



**112**  
Migrants interviewed



Data collected from  
**6** reception centres/  
asylum centres



**5,001**  
SCRM recorded in  
December 2023

Top **3** countries of origin of respondents



Syrian Arab Republic



Afghanistan



Morocco



**38%**  
Traveled throughout the  
country by bus



**45%**  
Also travelled by taxis

**108,828**

SCRM recorded from  
January to December 2023

This report provides insights into the profiles, experiences and journeys of migrants transiting through the Republic of Serbia. Data was collected from 15 to 29 December 2023 together with the Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants of the Republic of Serbia (SCRM). Total of 112 migrants were interviewed in six centres (AC Banja Koviljaca, RC Pirot, AC Obrenovac, RC Bujanovac, AC Krnjaca, RC Presevo) across the country.

**PROFILES**

This sample consists of 112 individual migrants surveyed in reception facilities in Serbia. The average age of interviewees was 28, with the youngest respondent being 18 years old and the oldest 59. Most respondents (60%) were single. Eighty-three per cent were men, while women made up seventeen per cent of respondents.

In December, Syrian nationals constituted the largest nationality group making up 39 per cent of the sample followed by Afghani nationals (27%) and Moroccan nationals (15%).

The respondents have reported various levels of education. A third of the respondents report completed primary education while 26 per cent report obtained lower secondary and 30 per cent upper secondary as well. Tertiary (Bachelors and Masters) degrees are held by 7 per cent of the respondents.

In 2022, the SCRM reported a total of 124,127 recorded migrants. In the following year, 2023, the total number of recorded migrants by SCRM decreased to 108,828.

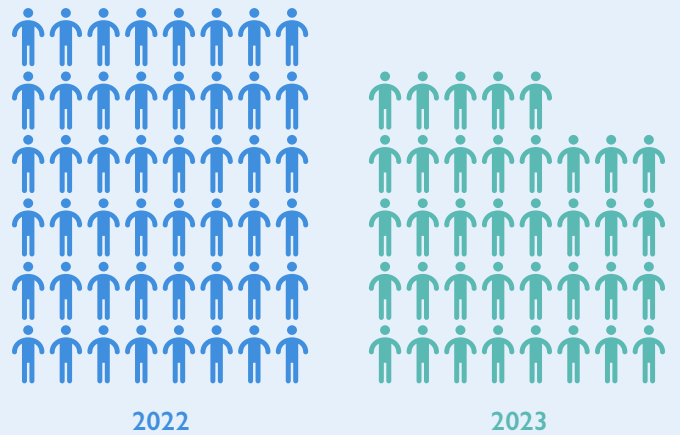


Figure 1: Percentage breakdown of registered and un-registered migrants in each country or territory. (Migrants surveyed in the Western Balkan countries/territories)



IOM and SCRM enumerators conducting the survey in one of the reception centres in Serbia. © IOM Serbia 2024

\* References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

**JOURNEYS**

The majority (63%) of respondents entered Serbia from Bulgaria, while 33 per cent entered through North Macedonia. Less than four per cent entered through Montenegro or by flight. Three people, nationals from Burundi, India, and Egypt entered Serbia by flight. Nationalities which do not require entry visas can enter regularly by flying.

When asked about the next intended destination the majority (65%) stated Bosnia and Herzegovina while 29 per cent stated Hungary. The rest plans to go to Croatia and Romania (6%).

When asked if they were accompanied by people who facilitated their border crossing, 68 per cent of respondents stated that they were accompanied. Key informant interviews reveal that the use of border crossing facilitation is well organized and suggests that this practice could be more prevalent than the individual survey data indicates. Migrants negotiate the cost of the border crossings with the smugglers and prices therefore fluctuate depending on the bargaining skills of the migrants at a particular moment. The results show that facilitation is much more frequent when entering from Bulgaria (85%) compared to entries from North Macedonia (43%).

Respondents who stated they were facilitated paid on average 800 EUR to enter from Bulgaria, and 700 EUR to enter from North Macedonia. In this sample, Syrian nationals paid more than other nationalities, with an average of 1,000 EUR.

The main modes of transportation used by migrants to move were walking (63%), taxi (45%), and bus (38%). Fourteen per cent reported using a private vehicle. On average, respondents paid 50 EUR per person for a taxi.

Eight per cent of the respondents reported attempting to cross the border with a facilitator, while twelve per cent reported attempting it alone. The most attempted crossing was into Hungary, and out of all crossing attempts seventy-seven per cent report being returned by authorities, while twenty-three per cent reported route closure.

Survey respondents use social media and instant messaging to organize their journeys to Western Europe. The most frequently used platforms were WhatsApp, Facebook, and Viber.

