



# Practitioner's Knowledge Kit: Digital & Green Transition in Agri-Food Cooperatives

TÜRKİYE CUMHURİYETİ  
DIŞİŞLERİ BAKANLIĞI  
AVRUPA BİRLİĞİ BAŞKANLIĞI



REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE  
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
DIRECTORATE FOR EU AFFAIRS



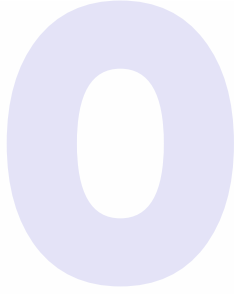
TÜRKİYE ULUSAL AJANSI  
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# How to Use This Kit

## Purpose

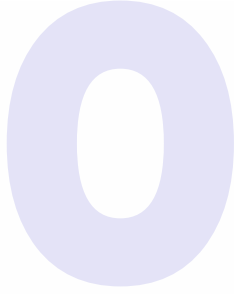
This Practitioner's Knowledge Kit has been developed as a **practical tool to support young people and cooperative actors** in understanding, planning, implementing, managing, and advocating for **digital and green transitions in agri-food cooperatives**.

Rather than offering abstract theory or purely technical guidance, the kit focuses on **real cooperative challenges and opportunities**, helping users translate broad policy goals and innovation trends into **concrete actions at cooperative level**. Digitalisation and sustainability are treated not as ends in themselves, but as **means to strengthen cooperatives**, improve working and living conditions in agriculture, and make the sector more attractive and viable for younger generations.

At its core, this kit aims to:

- help young cooperators **make sense of digital and green transition pathways** in the agri-food sector;
- provide **practical guidance** on how to design, roll out, monitor and adapt transition processes inside cooperatives;
- support young people in taking an **active role as change agents**, rather than passive recipients of innovation;
- offer tools to **advocate for inclusive, human-centred and cooperative-driven transitions** within their organisations and territories.

The kit is grounded in the experience of agri-food cooperatives and ecosystems in **Spain, Italy and Türkiye**, and builds on mapped good practices, lessons learned and policy frameworks at European and national level. While rooted in these three contexts, the approaches and tools proposed are designed to be **transferable and adaptable** to other cooperative realities.



# How to Use This Kit

## Who This Kit Is For

This Knowledge Kit is primarily addressed to:

- **young cooperators**, including members, workers, and young people interested in joining or shaping agri-food cooperatives;
- **cooperative managers and leaders** who want to involve younger generations in digital and green transition strategies;
- **trainers, facilitators and educators** working with cooperatives, youth groups and rural organisations;
- **youth organisations and cooperative associations** engaged in advocacy, capacity-building and strategic planning.

Although developed within the framework of the Youth4Coops Erasmus+ project, the kit is intentionally inclusive and can be used by **mixed-age and intergenerational groups**, reflecting the cooperative principle of democratic participation and shared responsibility.

## How This Kit Can Be Used

The kit is designed as a **flexible and modular resource**, which can be used in different ways depending on needs and contexts:

- **For self-learning**, allowing young cooperators to explore key concepts, reflect on their own cooperative experience, and identify possible entry points for action.
- **In training workshops**, as a structured learning pathway for group sessions, peer-to-peer learning, and facilitated discussions on digital and green transition.
- **For strategic reflection inside cooperatives or associations**, supporting boards, management teams and youth groups in assessing current practices, identifying gaps, and co-designing future strategies.

Users are encouraged to **adapt the content**, select relevant sections, and combine the tools and questions provided with their own local knowledge. The kit does not propose a single model of transition but invites cooperatives and young people to **build their own pathways**, rooted in cooperative values, territorial needs and shared visions for sustainable futures.

# Methodology

This Practitioner's Knowledge Kit is the result of a **participatory, practice-oriented and cooperative-based methodology**, designed to ensure relevance, usability and transferability for young people and agri-food cooperatives in **Italy, Spain and Türkiye**.

