

FILIPINA MIGRATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

“In the Service of our *Kababayans*!” - Bayanihan Philippine Women’s Centre

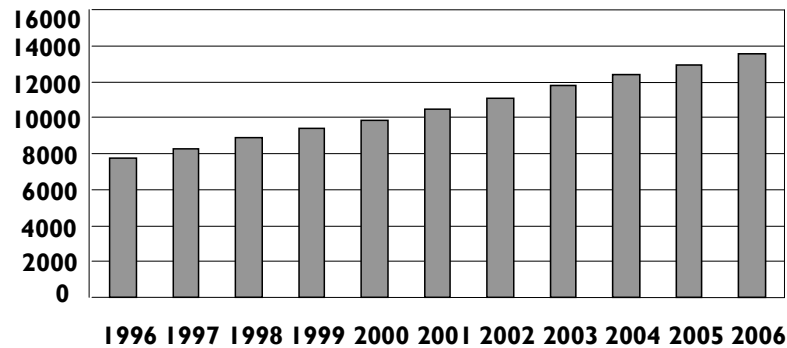
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Just like in any part of the world where they are, Filipinos in The Netherlands are found in various sectors of the Dutch society. Today, the majority of the Filipino community is composed of permanent residents, complimented by a number of students and scholars, au pairs, refugees, land-based seafarers and oilrig workers, and undocumented (domestic) workers. They work in the professional sector, local government, entertainment, and in the formal and informal service sectors. Some are self-employed who have put up their own businesses offering various services from selling Filipino products to shipping balikbayan boxes.³ There are big concentrations of the Filipino community in the major cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, and also in big towns and municipalities. But it’s not unusual to find Filipinas even in small villages.

According to the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics, as of July 2006 there are 13,499 registered Filipinos in The Netherlands, 67 percent (9,075) of which are women. Of the total community population, 64 percent are first generation migrants, 79 percent are women. In comparison with the second generation which make up 36 percent of the community, there is a slight tip of the balance with males making up 52 percent.

With regard to their civil status, 56 percent of the first generation Filipinas are married, 80 percent with Dutch partners. A very small percentage, around 7 percent are divorced.

Table 1. Filipino Population in The Netherlands



Compared to official figures, based on its own work and research, Bayanihan Foundation estimates, however, that there are 17,000 to 19,000 Filipinos in The Netherlands, including those without papers, land-based seafarers and offshore workers. Majority of the Filipinas who are married assumed their Dutch husbands names in their registrations and passports, hence their Philippine origin is not easy to trace anymore. Nobody can exactly tell how many Filipino residents are there in The Netherlands.

The Netherlands prouds itself in being a model of a welfare state. In 2005, it ranked 12th as 'most liveable country' according to the UN Human Development Index.⁴ The Netherlands is known to be an open, tolerant and multicultural society. It opened its doors to refugees fleeing dictatorships in the 1960s and 1970s. Its controversial liberal policy on soft drugs and regularisation of prostitution is either applauded or criticised by governments worldwide. It started receiving migrant workers for its reconstruction after World War II in the 1960s. The flow of migrant workers from Northern Africa and its former colonies has continued in the past 20 years.

However, during the past 10-15 years, and most recently due to economic decline and the upsurge of what they call 'economic refugees,' the government has introduced more restrictive and discriminatory migration laws. Moreover, with the war against terror, more and more restrictive laws are put in place. For those wishing to migrate to The Netherlands, acquiring a working or residence permit

has been more difficult than ever. These restrictions have tremendously affected women migrants.

Today, according to official figures by the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics, 4.3 percent of the total Dutch population have a foreign origin or background. The big groups of migrants are composed of Surinamese, Moroccans, Turks and Antilleans. It is a common street scene to see a lot of coloured people in the big cities and towns.

FILIPINOS IN THE NETHERLANDS – THEN AND NOW⁵

As far as it can be traced, the first Filipina who married and settled in The Netherlands arrived in 1948. In the beginning of the 1960s, Filipina musical artists came to The Netherlands to pursue their careers and eventually settled in the country. One was an opera singer and the other a violin child prodigy who won an international competition in Vienna. Two upper-class women from exclusive Catholic schools also joined their husbands.

Up to the 1960s, anyone could come to The Netherlands and work without the need of a work permit. A tourist could simply go to the Foreign Police and apply for a residence permit. Apart from individual Filipinas who came to develop careers or who settled down with a Dutch partner, several group of Filipinas also came to work as nurses and garment workers.

For many women who came in the 1960s, their reasons for coming were not so much the reasons why majority of Filipina women leave their country today. Then, there was still the excitement of adventure in working in a foreign country, and not so much to the inability to find good-paying job in the Philippines or the necessity to escape poverty.

