



# Transforming our world: A cooperative 2030

Cooperative contributions to SDG 16

This brief is part of the Transforming our world: A cooperative 2030 series produced by the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC). Through a series of 17 briefs, one for each Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), COPAC hopes to raise awareness about the significant contributions of cooperative enterprises towards achieving the 2030 Agenda in a sustainable, inclusive and responsible way, and encourage continued support for their efforts.

This brief focuses on SDG 16 – Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies.

## About the Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were adopted by world leaders in September 2015 during a historic summit at the United Nations. The SDGs set out a vision for countries to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

For more information, visit [www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment).

## About cooperatives

Cooperatives are defined as ‘autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise’<sup>1</sup>

All cooperatives subscribe to a set of values and principles that support the social and people-focused nature of their activities. They are operated democratically by their members. Whether customers of the business, workers or residents, members have an equal say and a share of the profits.

Cooperatives are a powerful economic and social force, present in most countries of the world and in most sectors of the economy. The cooperative movement counts more than a billion members.

<sup>1</sup> International Co-operative Alliance, Statement on the Co-operative Identity (Manchester, 1995). Available from <https://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles>



## The cooperative difference

Many regions of the world continue to suffer untold horrors because of armed conflict. Although there has been some progress in promoting the rule of law and access to justice in many countries, this progress has been uneven, and many people, particularly those living in poverty and in vulnerable situations, are still being subjected to various forms of abuse with no recourse to justice. Enhancing access to justice and promoting human rights are fundamental principles of sustainable development and integral to leaving no one behind. There is also an added gender dimension as women and girls often suffer horrific sexual and gender-based violence, both in times of war and peace.

We can acknowledge some progress in creating rules and regulations promoting public access to information and in strengthening institutions upholding human rights at the national level.<sup>2</sup> However, in many countries where such protection exists on paper, accessing justice remains an insurmountable challenge for the most vulnerable and marginalised.

The first measure of progress for SDG 16 is “to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.” In this regard, some countries have seen a remarkable reduction in homicide rates (South Africa, Colombia, Paraguay, Kazakhstan and Albania). However, due to continuing wars and conflict around the world, battle-related deaths remain extremely high.

The second target relates to ending human trafficking, where the situation remains grim. Between 2012 and 2014, more than 570 different flows involving trafficking in persons were detected, affecting all regions of the world with many of the movements being from lower-income to higher-income countries. In 2014, most detected trafficking victims were women and girls (71 per cent), and about 28 per cent were children (20 per cent girls and 8 per cent boys). Over 90 per cent of victims detected were trafficked for sexual exploitation or forced labour.<sup>3</sup>

The battle for resources often lies at the heart of most conflicts, from the household level to the international level. Control of resources and the wealth and power that flows from that may lead to a sense of security, but if it is at the cost of another’s insecurity, is inherently unsustainable.

Cooperatives promote communal living and communal security and therefore have a strong capacity to build mutual understanding and contribute to conflict eradication and promotion of peace while building inclusive societies.

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) passed a resolution in 2009 articulating the cooperative commitment to promoting and creating links between divided people, supporting social inclusion and conflict mitigation. Many strong cooperative movements that exist today grew out of times of crisis and as a response to the needs of vulnerable people living in difficult conditions.<sup>4</sup>

Below are some examples of cooperatives, through their actions for economic self-determination leading to broader externalities for peace and prosperity.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>

<sup>4</sup> Ian MacPherson; Yehudah Paz. Concern for community: The relevance of co-operatives to peace (2015). Available from <http://www.coopresearch.coop/a-very-special-release-concern-for-community-the-relevance-of-co-operatives-to-peace-by-dr-ian-macpherson-and-dr-yehudah-paz-edited-by-joy-emmanuel/>

For further information on decent work and the 2030 Agenda, visit [ilo.org/global/topics/sdg-2030/lang--en/index.htm](https://ilo.org/global/topics/sdg-2030/lang--en/index.htm)

### From the field: How cooperatives contribute to promoting peaceful and inclusive societies<sup>5</sup>

Rwanda provides an example of a cooperative working in a post-conflict setting to bring healing to the community. In 1994, within three months (April-July) the country experienced an intercommunal genocide that is estimated to have killed approximately one million people. Many of the victims were killed by friends, neighbours and even family members. The conflict created a deep division between the survivors and genocide perpetrators, and their respective family members.

