



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

Concept Note

EXPERT GROUP MEETING:

THE ROLE OF COOPERATIVES IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: SUPPORTING COOPERATIVES AS SUSTAINABLE AND SUCCESSFUL ENTERPRISES

30 MAY TO 1 JUNE 2023

Background

The United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution [A/RES/71/1](#) establishing the Sustainable Development Goals as the post 2015 development agenda in September 2015. The agenda recognises that “private business activity, investment and innovation are major drivers of productivity, inclusive economic growth and job creation. (It further) acknowledges the diversity of the private sector, ranging from micro-enterprises to **cooperatives** to multinationals” and calls upon “all businesses to apply their creativity and innovation to solving sustainable development challenges.”

In addition, several General Assembly resolutions on Cooperatives in Social Development, most recently in [A/RES/76/135](#), recognizes that cooperative enterprises often serve the socially excluded and vulnerable segments of the population and encourages governments to focus their support to cooperatives as **sustainable and successful enterprises** that contribute directly to “decent employment generation, poverty and hunger eradication, education, social protection, including universal health coverage, financial inclusion and the creation of affordable housing options across a variety of economic sectors....”

A/RES/76/135 further requests the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the relevant United Nations agencies and other international organizations and national, regional and international cooperative organizations, to continue to render support to Member States, as appropriate, in their efforts to create a supportive environment for the development of cooperatives.

The potential of cooperatives to make transformative changes for people, planet and prosperity was highlighted by the General Assembly in its resolution [A/RES/64/136](#), declaring 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives. The declaration encouraged all countries and other stakeholders to promote the role of cooperatives, and to raise awareness of their important contribution to social and economic development. By having the central theme of “Cooperative

enterprise build a better world”, individuals and institutions were encouraged to actively form and grow the landscape of cooperatives for socio-economic empowerment.

Therefore, in supporting the implementation of the resolutions of the General Assembly, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs is organising an Expert Group Meeting on **Cooperatives in Social Development: Supporting Cooperatives as Sustainable and Successful Enterprises** that is scheduled from **30 May to 1 June 2023, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, USA.**

Objectives

Cooperatives’ development is a complex process that depends on a combination of factors, including the legal framework guiding their operations; government policies that provide support for cooperative development while allowing them to maintain their autonomy; the availability of credit and financing at affordable rates that are at least comparable to other private sector organisations; the level of education and skills of the leaders of cooperative organisations, which is linked to the availability of training opportunities for members of cooperatives; and systems specialised in cooperatives and other business support networks in the economy and society.

The presence of strong cooperative representative organisations that are able to propose and co-create public policies, and inclusion of the cooperative business model in national education curricula are also important factors. Often these factors are treated as separate elements in the policymaking process, which prevent the inter-connectedness of the elements that shape an enabling environment for cooperatives.

It is essential to analyse all these factors in one comprehensive manner in order to provide the necessary policy advice to governments, as well as national and international agencies working on the promotion and advancement of cooperatives. This is also one of the main objectives of the Expert Group Meeting.

The meeting will provide expert analysis addressing the following key dimensions for the development of cooperatives:

- 1) National actions taken for supporting cooperatives as successful business enterprises. The analysis will be based on real country experiences and new research on entrepreneurial ecosystem, which is being pioneered in some countries.
- 2) The role of cooperatives in the wider social and solidarity economy movement
- 3) How cooperatives support countries in delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals
- 4) The progress of legal status of cooperatives made since the report of the Secretary-General in 2021 and its recommendations regarding the legal framework

- 5) Lessons learned since the international year of cooperatives in 2015 and any actions required to further promote cooperatives
- 6) Financing for cooperatives – the options, sources of funds and awareness by cooperatives of available options
- 7) Capacity Development Activities for cooperatives and collaboration between national and international actors to maximise the benefits of these options while avoiding duplication

Expected Outcomes

The meeting is expected to provide substantive inputs for:

- assessing the gaps, challenges and lessons learned to develop the cooperative sector;
- recommending strategies for creating an enabling environment for cooperatives;
- strategies for promoting cooperatives as a preferred business model; and
- supporting cooperatives as sustainable and successful business enterprises.

Organizational and administrative matters

The meeting will start at 10 AM on 30 May 2023 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, USA, in meeting room S25-MM2; and end at 1 PM on 1 June. It will be a hybrid event to enable those who are not able to travel to New York to participate.

Each session of the meeting will include presentations by lead experts who will present papers on the topics of the sessions, which will be followed by in-depth discussions. At the end of the meeting, participants will outline the major conclusions and recommendations of the meeting.

All meeting documentation and information, including papers, presentations and the summary of the discussions, will be made available on the meeting [webpage](#).

Presenters are encouraged to prepare PowerPoint presentations and share them in advance with the organizers. All presentations and other relevant correspondence should be sent to **Mr. Andrew Allimadi** (allimadi@un.org) with a copy to **Claudia Beatriz Altavas** (claudia.arcenasaltavas@un.org).

The working language of the meeting will be in English. Documentation for the meeting will be provided in English.