# Co-operatives in transition: Anticipating the futures ahead

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## Anticipating the futures ahead

Co-operatives are navigating rapid changes, interrelated trends and transformative opportunities that are reshaping their environment. These dynamics can be grouped into four main dimensions: (1) local and community-based action; (2) next generations, intergenerational responsibility and co-operative values; (3) human-centred digital transition; and (4) place-based environmental action. Drawing on case studies and insights from Italy, Korea, Spain and the United Kingdom – four countries with diverse co-operative ecosystems – this paper explores how co-operatives are adapting to evolving dynamics, turning challenges into opportunities, and implementing innovative strategies to strengthen their resilience and impact.

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# Acknowledgements

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# Executive summary

**Shifting demographics, continued urbanisation in some countries, digital transformation, environmental considerations, and evolving societal values are reshaping how communities live, work, and interact**. Co-operatives are uniquely positioned to navigate these trends given their local presence, member-driven structures, and social purpose. Their business and governance models are based on principles of democratic governance, mutualism, and collective benefit, as outlined in the seven principles of the International Cooperative Alliance. This orientation enables them to provide solutions to economic and social challenges, such as affordable housing, social services, community cohesion and local resilience, while serving their members. Co-operatives typically operate at the local level, although some of them are also international.

**As driving forces and trends evolve, they reshape the conditions under which co-operatives understand and respond to change, and consequently how they anticipate, adapt and act within complex systems.** Understanding how signals evolve into emerging trends and eventually into long-term trajectories of transformation enables them to identify where adaptation is needed and where transformation can be led. Drawing on literature, foresight workshops and interviews, the analysis identifies four dimensions of transformation that illustrate how co-operatives translate awareness of change into strategic action:

- Local-level and community-based action.
- Next generations, intergenerational responsibility and co-operative values.
- Human-centred digital transition.
- Place-based environmental action.

## Local-level and community-based action

**Many rural areas experience ageing and outmigration, while urbanisation brings rising living costs and housing affordability pressures.** In both urban and rural settings, there is growing interest in local and community-based approaches to enhance service provision, address affordability, and strengthen community resilience. Within this context, co-operatives often act as anchors of local development, fostering community cohesion and preserving cultural and social heritage. By embedding themselves in local economies, they innovate to meet the needs of their members and wider society. For instance, the Italian co-operative justMO' in Molise revitalises rural towns through cultural initiatives such as the "Libreria Sfusa" (Loose Library), promoting literacy and social engagement, while in Korea, iCOOP reconciles local focus with global outreach by supplying eco-friendly products through an extensive network of stores and online platforms. These examples illustrate how co-operatives strengthen local identity, promote social cohesion, and create opportunities for residents to remain and thrive in their communities.

## Next generations, intergenerational responsibility, and co-operative values

**Ageing populations, declining fertility rates, and longer life expectancy are creating new patterns of care, work, and intergenerational support.** Co-operatives, given their principles and management practices, can provide alternative solutions to these demographic shifts. They foster mixed-age

participation and shared responsibility, particularly in the provision of care services, while the transmission of co-operative knowledge to younger generations helps bridge generational gaps and spur intergenerational initiatives. In the United Kingdom, the co-operative Care Colne Valley empowers both carers and service users to co-manage home care services, improving quality, job satisfaction, and community involvement. In Spain, youth-focused programmes in Murcia, including the Vanguard Hub and the Youth Entrepreneurship Academy, cultivate young leadership in co-operatives, promoting the renewal of co-operative values across generations.

## Human-centred digital transition

**Rapid digitalisation, platform-based work, and the expansion of data-driven tools are transforming labour markets, service delivery, and governance practices.** Digitalisation offers co-operatives new opportunities to enhance operational efficiency and member engagement while maintaining inclusive and human-centred approaches to data and platform management. Across countries, co-operatives are increasingly using digital tools to strengthen service delivery and democratic governance. In Trentino, Italy, the inCooperazione platform connects over 200 co-operatives, using digital services and blockchain-based smart contracts to streamline operations. In Spain, the Suara Co-operative employs digital tools to co-ordinate social care services for nearly 50 000 users while training its workforce, enhancing both efficiency and inclusion. In the United Kingdom, the Open Digital Co-operative safeguards shared open-source infrastructure for local councils, showing how digital co-operatives can protect communal assets and foster collaboration. Platform co-operatives further demonstrate alternative, human-centred models of collective entrepreneurship and platform work, transforming digital tools into instruments of inclusion, transparency, and shared benefit.

## Place-based environmental action

**Environmental risks, resource scarcity, and growing societal demands for sustainability are driving shifts toward renewable energy, circular production systems, and new skills requirements.** Co-operatives play a key role in these transitions by generating environmental and social value, creating green jobs, and strengthening local resilience through renewable energy and circular economy initiatives. In Italy, the ènostra co-operative delivers 100% renewable electricity across the country and reinvests surpluses into new community projects. In Korea, the Solar and Wind Energy Co-operative promotes local energy generation and educates communities on energy efficiency, and in Spain, the ASISA health co-operative integrates eco-friendly practices into service delivery, demonstrating how sectoral co-operatives can combine social and environmental goals. These examples show how co-operatives translate environmental values into tangible local and global benefits.

## Policy opportunities

**This paper outlines a set of cross-cutting policy opportunities to create an enabling environment that supports co-operatives in their efforts to anticipate, adapt and act amid changing conditions.** These opportunities build on the four dimensions of transformation, translating co-operatives' capacity to navigate signals of change and emerging trends into concrete policy directions for sustainable and inclusive futures. Strengthening local-level and community-based action reinforces place-rooted economies and social cohesion. Supporting next generations through co-operative education and intergenerational exchange fosters renewal and the transmission of co-operative values. Investing in capacity-building and digital skills promotes a human-centred digital transition, while environmental upskilling and local procurement advance place-based environmental action. Together, these measures enhance co-operatives' ability to adapt to evolving trends while leading long-term transformations.

*Enabling policy and legal frameworks*

- *Recognising co-operatives as strategic partners in economic policymaking* by including their perspectives in the policymaking process, fostering partnerships between the public sector and co-operatives, and documenting their long-term contributions. In Spain, co-operatives participate directly in policymaking through the Spanish Business Confederation of the Social Economy (CEPES), which serves as the key national interlocutor for the social economy and represents co-operatives in national strategies and policy consultations.

- *Streamlining co-operative legal and regulatory frameworks* through clear, coherent, and adaptable legal regimes can help co-operatives scale, access funding, and capitalise on their democratic governance. For example, Korea's 2012 Framework Act on Co-operatives unified a previously fragmented system, simplified incorporation, and enabled access to public support for multiple types of co-operatives.

- *Engaging co-operatives actively in local procurement policies* anchors economic activity locally and promotes inclusive economic development. Options could include social clauses in public tenders, reserving quotas for co-operatives or requiring suppliers to deliver measurable social outcomes. Seoul's municipal procurement of social economy services demonstrates how targeted policies can support co-operative ecosystems.

*Building capacity and foresight*

- *Supporting skills development for co-operatives,* such as through training and capacity-building initiatives, can facilitate competitiveness, particularly in adapting to digital transitions and environmental considerations while maintaining democratic governance. Targeted public support for training and partnerships can help co-operatives build skills in environmental sustainability and meet evolving regulatory and consumer expectations. Italy's National Recovery Plan (PNRR) and Spain's Just Transition Strategy provide subsidies for upskilling in trades with an environmental consideration and renewable energy projects, benefiting local co-operatives.

- *Embedding anticipatory approaches into policy and organisational decision-making* through capacity-building initiatives and collaborative networks that foster shared learning, early signal detection, and collective adaptation to systemic challenges. Policymakers can promote co-operative resilience through targeted programmes that train leaders in anticipatory thinking, fund cross-sector learning networks, and support collaborative intelligence platforms that embed foresight and early warning systems into co-operatives' strategic planning.

*Cultivating co-operative mindsets and education*

- *Integrating co-operative values into school and university curricula* by embedding co-operative principles in education fosters intergenerational continuity of co-operatives and engagement. Spain's environmental science curricula incorporating co-operatives illustrates how education can cultivate familiarity and positive attitudes toward co-operative models among youth, as well as critical thinking around sustainability and alternative economic models. In the United Kingdom, innovative initiatives such as the Co-operative University Project and federated co-operative education models offer examples of how educational institutions themselves can be reimagined as co-operatives, embodying co-operative values.

# 1 Navigating change in times of disruption and transformation

## Staying ahead: Why is it important for co-operatives to plan for the future?

Societies are undergoing profound transformations driven by shifting demographics, continued urbanisation in some countries, digital transformation, environmental considerations, and evolving societal values. Co-operatives, with their focus on collective benefit, local anchoring, and shared value distribution, are uniquely positioned to explore, anticipate and address the challenges that different future scenarios might bring.

Since their 19th-century origins, co-operatives (Box 1) have consistently demonstrated their ability to adapt and thrive despite social and economic changes. They have expanded globally across many sectors such as agriculture, housing, microfinance, and health (Nakayiso and Andrew, 2023[1]), especially in contexts where public and private sector reach is limited, such as in rural or low-income areas (OECD, 2024[2]). Their resilience through major crises, such as the Great Depression, the 2008 financial crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic, stems from local embeddedness, collective ownership, and commitment to social purpose over profit (Billiet et al., 2021[3]). Today, co-operatives employ 280 million people, and the 300 largest generate over USD 2.4 trillion in turnover (World Cooperative Monitor, 2023[4]). The United Nations (UN) designation of 2025 as the International Year of Co-operatives underscores their global significance and momentum.

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### Box 1. What is a co-operative?

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) defines co-operatives as "an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise". The ICA also sets out principles that guide co-operatives' governance and activity, namely voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, autonomy and independence, education, training and information, co-operation among co-operatives, and concern for the community (International Cooperative Alliance, 1995[5]).

The co-operative model brings multiple benefits for people and places. For example, being member-based organisations, often embedded in local communities, they have a clear understanding of community needs (International Cooperative Alliance, n.d.[6]). They also provide services in remote areas, revitalise territories and have the ability to overcome difficulties during a crisis thanks to: 1) their inclusive and participatory governance structures; 2) their embeddedness in local communities; and 3) their mobilisation of diverse resources (OECD, 2020[7]). Additionally, co-operatives can achieve economies of scale as well as manage risks by pooling resources and reducing transaction costs (European Parliament, 2019[8]).

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Their longevity lies in the resilience of their model (Cook, 2018[9]). Co-operatives operate based on a one-member, one-vote structure. Their hybrid nature, operating with both an economic and social logic, helps them to balance efficiency with solidarity and to mobilise collective resources when navigating disruption (Merrien et al., 2021[10]). Understanding and capitalising on this governance model is helpful for anticipating how co-operatives can continue to adapt and thrive amid emerging challenges.

