

Strategic Plan

2026
2030



PICUM



Contents

Who we are	4
Vision and mission	6
25 years of PICUM	7
The external context impacting the strategy	10
How we work	14
Objective 1: Resistance and remedy	19
1.1 Challenging migration enforcement through community and rights-based alternatives	20
1.2 Safeguarding essential services from immigration enforcement obligations	22
1.3 Access to justice and effective remedies against violations	23
1.4 Countering the criminalisation of migration and solidarity	24
Objective 2: Belonging and inclusion	27
2.1 Promoting access to secure residence status, regularisation, and regular migration pathways	28
2.2 Advancing workers' rights, improving labour conditions, and developing pathways for decent labour migration	29
2.3 Access to essential services	30
2.4 Social inclusion and anti-poverty	31
2.5 Inclusive and accessible EU funding to support undocumented people	32
Objective 3: Resilience and participation	35
3.1 Strengthen PICUM's voice	36
3.2 Protect civic space	37
3.3 Foster participatory and inclusive work culture	38
3.4 Systematize and pool learning and expertise across the movement	39
Development and consultation process of the strategy	40

Who we are

The Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) is a network of member organisations working to ensure social justice and human rights for undocumented migrants in Europe and in other world regions.

Founded in 2001 as an initiative of grassroots organisations, PICUM represents a network of nearly 160 member organisations working with undocumented migrants in more than 30 countries. Bringing together a broad range of experience and expertise, PICUM provides an essential link and platform to engage policy makers and the general public in the full realisation of their rights.

Based in Brussels, Belgium, PICUM provides regular recommendations and expertise to inform policymakers and institutions within the European Union, Council of Europe and United Nations as well as on national and local levels on how to better protect undocumented people from social exclusion and harm.

Undocumented people lack formal authorisation to reside in a country and are therefore considered to have an irregular migration status. Many may have had residence permissions linked to employment, study, family, or international protection, but v permits were either temporary or very precarious and their validity expired. Some, due to the lack of regular migration pathways, will arrive to country without a residence permission, seeking for example asylum. People who are undocumented also include those subject to a deportation order.



Vision and mission

Vision

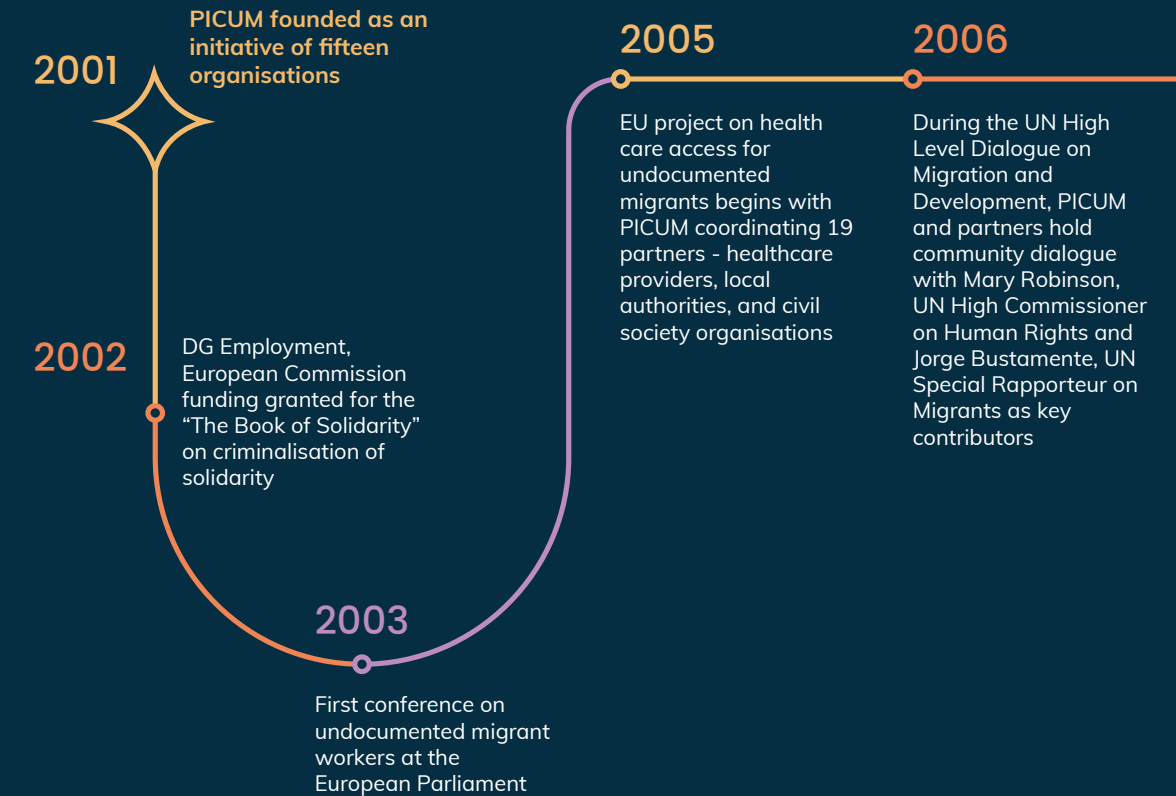
PICUM seeks a world where all people are guaranteed their human rights regardless of migration or residence status, and where human mobility is recognised as a normal reality.