Health workers

The nurses, (around 50 of them) came in the early 1960s upon the invitation of the current queen Beatrix. At the same time, The Netherlands was undergoing economic recovery and was in need of health workers particularly nurses. The nurses got a three-year contract and worked in Utrecht and Leiden. Some of them even came from the USA where they have been working and undergoing training. However, majority of the nurses later asked to be released from their contracts because of the heavy work which nurses in The Netherlands were normally made to do. Many of these nurses left for the United States,

while some stayed behind. To replace the nurses, the hospitals changed their recruitment targets to midwives. They were also given three-year contracts. The first group arrived in 1967 to work in Amsterdam. Successive groups arrived in Haarlem, Bussum, Eindhoven and Apeldoorn. The recruitment stopped sometime in the early 1970s when the economic condition of the country changed.

However today, due to shortage of health workers in Dutch hospitals and nursing homes, there are new recruitments again; at least three to four groups of Filipina nurses arrived since 2000. It is expected that there will be more active recruitments of foreign health workers in the near future.

Textile and garment workers

Between 1966 and the early 1970s, some 600 Filipinas came in batches of 10 to work in the textile factories of Berghuis in different parts of The Netherlands. This recruitment was arranged through Catholic missionaries. Many of the women who came were college graduates and professionals. The women were divided into groups of 60-70 and were housed collectively with eight or nine women living in an apartment. Each group was assigned a Filipino social worker.

They were not obliged to learn Dutch, rather, their Dutch colleagues were given English lessons. They worked at the Berghuis Textile Company until two of the factories closed down due to recession leaving Amsterdam as the only one operating. Around 70 of the women decided to stay; either because they got married or they found other jobs. Most migrated to Canada, to the USA and Britain, while a few went back to the Philippines. Filipinas stopped coming to The Netherlands as contract workers in the late 1970s.

“Trafficked” women

In the 1980s, the growing economic crisis in the Philippines had pushed Filipinas to take their chances with recruiters, who promised them good jobs but some ended up as victims of the sex trade. Others who came to work as entertainers saw themselves forced into prostitution. Various methods were used to force them to become prostitutes: their passports were taken away, intimidation, threats, violence, rape, blackmail, withholding of food, restriction of movement. They were told that they owed the trafficker the cost of their plane fare, visa, clothing, etc. that was why they had to work hard.

In mid 1980s, the celebrated case of "Nena," a Filipina who escaped from forced prostitution, hit the Dutch media and got not only public attention but landed in the political agenda of the Dutch parliament. A film based on the life of Nena, entitled "Cannot Run Away," was produced in The Netherlands which garnered several international awards. Eventually, the director took the information she gathered in making this film and saw to it that the Filipino man who headed up the racket was prosecuted for his many crimes. The Dutch Foundation against Trafficking of Women (STV) was instrumental in taking Nena's case in the open.

The few cases of Filipina women victimised by traffickers hit its all-time peak during the mid-1980s. Today, there is hardly any information available on Filipinas being trafficked to The Netherlands. But that does not mean it does not happen anymore. Today, more known cases are that of women coming from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Filipino refugees

Around late 1970s until early 1980s during the height of the political repression in the Philippines, Filipino activists were forced to flee the country and seek asylum in The Netherlands. There are also reports of new arrivals most recently. There would be around 20 or more Filipinos with refugee status and some with asylum applications still under process.

Marriage migrants

During and after the 1970s, migration of Filipinas grew and their situation today is much more varied. The number of Filipina residents in The Netherlands continues to grow mainly through marriage; they compose the majority of the Filipino community. Some Filipinas met their partners in the Philippines when Dutchmen were on vacation. A small number of them are married to Dutch development workers and ex-missionaries. Of late, a number of Filipino seafarers and offshore workers who have lived and worked here for several years married Dutch and Filipino-Dutch nationals. In the past 20 years, the bicultural marriage trend has been stimulated by correspondence and marriage bureaus.

Today, with the onset of globalisation, a new form of acquiring partners is taking place. Instead of the "pen pal correspondence and agencies," the Internet is used as the modern medium in looking for

possible partners. The trend of meeting partners through the Internet steadily continues. This is used especially by young people living in the urban areas in the Philippines. The new Filipina brides coming to The Netherlands are now young and freshly graduated from college. Likewise, their Dutch partners/husbands are also young, educated and more open to other cultures. This new development is a far cry from the traditional pen pal clubs in the 1970s and the 1980s when Filipinas did not get much opportunity to know their future husbands more interactively. However, due to new restrictive immigration laws and regulations, the criteria to come as bride have been very strict.

