

WORKSHOP FINAL REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

a. Purpose of the Workshop

The proclamation of 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives by the United Nations has provided a valuable opportunity to reconsider cooperatives not only as an economic model but also as a tool for social transformation and solidarity, both globally and in Türkiye. Placed at the center of values such as sustainable development, local empowerment, and social equity, cooperatives have gained prominence in the post-pandemic era as an alternative economic approach.

In light of these global developments, significant policy steps have been taken in Türkiye to strengthen the cooperative movement, including the launch of the 2025–2029 Türkiye Cooperative Strategy and Action Plan. This strategy has been designed to include socially impactful models, particularly women’s cooperatives, social cooperatives, and new-generation cooperatives.

Within this framework, CIRIEC Türkiye, the Turkish branch of the *International Centre of Research and Information on the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy (CIRIEC)*, continues its activities under Istanbul Gelisim University. Under the leadership of CIRIEC Türkiye, and in collaboration with Istanbul Gelisim University and Istanbul Rumeli University, a workshop was organized under the theme:

“New Trends in Turkish Cooperatives in the 2025 International Year of Cooperatives.”

During the workshop, the current situation of cooperative practices in Türkiye, the structural and social challenges encountered, and potential solutions to these challenges were extensively discussed. Particular emphasis was placed on women’s cooperatives, social cooperatives, and new-generation cooperative models.

b. Topics Addressed

In the first session of the workshop, discussions focused on the current status of cooperatives in Türkiye, legal infrastructure processes, present challenges, and possible solutions to these problems. In addition to these, issues such as raising awareness of the cooperative concept in society, new international trends in the cooperative field, and the sustainability of women’s cooperatives were also covered in this session.

The second session of the workshop addressed the current status of social cooperatives and new-generation cooperatives, the barriers to their sustainability, and proposed solutions for overcoming these obstacles.

c. Participant Profile

The workshop hosted participants representing public institutions and various cooperatives, including:

- Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Türkiye, Directorate General of Tradesmen, Craftsmen, and Cooperatives, Head of the Cooperative Department Gülsüm Gözde Ayanoglu,
- Ministry of Trade Specialist Mustafa Yıldırım,
- Istanbul Provincial Directorate of Trade, Branch Manager Hakan Özkan,
- General Manager of Trakya Birlik Hakan Çalen,
- Human Resources Manager of Marmarabirlik Aytaç Ünen,
- President of the Black Sea Regional Cooperative Union Bahar Kasten,
- Chair of Bahçe Chamber of Agriculture Fatma Şahin,
- Chair of Defne Women's Cooperative Nesrin Deli,
- Chair of Tomurcuk Yıldızlar Gülser Özkan,
- Chair of Şile Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Agricultural Development Cooperative Tuncay Eskin,
- Technology Transfer Specialist of Marmara Technopark Rasim Keskin.

In addition, the workshop was honored by the participation of:

- Rector of Istanbul Gelisim University Prof. Bahri Şahin,
- Rector of Istanbul Rumeli University Prof. Mustafa Kara,
- Chair of the CIRIEC Türkiye National Committee and Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences at Istanbul Gelisim University Prof. Kenan Aydın,
- Member of the CIRIEC Türkiye National Committee and Director of the Graduate School at Istanbul Gelisim University Prof. İzzet Gümüş,
- Vice Chair of the CIRIEC Türkiye National Committee Prof. Emine Akçadağ Alagöz,
- Faculty member at Anadolu University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Business Administration Prof. Nurcan Turan,
- Faculty member at Trakya University, Uzunköprü School of Applied Sciences Assoc. Prof. Nilüfer Serinikli,
- Member of the CIRIEC Türkiye National Committee and faculty member at Istanbul Gelisim University Asst. Prof. Aysun Kaya Deniz,
- Director of the Social Responsibility Research and Application Center at Istanbul Gelisim University Asst. Prof. Ayşe Aydın,
- Director of the Gender Studies Research and Application Center at Istanbul Gelisim University Asst. Prof. Selda Tunç Subaşı,
- Member of the CIRIEC Türkiye National Committee and Research Assistant Zehra Makar.

d. The Role of CIRIEC Türkiye

The International Centre of Research and Information on the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy (CIRIEC), established in 1947 and headquartered in Europe, is a non-governmental, international scientific organization. Its mission is to generate scientific knowledge, conduct practice-oriented research, and facilitate knowledge-sharing in the fields of public economy, social economy, and cooperatives.