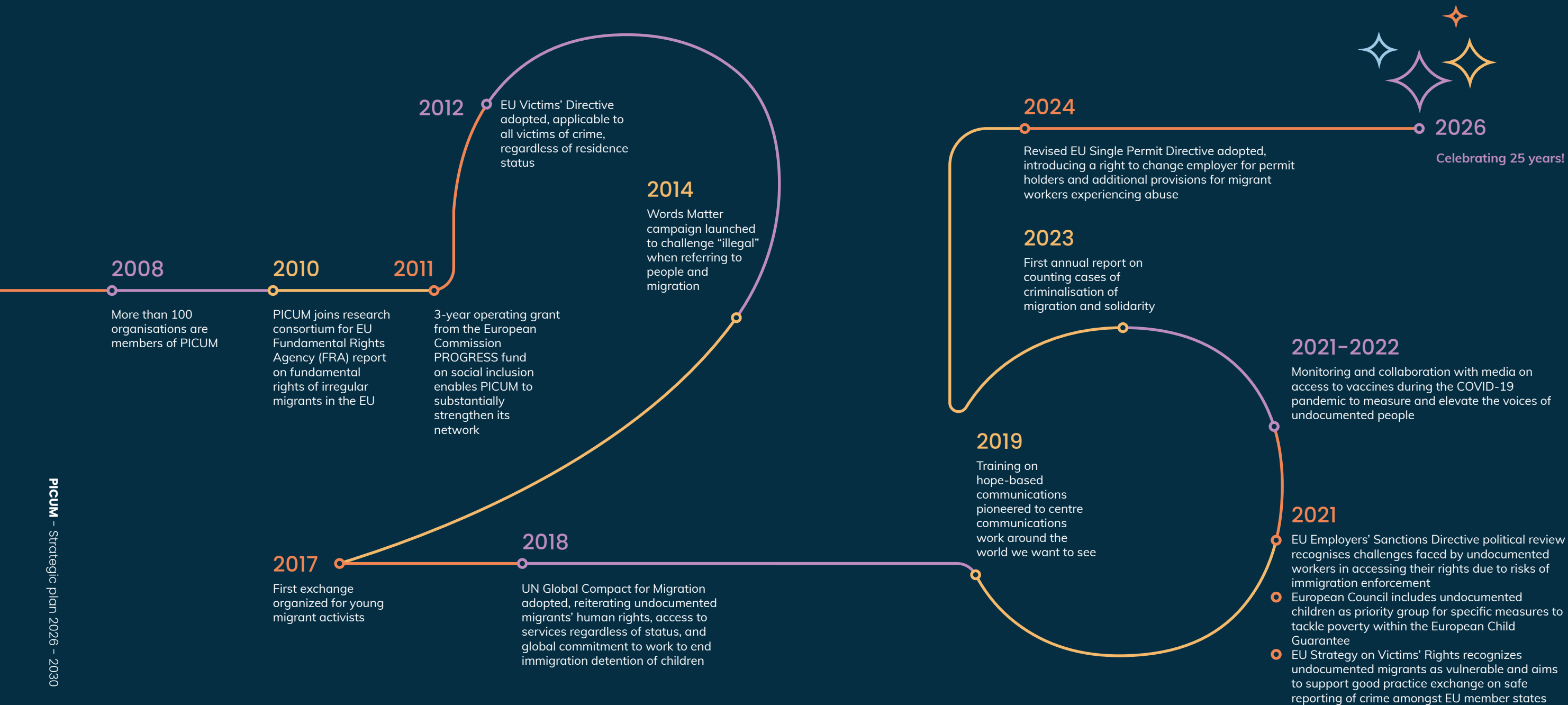
Mission

Grounded in principles and values of social justice, anti-racism and intersectional equality, PICUM is committed to ensuring that undocumented migrants have a dignified standard of living and are able to fully realise their rights.