Today, co-operatives face a landscape of profound and interconnected transformations, requiring adaptation to remain resilient and relevant. Environmental considerations call on co-operatives to extend beyond traditional roles by supporting sustainable practices, facilitating knowledge exchange, and building stakeholder coalitions (Bijman and Höhler, 2023[11]). Digitalisation offers opportunities for innovation and outreach but poses challenges, particularly in rural or resource-constrained contexts, where limited financial and human resources hinder adoption (Kaluge, 2023[12]; Core et al., 2024[13]). Demographic shifts also reshape co-operative activity, affecting service demand and membership composition, requiring efforts to engage younger members while ensuring intergenerational transfer of knowledge and governance responsibilities (OECD, 2023[14]).

Nonetheless, these developments also open new avenues for co-operative growth and leadership. As digital tools become central to achieving both operational efficiency and sustainability, co-operatives can harness them not merely as instruments of competitiveness but also as enablers of their distinct identity and social mission. Digital tools can facilitate more inclusive governance, enhance member participation, and support environmental and social innovation (Core et al., 2024[13]). These emerging trends thus not only pose challenges but also create spaces for co-operatives to deepen their impact and reassert their relevance in the future economy.

In this context, co-operatives need to anticipate, adapt and act. Co-operatives, as well as other social economy entities need to develop long-term capacities to respond to trends, from demographic changes and digitalisation to addressing environmental considerations (OECD, 2023[15]). Their role is important in periods of significant socio-economic changes and uncertainty, such as those linked to economic instability, health emergencies, and environmental disasters, as well as long-term societal transformations. The need for a role of the social economy to actively participate in socio-technical transitions is increasingly evident in public policy (European Commission, 2024[16]).

Co-operatives, and the social economy more generally, play a key role in advancing decent work and inclusive economic development, making them critical actors in building more future-proof economies for all (ILO, 2022[17]; OECD, 2022[18]). Through their focus on people and the planet, and their commitment to reinvesting in collective well-being, co-operatives operate as spaces for inclusive innovation and as facilitators of just transitions. This positions them as both adaptable actors and active contributors to systemic change.

## Co-operatives in motion: Trends and drivers shaping the sector

Change emerges gradually through signals that are small, sometimes weak indications that something new is taking shape. A signal anticipates processes that may have radical impacts ahead (Inayatullah, 2008[19]; Hiltunen, 2008[20]). When significant, such signals tend to strengthen over time, serving as early warnings of rising trends. As these signals accumulate and reinforce across systems, they evolve into trends that are discernible trajectories of transformation which may at times be accelerated or disrupted by sudden breakthroughs, crises or shifts in collective behaviour (OECD, 2025[21]). Over time, trends interact with drivers of change, such as technological innovation, demographic evolution, environmental pressure, or social value shifts. These interactions, including potential disruptions, redefine the conditions under which organisations and communities operate.

For co-operatives, understanding this dynamic is essential. Their capacity to adapt, anticipate and act depends on how well they interpret both gradual and disruptive change distinguishing what is transient from what signals a deeper systemic shift. Trends thus serve as bridges between emerging change and strategic action, as they help us understand where adaptation is needed and where transformation can be led. By continuously engaging with these evolving trajectories, co-operatives can translate awareness of change into strategies that strengthen their resilience today while shaping desirable futures aligned with their values.

In this context, the analysis combines insights from literature, foresight workshops and interviews with co-operative practitioners to identify signals of change, emerging trends and megatrends shaping the future of the sector. These insights were then grouped into four broad clusters, which capture the main directions of transformation and illustrate how co-operatives are translating awareness of change into strategic orientations for adaptation and renewal. Each cluster highlights key dimensions through which co-operatives are adapting to change and taking strategic action:

- The first relates to a renewed focus on local-level and community action.
- The second relates to demographic shifts, highlighting intergenerational responsibility and the transmission of co-operative values to younger generations.
- The third addresses the human-centred digital transition, with attention to how technology can be used in support of communities and individual needs.
- The fourth pertains to place-based environmental action, which requires local responses to global challenges.

### *Local-level and community-based action*

Amid ongoing global crises, there is a renewed focus on the importance of places and local production and the ways in which it shapes community resilience and territorial development. Co-operatives play a central role in this context, not only by creating local jobs but also by retaining resources and investments within communities. This makes them particularly relevant when examining the broader spatial shifts that are reshaping societies. Understanding these dynamics requires situating the role of co-operatives in both urban and rural communities and their respective challenges.

Globally, urbanisation is one of the defining global megatrends of the past six decades. The share of the world's population living in cities is steadily rising from around one-third in 1960 to well over half today (UN, 2018[22]). This trend plays out differently across countries: while Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom already had significant urban populations in 1960, Korea experienced a significant rural-to-urban shift, with its rural population share declining from over 70% in 1960 to 17% today (UN, 2018[22]).

Although educational attainment has improved in many rural regions, translating these gains into quality employment opportunities continues to be a major challenge. Regions with younger age profiles, capital-city regions, and those in tradeable sectors continue to lead in employment rates (OECD, 2024[23]). Rural areas often face distinctive challenges, including population decline, an ageing workforce, and limited connectivity. Yet, broader socio-economic conditions are reshaping people's settlement choices. Rising costs of living, combined with fewer prospects for job security, are prompting people to re-evaluate the benefits of relocating to large urban areas. In particular, increasing housing affordability issues are making life in cities more difficult. These pressures are driven by several structural factors, including international migration, changing household structures linked to rising divorce rates, as well as the expansion of tourism and short-term rental markets (OECD, 2023[24]). Housing prices in large Functional Urban Areas (FUAs) across OECD countries are on average 68% higher than in small FUAs and 86% higher than in very small FUAs. In Korea, where the difference between large and very small FUAs is the most pronounced, the gap now exceeds 100% (OECD, 2024[25]).

Within this context, local-level and community-led actions have become increasingly important, both in urban neighbourhoods and rural communities. In cities, such initiatives often emerge to address evolving social, cultural, and housing needs, strengthening cohesion and creating new forms of shared service provision at the neighbourhood scale. In rural and smaller communities, by contrast, they respond to different challenges, such as access to health, care, and economic opportunities, often filling gaps left by the withdrawal of public or private services. Together, these initiatives underscore the growing prominence of social economy organisations, including co-operatives, in the context of broader transformations.

### *Next generations, intergenerational responsibility and co-operative values*

Demographic pressures linked to population ageing and shrinking cohorts of young people are leading to long-term challenges for labour markets, welfare systems, and intergenerational solidarity. In this context, co-operatives, as key actors within the social economy, play an active role in ageing societies by providing services and fostering solidarity. Amid these shifts, questions of intergenerational responsibility and the renewal of co-operative values are becoming increasingly pressing. The transmission of knowledge, management practices, and co-operative principles to younger generations plays an important role in maintaining organisational continuity and vitality. At the same time, the active participation of youth in co-operative life reflects a process through which long-standing traditions are reinterpreted in light of new aspirations and social realities.

Fertility rates have fallen well below replacement levels in many OECD countries. The experiences of Italy, Korea, Spain and the United Kingdom illustrate these dynamics in different ways, pointing to a shared trajectory of demographic contraction that will shape the future environment in which co-operatives operate (Figure 1).

### Figure 1. Declining fertility rates

Fertility rate, 2010-2023
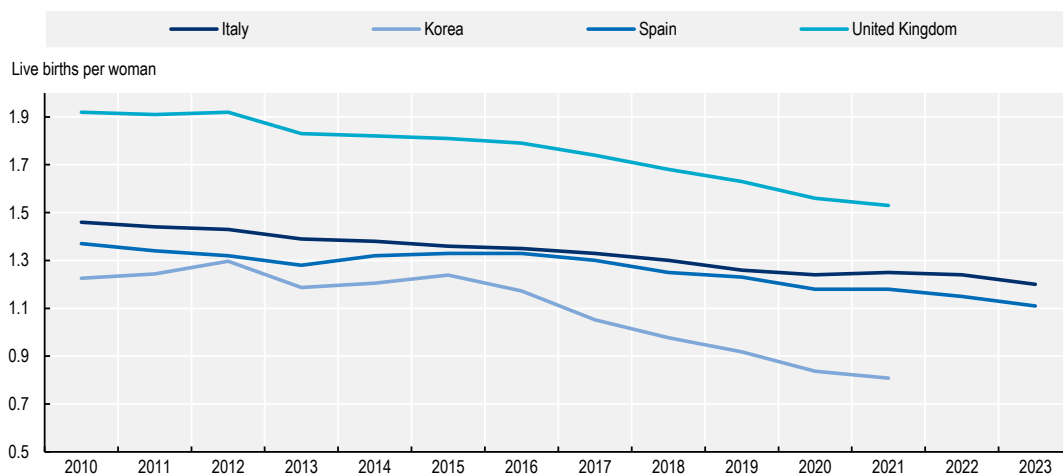


Source: Based on OECD (2025), Regions and Cities databases http://oe.cd/geostats.

The persistent decline in fertility across OECD countries translates directly into the reshaping of their demographic structures. Comparing population pyramids for 2025 and 2050 in Italy, Korea, Spain, and the United Kingdom highlights the speed and depth of this transformation (Figure 2). The narrowing bases of the pyramids reflect shrinking younger cohorts, while the widening upper tiers illustrate rapid ageing. This shift points to a structural rebalancing of societies towards older age groups. Comparatively, Italy and

Spain follow a similar pattern, with narrow bases and expanding older cohorts. Korea stands out as the most extreme case, with an inverted structure dominated by older groups. The United Kingdom shows ageing but retains a comparatively broader base, reflecting greater demographic resilience.

