

**60<sup>th</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference**  
**IFSW Facilitates a Workshop on the Effects of Climate Change**  
**on Migrants**  
**Joy Bittner and Elaine Congress**

As part of the 60<sup>th</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference at the United Nations on Climate Change, the International Federation of Social Workers cosponsored a midday session in cooperation with the NGO Migration Committee. IFSW UN team member Dr. Elaine Congress organized and moderated the session entitled the Impact of Climate Change on Migrants: Current Issues and Future Challenges. Dr. Michael Cronin (IFSW Main Representative to the UN IN New York) and team member Marcia Wallace also participated in the session.

The focus of the presentation was how climate change, caused by natural disasters and the effects of greenhouse emissions, has directly impacted migrants. Because of the apparent increase in natural disasters around the world, there is an increase in forced migration. Migrants often suffer physical hardships as well as social injustices and prejudice when they are forced to migrate. Social workers often work with these immigrants in multiple roles, as direct service providers, as advocates, and as policy makers. To increase attendees knowledge of IFSW, copies of policies on Migrants, Refugees, and Displaced Persons were shared with the over 60 participants who attended the midday session.

The four panelists for this session considered current trends, possible causes, and the role that NGOs and social workers play in meeting the significant needs of migrants seeking to adjust to a new environment. Dr. Charles Guzzetta, Professor at the Hunter College School of Social Work, explained how human behavior has significantly influenced climate change, resulting in an upsurge of environmental migrants. As a member of the UN NGO INPEA (International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and President Elect of the NYC chapter of NASW, Dr. Patricia Brownell from Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service discussed how older adults are particularly vulnerable to climate shifts due to physical frailty and social isolation. Fakhiza Feddal an immigration paralegal whose family emigrated from Algeria to France and she to the United States shared the personal experiences of her family, which poignantly highlighted the prejudices and struggles that many migrant families face in relocating.

Finally, the chair of the NGO Committee on Migration and UN representative from the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Immigrants Foundation, Dr. Rosa Perla Resnick, concluded by discussing the importance of disaster planning at the local level and the need for NGOs and social workers to work in partnerships to address the impact of climate change on immigrants.

Following the panel, this well attended event generated much lively discussion about policy and program issues in work with migrants who have been forced to relocate because of climate change.

Joy Bittner  
IFSW Intern 2007-2008  
Fordham University

Dr. Elaine Congress  
IFSW UN team member