25 years of PICUM

PICUM's multifaceted way of working has been instrumental in achieving various policy and other outcomes seeking to improve the lives of undocumented migrants.





The external context impacting the strategy

2025 has seen a backsliding of social standards across European and global levels. Attacks against human rights are increasing and we see a concerning increase in cases of criminalisation of migration and solidarity across the EU. The implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum has been marked by restrictive framing on migration that prioritises securitisation, return, deportation and surveillance. The criminalisation of migrant and racialised communities, including undocumented people, is likely to intensify as a whole range of technological systems to identify, filter, track, assess and control people entering or already in Europe is under development. A progressive erosion of legal standards is further accompanied by attempts to instrumentalize social rights as tools for migration enforcement.

As civic space is under attack from different angles, the financial context is also bleak with a new EU budget being negotiated in a context of a shifting socio-economic and uncertain political landscape, rising inequality, and geopolitical instability.

In parallel, the EU is experiencing ever deeper labour shortages and needs to take real action to increase decent labour migration pathways across sectors and skill levels. This is particularly salient in those sectors currently characterised by low wages, where many migrant workers are carrying out essential work and unable to access permits and are often employed in exploitative conditions.

While much remains to be done, we feel proud of our role as a network in contributing to a strong movement to advance the rights of undocumented migrants.

We remain committed to working with wide and diverse coalitions of partners at the EU and national levels to challenge harmful policies and mindsets, and to work together towards a different vision for migration and human mobility.

'Criminalisation of solidarity' refers to the increased policing of people who help migrants, through search and rescue operations, reception activities and the provision of food, housing and services. It can concern a wide range of people - lifeguards, journalists, volunteers, civil society organisations, as well as migrants helping other migrants.

'Criminalisation of migration' refers to policies that treat undocumented migrants as a potential security threat and irregular migration as a crime. It often involves the use of criminal sanctions for irregular entry or stay.

GOAL

OBJECTIVES

HOW WE ACHIEVE THIS

Undocumented migrants have a dignified standard of living and are able to realise their rights

1

Resistance
and
remedy

- Community and rights-based alternatives
- Safeguarding essential services
- Access to justice
- Countering criminalisation

2

Belonging
and
inclusion

- Promoting access to secure residence status
- Advancing workers' rights
- Access to essential services
- Social inclusion and anti-poverty
- Inclusive and accessible EU funding

3

Resilience
and
participation

- Strengthen PICUM's voice
- Protect civic space
- Participatory and inclusive work culture
- Learning and expertise across the network

- Evidence building - data collection
- Fostering legal accountability and policy action
- Communicating for change
- Engagement with wider civil society and across social movements
- Membership support
- Participation, self-organisation and representation
- Mainstreaming intersectionality

How we work

Evidence building – data collection

Gathering members' experience, evidence and insight on all aspects of life for people who are undocumented, PICUM engages policymakers and other stakeholders in the development of informed, human-centred, and sustainable solutions. PICUM works with think tanks, civil society partners, and academia to support research and data collection addressing the needs of people with an irregular or precarious residence status and migration and related policy areas impacting undocumented migrants.

Fostering legal accountability and policy action

PICUM pursues a comprehensive approach to upholding the human rights of migrants targeting the different stages of policy development and implementation. By monitoring and providing input into policy and legal developments and implementation at global, EU, national and local levels, PICUM works to ensure a rights-based approach by holding the EU and governments accountable, including through an incremental focus on strategic litigation.



Communicating for change

PICUM's communications work aims to contribute narratives that centres migration as something human, which helps societies grow and thrive. In parallel, it seeks to deconstruct criminalisation narratives around irregular migration. PICUM's communications team seeks to strengthen various communications channels to promote social inclusion in laws, policies and practices, and give visibility to the experiences and perspectives of members and people with lived experience.

Membership support

PICUM's membership has developed into a broad network committed to achieving social change through research, input to policy making, communications and work with communities. Members range from local, migrant-led community organisations and local service providers to international networks and include trade unions and faith-based organisations. PICUM strives to enhance visibility of members' work and perspectives and facilitates their engagement in relevant policy processes including in the implementation of EU policy initiatives and funding by building shared policy analyses, assessments, and recommendations, and identifying good practices.

Engagement with wider civil society and across social movements

As the only European civil society network focused exclusively on the social situation of people with an insecure or irregular status, PICUM has a unique perspective. In Europe and globally, PICUM serves as a key driver of evidence and expertise on undocumented migrants for a diverse range of stakeholders – from other civil society organisations, to institutions, to policy makers. PICUM reinforces cooperation with social partners and EU networks and organisations working to advance social rights and inclusion.