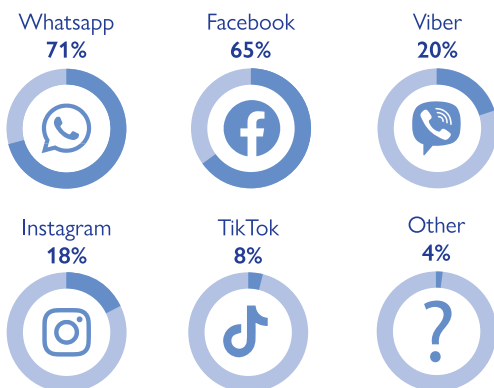


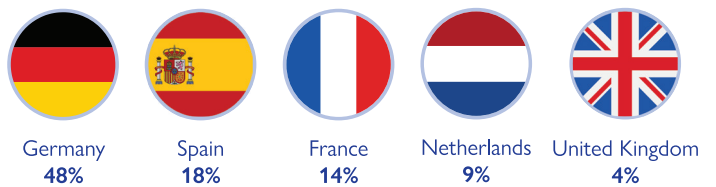
Figure 2: Most frequently cited platforms migrants use to plan their journeys (multiple answers possible) (n=112)

**REASONS FOR LEAVING COUNTRY OF ORIGIN**

Survey respondents cited war and conflict as the primary driver to leave their origin country (59%), followed by economic reasons (50%) and personal targeted violence (23%). Of those surveyed, 45 per cent reported residing in a transit country for at least one year. Most of the respondents departed from Türkiye which they left citing fear of being sent back to the country of origin (74%) as the predominant reason. Predominant nationalities departing from Türkiye are Syrian nationals (61%), Afghani nationals (26%), and Iranian nationals (10%). Key informant interviews reveal that a combination of economic conditions, such as high inflation, and policy changes regarding migration, are acting as push factors for the migrants in the country.

**INTENDED DESTINATION COUNTRIES**

Figure 3 below provides a percentage breakdown of top five intended countries of destination:



Most respondents reported Germany as their final destination; followed by, Spain, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Migrants tend to choose their final destinations based on family and friends connections (26%), potential for economic prosperity (37%), more lenient asylum and migration laws (7%), and the overall safety and stability of the country (6%). Many migrants have relatives waiting at their country of destination to help them settle in.



IOM and SCRM enumerators in one of the reception centres in Serbia. © IOM Serbia 2024

## SPECIAL FOCUS – PAYMENT OFFICES FOR SMUGGLING<sup>2</sup>

To contextualize the journeys, experiences and complex needs of people on the move, IOM carries out group interviews with specific migrant groups every month. This section aims to give context to the quantitative data. It does not claim to be representative, but portrays one of many possible experiences and modus operandi of individuals and groups transiting through Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- Istanbul is the main hub from which migrants depart for the Western Balkans. The process and modus operandi of migrants leaving their countries of origin for their country of destination involves the use of so-called “payment offices” which enable migrants to pay for smuggling services.
- This is not nationality-exclusive, as any nationality can use the services of the payment offices located in Istanbul. This has been corroborated by several nationalities, including nationals of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Palestinian Territories.
- There are two main arrangements available through the payment office for smuggling services. The first is for migrants to pay for specific GPS coordinates on a map, from where they can cross. Upon successfully crossing a border, they receive a message with new instructions and coordinates for the following step in the journey. The second arrangement of facilitation is when people pay to be accompanied along the journey by smugglers. Migrants are accompanied to specific border crossings, and once they reach specific locations on the other side, are met by new people who provide them with accommodation services and information on the next steps. The cost of these services can range from 9,000 EUR to 12,000 EUR from the Republic of Türkiye to the intended destination country.
- Migrants prepay for GPS coordinates for multiple countries, but only release their payment to the payment offices once they have successfully crossed a border.
- From the Republic of Türkiye to Bulgaria, the cost of receiving each of these coordinates can vary from 100 EUR to 400 EUR. Some interviewees who took the route to Greece stated that the cost of these coordinates varied from 325 EUR to 850 EUR. Those who stated that they used this payment method of facilitation, crossed borders on foot and were not accompanied when attempting to cross the border.

<sup>2</sup> “Smuggling” is defined as “the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the irregular entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.” ([International Migration Law No. 34 - Glossary on Migration](#))

## METHODOLOGY

This report uses a multi-source and multi-method approach with the aim of providing insights into the profiles, experiences, needs, movement patterns and intentions of migrants transiting through Serbia.

### Survey interviews with migrants

The questionnaire is administered via Kobo Toolbox and collects information on the age, sex and nationalities of respondents, information about their journeys to Serbia, registration information and movement modalities within the country. The survey is anonymized, voluntary and respondents do not receive compensation for participation. Respondents can choose not to answer any question and can withdraw their consent at any moment.

Data was collected from 15 December to 29 December 2023 in RCs/ACs (AC Banja Koviljaca, AC Krnjaca, AC Obrenovac, RC Bujanovac, RC Pirot, RC Presevo).

### Key informant interviews

Key informants can help provide information on the modus operandi of migrant mobility even when IOM field teams are not present to observe it themselves. The purpose of the key informant interviews is to contextualize the quantitative data gathered through the survey. Key informant interviews are carried out through group interviews with migrants inside reception centers. They are conducted by IOM staff trained in leading qualitative focus group discussions with vulnerable populations.

## LIMITATIONS

The data collection is conducted in the context of the following limitations:

1. Due to the training of SCRM enumerators held in December 2023, there was a delay in data collection which resulted in data being collected from 15 December onwards. This has impacted the sample size of this particular edition.
2. This data is based on a convenience sample of migrants in the survey locations during the timeframe indicated and can therefore not be generalized to the broader population of migrants in Serbia.
3. The data collection is limited to the RCs/ACs, therefore, no data collection occurs outside of camp settings. Entry points, bus stations, and railroads are known locations of migrant movements, however, in Serbia IOM does not collect data at such locations.