## Mapping of Best Practices in Three Countries

The starting point of the kit is a **comparative mapping of good practices** on digital and green transition in agri-food cooperatives carried out in the three partner countries. The mapping focused on cooperatives and cooperative-related initiatives that are already experimenting with digital tools, sustainability measures, or integrated “twin transition” approaches.

Across the three country reports, several **common constraints** emerged:

- ageing farmer populations and difficulties in generational renewal;
- limited digital skills and uneven access to technology, especially in rural areas;
- high upfront investment costs and uncertainty about returns;
- fragmentation of farms and supply chains, which limits individual capacity to innovate;
- regulatory pressure perceived as a burden rather than an opportunity.

At the same time, the mapping highlighted important **opportunities**:

- digital tools can reduce workload, improve decision-making and increase transparency;
- green practices can lower costs over time, improve resilience to climate change and strengthen market positioning;
- diversification (energy, processing, services, tourism) opens new roles beyond traditional farming;

young people are often more comfortable with digital tools and sustainability narratives



*The future of agri-food cooperatives will not be built by technology alone, but by people – and young people in particular – who can connect innovation, sustainability and cooperation.*

## Methodology

The analysis shows that **cooperatives are particularly well positioned to respond to these challenges**, as they can pool resources, spread risks, provide technical support, ensure inclusion of members with different skills, and embed innovation within democratic governance structures. This makes cooperatives a key lever for ensuring that digital and green transitions are **collective, fair and socially sustainable**, rather than exclusionary.

### Alignment with EU Policy Frameworks

The kit is framed within key **European Union policy orientations**, which provide both strategic direction and practical justification for action at cooperative level.

- The **European Green Deal** and the **Farm to Fork Strategy** emphasise sustainable food systems, reduced environmental impacts, resource efficiency, and fair value distribution along the chain.
- The **Digital Decade** highlights the importance of digital skills, connectivity, data-driven innovation and human-centred digitalisation, including in rural and agricultural contexts.

Rather than reproducing policy language, the kit translates these frameworks into **practical implications for cooperatives and young people**, showing how EU priorities can become opportunities for cooperative development, youth engagement and territorial resilience.

### Cooperative Values and Principles as a Guiding Lens

All content has been interpreted and adapted through the lens of **cooperative identity, values and principles**—such as democratic member control, education and training, cooperation among cooperatives, and concern for community. This ensures that digital and green transition is not treated as a purely technical process, but as a **cultural and organisational transformation** consistent with the cooperative model.

### A Participatory and Practice-Based Approach

Finally, the kit has been conceived as a **living and collective product**. Its structure, questions and tools were developed with the intention of being **tested, discussed and refined together with young cooperators**. In particular, the kit was designed to be co-developed and validated during a joint workshop involving **30 young cooperators from Spain, Italy and Türkiye**, creating a shared learning space across countries.

For this reason, the kit places strong emphasis on:

- practical questions rather than prescriptive answers;
- tools and reflection frameworks;
- real cases instead of abstract models.

The methodology reflects a core conviction: **young cooperators learn best by connecting experience, dialogue and action**, and digital and green transitions are most effective when they are built together.

# How Can Young Cooperators Build Communities Around Transition?

## SESSION OBJECTIVES

During this session, by answering and discussing together the answers, youth could:

- understand **transition as a process**, not a one-off project;
- identify **real cooperative needs** linked to digital and green change;
- practice **co-designing transition steps**;
- strengthen confidence in their **role as young co-designers**, not only users.

