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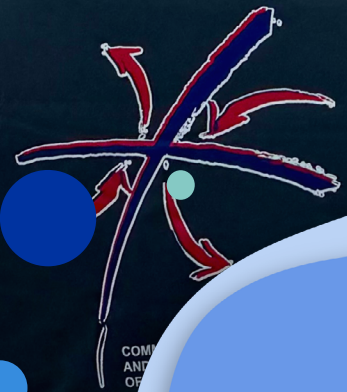
FLOW MONITORING SURVEYS WITH MIGRANTS TRAVELLING THROUGH SERBIA

20 JUNE – 31 AUGUST 2023



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This publication was made possible through support provided the Directorate General for Italian Citizens Abroad and Migration Policies of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway. The opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of donors.

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This report was issued without formal editing by IOM.

This publication was issued without IOM Publication Unit (PUB) approval for adherence to IOM's brand and style standards.

This publication was issued without IOM Research Unit (RES) endorsement.

Release date: 14 March 2024

Cover photo: IOM staff in Serbia ©IOM 2023

Required citation : International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2023). Flow Monitoring Surveys with Migrants Travelling through Serbia. IOM, Belgrade.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of the third round of the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Flow Monitoring Surveys (FMS) implemented in Serbia.¹ FMS provides a snapshot of the profiles, experiences and needs of migrants residing in reception centres in Serbia. The data was collected from 20 June to 31 August 2023 in the reception centre in Preševo, in the southern region bordering North Macedonia, and in asylum centres of Obrenovac and Krnjača, close to the capital city of Belgrade. IOM, in partnership with the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia (known by its Serbian acronym as KIRS), interviewed a total of 208 individual respondents.²

- Over two-thirds (67%) of the respondents were single adult men between the ages of 18 and 29.
- The top three nationalities were Afghans (56%), Syrians (19%) and Iranians (7%).
- Overall, 45 per cent of respondents had at least lower secondary education, and 53 per cent were employed prior to leaving their countries of origin.
- Most (87%) respondents were travelling in a group, and mostly travelling with non-relatives, while 11 per cent reported travelling with a facilitator.
- Under one-third (29%) of the migrants surveyed had been living in a country other than their own country of origin for at least a year, prior to arriving in Serbia. The two main countries where people had lived for more than a year were Türkiye (56%) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (23%).
- Germany (61%), France (10%), the United Kingdom (5%) and Switzerland (5%) were the most frequently cited countries of intended destination. Afghan nationals were more likely to cite Germany as their country of intended destination (65% of them intended to reach Germany). Similarly, nationals from the Syrian Arab Republic were more likely to state Germany and the Netherlands as their intended countries of destination with 80 per cent and 8 per cent respectively. Most nationals from the Islamic Republic of Iran stated that Germany (31%), Switzerland (23%), and France (15%) were their main countries of intended destination.
- The three main reported drivers of migration were war and conflict (62%), economic reasons (38%), and limited access to services (14%).³
- During their journeys, 60 per cent of the respondents reported at least one problem, ranging from robbery, theft of documents, health-related issues as well as a lack of food and shelter.⁴
- Ten per cent of all respondents reported having been returned from one country to another least once during their journeys, with 71 per cent of them having been returned more than once before reaching Serbia.
- Almost three fourths of respondents (73%) have spent more than 2,500 USD on their journeys. These were largely financed with savings or through working in the transit countries.

¹ The first round of FMS was conducted in [2017](#) and the second round in [2022](#).

² The term "respondents" refers to migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers as the reference population is made of mixed migration flows. These terms are used interchangeably throughout the report.

³ Multiple responses possible.

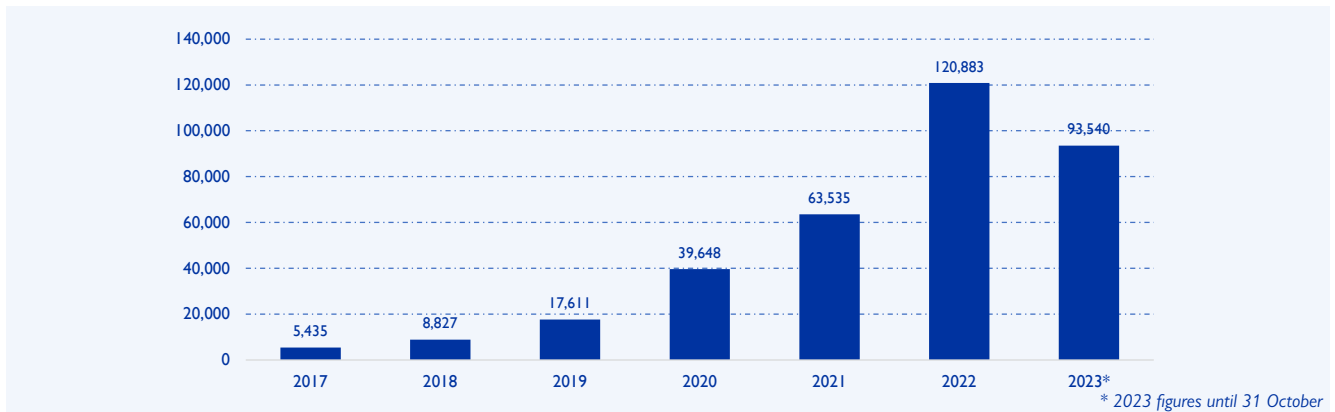
⁴ These are the main needs faced during their journeys, when migrants are in transit and not while they are hosted at TRCs where they have recourse to a shelter as well as a range of support services, including food, non-food items as well as mental health and psychosocial support.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since 2015, the Western Balkans (WB) region has emerged as a major crossroads for migrants attempting to reach the European Union (EU). There was a consistent increase in the number of migrants recorded by authorities in Serbia and the rest of the WB from 2018 to 2022. In Serbia, 2022 marked the highpoint in the mixed migration flow,