CIRIEC Türkiye, established under Istanbul Gelisim University, carries out academic activities, research, and collaborations aimed at raising awareness of cooperatives and the social economy in Türkiye. For this workshop, CIRIEC Türkiye not only undertook the intellectual framework but also coordinated the organization itself, thereby contributing to Türkiye's national and international integration in the cooperative movement.

1. STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE WORKSHOP

a. Date and Time

The workshop “New Trends in Turkish Cooperatives in the 2025 International Year of Cooperatives” was held on 23 May 2025, between 10:00–16:30, at Istanbul Gelisim University, Avcılar Campus.

b. Workshop Sessions

The opening speeches of the workshop were delivered by Prof. Kenan AYDIN, Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences at Istanbul Gelisim University and Chair of the CIRIEC Türkiye National Committee; Prof. Bahri ŞAHİN, Rector of Istanbul Gelisim University; and Prof. Mustafa KARA, Rector of Istanbul Rumeli University.

Prof. Kenan AYDIN emphasized the importance of raising awareness of cooperatives in Türkiye, highlighting the role of CIRIEC Türkiye National Committee in the field of social and solidarity economy. Prof. Bahri ŞAHİN underlined the significance of the United Nations' declaration of 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives, stressing the need to increase cooperative-based research and educational content within universities. Prof. Mustafa KARA drew attention to the importance of strategic planning in the development of cooperatives in Türkiye, noting that such plans should embrace values such as global networking, digital transformation, sustainability, and artificial intelligence integration.

Moderated by Dr. Aysun KAYA DENİZ, a member of the CIRIEC Türkiye National Committee, the workshop consisted of two sessions.

The first session, titled “Turkish Cooperatives and Women's Cooperatives in the International Year of Cooperatives: Change, Resistance and New Orientations,” began with a presentation by Gülsüm Gözde AYANOĞLU, Head of the Department of Cooperatives at the Ministry of Trade, Directorate General of Tradesmen, Craftsmen and Cooperatives. She emphasized the importance of cooperatives in the social domain and discussed the Ministry's efforts to provide a legal basis for social cooperatives. She highlighted that priority was given to social cooperatives for vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities, ex-convicts, individuals with addictions, unemployed youth, etc.). She also underlined that a cooperative strategy document had been prepared, which includes digital transformation, green transition, inter-cooperative collaboration, and the training of academics in the cooperative field.

Hakan ÇALEN, General Manager of Trakya Birlik, introduced Trakya Birlik as a successful cooperative model, stressing the necessity of institutions with effective organizational structures in overcoming challenges related to agricultural production and food security. Bahar KASTAN, President of the Black Sea Regional Cooperative Union, pointed out the supports provided to women's cooperatives by the Ministry of Industry and Technology, the Ministry of Trade, the Ministry of Family and Social Services, the Ministry of Interior, and local

governments. She emphasized that many cooperatives could not benefit from these supports due to lack of knowledge and experience, and underlined the importance of mentorship in this regard. She also stressed the need to expand training programs on project writing, social media management, cooperative education, financial literacy, leadership, e-commerce, and entrepreneurship for women's cooperatives.

Fatma ŞAHİN, Chair of Bahçe Chamber of Agriculture, highlighted the heavy burden of women's roles in rural areas and emphasized the contribution of women's cooperatives in reducing women's poverty and empowering women.

The second session, titled "The Changing Role of Cooperatives in the World and in Türkiye: Social Cooperatives and New-Generation Cooperatives," included contributions from several experts. Gülsüm Gözde AYANOĞLU, Head of the Department of Cooperatives at the Ministry of Trade, emphasized that in many countries cooperatives contribute to global clean energy production by receiving support to promote renewable energy generation. She noted the importance of creating an alternative initiative model through cooperatives in the renewable energy sector and pointed out that the 2025–2029 Türkiye Cooperative Strategy and Action Plan contains specific articles addressing the green transformation of cooperatives.

