



International
Labour
Office

STATISTICS ON COOPERATIVES

COUNTRY IN FOCUS: COSTA RICA¹

copac Committee for
the promotion
and advancement
of cooperatives

This country in focus note is part of the **Statistics on Cooperatives series** produced by the *International Labour Organization (ILO)* and the *Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC)* in support 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 Costa Rica

The Costa Rican cooperative movement is one of the most developed in Central America, and cooperative structures to support the organization of farmers, workers and artisans have existed since the 19th century. In 1943, legislation on cooperatives was introduced with law 49 and the creation of the Department of Cooperatives by the **Banco Nacional de Costa Rica**² to organise and support agricultural and industrial production cooperatives.

Recognised in the Costa Rican Constitution as a means to ‘provide better living conditions for workers’,³ cooperatives are today governed by **law 4179**,⁴ which was enacted in 1968. Law 4179 sets out strict rules for the formation and operation of cooperatives and establishes the National Council of Cooperatives (**Consejo Nacional de Cooperativas, CONACCOOP**)⁵ and the National Institute of Cooperative Development (**Instituto Nacional de Fomento Cooperativo, INFOCOOP**)⁶ as the drivers of public policies on cooperatives. These agencies collaborate to promote, train and support cooperatives, as well as produce statistics on the movement.

The types of cooperatives under law 4179 include consumer, production, marketing, supply, savings and credit, housing, services, school, youth and transport. Two cooperative types are specifically defined in separate sections of the law: worker cooperatives (*cooperativas de autogestion*) and co-management cooperatives (*cooperativas de cogestion*).

How are statistics on cooperatives generated in Costa Rica?

The **Ministry of Labour and Social Security**⁷ is responsible for registering cooperatives, excluding school and student cooperatives, which are overseen by the **Ministry of Education**.⁸ INFOCOOP maintains a database of active and inactive cooperatives through its Department of Supervision.

The main source of statistics on cooperatives is the Cooperative Census undertaken by INFOCOOP. Information covers economic, financial, social, productive and administrative aspects, as well as the contribution of cooperatives to Costa Rican society. The Census is taken every four years, with the most recent in 2012 (the 2016 Census has been postponed). Data for this 4th Cooperative Census was collected from basic questionnaires sent to all cooperatives, specific questionnaires according to economic sector of activity (agriculture/hunting/forestry, industry, service, fishery,

1 The information for this note was extracted from Eum, H. (2017) *Conducting country case studies for advancing global statistical system on cooperatives: Spain, France, Italy, South Korea and Costa Rica*. Geneva: ILO.

2 <https://www.bncr.fi.cr/BNCR/Default.aspx>

3 Article 64 of the Constitución política de la República de Costa Rica (1949), available at <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Costa/costa2.html>

4 Ley 4179 de Asociaciones Cooperativas y Creación del INFOCOOP, available at http://www.infocoop.go.cr/cooperativismo/legislacion/ley_4179_conexas.pdf

5 <http://conacoop.coop>

6 <http://www.infocoop.go.cr>

7 <http://www.mtss.go.cr>

8 <http://www.mep.go.cr>



salt and housing). The service category includes financial, transport, energy and health services cooperatives. School and student cooperatives were contacted through phone interviews.

INFOCOOP completed the 4th Cooperative Census through a collaboration with the State of the Nation Programme (**Programa Estado de la Nación, PEN**)⁹ of the National Council of Rectors (**Consejo Nacional de Rectores, CONARE**),¹⁰ which is composed of Costa Rica's four public universities. PEN is a research and training programme on sustainable human development.

What statistics are available?

The registries maintained by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and INFOCOOP are not publicly available. The summarised results of the Cooperative Census are published on **INFOCOOP's website**.¹¹ The Census includes all core information recommended by the **Resolution concerning further work on statistics of cooperatives**,¹² adopted at the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, including data on number of cooperatives, principal economic activities, membership (gender disaggregated), governing bodies, employment (gender disaggregated and differentiated between member- and non-member workers), services to the community, financial information and information on cooperative strengths, weaknesses and future outlook.

There is no official statistical definition for cooperatives, so only cooperatives registered according to Law 4179 are covered in the Cooperative Census.

Reflections on the approach of Costa Rica to cooperative statistics

Costa Rica has embraced the suggestions of the 19th ICLS Resolution which has resulted in strong population coverage, representativeness, breadth of variables and accuracy. Though the Census uses the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) for cooperatives, comparability with data on other businesses is limited by the fact that the data are not drawn from the same database.

A nationwide statistical definition and legal form for cooperatives could be instrumental in improving the inclusion of cooperative data in the activities of the national statistics office (**Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, INEC**).¹³ Currently, cooperatives are mentioned in the National Household Survey, as an option in the question on affiliation with social organisations, and are part of the data collected on companies, though data are not disaggregated.

The 19th Session of the **International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS)**¹⁴ 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**¹⁵, **ILO Department of Statistics**¹⁶ or **COPAC** websites¹⁷.

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9 <http://www.estadonacion.or.cr>

10 <https://www.conare.ac.cr>

11 <http://www.infocoop.go.cr/cooperativismo/estadisticas.html>

12 http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/areas-of-work/WCMS_553641/lang-en/index.htm

13 <http://www.inec.go.cr>

14 <http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/meetings-and-events/international-conference-of-labour-statisticians/19/lang-en/index.htm>

15 http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/areas-of-work/WCMS_550541/lang-en/index.htm

16 <http://www.ilo.org/stat/lang-en/index.htm>

17 www.copac.coop