

# Reunification of Filipino Families in Italy: What the Youth Have to Say

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*Filipinos are among the first migrant groups that came to work in Italy, starting from the late 70s. The first wave of migrant workers, majority of them women, did not bring their families with them. But the family reunification program of the government has recently encouraged more Filipinos to bring their children to Italy, especially before they reach 18 years of age. Children who are brought to Italy, the so-called 1.25 and 1.5 generations, i.e., from about 10-18 years old, seem to experience more difficulties adjusting and integrating into Italian schools, even in re-connecting to their parents in Italy.*

*This study undertook a literature review of the situation of migrant children and youth in the United States (US) and in Europe, particularly Italy, in terms of their integration and performance in school and in their families, and their identity formation. Two focus group discussions were also conducted with eleven (11) Filipino youths aged 14-20 who were petitioned by their parents to join them in Italy.*

*Findings from the FGDs support previous studies that show the emotional difficulties faced by migrant children as indicated by communication problems and lack of closeness with their absentee parents. Further, the lack of adequate grounding in speaking and understanding the Italian language as well as socio-psychological preparation greatly impede the migrant youth's capacity to cope with school and to socialize with the Italian natives. They experience difficulties in schools and recognize the advantages of the Philippine educational system. Nevertheless, they firmly intend to remain in Italy so they could be with their parents. They have definite ambitions to finish their studies in order to find good employment and take over the income-earning responsibility from their parents.*

**Key words:** migrant youth, integration, family reunification

*(Ma tu ti senti italiana o filippina? Eh, un po' tutti e due... mi sento filippina perché, cioè, dall'aspetto fisico, poi però di mentalità mi sento un po' italiana... cioè mi sento di tutte e due... non credo di fare una scelta... o sono filippina o sono italiana... no, non la voglio fare perché comunque sono attaccata a tutte e due... ma ormai non ci faccio neanche più caso a questa cosa dell'italiana o della filippina, cioè, io preferisco avere queste due culture diverse più che scegliere.) (Jeremie, genitori filippini) (Bosisio, R. et al, 2005)*

But do you feel Italian or Filipina? Well, a little bit of both...I feel Filipina because of the physical aspect, but then, in mentality I feel a bit Italian...I mean...I would say my feeling is both of them...I won't care to make a choice...being a Filipina or Italian...no, I don't like the idea of choosing because anyway, I'm personally attached to both identities...by now I don't even think of being Italian and that of being a Filipina, this is because, I prefer having two different cultures than having to choose (Jeremie, Filipino parents) (Bosisio, R. et al, 2005).<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

Filipinos are among the first ethnic groups of labor migrants into Italy, starting from the late 70s and accelerating in the 1980s (Chell, 2000; Tettamanzi, et al, 2005). Chell cites that by 1981, Filipinos in Italy numbered some 15,000 and by 1990, this had more than doubled to 35,000. The number of Filipinos continues to grow with more workers now bringing their families, especially their children under the Italian program on *ricongiungimento familiare* or family reunification. Italian law allows the entry of spouses and children below 18 years of age to join their parents as long as parents are either gainfully employed or have acquired Italian citizenship.<sup>2</sup> More babies are also being born in Italy of either one or both Filipino parents. In the 2001 census data, out of 13,298 Filipino children in Italy, 19.5 percent were first generation children and 80.5 percent were second generation (UNICEF, 2009).

According to Dazzi (2010), some 60,000 Filipino children and youth currently live in Italy. About 12,600 of them are studying in Italian schools. It appears that while the first generation of Filipinos in Italy lacked a desire to bring their families to Italy, this has now changed with increasing numbers of Filipinos petitioning for their spouses and children. More Filipinos, likewise, appear inclined towards a long-term stay in Italy by getting a *carta di soggiorno* (residence card) or taking on  *cittadinanza Italiana* or Italian citizenship.