Participation, self-organisation and representation

PICUM believes that people with lived experience of being undocumented should be at the centre of efforts to advance their rights. PICUM seeks to ensure their participation across all areas of activity, including in advocacy, communications, research, and membership support. PICUM provides a forum for its members, secretariat and Board to learn and reflect on how to practically achieve participation in a way that is meaningful and neither extractive nor reproducing harmful power dynamics. Our aim is to embed meaningful participation in all dimensions of PICUM's work including within its governance structures.

Mainstreaming intersectionality

PICUM is grounded in principles and values of social justice, anti-racism and intersectional equality. To strengthen our intersectional approach and ensure greater inclusivity across all areas of our work, PICUM acknowledges the need to systematically mainstream age, gender identity, racialisation, and disability. We also aim to strengthen alliances with other human rights movements and across sectors (e.g. anti-racism, disability, child rights, workers' rights) to challenge structural exclusion.





1

Objective 1: Resistance and remedy

To counter harmful migration policy developments by mobilizing against immigration detention, securing access to rights and justice and accountability.

Migration policies are increasingly restrictive, imposing structural violence through detention, deportation and limited access to regular migration pathways and secure residence permits. Undocumented people and those who support them face growing threats from punitive enforcement, the instrumentalisation of essential services, and the criminalisation of solidarity. Together, these measures entrench exclusion, insecurity, and widespread rights violations. PICUM will work to counter these harmful developments and to uphold rights, ensure accountability, and build fair migration systems.

1.1 Challenging migration enforcement through community and rights-based alternatives

Migration policies often produce precarity through restrictive access to residence and work permits and impose punishment through detention and deportation. We call for fair, rights-based systems rooted in communities, designed to prevent undocumented status.

Outcomes:

- Expanded evidence base on the harms of EU enforcement policies - including detention, deportation, and racial profiling - on undocumented people, along with stronger coordination with members to monitor policy implementation, identify fundamental rights violations, and pursue political and legal accountability
- Greater recognition among policy makers that return is not the only option for undocumented migrants, including stronger backing for and visibility of different options for case resolution, including residence permits beyond the international protection framework at both national and EU levels
- Increased multi-stakeholder support at European and national levels for ending deprivation of liberty in the context of migration, and promoting community-based solutions which foresee safeguards and fair procedures
- Increased awareness and use of accountability systems at national and EU level to ensure that EU funding does not contribute to fundamental rights violations and enhanced exposure of projects and programmes putting migrants' rights at risk
- Strengthened efforts to counter the securitisation and policing of migration, including by addressing the technological and digital tools used in enforcement, and resisting narratives that frame migration as a security threat

'Immigration detention' is understood as the deprivation of liberty for reasons related to a person's migration status.

'Migration enforcement policies' refer to laws and practices used to identify, control, and remove people without regular status. They often involve detention and deportation. These policies limit access to rights, safety, and essential services.

'Deportation' refers to any process which seeks to remove third-country nationals staying irregularly in the territory of a country. The term 'deportation' reflects more accurately the coercive nature of these measures rather than the term 'return', particularly in contexts where people have no access to regularisation or regular permits, are deprived of their liberty or forcibly removed.

1.2 Safeguarding essential services from immigration enforcement obligations

Undocumented people and those who support them increasingly face a hostile environment, where access to essential services is undermined by measures aimed at detection for immigration enforcement. We call for an end to mandatory reporting of irregular migrants’ personal data to immigration authorities by public institutions, services, employers, and private individuals.

Outcomes:

- Expanded evidence base on hostile environment measures, including reporting obligations imposed on public authorities and service providers (e.g. in healthcare, education, housing, and social services), and their impact on the rights and wellbeing of undocumented people and racialised communities
- Strengthened cross-sector alliances with professional bodies, trade unions, and civil society actors to resist migration enforcement through services
- Enhanced capacity of members and partners to identify, monitor, and respond to the instrumentalisation of services at national and local level, including by leveraging data protection rules and legal actions where relevant
- Stronger safeguards to ensure access to essential services are safe spaces, including through strong data protection and explicit prohibitions on reporting for migration purposes

'Reporting obligations' refers to laws or policies that require public authorities and service providers, such as healthcare workers, teachers, labour inspectors and social service employees, to report undocumented migrants to the public authority responsible for migration control, which might include police, border guards, immigration offices.

1.3 Access to justice and effective remedies against violations

Undocumented migrants experiencing mistreatment including victims of crime and gender-based violence face significant barriers to access justice, including limited avenues for safe reporting mechanisms, lack of legal aid, and fear of immigration enforcement. We call for full access to justice, protection and effective remedies for undocumented migrants, and for their protection from harm to be ensured in both law and practice.

