

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Migration and Crime in Greece: Implications for Entrepreneurship, Financial Literacy and Social Marketing Initiatives

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Abstract. In recent years, European nations have received increasing volumes of migrants. However, significant numbers of local residents remain skeptic towards migration, often because of the association of migrants with increased delinquent or criminal activity. In view of the previous, the present study aims at examining the evolution of crime activity in Greece, the crimes committed by Greek and foreign perpetrators, and the potential effects of undocumented migration inflows and economic conditions on criminal activity. Data for the period 2009-2019, suggest that although increased migrant inflows appear to contribute to a moderate rise in criminal behaviour of foreign individuals, their overrepresentation as perpetrators of crime is likely to be the result of poor living conditions and lack of integration into the Greek society. Apart from stricter border controls, a holistic approach of migration management is hypothesized to require the use of social marketing initiatives and the advancement of migrant entrepreneurship and financial literacy.

Keywords: *migration; crime; migrant entrepreneurship; social marketing; financial literacy; Greece*

1. Introduction

Forces of the macroenvironment, such as globalization, armed conflicts, population growth, poverty and inequality, have been the catalysts for large waves of documented and undocumented migration on a global level. As a result, citizens of mostly developed nations are required to coexist with increasing volumes of migrant populations. To regulate migration flows into the European Union (EU), the latter has introduced a number of interventions and policies. The existing European Migration Policy was driven by the 2014-2015 migration crisis, during which high numbers of migrants crossed into the EU, particularly through its Mediterranean and

Southeast borders (European Parliament, 2021). Consequently, the EU developed an action plan against migrant smuggling, by placing emphasis on law enforcement, judiciary capacity and cooperation with non-EU countries (European Parliament, 2019). To alleviate pressure in certain European countries, such as Greece, the EU also assigned migrant quotas to member states based on several socioeconomic indicators (Friedman, 2015). Gradually, the European Migration Policy focused on providing financial support to countries under increased pressure from migration flows, collaborating with Turkey to control the influx of migrants, and establishing stricter border controls (European Commission, 2016; Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union, 2018). Arguably, the introduction of said policies has been effective in reducing the number of migrants crossing the European borders, by suppressing attempts to enter into the EU and increasing the preventive capacity of member states.

From an economic point of view, inflows of migrant populations are often considered beneficial to developed economies. Being predominately young and low-skilled, migrants can renew an ageing workforce and are often willing to work in professions deemed undesirable by local populations (Ram, Jones & Villares-Varela, 2017; Vézina & Bélanger, 2019). Furthermore, given that the effective integration of migrants into host countries also depends on how well they adapt to existing socioeconomic and financial systems, access to financial products and services is of particular importance (OECD, 2016). On the other hand, significant numbers of local residents are not welcoming towards migrants (e.g., Dimakos & Tasiopoulou, 2003; Facchini & Mayda, 2008), whom they regularly associate with increased criminal activity.

In view of the previous, the present study aims at examining the relationship between migration and crime in Greece, over the 2009-2019 period. Taking into consideration the country's severe and prolonged economic recession, as well as its strategic geographic position as an eastern gateway to the EU, the case of Greece may provide useful insights about the migration – crime relationship. To assess whether migrant populations are linked to increased crime activity, the present study proceeds to investigate the evolution of crime activity, conduct a comparative examination of crimes committed by Greek and foreign perpetrators, and assess the hypothesized relationship of criminal activity with undocumented migration inflows and economic conditions.

Given the complex and sensitive nature of the issue being examined, it should be noted that the present study does not attempt to argue for or against

migration, nor to recommend strategies for regulating migration flows. The principal objective is to examine the extent to which the presence of migrants is associated with increased criminal activity in Greece, and consequently to propose measures targeted at the socioeconomic integration of migrants in the Greek and European communities. Association of foreign (i.e., non-European) individuals with criminal behaviour significantly contributes to the development of negative attitudes and hostility towards migrant populations, and holds a central position in far-right argumentation and nationalist ideology.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Factors affecting criminal activity