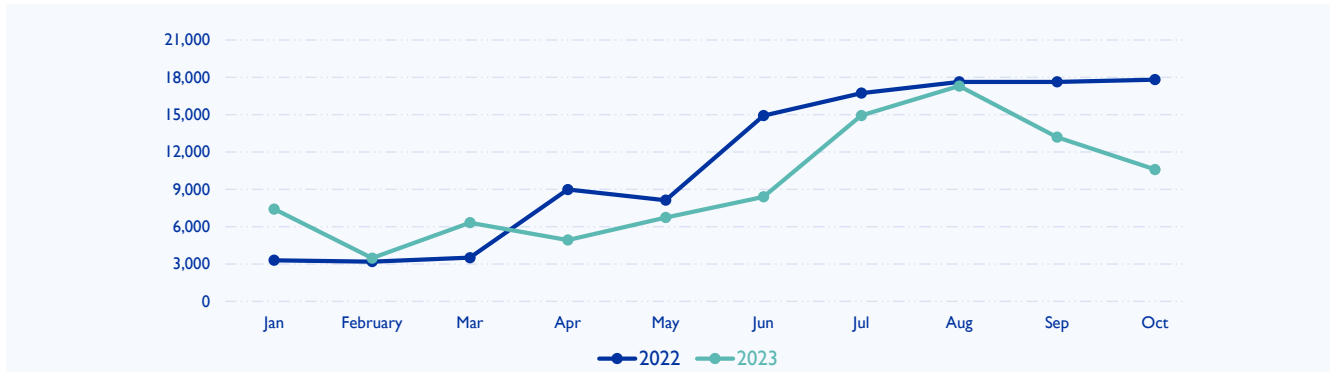
the highest since 2015, with 120,883 migrants recorded by national authorities. The number of arrivals levelled off in 2023 with 93,540 registrations from 1 January to 31 October, which is a six per cent decrease compared to the same period last year.

Figure 1. Migrants recorded by authorities in Serbia 2017– 2023



Source: [DTM Mixed Migration Flows to Europe by Sea and Land](#)

Figure 2. Number of migrants recorded per month by authorities in Serbia 2022 vs 2023

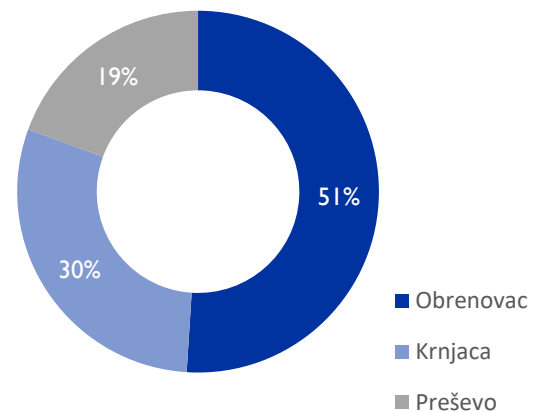


Source: [DTM Mixed Migration Flows to Europe by Sea and Land](#)

This report contains findings from the DTM FMS in Serbia to better grasp changes in migrants’ profiles and improve assistance. Surveys were conducted by IOM field staff, in partnership with KIRS, between 20 June and 31 August 2023. Field staff surveyed a total of 208 individuals in the reception centre in Preševo, and in the asylum centres in Obrenovac and Krnjaja.

The first section presents the baseline profile of the population interviewed, followed by a section on the migrants’ travel experience up to the location where the interview took place. The report then highlights respondents’ experiences of violence, exploitation and abuse during the journey. The last section looks at the respondent’s views on their return intentions.

Figure 3. Number of interviewed migrants per migrant reception centre



Source: DTM SRB FMS 2023 (n=208)

2 MIGRANTS TRAVELLING THROUGH SERBIA: BASELINE PROFILE

2.1 SAMPLE SIZE AND MAIN NATIONALITIES

The information in this report is based on a sample of 208 respondents.⁵ The two main declared nationalities⁶ of respondents were Afghanistan (56%) and the Syrian Arab Republic (19%), followed by the Islamic Republic of Iran (7%), Burundi (5%), Morocco (4%), Pakistan (2%), Iraq (1%) and one per cent or less from Algeria,

Cameroon, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gambia, India, Mali and Tunisia. Compared to the previous FMS conducted in 2022, there was a five per cent increase in respondents from the Syrian Arab Republic and a 21 per cent decrease in Pakistani nationals.

2.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Male migrants represent the majority (90%) of the sample, followed by 10 per cent female respondents.⁷ The median age was 25, with the youngest migrant interviewed being 14 years old and the oldest 57 years old. Children made up two per cent of the respondents, and all of them came from Afghanistan (4 boys).