Scholars and students

Under Dutch and Philippine government scholarships, professionals working mainly in the government sector and NGOs come to The Netherlands for diploma graduate or postgraduate courses in educational institutions and universities in The Hague, Delft, Wageningen, Enschede and Amsterdam. Most of the scholars and students go back to the Philippines after they finish their studies. Normally their residence status as students is coterminus with their courses but some are able to stay either because of marriage or work opportunities.

Au pair schemes in Europe and in The Netherlands are increasingly being used as a way of ensuring that families have access to low cost domestic labour. Constructed as cultural exchange and as family rather than contractual labour this can often leave young women extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Agencies operating for profit are often unregulated even though au pairs are extremely dependent on them for protection. There is an urgent need for research and evaluation of these schemes in order to decide how best to work with them.

(Undocumented) domestic workers

The presence of Filipina domestic workers in The Netherlands is getting more and more visible. One reason for the growing demand for domestic work in many Dutch households is due to the increased participation of Dutch women in the labour market. Hiring migrant labour, especially that of undocumented workers, is much cheaper than hiring local labour. Because of their undocumented status, most of the Filipina domestic workers work in the informal sector (meaning unregistered work or what is commonly referred to as "black" work).

Many of the Filipina domestic workers (documented and undocumented) who are informally employed work on a regular basis in more than two households at the same time. They also work either as “live-in” or “live-out.” It is rather common to hear that they have 5 to 11 employers at any one time.⁶ Most of them are concentrated in Amsterdam, The Hague and in other big cities. Because they are hard working, have good education and speak good English, Filipina domestic workers are also favourites by the diplomatic corps.

In the past years, we also see an increasing number of male Filipino domestic workers. Most of them are those who came to work in the oils rigs but ended up doing domestic work. It is interesting to note however that in The Netherlands, work in the private household is not a recognised proper work and is not an accepted immigration status. Those who become undocumented are mostly those whose visa have already expired but have chosen to stay to earn the much needed income.

Seafarers and oil-rig workers⁷

There are a significant number of Filipino sea-based workers falling within the ambit of Dutch laws and policy. The Netherlands, aside from being one of the major commercial shipping flag states, hosts the Rotterdam port - the biggest port complex in the world today as well as a number of significant ports like Amsterdam, Vlissingen, Den Helder, and Eemshaven. Moreover, it is heavily involved in the exploitation and development of the North Sea Oil and gas deposits.

The Philippine Seaman’s Assistance Program (PSAP), a non-governmental institution based in Rotterdam, estimates that around 300 Filipino seafarers pass by Rotterdam each day. Hundreds work on board Dutch ships, while a number of Filipino residents in The Netherlands have been hired by Norwegian, German and other European ships. No less than 300 Filipino men and women are working in production platforms run by American, Norwegian, British, and Dutch companies in the North Sea.

Around the mid-1980s, the first batch of Filipino offshore workers, including some women, got their jobs in the North Sea mining industry. Since then, their numbers increased to an estimated number of more than 300, including those who have already quit the work for various reasons. Many of them applied for the jobs through the tips and invitations of families and friends who were already settled in The

Netherlands. A few of them were recruited directly by some Filipino residents in the Philippines, with placement fees amounting approximately to thirty thousand pesos. Some of them, who already reside here, have applied for the jobs because they desperately needed work. Many of them have a college or university degree, while a number have graduated from high school. Majority of them, especially those who are married, and left their families at home, say that the job in the oil-rig still pays better than in the Philippines. A few admit they just want to experience life abroad and are open for adventure. Most of them expect to acquire a residence permit after seven years, and hope to be able to apply for better jobs on shore.

Filipino organisations

The Filipino community is one of the highly organised migrant communities in The Netherlands. However, there are no exact numbers available how many Filipino organisations exist. It can be estimated that there are around 50, or even more, on the national, regional and local levels. These organisations are either for Filipinos only, or a combination of Filipino-Dutch. They depend fully on volunteer time of their members and support from their Dutch members and sympathisers. Most of the organisations are self-reliant but some of their activities get financial support from provincial and regional governments or from funding agencies and church organisations.

The forms of Filipino organisations in The Netherlands changed through the years. As the Filipino population grew and the needs and problems of the community became more varied and evident, groups and organisations also increased. Some emphasise social and cultural expressions, others have a more political character, and most devote activities to rights and the welfare of the migrant community. All of the groups maintain their links to their homeland, seen particularly in fundraising campaigns for relief, charity and in supporting small-scale development projects in the Philippines. A federation and a coalition of Filipino organisations have been formed to undertake common activities and action. The community picnic during the Philippine Independence Day celebration annually in June is one activity where hundreds of Filipinos with their families and friends converge.

