

CONCEPT NOTE

Building bridges across generations: global cooperative leaders advancing the PRACTICE pillar

Date	16 September 2026, from 14:45 to 17:15
Location	Panama Convention Center - Rooms Caribe 1-2-3
Languages	EN–ES simultaneous interpretation

Background and Rationale

The International Cooperative Alliance launched its 2026–2030 Strategy — Practice, Promote and Protect — as a transformative global roadmap to strengthen cooperative enterprises, accelerate sustainable development, and expand economic democracy worldwide. Anchored in the Cooperative Identity, the strategy rests on three overarching pillars. This side event contributes directly to the PRACTICE pillar by showcasing how cooperative values and principles are translated into concrete action through leadership, inclusion, collaboration and innovation.

The session also responds directly to the theme of the 2026 Global Conference Building Bridges: Cooperative Contributions for a Peaceful World. It places youth and gender at the centre of the PRACTICE pillar, sharing a stage with representatives of cooperative enterprises and international organisations, by convening the ICA Youth Committee, the ICA Gender Equality Committee, ICADP and CM50 alongside ICA member organisations, UN and multilateral organisations, the EU and national authorities. Bridging generations, genders, experiences and regions is itself a direct expression of the conference theme.

The event is co-funded through the ICA–EU Financial Framework Partnership Agreement II (#coops4dev), whose thematic priorities include gender equality, diversity, and youth as cross-cutting priorities across its workstreams: capacity building, research & education, advocacy & partnership, visibility & communication, and project management. The CM50 panel is designed to evidence the partnership and international-cooperation-for-development dimension that #coops4dev co-funding requires — showing how large cooperatives are mobilising Principle 6 (Cooperation among Cooperatives) to support youth-led and women-led cooperatives internationally.

Research consistently demonstrates that cooperatives which invest in youth education, create meaningful governance pathways for young members, and advance gender-equitable leadership outperform their peers in resilience, innovation, and member retention. Yet systemic barriers remain: youth representation in cooperative governance is under-institutionalised, cooperative education curricula often fail to reach young people, and women continue to face structural obstacles to leadership, even in a movement that proclaims democratic values as foundational.

By creating a space for dialogue among cooperative leaders, practitioners, policymakers and international organizations, this side event aims to move from commitment to action. Through the exchange of experiences, practical initiatives and policy perspectives, participants will identify opportunities to strengthen inclusive leadership, reinforce cooperation across the movement and contribute to a more peaceful, democratic and sustainable world.

Objectives

Overall objective: To showcase how the PRACTICE pillar of the ICA 2026–2030 Strategy can be advanced through youth leadership, gender equality and collaboration across the global cooperative movement, contributing to the Conference theme *Building Bridges: Cooperative Contributions for a Peaceful World*.

Specific objectives:

- Amplify the voices of young cooperators and women leaders from across ICA's global membership.
- Present experiences and evidence on cooperative education, youth participation and gender equality from different regions of the global cooperative movement.
- Identify priority actions and policy recommendations to strengthen youth and women's participation in cooperative governance and leadership.
- Facilitate dialogue among ICA member organizations, cooperative leaders, international organizations and public authorities on enabling environments for inclusive cooperative development.
- Highlight international cooperation initiatives supported through the ICA–EU Partnership (#coops4dev) that contribute to inclusive and sustainable cooperative development.

Thematic Focus Areas and Panels

Panel 1 — Youth

1. Cooperative Education as a Foundation for Inclusion

The ICA Youth Committee places education at the heart of its mandate, promoting training and information on the ICA Statement on the Cooperative Identity and building a movement in which youth participate on fully equal terms. This strand explores how cooperative education — from school curricula to vocational training and university programmes — can be redesigned to be youth-relevant, gender-sensitive, and digitally accessible

2. Youth Participation and Voice in Cooperative Governance

The ICA Youth Committee's mission is to ensure young people participate in cooperative governance and ICA structures on fully equal terms, increase their active participation in cooperative operations, and represent youth concerns at global fora. This strand showcases the wealth of youth-led cooperatives, examines structural mechanisms — quota systems, youth departments, mentoring pathways, digital engagement tools — that have demonstrably increased youth participation, with recommendations for member organisations and policy-makers.

Panel 2 — Gender Equality

Gender Equality as a Cooperative Imperative — ICA Gender Equality Committee and ICADP

The ICA Gender Equality Committee promotes equality between women and men and gender integration across the cooperative movement as essential to achieving truly democratic and successful cooperatives, and as a direct contribution to the UN 2030 Agenda. This strand addresses the strength of women's leadership in cooperatives, the intersectionality of gender and youth

disadvantage, best practices in gender-responsive governance, and the role of cooperatives in advancing SDG 5 (Gender Equality) alongside SDG 8 (Decent Work) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

The International Cooperative Alliance Development Platform (ICADP) is the ICA Committee that brings together cooperative organisations active in international development. Its mission is to promote the cooperative model within international development policies and programmes, and to enhance collaboration across regions, both inside and outside the cooperative movement. ICADP serves as a forum for discussion and exchange of experience on international cooperative development and works to increase collaboration among members in development programmes and partnerships.

