

Annual Report 2020



الشبكة العالمية
للحقوق الاقتصادية
والاجتماعية والثقافية



ESCR-Net
Red-DESC
Réseau-DESC

In mid-February 2020, the ESCR-Net Board gathered in Barcelona, where we were hosted by Observatori DESC and able to meet with and learn from grassroots leaders struggling for housing and workers' rights, as well as advancing cooperatives and solidarity economy projects. This would be the last international trip for most of us, as the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly accelerated around the world. In mid-March, as the ESCR-Net secretariat indefinitely postponed a series of in-person advocacy actions and events, we issued a statement warning: "The pandemic and the response of state, corporate and other non-state actors have the potential to exacerbate precisely the kind of intolerable intersectional inequalities at the heart of many members' struggles for social justice." We highlighted long-standing attacks on public healthcare systems and workers' rights, the inequitable gender burden and limited public provision of care, and the corporate capture of transparent and participatory governance. Emphasizing the need for systemic change, we insisted that "addressing this pandemic through a human rights-based approach involves demanding States put people over profit, revisit priorities in public expenditure and resource allocation, and counter dangerous austerity measures." We urged that the Network's Common Charter for Collective Struggle is more critical than ever—"[t]he need to reclaim human rights, to connect struggles across regions, to center social movements and grassroots groups emerging from affected and resisting communities, and to articulate alternatives to the current dominant socioeconomic model."

As the magnitude of the pandemic and interconnected crises became increasingly apparent, ESCR-Net members engaged in a series of discussions across working groups to analyze the likely implications of the pandemic and to articulate rights-based demands. These ultimately informed a network-wide Global Call to Action – endorsed by over 135 member organizations and a few dozen allies – as a collective response outlining inclusive and systemic demands for a just recovery, just transition, and transformative actions towards a "new normal" rooted in human and environmental rights. Since its launch on 1 May, the Global Call has informed collective advocacy, serving as a blueprint for continuing to

advance our long-term objectives in the current context. Social movement members have amplified their own analysis and collective ESCR-Net demands in multiple virtual civil society and UN spaces, including advocacy for a new global social pact on care. Diverse members across regions have jointly addressed issues of vaccine equity, dispossession, data justice and debt, including via legal interventions and advocacy targeting the International Monetary Fund and Finance in Common Summit of public development banks.

Yet, as we endeavored to strengthen and expand our collective analysis and advocacy, we were restricted to screens, working across multiple time zones and technical barriers, in part due to structural inequalities and oppression (such as in accessing internet and electricity, etc., for some of the members). Human rights defenders faced growing repression in many contexts, as well as new care responsibilities and personal challenges. Many grassroots and movement members – the leaders of our collective vision for transformative change – faced intense hardship due to social and economic crises in their communities and countries, compounded by climate-related disasters. However, many also lived into alternatives that have long existed among Indigenous Peoples, in other resisting communities and among feminist movements (community self-protection, community kitchens and care networks, solidarity economies), and members collectivized their struggles to respond to time-limited strategic openings to advocate for inclusive, systemic alternatives grounded in human rights and climate justice. As articulated by social movement member Consejo de Pueblos Wuxhtaj (Guatemala), "collective efforts and solidarity are the only way to overcome the COVID-19 crisis and other political and economic systemic global challenges." We remain convinced that ESCR-Net's member-led model of mutual solidarity and learning, shared analysis, and collective action offers an important pathway for confronting and emerging from intersecting crises.