Most recently, self-organisations of undocumented domestic workers were put up. Some organisations have also started initiatives on microfinance and remittances investments.

On the national level, there are at least four centres established which cater to the needs of the Filipino community: a women's centre, an assistance programme for seafarers, and two information and service centres for general migrants' needs. These offices are run either by paid part-time staff with volunteers' support, or wholly run by volunteers only. There are also radio programs on the regional/local areas (Amsterdam and Rotterdam).

There is an initiative by several Filipino organisations to form a lobby/advocacy group for the recognition of the Filipino community as an official minority group in The Netherlands. A few years ago, a group was formed which lobbied successfully for the 'export' of social benefits for Filipinos remigrating back to the Philippines.

Philippine-related organisations and NGOs, such as solidarity, information and documentation centres and charity organisations, set up by Dutch people are also present in The Netherlands. Occasionally, there are joint activities and projects between these organisations and some Filipino organisations.

THE ROLE OF THE FILIPINA IN THE COMMUNITY

In relation to specific activities on women, the Filipino organisations address these issues in different ways. There have been direct actions against sex-trafficking, legal and financial help, housing, and often, intervention on behalf of the Filipina in trouble. Information sessions on migration laws and policies have been held at different periods. Women's gatherings, workshops and study groups are not new. There has been participation of Filipinas in the work of other institutions like Third world projects, children, etc. Filipinas have spoken in International Women's Day activities, international fora on women's issues, and in local neighbourhood and religious gatherings. Researches on specific problems of women in Europe have been done by the Filipinas themselves. Cultural activities have also contributed to building confidence and to developing the ability to express oneself.

There are several Filipina organisations which operate on the national and local levels and a small network of Filipina organisations and individuals called Diwang Pilipina.

Filipinas have been instrumental in getting the Filipino community organised. Majority of the members of Filipino organisations are women and in general, are more active than their male counterpart. Most

women who have assumed leadership roles have had previous experiences in organising work back in the Philippines. Others who did not have these earlier experiences became trained to handle responsibilities through the actual running of their organisations. However, there would still be many women who have taken on more passive roles within their organisations mainly due to shyness, fear of gossips or lack of self-confidence.

In general, a considerable number of Filipinas in The Netherlands (88%) have college degrees in education, commerce, nutrition, health, social work, and the like; a few (10%) have high school diplomas, and 2% finished elementary education. Many of them have already working experiences in their own field of discipline prior to coming to The Netherlands.

Given that the majority in the Filipino community are women, their needs and concerns are much greater than that of their male counterparts. Also the current immigration laws and regulations in The Netherlands, make the situation of the Filipina more difficult. The fact that she is a woman and a migrant make her more vulnerable to all forms of violations of her human rights.

BAYANIHAN FOUNDATION – PHILIPPINE WOMEN’S CENTRE

Bayanihan Foundation finds itself at the core of the Filipino community in The Netherlands. Bayanihan is a Filipino word meaning “neighbourly cooperation” or helping each other. Bayanihan Foundation is a self-help women organisation, established in 1991,⁸ providing various forms of assistance and support to all Filipinas who are living and/or working in The Netherlands. It is a service and training centre for Filipinas needing assistance for self-development to make their lives as Filipina migrants more meaningful and fulfilling.

Bayanihan’s mission as a self-help women’s organisation is to work for the empowerment of Filipinas in The Netherlands so they can be well-integrated and active members of Dutch society. This mission is an integral part of our vision of a society where everyone—regardless of gender, religion, race and sexual preference—enjoys the same fundamental rights and liberties, and valuable opportunities for self-development and for becoming active participants in pursuing the ideals of an egalitarian society. This is a society where all women have control over the direction of their own lives, the capability to pursue and enjoy

meaningful lives, and are duly recognised for their equally invaluable role in creating a more humane and just society.

Bayanihan makes concrete this mission and vision not only through specific activities such as awareness-raising, information campaigns, seminars and workshops on the rights of women and migrants, but also by actively advocating and lobbying on issues that affect migrant women. In this manner, Bayanihan makes an important contribution to the advancement of the rights of Filipinas in particular, and of women in general.

Through our years of service, we have embedded our work at the centre of the community. To be able to attend to growing needs of our target group and because their needs and problems are getting more and more complex, after 10 years, Bayanihan embarked on a professionalisation process. This process is meant to make our services and programmes more effective and relevant to the community of Filipinas we serve.

Social services assistance and counselling

This is Bayanihan's core business. Every year we give assistance to an average of 120 women who come to the centre for support on various forms of problems. These problems can range from practical tips and information how to make their stay in The Netherlands pleasant to more complex psychological and legal problems. Some need intensive guidance and counselling which can take a few months to a year or even more.

