people by giving them the possibility to have an active role and to be heard at their workplace. This is a very important element, given the underrepresentation of young people in our society, politics and decision-making spheres.

### What policy measures would you like to see adopted globally to support cooperatives in their efforts to provide decent work?

An important step would be the recognition of worker-ownership as an employment relationship promoted in employment policies. In order to foster a favourable environment which would strengthen businesses, it is important to develop appropriate legal frameworks which would recognise worker-members' rights and protection at work as workers, but also flexibility and independence as owners.