Panel 3 — CM50: Cooperation Among Cooperatives in Practice

This session makes the case that peace is, first, an economic achievement: it holds where livelihoods, capital and institutions hold and fails where they don't. The world's largest cooperatives, convened through the ICA's Cooperatives and Mutuals Leadership Circle (CM50), are structurally built to hold that floor: community-focused delivery of goods and services, member-owned capital that cannot flee, governance that survives shocks, value that stays local rather than extracting outward. But individual cooperatives holding their own ground is not the same as resilience at the scale a peace process requires. Closing that gap is what CM50's Contract for a New Global Economy exists to do. This is also the panel's clearest showcase of #coops4dev's international-cooperation-for-development objective: CM50 leaders bring specific commitments to partner with, mentor, or co-invest in youth-led and women-led cooperatives worldwide, building a direct bridge between global cooperative scale and grassroots cooperative leadership, and demonstrating that the Contract's ambition depends on exactly this kind of cross-generational buy-in.

Indicative Programme (2 hours 30 minutes) — Interpretation in EN–ES

Time	Format	Content & Speakers
5'	Opening & Welcome	Welcome by the Americas Regional Director or #coops4dev Global Coordinator.
10'	Moderator framing	<i>The Cooperative Era in Practice</i> . Ignacio Moncayo, Former Chief of Staff, Ministry of Agriculture, Chile. Policy and Rural Development Consultant
35'	Panel 1 — Youth Voices: Education & Participation in the Cooperative Movement	Speakers: Maria Jovita Soto Chavez - Cuahatemoc, Mexico Kristen Murray –Newfoundland & Labrador Federation of Co-operatives – Canada Khalat Shikhmous co-op development body Aboryia Gisti - Syria. (7' each)

Time	Format	Content & Speakers
		Personal testimonies and evidence on the impact of cooperative education; best examples of youth-led cooperatives; one concrete policy ask each. ~10' reserved within the block for moderated floor dialogue. Harsh Sanghani (India), moderator.
35'	Panel 2 — Gender Equality: Leading Change from Within Cooperatives	Speakers: Structural barriers to women's leadership; intersectionality of gender and youth; flagship gender-equality initiatives. Moderated discussion with guiding questions Kaira Reece – International Trade Union Confederation - Americas Xiomara Nunez de Cespedes : President, ICA Gender Equality Committee Silke Staab - UN Women Regional Office for LAC Ana Aguirre , moderator
5'	Transition	<i>Short stretch break</i>
35'	Panel 3 — CM50: Cooperation Among Cooperatives in Practice	Speakers to be announced soon (CM50 leaders) Makes the case that economic resilience, not settlement alone, is what makes peace hold, and that the cooperative model is structurally built to deliver it. CM50 leaders translate that into concrete commitments to partner with, mentor, or co-invest in youth-led and women-led cooperatives internationally, in direct support of #coops4dev's development-cooperation objectives.
15'	Synthesis — #ICAPanama2026 Youth and Gender Commitments	Ignacio Moncayo, with a representative from each of the three panels, presents the consolidated set of commitments drafted ahead of the event (pre-drafted by the conveners and validated in the room, rather than drafted live) for formal presentation to the ICA General Assembly.
10'	Closing Statements	Wrap-up of all three panels by Ignacio Moncayo; handover of commitments to ICA governance; a closing statement from a senior ICA or EU representative.
5'	Group photo	

Strategic Alignment

- ICA 2026–2030 Strategy — PRACTICE pillar; and the 2026 Global Conference theme, Building Bridges: Cooperative Contributions for a Peaceful World.

- Thematic frameworks: gender equality & diversity and youth; workstreams on capacity building, advocacy & political dialogue, and communication: ICA–EU #coops4dev FFPA II (2024–2028).
- SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals): UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Explicitly recognises cooperatives and SSE actors as key development partners and equitable economic contributors; prioritises youth empowerment and gender equality in international development: EU Consensus on Development.
- Ensuring youth inclusion and mainstreaming in ICA policies, strategies and activities; increasing active participation of young people in cooperative governance: ICA Youth Committee mandate.
- Promoting equality between women and men and gender integration across the cooperative movement as a contribution to sustainable development: ICA Gender Equality Committee mandate.
- Advocating for the cooperative and mutual business model on the global stage and expanding international commitments in support of the SDGs: CM50 mandate.

Expected Outcomes and Deliverables

- A set of #ICAPanama2026 Youth and Gender Commitments, formally presented to the ICA General Assembly — concrete, measurable and time-bound pledges by ICA member organisations and CM50 leaders.
- Strengthened relationships between ICA member organisations, CM50 leaders, and UN, EU and national authorities on inclusive cooperative development.
- Documented evidence of #coops4dev outcomes for reporting under the ICA–EU FFPA II, contributing to the communication and visibility workstream deliverables.
- A short video recap (2–3 minutes) for dissemination via ICA, #coops4dev, EU and member organisation channels.