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PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**18 DECEMBER: INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT DAY
TIME TO MAKE MIGRANT WOMEN VISIBLE IN EUROPE**

Brussels, 18 December 2006 - At the occasion of International Migrant Day, the European Women's Lobby (EWL) stresses the urgent need to make migrant women visible and to develop a gender-specific approach to EU policies and legislations in the fields of immigration and integration. EWL recalls that all women should have equal access to their fundamental rights, without any differentiation based on their status or origin.

Women now account for more than 45% of the migrant population in the European Union. Despite their contribution to economic and social development in the host country, migrant women experience high levels of poverty and social exclusion and remain invisible in the European debate in the field of integration/immigration. "In 90% of the cases of family reunification, the principal holder of the resident permit is the male partner, the wife being dependent economically and legally on her husband. This constitutes a clear legal discrimination against migrant women! The European directive regulating family reunification needs to be revised as a matter of urgency," stated Kirsti Kolthoff, President of EWL.

Another example of the barriers that migrant women face in host countries is the lack of recognition of experience and qualifications acquired in the country of origin. "Many of the women who are migrating are educated. They have ambitions about their own advancement economically and socially. However high-unemployed rates together with racist attitudes mean that many qualified migrant women are often constrained to take work that is well below their qualifications" said Mary McPhail, EWL secretary General, who then explained " Not only does this constitute a clear obstacle to their independence and empowerment as such, but this employment situation also reinforces a stereotyped image of migrant women being without qualifications, dependent on their partners, while in fact migrant women tend more and more to migrate independently to develop skills and send considerable amounts of money back home."

On the 19th of January, EWL will hold a public Seminar in Brussels: "Equal rights, Equal Voices - Migrant Women in the European Union" which will gather, for the first time ever, migrant women leaders from across the European Union. "It is the belief of EWL that migrant women should have the opportunity to meet, to organise themselves and to speak out in order to promote their rights at European level. This seminar is about giving them this space." concluded Kirsti Kolthoff.

Contact: Clarisse Delorme, EWL secretariat, delorme@womenlobby.org, 02.2100429

European Women's Lobby
Lobby européen des femmes
18 rue hydraulique
1210 Bruxelles, Belgique
Tel: +32/2 2179020
Fax: +32/2 2198451
<http://www.womenlobby.org/>