Studies on the effects of long separations between Filipino migrant parents and children, particularly between mothers and children, indicate increasing numbers of breakdown of relationships and parental authority, and the development of rebellious and risky behaviors, such as dropping out of school, both in the Philippines and in the host countries, including Italy.<sup>3</sup> Negative consequences are more likely to occur when mothers are the migrant workers (SMC, 2004; Asis, 1995 and 2003; Battistella & Conaco, 1998 as cited by Edillon, 2008).

The effects have not all been negative. Some studies have shown that children left behind in the Philippines with relatives and other caregivers in many cases have also been able to cope positively with their parents' long absence. Factors such as constant and meaningful communication from a distance and support by family members caring for the children appear critical for ensuring relatively smooth relations between parents working abroad and their children in the Philippines (Aguilar et al., 2009).

The family reunification program in Italy provides what may be viewed as a very positive step in addressing the drawbacks of the separation of migrant parents and children. But there is increasing anecdotal evidence on the inability of Filipino teen-agers and older ones to adequately integrate into Italian society, particularly in its school system, and in finding meaningful employment, or even re-establishing parent-child relationships.<sup>4</sup>

## **Background on the Study**

### ***Objectives***

This study focuses on the issues of Filipino migrant youths in relation to re-connecting with parents and/or siblings who may have been raised in Italy; the school and educational system that is vastly dissimilar from that of the Philippines; the identity formation that each young person goes through in the process of individuation; and for some, employment. These issues may be viewed as factors that can determine the successful integration of the youth into Italian society.

The study follows and complements the previous one done by the author (Liamzon, 2005), given the paucity of research in this area, in exploring the situation of the Filipino youth in Rome. It aims to capture some of the youths' hopes and dreams for themselves and their perceptions of the challenges they face in coming to Italy.

The study hopes to contribute to a better understanding and definition of the conditions and challenges facing the Filipino youth who reunite with their parents in Italy, and what may be done to assist them to develop a strong identity or 'hardiness of spirit'. This 'hardiness of spirit' can help them overcome the hurdles of integration and acculturation into the host society, and more importantly, work towards the fulfillment of their own dreams.

There are potential critical ramifications if the Filipino youth in general, and those who come to reunite with their families in particular, are unable to adequately grapple with integration issues in the host society. More of them could drop out of school, engage in delinquent and other risky behaviors including teen age sexual relations leading to early and unwanted pregnancies, and dead-end, low-income jobs such as domestic services. Already, in the past few years, news reports abound of 'baby gangs' composed of both Italian and non-Italian teen-agers. Operating in big cities like Rome and Milan, some of these gangs

include Filipino immigrant youth who get involved in fights, beating up Italian or other ethnic youth.<sup>5</sup>

For many children and youth who were born or grew up in Italy for the bigger part of their lives (the Generation 1.75 and 2.0), the dilemma is not as pronounced given their facility in the use of the Italian language and the longer exposure to non-Filipinos or native Italians in the schools.

Thus, the study focuses on Generation 1.0 to 1.5 (Rumbaut, 1997) or those between 10-17 years of age who came to Italy under the family reunification program.

### ***Methodology***

The study was conducted during the summer of 2010, from June to September. Primary data were obtained from two focus group discussions (FGDs) with eleven Rome-based Filipino youths (six males, five females). While a large number of research literature on migration is quantitative, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in qualitative approaches for issues on migration such as the role of social capital and social networks, identity formation and change as they can be better analyzed and understood with qualitative methods.

The first FGD was held on August 19, the second on September 25. Two criteria were used for selecting the participants: their parents petitioned for them under the family reunification program, and they came to Italy as pre-teens or in their teens. Most of the youth were contacted through the Sentro Pilipino Chaplaincy, the Catholic parish of the Filipinos in Rome.<sup>6</sup>

The FGDs brought together youths coming from a shared experience of having spent a significant part of their lives in the Philippines away from their parents. This is, to the author's knowledge, one of the first attempts to actually obtain data from the youths themselves on what they have experienced in coming to Italy as well as their thoughts and feelings.

The study also reviewed recent literature on immigrant children and youth in the European Union but with focus on Italy. In this way, some comparisons can be drawn from what have emerged from researches in a new immigration country such as Italy compared with the older immigration countries such as France, Germany and certainly the USA.

