

Merkel fears for Europe's 'lost generation'

As joblessness among young people rises across the European Union, Angela Merkel has a strategy to help the under-25s find work: imitate Germany's apprenticeships.



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€6 billion sounds like a lot of money, just think how far the new budget for tackling European youth unemployment has to go. The fund is intended to create apprenticeships and training across a continent experiencing a frightening peak in joblessness among the under-25s.

Figures released earlier this week showed that 23.8% of young people across the EU are now out of work. Fearing that these jobless youths might become 'a lost generation' Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, called a summit meeting of employment ministers in Berlin on Wednesday to discuss what she calls 'perhaps the most pressing European problem at the moment.'

In Greece, the most dramatically damaged economy in the EU, youth unemployment is running at 64.2%, and a graduate brain drain has been

reported: over 150,000 graduates have left the country in search of work in the last five years. Spain also has a crippling 60% of young people out of work, with Italy and Portugal hovering around the 40% mark. Ironically, this slump in hiring comes at a time when Europe's youth is better educated than ever.

In Germany, by contrast, overall unemployment is almost as low as it has been since the historic reunification of this once-divided nation. Only 5.4% are unemployed, and even among young people the rate is around 7%, a 20-year low.

The reason, many say, is that above the age of 15, half of all young Germans are in vocational training. Of those, half are on an apprenticeship. This has built 'a conveyor belt of highly skilled workers' able to take up productive roles straightaway in the country's consistently strong manufacturing industry.

GET UP! START UP!

The outlook for many young people contemplating their first search for a job is undoubtedly gloomy. Even equipped with a degree, competition for each position is fiercer than ever.

But some voices try to strike an encouraging note, pointing out that amid all the doom, there might be a chance for some of those embarking on a career to make it more exciting than for earlier generations. 'If formal employment is hard to come by,' they say, 'use your initiative, and get your own business or creative scheme started.'

Soft soap and unrealistic pressure! others retort. The reason Germany is able to lecture the rest of the EU about creating better employment prospects for the young is that they follow a very traditional path through learning a trade and then working in industry. Only in countries where work is uncertain are young people being forced to start their own businesses.

Q & A

Q I don't think I'm an entrepreneur.

A That's fine, of course. Not everyone can be Richard Branson. But relying on the traditional routes into a good job or career may become increasingly unwise as economies across the world adapt to the harsh

new realities of life after the financial crash. Don't be downhearted, because those with a good education will still have an advantage in the jobs market – but you might also need to be imaginative.

Q Meaning what?

A Well, it will be helpful for many to think about a career with lots of different stages, rather than picking one path. Some people still progress within one trade or profes-

sion, but many others move sideways from industry to industry, and some do different jobs at the same time: a portfolio career.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

'The job is dead. Long live work!'

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

► Merkel fears for Europe's 'lost generation'

WORD WATCH

Fund – During June, the European Commission pledged €6 billion for a youth jobs initiative but this week Angela Merkel estimated that the total, when added to other available funds, was more like €20 billion.

Damaged economy – Nations across Europe have been hit by harsh recessions following the 2008 financial crash, and the Eurozone debt crisis has been

rumbling along almost ever since. But the spending cuts and tax rises introduced to tackle debt and deficit levels in most European countries have also brought job cuts, business closures and hiring freezes.

Richard Branson – This British business maverick is one of the most successful entrepreneurs in the UK. He founded a magazine called *Student* when he was 16 and over his career has

created 400 companies under the Virgin brand, including airlines. His swashbuckling adventurous style and refusal to bow to convention (he never wears a suit and tie) are the epitome of the entrepreneur.

Advantage in the jobs market – The OECD, the think tank for the most highly developed economies found in its latest comparative study that UK graduates earn an average 57% more than employees who left education at secondary school level.

YOU DECIDE

1. Would you prefer to work as an employee or in a self-employed creative or business role?
2. 'Angela Merkel is seen as the author of all Europe's woes, when in fact she is its saviour.' What does this mean and do you agree?

ACTIVITIES

1. Design an advertisement for your ideal job, and write a CV to ensure you are hired for the role.
2. Research the German 'economic miracle' and write about how much of it can be ascribed to the education system.

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 **NOTES**

