



International
Labour
Office



STATISTICS ON COOPERATIVES

COUNTRY IN FOCUS: UNITED KINGDOM¹

This is one of the notes prepared for the **Countries in Focus on Statistics of Cooperatives series** produced by the *International Labour Organization (ILO)* and the *Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC)* as part of a larger initiative to increase understanding of the ways in which countries around the world are producing and using statistics on cooperatives. Currently reliable and comparable statistics on cooperatives are missing in most countries of the world. These statistics are essential to measuring the impact of cooperatives on members, workers and the economy as a whole.

Cooperatives in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom presents a unique case for statistics on cooperatives. First, the UK has a long history of cooperatives, dating back to 1761 with the Fenwick Weavers' Society, followed by the establishment of the first modern cooperative in 1844. Second, the UK does not have a legal definition for what constitutes a cooperative, resulting in the absence of official statistics.

How are statistics on cooperatives generated in the United Kingdom?

Without a legal definition, **Co-operatives UK**—the national apex organisation representing cooperatives—is the primary source of cooperative-related data. Co-operatives UK defines cooperatives based on a combination of legal and policy variables. Legally, Co-operatives UK uses the 2014 Cooperatives Act and the registration guidance of the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). The former focuses on whether the organisation pursues profit while the latter focuses on the organisation's governance and ownership structure. Co-operatives UK also defines community benefit societies as cooperatives in cases when the identity policy is met.

Co-operatives UK combines statistics from an administrative database with an annual member survey. The database is updated to include new information, corrected for duplicate data and differentiated between dormant or dissolved organisations. Co-operatives UK also conducts an annual survey—referred to as **'The Co-operative Economy'**—with the express purpose of improving awareness of the cooperative environment and understanding cooperative needs. The most recent survey conducted in 2016 was open to the public, and the results are **available online**.

¹ The information is extracted from Carini, C., Borzaga, C. & Carpita, M. (2017) *Case studies on Brazil, Canada, Colombia, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom*. Geneva: ILO.





What statistics are available in the United Kingdom?

Co-operatives UK's database includes: 1) annual returns submitted to the FCA and the Companies House, 2) statements of accounts published on cooperatives' websites, 3) Department of Education data on cooperative school finances, 4) Prudential Regulation Authority data on credit union finances and 5) data from federal and other collaborating organisations.

Co-operatives UK annually issues a publication synthesising information from the database. The report covers the number of cooperatives, number of members, number of employees and sector of economic activity. Co-operatives UK also publishes **three datasets** containing cooperative organisations, economic data and outlets. The cooperative organisation and economic datasets capture general organisational and financial information respectively, including company location, legal classification, administrative area, profit before tax, turnover rate and member/shareholder funds.

In addition, the outlet data includes disclosures for the outlet.

Reflections on the United Kingdom's approach to cooperative statistics

Without a legal definition for cooperatives and a subsequent lack of official statistics, the UK relies on Co-operatives UK for a definition, data collection and analysis. Co-operatives UK's use of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) for sectors of economic activity allows for comparison with cooperatives in other parts of the world. The annually updated statistics combine survey results with database information to provide opportunities for qualitative analysis.

Statistics from the UK cover a wide range of variables and are accessible online in English. However, limiting access to data from only 'the most recent available year' can create obstacles in comparing economic variables, members and employees.

The 19th Session of the **International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS)** in 2013 included cooperatives in the Conference agenda for the first time in its history. The discussion converged towards the need for accurate, reliable, relevant and comparable statistics on the economic and social impact of cooperatives on the economies. A Resolution was passed with a view to carry out further developmental work on the measurement of cooperatives and carry out pilot studies in a number of countries to test various measurement approaches on collecting data on cooperatives.

The initiative on statistics on cooperatives is a collaboration between the ILO, COPAC, the cooperative movement, UN agencies, national statistics offices, government agencies and academic institutions to improve the quality and accessibility of statistical data on cooperatives. The outcome of this work will be guidelines for discussion at the 20th ICLS in October 2018.

COPAC is a multi-stakeholder partnership of global public and private institutions that promotes and advocates for people-centred, self-sustaining cooperative enterprises, guided by the principles of economic, social and environmental sustainable development. The current members of COPAC are the ILO, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Co-operative Alliance and the World Farmers' Organisation.

To find out more, please visit the **ILO COOP**, **ILO Department of Statistics** or **COPAC websites**.

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