### ***Limitations***

The study was conducted during the summer of 2010 when large numbers of Filipinos, as with most Italians and other nationalities, were away for holidays or accompanied and worked for their employers on their vacations. These included many youths who thus could not be available for the FGDs.

Moreover, as in previous experiences, several attempts to invite young people who have joined their parents under the family reunification program did not yield the expected numbers. There were constraints of time to conduct the study as well as limited resources that did not allow for a wider net of Filipino children and youth covering not only Rome but also other parts of the country.

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### ***Immigrant Children and Youth in Europe and the USA***

Rumbaut (1996) provides the following categorization of migrant children and youth based on their arrival in the host country which is useful for understanding more specific groups of children and youth, rather than a generalization of all children and youth.

- Generation
- 1.0 - those who arrived in the host country as adults;
  - 1.5 - those who have arrived at a young age;
  - 2.0 - children born in the host country of two immigrant parents;
  - 2.5 - children born in the host country of mixed native and immigrant parents.

Rumbaut's subcategories include the 1.25 generation or children who have immigrated between the ages of 13 and 17, the 1.5 generation (children who began primary education in the country of origin, but completed it in the country of settlement) and the 1.75 generation (children who immigrated before they had reached the age of compulsory schooling).

While research on young migrants in Europe is fairly new and sparse, there has recently been increasing concern for the second generation with these children and youth getting older and becoming more visible, especially in countries such as France and Germany.

The general view from various researches across the different European countries has been that migrant youths tend towards underachievement (Crul and Vermeulen, 2003; Bosissio, 2005; Queirolo Palmas, 2006). Available studies point out that second generation migrants are apt to lag behind the children of non-immigrant families in their schooling; they have higher dropout rates; they repeat grades more often, and they are concentrated in the least challenging educational tracks, opting to finish their education as soon as possible (Crul and Schneider, 2009).

These studies, however, also show that there have been children of guest workers such as those from Turkey in countries such as Germany since the 1960s and 1970s who have succeeded in the educational ladder. Crul (2005, 2009) argues that the factors for success depend to a large extent on the background characteristics of the immigrant families such as their socio-economic standing.

One of the proven hypotheses is that migrant children starting kindergarten and primary school in the host society have higher opportunities to finish with higher educational degrees. Those arriving after 12 years old are more likely not to obtain a high school level diploma. This is clearly shown in the experience of recent immigration countries where migrant pupils are over-represented in the "1.5" generation (Gobbo et al, 2009). The same study cites that there is a lack of inclusion of immigrant children in the school environment based on the experience of the new European immigration countries and that immigrant children encounter hostility and difficulties at school.

In the United States (US), more studies on migrant children and youth are available with its longer history of large waves of immigration. As Filipinos are among the largest nationality groups in the US and generally regarded with other Asians as model minorities, more studies have been conducted on the integration into American society of Filipino migrant children and youth (Root, 2005; Su Yeong Kim et al, 2009). One such study delved into the experiences of recently-arrived young migrant female adolescents in Hawaii with regard to their families and their integration in American schools. It found out that these youths underwent difficulties in the integration process. The young Filipinas reported frequent experiences of physical and verbal discrimination from classmates and unfair treatment by teachers in the schools. In Hawaii, Filipinos have the lowest percentage of high school graduates at just over 50 percent and the second lowest percentage of college graduates (11%). The study cited that the girls remained close to their families, especially their mothers, strongly recognizing and appreciating their parents' struggle and sacrifices in migrating to Hawaii for the sake of the family. Despite their negative experiences in school, they still viewed academic success as a primary means to getting good employment to help their families (Su Yeong Kim et al., 2009).

Newly arrived Filipino youths in the US also suffer socio-psychological effects, often, 'culture shock', in having to adjust to a new environment and culture. As the second generation youth assimilate into American society, conflict emerges between generations with the clash of traditional Filipino and American values (Root, 2005). Problems among adolescents in the Filipino-American communities, according to Root, are high pregnancy rates, high rates of high school drop-outs, and suicidal ideas and attempts. These appear to echo some of the same issues currently appearing among Filipino youths in Italy.