Questions on Mentimeter: <https://www.menti.com/ale5grpepvce>

- What is for you Digital & Green Transition? (WorldCloud)
- Why digital and green transition matter for Cooperators? (Open question)
- How do you imagine the digital & green transition in an agricultural cooperatives? Surely, you can imagine or refers to the case of your cooperatives or not. (Open question)
- How the transition can be linked to the cooperative principles? to ensure diversity, inclusion and human-centered nature of transition without any exclusion.. (Open question)
- Think about the constraints... Identify 2-3 real problems that a cooperative/association could encounter in the digital & Green transition? (Open question)
- Think about the solutions... Identify 2-3 possible solutions that a cooperative/association could propose and adapt in the own digital & Green transition strategy? (Open question)
- In your experience, cooperatives are currently...(Multiple choice)
- What should cooperatives do MORE or LESS to support young people in the transition? (Open question)



# Plan, roll out, monitor and manage the transition in line with the cooperative identity

## Exercise 3.1: Design the Transition Together

Each group fills in a Transition Co-Design Canvas:

- *Goal: What do we want to improve?*
- *Who decides? (board, members, youth group, mixed)*
- *Who needs to be involved from the start?*
- *What knowledge is missing?*
- *What could go wrong if youth are not involved?*



Question on Mentimeter:

### Mentimeter Check-in (Poll)

*In your cooperative today, young people are involved in planning transitions...(Multiple choice)*

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always



### Question on Mentimeter

*When your cooperative evaluates a project, what is usually measured? (Multiple choice)*

Options:

- Costs
- Productivity
- Compliance
- Environmental impact
- Member satisfaction
- Youth involvement
- Nothing / unclear



*What Should We Really Monitor? (Multiple choice) choose 1 indicator, or propose more:*

- Economic
- Environmental
- Social / youth-related

## Exercise 3.2 : Groups imagine the first 6 months of implementation and answer:

1. What is the first small step? (pilot, test, training)
2. Who supports members during change?
3. What skills are needed?
4. What resistance might appear?
5. How do we avoid excluding older or less digital members?

### Role-play twist

Each group must assign: one young cooperator, one senior member, one manager or technician. They must explain the plan from all three perspectives.



# Youth Perspectives on Digital & Green Transition in Cooperatives

## *A workshop involving youth cooperators from Italy, Spain and Türkiye to imagine the Digital & Green Transition*

This section presents key insights from a participatory workshop conducted within the Youth4Coops project, involving **28 cooperative members** from: Italy (6 participants), Spain (12 participants), Türkiye (10 participants).

The exercise aimed to capture **youth and practitioner perspectives** on digital and green transitions in agri-food cooperatives, focusing on perceptions, challenges, opportunities and practical solutions.

### How Participants Understand the Transition

Participants associate digital and green transition with a combination of:

- **Sustainability and environmental responsibility**
- **Modernization and innovation**
- **Efficiency and productivity improvements**
- **Future-oriented change**
- **Administrative complexity (bureaucracy)**

**Key insight:** While the transition is widely recognized as necessary, it is also perceived as **complex and burdened by bureaucracy**, which can discourage engagement—especially among young people.

### Why Young People Should Engage

Participants identified several strong motivations:

- Improving **economic efficiency** and reducing costs
- Increasing **market competitiveness**
- Strengthening **long-term resilience** of cooperatives
- Supporting **environmental sustainability**
- Enabling **generational renewal in agriculture**

### Takeaway for young cooperators:

Digital and green transition is not only about environmental responsibility—it is a **strategic opportunity to reshape the future of cooperatives** and create space for new roles, skills, and leadership.

### What we should really monitor?



Environment



Economy



Social & Youth Members Engagement

#### The Current Role of Cooperatives

Most participants see cooperatives as **potential drivers of transition, but not yet fully active.**

Fewer respondents consider them already leading, while a small minority see them as obstacles. There is **untapped potential**: cooperatives are trusted structures, but often lack the **capacity, vision, or tools** to lead transformation.

#### Youth Involvement: Still Limited

Young people are **present but not empowered**—they are not systematically involved in decision-making processes.

#### What Cooperatives Measure vs What They Should Measure

The workshop results highlight a clear imbalance in how cooperatives currently assess their performance. Most participants reported that **evaluation systems are still heavily focused on**

**economic indicators, with costs being the dominant metric.** To a lesser extent, cooperatives also consider member satisfaction and, more occasionally, productivity.

