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17. November 2025

Consultation on ICA Statement on the Cooperative Identity

Dear Alexandra Wilson,

Dear members of the Advisory Group,

We would like to thank the Advisory Group for its work so far and for giving us the opportunity to comment on the second draft. As an associate member of the International Cooperative Alliance, we would like to participate in the consultation. We have more than 600 cooperatives members, with a strong focus on food and housing.

Our comments are based on extensive discussions with our member cooperatives, with a focus on cooperatives that are organisations of consumers.

First of all, we would like to emphasise that we support the goal of modernising the language. The principles are recognised throughout the world, so it should be our common goal to carefully consider any changes and, where possible, to clarify the Guidance Notes.

Our comments and notes are as follows:

Definition

No comment

Values

We expressly welcome the fact that the multi-generational perspective of cooperatives has now been explicitly incorporated into the identity. Many of our member cooperatives are 140 years old, so this aspect is part of our DNA. Nevertheless, we would suggest focusing not only on social and

environmental responsibility, but on sustainability itself, as multi-generational work requires not only environmental and social responsibility, but also economic sustainability.

1. Principle

In principle, the issue of discrimination on any kind is a welcome clarification. At the same time, there is a fear that this could also include political views. Anyone who openly pursues right-wing extremist (nationalist/racist) views is not welcome in every cooperative. Cooperatives must be able to reject members if they do not fit into the (internal) community.

There are also cooperatives with limited resources (jobs in workers' cooperatives and flats in housing cooperatives). Here, it must not be implied that there is a legal right to a membership.

In this respect, we would suggest that cooperatives be able to regulate the rules for open membership in their statutes.

2. Principle

The principle of one member, one vote – regardless of capital – is a very important principle that should not be touched at its core.

Nevertheless, there are now cooperative models in which voting rights are arranged differently. This applies in particular to multi-stakeholder cooperatives, in which the voting rights of the different groups are balanced. Whenever consumers form cooperatives with other groups (e.g. producers or employees), this makes sense, as otherwise the numerically largest group of consumers could always dominate the others in a pure one-person-one-vote system.

In addition, there are now members in Germany who only support the cooperative with capital but have no interest in using it. To prevent them from changing the business policy to the disadvantage of the using members, their voting rights are restricted (up to and including exclusion from voting). Here, too, there is a group of members who are treated differently, taking into account the overall structure of the cooperative.

We therefore suggest that such cooperatives (cooperatives with different member groups) be included in the last sentence. This would reflect modern practice and the members would have control over the details of the statutes themselves.

3. Principle

The list of possible member groups should not be exhaustive, but rather provide examples. From a German perspective, 'community members' would not be a separate category, as we believe that it is not the place of residence that matters, but rather the usage of services. Legal entities (such as cooperatives) are also missing from the list.

The equal allocation of capital is also regulated differently in Germany. In principle, the idea that all members participate equally makes sense in order to prevent informal power structures. Nevertheless, there are cooperatives (e.g. housing cooperatives) in which participation is related to capital in relation to use. Those who use a larger flat contribute more capital.

In addition, there is the principle of solidarity, whereby financially stronger members support other members by contributing additional shares.

In this respect, we suggest that this aspect be included in such a way that the rules of capital participation can be regulated by membership (according to objective criteria?).

4. Principle

No comment

5. Principle

The change from 'development' to 'success' of the cooperative has been intensively discussed. The goal of a cooperative is not (primarily) financial success, but rather to support its members in the best possible way. In this respect, consideration should be given to focusing the formulation of goals more on promoting the interests of members than on (financial) success. Of course, cooperatives must be financially successful, but this serves the cooperative goals, as described in Principle 3, and is not an goal in itself.

6. Principle

We expressly welcome the fact that (business) cooperation between cooperatives is now explicitly mentioned in the principle. However, we would suggest that the goals of this cooperation be reconsidered. When a cooperative bank and a consumer cooperative have a business relationship, this is done to support their own goals – it is not necessary to define a new common goal here.

7. Principle

This principle is one that repeatedly causes major debate in Germany, as it breaks through the actual circle of beneficiaries and focuses on the general public in addition to the members.

The first part of the sentence could now be interpreted to mean that all cooperatives pursue 'responsible business' and that members can 'only' influence "policies". From a German perspective, the voluntary nature of the positive effects should be emphasised even more strongly. Cooperatives often have indirect positive effects on the community. However, they can also consciously and deliberately amplify these effects. Whether this happens – and to what extent – should not be predetermined, but should be decided by each cooperative individually.

We also encourage further work on the text with regard to the 'goals'.

The definition of 'community' is to be welcomed, as it strengthens the regional character of the work of cooperatives. However, this contradicts the target group of positive effects, as it now refers to 'all' (everyone / globally). This general (global) reference and the stated objectives ('peaceful, just and environmentally') are not only very ambitious for locally active cooperatives, but also overwhelming. We therefore suggest returning to the (positive) development of the (local) communities.

As the United Nations has now recognised cooperatives twice with the slogan 'Cooperatives build a better world', this aspect could be included here, namely that cooperatives contribute to making the world a better place within the framework of the decisions taken by their members.

We hope that our suggestions and comments will contribute to the further development of the Coop Identity. If you require further information on any aspect of our statement, please do not hesitate to contact us – we are happy to answer any questions you may have.

With cooperative regards

Zentralverband deutscher
Konsumgenossenschaften e.V.

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