Other activities under this programme are:

- a. Crisis intervention - for immediate and direct help, for instance in partner-related cases involving physical, mental and emotional violence.
- b. Telephone helpline - devoted entirely to receiving calls from Filipinas who need information, immediate help or simply a listening ear.
- c. Follow-up support activities - continuous assistance and guidance for the Filipinas who are slowly but surely trying to build her life again after a crisis.

Bayanihan has also "special support services for Filipina au-pairs" which include giving information about au pair rights and obligations, and providing practical assistance like helping them overcome

difficulties in making social and cultural adjustments in The Netherlands and acting as mediator between the au pair and other entities.

To be able to extend its social services assistance to as many Filipinas as possible, Bayanihan has a Network of Volunteers composed of Filipinas in different regional areas of The Netherlands. They are professionally trained to give counselling and to respond to crisis situations.

Empowerment programme

As part of our capacity building and awareness-raising activities, Bayanihan conducts trainings and seminars on various issues and topics that affect Filipinas in their stay in The Netherlands. The main objective is to enhance their capacity towards self-empowerment for a meaningful and productive life. It is meant as a preventive measure equipping our target groups with sufficient knowledge and skills on how to protect their rights and welfare.

Integration and participation of Filipinas in the Dutch society are two important aspects of this programme. Some of the topics taken are on migrants rights and responsibilities, gender-based violence, skills and leadership trainings, crosscultural communication, basic women orientation, marriage and parenting in a bi-cultural society.

Network, lobby and advocacy

In general, we lobby Dutch government institutions, policy-making bodies, trade union federations, welfare and health institutions, the Philippine Embassy in The Netherlands and the Philippine government. Our lobby and advocacy work are primarily on migration laws, independent residence permits for women, working conditions, welfare and health services, equal job opportunities and rights and welfare of au pairs. We are an active member of the lobby group Komite Zelfstanding Verblijfsvergunning, and we work with other lobby groups and expertise centres such as E-quality and Forum (Instituut voor Multiculturele Ontwikkeling).

At the European level, Bayanihan is an active member of Babaylan, the Philippine women's network in Europe, and of the European Feminist Forum (EFF). Internationally, Bayanihan is a member of the Association for Women's Rights and Development (AWID).

Since 2006, Babaylan is member of the steering committee of the European Feminist Forum (EFF). EFF is a space for discussions on how to repoliticize the feminist movement in Europe and to explore feminist agendas needed in today's Europe. EFF aims to engage all interested in a broad forum on key issues for feminists across Europe, however they wish to define Europe. Babaylan's agenda at EFF is to contribute in the discussion on how feminists see migration in our lives, as migrants and as women supporting migrants.

Information, research and documentation

This programme includes dissemination of information on the situation of the Filipinas in The Netherlands and on the causes of their migration from the Philippines. Bayanihan initiates researches and surveys on issues which concern its target groups (i.e., the Filipinas, the Filipino and Dutch communities). Some examples of its recent major collaborative and independent work:

- a. The position of au pairs in The Netherlands from outside the EU (with the University of Tilburg) in 2000;
- b. "Networks, Migrants and Natives: Networks of Experience, Networks of Welcome"⁹ Migrants and Networks in Europe 2005 (a research project led by the University of Rome Tre and funded by the European Commission);
- c. The social and economic position of Filipinas in The Netherlands (on-going); and
- d. Compilation and publication of primers and pamphlets on existing laws and policies which are relevant to our work (e.g., immigration and integration policies, marriage to Dutch partner, divorce, social security, au pair system regulation, au pair rights).

PROBLEMS THAT FILIPINAS FACE IN THE NETHERLANDS

With its 15 years of experience and through written materials and information gathered through formal and informal exchanges among Filipino organisations, Bayanihan is able to identify the main concerns and problems Filipinas are confronted with in The Netherlands. To name a few:

1. Loneliness and isolation

Research and experience prove that most Filipinas who come to The Netherlands are not properly prepared and do not have much idea in what situation they will land. During the first period they suffer

loneliness and homesickness. Filipinos cherish strong family ties. The warmth and company of immediate families and friends are especially missed during occasions such as birthdays, baptisms, and Christmas season.

Taking care of the elderly and raising of children are social responsibilities shared with the extended family. Since she also does not know her way around yet, she does not have the opportunity to meet *kababayans*. The Filipina lacks the family and friends' network of support when she settles down with her Dutch partner. Homesickness and loneliness may cause strain and tension in the relationship and may eventually lead to depression and isolation of the Filipina.

On the other hand, those who have some members of their families here are recreating and living-up to the hierarchical structure and dependency to elders just like in the Philippines. This in turn hinders the integration to Dutch society, and becomes an additional difficulty in bicultural relationships.