However, this approach appears increasingly insufficient in the context of digital and green transitions. Participants emphasized that several crucial dimensions are still largely overlooked. In particular, environmental impact, youth involvement, and broader social engagement are rarely monitored in a structured way. Even compliance indicators, which are becoming more relevant in sustainability frameworks, are often absent.

When asked what should be measured, participants pointed toward a more balanced and forward-looking system. They stressed the importance of integrating economic performance with environmental sustainability and social dimensions, including the active participation of young members. Overall, the discussion revealed a significant gap between current practices—still rooted in a narrow economic perspective—and a desired approach that embraces a more holistic sustainability framework.

## Main Barriers to Transition

Participants identified a wide range of barriers that go beyond purely technical challenges. These obstacles can be grouped into structural, human, and territorial dimensions, all of which interact and reinforce each other.

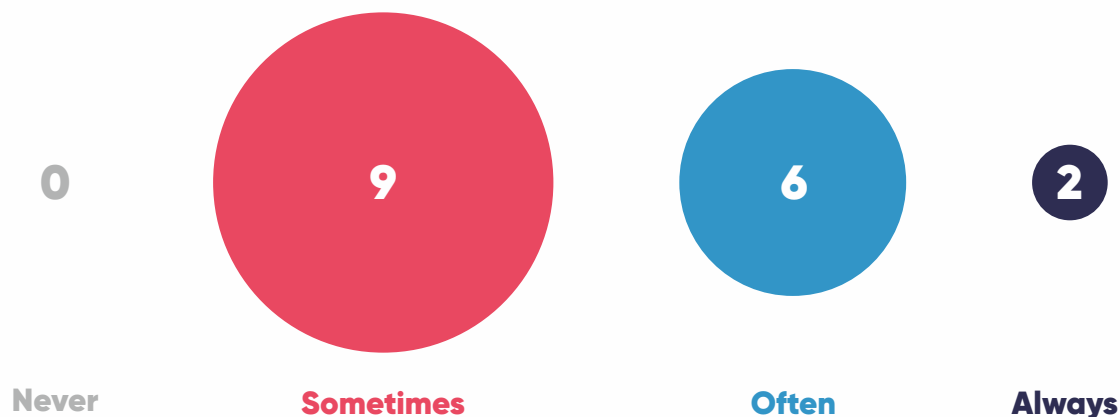
From a structural perspective, one of the most frequently mentioned issues is the high upfront **cost associated with digital and green innovations**. This is compounded by **bureaucratic complexity and regulatory constraints**, which often make access to funding both difficult and time-consuming. Limited financial resources further constrain the ability of cooperatives to invest in long-term transformation.

At the same time, human and cultural factors play a decisive role. Many participants pointed to low levels of digital skills among farmers, which hinder the adoption of new technologies. In addition, resistance to change, particularly among older generations, creates internal friction within cooperatives. This is often linked to a lack of training opportunities and insufficient awareness of the benefits of transition.

**Territorial disparities also emerged as a significant challenge.** In many rural areas, the digital divide remains a major barrier, with limited infrastructure and connectivity restricting access to digital tools and services.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the transition is not simply a matter of introducing new technologies. Rather, it is a deeply human and systemic process, requiring coordinated action across economic, social, and institutional dimensions.

**In your cooperative/association today, young people are involved in planning transitions?**



**Solutions Proposed by Participants**

In response to these challenges, participants proposed a range of solutions that reflect a comprehensive and integrated approach to transition.

On the technological side, there is strong interest in **advancing the digitalization of administrative processes**, reducing paperwork and **improving efficiency**. Participants also highlighted the potential of innovative tools, such as artificial intelligence, drones, and precision agriculture technologies, to enhance productivity and sustainability. The development of digital platforms within cooperatives was seen as a key step to improve management, communication, and transparency.