## Figure 2. Ageing population

Total population in 2025 and forecasted population in 2050 (in thousands) for Italy, Korea, Spain, and the United Kingdom
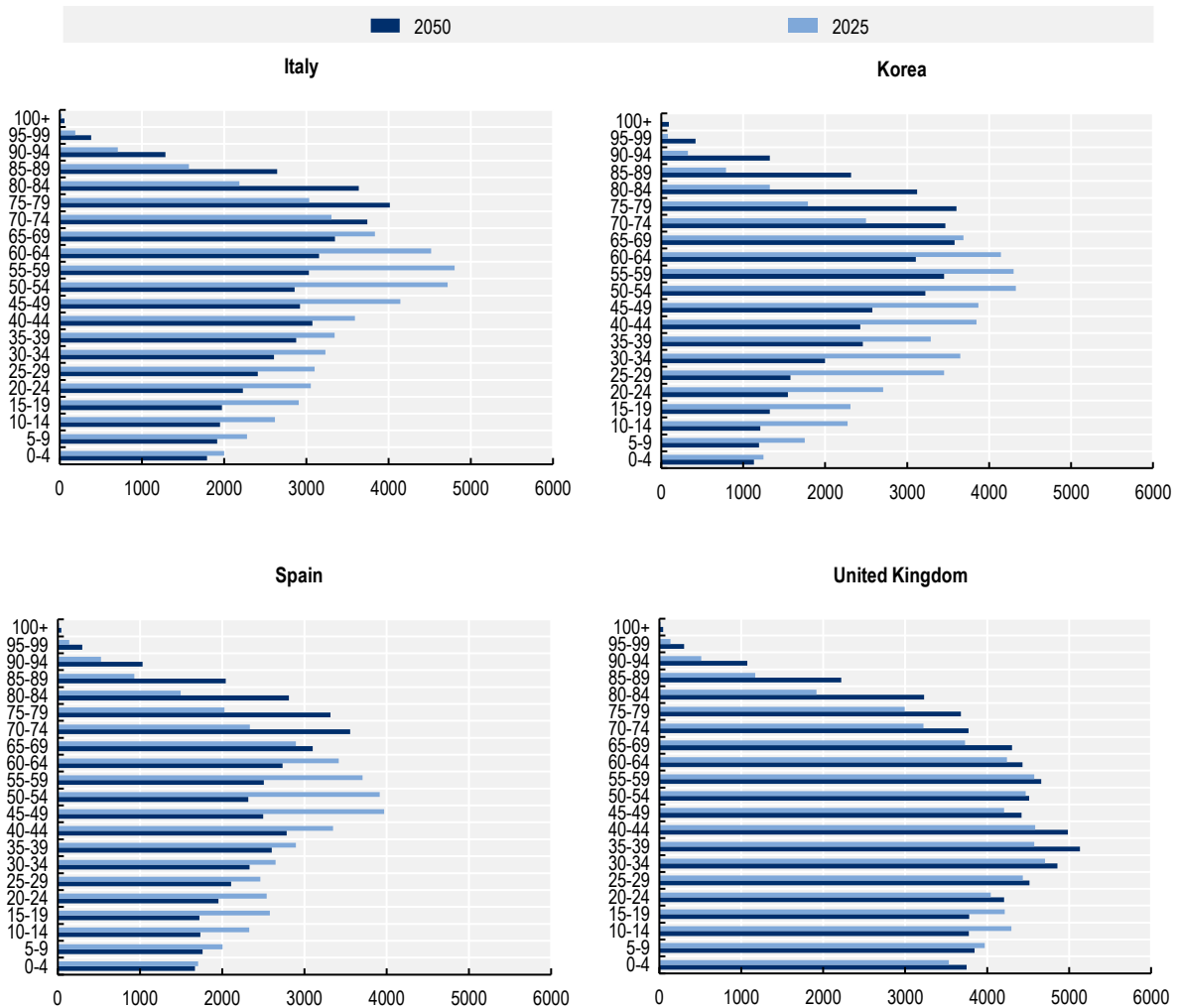


Source: Based on UN (2024) Revision of World Population Prospects.

Demographic change is also evident in the rising share of people aged 65 and over across all four countries. Between 2010 and 2022, the proportion of older adults increased everywhere, with Italy already among the most aged societies in the OECD and projected to become one of the oldest worldwide. Korea, although starting from lower levels, is experiencing the fastest pace of ageing and is also expected to rank among the world's oldest societies in the coming decades (Figure 3).

Share of population aged 65 and over (% of total), 2010–2022
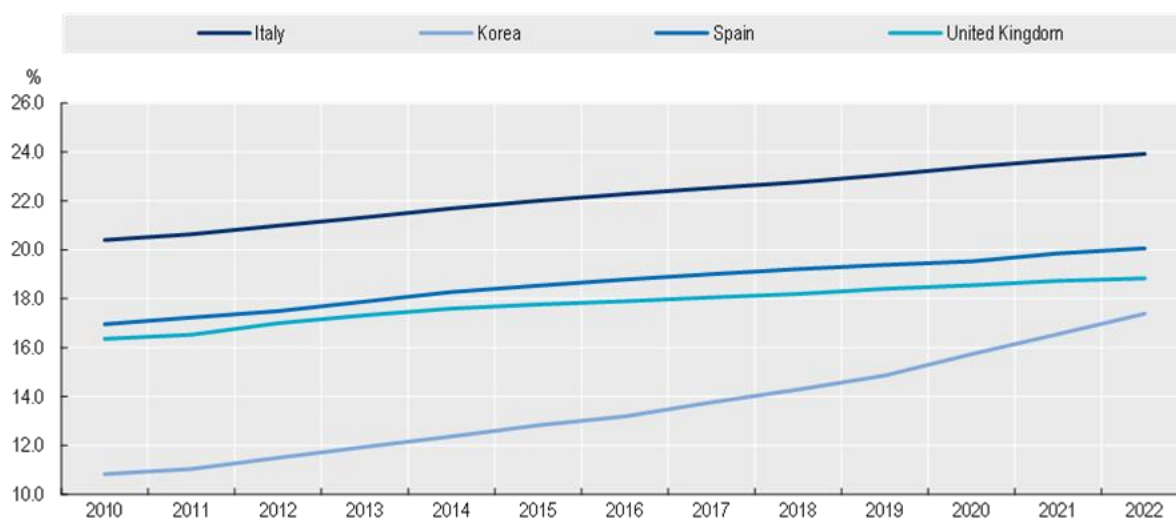


Source: Based on OECD (2025), Historical population data.

These dynamics have far-reaching consequences for economic sustainability and public finances. As larger cohorts exit the workforce and fewer younger workers replace them, labour shortages are expected to intensify, with direct implications for productivity and competitiveness (European Parliament, 2024[26]). Rising dependency ratios will place growing financial pressures on pension and health care systems, raising concerns about their long-term sustainability. These demographic shifts also point to the emergence of more vertical family structures with several generations living simultaneously, the growing responsibility of caring for ageing populations, and the need for workplaces to adapt as older employees nearing retirement increasingly work alongside younger generations (Government Office for Science, 2016[27]). At the same time, demographic contraction risks reducing domestic demand and shrinking the tax base, further constraining public finances.

Population decline and the out-migration of younger generations can weaken social cohesion and trust in institutions by reducing access to essential services, increasing isolation, and eroding community vitality (OECD, 2025[28]). Although immigration can partly offset these dynamics, persistent low fertility and continued outward migration, as seen for instance in Italy, continue to weigh on long-term demographic and social prospects in many regions. (ISTAT, 2025[29]). Addressing these shifts requires new approaches to labour markets, intergenerational collaboration, and the role of co-operatives, which can contribute by providing employment that empowers workers (Berry and Bell, 2018[30]), care services (Kurimoto and Kumakura, 2016[31]), and community-based support for ageing populations (Song and Chen, 2015[32]).

These external demographic pressures also have direct implications for the internal functioning of co-operatives. Beyond their role in labour markets and service provision, co-operatives themselves are shaped by the same demographic realities, as ageing memberships and leadership structures create the need for renewal. The changing age structure of co-operative members and leaders creates both challenges and opportunities. Older generations hold valuable experience and institutional memory, but without effective mechanisms for transfer, this knowledge risks being lost. Conversely, younger generations bring new perspectives, digital skills, and evolving expectations about participation and work-life balance. The intergenerational renewal of co-operatives therefore involves not only the transmission of knowledge and skills, but also the gradual transfer of management and governance responsibilities.

The active engagement of young people in membership, management, and decision-making helps maintain continuity while reinterpreting co-operative principles to remain relevant in a rapidly changing social, technological, and economic landscape. In this sense, generational renewal is not simply a matter of replacing older members with younger ones, but of creating dynamic spaces where co-operative values are redefined and recontextualised across generations. This interplay between continuity and adaptation is central to the resilience of co-operatives in the face of broader societal transformations, ensuring that their identity and mission evolve in line with the changing needs of members and communities.

### *Human-centred digital transition*

Digitalisation is reshaping every sector of the economy and society at an accelerating pace, with the intelligent use of data and new technologies offering opportunities for communities and businesses alike. From artificial intelligence to digital platforms, new technologies are altering how people produce, consume, and interact, raising fundamental questions about who benefits from these changes and how data is managed, shared and used. Digital transformations also carry significant risks and require ensuring that digital transitions are trustworthy and accessible.

The steady acceleration of digitalisation is reflected in the steep growth of internet access over the past decade. Between 2010 and 2024, the share of individuals using the internet increased sharply, converging towards near-universal access. Broadband data show strong but uneven digital infrastructure development, with Korea and the United Kingdom leading, and Spain and Italy following at lower levels (Figure 4). These dynamics highlight not only the broad diffusion of digital infrastructure but also the speed at which technological adoption accelerates, particularly with the rollout of AI-powered tools and services that are reshaping access, usage, and expectations in the digital landscape. Despite progress in recent years, a digital divide persists between urban and rural areas across OECD countries. Differences in population density, geography, and the profitability of network deployment continue to limit broadband availability and uptake in some rural regions; however, in some countries, including the United Kingdom, rural households report higher Internet coverage than their urban counterparts in 2017 (OECD, 2018[33]).

### Figure 4. Near-universal access to internet

Percentage of population with internet access, 2010-2024
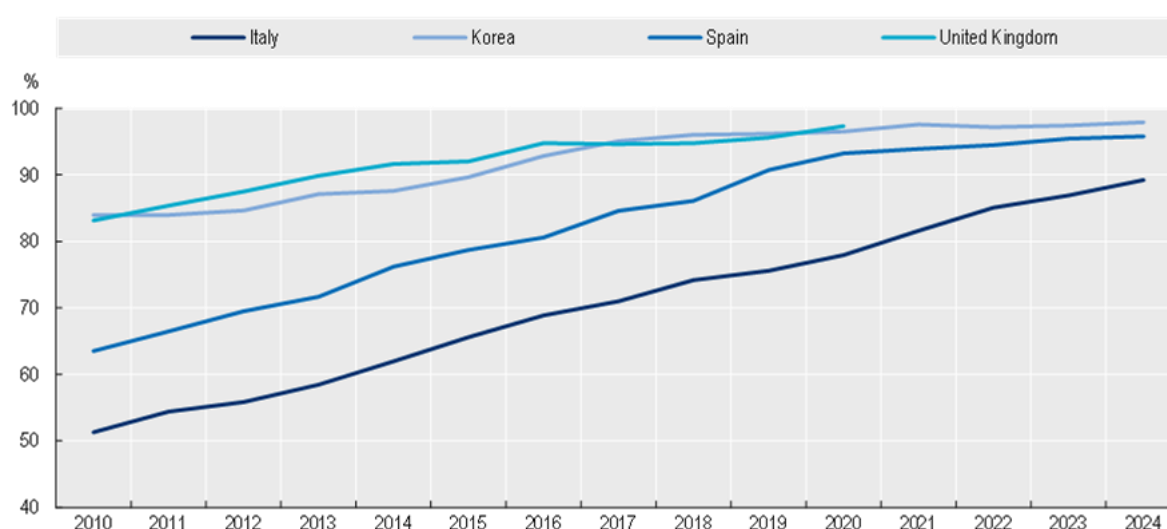


Source: based on OECD (2025), ICT Access and Usage by Households and Individuals database.