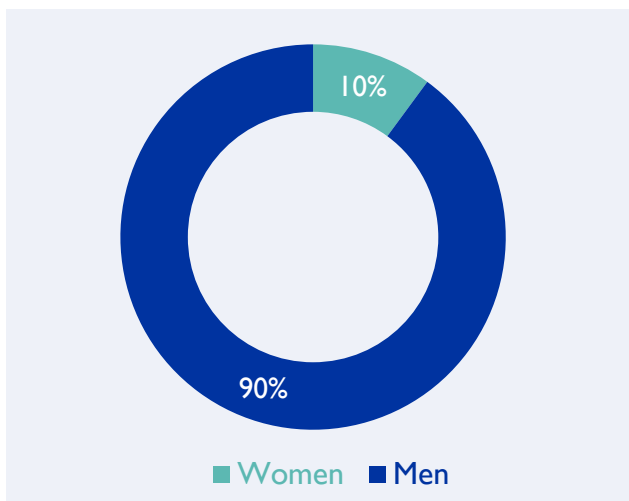
Almost three-fourths of the respondents (72%) declared they were single, followed by 23 per cent who were married, one per cent divorced, the remainder were either widowed or in some other form of partnership.

More than three quarters (78%) of the respondents did not have children. Of the 22 per cent who had children, 43 per cent declared having at least one child left in the country of origin and 25 per cent had children in the country of destination and three respondents reported that they have children elsewhere .

The most spoken languages by the respondents were Farsi (39%), Arabic (27%), Pashto (20%), French (5%), Dari (3%) followed by Azerbaijani (2%), Sorani Kurdish (1%), and Congolese Swahili, English, Hindi, Kurmanji Kurdish, Punjabi, Turkish and Urdu with less than one per cent each.

Of the total respondents, three per cent stated that they were internally displaced inside their countries of origin before crossing a border and starting the journey. Of those who were internally displaced, half were from Afghanistan and the other half came from the Syrian Arab Republic.

Figure 4. Percentages of interviewed migrants disaggregated by sex



Source: DTM SRB FMS 2023 (n=208)

⁵ Two other migrants met by enumerators stated that they had already participated in the FMS before, and were therefore not asked the remainder of the questions after these initial ones.

⁶ Nationality data is not publicly available in Serbia. However, the sample covers nationality figures that are consistent with overall nationality registrations in reception facilities, based on data shared with IOM.

⁷ The questionnaire includes one question on sex and one question on gender self-identification, both including the possibility of declining to specify for the respondent.

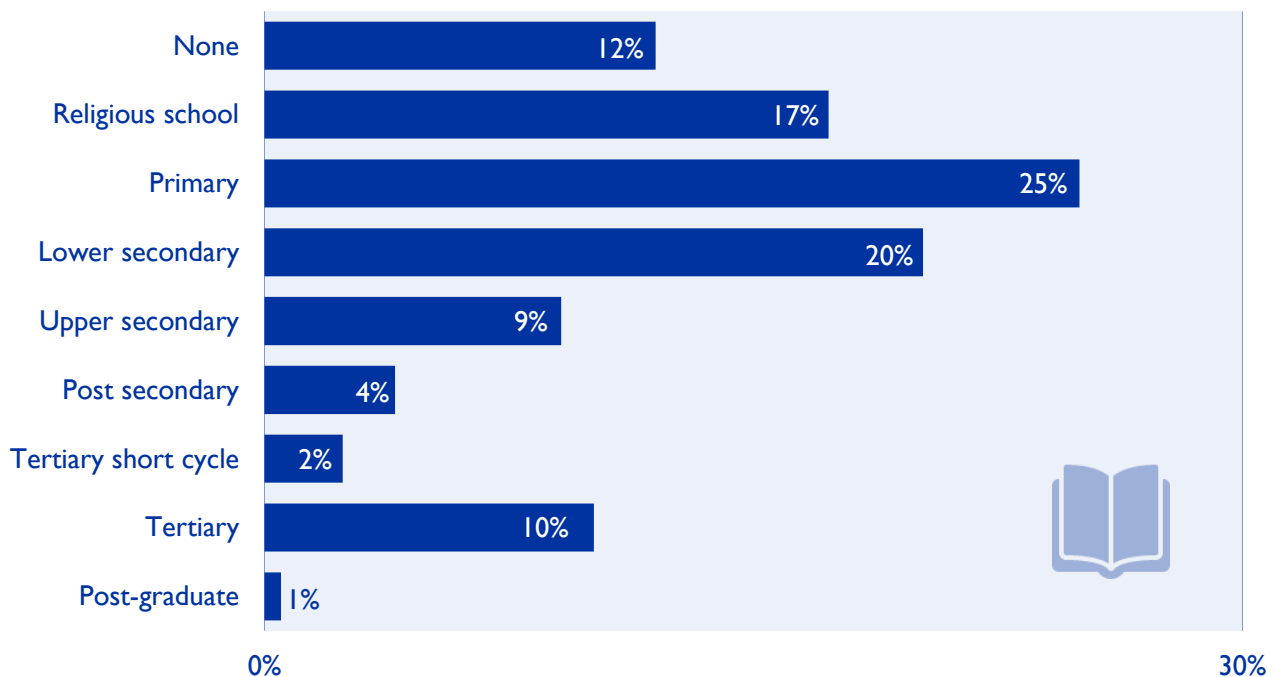
2.3 EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Education

Information on the educational attainment of different nationalities can help facilitate the planning of integration programmes in host countries. Respondents were therefore asked about the highest level of formal education

they had completed. Figure 5 below provides a complete breakdown of the highest levels of completed education of respondents in the countries of origin.