### ***Immigrant Children and Youth in Italy: An Overview***

Data from the Italian 2001 Census show that there were more than 900,000 children from zero to 17 years old or 10 percent of all children in the country who were born abroad or had at least one parent born abroad. (Mencarini,



et al., 2009) About 400,000 of them were born in Italy. In 2006 alone, 52,000 migrant babies were born (Caritas/Migrantes 2006). Of the 500,000 immigrant children, one or both of the parents came from developing countries.

The study of Mencarini, et al. (2009) provides a situationer on immigrant families in Italy and their children. It shows that majority of the migrant children grow up with both parents, though one-parent households are also common, and that immigrant families live in overcrowded housing. In terms of schooling, there are less migrant youths aged 18-24 years old who are in school, with only 25 percent versus 40 percent for native Italians. Large numbers of migrant youths also tend to choose and enroll in the vocational/ technical/ 'professional' courses compared to their Italian counterparts. A high percentage, some 60 percent, especially among recent arrivals, enrolled in technical or vocational schools which are the fast-track and easier means to finish schooling and obtain jobs (MIUR 2008). In Milan, many immigrant Chinese and Filipino students were found to be both working and studying (Cologna & Breveglieri, 2003 as quoted in Mencarini, 2009).

Likewise, immigrants are in less qualified jobs in the labor market. While women/mothers report high rates of economic activity, this is basically relegated to domestic and home services and generally, on part-time arrangements.

Mencarini et al's study also identifies the factors that strongly influence whether children will continue with their studies after middle school or choose to find jobs instead. It cites Queirolo Palmas' (2006) finding that family socio-economic status (SES) is a strong determinant of whether students choose to go to the academic track (*licei*) or the technical/vocational schools. This relates closely to Crul's finding in other European countries as earlier cited. Those from middle to upper class backgrounds tend to choose the academic track while children from blue-collar families take up vocational or technical courses. In relation to migrant children in Europe, Queirolo Palmas offers the explanation that the overrepresentation of migrant students in vocational/technical courses

may be a result of their parents' experiences. Despite their university degrees from their home countries, many have failed to find jobs that are related to their educational qualifications. Thus, many parents conclude that there may not really be advantages in pursuing academic courses.

### ***Filipino Children and Youth in Italy***

According to Dazzi (2010), when parents and children reunite in Italy after a long period of separation, the children are thrust into a society that is not really prepared to assimilate immigrants. This makes living in the new country very difficult and challenging. She highlights that this is quite a contrast from living back in the Philippines where, despite the physical distance from their parents, these youths were able to attend private schools. They also had a privileged relationship with other family members, particularly grandparents, and had little responsibility, thanks to the sacrifice and economic sustenance of their parents.

Upon arrival in Italy, many of these youths, particularly those in high school and college, are asked to contribute to the family income. Thus, they take on small jobs, such as baby-sitting, while they continue with their education. Often, like other immigrant students, they choose the vocational track so that they can find work immediately after their studies.

It was in the 1980s that Filipino migrant workers began to enter Italy for work. Most of the workers initially planned to return to the Philippines after accumulating sufficient savings. They also wanted their children to complete their education in the Philippines. Consequently, the children remained in the Philippines. However, in recent years, Filipino migration has become more stabilized with the Italian government giving occasional amnesty to previously undocumented migrant workers. More parents are deciding to petition for their children to join them in Italy. Being in Italy means children must integrate into a different culture as well as resume a relationship with family members whom they deem, to some extent, as strangers (Tettamanzi, et al., 2005).

Liamzon's (2005) exploratory study of the situation of the Filipino youth in Rome distinguishes four types of Filipino youths in Italy for purposes of identifying the specific issues for each group. These are: a) those born and/or raised continuously in Italy starting at a young age; b) those under 18 years of age who are reunited with their parents; c) the youth who come to Italy primarily for employment reasons; and d) those with mixed parentage. The author opines that the category of children and youth who were claimed by their parents at an older age (the 1.75 generation), having spent a certain length of time in the Philippines under the care of relatives, has experienced the most difficulties and challenges in living in Italy.