Existing literature has examined and identified numerous factors affecting criminal activity, all of which have led to the development of various socioeconomic theories of crime (Buonanno, 2003). Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to present an exhaustive list of all factors affecting every type of criminal activity, past research has emphasized the relative importance of economic, sociocultural, personal and psychological factors. Regarding the economic antecedents of crime, income inequality has been associated with violent crime, such as robberies (Fajnzylber, Lederman & Loayza, 2002; Kelly, 2000). Because crime appears to be countercyclical (Fajnzylber, Lederman & Loayza, 2002), and despite the established relationship between poverty and property crime (Kelly, 2000), existing literature has paid particular attention to the role of unemployment. Data from diverse national and sociocultural contexts, such as Sweden, Britain and the United States of America (USA), indicate that unemployment has a significant and large positive effect on most types of property and violent crimes (Carmichael & Ward, 2001; Edmark, 2005; Raphael & Winter-Ebmer, 2001). Such effects are found to be significant particularly for men, regardless of age (Carmichael & Ward, 2001).

Financial exclusion of migrant populations may be also driven by the lack of access to, and use of, formal financial services, lack of documentation, language barriers and distrust of the financial sector (Atkinson & Messy, 2013; Orozco, 2015). As a result, financially excluded individuals are more likely to have worse economic circumstances and therefore engage in delinquent or criminal behavior. Even though most transactions among migrants are undertaken in cash, it is vital for them to know how to calculate exchange rates, manage their budgets, keep records of income and expenses, and properly use financial resources (OECD, 2016).

Despite the view of criminal behavior as a largely economic choice, prior research has also identified the importance of certain personal attributes and circumstances, such as cultural and family background, level of education, age and biological sex (Buonanno, 2003). Men have been found to be more likely to engage in criminal activity than women, although their propensity to commit crime is significantly reduced when they transition to monogamous relationships (Seffrin, 2017) and have children (Kanazawa & Still, 2000). From an evolutionary psychology perspective, men commit violent and property crimes in their attempt to gain reproductive access to women and overcome perceived social deficits relating to their physical traits or socioeconomic circumstances (Kanazawa & Still, 2000). In view of the large volume and complexity of the determinants of criminal activity, numerous studies have examined the effect of migration on crime levels.

2.2 Migration and crime

Although findings about the impact of migration on criminality are, to a certain extent, contradictory, said impact appears to be overestimated due to negative assumptions and predispositions among local communities and media (Hooghe & De Vroome, 2016; Reid *et al.*, 2005; Zatz & Smith, 2012). These negative perceptions often result in a '*fear of crime*' from foreign ethnic groups among local populations (Hooghe & De Vroome, 2016; Nunziata, 2015). A growing body of research, which extends to various national contexts, suggests that migration does not increase the incidence of crime in host countries. For instance, data regarding the migration flows into western European countries suggests that an increase in migration does not affect crime victimization, contrary to predominant misconceptions among European natives (Nunziata, 2015). In the USA, several studies have shown that there is no association between the size of migrant populations and incidence of violent crimes (Green, 2016; Reid *et al.*, 2005), as well as between undocumented migration and overall crime activity (Gunadi, 2021; Light & Miller, 2018).

Recent research suggests that '*sanctuary city*' policies have no effect on violent crime, rape, or property crime rates (O'Brien, Collingwood & El-Khatib, 2019). Furthermore, available data indicate that youth born abroad appear to be significantly less likely to engage in criminal activity (Butcher & Piehl, 1998), and that migration may serve as a crime reducing function in society (Zatz & Smith, 2012). All

in all, although a few studies posit that cities with high crime rates tend to have large migrant populations (Butcher & Piehl, 1998), the overreaction of local authorities, as expressed by legislative interventions and enforcement practices, is often considered unjustified and unsafe for migrant communities (Zatz & Smith, 2012).

In view of the prolonged and severe economic recession facing Greece over the past decade, the local population had to allegedly manage a significant increase in crime activity by migrant populations (Hadjimatheou, 2012). Overall, the scarcity of studies examining the migration – crime relationship at the macro level (Reid *et al.*, 2005), is perhaps one of the main reasons behind existing perceptions among Europeans.

3. Method

Being primarily of exploratory nature and to fulfil the research aim, the present research accessed publicly available data on criminal activity, economic conditions and material deprivation in Greece, as well as data regarding the illegal border-crossings to the European Union (EU) over the Eastern Mediterranean route, for the period 2009-2019. To ensure secondary data reliability and validity, data were compiled from credible sources, namely the Hellenic Police, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Hellenic Statistical Authority and Frontex.