**In solidarity,
ESCR-Net Board**



Fernanda Hopenhaym, Chair
Project on Organizing, Development, Education, and Research (Mexico)



Ryan Schlieff, Treasurer
International Accountability Project (USA)



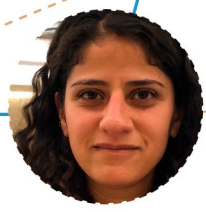
Priyanthi Fernando, Secretary
International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (Malaysia)



Binota Moy Dhamai
Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (Thailand)



Irene Escorihuela Blasco
Observatori DESC (Spain)



Maha Abdallah
Al-Haq (Palestine)



S'bu Zikode
Abahlali baseMjondolo (South Africa)



Chris Grove
ESCR-Net (ex-officio)



WHAT WE DO

The origins of ESCR-Net can be traced to a small group of social movements, human rights NGOs and advocates who came together in shared recognition that many of the injustices they were confronting were increasingly global in nature and rooted in common structural causes. Established in 2003, the Network emerged as a space for members to connect their struggles across regions to address these often systemic challenges. Reflecting an understanding of human rights as grounded in, and realized through peoples' lived experiences and struggles, members defined the centrality of social movements, an intersectional approach foregrounding gender analysis, along with regional and gender balance, as core guiding principles for ESCR-Net. Over the past 15 years, these core principles have been the pillars of our member-led model of work, informing four primary strategies central to ESCR-Net's theory of change:

- **Solidarity**, grounded in a recognition that “your struggle is my struggle,” manifests in collective mobilizations via ESCR-Net's System of Solidarity to defend members facing threat or attack, taking up their broader human rights demands, countering the political economy of violence and racism, and facilitating member-to-member strategic support.
- **Mutual learning** via cross-regional sharing of experiences, strategies and lessons is facilitated through grassroots leaders' exchanges, strategic litigation workshops and our Caselaw Database, security and protection workshops, and multilingual webinars. Solidarity and mutual learning nurture relationships of trust and foster movement-building, which are foundational to the other two elements of our theory of change.
- **Shared analysis** of the global conditions and historical trajectories undermining human rights that is guided by resisting communities is integral to defining issues, strategies, and inclusive demands for systemic change, as captured in our Common Charter for Collective Struggle and Global Call to Action in response to COVID-19.
- **Collective action** – drawing on the power of over 280 diverse members across 75 countries to make human rights and social justice a reality for all – involves responding to the fallout of the pandemic and imagining into being a ‘new normal’, advocating for effective regulation and remedy, shifting global economic policy, intervening in key legal cases, confronting corporate capture, mobilizing for climate justice, and centering the visions of people's movements in all collective efforts.



Our seven-person Board is elected every three years from and by members based on our core principles. ESCR-Net working groups, a primary vehicle through which members operationalize shared objectives, currently include: Women and ESCR (WESCR WG), Corporate Accountability (CAWG), Economic Policy (EPWG), Monitoring of ESCR (MWG), Strategic Litigation (SLWG) and Social Movements and Grassroots Groups (SMWG), as well as a network-wide project on Environment and ESCR, focused on climate justice. Members have increasingly prioritized utilizing the diverse and collective strength of the Network to address the complexity of interconnected challenges and crises. Many initiatives are now cross-working group, including struggles to secure human rights related to land, housing and natural resources; to confront corporate capture of government institutions and decision-making; and to advance ESCR in situations of conflict.

The point of departure for all collective work is the lived experience, analysis, and leadership of those disproportionately affected by and resisting inequality, impoverishment, injustice, and environmental destruction – particularly women and girls. This baseline informs all Network processes and policies – from the development of political positions to the formation of governance structures to planning for strategy meetings and workshops. Via this necessarily never-ending effort to live into our core principles and create this horizontal and radically democratic space dedicated to a common humanity and the dignity of all, ESCR-Net practices and models a prefigurative politics of the type of world we want to build and the polity that we want to become.



IMPACTS

Via two strategy calls coordinated in partnership with the Coalition for Human Rights in Development, over 100 members and allies crafted a human rights- and equity-based response to the first Finance in Common Summit (November 2020), which brought together 450 development banks to strategize their post-COVID recovery plans. Emerging from this process, a more coordinated group of movements and NGOs has honed collective demands for a transformed financial system that is also informing advocacy targeting the International Monetary Fund.