However, technology alone is not sufficient. A central theme emerging from the discussion is the **need for capacity-building**. Participants stressed the importance of training programs, awareness-raising activities, and **opportunities for peer learning and**

**knowledge exchange**. Strengthening human capital is seen as essential to ensure that innovations are effectively adopted and managed.

Governance also plays a crucial role. Many participants emphasized the **need to involve young people more actively in decision-making processes, moving toward more inclusive and participatory models**. This includes creating space for empowerment strategies and adopting bottom-up approaches that reflect the needs and perspectives of cooperative members.

Finally, economic support mechanisms are considered indispensable. Suggested measures include targeted incentives for young farmers, simplified access to finance, and the creation of new job opportunities within cooperatives.

Overall, the proposed solutions highlight that a successful transition requires a combination of technological innovation, skill development, and governance transformation.

## What Cooperatives Should Do More (and Less)

The discussion also provided clear indications of how cooperatives should adapt their strategies and practices.

Participants expressed a strong demand for increasing efforts in several key areas. First and foremost, cooperatives should actively **involve young people in governance**, ensuring that their perspectives and skills contribute to strategic decisions. There is also a need **to invest more in education and training**, enabling members to develop the competences required for digital and green transition. In addition, participants highlighted the importance of **recognizing and valuing youth skills**, particularly in relation to innovation and new technologies. Providing **economic incentives and strengthening collaboration and community-building were also identified as critical actions**.

At the same time, cooperatives are encouraged to reduce practices that hinder change. This includes minimizing bureaucratic procedures, moving away from top-down decision-making models, and addressing resistance to innovation within the organization.

These reflections point toward a broader transformation: cooperatives need to become more inclusive, flexible, and youth-driven, while maintaining their collective identity.

## Linking Transition to Cooperative Principles

An important outcome of the workshop is the strong alignment identified between digital and green transition and the cooperative principles in line with the cooperative identity.

Participants consistently linked the transition to principles such as democratic participation, inclusion and equity, transparency,

and shared responsibility. The idea of community-led development also emerged as central, reinforcing the role of cooperatives as locally rooted actors capable of driving change.

Furthermore, the transition was associated with the responsible use of resources and long-term sustainability, which are already embedded in cooperative thinking.

This suggests that digital and green transition should not be seen as an external or imposed process. Rather, it represents a **natural evolution of cooperative identity**, building on existing values while adapting them to contemporary challenges.

## Cross-Country Insights

Despite the diversity of contexts, participants from Italy, Spain, and Türkiye showed a remarkable degree of convergence in their perspectives.

Across all three countries, **bureaucracy was identified as a major barrier**, alongside the **lack of digital skills and the need for greater youth involvement**. Participants also shared a strong awareness of the importance of sustainability and resilience as guiding principles for the future of cooperatives.

While some differences in emphasis emerged, such as a stronger focus on employment in Spain, governance issues in Italy, and training needs in Türkiye—the overall picture is one of shared challenges and common priorities.

This convergence suggests that the digital and green transition of cooperatives is not only a local issue, but a shared European and international challenge, requiring coordinated and collaborative responses.

## Practical Implications for Young Cooperators

Based on the workshop, young cooperators can:

- Take initiative:** Propose pilot projects (digital tools, sustainable practices)
- Build alliances:** Engage peers and create communities of practice
- Advocate for change:** Push for inclusion in governance structures
- Develop skills:** Invest in digital, environmental, and management competences
- Use the cooperative model strategically:** Leverage collective action to reduce risks and costs

## Key Messages

- ✓ Digital and green transition is **necessary, but not yet fully operational** in cooperatives
- ✓ Youth are **essential actors**, but still underrepresented in decision-making
- ✓ The biggest challenges are **not only technical, but cultural and institutional**
- ✓ The transition aligns strongly with **cooperative values and principles**
- ✓ Success requires a **holistic approach: technology + people + governance**

This is a reporting of the Youth4Coops workshop, now let's propose it in *your cooperative*.