Outcomes:

- Expanded evidence base on access to justice, protection, and remedies for undocumented people, including practices that encourage reporting and support access to holistic services, as well as experiences of undocumented migrants within criminal and civil justice systems
- Improved implementation of EU legal frameworks that guarantee access to justice for undocumented victims of crime, including gender-based violence, and that do not undermine the rights of undocumented migrants
- Increased capacity and empowerment of members to support access to justice through tailored support, exchange, and tools
- Mitigation of the negative impacts of EU anti-trafficking measures that are harmful to undocumented migrants, including improving access to residence permits and establishing mechanisms for safe reporting of abuse and exploitation, remedy, and compensation

1.4 Countering the criminalisation of migration and solidarity

The criminalisation of solidarity is part of the broader criminalisation of migration. Both stem from restrictive policies that make border crossings unsafe and foster hostility toward people deemed to have entered or reside irregularly. These issues must be addressed together as part of the same harmful and exclusionary policy framework.

Outcomes:

- Broadened evidence base and strengthened messaging on the impact of EU policies in the areas of crime prevention and security, and counter-smuggling policies, on migrant communities and their supporters
- Stronger safeguards ensuring that migrants, those acting in solidarity with them as well as service providers are not criminalised under counter-smuggling policies and legislation at EU and national level
- Sustained media coverage of the criminalisation of migrants and those acting in solidarity, building public support for decriminalisation and the right to assist, alongside references to their root causes like the lack of regular pathways and safe routes that lead to punishment under counter-smuggling laws

Migration is human.
People move, they
always have and
always will.



2

Objective 2: Belonging and inclusion

To promote inclusion through practical solutions and effective access to social and labour rights, anti-poverty policies and well-funded services.

The millions of undocumented people who live and work in Europe are part of society – they develop relationships, build connections and contribute to the life of the community in many different ways. But because of their residence status, undocumented people experience various forms of exclusion. They also face additional barriers when residence status intersects with other forms of discrimination due to their gender, disability, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age, and/or sexual orientation. PICUM's work on belonging and inclusion aims to ensure undocumented migrants' access to well-funded services, social inclusion and anti-poverty policies, and to uphold their social and labour rights. We also promote solutions to address irregular migration status, such as well-designed regularisation measures, regular migration pathways and access to secure permits.

2.1 Promoting access to secure residence status, regularisation, and regular migration pathways

Regularisation, access to a secure residence permit and the availability of a range of grounds to stay and migrate are central aspects of fair and effective migration management. Yet these options are often deprioritised by governments or designed in a way that makes it difficult for people to access or keep a secure residence permit. This is the case of undocumented children and young people transitioning into adulthood and will likely also become a reality for people who have left Ukraine after their temporary protection status expires. Our work on regularisation and the establishment of regular migration pathways prioritises fair, effective and people-centered policies and addresses the immediate concerns of migrants with precarious residence status, while at the same time helping to design policies to limit future precarity.

Outcomes:

- Broader, more consistent multi-stakeholder support for regularisation as a vital policy instrument, with PICUM members and partners championing fair, effective and people-centered regularisation measures and regular migration pathways
- Expanded evidence base on regularisation measures, regular pathways on different grounds and access to a secure residence status and relevant EU and national developments in these areas
- Improved understanding of practical barriers to accessing permits and of people's experience of regularisation measures through the direct involvement of undocumented migrants in PICUM's work
- Regularisation campaigns led by PICUM members and migrant-led organisations are informed by exchanges of expertise, capacity building, and lessons learnt from different contexts

2.2 Advancing workers' rights, improving labour conditions, and developing pathways for decent labour migration

Being a migrant worker with precarious status often means not being paid the minimum wage, working in poor conditions, and being exposed to harm. Undocumented migrant workers who try to stand up for their rights often risk immigration detention and deportation. PICUM's work on labour looks at improving access to workers' rights, supporting pathways for labour migration that provide decent permits and promote social inclusion, and the eradication of workplace exploitation.

Outcomes:

- Strengthened evidence base on access to labour rights for people with undocumented or precarious status
- Improved access to labour rights and remedies including through further development at EU and national/local level of complaints mechanisms
- Increased and improved pathways for regular work and work permits which reduce dependency on employers and are subscribed in a less utilitarian approach to migrant workers
- Stronger collective actions involving trade unions and cross-sectoral coalitions – including migrant workers - to improve access to fair working conditions for undocumented migrant workers
- Greater capacity of PICUM members to support migrant worker activists, and to offer needs-based employment-related supports to migrant workers, including around mediation and complaints in case of labour rights violations

'Regularisation' refers to any process or procedure through which an undocumented person can obtain a residence permit from a relevant government authority authorising their stay in the country they reside. The person applies for these procedures from inside the country in contrast to residence and work permits which must be applied for from another country.