Digitalisation extends beyond the evolution of technologies to encompass the collection, use, and ownership of data. As large technology companies tend to monopolise the value created by data ownership and sharing, the debate increasingly turns towards more ethical and decentralised structures, where data governance supports wider participation and distributes value more equitably (Hicks, 2022[34]).

A concrete example of how co-operatives can engage in the digital transition is provided by platform co-operatives. Digital platforms serve as the core infrastructure of platform co-operatives across sectors such as energy, environment, finance, and transportation, where they challenge conventional models by delivering innovative social and economic services to their members and users (Gagliardi et al., 2020[35]; OECD, 2023[36]; OECD, 2023[37]). Data collected through co-operative platforms is typically harnessed to benefit both local communities and co-operative members, enabling more transparent and collective ownership while providing access to tailored services.

Artificial intelligence presents a particularly important frontier. While concerns about accountability and transparency are heightened, co-operatives benefit from their member-led governance structures, which place active participation at the centre of decision-making (Ramos et al., 2022[38]). Emerging examples of AI co-operatives show how shared ownership and democratic control can foster more accountable and community-oriented approaches to the development and use of AI (OECD, 2023[36]; OECD, 2024[23]).

### *Place-based environmental action*

Environment-related risks are increasingly shaping the future of territories, economies, and communities, with uneven impacts across regions. Geographic, socio-economic, and structural contexts strongly influence both the risks posed by environment-related changes and the capacity to respond effectively. Many governments are seeking to reduce dependence on conventional and polluting energy sources, advancing circular and bioeconomy strategies, and aligning with sector-specific policies and regulatory requirements. Achieving environmental sustainability, whether through reducing waste, cutting emissions in production chains or mitigating the negative impacts of intensive agriculture, requires a multifaceted approach. At the macro scale, this involves significant transformations across the economy, society, and technology. The boundaries between environmental, energy, and industrial policies are increasingly intersecting, as seen for example in the advancement of circular economy models that integrate waste management with resource efficiency and recycling objectives (Zoboli, Mazzanti and Tagliapietra, 2024[39]). Other examples include the expansion of renewable energy sources, the adoption of new mobility habits aimed at reducing emissions, and intensified research into more sustainable food systems that minimise environmental impacts.

The development and deployment of technologies and services for sustainability are a priority in many countries. They can reduce dependence on fossil fuels, lower emissions, and support more sustainable local economies. Korea leads in patenting of environment-related technologies, while the United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy show stable levels of activity over time (OECD, n.d.[40]). Evidence from Italy demonstrates how co-operatives contribute to environmental objectives by delivering services such as basic urban cleaning, environmental education, and the installation of solar panels. In doing so, they not only advance environmental sustainability but also create employment opportunities (Hufen and Koppenjan, 2015[41]).

The distribution of renewable energy by co-operatives illustrates how environmental technology deployment and service provision come together. These initiatives not only introduce sustainable energy technologies but also deliver essential services that enhance community participation to address environmental issues (Hufen and Koppenjan, 2015[41]). By enabling local ownership and decision-making, they create strong links between technological innovation and service delivery. While smaller co-operatives may struggle to mobilise sufficient resources for large-scale investments, collaborations and partnerships offer pathways to pool resources, share risks, and strengthen their contribution to environmentally sustainable and socially beneficial energy systems.

# 2 Co-operative responses to a changing world

All co-operatives share a common commitment to member and/or societal welfare as well as democratic governance, and their approaches to innovation and adaptation can vary significantly compared to conventional businesses. Within this broader socioeconomic environment, co-operatives participate in social and economic transactions in ways that reflect their distinct identity and governance model by prioritising the attainment of social objectives over profits and upholding participatory decision-making (Wieland, 2024[42]). When addressing different challenges, some co-operatives prioritise technological innovation to remain competitive, while others focus on community engagement or place-based sustainable practices. Embedded in their communities and governed by members, co-operatives can tailor solutions to local needs. At the same time, they must maintain technical efficiency and competitiveness against conventional firms, despite their primary focus on social benefits (Maietta and Sena, 2008[43]).

As markets are generally structured around conventional business models, co-operatives often operate in environments that are not designed to support their distinct priorities and socially oriented ways of operating (Gunn, 2006[44]). This context requires them to demonstrate greater flexibility and adaptability to sustain and grow their activities (Katz and Boland, 2002[45]). While many EU countries have long co-operative traditions, their origins and recognition vary. In Denmark and the Netherlands, co-operatives arose in the late 19th century to address agricultural market failures (Katz and Boland, 2002[45]), whereas in Italy, social co-operatives developed to meet societal needs such as eldercare and inclusive housing (Camargo Benavides and Ehrenhard, 2021[46]).

Even in countries with long co-operative traditions, such as Italy, Spain or the United Kingdom, co-operative expansion and development depend significantly on institutional and legal frameworks (Co-operative Party, n.d.[47]). Spain, with 1 565 new co-operatives created in 2024, is one of the most dynamic countries globally for co-operative enterprise creation (The Ministry of Labour and Social Economy, 2024[48]; Díaz-Foncea and Marcuello, 2014[49]).Its advanced institutional framework, led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy and supported by the Secretary of State and a Special Commissioner for the Social Economy, coordinates projects under the Strategic Plan for Economic Recovery and Transformation for the Social Economy and Care. Spain's highly decentralised system grants its Autonomous Communities legislative powers over the social economy, complemented by local authorities implementing programs and financing initiatives. Within this context, Murcia was designated Spanish capital of social economy in 2025, reflecting strong local engagement with the social economy (Ministerio de Trabajo y Economía Social, n.d.[50]).

The way co-operatives respond to change is deeply interconnected with their mission, values, and the environment requiring them to find solutions that align with both global changes and local realities. Co-operatives offer practical ways to address today's trends, from place-based environmental action to human-centred digitalisation, demographic shifts and intergenerational changes. Relying on self-organisation as a social practice – processes through which people collectively create, innovate, share and protect resources – fosters collective thinking and creativity in the pursuit of the common good (Micken et al., 2024[51]). This chapter identifies how co-operatives from Italy, Korea, Spain and the United Kingdom respond to these changes.

## Local-level and community-based action

As co-operatives historically emerged to address unmet societal needs where government intervention has been limited (Guerreschi and Zecca, 2025[52]), co-operatives were often required to operate locally and were characterised by decentralised and community-based governance structures (Featherstone et al., 2012[53]). In such local contexts, co-operative values and collaborative action are instrumental in fostering social trust and community cohesion (Padley, 2013[54]).

Both the ownership structure of co-operatives and their capacity to contribute to local communities are assets for local development. At the same time, external factors such as public policy, social norms, and local mindsets, can significantly influence how co-operatives evolve and operate. Co-operatives survive in a financially competitive global marketplace and stay true to their mission when they build strategies based on the distinctive principles and values that set them apart from other businesses (Bretos and Marcuello, 2016[55]). Therefore, it is the ability of co-operatives to innovate and adapt while maintaining their values, which contribute to reinforcing economic, social and democratic stability in their communities (Bretos and Marcuello, 2016[55]).

Co-operatives contribute to local development and community life in multiple ways, including by fostering cultural, social, and sustainable development of communities and territories. These co-operatives often engage in community-based initiatives aimed at preserving local heritage, promoting artistic expression, and supporting social inclusion. One illustrative case is the co-operative network in the Molise region of Italy, which exemplifies how cultural initiatives can serve as catalysts for territorial regeneration (Box 2).

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### Box 2. Cultural Cooperatives in the Fortore Area (Italy)

Molise is a small region in southern Italy where many areas, particularly smaller inland towns, have been experiencing depopulation and a decline in cultural services. To address these issues, experimental co-operative projects are being promoted to improve community welfare across small municipalities in the Fortore area, a hilly zone in the south of the region. The project ALL'interno (Inside), for example, fosters tourism, local skills, and development through engagement and training activities. Its award-winning "Libreria Sfusa" (Loose Library) project encourages reading in rural areas via workshops, events, and shared practices.

The "Libreria Sfusa" project is run collaboratively by the regional Legacoop section, a local library, and a number of small co-operatives led by the JustMO' co-operative, which supports cultural policies, territorial promotion, and public-private partnerships, including branding and narratives for the Sepino archaeological park. These initiatives demonstrate a territorial, community-centred approach, engaging residents in depopulated areas while providing cultural services supported by local administrators and small businesses.

Source: (justMO, n.d.[56]).

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Worker buyouts represent another important form of co-operative initiative, valued for their ability to address local needs while supporting co-operative development. They arise when a group of workers from a failing or successor-less business acquire ownership and relaunch the enterprise as a worker co-operative. This model is also known as a regenerated co-operative (Legacoop, 2023[57]). A recent example is Trafocoop, an Italian worker co-operative founded in 2022 by 31 former employees of the manufacturing company Trafomec. The co-operative emerged through a collective takeover following Trafomec's bankruptcy, made possible by the right of first refusal granted to potential member-owners under Italian

law, combined with support from major stakeholders in the social economy such as Fondosviluppo and Confcooperative, that provided financial and technical assistance (Confcooperative, 2023[58]).

An example of efforts to develop local anchoring and community ownership is the Korean iCOOP (Box 3), that reconciles its strong local focus with a commitment to internationalism. As co-operatives expand their operations internationally, they may face governance challenges, such as the need to establish conventional subsidiaries or a decline in member participation based on mission drift concerns. This is often due to the difficulty of maintaining active engagement in co-operative governance when membership becomes larger and geographically dispersed. As a response to increasing global competition, iCOOP supplies eco-friendly and organic food and fair trade products and distributes to a network of 187 outlets around Korea as well as an online store (OECD, 2023[59]; ILO, 2016[60]).