The same study reveals that Filipino migrant youths tend to be ambivalent about leaving the Philippines. They were eager to reunite with their parents but anxious about losing their childhood friends and adjusting to a new country.

In Italy, they may or may not want to continue their studies as their new country presents opportunities to work without a college degree, and entails major adjustments to a different educational system. Furthermore, they tend to experience high stress in adjusting to living in a new country, especially in learning a new language.

The inability to cope adequately can lead to a loss of self-confidence. This may be exacerbated by the negative image of Filipinos in Italy arising from their concentration in domestic services and the low social status attached to it.

The migrant youth also experience difficulty in communicating with their parents from whom they lived apart for long periods and can even become emotionally distant from them. As a result, many could rebel against their parents and engage in socially undesirable behaviors in the new country, e.g., smoking, drinking, and drug use.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### ***Profile of the FGD Participants***

Except for one who came from the Visayas (Cebu/Leyte), the youths and their families were from Luzon. Three were from Central Luzon, four from Southern Tagalog, and one from Bicol.

Ages ranged from 14 to 20 years with 17.5 years as the average. There were two pairs of siblings. Three have been in the country for less than six months while one has stayed the longest at nine years. The average length of stay for the rest is over five years.

All 11, therefore, spent the longer portion of their childhood in the Philippines. Several were already in their mid-teens when they finally left for Italy. Thus, everyone could understand and speak good Filipino and relatively good English.

A few had come to Italy previously to spend their vacation with their parents.

The youths' families in Italy generally consisted of both parents although two had only their mothers, and some had siblings in Italy. Of those over 18 years, two were in the *liceo* track (which includes linguistic, scientific, classical and art) while four were studying in the vocational/professional tracks, such as tourism, hotel management and mechanics. Six of the youths said they were members of certain organizations or communities, two of which were church-related.

### ***Family Issues***

Almost all the participants were either infants or toddlers when their mothers/fathers left for overseas work. They were left in the care of grandparents (the *lola and lolo*) although one had a 'yaya' (nursemaid) and an aunt as parental substitutes.

They said they understood that their parents had to leave and work abroad for their benefit, sacrificing and undergoing hardships to do so. Grandparents contributed to this awareness, specially to soften the children's adverse reactions to their parents' emigration. Nonetheless, three participants, two of whom were females, felt angry about their parents' absence. This anger was aggravated by a lack of real communication with their parents.

Most of the children's parents tried to bridge the distance through phone calls and regular (e.g. annual) home trips. They stayed for a month or so to ensure that they and their children got to know each other through the years. But these vacations were clearly not enough to prevent adverse outcomes of long periods of separation. Two participants said that when they were younger, they did not recognize their parents when they visited. Based on his own experience, another participant said children can get used to their parents' absence and be actually happy in the Philippines with their friends. Another lamented that as she rarely saw her mother, she did not know her at all. She could communicate her love to her mother over the phone but not face-to-face.

Children left behind also learn to hide their real feelings to avoid worrying their parents. A male participant said he felt confused when his parents reunited in Italy. But, he put on a happy face so there would be no need for them to return to the Philippines. He tried to be courageous and 'thick-skinned.'

In Italy, the youths felt mixed emotions: happy and content to be with their parents after many years of separation, but also lonely and sorely missing relatives and childhood friends in the Philippines. A male participant disclosed that his parents gave him the latest gadgets to make him happy in Italy and compensate for uprooting him from the Philippines.

Reunification does not automatically mean all would go well between parents and children. The participants had difficulties, even conflicts, with their parents, especially their mothers. They were not able to relate easily with parents as they had not developed the means to express their feelings when they were

still in the Philippines. In part, this may be due to the lack of bonding arising from the years that they did not live together as a family. This inability to relate to parents, particularly mothers, despite the desire to do so has led to frustration on the part of two girl participants.