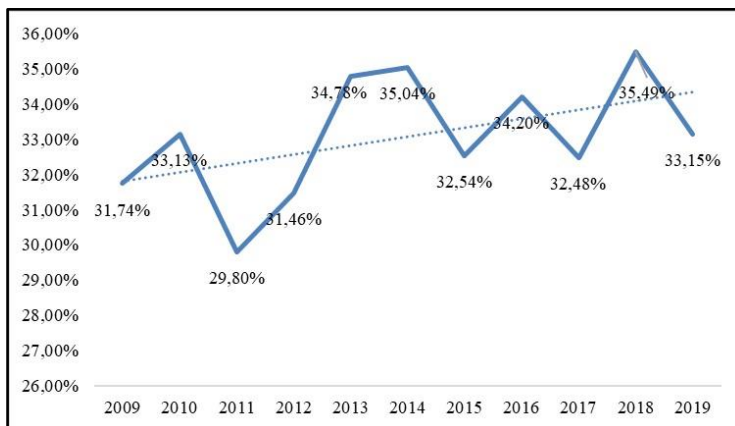


Figure 1: Per Cent of Crimes Solved by the Hellenic Police
Source: Hellenic Police (2020)

Given the study's emphasis on the relationship between migration and crime, the research method attempted to control for potential fluctuations in policing effectiveness. Data obtained from the Hellenic Police indicated that over the

2009-2019 period (Figure 1), there was a slight increase in the percentage of solved crimes, indicating that the police force is gradually becoming more effective in solving crimes. However, because said percentage ranges from a minimum of 29,8 per cent (2011) to a maximum of 35,49 per cent (2018), observed differences were deemed insignificant for the present study's purposes.

Furthermore, although Greece has been receiving large numbers of documented and undocumented migrants over the past three decades, data suggest that during 2014 and 2015, the volume of illegal border-crossings was significantly amplified (Table 1). Thus, from a methodological point of view, it would be useful to examine whether criminal activity and crimes committed by foreign individuals in Greece increased during and after that period.

Table 1: Illegal Border-Crossings to the EU over the East Med Route

Source: Frontex (2020)

Year	#	Per Cent Change
2009	39.975	-
2010	55.688	39,31
2011	57.025	2,40
2012	37.224	-34,72
2013	24.799	-33,38
2014	50.834	104,98
2015	885.386	1641,72
2016	182.277	-79,41
2017	42.319	-76,78
2018	56.561	33,65
2019	83.333	47,33

4. Results

Regarding the absolute numbers of perpetrators (Figure 2), it appears that after a sharp increase in 2010, the volume of total perpetrators remained practically unchanged (i.e., approximately 52 thousand in 2010 vs. 51 thousand in 2019). However, a more careful examination of fluctuations in the numbers of Greek and foreign perpetrators are more revealing of specific trends. During 2010-2015, the number of Greek perpetrators showed signs of increase whereas the number of foreign perpetrators was reduced. The following two years (i.e., 2016 and 2017) saw the numbers of both Greek and foreign perpetrators rise simultaneously. Lastly, although the number of Greek perpetrators declined in 2018 and 2019, the number of foreign perpetrators rose in 2018 and fell in 2019.

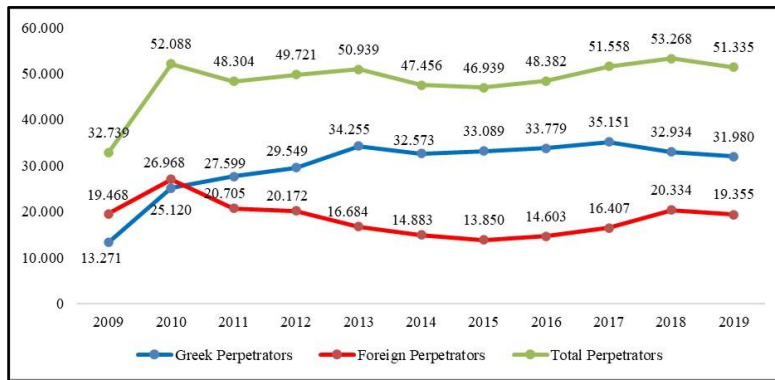


Figure 2: Volume of Perpetrators in Greece (in thousands)
 Source: Hellenic Police (2020)

Examination of said fluctuations during the 2009-2019 period suggests that following the introduction of the first economic adjustment programme in 2010, which aimed at assisting Greece with its severe debt-crisis, criminal activity rose significantly. The deteriorating economic and living conditions, as well as the persistence of high unemployment, appear to have played a significant role in the increase of Greek perpetrators between 2010 and 2017. On the other hand, the number of foreign perpetrators rose gradually from 2016 to 2018, following the explosive increase in illegal border-crossings that occurred during 2014 and 2015. Thus, it is likely that individuals with a propensity to commit crime were able to join the large masses of undocumented migrants and cross the Greek borders.

