

ENTRY INTO FORCE OF 'ISTANBUL CONVENTION': VITAL OPPORTUNITY TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST MIGRANT WOMEN

BRUSSELS, 1 AUGUST 2014 – The *Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants* (PICUM), *Women against Violence Europe* (WAVE), and the *European Network of Migrant Women* (ENoMW) welcome today's entry into force of the [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) as an important step to end impunity for violence against migrant women.

Also referred to as 'Istanbul Convention', it is the first European treaty specifically targeting violence against women and domestic violence. To date it has been signed by 23 Council of Europe member states and ratified by 13 (Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Andorra, Denmark, France, Italy, Montenegro, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey).

The Convention sets out, and calls for the implementation of, legally binding standards to prevent violence against women, protect survivors and punish perpetrators. Requiring state parties to ensure availability of services such as hotlines, shelters, medical assistance, counselling, and legal aid, the Convention prohibits discrimination on the grounds of migration status (Article 4).

Because of their gender, foreign origin, and often dependent or irregular status, migrant women may face increased exposure to exploitation and abuse. A 33-year old undocumented woman from Mauritius living in the UK told PICUM how migration-control policies forced her to endure years of physical and psychological abuse at the hands of her British husband:

"He took advantage of my status being dependent on him, and when he failed to renew my permit and I became undocumented, it helped him. I was always scared of the police because he told me 'if you go to the police they will deport you!' It was emotional blackmail, that they would take my daughter away from me, because she is a British citizen and if I was deported, I would never see her again. And how could I live without my daughter!"

As Lara Natale of the **European Network of Migrant Women** explains, *"Policies governing entry, employment and residence frequently disadvantage migrant women and increase their risk of abuse. To address this, Article 59 of the Convention requires state parties to provide an autonomous permit to victims whose status is dependent on a violent partner or spouse"*.

In addition to ensuring that migrant women do not lose their status because of violence, it is also vital to ensure prevention, protection, and justice for undocumented migrant women. *"Violence against women will only end in Europe when all women have access to justice,"* affirmed Michele LeVoy of the **Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants**, *"To do this, authorities must ensure a firewall to completely delink access to justice, support services, and shelters from immigration enforcement."*

Now that the Convention is in force, the Group of experts on action against violence against women and domestic violence (GREVIO) will measure the extent to which state parties are adhering to it. In addition

to reports received from national governments, these experts will rely on information from NGOs and national parliaments, and may also conduct field trips as part of their inquiry.

Underlining the vital role of civil society to ensure the protections in this convention become a reality, Rosa Logar from **Women Against Violence in Europe** stated: "*The migrants-rights and women's rights movements now have a key-role to play in ensuring national authorities are held to account if they fail to prevent violence, protect victims, and punish perpetrators*".

All three networks backed the call of Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, that all Council of Europe member states, the European Union, and other countries around the world make a strong commitment to ending violence against all women by ratifying this Convention.

###

Chart of signatures and ratifications of the Convention

PICUM's report "[Strategies to End Double Violence Against Undocumented Women. Protecting Rights and Ensuring Justice](#)", 2012.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights' (FRA) [Fundamental Rights Considerations on Apprehension of Migrants in an Irregular Situation](#)

Contact:

Eve Geddie
PICUM Programmes Director
+32 2 210 1780
eve@picum.org

[Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants](#) (PICUM) is a network of individuals and organisations working to ensure social justice and human rights for undocumented migrants. Grounded in principles of social justice, anti-racism and equality, PICUM works to ensure that all migrants are entitled to a dignified standard of living and respect. Bringing together the experiences and expertise of its members, PICUM generates and coordinates a humane and informed response to undocumented migrants' realities and provides a platform to engage policy makers and the general public in the full realisation of their rights.

[Women Against Violence Europe](#) (WAVE) is a formal network in 46 European Countries of women's shelters, counselling centers, women's helplines, and other NGOs working in the field of combating violence against women and children. The network sets out to promote and strengthen the human rights of women and children in general and to prevent violence against women and children in particular. WAVE adheres to the aims of the United Nations, stressing the importance of working towards ending all forms of violence against women and children in public and private life in accordance with the Vienna Declaration, the Declaration on Violence against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and all other related documents. Since 2009, WAVE has participatory status with the Council of Europe and as of 2011 consultative status with ECOSOC. www.wave-network.org. Contact: office@wave-network.org

[The European Network of Migrant Women](#) (ENoMW) promotes equal treatment, equal rights and better integration for migrant women in Europe. As a membership organisation, ENoMW comprises national platforms in 16 European countries and lobbies for and with migrant women to have a stronger voice at the European level. The network provides regular input in policy areas impacting on migrant women and support their members through information and training. Its membership works on a variety of issues including immigration, violence against women, employment, health and education.