### ***School and education-related issues***

The youths experienced different types of problems, albeit in varying degrees, in adjusting to their schools. This was primarily because of their inadequacy in communicating effectively in Italian, enrollment in school without sufficient preparation and for some, inadequate support in school to help them cope with the classes.

In general, they coped by keeping quiet, some to the point of making themselves "invisible," and simply listening to the lessons. They admitted vacillating between wanting and not wanting to go to school. They were also shy and embarrassed towards teachers and classmates because of their inability to speak Italian. English was their medium of communication. They were upset and irritated by classmates making fun of their attempts to speak Italian. Some even stopped reciting in classes. Only one, a girl, dismissed and ignored such behavior.

Another female participant responded by showing off her ability to understand and speak English which her Italian classmates could not do. She had done a few months of college education before coming to Italy.

This kind of an attitude supports an observation by a male participant that it may be better for other Filipino youths to finish secondary education before coming to Italy so they can have the confidence to respond to the challenges of the educational system.

In addition to self-confidence, the youths' determination and a supportive environment were critical to a successful adjustment in school, specially in the case of

female participants. One learned to speak Italian after only four months, thereby impressing her classmates in a school run by nuns. She attributes her success to her courage, confidence and determination to learn. She also had an enabling environment. Her mother took time and effort to help her systematically learn the Italian language. Her teachers and classmates also gave her much support during her adjustment period.

Another girl, also enrolled in a school run by nuns, often stayed up late at night to study her lessons, particularly on the Italian language. She had very little preparation before going to regular school. In fact, she had to be in school barely 24 hours after arriving in Italy. She was determined to succeed because she wanted to stay in Italy with her parents and siblings.

A third girl participant put in an extra hour for Italian language lessons. This was a service provided by the school for newcomers after regular classes. Italian schools have the discretion to provide this service or not. Unfortunately, this service has been offered haphazardly and irregularly.

A male participant decided to enroll at a separate Italian language school. He arrived in summer and had time to take a basic language course before the start of classes. But, this was not enough.

The participants mentioned that they had some classmates, including Filipino and other non-Italians, who showed concern and helped them with lessons. They tend to bond more easily with other Filipinos or with other foreigners with whom they share a common experience of being new and different. One example is that of a male participant who went to a tourism school with many foreign students like himself. His classmates were welcoming, making his adjustment less stressful.

There were mixed feelings towards discrimination. Several spoke about being teased and bullied. More girls than boys mentioned being teased by Italian boys. A recent arrival was angry with male classmates who sent her love notes to irritate her.

Girls reacted to teasing and bullying differently from boys. A girl participant said she simply tolerated the bullying and teasing whereas a boy who was bullied actually fought back. Consequently, he got into trouble with the school authorities. But, appearing to be a 'tough guy' brought him acceptance and recognition by the gang of 'bullies.' Eventually, he became the 'leader'.

In starting their education in Italian schools, one had to repeat her grade level; another failed in his last year of school no longer as a result of adjustment problems but a lack of diligence.<sup>7</sup>

Teachers have been generally accommodating and helpful to the newcomers, telling them to just try their best. One newcomer, however, found it disconcerting that teachers always seemed to be shouting. She found them strict. At times, she was scared of them.

Other comparisons were made between school systems in the Philippines and in Italy, and between Filipino and Italian students. In Italy, exams could be given everyday and recitation is graded. Initially, the oral examinations were in English.

The school system in Italy provides a sense of being more free for the Filipino youth. One participant even lamented the fact that he had to study for ten years in the Philippines. In his first few days in an Italian school of tourism, he did well in his mathematics and engineering subjects as these did not require oral communication skills. He and one other male participant prefer the way schools are run in Italy compared to the Philippines despite difficulties encountered in school and in learning a new language.

But there are also features of the Philippine educational system that some youths missed. One would be the strict and efficient teachers and system. Another is the conduct of graduation exercises which is not done in the Italian system.