You may use and adapt, this exercise within your network of youth cooperator to imagine the Digital & Green transition.

<https://www.menti.com/ale5grpepvce>



## The Canvas to design the Digital & Green Transition

The **Transition Planning Canvas** is designed as a **simple but powerful collective tool** to help cooperatives—and especially young cooperators—**make sense of, imagine, and structure their digital and green transition pathways.**

Too often, transition is perceived as something abstract, technical, or externally imposed: a new regulation to comply with, a technology to adopt, or a project driven by funding opportunities. In this context, the Canvas helps shift the perspective. It invites cooperatives to **start from their own reality**—their challenges, their people, their values—and to build a transition that is **owned, shared, and meaningful.**

### Why it is useful

First, the Canvas helps **turn complexity into clarity.** Digital and green transitions involve many dimensions—economic, environmental, social, technological—and can easily feel overwhelming. By breaking the process into clear steps (challenge, purpose, people, actions, risks, monitoring, governance), the Canvas allows members to **see the whole picture while working on concrete elements.**

Second, it supports **collective thinking and dialogue.** In cooperatives, transition cannot be designed by one person alone. It requires discussion between different actors: young and senior members, managers, technicians, and sometimes external partners. The Canvas creates a **shared space for conversation**, where different perspectives can emerge, be confronted, and be aligned. This is particularly important for young people, who often have ideas and skills but lack structured opportunities to contribute to decision-making.

Third, it reinforces a **human-centred and inclusive approach.** By explicitly asking questions such as “who is involved?”, “who might be left behind?”, and “what is the role of young people?”, the Canvas helps ensure that transition is not only efficient, but also **fair and cooperative in nature.** It reflects the idea that innovation should strengthen the cooperative, not create new inequalities within it.

Finally, it connects transition to **cooperative identity and long-term vision.** The final reflection—on how the transition strengthens cooperative values—ensures that digital and green changes are not disconnected from the cooperative’s mission, but rather contribute to its sustainability, resilience, and relevance for future generations.

# The Canvas to design the Digital & Green Transition

## How it can be used as a collective exercise

The Canvas is most effective when used as a **participatory exercise among members**, and especially within **networks of young cooperators**.

For example, it can be used:

- during a **youth meeting inside a cooperative**, where young members work together to identify key challenges and propose initial transition ideas;
- in a **mixed workshop with different generations**, using the Canvas to facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding;
- within a **network of young cooperators across different cooperatives**, allowing participants to compare experiences, share ideas, and co-develop solutions;

- as part of a **strategic reflection process**, where the results of the Canvas are brought to the board or management as structured input from youth.

In practice, small groups can fill in the Canvas together, discuss each section, and then present their results to others. This process not only generates concrete ideas, but also builds **ownership, confidence, and a sense of agency among young cooperators**.

In this way, the Transition Planning Canvas becomes more than a tool: it becomes a **learning process and a space for empowerment**, where young people can actively contribute to shaping the future of their cooperatives—making digital and green transition not something that happens to them, but something they **co-create together**.

# Conclusions & Considerations

This Practitioner's Knowledge Kit has explored the digital and green transition of agri-food cooperatives not as a purely technological shift, but as a **collective transformation process**, deeply rooted in people, governance, and cooperative identity. Drawing on experiences from Italy, Spain, and Türkiye, as well as on participatory insights from young cooperators, several key conclusions emerge.

## Transition is not optional—it is structural!

Across all contexts analysed, digitalisation and sustainability are no longer emerging trends but **structural drivers shaping the future of agriculture and food systems**. Climate change, market pressures, regulatory frameworks, and societal expectations are converging to make the transition unavoidable.



However, this kit highlights a crucial nuance: **transition is not only about adopting tools, but about redefining how cooperatives operate, create value, and engage with their members and territories.**

The mapping of practices confirms that **cooperatives are uniquely positioned, but not yet fully mobilised**, cooperatives have strong comparative advantages, as the ability to **pool resources and reduce risks**, capacity to **support members with different skills**, embeddedness in local communities and democratic governance structures.