Mustafa YILDIRIM, Cooperative Specialist at the Ministry of Trade, introduced the model of campus cooperatives, stressing that cooperatives established to meet the basic needs of university students such as housing, transportation, and food could contribute significantly to youth entrepreneurship. Gülser ÖZKAN, Chair of Tomurcuk Yıldızlar, stated that they were the first non-profit social cooperative in Türkiye, founded in 2006 by mothers of children with intellectual disabilities. She highlighted the need for more social cooperatives to provide training for the employment of people with intellectual disabilities and to offer job opportunities for mothers facing economic difficulties. She also pointed out challenges related to taxation and bureaucratic recognition of social cooperatives.

Nesrin DELİ, Chair of Defne Women's Cooperative, underlined the role of women's cooperatives in overcoming the disadvantaged conditions of rural women. She emphasized that women's cooperatives face challenges in terms of logistics, infrastructure, production centers, and market access, and she drew attention to the importance of disaster management training for cooperatives, using the example of her cooperative located in Hatay.

Rasim KESKİN, Technology Transfer Specialist at Marmara Technopark, spoke about types of entrepreneurship, the entrepreneurship ecosystem and culture, and the importance of instilling entrepreneurship culture in students. He underlined that digitalization is essential for the sustainability of cooperatives and highlighted the importance of patent applications.

Tuncay ESKİN, Chair of the Şile Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Agricultural Development Cooperative, emphasized the importance of production-oriented cooperatives both in implementing good agricultural practices and in supporting the economy through revitalizing domestic production. He stressed the need for greater support for cooperatives and for improvements in legislation.

c. Data Collection Method

For the discussions held during the workshop, focus group discussions and brainstorming were employed as the primary data collection methods.

3. KEY ISSUES DISCUSSED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Development of the Legal Framework

In Türkiye, there is no clear legal framework regulating social and women's cooperatives. Law No. 1163 on Cooperatives focuses mainly on traditional production-consumption cooperatives and does not adequately cover unique purposes such as generating social benefit or supporting women's labor. Moreover, the law does not allow flexible and contemporary cooperative models; the unclear division of authority among different ministries also creates practical challenges.

Recommendations:

- A special legal status should be defined for social and women's cooperatives (e.g., under the title of "social cooperative").
- The Cooperatives Law should be rewritten and modernized to encompass models that generate social value and are participatory and democratic.
- A high-level body, such as a "Supreme Cooperative Council," could be established to ensure inter-ministerial coordination.
- Bureaucratic processes should be simplified to enable women's cooperatives to benefit from public support.

b. Informal Employment and Cooperatives

In women's cooperatives, many women workers participating in the production process work informally; due to social security premiums and tax burdens, cooperatives face difficulties in creating formal employment. The lack of clear legal distinction between membership and employment increases the legal responsibilities of cooperatives.

Recommendations:

- Micro-employment models and flexible social security premium systems should be introduced for cooperatives.
- Gender-sensitive incentive packages (tax reductions, social security exemptions) should be implemented for workers in women's cooperatives.
- Clear and binding regulations should be established to define the relationship between membership and employment, accompanied by guiding manuals.
- An "employment-friendly cooperative" certification program could be launched, linking incentives to such certification.

c. Promotion and Awareness-Raising

A segment of society still perceives cooperatives as "outdated" and "inefficient." Awareness about the transformative power of women's labor and the public benefits of social cooperatives remains insufficient. Among youth and entrepreneurs, cooperatives are not considered sufficiently attractive.