2.3 Access to essential services

Undocumented migrants face systemic barriers to essential services such as healthcare, education, housing, and social protection, often due to discriminatory policies and the threat of migration enforcement. We call for equal access to these services for all, regardless of residence status, and for policies that uphold social rights in practice.

Outcomes:

- Expanded knowledge and evidence on barriers to essential services, access to housing and strategies used at the local level to uphold access within a hostile environment
- Enhanced expertise and capacity to support legal strategies to uphold and advance access to services for undocumented migrants
- Strengthened capacity of members and allies, including through partnerships with professional bodies (e.g. trade unions, health professionals, educators) and social justice movements and sectors (e.g. disability rights, child rights, anti-racism, and workers' rights), to advocate for equal access to services
- Increased policy and legal commitments to access to services regardless of residence status

2.4 Social inclusion and anti-poverty

Undocumented migrants face a high risk of poverty yet are largely excluded from social inclusion and anti-poverty policies or efforts. We call for inclusive, needs-based strategies that address poverty regardless of residence status and dismantle the structural exclusions that undocumented people face.

Outcomes:

- Increased recognition of the interaction between migration policies, residence status and poverty, resulting in needs-based social inclusion and anti-poverty policies that target everyone experiencing poverty, regardless of their residence status
- Strengthened capacity of members and allies to advocate for inclusive, intersectional anti-poverty approaches that reflect the lived realities of undocumented migrants
- Expanded evidence base on the interaction between migration policies and people exposure to poverty
- Broader alliances with movements and sectors (e.g. anti-racism, disability, child rights, workers' rights) to challenge structural exclusion and promote systemic inclusion

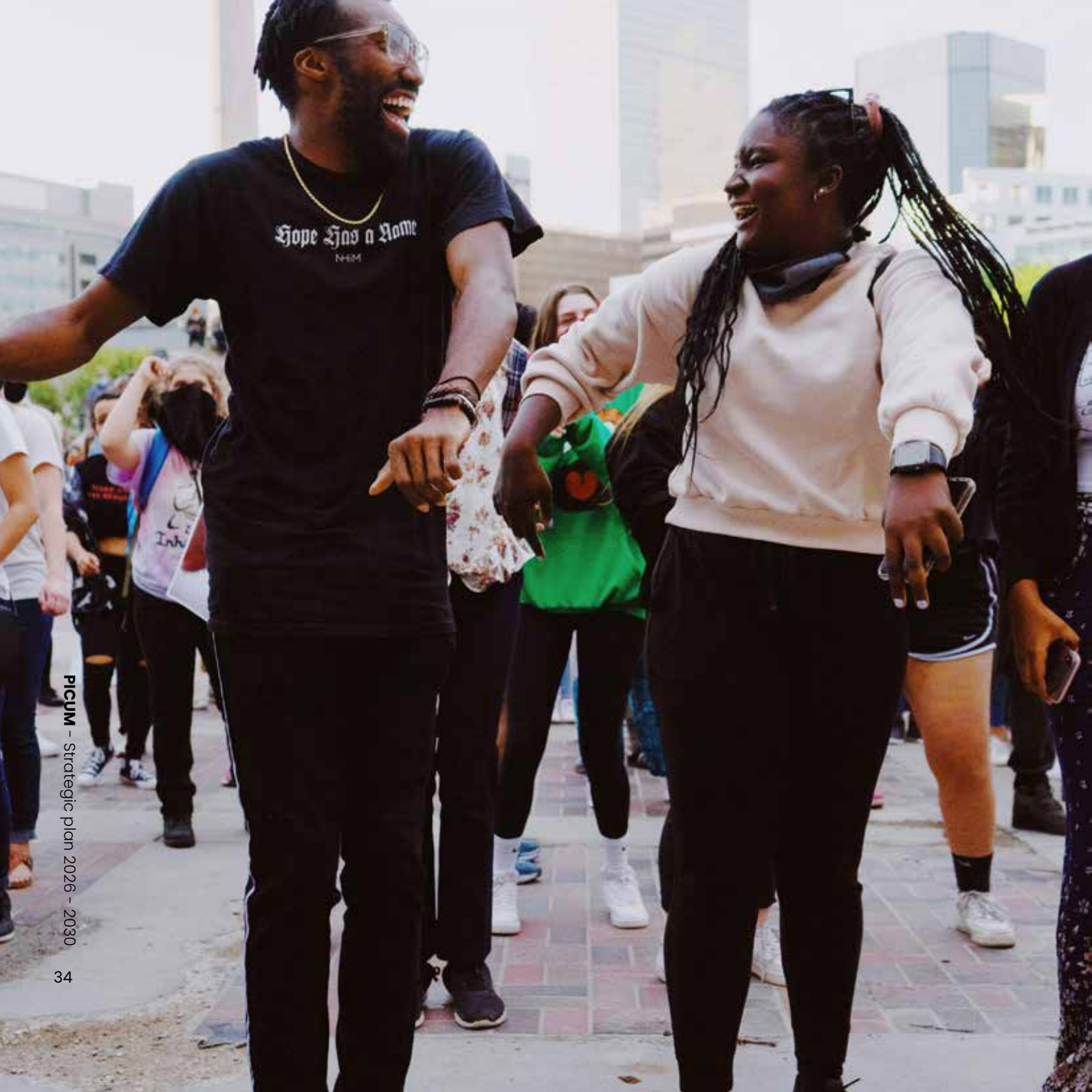
2.5 Inclusive and accessible EU funding to support undocumented people