2. Cultural differences in a bicultural relationship

As already mentioned, majority of Filipinas in The Netherlands are married to Dutch nationals. Some of these marriages have been the results of correspondence and tourism in the Philippines. Studies show that not only language is a barrier but also cultural differences which make the communication between the partners difficult. Communication and management of family resources are the two particular areas of adjustments crucial towards maintaining a stable marriage. The manner and the style of communication, especially during the early part of the marriage are critical. The "gentleness" and smooth interpersonal relations which are the prevailing characters of social interaction in the Philippines, contrast sharply with the general "roughness" and directness of the Dutch interaction.¹⁰

Due to their husbands' ignorance about Filipino culture, most Filipina wives are made to stay at home, and in worst cases, prevented from having contact with other Filipinos, and from joining activities in the organisations. As they do not earn any income, their dependence on their husbands is total.

Many Filipinas have also opted to stay at home to keep the household and to take care of their children and husband's needs. Apart from the influence of such values that the woman's place is in the home, their decision can also be influenced by the difficulty of

entering the labour market to practice their professions in the Philippines. The Dutch tax system has also not encouraged married women to get out of their homes and work, particularly for those who want to work part-time. Childcare services are very limited and costly. Women simply decide to stay at home which means again a total economic dependence on the husband.

Filipino residents in The Netherlands work hard to earn money, not only for their families here but also for the entire family back in the Philippines. Sometimes, such a financial responsibility becomes a burden, especially when their Dutch partners do not understand this and are not willing to cooperate, making this one source of friction within the marriage.

3. Dependent residence permit and domestic violence

While stories abound of successful relationships between Filipinas and Dutch, there are also those hidden and kept secret. Due to complete dependence on their partners, Filipinas are prone to become victims in abusive relationships. From time to time, these experiences of violence in the hands of abusive fiancés, partners and husbands are reported to Bayanihan by the Filipinas themselves who seek help and assistance. Wife battering and other forms of physical, emotional and psychological abuse are experienced by some Filipinas. A number have threatened to commit suicide to escape intolerable relationships. A few have lost their sanity and have been committed to mental institutions and psychiatric hospitals.

One contributing factor to the victimisation of a Filipina is that current immigration laws do not give independent residence permits to migrant women. Their legal status is “tied” to their relationship with their Dutch male partner. Recently amended laws provide permanent residence permits only after staying three years in the relationship, either living together or in matrimony.

Regardless of any reason, if the Filipina decides to separate from her husband or partner within this period, she faces deportation proceedings. Thus, many who are trapped in violent relationships have been forced to endure their situation, until they become entitled to more permanent residency. Although there have been new laws which give some protection to women victims of violence, most women are ignorant of their existence. The violence they suffer goes unreported to the police authorities.

4. Raising of children in a bicultural relationship

Many Filipinas are bringing up the second generation of Dutch-Filipino children in a highly industrialised, urban, multiracial and multicultural society. Divergent economic, political and sociocultural backgrounds greatly impacts on the marriage between a Filipina and a Dutch national. These divergent attitudes shape the way they view the institution of family and their respective roles within it: childrearing practices, religious expression, food preferences and other values and cultural traditions. These issues, if not resolved by the husband and wife, result in conflicts in rearing a child in a bicultural relationship. The Dutch partner's inability to understand the cultural context of his Filipina wife aggravates the conflict. The Filipina is confronted by socio-cultural issues which she cannot properly transfer to her child. The Filipino values and traditions which she highly regards are put in question, and she is left on her own to deal with them. In the meantime, due also to her lack of understanding the full context of her Dutch partner's culture, she lacks a good environment conducive to good childrearing. Such unresolved issues bring confusion to the child as to which norms and values are important to her/him and result to conflicting cultures instead of their good and harmonious combination. Because the dominant culture is Dutch and the Filipino culture is seen as inferior, in the end, the child is ashamed of her/his Filipino background.

5. Integration and participation in the Dutch society

Integration and participation by migrants are the two important agendas of the past and present Dutch governments. For years now, the Dutch government had introduced several policies and programmes to facilitate the integration of migrants in The Netherlands. Somehow they do not seem to work. The criteria are getting more and more difficult with the obvious objective of actually discouraging migrants to come.

Being integrated in a receiving country, one has to go through two important stages – learn the culture and speak the language. Only then can one participate fully in the society either by finding a job and/or being active in the community.

