The NGO Coalition for the Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (OP-ICESCR), coordinated by ESCR-Net, leads an international campaign for the ratification and implementation of the OP-ICESCR to ensure that individuals and groups have access to justice for violations to their economic, social and cultural rights.

**Current Objectives**

- To secure new ratifications of the OP-ICESCR from all regions;
- To maintain an engaged Group of Friends of the OP-ICESCR/ESCR, composed of ratifying countries (and others fostering ESCR), who are committed to and active in securing further ratifications from their peers;
- To build the awareness and capacity of civil society, as well as progressive government officials, to advance ratification in multiple countries, including through the provision of campaign resources in multiple formats and languages; and
- To assess the successes and lessons of the Ratification Campaign with members to inform next steps in advancing the OP-ICESCR, access to justice and ESCR more broadly.

**Impacts 2013-2016**

- The NGO Coalition has contributed to several ratification processes, including playing a central role in the national campaign in Uruguay, which provided the tenth ratification bringing the OP-ICESCR into force on 5 May 2013. There are now more than 20 ratifications across Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Europe.
- The NGO Coalition has supported a robust Group of Friends of the OP-ICESCR at the UN in Geneva and New York, which has engaged in peer-to-peer advocacy for ratification via events, formal recommendations and UN resolutions in dialogue with the NGO Coalition. These countries have transitioned to the Group of Friends of ESCR in Geneva, as well as making similar moves in NYC, advocating for these rights within a range of UN spaces.
- Strengthened focus on obligations to respect, protect and fulfill ESCR, including ensuring access to effective remedies via active engagement with regional and international bodies and forums, as well as supporting national campaigns.

**Prioritized Activities for 2016**

The political and legal significance of the OP-ICESCR—recognizing the need for accountability and access to remedy for all human rights—is now well-established. With the entry into force of the OP-ICESCR and the first case in 2015, in which ESCR-Net’s Strategic Litigation Working Group presented a third party intervention, the NGO Coalition is focused on securing ongoing, regionally diverse ratifications, while keeping ESCR and access to justice central to debates at the international and regional levels.

1. **Engagement at the UN, especially via collaboration with the Group of Friends of the OP-ICESCR/ESCR and the OHCHR:** including via events around key dates (anniversary of the entry into force in May, Third Committee sessions in October, and various meetings of the Human Rights Council and Committee on ESCR) in New York and Geneva, as well as support for resolutions and interventions by the Group of Friends.
2. **NGO Campaign events and advocacy at regional forums:** engagement with states and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, including via a panel on the *Role of the OP-ICESCR in advancing equality and human rights for all* during the 58th session of the ACHPR (April); at least one additional regional event in Asia or Latin America (i.e. ASEAN, MERCOSUR/UNASUR, IASHR)

3. **Development of campaign tools and resources, as well as provision of technical support to national-level campaigns:** disseminate new brochure and animated campaign video in English, Spanish, French and Arabic, as well as completing a version in Portuguese; produce brief case study on *Why States Have Ratified*, including attention to early impacts of ratification, as well as complementary video of interviews with key actors across different regions; continue preparing Actions Circulars for national level campaigns and up-to-date chart of countries approaching ratification

**Emerging Issues and Potential Synergies:** ESCR are vital to deepening debates at the international level focused on migration, the persistence of poverty affecting millions of people, and the environmental and social impacts of corporate activity. In this context, reinforcing state obligations to respect, protect and fulfill human rights—particularly ESCR—is central to challenging systemic inequalities and ensuring access to justice for victims of many of the most widespread, systemic human rights violations. While the recognition of the justiciability of all aspects of ESCR with the adoption of the OP-ICESCR was an historic advance, the unequal levels of ratification of the OP-ICCPR and the OP-ICESCR continues to send a message of unequal status of ESC rights and unequal commitment of states to the principle of access to justice. Efforts to reinforce the equal status of ESCR and to promote equal access to justice should be increasingly integrated into the work of all of ESCR-Net’s working groups, building synergies between different areas of advocacy, and in the work of individual members.

**Membership**

The NGO Coalition for the OP-ICESCR is formed by over 300 organizations and individuals, including all ESCR-Net members. In 2015, the Coalition’s Steering Committee added two new members to strengthen its regional balance and new regional support groups are strengthening analysis and action. The Steering Committee, coordinated by ESCR-Net, includes: Amnesty International, Dullah Omar Institute (South Africa), Equipo Pueblo (Mexico), FIDH, FIAN, ICJ, IWRAW-AP (Asia-Pacific), NCAS (India), PIDHDD (Latin America), and SRAC (Canada).