

Vulnerable migrants and spatialities in a global context

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The International Geographical Union organized IGU 2006 Brisbane Conference "Regional Responses to Global Changes. A View from the Antipodes" in Brisbane, Australia in July 2006. There were over 1 000 participants from all over the world. The Commission of Population and Vulnerability arranged special sessions dealing with vulnerability from different aspects, like vulnerable diaspora, and vulnerable spatialities which both include migration dynamics.

Allan M. Findlay, University of Dundee, Scotland, searched for conceptual understanding of population and vulnerability. An important dimension of research on the demographic correlates of vulnerability is that it reveals that populations are often exposed to multiple vulnerabilities, with one dimension of vulnerability often increasing the likelihood of other vulnerability. This can be recognized also in human migration and spatial development.

Petra T. Bürgelt, Massey University, New Zealand, pointed out in her paper that a growing number of first world countries compete progressively with one another over skilled migrants. In those areas with high leaving rate there is a negative impact on economic growth. Immigrants can face adap-

tation difficulties in the destination country which can be seen as proliferate distress and health problems. In the host country, it is important to retain migrants in ways that facilitate their well-being so that they can contribute to the development of social and economic capital.



IGU Commission on Population and Vulnerability, the members of the steering group. From the left: Professor Allan M. Findlay, Scotland (Chair), Professor Brenda Yeoh, Singapore, Research Director Elli Heikkilä, Finland, Professor Paul Gans, Germany, Professor Richard Bedford, New Zealand (Secretary) and Dr. Carmen Voigt-Graf, Fiji Islands.

Mohammed Al-Gabbani, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia, dealt in his presentation with brain drain from Arab countries, i.e. the professionals moving out to developed countries searching for better job opportunities and salaries. According to the study, 50 per cent

of medical doctors, 23 per cent of engineers and 15 per cent of Arab scientists are lost every year to Europe and North America. Also more Arab students receiving an education in Britain, the US, Canada or France stay after completing their studies.

Sureeporn Punpuing, Mahidol University, Thailand, exposed the vulnerability of migrant domestic workers from Burma to Thailand. None of the participants in her study knew about their employment conditions until they arrived at their workplaces. In addition to receiving below-minimum wages and no regular days off, incidents of withholding or non-payment of wages were frequently reported by the participants. Lack of proficiency of Thai limited the migrants' negotiating ability, and their interactions with their employers. Almost one in ten migrant domestic workers is subjected to physical abuse. In conclusion, these migrant domestic workers are vulnerable at work.

More information about the Conference and the Commission activities: www.igu2006.org
<http://www.arts.adelaide.edu.au/socialsciences/IGU/>