Figure 5. Highest level of educational attainment



Source: DTM SRB FMS 2023 (n=208)

Employment status before departure

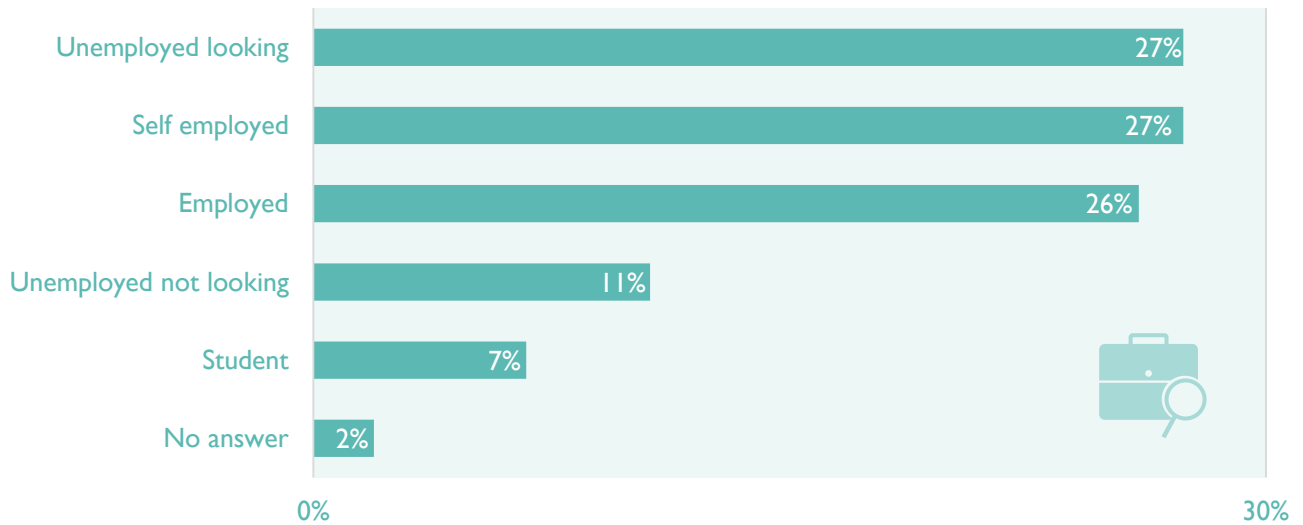
Information on the educational attainment of different nationalities can help facilitate the planning of integration programmes in host countries. Respondents were therefore asked about the highest level of formal education they had completed. Figure 5 below provides a complete breakdown of the highest levels of completed education of respondents in the countries of origin.

Among those who had been employed prior to leaving their country or origin, the most frequently held jobs were skilled manual labour (28%), this was followed by elementary occupations (22%), professionals (12%), service and sales workers (11%), craft and trade workers

(10%), plant machine operators (8%), technicians (5%) and armed forces (4%). The significant numbers of people who had been skilled manual labourers could potentially be relevant more broadly in the WB as countries look to fill labour shortages in key sectors of the economy.

The most frequently cited sectors of employment were agriculture and forestry (22%), other services activities (17%), construction (12%), education (9%), IT sector, public administration (5%), defence (5%), transport and logistics (5%). Fewer respondent reported having worked in energy (5%), manufacturing sector (5%) and in administrative support (4%).

Figure 6. Highest level of educational attainment



Source: DTM SRB FMS 2023 (n=208)

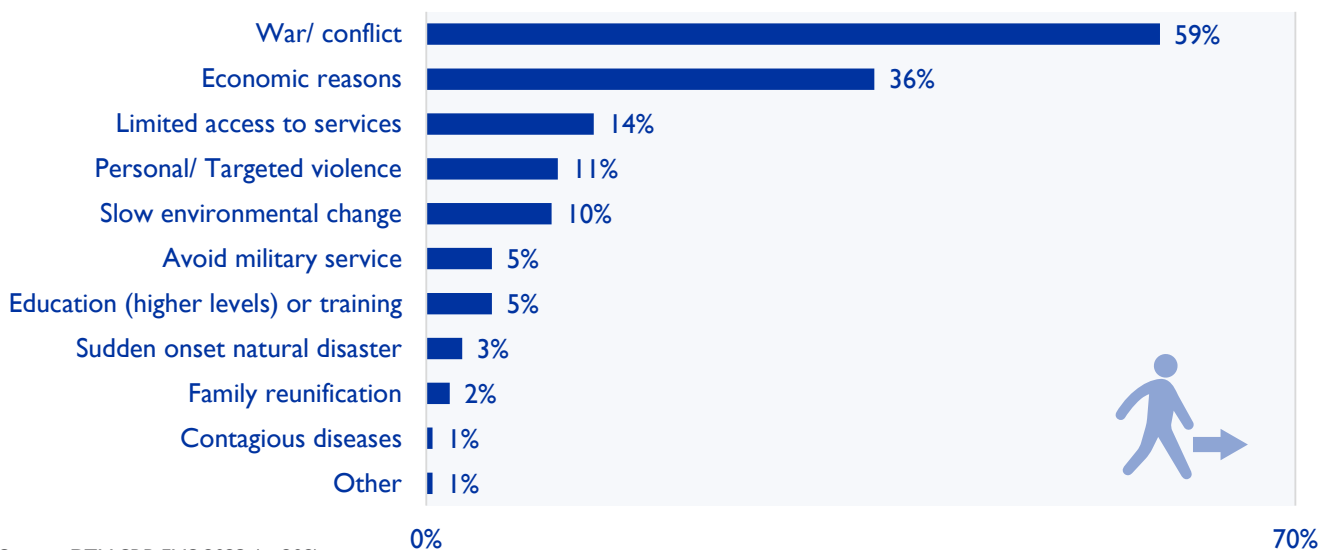
2.4 REASONS FOR LEAVING THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Interviewees were asked to mention the two main reasons for leaving their countries of origin. Almost two-thirds (59%) cited war and conflict, which is similar to the 65 per cent from 2022. Thirty-six per cent of respondents said they left due to economic reasons.