Undocumented migrants are often de facto or formally excluded from EU funding support for social inclusion and integration measures. We call for an EU budget that is truly inclusive and accessible both in its design and implementation, enabling those best placed to provide support with the resources needed to reach all members of society.

Outcomes:

- Increased capacity of members and partners to influence the design of the next long-term EU budget, ensuring adequate and accessible resources for social inclusion, anti-poverty and access to services, including for undocumented children and their families
- Expanded qualitative and quantitative evidence on civil society's access to EU funding for supporting undocumented migrants' access to social inclusion and anti-poverty services
- Enhanced recognition of inclusion and access to services needs of undocumented migrants in EU funding at national and EU level
- Strengthened capacity of members and partners to participate in the programming, monitoring and implementation of EU funding for social inclusion and migration at national level

Everyone must
enjoy their human
rights, whatever their
residence status.



3

Objective 3: Resilience and participation

To strengthen the network and empower members and undocumented people to contribute to a more informed debate.

There is an increasing trend towards limiting the space for civil society to address and advocate for the human rights of migrants. Hostile narratives and disinformation on migration and human rights are becoming prevalent in political discourses and public opinion. PICUM and its members believe that strengthening the network and empowering undocumented people can contribute to a more informed debate.

PICUM will foster resilience and participation of the members and network by supporting and lifting up informed, lived experiences and calls for change and increasing the participation of undocumented people across PICUM's work. We will also enhance our engagement with members including through direct support and working to ensure civil society organisations have increased access to funding.

3.1 Strengthen PICUM’s voice

A strong voice and effective communication are key to advancing our mission and influencing public and political discourses on migration. We will work to advance positive narratives on migration and undocumented people, strengthen our response to fast-moving developments, and protect our reputation in hostile contexts.

Outcomes:

- Increased awareness of the need for social inclusion measures for undocumented migrants, illustrated through greater media coverage, social media followership and newsletter readership
- Increased capacity of members to counter hostile narratives and promote positive narratives on migration and undocumented people
- Strengthened capacity of the Secretariat to communicate and respond to migration-related issues and real-time developments concerning undocumented migrants, and ability to manage negative coverage

‘Civic space’ refers to the physical and digital environments where civil society, consisting of individuals and organizations, can freely assemble, speak out, access information, and take action on matters of public concern. An open civic space, free of censorship, threats, and repression, is essential to advocate for the rights and dignity of undocumented migrants. Decisions on resource allocation can affect the space for civil society and their capacity to engage and to respond.

3.2 Protect civic space

Civil society organisations are increasingly subject to administrative and financial pressures, as well as to harassment and attacks linked to their human rights work. Stronger coalition-building, collective action, and inclusive policymaking are crucial to resist criminalisation, protect civic space, and support organisations working in solidarity with migrants.

Outcomes:

- Stronger and more coordinated mobilisation and coalition-building that effectively protects migrants, migrants’ rights defenders, and civil society organisations from criminalisation and other forms of harassment, alongside increased recognition of civil society as a key democratic actor in the EU
- Reduced impact of reputational threat narratives linked to anti-lobbying and “foreign agent” laws for PICUM, its members, and the broader civil society sector, preventing the stigmatisation and intimidation of organisations working in solidarity with migrants
- Systematic and meaningful consultation of civil society and affected communities at all stages of policy-making, with stronger inclusion of those with lived experience in relevant governance, social, employment, and migration policy processes
- Increased capacity of PICUM and its members to identify, seize and manage funding opportunities ensuring the sustainability of their work in the face of growing uncertainty around funding for civil society organisations supporting migrants

3.3 Foster participatory and inclusive work culture

Increasing meaningful representation and participation of persons with lived experience of precarious or insecure status is a key target in all of PICUM’s policies, research, membership and communications related work. PICUM aims to embed meaningful participation of people with lived experience of precarious and insecure status in all dimensions of our work.