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### Box 3. iCOOP Co-operative Institute (Korea)

The iCOOP Co-operative Institute, founded in 2006 and reorganised as a foundation in 2010, serves as the knowledge hub and think-tank for iCOOP KOREA, funded by donations from its 270 000 members. Its mandate includes research, education, and archiving to support evidence-based management, foster co-operative culture, and advance the Korean co-operative movement. The Institute promotes local and global responsiveness, disseminates grassroots innovations, and raises awareness of co-operatives' socio-economic impact, while training new leaders and building research networks.

Founded after the 1997 Asian financial crisis to support farmers and workers, iCOOP KOREA extends beyond localism to propagate co-operative practices through campaigning and solidarity networks bringing people around a shared co-operative culture. By 2015, it mobilised 11 000 member-owners in local study circles, cultivated around 3 000 grassroots leaders including 700 elected directors and delivered over 7 000 training sessions to 114 000 participants, with an additional 27 000 prospective members completing pre-membership courses. These initiatives reflect a commitment to inclusive governance and community-rooted, globally connected co-operative development.

Source: (iCOOP, n.d.[61]; Jeon and Pun, 2024[62]; ILO, 2016[60]; OECD, 2023[59]).

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The circular economy can act as a catalyst for place-based development by keeping resources, skills and revenue circulating locally. Social enterprises, by combining material reuse with social missions, embed circular practices within local communities, generating inclusive employment, community wealth, and alternative pathways for growth (Lekan, Jonas and Deutz, 2021[63]). The Italian example of Cartiera, a brand created by Lai Momo, demonstrates the connection between local development, social cohesion and environmental sustainability (Box 4).

> **Box 4. Cartiera (Lai Momo) (Italy)**
>
> Founded in 2017, Cartiera is an ethical leather goods brand created by the social co-operative Lai Momo, which works in the areas of migration, social communication, intercultural dialogue, and development. Cartiera was established with a dual purpose: to provide migrants with stable employment and to transform surplus or discarded leather into high-quality accessories. In its workshop, the co-operative trains migrants in Italian leather craftsmanship, equipping them with marketable skills and long-term job opportunities while reducing material waste. The company employs people from disadvantaged backgrounds and grounds its production in social and environmental sustainability. With an extensive network of collaborators, including major international brands such as BMW and IKEA, Cartiera has evolved from a small local workshop into an organisation capable of supporting both artisanal production and the development of full collections for globally recognised brands.
>
> Source: (Cartiera, n.d.[64]).

## Next generations, inter-generational responsibility and co-operative values

Across many countries, co-operatives make a substantial contribution to the delivery of social services. In Italy, co-operatives are most widespread in regions characterised by fragile social cohesion and settings that particularly benefit from their social mission. Although social co-operatives display lower average productivity than other firms overall, they outperform other co-operatives in health and social care, personal services, and education (OECD, 2021[65]).

In Italy, co-operatives provide 87% of care service in Bologna, and over 50% of social care is provided by social co-operatives in Emilia Romagna (CECOP, 2022[66]). They often improve accessibility in rural areas and strengthen participation by involving members and their families, who are also beneficiaries, directly in service delivery and governance (OECD, forthcoming[67]).

As populations in most OECD countries are ageing, some rising challenges include the growing need for healthcare and social assistance for the elderly population combined with increasing public spending (Loo et al., 2017[68]). Around the world, health co-operatives take many shapes, such as worker, production, user or multi-stakeholder co-operatives. Yet, they share a common aim: assisting people in need and enhancing public health while securing better working conditions for healthcare professionals (UNDESA, 2018[69]).

Co-operatives not only benefit older people through care services but also through affordable and inclusive housing provision. In some OECD countries, they account for a notable share of the housing stock: nearly one quarter in Sweden and over 10% in Poland, Norway, Czechia, and Austria. Platform co-operatives extend the "sharing-economy" idea beyond ride-hailing or delivery to social welfare itself. Emerging cohousing models are seeking to integrate housing, care, and community spaces, enabling elderly residents to receive tailored support while younger tenants benefit from affordable living in exchange for providing neighbourly assistance. This mixed-age setup lowers costs through shared resources, fills gaps left by state services and fosters both stronger local ties and intergenerational contact demonstrating how a co-operative, sharing-economy approach can meet the needs of an ageing population and the wider community at the same time (Box 5).

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**Box 5. Co-operative Care Colne Valley: Empowering care givers and receivers (United Kingdom)**

Founded in 2020 in Huddersfield, Co-operative Care Colne Valley (CCCV) is a multi-stakeholder co-operative giving carers, service-users, and residents joint control of local home-care provision. Supporting 40 older people and adults with disabilities, CCCV employs a similar number of carers on above-average employment terms, including paid travel and training. Formal membership, regular forums, and "ownership tools" ensure workers and clients shape service design, contributing to higher satisfaction and lower staff turnover. Operating on a not-for-profit basis, surpluses first repay early investors, then fund modest returns, with the rest reinvested in pay, development, and services. Community members exercise democratic control over all decisions, and the co-op commits to ethical and environmentally sustainable practices, delivering care with dignity and respect.

Source: (Co-operatives UK, 2025[70]).

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Co-operatives have repeatedly shown they can adapt to changing socio-economic contexts such as during COVID-19 pandemic and economic crises, largely driven by reinvestment of profits back into the businesses (OECD, 2025[71]).This way they can deliver services and safeguard long-term viability. Examples such as the Spanish ASISA (Box 6) highlight how long-term viability with an efficient economic model provides services that can be more accessible and sustainable. Community-based co-operatives such as Dure co-operatives in Korea show how solidarity and community cohesion can be integrated into providing essential services such as healthcare in local contexts (Box 7).

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**Box 6. ASISA and Lavinia (Spain)**

Founded in 1971, ASISA has grown into one of Spain's leading healthcare and multi-insurance groups, delivering nationwide medical cover and services. Created by Lavinia, a physician-owned co-operative, over 10 000 doctors, ranking as Europe's largest healthcare co-op. Entirely Spanish-capitalised and run on a non-profit basis, Lavinia channels all surpluses back into facilities, technology and research, while its members elect the governing board every four years, ensuring that ASISA's patient-centred model remains both democratic and clinically driven.

Source: (Asisa, n.d.[72]; Lavinia, n.d.[73]).

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**Box 7. The Dure Co-operative Network (Korea)**

In Seoul, three Dure co-operatives integrate mutual aid into daily life. Ulim Dure (Mapo-gu), established in 2009, provides elder care and an "assisted-living" scheme offering emergency childcare, hospital accompaniment, and pet- and plant-sitting, funded by 1 300 members. A Care Social Co-operative delivers long-term care to 60 clients with 60 carers, plus daily life-support services for 100 users. Jumin Dure runs a public day-care centre through its social co-op, where 36 parents, teachers, and residents care for 116 children, teach co-operative principles, and participate in governance. Eunpyeong Dure, in partnership with a medical co-op and the district office, offers basic health support and the "Eunbit Sol" daily-care programme for single middle-aged residents, led by trained co-op members, strengthening both community ties and skills.

Source: (Coop News, 2024[74]).

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Some regions, such as Trentino in Italy, are at higher risk of population decline and ageing. In this context, immigration can represent an important resource, contributing to the workforce while also supporting more welcoming communities. Co-operatives, through their local embeddedness, can facilitate the integration of newcomers by providing employment opportunities, access to community networks, and forms of participation that help strengthen social cohesion. Community co-operatives in particular may encourage settlement in smaller, depopulating areas by offering opportunities to engage in local development and decision-making.

Inter-generational ties, once centred on shared knowledge, mutual care and resource exchange, are being reshaped by falling fertility, rising longevity, migration and smaller, more mobile families. Older adults might soon outnumber the young in many regions, increasing their need for prolonged support even as youth face delayed independence due to job and housing shortages. Evidence shows that measures such as Latin America's conditional-cash-transfer programmes can reduce poverty across generations, while European survey data highlight grandparents' pivotal childcare role and the growing financial support older people give younger relatives (UN DESA, n.d.[75]).

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted intergenerational relationships by limiting opportunities for direct contact. Elders, once supported by family or actively supporting younger generations, were suddenly isolated and unable to maintain these roles. This widened the gap between generations, leaving many older relatives physically and socially distanced from younger family members (Boulanger, Schmidt-Hertha and Albert, 2025[76]).

In Korea, the burden of a rapidly ageing population rests largely on younger people who are expected to provide care (Korean Social Enterprise Promotion Agency, 2019[77]), but intergenerational co-housing schemes are helping to lighten that load (Jang, 2017[78]). However, limited visibility of the co-operative model, particularly among younger generations and the wider public, remains a significant challenge. This lack of recognition makes it difficult to see co-operatives as viable solutions, showing the need for both training and a change of mindset towards more intergenerational structures and support.

Across Europe, co-operatives are found in different aspects of daily life. Some 140 million EU citizens (around 31% of the population) belong to one. In the United Kingdom, what consumers reportedly value most in local businesses are quality products (82%), community support (71%) and ethical behaviour (65%). These are all hallmarks of co-operatives. About 30% of consumers avoid firms whose values clash with their own and 34% do not seek to shop in stores where money is spent unethically (Co-operatives UK, 2024[79]; Co-op UK, n.d.[80]). Yet despite this alignment of values, co-operatives are sometimes overlooked by consumers, largely due to a lack of understanding of their distinct values and business

model. Examples such as the campaign entitled *Owned by You. Right by You* by Co-op Group in the UK (Box 8) or the Italian projects Coopstartup and Creare.coop (Box 9) highlight the efforts to tackle the limited awareness of the co-operative model among the general public (Coopstartup, n.d.[81]).

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**Box 8. Co-op Group launches bold new brand platform: "Owned by You. Right By You" (United Kingdom)**

The Co-operative Group Limited, or Co-op, is a UK consumer co-operative operating in groceries, wholesaling, funeral care, insurance, legal services, and other social enterprises. Tracing its roots to the 1844 Rochdale Pioneers, it was formally established in 1863 by 300 co-operatives in Yorkshire and Lancashire. Since 2015, it has operated on a "one member, one vote" principle, giving all members a voice in decision-making. In July 2024, the Co-op launched its "Owned by You. Right by You" campaign to raise awareness of co-operative membership, using a 60-second stop-motion film and extensive media coverage. With over 5 million members, the highest influx in seven years, the Co-op aims to reach 8 million by 2030.

Source: (Co-operatives UK, 2024[79]; Co-op UK, n.d.[80]; VCCP, 2024[82]).