Members of the Environment and ESCR network-wide project played a leadership role in drafting and promoting an appeal submitted by the Right to a Healthy Environment Campaign – a global civil society coalition – prior to the forty-fifth regular session of the UN Human Rights Council (September 2020). Over 1170 organizations and movements have now signed, and members’ input within this coalition ensured that resisting communities and Global South actors were central to the process.

Building on their Global Call to Action in response to COVID-19, members submitted a collective amicus in the case *Techo v. INEGI* concerning the duty to collect data on informal settlements in Mexico, highlighting the importance of this data in the COVID-19 context (May 2020). Drawing substantially on our intervention, Mexico’s Supreme Court of Justice issued a positive decision, requiring the collection of representative and inclusive data in informal settlements to inform public policy and provision (June 2020).



Advocating gender, economic, and climate justice, tens of thousands of women from diverse contexts in 59 countries participated in the inaugural Women’s Global Strike (March 2020), achieving a strong social media following and widespread coverage in over 50 media outlets. Initiated by member Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, the Women and ESCR Working Group formed part of the global coordination, with multiple members serving as regional and national focal points.



Resisting communities led on collective positions in response to the revised draft of the UN business and human rights treaty text (August 2020), amplified by over a dozen members at the sixth session of the UN open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group (October 2020). To date, key points and language regarding corporate capture, extraterritorial obligations, a feminist lens, human rights defenders, Indigenous Peoples, environmental rights, and conflict-affected areas have been cited repeatedly in the Chair’s draft reports and preliminary drafts, as well as by several States.

Mobilized via System of Solidarity (SOS) urgent actions, members denounced deepening repression, violence, and criminalization facing human rights defenders in Egypt, Kenya, and the Philippines. ESCR-Net is pleased to have been among the many allies that contributed to the release from prison of staff members of ESCR-Net member Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (December 2020). The SOS also facilitated solidarity support to members in Sri Lanka, Nepal, India, Colombia, and the Occupied Golan Heights.



Members launched *Altavoz*, an online parallel reporting guide and interactive platform – available in the four languages of the Network – providing over ten case studies, many with grassroots women leaders. *Altavoz* amplifies how parallel reporting has been a tool for mobilizing civil society, building inclusive demands, and reinforcing wider campaigns for gender justice tied to issues such as land, work, and climate (March 2020).



Members expressed solidarity with the anti-racist protests in the US, condemning the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many others around the world as evidence of the systemic racism and political economy of violence used to maintain inequality and injustice globally. In an op-ed published in *OpenGlobalRights* in four languages (October 2020), members pointed to long histories of racism embedded in colonialism and imperialism, as well as the role of corporate capture.

By subverting what counts as legitimate data and knowledge, members participating in the community-led research (CLR) project and advocacy for a human rights-based approach to data are reclaiming their own stories and providing the basis for inclusive, democratic decision-making. Members amplified the collective position on “good” data via an op-ed in *OpenGlobalRights* (July 2020) and advanced research questions, plans, and methodologies in a series of CLR workshops (November 2020).

In continued work on implementation and follow-up of views with regional and international treaty bodies, members foregrounded the participation of affected women and other marginalized groups in framing remedies, including via formal consultations and informal dialogues with the UN CESCR (March 2020), as well as key inputs into the IACHR SIMORE database of recommendations and implementation status (launched in April 2020).

In collaboration with allied feminist groups in Ecuador, members submitted a follow-up intervention to the UN Committee on ESCR (CESCR) advocating steps towards the full implementation of their positive decision in a case on gender equality, social security, and unpaid care work (*M.C.T.C. v. Ecuador*), in which members submitted an initial collective third-party intervention in October 2017. This follow-up was informed by members’ advocacy for a new social pact on care.

Despite the embattled situations many members continue to face in their own contexts, the drawbacks of online convenings, and technological challenges, members have reaffirmed the critical importance of the Network as a space to process and analyze challenges and collectivize our strategies for resistance and transformation. This determination to act together in solidarity towards an alternative future was ESCR-Net’s most meaningful form of success in 2020.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS CALL



@ESCRNET

WHAT OUR MEMBERS SAY



We feed into each other's work, and this is when the change starts to happen... We don't always need to obtain our information from international entities because we have our own truths and our own information. This is where collaboration becomes very important.