See Figure 7 below for a complete breakdown of the reasons for leaving the countries of origin.⁸

Drivers of migration varied between the different nationalities. Eighty-three per cent of Syrians and 77 per cent of Afghans reported war and conflict as the main reason for leaving their country of origin. For nationals of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 73 per cent reported economic reason for leaving their country of origin, while 77 per cent of Burundians mentioned war and conflict as the main reason for leaving their country of origin.

Figure 7. Main reasons for leaving the country of origin (multiple choices possible)



Source: DTM SRB FMS 2023 (n=208)

⁸ Participants can choose multiple options. The total therefore does not add up to 100 per cent.

2.5 REASONS FOR LEAVING THE COUNTRY OF DEPARTURE

Almost one third (29%) of the respondents had been living in a country other than that of origin or habitual residence for at least a year prior to moving again. In most cases, the countries where people had lived for more than a year were Türkiye (56%) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (23%).

When asked why they decided to leave Türkiye after having lived there for a year or more, 66 per cent of respondents said it was due to economic reasons and 23 per cent said it was due to a fear of being sent back to

their countries of origin.⁹ Among those who lived in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 67 per cent said they moved again due to economic reasons and 20 per cent due limited access to basic services.

In 2022, 46 per cent of those who had been living in a country other than their country of origin for one year or more said they had been living in Greece, while only 5 per cent had a former residence in Greece in the 2023 sample.

2.6 MODE OF TRAVEL

Most (87%) of the respondents travelled with a group while the other 13 per cent travelled alone. Almost two-thirds (62%) of those who travelled in a group

were with non-family, while less than one third (28%) travelled with family members and the rest travelled with facilitators (11%).

Figure 8. Mode of travel of the respondents



Source: DTM SRB FMS 2023 (n=208)

2.7 ROUTES TRAVELLED

Thirty-eight per cent of respondents entered Serbia through the Bulgarian route from Türkiye, while 21 per

cent took the Greek route from Türkiye, entering Serbia through North Macedonia or Kosovo*.¹⁰

2.8 COST OF JOURNEY

Figure 9 provides a complete breakdown of the cost of the journeys of respondents from their country of origin or habitual residence until they arrived in Serbia.

When asked how they financed their journeys, more than one third of the respondents (39%) said they used their own money. This was followed by 32 per cent who

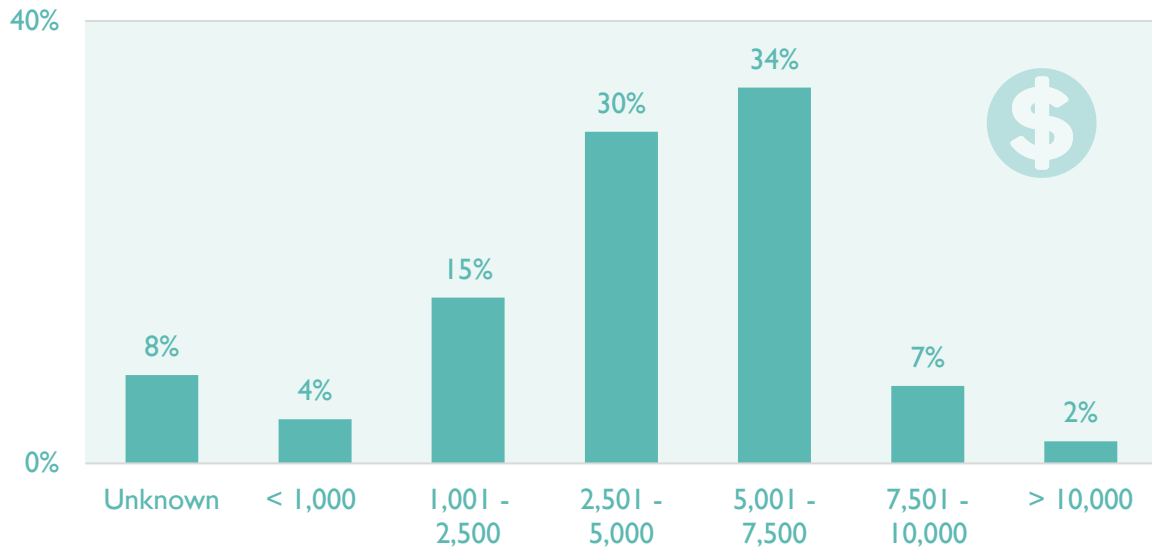
reported working in a transit country, 31 per cent who borrowed money, 28 per cent had to sell property, 17 per cent who received the money from relatives in the country of origin, 6 per cent who received the money from relatives abroad, and 2 per cent who received the money from an employer.¹¹

⁹ Participants could choose up to two options. The total therefore does not add up to 100.