The relative shares of Greek and foreign perpetrators (Figure 3) indicate that although the former is the majority, the latter are overrepresented in crime statistics. Considering that the migrant population in Greece was estimated to approximately 11,34 per cent of the total population in 2015 (Macrotrends, 2021), migrants commit more crimes than expected based on their population size. Although overrepresentation could be partly attributed to racial profiling or strict police enforcement practices aimed at migrants, it appears that foreign individuals residing in Greece are disproportionately more likely to commit crimes. Nevertheless, the ongoing economic adversities appear to have contributed to an ongoing rise in the relative size of Greek perpetrators. Assuming that the Hellenic Police is not purposely arresting more Greek or foreign perpetrators, it seems that economic and living conditions are a crucial factor affecting individuals' propensity to commit crime.

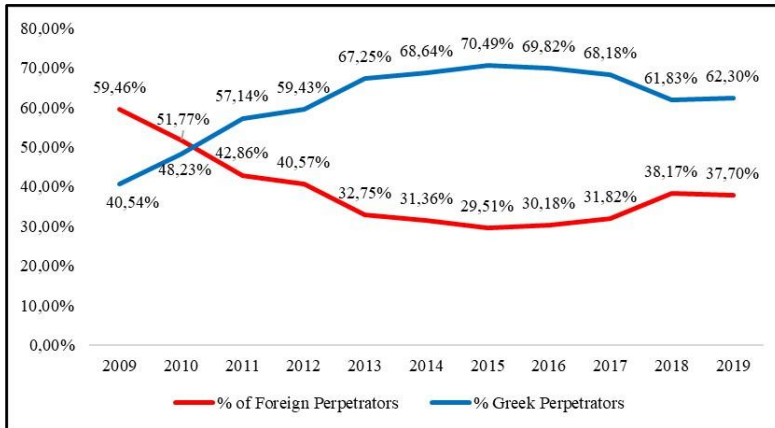


Figure 3: Per Cent Share of Greek and Foreign Perpetrators
 Source: Hellenic Police (2020)

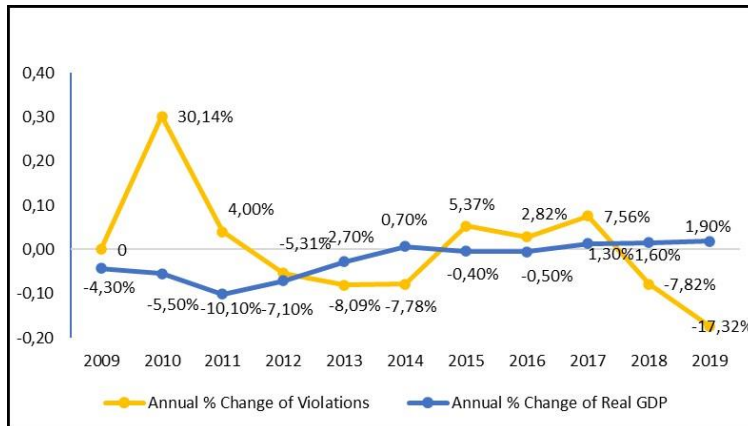


Figure 4: Annual (Per Cent) Change of Real GDP and Volume of Violations
 Sources: Hellenic Police (2020) & IMF (2021)

In line with the sharp increase in the number of perpetrators, the growth rate of total violations (i.e., attempted and committed crimes) experienced a dramatic increase in 2010 (i.e., 30,10 per cent) (Figure 4), almost simultaneously with the first economic adjustment programme for Greece. Although the percentage change of violations appears to fall between 2011 and 2014, perhaps partly due to slow economic recovery, 2015 marked the return to positive growth rates in violations. This turn of events coincides with the sociopolitical turbulence in 2015 and the resulting economic stagnation of the following period (i.e., up to 2017). In

addition, the rise of criminal activity concurs with the large influx of undocumented migrants and refugees during 2015.