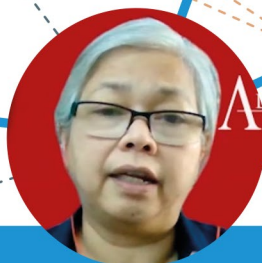
Suha Jarrar, Al-Haq, Palestine

In July 2021, we received the devastating news of the passing of our friend and fellow human rights defender Suha Jarrar. As an Advisory Group member for Environment & ESCR, Suha was critical to shaping our collective work on climate justice and human rights. She will live on in our hearts and minds, and her work will continue to inspire us.



We are happy to be members of ESCR-Net and have experienced more strong support at the community level during this COVID-19 period, as well as solidarity and collective action to fight corporate capture and the failure by States to protect affected communities worldwide.

Jackson Shaa, Narasha Community Development Group, Kenya



One thing that is really empowering about ESCR-Net is the insistence on privileging the lived experience of people in affected communities and social movements. Think about what [our fellow member and movement leader in Sri Lanka] said, that while he is struggling at the local level, he is feeling and acting in solidarity with people in Myanmar and Palestine. There is immense power in this.

Debbie Stoddard, Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma, Thailand



Building this collective global fabric has been so valuable, as it has enabled us to cultivate common struggles that create a visibility and a strength that we would not have if we worked in isolation.

Martha Devia Grisales, Comité Ambiental en Defensa de la Vida, Colombia



For Consejo de Pueblos Wuxhtaj, ESCR-Net has been an important space for keeping up to date on the global context. It is a space to elevate our voices and demands to international bodies like the United Nations and be a part of international processes of struggle for rights, such as the treaty on business and human rights. It is also a space of solidarity, of making different violations to fundamental rights visible.

Francisco Rocaél, Consejo de Pueblos Wuxhtaj, Guatemala



We are very happy to work with ESCR-Net, where we can fight for women workers right in the global supply chain.

Nazma Akter, Awaj Foundation, Bangladesh.



It is a great opportunity to extend the solidarity in global level platforms. At the same time, we are able to share the new development of ESCR issues of Sri Lanka, plus we can learn the other global trends and ESCR developments.

Francis Raajan, National Fisheries Solidarity Organization, Sri Lanka



We are new and learning - it's only been two months, but for us it's been important for us to identify groups working on issues similar to us. So, it's important for us to listen and to speak to all as well.

Larissa Pereira Santos, Justiça nos Trilhos, Brazil



One strength [of the Network] is definitely the diversity of work, the plurality of fields of action. This is very important. Another strength is supporting concrete struggles on the ground...connecting these struggles.

Sofia Monsalve, FIAN International - Food First Information and Action Network, Germany