Buranga Cooperative was established after the genocide. It is an arts and crafts cooperative with 16 women members who joined the cooperative to make a living and lift themselves out of extreme conditions of poverty. The members had lost most of their possessions during the genocide as they come from communities where perpetrators of the genocide and those who survived it lived. The cooperative allowed them to work together collaboratively and created dialogue between the two communities. They helped one another while working within the cooperative, but when they returned to their homes on activities that were not associated with the cooperative. They supported one another for instance with savings to pay for school fees for their children or with preparations for weddings and other social events.


Another example comes from Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the violent breakup of Yugoslavia led to a civil war that lasted from 1992 to 1995. In the wake of the war, the society emerged fragmented, with a high number of displaced people, an economy destroyed and a severely damaged infrastructure. The dependence of Bosnia's rural communities on agriculture for their livelihoods meant that a key focus of the post-conflict period was agricultural sector reform.

With the support of Gruppo di Volontariato Civile (GVC), an Italian NGO, and Legacoop, an Italian federation of cooperative enterprises, multi-ethnic agri-food cooperatives were established in the Canton of Zenica-Doboj. The cooperatives created space for dialogue and inter communal exchange between groups and individuals. They contributed to a process of normalisation that had already begun in the country to build trust between people. Despite conflicts that arose between Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian farmers, the cooperative provided an opportunity to bring to light misunderstandings and to find ways toward enhanced trust and peaceful coexistence.

In Guatemala, the civil war ran from 1960 to 1996, with the Guatemalan



<sup>5</sup> Cooperatives Europe. Cooperatives and peace: Strengthening democracy, participation and trust (2019). Available from [https://coopseurope.coop/sites/default/files/COOPS%26PEACE\\_research\\_2019\\_Cooperatives%20Europe-WEB\\_0.pdf](https://coopseurope.coop/sites/default/files/COOPS%26PEACE_research_2019_Cooperatives%20Europe-WEB_0.pdf)



army fighting various guerrilla groups in indigenous areas, which led to many human rights violations against civilians. The most affected populations were the ethnic Maya indigenous people and Ladino peasants, who represented the majority of the rural poor.

La Federación Comercializadora de Café Especial de Guatemala (FECCEG, or the Guatemalan Specialty Coffee Trading Federation) was established in 2006 and is a second-level organization of small producer cooperatives in the Western Highlands of Guatemala, representing 2,000 small farmers.

The cooperative has brought together people affected by the civil war and is establishing sustainable communities, through an approach that values equality and respect between Guatemala's vast numbers of different cultures and ethnicities. This has enabled people to strengthen community links and access training, technical assistance, value-addition to products and access export markets that were previously out of reach for individual producers. With a strong focus on gender equality, FECCEG aims to increase women's visibility, leadership and voice among member cooperatives.

In Syria, the high number of internally displaced, – families forced to leave their homes and move to other regions of the country, has seriously aggravated the already precarious living conditions of the population. There are an estimated 13.5 million people, including 6 million children, who require emergency humanitarian aid, many of them needing food, medicines, psychological and other daily support.

In 2013, Armadilla social cooperative started a humanitarian programme in the Southern Suburbs of Damascus to respond to the most urgent needs of vulnerable families. The cooperative has been able to provide assistance and protection to around 1300 families. By providing a rapid response to continuing and new needs, Armadilla social cooperative has mitigated some of the worse effects of the ongoing conflict, demonstrating the seventh cooperative principle, concern for community.

Members assess the needs of the families they work with, and provide targeted psycho-social support to women, thus relieving some of the burden of care to their families. The cooperative also offers education and training for women as an income support initiative.

In Bangladesh refugees have organized themselves into a cooperative to improve their livelihoods. Testimony Tailors is a sewing cooperative among the Rohingya refugees living in a camp in Bangladesh. The women members of the cooperative can begin to heal some of the immense trauma they have suffered by working together, sewing and selling hand-made clothes. The cooperative has set up a website, where clothes can be bought and donated to other refugees.<sup>6</sup> All profits from the online shop go directly to the Rohingya women in a move to provide self-sufficiency and a way for them to get involved in something which could bring them new skills and hope for the future.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://testimonytailors.com/>



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## About COPAC

COPAC is a multi-stakeholder partnership of global public and private institutions that promotes and advances people-centered, self-sustaining cooperative enterprises, guided by the principles of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – in all aspects of its work. The Committee's current members are the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Co-operative Alliance and the World Farmers' Organisation.

For more information, please visit  
[www.copac.coop](http://www.copac.coop).