The first requirement for integration is learning the Dutch language. The level of language fluency of Filipinas varies from poor, reasonable and good. Filipinas who came here before the 1990s had less opportunity to learn the Dutch language intensively. That situation was demotivating for many. According to them, the language courses before

were not designed to fit the different levels of education of the participants. There were no differentiation, all the courses were only organised in big cities and municipalities, affecting those who settled in relatively small towns and villages. Many of those who attended language courses, left school after a few months because of dissatisfaction over how the courses were conducted. In most cases, the pattern followed by Filipinas who came here was to earn money in any kind of work as soon as possible, rather than choose a career which required learning the Dutch language well and further training. Furthermore, the Filipino community is not reached by Dutch labour service institutions; they have no access to relevant social and educational information.

With regard to participation in the labour market, Filipinas in general, do not make the necessary efforts to have their diplomas accredited for the right discipline, either due to ignorance of the system, lack of interest or inability to pursue more years of studies to earn the necessary credits. As a result, most of the women here have either worked in the last 15 to 20 years as unqualified medical attendants, caring for the aged in rehabilitation houses, as chamber maids in hotels or domestic workers which contributes to the deskilling of an otherwise highly capable work force. Majority of those who found professional jobs mostly work well under their skills and work experience already acquired in the Philippines.

Because majority of Filipinas have more urgent concerns – earn a living, take care of the family, etc., participation in the general Dutch community is not a big priority. They would have a small circle of friends for social contact but are not particularly active in Dutch community life.

Language proficiency and limited work opportunities are two main obstacles that Filipinas face in their integration in the Dutch society; one having an effect on the other.

6. Human rights violations and racism

It is generally known that the Dutch people are known to be tolerant to migrants. During the past 15 years, and more so after 9/11 however, the trend towards more blatant violation of the human rights of migrants is on the rise. The institutionalisation of racism in relation to immigration and the treatment of migrants has cleverly sanitised racism, giving it an acceptable face, for the sake of “safety and security” of the general public.

The declaration of the war on terror has exposed migrants of colour more than ever to more violations of their human rights. Their safety in public places or even in their own environment is no longer guaranteed.

The Filipina residents identify with other migrant ethnic groups in combating racial prejudice and discrimination in their working and living conditions. In the workplace, discrimination takes on very subtle forms. As professionals, Filipinas seldom get promoted to positions which require skill, experience and a solid training and educational background. Despite being over-qualified for the job, having accumulated several years of experience and training in the Philippines, their qualifications are deemed inferior, and therefore, not recognised.

The Dutch media, in the meantime, tend to portray Filipinas as domestic workers, mail-order brides, prostitutes, and entertainers. They are portrayed as victims instead of determined and strong women trying to build a better life which they deserve in a foreign country.

MOST RECENT RESTRICTIVE IMMIGRATION REQUIREMENTS

As already mentioned earlier, we have seen in the past years the increasing restrictive direction the immigration laws in The Netherlands is taking. This current trend can be felt all over Europe. Most recently the Dutch government increased the restrictions of its immigration requirements on family formation and family reunification. Waiting out the three-year requirement to secure an independent residence permit is not the only impediment for the emancipation of migrant women in The Netherlands but a clear violation of their human rights:

- a. In 2004, more requirements were imposed for admission and renewal of residence permit. It means that the application for an independent residence permit will take longer - longer dependence on the Dutch partner means vulnerability to domestic violence.
- b. Another requirement is a proof of stable means of income — through a work contract with a minimum of one year and at least 120% net income based on the minimum wage. For a migrant woman with children who does not have her own income but would like to divorce her Dutch husband, this is almost an impossibility. Moreover, the fees for a residence permit has sky-rocketed in the last years, in some cases up to 1000% increase. For women without income or very low income, who can afford this?
- c. The processing of the applications by the Dutch immigration and naturalisation service (IND) takes very long and is inefficient.

Another law called the Civic Integration Act (Wet Inburgering) entered into force on 15 March 2006 and sets an additional condition for obtaining a regular temporary residence permit (known as “MVV”), namely that people must first have a basic knowledge of the Dutch language and Dutch society before they come to The Netherlands. This basic knowledge will be tested by taking the Basic Civic Integration Examination with the use of a computer at a Dutch embassy or consulate-general in the country of residence costing approximately about •350. Passing the examination means getting a visa while failing means refusal or rejection of the visa application.

Those who have passed the exam and are admitted to The Netherlands are obliged as newcomers, under the terms of the Civic Integration for Newcomers Act¹¹ (Wet inburgering nieuwkomers), to participate in a civic integration programme upon arrival in The Netherlands. It primarily concerns people who want to form a family (by marriage for example) with someone in The Netherlands or who want to join family members already living in The Netherlands.