The participants viewed Italian students as much more liberated than their Filipino counterparts. Many of them expressed surprise, if not shock, at the disrespect shown by some Italian students for their teachers (or parents) and getting away with it. They deemed this unthinkable back in the Philippines where, they argued, there is much more respect for teachers and more discipline among students.

### **Italy or the Philippines?**

Given what they have experienced, would the participants prefer to remain in Italy or return to the Philippines for good? All stated that they wanted to go back but solely for vacation. They missed their relatives, especially their grandparents or other caregivers, and their friends. They would like to stay in Italy mainly because they want to be with their parents. One boy recalled how wonderful it felt to spend his first Christmas, New Year and birthday with his parents.

For the older participants who have been studying in Italy for several years, they want to stay in Italy because they have already "made their name", i.e. they have been able to prove that they survived and made it. This is something they would not have been able to accomplish in their homeland.

The participants had mixed views on what they left behind in the Philippines. One boy said he found people in the Philippines to be rather narrow or closed-minded. But, he was also critical of the "disorder" in Italian society as manifested in the vices among the youth.

Another male participant shared the information that, in the past, he wanted to return to the Philippines. But, now that he has lived in Italy for several years, he can actually live and adjust anywhere.

When asked if they felt they had adequate preparation before emigrating to Italy, the responses were in the negative, particularly in relation to the Italian

language. One recalled how his parents told him as a young boy that living in Italy would be nice and cold, and nothing more. Others said they had been waiting for the opportunity to go to Italy for a long time so, in a sense, they were psychologically prepared. This was particularly true in the case of one boy who had visited his parents in Italy for vacations.

The youths aspire to complete their studies, and then look for a good job so they can eventually take over the role of income earner from their parents. The older ones expressed interest in hotel and restaurant management, tourism, engineering, medicine or nursing, and architecture. But, the general tendency is to go into the technical/vocational/professional track rather than the academic one. This would be consistent with an identified pattern among immigrant youth in the European countries (Crul, 2005; Mencarini, 2009; Queirolo Palmas, 2006). One youth who has not done well in school, nevertheless, expressed his determination to finish his schooling and live up to his parents' expectations. He cited that he did not want to follow in the path of other Filipino youths in Italy who, according to his parents' friends, "*lahat ng mga nag-aaral dito, hindi natatapos, napupunta sa mga supermarket*" (all those who study here are unable to finish their studies; they end up in the supermarket – (as bag boys – author's addition).

## **Conclusions**

Reunification does not automatically lead to smooth family relationships as exemplified by the persistence of communication problems with parents, especially mothers. Long years of separation have created a vacuum and distance in terms of relationships between parents and children. Earlier studies on Filipino transnational families support this finding (Asis, Huang & Yoeh, 2004 as cited in Edillon, 2008).

Reunification also evokes mixed emotions. While happy to be with their parents in Italy, the youths also expressed sadness and loneliness in leaving behind in the Philippines family members who took care of them for most of their lives, especially their *lolas* (grandmothers) in the Philippines.

The type, quantity and quality of preparation for the youth to easily adjust to life in Italy were very inadequate on the part of parents and Philippine-based family members. Of particular concern is their lack of proficiency in the Italian language. This is a major reason behind the youths' adjustment problems in school. Another reason was the lack of sufficient support in Italian schools to help them cope with their classes.

Those with proactively supportive family members, teachers and classmates managed to overcome the challenges of learning and adjusting to a new language and a new school. An equally critical factor came from within: the determination to succeed as motivated by the desire to remain with their families in Italy. The determined ones put in additional hours and resources learning and practicing the Italian language. Their success eventually made a difference in building confidence and perseverance.

The youths who were motivated to do well in school, including becoming proficient in the language, did perform better. Or they perceived themselves as being able to perform school tasks instead of feeling insecure and unable to fully participate.

As newcomers and foreigners, they also had to contend with bullying and teasing as well as discrimination in school. They forged friendships with kindred souls - fellow Filipinos and other migrant nationalities.

