

# Class of 2012: Europe's young pursue dreams abroad

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Santiago Oviedo poses for a picture at Tirso de Molina square in Madrid, Spain, Sunday, July 29, 2012. Santiago Oviedo, a tall 24-year old from Madrid, is on track to get his master's in physics in October 2012, a crucial milestone in his dream of becoming a researcher probing the origins of the universe, but Spain won't benefit from his big brain, because of education spending cuts and Spain's downward economic spiral, Oviedo is planning to emigrate to Britain, France, the Netherlands or Germany to get his Ph.D. or work at a company that lets him do research. He's afraid he may never work or raise a family in his country. According to economist at Madrid's IE Business School, Gayle Allard, the long-term toll of emigration could be sinking competitiveness as crisis-hit countries lose many of their best and brightest citizens a potential formula for a vicious circle of economic agony, although they could benefit if young emigres return, bringing back better work and language skills.(AP Photo/Andres Kudacki)

(AP) — Santiago Oviedo, a lanky 24-year-old from Madrid, is on track to get his master's in physics in October — a crucial milestone in his

dream of becoming a researcher probing the origins of the universe.

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Because of education spending cuts and Spain's downward economic spiral, Oviedo is planning to emigrate to Britain, France, the Netherlands or Germany to get his Ph.D. or work at a company that lets him do research. He's afraid he may never work or raise a family in his country.

If he had graduated two years ago, Oviedo would have stood a good chance of landing a government-funded scholarship and grant for four years of doctoral study and research. That has evaporated in an austerity drive that has brought slashed budgets for scientific research and waves of layoffs at companies large and small.

With Spain's unemployment rate for people under 25 at an astonishing 53 percent, young Spaniards are leaving the country in droves to carve out a brighter future. Most seek jobs, but some, like Oviedo, are leaving because the government is struggling to afford to develop their minds.

Since 2009, when [Europe](#)'s financial crisis hit full-bore, the number of Spaniards in their late teens, 20s and early 30s leaving the country has increased 52 percent — from about 12,500 to nearly 20,000 according to the government statistics agency. Young and talented Europeans from other hurting eurozone nations — Greece, Ireland, Italy and Portugal — are also abandoning home not only for stronger European countries but surging former European colonies in Africa, Asia and the Americas.

Oviedo is set to join a growing number of young Spaniards giving up on Spain, a nation that had visions of grandeur during a decade-long property boom but which is now teetering on the edge of financial collapse.

"I don't want to go away forever, but looking at the situation how it is now, maybe that will happen," said Oviedo, who heads to every Madrid anti-austerity protest he can fit in with his studies. He blames politicians for immersing Spain in its misery.

In addition to education spending cuts, Spain last December eliminated its Ministry of Science and Innovation to save money, making it a division of the Economy Ministry. In May, the country saw a tide of protests against the education squeeze by university students and teachers, some of whom clashed with police.

"Science isn't a priority now in Spain," Oviedo said. "The economy is terrible. A couple years ago we had a really good public health and education system, but now they are destroying it all. When I have children, I don't want them to live here if they don't have the things I have enjoyed."

Oviedo's fears mirror those of Spanish architecture student Rafael Gonzalez del Castillo, one of the five European students whose lives The Associated Press is tracking in the Class of 2012 project.



In this 19 June 2012 picture Rafael Gonzalez del Castillo, architecture student looks through one of his architecture models at his home in Madrid before being interviewed by The Associated Press. "I see myself working abroad," said

Gonzalez del Castillo, "It doesn't matter where." According to economist at Madrid's IE Business School, Gayle Allard, the long-term toll of emigration could be sinking competitiveness as crisis-hit countries lose many of their best and brightest citizens a potential formula for a vicious circle of economic agony, although they could benefit if young emigres return, bringing back better work and language skills. (AP Photo/Daniel Ochoa de Olza)

"I see myself working abroad," said Gonzalez del Castillo, as do many of his 25 architecture classmates at his elite Madrid university. "I don't know where. It doesn't matter where."

The long-term toll could be sinking competitiveness as crisis-hit countries lose many of their best and brightest amid already falling birth-rates — a potential formula for a vicious circle of economic agony. But countries like Spain could benefit if young emigres return because they would bring back better work and language skills that would help fix low productivity, said Gayle Allard, an economist with Madrid's IE Business School.

"If they come back it will be for the good of the country," said Allard. "If they don't come back, this is a tragedy,"

Across the border from Spain, the number of Portuguese heading to former colonies Brazil and Angola for work has increased sharply since 2008. The trend has accelerated since last year when Portugal got a bailout of its public finances, according to statistics based on consulate and embassy registrations. Portugal's prime minister suggested last year that unemployed teachers should consider heading to former colonies for work. The country doesn't track youth emigration, but researchers say it is rising.

One of Gonzalez del Castillo's friends is a 26-year-old Spanish civil engineer who graduated last October, and moved to Brazil last month after a six-month job hunt in Spain that netted not a single job interview. She represents a sharp reversal for countries like Spain and Portugal, which for decades were on the receiving end of migrants from Latin America.

She has already had better luck in the booming business hub of Sao Paulo, getting an interview within two weeks of arriving. The woman did not want her name revealed because she entered Brazil on a tourist visa and fears she could be deported if caught seeking work.

In bailed-out Ireland, emigration has become a defining national characteristic. More than 76,000 people left last year, representing 1.7 percent of the population. They joined 200,000 who have departed since 2008 at the end of a property boom-gone-bust similar to Spain's. Their top destinations are Britain, Australia, Canada and the United States. Official statistics show that the vast majority of those leaving are in their 20s and 30s.

Orla Kelleher, executive director of the Aisling Irish Community Center in Yonkers, New York, said the volume of newly arrived Irish jobseekers had multiplied six times "if not more" since 2009, following the implosion of the Celtic Tiger economy.

Brian Whelan, 28, moved to London from Dublin two years ago after being recruited to work on the Irish pages of the Yahoo news site. Many of his Dublin friends are living outside the country, many in Canada.

"If I hadn't landed a job in advance I'd have been heading to London anyway," said Whelan, who now works as a freelance journalist. "Irish people are not having any difficulty landing jobs abroad. It's often the best and the brightest who are going abroad. Some of the best trained

and most able young people are leaving because Ireland can't afford to keep them."

Italy, whose decaying economy may soon need a bailout, has long been bleeding much of its finest talent as rigid labor laws and chronic cronyism force highly skilled young people abroad. Italy doesn't track how many citizens leave, but the country's statistics agency said the number of Italians with college degrees living abroad rose from 8.3 percent in 2001 to 15.9 percent in 2010.

Maria Adele Carrai, 26, got her bachelor's degree in Chinese language and culture in Rome, graduating at the top of her class, and went on to complete a master's in Venice focusing on Asian languages, economics and legal institutions. When she finished, she could find only low-paying work as an Italian-Chinese translator for a court that always paid her late — or not at all. She did freelance translation on the side, making €5 (\$6) an hour.

Carrai would rather be home but left Italy for Hong Kong, where she's doing her Ph.D.

"That's the only way to become economically independent," she said. "Italy is an unthinkable destination right now."

Oviedo, the physics master's candidate, thinks he would probably be able to land a well-paid job in Madrid, where large banks pay good money for math whizzes like him to be analysts, known as "quants," and design complex trading formulas.

Oviedo says he would hate himself if he used his math skills to help big banks profit off the financial crisis.

"I don't want to do that job. It would be like helping the enemy," he said.

"They have destroyed the world. I see the results every day in Spain."

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