



Women and ESCR Working Group



The **Women and ESCR Working Group** (WESCR WG) works collectively to ensure women's experiences and analyses are at the center of advocacy, policy-making and legal developments related to human rights at all levels. The WESCR WG strives to build an effective network of women's rights and wider human rights organizations committed to securing substantive equality and advancing key areas of women's ESCR, including rights related to housing, land and natural resources.

Current Objectives

- Create an effective space for collaboration in the form of mutual learning, joint work, technical support and solidarity between WG members across regions;
- Strengthen human rights standards and mechanisms for realizing women's ESCR and substantive equality, ensuring that they are shaped by and accessible to grassroots women's rights advocates;
- Advance specific areas of women's ESCR, including rights to housing, land and natural resources, health and labor, among others;
- Broaden the WG's membership in line with core principles of regional balance and the inclusion of social movements and grassroots groups, seeking as well to ensure expertise across various issues;
- Create a geographically and organizationally diverse Steering Committee that will ensure that projects and decisions are responsive to the needs and interests of WG members and the constituents they represent; and
- Increase member organizations' sense of ownership and participation through discussions (in-person and online) about the role and potential of the WESCR WG as part of ESCR-Net, including via the Global Strategy Meeting.

Impacts 2013-2016

- The WESCR WG has facilitated a series of regional workshops (Mexico, November 2014; Kenya, June 2015; Lebanon and Bulgaria, 2016) in which participants have shared successful strategies and lessons for advocating women's human rights, incorporating an intersectional gender analysis and utilizing international and regional standards, jurisprudence and mechanisms. These workshops have drawn on the working group's "*Guide: Claiming Women's ESC Rights Using OP-CEDAW and OP-ICESCR*," now widely disseminated in English, Spanish and French, with key chapters in Arabic.
- The WESCR WG coordinated a Joint Briefing with the UN CEDAW Committee and Committee on ESCR to reinforce attention to substantive equality and intersectional analysis in their concluding observations and recommendations. The working group developed briefing papers that analysed specific and systemic challenges to the realization of women's ESCR and explored progressive approaches to advancing substantive equality in relation to land, health and work. In addition to deepening dialogue with both Committees and creating new openings to shape General Comments and Recommendations and coordinate advocacy via targeted complaints and parallel reports, this Joint Briefing also provided an opportunity for close collaboration among members.

- An international strategy meeting in Montevideo, Uruguay (August 2015) strengthened shared analysis in relation to women's rights to housing, land and natural resources and resulted in plans to: pursue new joint advocacy projects to strengthen related standards and accountability mechanisms; reinforce the leadership of indigenous and grassroots women and leverage the implementation of existing legal frameworks to challenge socially-constructed gender norms; and challenge systemic patterns of human rights violations involving private actors and leading to large-scale displacement.

Prioritized Activities for 2016

1. **Strengthen strategic litigation and advocacy for women's ESCR by utilizing and reinforcing international standards and mechanisms.** This will be done through regional workshops in the MENA region (July 2016), Europe/Central Asia (October 2016), and Asia (2017); the AWID Forum (September 2016); and updating and disseminating the WG's multilingual *Guide: Claiming Women's ESC Rights Using OP-CEDAW and OP-ICESCR*.
2. **Contribute to developing progressive international norms and standards related to women's ESCR and advance the implementation of these rights using a substantive equality approach.** This will include translating and disseminating final versions of the WESCR WG's briefing papers on substantive equality and women's right to land, work and health to members of the UN CEDAW Committee and Committee on ESCR and an organized panel at the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), as well as facilitating technical support for NGO parallel reporting through the creation of a user-friendly parallel reporting template.
3. **Advance women's rights in relation to the key issue areas of housing, land and natural resources rights.** Building on a mapping of existing member work, this will include producing an analysis of key issues, advocacy materials and an online library of existing resources. Challenging both large-scale displacement and socially-constructed norms that undermine women's rights, advocacy projects will be piloted with the Corporate Accountability, Strategic Litigation and Monitoring Working Groups.
4. **Build a diverse and member-driven WG and increase communication among WG members.** Key activities will include preparation for and engagement in the ESCR-Net Global Strategy Meeting (November 2016) and development of a Steering Committee to help guide and assess WG activities.

Emerging Issues and Potential Synergies: There is the potential for increasing collaborative work with other ESCR-Net WGs both through specific projects as well as more fully integrating an intersectional gender analysis throughout the work of WGs. For example, the recent MENA regional workshop (August 2016) had a focus on economic policy issues. Similarly, as noted above, ongoing advocacy projects with the Strategic Litigation Working Group will continue to be developed and carried out.

Membership

As of May 2016, the WESCR WG consists of 43 organizational and three individual members. Regionally, the highest number of members are from Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, followed by Asia. The United States and Canada, Europe, and the MENA region are currently less well represented in the WG. The WG has realized the importance of incorporating grassroots groups and social movements into their ongoing analysis, work and leadership. Grassroots leaders were incorporated into regional WESCR WG workshops and the international strategy meeting on housing, land and natural resources. While the WESCR WG does not currently have a Steering Committee, different members have taken leadership roles in planning committees for workshops and via specific projects including the joint treaty body briefing and updating the *Guide: Claiming Women's ESC Rights Using OP-CEDAW and OP-ICESCR*.