Recommendations:

- Nationwide Cooperative Awareness Campaigns should be conducted through media and social media.
- Municipalities, schools, and universities should organize “Cooperative Day” events.
- Successful cooperatives should be promoted through documentaries and digital storytelling projects.
- Cooperative-focused elective courses or club activities should be introduced at the high school and university levels.

d. Sustainability of Women’s Cooperatives

Many women’s cooperatives fail to sustain their activities once external support ends; they lack professional management, marketing, planning, and income diversification. Since most of them are based on voluntary work, their resilience weakens over time. Although the number of women’s cooperatives is increasing in certain regions, sustainability problems lead to higher closure rates.

Recommendations:

- Instead of increasing the number of cooperatives in the same field within a region, priority should be given to strengthening inter-cooperative collaboration and ensuring the sustainability of existing ones.
- Financial sustainability and business model development programs should be offered to women’s cooperatives.
- Municipalities should link infrastructure and space support to long-term partnerships.
- Mentorship networks (academics, social entrepreneurs, retired managers) should be created for cooperatives.
- A performance-based rating system could be introduced to reward the most successful cooperatives.

e. Gender Inequality and Women’s Cooperatives

Women face limited participation in production processes due to caregiving responsibilities, spousal consent, cultural pressures, and social norms. Representation of women in management and leadership positions remains low. Women’s labor is still largely perceived as a contribution to the family budget rather than being approached from a rights-based perspective.

Recommendations:

- Women’s cooperatives should be provided with environmental support services such as childcare facilities, transportation assistance, and caregiving leave.
- Women’s leadership academies could be established to promote women’s access to managerial positions.
- Positive discrimination incentives should be provided for cooperatives that promote gender equality.
- Local development plans should integrate gender-sensitive perspectives.

f. Development of Social Cooperatives

Social cooperatives working with disadvantaged groups such as people with disabilities, the elderly, and migrants cannot benefit from support programs since they lack a defined legal status; moreover, they are not recognized as partners in the provision of public services.

Recommendations:

- A separate legal status should be defined for social cooperatives (e.g., “Community Benefit Cooperatives”).
- Municipalities supporting social cooperatives should receive incentive funds from the central budget.
- Public financial incentives such as tax reductions, social security premium support, and discounts on utilities (electricity/water) should be introduced.
- Banks and development agencies should provide special low-interest credit packages for social cooperatives.
- Social cooperatives should be supported under public-private partnership (PPP) schemes.
- Performance-based funding models should be applied for cooperatives carrying out measurable social impact projects.

g. Marketing and Sales Challenges

Cooperative products are mostly marketed without branding, packaging, or added value; they face difficulties reaching target audiences. Due to intermediaries, cooperatives lose revenue, and the transition to e-commerce remains limited. For women’s cooperatives, logistics—particularly shipping—constitutes a critical challenge, since most cannot secure large-scale logistics agreements. Consequently, per-product shipping costs increase, forcing them to raise prices and lose competitiveness.

Recommendations:

- A joint branding and labeling system should be established for cooperative products (e.g., “Women’s Cooperatives Brand”).
- Digital store infrastructures and e-commerce consultancy should be provided to cooperatives.
- Municipalities and public institutions should guarantee procurement of cooperative products.
- Cooperative fairs and markets should be organized for product promotion.
- Discounted bulk-shipping agreements should be negotiated for women’s cooperatives by the Ministry of Trade or local municipalities.
- Regional distribution centers or micro-logistics networks should be established to deliver small producers’ goods to urban markets at lower costs.

h. Supply Chain and Integration Challenges

Women’s and social cooperatives often operate alone at different stages such as raw material access, intermediate production, and final product delivery. They cannot integrate into larger production networks and fail to achieve economies of scale. Cooperation with other cooperatives is weak, and integration into sectoral networks is insufficient.

Recommendations:

- Joint production and supply unions should be established among cooperatives.
- Vertical integration projects in sectors such as agriculture, textiles, and food (where cooperatives at different stages form a production chain) should be supported.
- Development agencies should provide logistics and technical infrastructure investments for these unions.
- Procurement protocols should be established to include cooperatives in public procurement chains.

i. New-Generation Cooperative Approaches

Traditional cooperative structures cannot adapt to fields such as digital transformation, platform economy, climate-friendly production, and social innovation. Young people often perceive the cooperative model as outdated and distant from technology-based solutions.

