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Greece loses skilled graduates to countries that are still hiring



Young Greek grads aren't sticking around

Greek's young graduates are leaving the country to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Many turn to Germany, where friends or relatives had come in the 1950s wave of immigration.

They have been called the 500-euro-generation, though most of them can consider themselves lucky if they actually earn money at all. Young, well-educated university graduates and skilled laborers in Greece are facing a tough future in their country. Many are deciding to leave rather than put up with measly-paid jobs, under the table conditions or outright unemployment.

Christos Christoglou is among those who left. The 37-year-old studied chemical engineering at a good university in Athens, finished his PhD and was hired by one of the biggest companies in Greece, export-oriented Elval Hellenic Aluminium Industry. But he lost his job in 2008 when the financial crisis hit. Even though he continued to work as a self-employed inspector, he was relieved to be offered work in Germany.

"It's virtually impossible to find a job, and it's totally impossible to find a good job at the moment in Greece," Christoglou told Deutsche Welle. "It will be hard in a year's time from now, I suppose, and even longer - two, three or maybe five years."



It's impossible to find a good job in Greece now, says chemical engineer Christoglou

According to one of his former professors, students are now leaving Greece as soon as they finish their studies. Those who want to pursue a PhD apply in other countries as well, since no research grants are available in Greece, aside from those funded by the European Union. Even the professor's son decided to quit his studies in Greece altogether and to pick them up in Munich next year instead.

"No one knows if we will make it as a country or not," Christoglou said. "No one is able to plan ahead."

Waiting it out

Christoglou started to work as an inspection engineer for German chemical and pharmaceutical company Bayer in June 2010. He says that while unemployed Greeks have left the country en masse, those who own a home, or who have a partner who still has a job, are trying to wait it out.

Moving to Germany wasn't much of an adjustment for Christoglou, since he had already lived here as a child. He was born in Hamburg, but his family moved back to Greece when he was 12. He says it definitely helped that he already spoke German.

"All the Greeks speak English, especially those who did study. And most engineers know German as well, as it's considered the engineering language," he commented.

Christoglou says many of his former colleagues who still have jobs are sending their resumes to companies in Europe, because they don't know how long they will still be employed.

"Usually the ones who go are the brightest, who can get a good job elsewhere, or the ones who could really offer something to the country. And these people leave the country. It's a huge disaster," he said. "Imagine who will stay in the university to become the next generation of professors: The mediocre ones who can't find a job outside of Greece!"

Permanent brain drain?

Christoglou said he thinks the brain drain could be permanent if incentives aren't put in place soon to entice Greek graduates to return home.

"If somebody who is 25 years old, or 28 or 30, leaves for Germany now, he will get married there, he will have children there, he will have his friends there. In 10 year's time, there's no reason for him to leave all this and come back to Greece," he explained.

But if a recent university graduate can only get a job delivering pizzas in Greece, there might be no reason to come back at all.



[Courtidis wants to help his brother-in-law make a living in Germany](#)

Ilias Courtidis, a Greek national who was born in Bonn, agrees that the situation in Greece is grim for the young generation. He has encouraged his brother-in-law, who is also an engineer, to come stay with him and look for a job in Germany, an offer the man plans to take him up on.

"I'm telling everyone: 'Don't be stupid and waste your years working as day laborers in Greece. Try to get on your feet and go abroad when you're still young,'" he said.

Nowadays, there is someone in every family thinking about leaving, said Courtidis, who visits Greece several times a year.

"It's not only the young generation that wants to go to Germany," Courtidis said. It is also the older generation who worked in Germany for a long time and came back to Greece to open restaurants and work in the tourism sector. Now they can't live off it anymore.

They are not the only people who are being forced to make a living out of nothing. Georgios Starridis, 24, was born in Germany and went to work in Greece after he finished school. During those three years, he said, he was only able to find illegal employment. Then suddenly his boss stopped paying him.

"I didn't get paid the last three months. Then we - my friends and acquaintances as well - were told by our employers that they don't have the money, and they can't pay us," he said. "A lot of people continued to work without pay, and they still do."



[Starridis left Greece when his boss stopped paying him](#)

Under the table

Greece's problem goes beyond the current economic crisis, according to Christos Christoglou, because, he said, everyone is trying to strike some kind of deal under the table.

"The problem with Greece is that they give you the feeling that everybody is doing it. You would be stupid if you didn't do it," he said. Apparently, it's so common, that even well-paid private doctors participate in fraud.

Christoglou recounted an early morning visit to a pediatrician at a private hospital. At the end of the consultation, the doctor asked whether the secretary had seen him enter the office. Upon hearing that she had not, he suggested Christoglou give him 60 euros cash in hand and leave quickly, instead of settling his account the official way, by paying the secretary the mandated 80 euros. "So the doctor, who is working in a private hospital and getting a very good salary and probably even owns shares in the hospital, tries to steal money from the very hospital he's working for," he commented.

Greece still has many problems to fix, and as long as the country fails to address those issues, Greeks are better off leaving, Christoglou said.

"My parents did it, and they didn't speak anything other but Greek. They hadn't even finished school in Greece. My father left when he was 17, and until then he was a farmer's boy," he said. "And he left without knowing anyone, and he ended up fine. Young people nowadays won't have any problem."

Author: Sarah Steffen

Editor: Kate Bowen, Nancy Isenson