To assess the relationship between economic conditions and criminal activity, Figure 5 illustrates the cumulative percentage change of Real GDP in Greece against the percentage share of Greek perpetrators for the period under review. It is evident that the more real GDP contracted, Greek perpetrators took up a larger share of total perpetrators of crime in Greece, thus providing evidence to support the economic circumstances and criminal behavior relationship hypothesis.

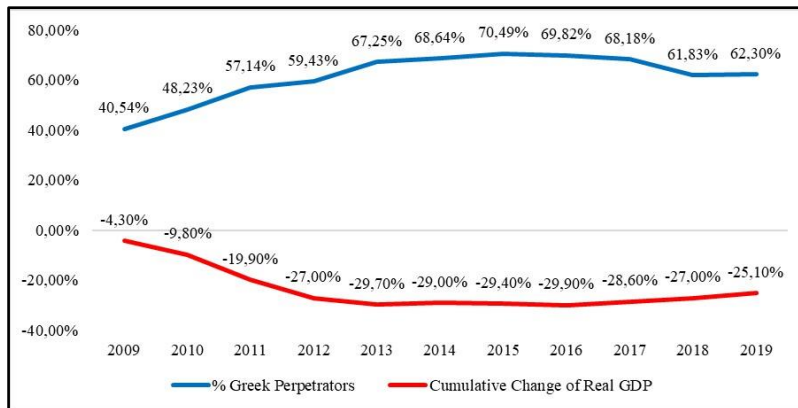


Figure 5: Per Cent of Greek Perpetrators and Cumulative (Per Cent) Change in Real GDP

Sources: Hellenic Police (2020) & IMF (2021)

Because, in the case of Greece, deteriorating economic conditions led to the introduction of austerity measures (Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou & Exadaktylos, 2014), large parts of the Greek population experienced poverty and material deprivation. Figure 6 clearly illustrates the positive relationship between the percentage share of Greek perpetrators and the percentage of the Greek population with material deprivation on an annual basis, for the period under review. It appears that as larger parts of the local Greek population were faced with material deprivation, the percentage of Greek perpetrators rose accordingly.

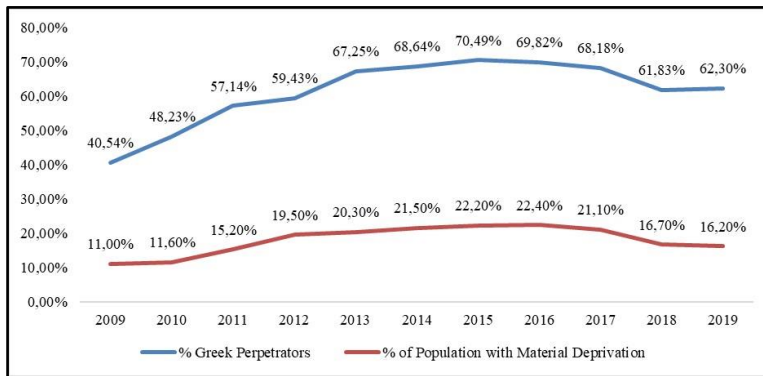


Figure 6: Per Cent of Greek Perpetrators and Per Cent of Population with Material Deprivation

Sources: Hellenic Police (2020) & Hellenic Statistical Authority (2020)

5. Discussion and Implications

The first objective of the present study involved examining the evolution of crime activity in Greece from 2009 to 2019. Data for the period suggest that criminal activity radically increased during 2010, at a time when Greece received a bailout loan from the European Commission (EC), European Central Bank (ECB) and IMF, to avoid sovereign default (IMF, 2010). The following four years (i.e., 2011 to 2014), which were characterized by relative and temporary stability of the Greek economy, saw a decrease in criminal activity. In 2015, sociopolitical and economic conditions worsened, leading to a referendum about a proposed new bailout program and lengthy negotiations among European leaders. The deterioration of economic conditions, increasing sociopolitical turbulence and large influx of undocumented migrants in 2015, coincided with a new rise in criminal activity, which persisted until 2017. Overall, observed fluctuations in criminal activity over the 2009-2019 period appear to correspond to the adverse sociopolitical and economic events that occurred in 2010 and 2015. Furthermore, the increase in criminal activity during 2015 appears to be also fueled by the migration crisis and rise in illegal border crossings.