For women coming to The Netherlands for family reunification purposes, according to the Dutch government, this Act is also intended for the emancipation and integration of these women and also to protect them against violence. However, in practice it hardly works; in fact, it presents more obstacles to the very women it wants to protect. Some of the reasons behind this are:

- a. The mandatory “integration examination” in the country of origin has a very high threshold for these women – the test is poorly developed and its content is highly criticized; there is no preparation for the test; tests are only available through the computers in Dutch embassies and consulates; and the fee is very high which most women cannot afford.
- b. When the exam is passed and the visa is granted, upon arrival in The Netherlands, she has to follow the mandatory integration course which is also very expensive. Moreover, the quality of the course is questionable and there are insufficient childcare facilities to make it more accessible to women. Nonparticipation in this course means sanctions such as administrative fines¹² or the threat of not getting an independent residence permit later.
- c. The integration and emancipation of women are severely undermined by this Act. It does not give sufficient protection to women who have the misfortune of being trapped in a violent relationship.

Thanks to the vigorous lobby and campaign work of civil society organisations led by black, migrant and refugee women, there have been improvements to the protection of battered women with dependent residence permits. There is now a possibility to apply for an independent permit based on humanitarian grounds as long as these women report the incidents of violence to the police, either with or without the help of their family physician. But because of their ignorance of the law, most women victims are not aware of this possibility and remain trapped in their violent relationships. It is reported that only 12 percent of women filed official complaints to the police. Escalation of violence is one risk that women avoid just as losing their permit totally. The improvement in the law is not a preventive measure but rather a reactive one. In addition, there are hardly any accessible women shelters for these women. Some shelters do not accept women with 'uncertain' residence status and most are overcrowded. Sometimes, there is also lack of sufficient knowledge by professionals working in women shelters on the legal possibilities for these women and their situations.

Given the above, it is therefore not unusual that there is an increasing number of undocumented migrant women and by being so, their precarious situation make them more prone to become victims of violence.

NOTES

- 1 The word *kababayan* is a Filipino word which means compatriots. Filipinos use this word with endearment especially when abroad. It refers here to female compatriots.
- 2 The author is the current coordinator of Bayanihan. Some parts of this paper were presented during AWID International Forum in Bangkok, 2005, which was cowritten by Cecilia Nalagon, Bayanihan board member and researcher.
- 3 There is an ongoing study entitled "Filipino Entrepreneurship in The Netherlands: Male and Female Business Activity Compared," Marisha Maas of the University of Nijmegen.
- 4 The UNHDI ranks nations according to their citizens' quality of life rather than strictly by a nation's traditional economic figures.

The criteria for calculating rankings include life expectancy, educational attainment, and adjusted real income.

- 5 Some of the information was cited from the report of the Filipina delegation from The Netherlands to the founding congress of Babaylan in September 1992 in Barcelona, Spain.
- 6 "Au Pairs and Sans Papier in The Netherlands," C.Nalagon, Bayanihan Foundation, 2005. This paper is part of the research project by the University of Rome Tre "Welcome? Migrants and Natives Network," F. Brezzi and I. Peretti. Aracane. 2006.
- 7 Cited from "Philippine International Migration: Issues and Concerns of Filipino Migrant in The Netherlands" Public Forum Report. 1997. FFON. The Netherlands.
- 8 Bayanihan Foundation evolved from the social services committee of Damayang Pilipino, a Filipino organisation in The Netherlands established in 1986. The women members of the committee decided to establish a separate foundation to be able to give more concrete services and counselling to Filipinas who came for help.
- 9 This research project was conducted from 2003-2005. M.L. Hardillo, then chair of Babaylan participated in the first phase together with C. Basa of FWC-Ilt. Later they were joined by D. Carlos (Diwata-Gr), D. Oosterbeek & C. Nalagon (Bayanihan-NL). The project was funded by the European Community. Documentation of the research is published in book form entitled "Welcome? Migrants and Natives Network." F. Brezzi and I. Peretti. Aracne. 2006.
- 10 V. del Rosario *Lifting the Smoke Screen: Dynamics of Mail-Order Bride Migration from the Philippines*. ISS. The Hague. 1994.
- 11 This Act prescribes an integration programme of 600 hours of language training and general knowledge of Dutch society for newcomers, aliens and Dutch nationals born outside The Netherlands who are aged 18 years and older and who have come to The Netherlands for the first time in order to reside there for an indefinite period.
- 12 This fine is in principle, 20% of the relevant social assistance benefit (*Bijstandsuitkering*), which is a sum that may vary depending on the family situation from approximately •114 to •240; the fine is doubled if within 12 months from the imposition of a first fine, an individual still has not complied with the duty to register and take part in an integration programme.
- 13 The Declaration's definition of violence against women is "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in,

physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

14 Ralph Reede made this proposal in his research, see p.54.

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