

Italy's Millennial Youth Under the Microscope

Judith Harris (December 11, 2014)



Two new studies are examining under the microscope Italy's so-called millennial generation, to analyze both their aspirations and the ways they are facing a new globalized world while challenged by tough economic prospects at home. During 2013 some 82,000 young people set out for foreign pastures, almost 21% more than in 2012; of this new generation of Italian emigres, one out of six holds a degree from an Italian university. The effects have brought real change in family relationships, but also in politics.

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A two-year scholarly survey of Italian youth, conducted by [Milan's Istituto Toniolo](#) [2], an offshoot of the [Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan](#) [3], has produced a particularly thoughtful analysis of the generation. Its second annual report reflects the views of some 5,000 Italians over 18 but under 30, and was published by Il Mulino this month as "La condizione giovanile in Italia, Rapporto Giovani 2014" (The Condition of Youth in Italy, Youth Report 2014). A copy of the book was brought to Rome by a delegation of 44 scholarship students from the Institute, who presented a copy to [Senate President Pietro Grasso](#) [4].



The study shows that eight young people out of ten consider themselves happiest (that is, “very satisfied”) with their friends and family. Friendships loom larger than ever in the past; because many are only children, they adopt friends as the equivalent of a sibling. Seven out of ten see little chance of conditions improving in Italy; hence the vital importance of private life and personal friendships.

Their single dearest friend and help-meet nevertheless remains La Mamma, but the figure of Il Papa has shrunk considerably, to the point that Father has tumbled in the ranking down to number five. “Father has become a symbolic figure,” said Alessandro Rosina, professor of demography at the Milanese university and chief editor of the publication.

They have few illusions about getting rich quick: almost 34% of the young men and 41.5% of the young women believe they are unlikely to earn more than \$1,250 or \$1,800 a month.

Says psychologist Eleana Marta of the same University of the Sacred Heart: “The data shows us a sort of unfinished revolution regarding the figure of the father. It is a metamorphosis that began 15 years ago, when the men became more involved with the children. They began to share home life and finally quit their authoritarian function.

For these young people, politics are also changed drastically. Instead of becoming engaged in traditional party politics, they rally each other via cell phones and tweets to turn out together for a given cause.

The second survey was conducted by the respected polling organization IPSOS, with 677 in-depth interviews with students between the ages of 19 and 26. Of these, 115 are studying outside Italy. The goals between those at home and those abroad are curiously different: those at home dream of a well-paying job (39%) while those abroad long for a “job that gives satisfaction” (56%).

Twenty-seven percent of these say that being well paid is notably less important than it is for those who have stayed at home. Not surprisingly, these distinctions tend to reflect class differences because of the cost to parents for sending their youngsters outside Italy to study.

“Job security is not among their principal ambitions, neither for the Italian students at home nor for those abroad,” said [Nando Pagnoncelli](#) [5], popular TV presenter, university professor and a director of [IPSOS](#) [6] Italy, in presenting the survey results to the press. “The study shows that our young people are less inept and more open to the world than they are often depicted.”

In a separate study of Italian schooling, we learn that the country has, all told, 7.3 million students, with a tendency in the South, and only in the South, for the number of children in school on the rise.

The problem is that, as this study shows, the European median of school leavers is 14.5%, but in Italy significantly higher, at 18.8%. Italy has about 4.3 million school leavers between the ages of 14 and 18, which means that a staggering number, over 800,000 drop out before they enter high school.

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