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**Box 9. Empowering young co-operators through start-up support (Italy)**

Coopstartup, the mutual fund initiative launched by Coopfond in 2013 within Legacoop, is an open, action-research programme designed to test new ways of growing Italy's co-operative movement. It supports young entrepreneurs, often in partnership with experienced co-operators, to explore emerging markets and introduce technological, organisational and social innovation into both start-ups and existing co-operatives, in line with the goal of smart, sustainable and inclusive development. Implemented through bottom-up pilot projects tailored to local resources and opportunities, the initiative also mobilises expertise and ideas from across the wider co-operative network. Since its launch, Coopstartup has received over 1 300 applications and supported 267 new co-operatives across diverse sectors, ranging from sustainable tourism to smart safety wear and circular-economy solutions that transform plastic and textile waste into new products.

Creare.coop, developed by Confcooperative through the mutual fund Fondosviluppo, is an initiative designed to support co-operative start-ups launched by young co-operators. It targets newly established co-operatives (less than six months old) with up to eight members, primarily under the age of 35, offering grants, reimbursements and subsidised loans from co-operative banks within the Confcooperative network. In addition to financial assistance, the programme provides technical and managerial training to strengthen the skills of new co-operators and enhance their chances of success. Between 2018 and 2024, Creare.coop supported an average of 240 new co-operatives per year, mainly in the social and service sectors.

Source: (Coopstartup, n.d.[81]; Creare.coop, n.d.[83]).

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Given the limited awareness of the co-operative model, particularly among younger generations, there is a growing need to equip young people entering the labour market with a better understanding of co-operatives and the skills required to develop them. Initiatives such as Coopstartup and Creare.coop support young entrepreneurs in developing their businesses and strengthening their market position within

the co-operative sector. Strengthening youth awareness and participation remains key to ensure the intergenerational renewal of the co-operative model, as well as sustaining its long-term viability. Two initiatives from Murcia (Box 10 and Box 11) and one from Italy (Box 12) highlight this commitment to boost youth engagement in co-operative models.

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**Box 10. Funds to boost youth membership in co-operatives in Murcia (Spain)**

The Spanish region of Murcia boasts an active co-operative movement that works in tandem with the local government to support the sector and boost youth participation. In 2014, subsidies enabled co-operatives to recruit 198 new members, 19 of whom were aged 25 or under, and helped establish 133 new co-operatives and 520 jobs. To increase youth engagement, the regional government in Murcia unveiled a youth-focused co-operative programme allocating EUR 300 000 to enable people under 25 years old to become members of co-operatives. This funding provided grants of EUR 7 000 for each new member, as well as funding for training programmes. This investment aimed to boost both regional youth employment, and the co-operative sector, which at the time employed 20 000 people in Murcia, being one of the strongest in Spain.

Source: (ICA, 2015[84]).

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**Box 11. The Vanguard Hub and the Youth Entrepreneurship Academy for the Social Economy in the Region of Murcia (Spain)**

The Vanguard Hub is an innovation centre enhancing regional competitiveness in digitalisation, agri-food, and talent development. It provides workspaces, consultancy, events, networking, and an online collaborative platform for members. The Hub's Youth Entrepreneurship Academy fosters social business creation and job opportunities among young people through programmes such as the Entrepreneurial Node Network, which develops student entrepreneurial talent, and the Startup Support Programme, offering mentoring and guidance to businesses in their first three years. Promoted by the regional government and the association Ucomur, the initiative has an investment of around EUR 1.1 million and aligns with the Action Plan for the Social Economy, the Spanish Strategy for 2023–2027, and the Strategic Project for the Recovery and Economic Transformation (PERTE) for the Social Economy and Care.

Source: (UCOMUR, 2025[85]).

> **Box 12. EURICSE and educating young co-operators in Trentino (Italy)**
>
> In Trentino, the European Research Institute on Co-operative and Social Enterprises (EURICSE) promotes knowledge development and youth engagement in the co-operative sector through research, training and education. EURICSE is a research centre dedicated to studying the co-operative model and serves as an observer in the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSE). It also collaborates with the European Commission, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the OECD, and contributes to the work of the Commission Expert Group on Social Economy and Social Enterprises (GECES).
>
> At the European level, EURICSE co-ordinates the Large-Scale Partnership for the Social Economy and acts as the technical secretariat of the International Co-operative Business Education Consortium (ICBEC), a network of universities and research institutes specialising in co-operative management education. Locally, EURICSE runs a range of co-operative education and training initiatives, including the *FeelCoop* programme, which combines seminars, project work and internships for students and professionals under 35. It also offers a Master's degree in Social Enterprise Management, designed to train new managers and project leaders in the co-operative field. In addition, EURICSE provides customised training courses for national and local co-operatives.
>
> Source: (EURICSE, n.d.[86])

Finally, digitalisation offers new opportunities to attract younger generations and to raise broader public awareness around co-operatives. Online platforms, open-access resources, and digital participation tools can make co-operatives more visible, accessible and appealing to young people while also facilitating training, networking and democratic engagement. Strengthening the digital presence of co-operatives is increasingly considered to support intergenerational sustainability of the model.

## Human-centred digital transition

Co-operatives are seeking strategies to adopt new digital tools and processes. Platform co-operatives, in particular, demonstrate how digital innovation can be leveraged not only to improve services and operations, but also to strengthen shared ownership and member participation; (OECD, 2023[37]; OECD, 2023[87]). An example from Trentino is the inCooperazione digital platform, designed to provide digital services to co-operatives in the region and to facilitate their transition into the digital era (Box 13).

> **Box 13. inCooperazione: Digital Transformation in Trentino's Cooperative System (Italy)**
>
> inCooperazione is a digital platform developed with the support of the Trentino Federation of Co-operatives to connect members and cooperatives across the province. More than 200 enterprises already use the platform to promote services and discounts, which are accessible to about 170 000 members belonging to the Rural Credit Co-operative Banks (Casse Rurali) and Consumer Co-operative (Famiglia Cooperativa) networks.
>
> The platform strengthens the digital capacity of co-operatives, providing particular value to smaller ones that often lack the resources to invest in digitalisation. Through the platform, members can access discounts, agreements, a digital wallet and a growing range of services. More than 200 enterprises already use it to promote their services and discounts, which reach around 230 000 members of the Casse Rurali, Famiglia Cooperativa, and other agricultural and social co-operative networks.
>
> The platform has been made possible by the ongoing DCooP research project, which seeks to enhance connections among local co-operatives by applying blockchain technology. By enabling smart contracts and digital transactions, the project reduces costs, increases revenues and creates added value across the co-operative system.
>
> Source: (inCooperazione, n.d.[88]).

Digital technologies are reshaping our understanding of work and how workers are meant to carry out tasks by accelerating non-standard employment often outside of the full-time contract deal. This is particularly clear with the increasing use of new technologies and the rise in platform work and project work models. For example, a 2018 survey found that around 11% of workers in Europe had at some point provided work through digital platforms with 1.4% as main platform workers, 4.1% secondary, 3.1% marginal, and 2.4% sporadic. Full-time jobs remain the norm in the EU, yet part-time, temporary and high-skill freelance work have risen steadily since the early 2000s; an increase in self-employment can be observed among professionals (up 21% since 2012, at nearly 15% in 2022), and self-employed with tertiary education also rose, from about 27% in 2010 to 38% in 2022 (Weber, Eiffe and Adăscăliţei, 2024[89]). Digital technology is the chief force behind this shift, alongside demographics, deregulation and global competition (Charles, Xia and Coutts, 2022[90]). Teleworking has also risen to record levels since the COVID-19 outbreak, which has implications on improving people's work-life balance, boosting productivity, addressing spatial divides, reducing commuting and the related emissions, and fostering regional competitiveness (OECD, 2022[91]).

Digitalisation can also enhance inclusiveness and efficiency in service delivery. Online tools and platforms improve access to information, reduce costs, and expand choice including in underserved areas. For co-operatives, digital technologies support new business models like platform co-operatives, strengthen member participation through e-voting systems and enable virtual communities underpinning new forms of collaboration (OECD, 2023[87]).

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**Box 14. Suara Co-operative uniting digitalisation with support to the ageing population (Spain)**

Suara Serveis SCCL, a Catalan social-care co-operative based in Barcelona, has spent nearly four decades serving people. Its 5 300 professionals provide home care, childcare, eldercare, employment and training programmes, health initiatives, and broader social-action projects, reaching nearly 50 000 users annually. In 2023, Suara delivered over three million hours of home assistance, generated EUR 118 million in income, and reported EUR 283 million in integrated social value, with 89% of its staff being women and members logging 71 000 training hours.

Governed by its members' assembly, supported by a ten-person Advisory Council and multi-disciplinary management team, Suara embeds workplace democracy and empowerment in strategy. Guided by its mission to "transform the social environment," it delivers locally rooted, high-quality services, piloting digital tools, reinvesting surpluses in communities, and partnering with public and third-sector organisations, blending economic stability with social impact.

Source: (Suara Cooperativa, n.d.[92]).

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Increasing digitalisation affects not only market competition but also privacy, autonomy and access to digital resources. A key concern is how data are collected, used and monetised since when these processes are not transparent or fairly governed, they can undermine individual and community rights (Bühler et al., 2023[93]). Co-owned digital ownership means that data and digital products can now be shared and co-operatives can implement them in ways that deepen worker engagement and address some of the negative aspects of the gig economy (OECD, 2023[37]; Peuter, Verteuil and Machaka, 2022[94]). Co-operatives can serve as a reliable, secure platform that lets members exchange data under their own collective sovereignty (Bühler et al., 2023[93]).

By transforming the nature of work in the process, co-operatives can drive change on two fronts: they guarantee ownership of digital products and content to users, and they reshape how these assets are deployed. The Spanish example of SALUS demonstrates this through its effectiveness in providing services to an ageing population; it also uses digital tools such as their Social Digital Lab to work on preventive strategies to address health issues (Box 15).

---

**Box 15. SALUS.COOP (Spain)**

SALUS.COOP is a member-owned data-donor co-operative that channels personal health and lifestyle data into research serving the common good. Its guiding idea is simple: when anonymised and shared under donors' control, data become a collective asset that can generate the evidence society needs for better decisions and social change. Through the SALUS.COOP app, individuals choose which datasets to contribute; the platform strips out identifiers and allows researchers to access only the fields authorised in a clear, transparent agreement. Every project must demonstrate a positive social impact, ensuring that the co-operative's growing data commons remain both secure and purpose driven. Since it facilitates data sharing that is secure and anonymous, it helps to accelerate research and innovation in the field of health.

Source: (SALUS.COOP, n.d.[95]).