With respect to the volumes of Greek and foreign perpetrators, data suggest that over the 2009-2019 period, the total number of Greek perpetrators was on the rise. On the other hand, the number of foreign perpetrators remained relatively stable, after a sharp increase in 2010. However, although Greek perpetrators were the majority of perpetrators from 2011 to 2019, foreign individuals appear to be

significantly overrepresented as perpetrators of crimes, as they represent approximately 37,8 per cent of perpetrators over the 2009-2019 period and only 11,34 per cent of the total population (Macrotrends, 2021). Thus, foreign individuals appear to be more likely to engage in criminal activity than Greeks.

Regarding the relationship of criminal activity with migrant inflows and economic conditions, data suggest that economic adversity and sociopolitical turbulence play an important role in criminal activity. In accordance with existing literature (e.g., Carmichael & Ward, 2001; Edmark, 2005; Fajnzylber, Lederman & Loayza, 2002; Kelly, 2000; Raphael & Winter-Ebmer, 2001), rising unemployment, poverty and material deprivation, which were accentuated by the prolonged economic recession in Greece, are perhaps the main reasons behind the increase in the number of Greek perpetrators during the period under review.

Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that the observed fluctuations in the share of foreign perpetrators of crime in Greece may be also linked to the large inflow of undocumented migrants in 2015. It is very likely that by blending into large migrant and/or refugee populations, deviant individuals with criminal records are easier to move across borders. Moreover, a substantial share of migrants' criminal activity may be attributable to the lack of appropriate financial education and employment opportunities. In agreement with the previous argumentation, existing research reveals that students with migrant backgrounds score lower levels on financial literacy (OECD, 2014).

In summary, the analysis suggests that there is a significant positive relationship between adverse economic conditions facing individuals and criminal behaviour. Although, increased migrant inflows appear to have contributed to a rise in the volume of foreign perpetrators in Greece, their overrepresentation as perpetrators of crime is hypothesized to be the result of poor living conditions and lack of integration into the Greek and European society.

Apart from measures relating to border control and enforcement, the development of a comprehensive European Migration Policy should incorporate the introduction of appropriate 'soft' initiatives, aimed at improving the economic circumstances of migrants and facilitating their social integration into Europe. Regarding the former, the EU could focus on promoting formal migrant entrepreneurship and equal pay for migrants (Baycan-Levent & Nijkamp, 2009). Among other, European institutions should aim at aiding migrant entrepreneurs to exit the low value '*business ghettos*' and combating phenomena of racist exclusion (Ram *et al.*, 2017). European institutions and organizations could also harness the

power of social marketing messaging across traditional and digital media, to promote the benefits of social inclusion and challenge negative preconceptions regarding migrant populations. Prior research posits that socially inclusive marketing communications may improve the perceived social inclusion and welfare of vulnerable individuals (Licsandru & Cui, 2018). If European countries emphasize on the cultural engagement of migrants residing in Europe, the latter are more likely to be able to simultaneously maintain links with their home culture and integrate with local communities (Le, Polonsky & Arambewela, 2015).

6. Conclusion

Positioned at the EU's southeastern border with Asia Minor and Africa, Greece has been required to effectively manage large migration inflows despite its economic hardships. The case of Greece provides useful insight in assessing the relationship between migration and crime, and examining common beliefs about migrant criminality. Contrary to existing misconceptions, available data suggest that individuals engage in criminal activity primarily because of their adverse socioeconomic circumstances, rather than due to their racial, cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Besides existing measures and policies, aimed at improving border control and preventing illegal border crossings, a comprehensive migration policy for Europe should consist of additional initiatives with the purpose of improving migrant employability and facilitating social inclusion. The support of formal migrant entrepreneurship, advancement of financial literacy and introduction of socially inclusive marketing messaging may contribute towards this direction. Lastly, because uncontrolled and large migrant flows are often the result of armed conflicts and imperialist ideologies, Europe should concurrently aim at the source of the problem and take appropriate action to safeguard world peace and assist suffering populations, either at their home countries or abroad.

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