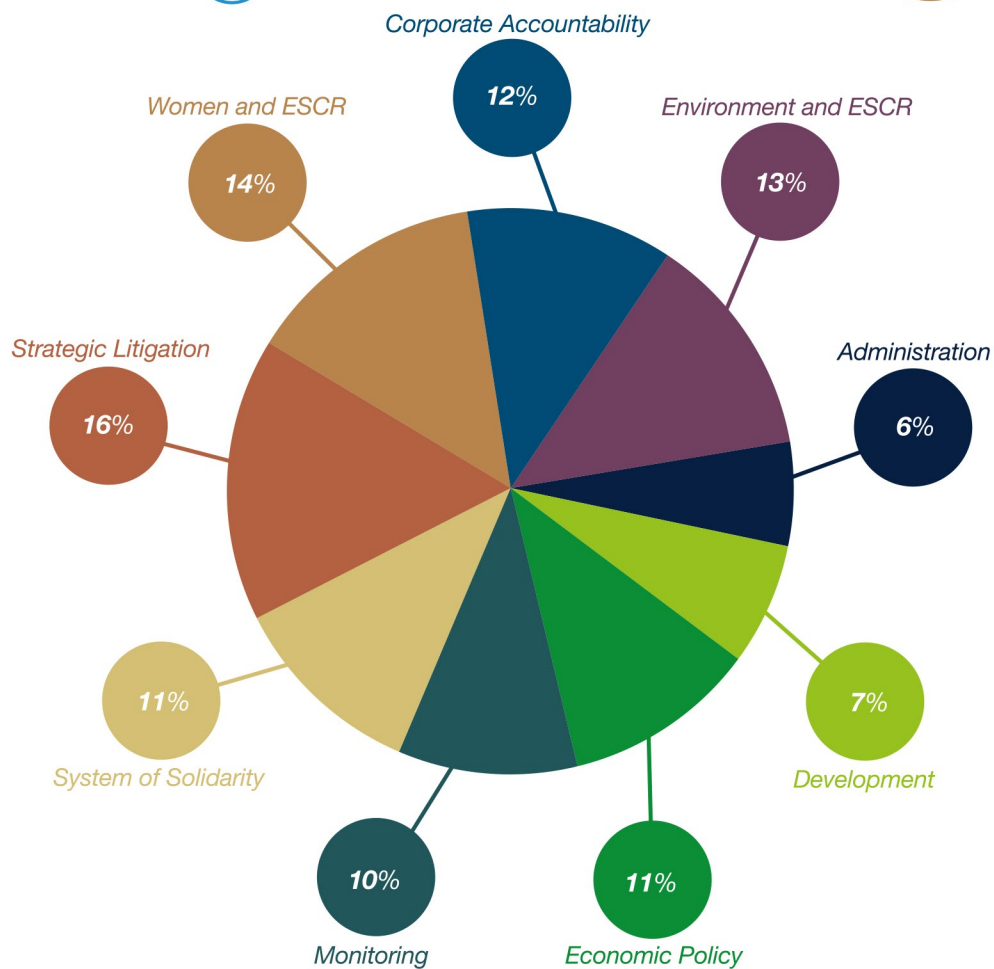
The width of this Network, and the variety and quality of organizations, are very important, and this enables us to hear different perspectives and experiences from different places. This makes us look at finding domestic solutions from a global perspective. That's very important. And this also helps us to do collective action and advocacy at the UN level.

Zahra Bazzi, Arab NGO Network for Development, Lebanon



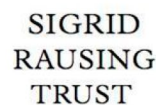
[W]e value being part of this collective space for collective analysis. It is very important for us to be part of this great family of people whose effort is really about doing all they can to bring about social justice in our countries and, of course, in our world. To be part of these efforts, to humanize the world, makes us very honoured to be part of ESCR-Net...[T]ogether we are strong and, of course, we believe that unity is one of the greatest weapons which the working class and poor people could potentially utilize...The level of solidarity and internationalism for us is something that we value so much because sometimes you can feel very isolated, you can feel very vulnerable, but knowing that you have sisters and brothers in India, in Honduras, is something that inspires us every day, especially those of us who work under difficult circumstances, under difficult threats to our lives...ESCR-Net also provided the opportunity for us a social movement to engage directly with the UN bodies. I was very privileged and honoured to be addressing the 68th session of the UN CDESCR. Nobody would have thought a slum dweller would have given these opening remarks in this platform...Who are we? We are often asked those questions by our own city governments. Who are you to be engaging your own local city governments? Now we are not only engaging our city governments, but we are addressing and linking directly with the UN body.