¹⁰ References to Kosovo* shall be understood in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

¹¹ Respondents could choose multiple options. The total therefore does not add up to 100.

Figure 9. Cost of the journey in USD from the country of origin to Serbia



Source: DTM SRB FMS 2023 (n=208)

Sixty-four per cent of respondents said that they paid per leg of the journey. This was followed by 11 per cent who will pay upon arrival in the intended destination, 9 per cent who paid full amount upfront in the country of origin, 7 per cent who paid in instalments through the hawala¹² system, and 4 per cent who paid in cash instalments. Two respondent reported no specific payment method. Four per cent did not answer this question.

Almost three-fourths (70%) of the respondents reported that they had to repay part of the expenses of the journey upon arrival at the destination. This is potentially significant for countries of arrival: migrants incurring in significant debts throughout their journey can be more vulnerable to socio-economic difficulties, more prone to exploitation and to harmful coping strategies with mental health implications.

2.9 PROBLEMS DURING THE JOURNEY

Respondents were asked about specific problems they faced during the journey to Serbia.

Hunger, in addition to financial problems, continues to be a prevalent issue among migrants travelling through the WB route. Most people reported experiencing issues of hunger in transit including in Bulgaria, Republic of Türkiye, Greece, and North Macedonia.

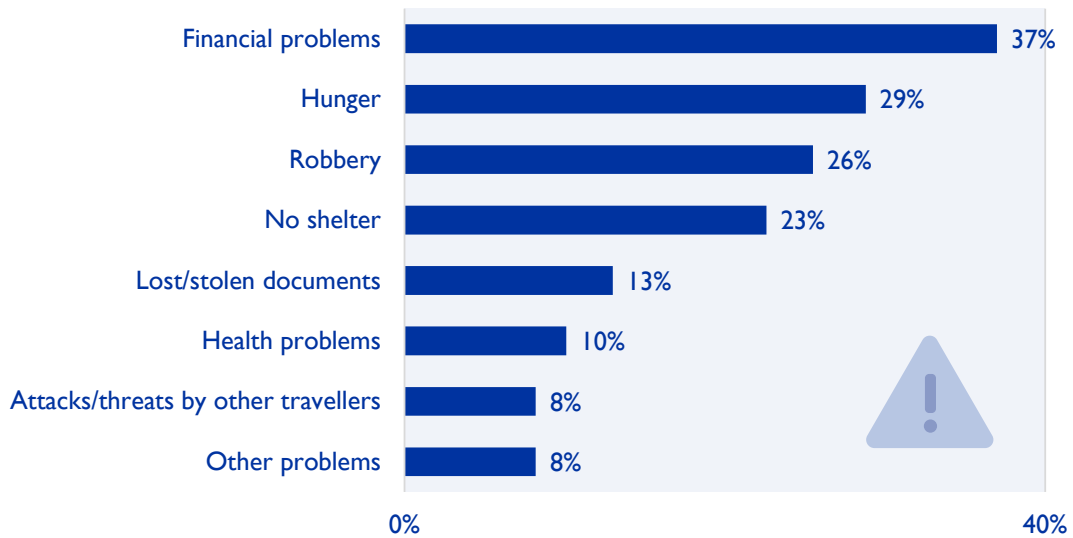
Just over one fourth (26%) reported that they had been robbed, which is similar with what observed in 2022 (22% of the respondents). Most episodes of robbery (81%) occurred in a country of transit while 19 per cent occurred in Serbia (compared to the 5% in 2022). One third of the female respondents reported having been

robbed, compared to 25 per cent of male respondents. In 2022, 14 per cent of female respondents reported having been robbed, and 22 per cent of male respondents reported having been robbed.

Forty-six per cent of all episodes of robberies happened in Bulgaria, while almost a third occurred in Türkiye, 8 per cent in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Greece, 5 per cent in North Macedonia and Pakistan. This is a change compared to 2022, when more than a third of all the robberies happened in Greece, while a quarter of the robberies occurred in Türkiye. This change is consistent with the shift in route in 2023, as more migrants are taking the Bulgaria route so these issues are more likely to be reported there.

¹² Hawala is an informal money transfer system in which money is passed on through a network of brokers (who are known as hawaladars) without the actual/physical movement of cash. It is the transmission of money in ways other than the regular banking routes and hence sometimes called underground banking.

Figure 10. Percentage of respondents who reported some problems either in transit or in Serbia



Source: DTM SRB FMS 2023 (n=208)

Respondents were also asked if they had been readmitted¹³ to another country during their journey by the authorities of transit countries. Ten per cent of respondents reported having been returned from one country to another. Of these, 29 per cent reported having been returned once,