### **Recommendations**

- A. Parents who wish to bring their children to Italy should consider the findings of numerous studies that show migrant children integrating more easily to the host country school and its educational system at a younger age. If and when children are petitioned at an older age, parents should provide adequate preparation to them in terms of formal language instruction prior to the start of regular schooling, proper orientation on what to expect in Italy and most importantly, emotional and socio-psychological support. These children

will be uprooted from the relatives who were their primary caregivers for long periods and their friends who have been part of their moral and emotional support system. Hence, parents, despite their heavy workload, must take the time and the effort to reach out to their children who have to cope both as migrants and as youths still in the process of identity formation.

- B. Italian schools and Italian authorities can assist in a more smooth and facilitative integration of newly-arrived migrant youth into the Italian educational system by providing lessons in the Italian language prior to the start of formal schooling and augmenting them with extensive remedial/tutorial classes for the period needed to allow them to cope with their courses than what is currently being offered.
- C. The Philippine government, through the embassy and related agencies, and the religious communities in Italy should actively bring to the attention of Filipinos in Italy the concerns of the Filipino youth, and identify concrete steps that can be undertaken as a migrant community to show moral and social support to their integration, particularly those who may have dropped out of school, are unemployed or are engaged in non-productive behaviors. To ignore the youths' concerns is to do so at our peril for the youth will be the citizens of not only Italy but also the Philippines.
- D. Researches should investigate the Filipino youth's performance. This is especially urgent for those in the 1.75 to 2.0 generations who have the advantage of having been born or raised in Italy at a young age and gone through its educational system from pre-school. It is this generation of children and youth who would have experienced an easier transition, integration and acculturation into Italian society. How would this 'new' generation of adolescents fare in relation to the educational and career tracks as compared to their parents or other migrant youths or their native Italian classmates? Would they find themselves much better integrated, in fact, assimilated into Italian society, relegating their Filipino roots and culture into the background as they transform themselves into Italians? Or would

many of them, as the Filipina quoted in the beginning of this paper, view themselves as being both Italian and Filipino, appreciating both cultures and neither wishing nor needing to choose to be one or the other? Hence, parents, despite their heavy workload, must take the time and the effort to reach out to their children who have to cope both as migrants and as youths still in the process of identity formation.

A last note of concern that confronts Filipino as well as other migrant workers in Italy, as in several other countries in Europe, is the financial crisis that started around 2008. Said crisis is likely to continue, thereby constraining the labor market available for migrants, and resulting in tighter immigration laws throughout the continent. What the impact will be on migrant workers, including Filipinos and their families, has yet to be fully seen and felt .

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### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Annaliza Bueno helped to translate the Italian text into English.

<sup>2</sup> The European Council Directive 2003/86/EC of 22 September 2003 focuses on the right to family reunification. This has been adopted by the Italian government as written in the *Gazzetta ufficiale* n. L 251 del 03/10/2003 pag. 0012 – 0018.

<sup>3</sup> One such study was done in 2005 by C. Liamzon for the Sentro Pilipino Chaplaincy, Rome and the Associazione Pilipinas OFSPES. *An Exploratory Study of the Situation of Filipino Youth in Rome*. The study can be found at [www.pilipinas-ofspes.net](http://www.pilipinas-ofspes.net). A shorter version entitled "Filipino Migrant Youth in Rome, Italy -A View of their Issues and Concerns" is found in: IN DE OLDE WORLDE: Views of Filipino Migrants in Europe. (see References).

<sup>4</sup> The author's work with the Sentro Pilipino Commission on Family and Youth relates precisely to these types of issues and concerns of the youth that arise in many Filipino communities in Rome.

<sup>5</sup> Bjorn Thomassen cites the highly publicized case of the son of Rome mayor, Alemanno being beaten up by a group of Filipino and other migrant youths in Rome.

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<sup>7</sup> For the majority, other Filipinos who were not necessarily classmates became the peer group that they have bonded with and who have helped them to cope with their new surroundings. For some, attending a national youth encounter organized by the Sentro Pilipino Chaplaincy helped them to relate with other Filipino youth and they continue to communicate with some of them.