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In addition to SALUS.COOP, other examples include an informal way of managing data that allowed co-operatives to be operative for urgent day-to-day necessities. Some examples include the Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union scaling up door-to-door grocery deliveries for its members, while Coop Norge partnered with the national postal service to reach households across Norway. In the United Kingdom, the Midcounties Co-operative mobilised more than 1 000 volunteers and 100 community groups, completing over 100 000 grocery drop-offs to vulnerable members (EURICSE/ICA, 2021[96]).

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**Box 16. Open Digital Co-operative (UK)**

Founded in January 2023, Open Digital Co-operative (ODC) was set-up as a multi-stakeholder co-operative to secure the long-term future of LocalGov Drupal, an open-source website platform jointly built and maintained by UK local authorities and their tech suppliers. After two rounds of seed funding from the UK Local Digital Fund, administered first by Croydon Council and later by Cumbria Council, came to an end, the community required a legal entity to manage a bank account, collect voluntary contributions, and remunerate a core technical team. ODC now does exactly that: voluntary contributions from stakeholders and suppliers cover product development and maintenance, user support, community infrastructure (Slack, knowledge-sharing sessions), marketing and general administration. By pooling resources this way, the co-operative safeguards a shared digital asset, reduces procurement costs for councils and demonstrates how open-source tools for the public sector can be sustained without reverting to proprietary vendors.

Source: (Open Digital Cooperative, n.d.[97]).

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## Place-based environmental action

Co-operatives are creating quality jobs that support environmental sustainability (OECD, 2023[98]; López Rodríguez, 2019[99]). Both Italy and Spain have implemented, within the scope of social economy policies, support for the creation of such jobs. In the Italian case, there are investments within the National Recovery Plan (PNRR) directed to offer accredited up-skilling in trades supporting environmental sustainability, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises (Government of Italy, 2021[100]). While national policies set the direction, it is often at the local level that co-operatives demonstrate how sustainability and job creation can effectively align. The experience of the Melinda Consortium in Trentino illustrates how agricultural co-operatives can combine innovation and sustainability to strengthen local economies in mountain areas. Its investments in renewable energy, water efficiency and low-carbon logistics show how co-operative models can foster green transitions while sustaining rural employment (Box 17).

In Spain, the Climate Change and Energy Transition Act and Just Transition Strategy offer renewable and restoration funding in former coal regions only to firms that rehire or retrain displaced workers at comparable pay. This includes local small and medium enterprises and social economy entities that can also receive such grants.

> **Box 17. The Melinda consortium and innovation in sustainable business operations (Italy)**
>
> The Melinda Consortium brings together 16 fruit-farming co-operatives that produce around 400 000 tonnes of apples annually across the Non and Sole valleys in Trentino. As one of Trentino's largest exporters, it generates employment and helps counter depopulation in mountain areas while creating value across the province. Sustainability has become central to Melinda's strategy, with the consortium adopting innovative, eco-friendly technologies throughout its production chain. All manufacturing and storage processes now run on renewable energy, 11% of which is self-produced through photovoltaic systems installed on its facilities. Water efficiency is achieved through drip irrigation, which delivers water directly to the roots and saves about 30% of water compared with traditional methods.
>
> The consortium's most distinctive environmental innovations lie not in production but in conservation and distribution. After harvest, Melinda apples are stored in underground hypogeal cells, former mining tunnels located 300 metres below ground, which maintain a naturally cool temperature throughout the year. Supported by a research collaboration with the universities of Padua and Trento in Italy and Trondheim in Norway, these tunnels were converted into storage facilities that halve $CO_2$ emissions, eliminate the need for polluting polyurethane insulation panels, and substantially reduce water consumption otherwise required for cooling. A newly constructed cable car now links the main processing plant with the hypogeal storage site, significantly reducing truck transport, cutting emissions, and ensuring that the entire process operates exclusively on renewable energy.
>
> Source: (Melinda, n.d.[101]).

Scaling up renewable energy is another policy priority in many countries. Citizen-owned generation is hardly novel; it helped pioneer the modern idea of "community energy." Today, this approach is visible in energy co-operatives. However, challenges exist, especially in competing with for-profit firms and scaling up existing models (Roberts, 2020[102]; Holstenkamp, 2015[103]).

While energy communities are not new, national policies have been introduced that actively encourage and facilitate their development. In Italy, for example, legislation enabling the creation of energy communities was adopted in 2023 (Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Sicurezza Energetica, 2024[104]). Yet, regions such as Trentino had already begun experimenting earlier. A notable example is the Green Land Cooperative, the first community co-operative in Trentino to operate as a Renewable Energy Community established through a process led by the municipal administration of Alpe Cimbra bringing together around 170 members. By producing, exchanging, and selling renewable energy, members reduce local operating costs while promoting sustainable generation. Governance is fully democratic, with members electing representatives and collectively deciding strategies and investments (Green Land, n.d.[105]).

Another example of an Italian energy community is RESPIRA, funded jointly by CoopFond, Legacoop, Banca Etica and EcoMil. It provides a comprehensive support framework for establishing and scaling energy communities organised as co-operatives. Launched a year before the relevant legislation entered into force, this initiative shows how the co-operative model can combine local development, digital platforms for shared-resource management and environmental sustainability objectives, while even anticipating policy developments.

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### Box 18. From a small co-operative Reware to a large co-operative Caviro (Italy)

Reware, a small Italian co-operative based in Rome, sells upcycled laptops and donates devices to nonprofits. It intercepts retired IT equipment, refurbishes working units, and recycles components, reducing e-waste, cutting demand for new raw materials, and providing affordable technology worldwide while supporting local digital-access projects.

Caviro, an agricultural co-operative and wine producer founded in 1966, applies circular practices: grapes are turned into wine, by-products are reused, and organic material returns to vineyards, with 99% of waste reused annually. Stakeholders, including members and employees, provide input through annual reports, guiding investment and sustainability decisions.

Source: (Reware, n.d.[106]; Caviro, n.d.[107]).

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Co-operatives can advance circular economy strategies (OECD/European Commission, 2022[108]). While circular economy spans multiple value-chain stages and remains under-researched in co-operatives (Figge, Thorpe and Gutberlet, 2023[109]; Guerreschi and Díaz López, 2023[110]), evidence from Italy shows that co-operatives engaging in circular models perform comparably to other firms, investing in R&D and competing in export markets (Guerreschi and Zecca, 2025[52]). They differ in their strong focus on product, service, and consumer expectations, capturing environmental and social benefits alongside commercial returns. These intrinsic motivations make co-operatives important catalysts for mainstreaming circular strategies across local and global supply chains.

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### Box 19. ènostra (Italy)

ènostra, Italy's nationwide renewable-energy co-operative founded in 2014, unites citizen-owned generators, sustainability consultants, and civil-society partners under the EU REScoop20-20-20 programme to offer an ethical alternative to the conventional power market. Owned by over 13 000 members, the non-profit supplies households, SMEs, and public bodies with 100% renewable electricity from small Italian wind, solar, and hydro plants, reinvesting surpluses in new community-owned generation projects. Beyond power supply, ènostra advises on energy efficiency, promotes self-consumption, runs public education campaigns, and advocates for fair, transparent, and environmentally responsible energy policies.

Source: (REScoop, 2020[111]; ènostra, n.d.[112]).

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Co-operatives need to navigate new regulations, manage financial risks, and invest in environmentally sustainable technologies. This is challenging, particularly for smaller co-operatives with limited resources or expertise. Collaboration through networks or federations can help share knowledge, reduce costs, and amplify impact. At the same time, the transition creates opportunities to generate jobs and develop innovative employment models, supporting both environmental sustainability and social inclusion.

Many countries are encouraging increased production and distribution of renewable energy. Korea's power landscape is still mainly a centralised model (Park and Yun, 2021[113]): large coal- and nuclear-fuelled plants run by subsidiaries of the state utility KEPCO are the main sources (Han, 2020[114]). However, spurred by the December 2012 Framework Act on Co-operatives lowering the barriers for forming small co-operatives, some energy-movement groups began setting up renewable-energy co-operatives (RE co-

ops) in 2013 (Park and Yun, 2021[113]). Navigating the national electricity regime in Korea could be challenging for small, distributed generators. As a result, energy co-operatives have formed alliances to advocate for regulatory change, though there are still limitations in access to electricity grid, local policy incentives, and the need for community capital. To succeed, these co-operatives need to operate simultaneously as market actors (selling power), community builders (engaging members) and policy advocates (interacting with the state) (Park and Yun, 2021[113]).

**Box 20. Solar and Wind Energy Cooperative (Korea)**

Established in the Eunpyeong district of Seoul in 2013, Solar and Wind Energy Cooperative (태양과 바림에너지 협동조합) counted 330 members in 2018, running five solar power stations built in leased public space in the local area with an overall capacity of 332.33 kW and a plan to build more in the following years adding 600-700kW.

This co-operative also manages supermarkets named "Energy Supermarkets". These kiosks offer advice on the energy transition and power-efficiency while retailing energy-saving devices, such as LED light bulbs and smart thermostats. Their long-term goal is to open a dedicated independent supermarket aiming to raise awareness and support those who want to shift to cleaner and more efficient energy sources.

Source: (Kang, 2018[115]).

# 3 Looking to the future of the co-operative movement

## What can co-operatives learn from international practices?

Locally rooted ownership is making a comeback as an opportunity in today's economy. As communities seek greater independence and control over their futures, co-operatives that embed local decision-making are standing out for their ability to drive locally grounded development. These models are not just about economic participation, they're about empowering people where they live and ensuring that value created locally stays local. In doing so, they strengthen resilience, build trust, and foster long-term commitment within communities. Co-operatives that embed local decision-making are not just staying relevant, they're leading the way in building resilient, community-rooted economies that adapt quickly to local needs.

Examples from across the globe highlight how this approach can scale without losing a local focus. Community energy projects in Italy and Korea, and mutual-aid networks like Korea's Dure, show how co-operatives rooted in place can help local economies while responding to pressing social and environmental needs. What sets them apart is their ability to grow through federated structures and digital tools linking up with other initiatives to share knowledge, resources, and influence, while staying deeply connected to the people and places they serve.

Demographic change is reshaping the way services are designed, delivered, and sustained especially in ageing societies. Co-operatives are stepping up with innovative, people-centred solutions that respond to these shifts without compromising on affordability or care quality. By integrating co-operative social housing, community-based care, and member-driven health data platforms, they offer a more sustainable model of service delivery that puts people, not profit, at the core.

Co-operative models can help bridge generations, empower both older and younger members, and explore new ways to govern data and deliver care in the public interest. Examples such as Suara, SALUS.Coop, and Co-operative Care Colne Valley demonstrate how this can be done in practice providing meaningful jobs, strengthening community ties, and raising awareness of the co-operative model as a viable alternative for ageing and care systems.