Recommendations:

- Training on digital tools, platform cooperativism, and social media should be provided for new-generation cooperatives.
- Youth cooperative entrepreneurship should be supported, and “social cooperative clubs” should be established in universities.
- Cooperatives focusing on sustainability should receive special incentives in areas such as carbon footprint reduction, recycling, and renewable energy.
- Campus cooperatives should be encouraged to meet university students’ basic needs such as housing, transportation, and food. Campus cooperatives are essential in enabling students to generate social impact and acquire entrepreneurial skills.
- In Türkiye, cooperatives are often perceived as limited to agriculture and women’s labor, whereas campus cooperatives could transform this structure into an innovative and digital model. Globally, student cooperatives are widespread in universities (e.g., in the United States, Canada, Italy). The development of this model in Türkiye would also ensure alignment with global education and social economy norms.

CONCLUSION

The workshop “New Trends in Turkish Cooperatives in the 2025 International Year of Cooperatives” comprehensively evaluated the current state of the cooperative movement in Türkiye and provided significant findings and recommendations to support its development. Thanks to its wide range of participants, diverse experiences and perspectives were brought together, enabling an in-depth discussion on the current situation of women’s cooperatives, social cooperatives, and new-generation cooperatives, the key challenges they face, possible solutions, and international trends in the cooperative field.

The following key outcomes and recommendations emerged from the workshop:

1. The need to restructure the existing legal framework in the field of cooperatives was strongly emphasized. A clear and inclusive legal status should be created, particularly to meet the different needs of women’s and social cooperatives, and high-level coordination mechanisms should be established to ensure effective cooperation among all relevant ministries.

2. To address the problem of informal employment, innovative solutions such as micro-employment models, flexible social security contributions, and incentives specific to women's labor were proposed. In addition, the legal distinction between cooperative members and employees should be clarified, and practical guidelines should be prepared on this matter.
3. To enhance promotion and awareness-raising in the cooperative field, nationwide media campaigns should be conducted, collaboration with educational institutions (universities and high schools) should be strengthened, and successful cooperative models should be made more visible through digital storytelling. In particular, social cooperative clubs and educational programs should be established on university campuses to attract young people.
4. To improve the sustainability of women's cooperatives, inter-cooperative networks should be strengthened, professional management and financial sustainability trainings should be organized, long-term infrastructural support should be provided by local administrations, and mentoring systems should be developed.
5. To strengthen gender equality, environmental support services (such as childcare, transportation, and caregiving services) should be provided to facilitate women's active participation in production processes. Leadership trainings and academies should be established to increase women's representation in management positions, and incentives promoting positive discrimination should be applied.
6. For the development of social cooperatives, a separate legal status should be created, and public incentives, financial supports, and financing tools specific to social cooperatives should be developed. In addition, municipalities and public institutions should provide incentive funds and low-interest loans to support social cooperative projects.
7. To address marketing and sales challenges, joint branding and certification systems should be established for cooperatives, and digital stores and e-commerce infrastructures should be developed. Furthermore, collective shipping agreements, regional distribution centers, and micro-logistics networks should be introduced to reduce costs.
8. To strengthen cooperatives' supply chains and sectoral integration, joint production and supply unions should be formed, vertical integration projects within sectors should be encouraged, and cooperatives should be integrated into public procurement chains.
9. To foster new-generation cooperative approaches, training and incentive programs should be developed in digital transformation, platform cooperativism, and youth entrepreneurship. Campus cooperatives should be encouraged to meet the basic needs of university students, thereby enabling them to both create social impact and gain entrepreneurial skills.

In conclusion, the workshop clearly demonstrated the importance of strong cooperation among the public sector, private sector, academia, and civil society for the transformation of the cooperative movement in Türkiye. It was emphasized that participants must act with a shared will and solidarity to implement the proposed recommendations. In this respect, under the leadership of CIRIEC Türkiye, platforms should be established where relevant stakeholders can come together regularly, and efforts to ensure the sustainability of the cooperative movement in Türkiye's social and economic development should be further strengthened