S'bu Zikode, Abahlali baseMjondolo, South Africa



Total Income: USD \$1,377,722 / Total Expense: USD \$1,397,277

By mobilizing solidarity actions, engaging in mutual learning, deepening shared analysis and common demands, and, ultimately, advancing collective action, ESCR-Net members have made important advances towards a reality of human rights and social justice for all. ESCR-Net thanks the many members and allies who dedicated immense time and effort to collective work in 2020, as well as those who shared financial resources to help advance ESCR-Net's work, including:



Learn more

www.escr-net.org

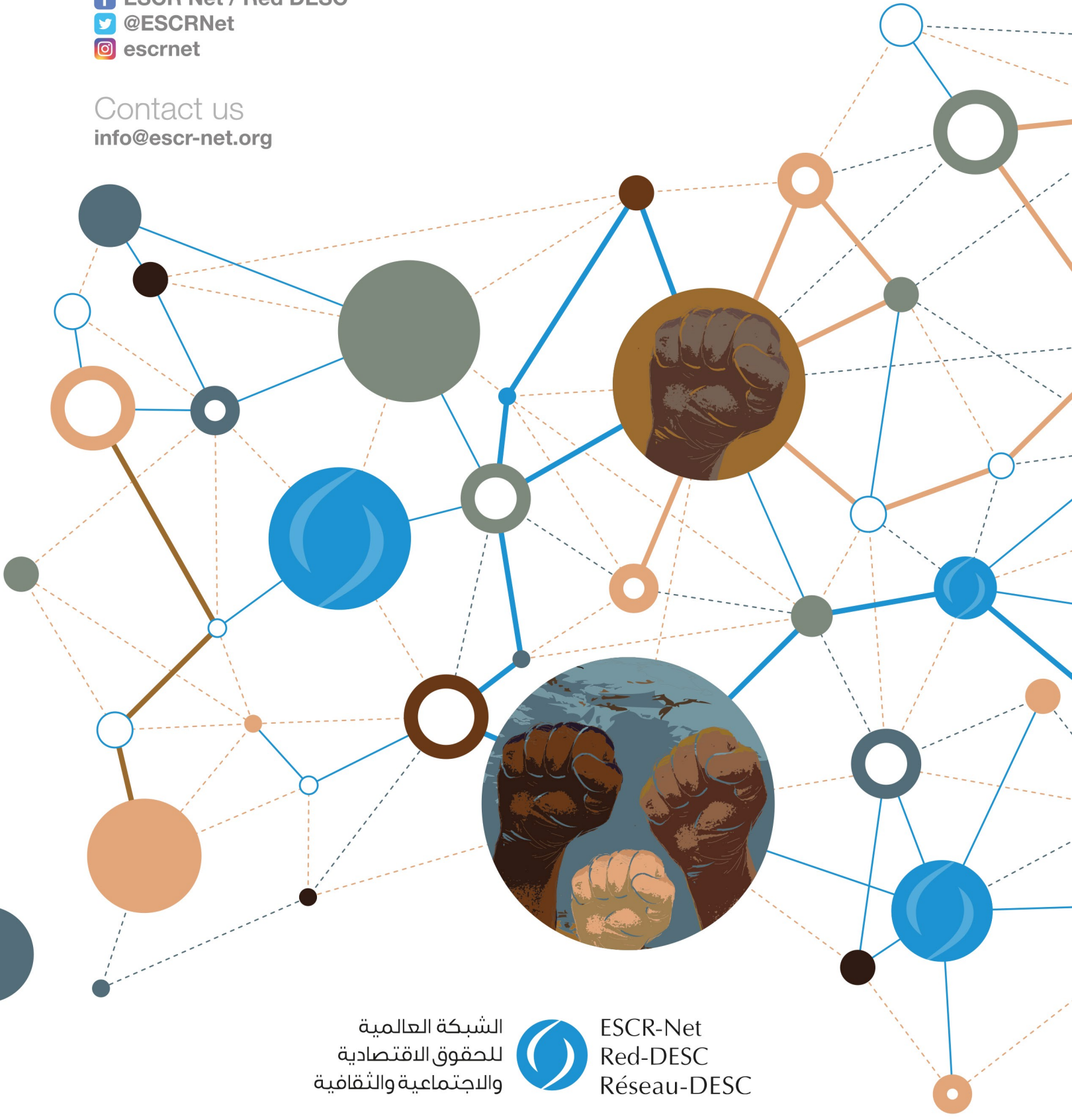
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