



International Organisation of
Industrial and Service Cooperatives
A Sector of the International
Co-operative Alliance

Declaration on migrants and refugees

by **CICOPA**

International organization of industrial and service cooperatives

7 April 2016

According to the United Nations, the number of international migrants increased by 41% over the last 15 years, from 173 million in 2000 to 244 million in 2015;¹ the UN also point out that the main reasons for migrating include conflict, poverty, inequality and lack of decent jobs, and that the distinction between countries of origin, transit and destination is becoming increasingly obsolete.²

According to the UNHCR, refugees reached an estimated 15.1 million people in mid-2015, up from 10.5 million in 2012,³ namely an increase of 40% in only 3 years, the vast majority being hosted by low or middle income countries.⁴

This massive increase in the flow of migrants and refugees is bound to increase over the next few years, both because the present reasons for such an increase have not been solved and because new phenomena are beginning to impact on migration, such as climate change.

Europe in particular is facing the gravest migration and humanitarian crisis since World War II, bringing into light its own paradoxes and inabilities to apply its constituent values such as solidarity, respect for human dignity and liberty.

It should be pointed out that, when they are able to survive during their exodus, migrants often face difficulties in accessing employment opportunities and basic social and health services. Furthermore, migrants are among the most exposed to working in low-paid precarious jobs and potentially exploitive conditions in the informal economy.

CICOPA is fully aware of the complex reality which migrants are facing around the world and that it is, at times, a difficult or perilous path.

As an organization active globally, CICOPA strives to change this paradigm through the development and growth of industrial and service cooperatives, in compliance with the first cooperative principle according to which "*cooperatives are voluntary organisations, open to all*

¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016) *International Migration Report 2015*; New York: United Nations, p. 5

² Ibid.

³ UNHCR (2015) *Mid-Year Trends 2015* ; Geneva : UNHCR

⁴ Ibid., p. 7



persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination”.

Industrial and service cooperatives contribute to a decent and dignified life and to the social and economic integration of refugees and migrants in various parts of the world.⁵ They are also used as a tool by migrants and refugees themselves for developing entrepreneurship initiatives together with other members from the community, thus increasing autonomy, solidarity and human development while at the same time contributing to a sustainable economy both globally and locally.

Industrial and service cooperatives are the natural allies of international organizations, regional organizations and national governments in carrying out inclusive policies that provide basic services and socioeconomic inclusion for migrants and refugees. Cooperative entrepreneurship is a valuable tool to maximize the developmental benefits represented by migrants and refugees for welcoming countries, in terms of human resources, competences and skills.

Through this Declaration, CICOPA wants to express its commitment to fight for an equal access to services and work opportunities provided by cooperatives, allowing for a decent life and increased opportunities for the entrepreneurial projects to be initiated by workers and producers in the migrant and refugee communities around the world.

Cooperatives are based on the principle of equality, whereby all human beings are equal in rights and remain at the heart of all policy concerns. This is why cooperatives in industry and services commit themselves to fight against discrimination, stigmatization and exclusion which refugees and migrants are facing all around the globe.

⁵ For example, Si, Se Puede! (Yes, it is possible!) Women’s Cooperative was founded in New York in 2006, with the mission to bring together immigrant women to create a women-run, women-owned, eco-friendly housecleaning business. The cooperative Nor Bum, established in 2011 in La Plata, Argentina, groups 7 construction workers coming from Bolivia. Social cooperative Camelot established in 1997 in Ferrara, Italy, by three persons now provides employment to 200 persons, 13% of whom are migrants, and provides services to asylum seekers.