Digital sovereignty is fast becoming a key differentiator in how value is created and distributed in the digital economy. Co-operatives are carving out space in this landscape by offering models of shared control over digital infrastructure, where communities, not corporations, govern platforms and data. This approach holds the potential to counter precarious working conditions, especially in the gig economy, reduce power imbalances with workers, and help the benefits of digital innovation to be more evenly shared, especially when informed consent and data literacy are actively addressed.

Such models show how collective ownership of digital tools can empower workers and communities while building more ethical, transparent systems. Platform and data co-operatives such as SALUS.Coop are

early examples demonstrating how value can be retained locally, workers can gain a voice, and digital tools can serve the common good rather than extract it.

Environmental considerations are creating new opportunities and value chains focused on sustainability. Co-operatives are uniquely positioned to lead this shift by leveraging member capital and long-term perspectives to finance renewable energy projects and promote circular economies that reduce waste and close material loops. Local networks, such as RESPIRA, play an important role in supporting these efforts by fostering collaboration and resource sharing.

Co-operatives succeed when they combine their traditional strengths in social trust and community engagement with investments in research and development. They also benefit from adopting digital tools and forming partnerships between co-operatives. This combination helps them innovate and scale their impact.

## How can policy help co-operatives stay relevant and strong?

Co-operatives around the world are already taking proactive steps to ensure their resilience and relevance in a rapidly changing economic and social landscape. However, their ability to thrive and scale impact is closely tied to the policy environment in which they operate. Strategic and supportive public policies are essential to unlock the full potential of co-operatives and help them navigate future challenges.

By grounding action at the local level, measures such as engaging co-operatives in public procurement and streamlining legal frameworks strengthen community-based economies and empower place-specific solutions. Embedding co-operative education and values into curricula fosters intergenerational responsibility, ensuring that younger generations inherit and advance co-operative principles that prioritise social equity and shared prosperity. Policies that promote skill development, local procurement and strategic long-term thinking enable co-operatives to lead place-based initiatives and position them as key actors in advancing sustainable local transitions.

### *Enabling policy and legal frameworks*

#### *Recognising co-operatives as strategic partners in economic policymaking*

Co-operatives offer unique values and strengths that deserve recognition in public and policy debates. Economic policies often focus on private enterprises, leaving co-operatives overlooked. Recognising co-operatives as providers of goods and services highlights their innovations and contributions to economic growth and social cohesion. Engaging them directly in policy discussions and fostering public-co-operative partnerships can showcase their long-term value to members, communities, and territories, strengthening their role as strategic partners in inclusive, future-ready economies. In Spain, for example, co-operatives are recognised as part of the policymaking process through the Social Economy Law (2011), which formally designates representative bodies like the Spanish Business Confederation of the Social Economy (CEPES) as partners in policy design and implementation ensuring co-operatives contribute directly to national and regional economic strategies (OECD, 2023[116]).

#### *Streamlining co-operative legal and regulatory frameworks*

Clear, coherent, and enabling legal frameworks are a cornerstone for co-operatives to grow, innovate, and deliver inclusive and sustainable services (OECD, 2023[116]). Outdated or fragmented legal regimes can limit co-operatives' capacity to adapt to evolving social, environmental and economic needs. Updating co-operative laws to clarify the definition, scope and governance of co-operatives, as well as streamlining registration and oversight mechanisms, can help reduce barriers to entry, facilitate access to funding, and

improve accountability. Legal recognition also supports co-operatives in asserting their distinct model, particularly their democratic governance and social purpose, and positions them to better engage with the transition. Legal frameworks can help co-operatives scale by enabling them to access differentiated fiscal treatment, participate in public procurement, and develop new market opportunities (OECD, 2022[117]).

International experience highlights the value of legal frameworks that are both robust and adaptable to local needs. In Korea, the Framework Act on Co-operatives of 2012 unified and clarified a previously fragmented landscape, recognising a range of co-operative types beyond traditional sectors such as agriculture or fisheries (Republic of Korea, 2012[118]). It simplified incorporation procedures, introduced oversight mechanisms to protect democratic governance, and enabled co-operatives to benefit from public support, such as labour subsidies and business development services (OECD, 2022[119]). Similarly, although co-operative law in the United Kingdom is set by the UK Parliament, devolved administrations such as Scotland have advanced non-legislative strategies to promote co-operatives and social enterprises. (OECD, 2023[116]). The Scottish Government's Social Enterprise Strategy 2016-2026 provides visibility, support and data on the sector, complementing the legal environment with targeted public procurement and tailored finance schemes. These examples underscore the fact that legal frameworks, when well designed and context-sensitive, can provide essential infrastructure to modernise the co-operative sector and enhance its contribution to social and territorial resilience.

### Engaging co-operatives in local procurement policies

Community-rooted co-operatives are well-positioned to address service gaps in sectors like elderly care, education, health, and renewable energy. In regions such as Trentino, where demographic shifts and rising care needs are placing increasing pressure on services, co-operatives offer tailored, place-based solutions where public or private providers may fall short. Policymakers can engage co-operatives in procurement through social clauses, reserved quotas, measurable social outcomes, smaller contract lots, and capacity-building tools (OECD, 2023[120]). Facilitating market access can contribute to steady service delivery and anchors economic activity locally (Hermanson and Schram, 2022[121]). In Korea, municipalities including Seoul have promoted procurement from social economy organisations, especially in welfare services (OECD, 2023[14]).

Embedding co-operatives in public procurement strategies also reinforces broader local development goals. Co-operatives, including platform co-operatives, act as conduits for community engagement, trust-building, and democratic participation (OECD, 2023[87]). By favouring co-operatives in procurement, local authorities also stimulate co-operative ecosystems (networks of interdependent co-operatives offering complementary services such as mobility, housing, and energy), which can generate systemic impact and community wealth. A strategic public procurement policy can therefore serve as both a mechanism to deliver critical services and a lever to structure inclusive, long-term local development led by co-operatives.

## Building capacity and foresight

### Supporting skills development for co-operatives

To remain competitive and relevant in the context of changing workforce needs, co-operatives can choose to invest in upgrading the skills of their members and workforce. Despite their strong local roots and social mission, many co-operatives, especially in rural or smaller-scale contexts face barriers in accessing technical training and emerging knowledge on sustainable practices and technologies (Singh, Sathyakumar and Srinivasan, 2022[122]). Targeted public investment in capacity-building, including subsidised training schemes, collaboration with local educational institutions and tax incentives for developing skills in environmental sustainability, can enable co-operatives to keep pace with changing regulatory demands and consumer expectations. For instance, co-operatives involved in agriculture, housing, or energy provision need ongoing support to integrate circular economy practices, environmental

compliance tools, and resource-efficient technologies into their operations. Such investments could not only improve environmental outcomes but also position co-operatives as key actors in the ecological transition, particularly in mountainous and rural areas where other actors may be less present.

Digital transformation is also reshaping the operating environment for co-operatives, pushing them to adopt new tools for member engagement, data management, and service delivery. However, many still lack the digital infrastructure or skills to transition towards "smart co-operatives" that leverage information and communication technologies for transparency, efficiency and participatory governance (Chawviang and Kiattisin, 2022[123]). Subsidising digital upskilling (such as in e-commerce, cloud platforms, enterprise resource planning, and stakeholder management) can help co-operatives remain competitive while preserving their democratic structures. Moreover, digital tools can enable more inclusive participation, particularly for younger or geographically remote members, while improving decision-making processes and enabling data-driven management. Leadership development goes together with this digital transition, as strategic leaders are essential for steering co-operatives through technological and organisational change. (Hejkrlik, Chaloupkova and Sokolska, 2021[124]).

### *Embedding anticipatory approaches into policy and organisational decision-making*

To navigate complex future challenges and opportunities, co-operatives are encouraged to strengthen their processes and capabilities in horizon scanning, strategic intelligence gathering, scenario planning, and systems analysis. Public authorities can play a central role by financing and supporting targeted capacity-building programs that train co-operative leaders in anticipatory thinking methodologies, establishing cross-sectoral learning networks for sharing strategic intelligence, and creating organisational structures that systematically embed foresight into decision-making processes. Additionally, policies and public-backed grants can facilitate the development of collaborative intelligence networks between co-operatives, enabling them to pool resources for strategic foresight activities, share early warning signals about disruptions, and collectively develop adaptive responses to systemic challenges.

## Cultivating co-operative mindsets and education

### *Integrating co-operative values into school and university curricula*

Integrating co-operative education into school and university curricula helps support the long-term vitality of the co-operative movement. As co-operatives rely on democratic participation and shared values rather than profit maximisation, cultivating awareness and understanding of the co-operative model among youth is key to its intergenerational renewal (Noble and Ross, 2021[125]). Young people often remain unaware of co-operatives as a viable career path or business model, partly due to the limited visibility of co-operatives in mainstream educational content (Dongre, Paranjothi and Parameshwari, 2020[126]). Embedding co-operative values (such as solidarity, democratic governance, and social responsibility) into education at all levels can foster early familiarity and positive attitudes among future workers, consumers, and entrepreneurs. As demonstrated by campus-based co-operatives in countries such as Malaysia and Japan, educational institutions can act as living laboratories for co-operative practice, enabling students to experience democratic decision-making and collective enterprise first-hand (Dongre, Paranjothi and Parameshwari, 2020[126]). In Spain, the integration of co-operatives into environmental science curricula has proven effective in promoting critical thinking around sustainability and alternative economic models (Espinet et al., 2023[127]), suggesting the transformative potential of co-operative education..

Empirical evidence further supports the importance of education in shaping youth engagement with co-operatives. Studies reveal that while students generally hold a positive image of co-operatives, actual engagement remains low due to limited exposure and lack of experience (Habumuremyi, 2023[128]). Formal education can address these gaps by fostering not only knowledge but also the soft skills and confidence needed to actively participate in co-operative governance and entrepreneurship (Pesci et al., 2024[129]).

Evidence from Canada and other contexts indicates that young people are particularly inclined to engage with organisations whose values align with their own, especially when such engagement also offers opportunities for professional development and the enhancement of their career portfolios (Ellerby and Leviten-Reid, 2015[130]). Co-operatives are well positioned to play a dual role: they can provide meaningful, purpose-driven opportunities for youth engagement while simultaneously benefiting from the creativity, dynamism, and leadership renewal that younger generations contribute. The United Kingdom offers illustrative examples of this potential through initiatives such as the Co-operative University Project and federated co-operative education models, which demonstrate how educational institutions can be reimagined as co-operatives, embedding co-operative principles not only in governance structures but also in teaching and learning practices (Noble and Ross, 2021[125]).

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