Outcomes:

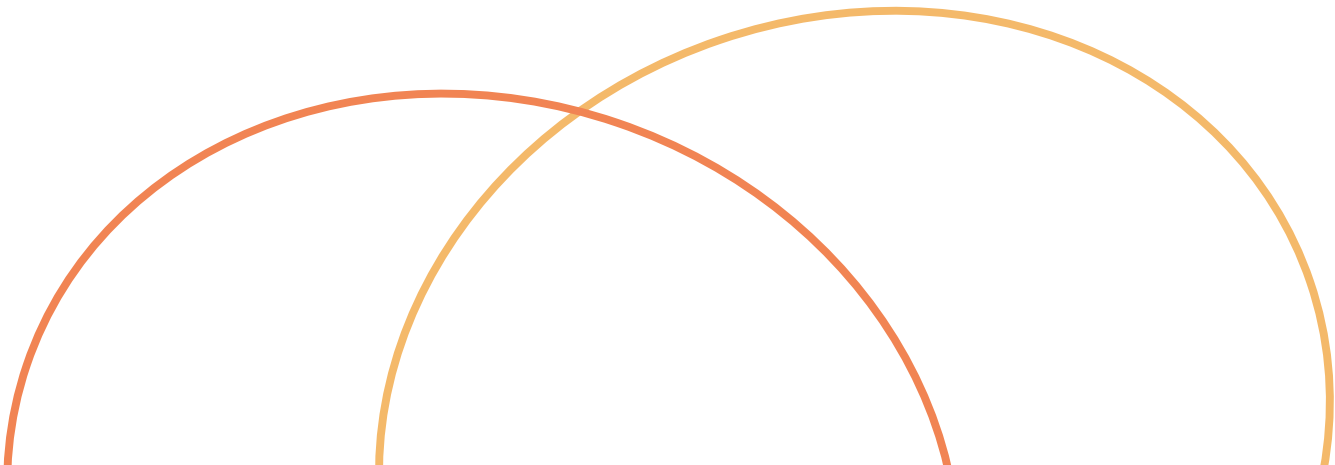
- PICUM’s monitoring, evaluation and strategic planning efforts are informed by its members and the views of persons with lived experience of precarious or insecure status
- PICUM’s communication channels include regular contributions from people with lived experience and activists.
- Members are better equipped to support migrant-led organizations in advocating for their rights
- Increased use and understanding of action-oriented participatory approaches, including participatory action research (PAR) involving undocumented migrants and migrants’ rights organisations within PICUM’s work

3.4 Systematize and pool learning and expertise across the movement

PICUM will systematize learning endeavors within the secretariat, among members, as well as with partners to help strengthen the sector overall. Expertise will be further developed on key cross-cutting priorities including intersectionality, legal strategies and digitalization.

Outcomes:

- Strengthened capacity of PICUM and its members to consistently mainstream age, disability, gender identity and racialisation across areas of work
- Enhanced expertise on the harm and potential for migrant populations and racialised communities of digital technologies and of the digitalisation of migration enforcement
- Enhanced availability of legal tools, expertise and knowledge to support individual or collective legal cases with potential for wider strategic impact on the rights of undocumented people
- Better equipped network to consider and support strategic legal work through the development of legal expertise and partnerships to align strategies and respond to emerging challenges on the needs of undocumented migrants



Development and consultation process of the strategy

This strategic plan was co-developed with PICUM's staff, Board and members and partners. After a staff and board retreat which kick started the process, PICUM membership provided feedback on the core strategic directions throughout via dedicated sessions at the General Assembly, virtual consultations and a steering group which monitored the entire strategy development process.

A strategy consultant provided guidance and lead in the design of the methodology and analysis of inputs. The strategic directions were further informed by the feedback of different stakeholders and external evaluations providing key insight into the actual reach and impact of PICUM's work.

Co-creating the strategy content together with members and key experts contributed to carving out future directions for PICUM's work based on an evaluation of our work and positioning, our strengths and achievements, as well as the opportunity and necessity for new approaches to confront, collectively, an increasingly challenging and hostile political environment.



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