These features make cooperatives ideal actors to ensure that transition is **inclusive, fair, and territorially rooted**.

Yet, there is still a gap between potential and reality. Many cooperatives:

- remain **reactive rather than strategic**
- struggle with **limited capacity and fragmented approaches**
- have not fully integrated digital and green transition into their **core governance and business models**

A consistent finding across countries and workshop results is that the **real challenge is human, not technological**:

- lack of **digital and green skills**
- resistance to change
- **weak intergenerational dialogue**
- limited access to training and support
- governance structures that do not fully include youth

This confirms a central message of the kit:

*the transition is deeply human and systemic, not just technical*



# Conclusions & Considerations

Technology can enable change, but **people determine whether it succeeds or fails.**

*The paradox: those most capable of driving transition are not yet fully empowered to do so.*

Young people emerge throughout the toolkit as more open to innovation and sustainability and more comfortable with digital tools as well the most motivated actors to reshape agriculture into a meaningful and viable life project. At the same time, youth remain:

- **underrepresented in decision-making**
- often confined to operational roles rather than strategic ones
- insufficiently supported through structured pathways

Unlocking this potential requires moving from “youth participation” to **youth co-leadership.**

The experiences analysed clearly show that **no single solution is sufficient.** Effective transition pathways combine:

- **technological innovation** (digital tools, precision agriculture, data systems)
- **capacity-building** (training, peer learning, advisory services)
- **inclusive governance** (participatory decision-making, intergenerational dialogue)
- **economic support** (access to finance, incentives, risk-sharing mechanisms)

Fragmented or purely technical approaches risk failure. Instead, cooperatives need to adopt **integrated strategies** that align people, tools, and purpose.

# Main Findings and Recommendations of the Toolkit

## Main Findings

### 1. What we measure shapes the transition

Current cooperative evaluation systems are still largely focused on economic indicators such as costs and productivity. However, the transition requires a broader perspective that also includes environmental impact, social value, and youth involvement. Without updating what is measured, it is difficult to drive real transformation.

### 2. Transition risks increasing inequalities if not managed carefully

Digital and green transitions can unintentionally exclude certain groups—particularly older members, small-scale farmers, women, and young people with limited access to resources. Inclusion is not automatic and must be actively designed and monitored.

### 3. Transition is an evolution of cooperative identity

Digitalisation and sustainability are not external impositions but are fully aligned with cooperative values such as democratic participation, education, solidarity, and concern for community. The transition represents an opportunity to renew and strengthen the cooperative model.

## Recommendations for cooperatives

### 1. Adopt holistic monitoring systems

Cooperatives should move beyond purely economic indicators and integrate environmental, social, and youth-related metrics into their evaluation frameworks, aligning with a more comprehensive vision of sustainability.

### 2. Embed transition within cooperative governance and values

Digital and green strategies should be fully integrated into cooperative identity and decision-making processes, reinforcing democratic participation, transparency, and long-term community impact. Beside, transition should be inclusive by ensuring that all members can participate in the transition by investing in training, providing tailored support, and adopting accessible technologies. Special attention should be given to reducing digital divides and structural inequalities.

### 3. Empower young cooperators as co-leaders of change

Create structured opportunities for youth involvement in governance, strategy, and innovation processes. Support youth with targeted training, mentorship, and spaces for experimentation and leadership.

### 4. Promote collective and participatory approaches

Transition should be co-designed through dialogue between different actors (young and senior members, managers, technicians, external partners), ensuring shared ownership and stronger implementation.



The success of the digital and green transition in cooperatives depends not only on technologies or investments, but on the ability to mobilise people, knowledge, and collective action.

Young cooperators, in particular, have the potential to bridge innovation, sustainability, and cooperation—transforming challenges into opportunities and ensuring that the cooperative model remains relevant, resilient, and future-oriented.



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