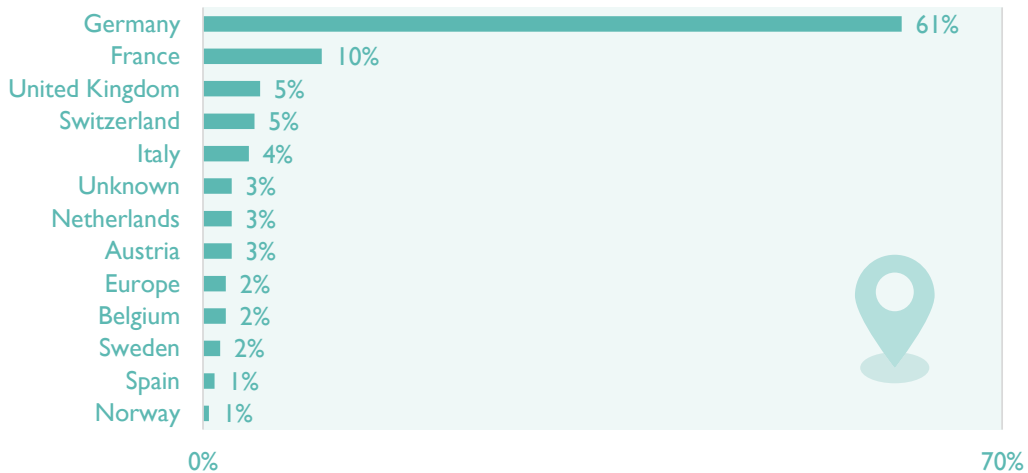
29 per cent also reported having been returned twice, 24 per cent said they had been returned between three and five times, while 18 per cent stated that they had been returned six times or more.

2.10 INTENDED DESTINATION

Germany, France, and the United Kingdom were the most frequently cited countries of intended destination. In 2022, Germany, France, and Italy were the most frequently cited

countries of intended destination. Italy dropped from 19 per cent in 2022 to 4 per cent in 2023.

Figure 11. Most frequently cited countries of intended destination



Source: DTM SRB FMS 2023 (n=208)

¹³ The survey asks migrants questions about whether they have been readmitted from one country to another. Migrants may or may not know the difference between formal readmission procedures and push backs and may use or understand those terms interchangeably. Findings on readmission should therefore not be understood to definitively mean pushbacks.

Survey respondents were asked why they chose their countries of intended destination. The most frequently reported answers were ease of access to asylum procedures (37%), appealing socio-economic conditions (27%), relatives in the intended destination country (19%), safety (10%), well-established network of co-nationals (4%), followed by the only available or feasible choice due to policy and geographical constraints, language and other reasons (1%). One per cent of respondents did not answer this question.

Out of those intending to reach Germany, 40 per cent reported ease of access to asylum procedures, while 29 per cent said it was due to appealing socio-economic conditions, and 17 per cent said it was because they already had family in Germany. Of those who reported France as their intended destination, 57 per cent reported ease of access to asylum procedure as their main reason, while 24 per cent mentioned appealing socio-economic conditions. The most frequently cited reasons for choosing the United Kingdom as intended destination were appealing socio-economic conditions (40%), because of friends and family (40%) and because of ease of access to asylum procedures (10%).

The intended countries of destination do not differ significantly for the three main nationalities surveyed. Respondents from Afghanistan reported Germany (65%), France (12%), Switzerland (5%), and Austria (3%) as main countries of destination. For nationals of Syrians, the most frequently cited destinations were Germany (80%), the Netherlands (8%), and the United Kingdom (5%). Nationals of the Islamic Republic of Iran cited Germany (31%), the Switzerland (23%) and France (15%).

More than half of survey respondents (56%) stated that they did not have family in the country of intended destination, 9 per cent stated that they had immediate family members (spouses, children or parents), while 35 per cent noted that they had extended family in the country of destination. Moreover, twenty-seven per cent of respondents stated that they had family in another European country. Two per cent of respondents said they had immediate family members (spouses, children or parents) in another European country, while 26 per cent said they had extended family members. More than half (52%) of all respondents had either relatives in their country of destination or in some another EU country.

3 VULNERABILITY TO VIOLENCE, EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

The questionnaire also included a module which gathers data on migrants' vulnerability and the forms of abuse, violence and exploitation they may have experienced or witnessed during the journey. More specifically, the survey includes eight questions that aim to capture information about whether the respondent had, during their journey:

1. Worked or performed other activities without getting the expected payment
2. Was forced to perform work or other activities against your will
3. Was approached by someone offering a marriage (for you or close family member – child or sibling)
4. Was kept at a certain location against your will (by persons other than the authorities of the country)
5. Had experienced any form of physical violence
6. Was forced to travel/move
7. Was lied to, tricked, manipulated, indebted, given false promises, or otherwise deceived in order to get to travel/move
8. Had access to travel documents during the journey

These questions relate to an event, that might indicate exposure to human trafficking, exploitation and abuse practices, physical and sexual violence, experienced by the respondent, or witnessed by the respondent during the journey. The experiences described in these questions do not aim to identify cases of human trafficking as defined by international and national legal instruments. If interviewers came across respondents who requested further support, they referred these cases to the relevant protection actor.



UNPAID LABOUR

About 10 per cent of respondents reported they worked or performed other activities during their journey without receiving the expected payment. Eighty-six per cent of these incidents happened in Türkiye, while 10 per cent took place in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the remaining 5 per cent occurred in Lebanon.



FORCED LABOUR

About one per cent of respondents reported having been forced to work or conduct activities against their will. These experiences reportedly happened in Türkiye and Serbia.



OFFERS OF AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE

About one per cent of respondents reported they have been approached by someone offering marriage. Respondents mentioned that this happened in Greece and Türkiye.



KEPT AT A CERTAIN LOCATION AGAINST WILL

Seven per cent of respondents noted that they had been kept at a location against their will. This allegedly happened in Bulgaria, Serbia, Türkiye, Greece, and Pakistan.



PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

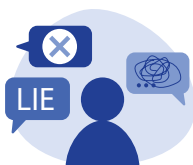
Twenty-two per cent of respondents reported having experienced some form of physical violence during their journey. This share is slower than in the previous round of FMS in 2022, when almost 34 per cent of respondents reported having experienced some form of physical violence.

The most frequently cited countries where physical violence was suffered were Bulgaria (38%), Türkiye (21%), North Macedonia (21%), Serbia (19%), Greece (9%), Pakistan (6%), and the Islamic Republic of Iran (4%). In 2022, the most frequently cited countries where instead Greece (37%), Bulgaria and Türkiye each with 18 per cent, and North Macedonia with 12 per cent.



FORCED TO TRAVE

Four per cent of respondents reported that they been forced to travel or to move. This allegedly happened in Bulgaria, Serbia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye.



LIED, TRICKED, OR OTHERWISE DECEIVED IN ORDER TO TRAVEL

Twenty-one per cent of respondents noted that they been lied to, tricked, manipulated, indebted, given false promises, or otherwise deceived in order to get to travel or to move. This was reported to have happened in Türkiye, Bulgaria, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Serbia, and Pakistan and in Afghanistan.



CONTROL OF TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

Just under half (45%) of the respondents reported that they never had documents during journey. More than one fifth (22%) noted that they had documents during the journey, while 11 per cent reported having lost their documents during their journey. Nine per cent reported that someone else took their documents, and 5 per cent reported having had their documents stolen. Eight percent preferred not to answer this question.

4 RETURN INTENTIONS

Most (86%) respondents had not considered returning to their country of origin during the journey wither because they were not willing (80% of respondents), they feared for their security in their origin country (16%), or they intended to re-join their families in the destination countries (3%).

Among those who considered returning (14% of the sample), 63 per cent reported being too tired or

exhausted to continue, while the remainder cited a lack of job opportunities or legal barriers, better condition, xenophobia or discrimination. When asked at what point of their journey they had considered returning to their countries of origin, 29 per cent stated that it happened in Türkiye, followed by Bulgaria, Greece, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Pakistan at 14 per cent each. Seven per cent said Burundi and Libya each.

5 METHODOLOGY

Flow Monitoring Surveys (FMS) in Serbia were conducted as part of DTM activities in the Mediterranean that the IOM launched in October 2015 and are presently conducted within the framework of IOM's research on populations on the move, through the Mediterranean and Western Balkans Routes to Europe. The data collection involves direct interviews with migrants and collation of statistical data on arrivals and migrant presence in reception and outside from national authorities and IOM staff presence. Regular updates on arrivals are available on [DTM Migration Flow to Europe | Europe](#).

FMS in Serbia were conducted by IOM field staff in partnership with KIRS, which provided organizational and logistical support, between 20 June and 31 August 2023.

A total number of seven enumerators (4 female, 3 male) with language skills in English, Arabic, Dari, Farsi, and Pashto were trained by IOM. Field staff surveyed 208

migrants in the reception centre in Preševo, and in asylum centres in Obrenovac and Krnjača.

The survey is designed to profile third country (non-EEA, non-Western Balkan) nationals who are migrating to Western Europe through the Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes. Only migrants aged 14 and above are approached. IOM requires the informed consent of the legal guardians of any participants under the age of 18.

The FMS questionnaire was available in e-format in Kobo Toolbox in English, French and Arabic, and in paper forms translated into Arabic, English, Farsi, French, Pashto and Urdu. Respondents were approached by IOM field staff working in the reception centers. The interviews were anonymous and conducted one-on-one with respondents, in safe and isolated spaces. Interview participants could decline to respond to any individual questions or to interrupt the interview at any moment if they wished.

5.1 SAMPLING

The sampling frame was agreed with IOM's Regional Office in Vienna to ensure the consistency and solidity of the final sample for research purposes, reflecting the general demographic profile of migrant presence in reception centres of the country in the covered period. In Serbia, IOM applied a non-random, convenience sampling

procedure due to the availability to reception centres in Serbia, which may have introduced some sample bias. IOM used a convenience sample, which means that the figures should not be interpreted to be representative of the broader population of migrants in Serbia.

5.2 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

DTM's FMS baseline module captures data on the demographic profile of the respondents, their education and employment background, the circumstances of their migration journey and migration factors, their place of origin or their last country of habitual residence, and their intended countries of destination.

The second FMS module contains questions that refer to experience exploitation, violence and abuse that may amount to human trafficking. The module was prepared together with IOM's Migrant Protection and Assistance

Division and gathers information on events and practices, experienced directly by the respondent or by his/her family member(s), or that are witnessed by the respondent during the journey.

The third module contains questions related to return intentions. As outreach activities on the existence and functioning of AVRR were run by IOM in the country, this module of the FMS asks respondents questions on the intention to return to the country of origin.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

The data presented in this document are representative of the individuals surveyed in the covered locations and during the indicated timeframe. The data should not be generalized and should not represent a full picture of regional migration flows, but rather of trends in the specific locations monitored in Serbia during the period covered. No surveys were collected outside reception centers in Serbia.

It should also be noted that the relatively low percentage of women in the total sample is due to several factors, including the fact that women tend to be less willing to talk even when women enumerators are deployed. Moreover, women tend to travel less often than men alone, and they are more difficult to approach when travelling with male family members.

