

This report provides insights into the profiles, experiences, needs, routes travelled and intentions of migrants transiting through the Western Balkans. IOM surveyed 1,307 migrants¹ from 1 May to 31 May 2024 in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo*.²



Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM
Map 1: Most prevalent routes travelled by migrants in the Western Balkans

1,307
Migrants interviewed

Top **5** countries of origin of respondents



600 days

Average time since leaving country of origin



3,650

Registrations by authorities and institutions³ in May 2024 in the Western Balkans



28
years old
Average age



60%

Travelled throughout the region by bus



31%

Travelled by taxi



Average number of failed border crossing attempts per person



Were facilitated across at least one border in the Western Balkans



36%

Slept outside or squatted in abandoned buildings in the Western Balkans

22,437

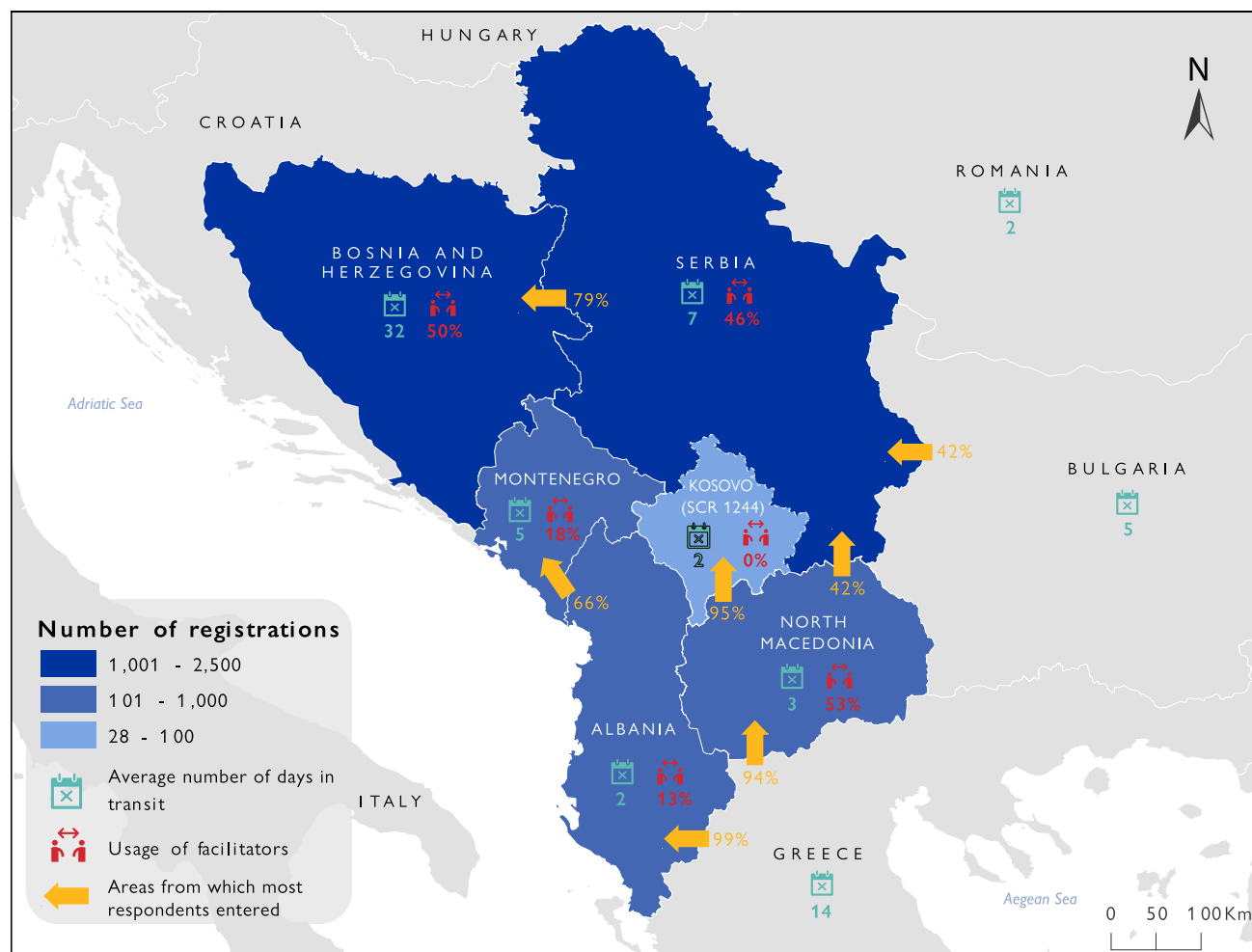
Total registrations in the Western Balkans in 2024

¹ Interviewees include migrants in an irregular situation, refugees and asylum-seekers as the reference population consists of mixed migration flows.

² References to Kosovo* shall be understood in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

³ Albania: the Directorate for Borders and Migration; BiH, the Service for Foreigners' Affairs; Montenegro: the Ministry of Interior; North Macedonia: Department of Border Affairs and Migration; Serbia: the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants; Kosovo*: Directorate for Migration and Foreigners

JOURNEYS



Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM
Map 2: Information on migrant movements in the Western Balkans – May 2024

Map 2 above provides a detailed look at the main borders migrants cross to enter each country or territory in the Western Balkans. The yellow arrows show the country or territory from which most of the respondents entered while red icons show the percentage of respondents who were facilitated to enter the country or territory of interview. The map also shows the average length of stay in days in each transit country or territory.

In May 2024, 79 per cent of respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina entered from Serbia, which was consistent with April 2024 (73%) and March 2024 (75%), but a decrease when compared to February 2024 when 90 per cent of respondents stated they had entered from Serbia. The share of respondents who entered Montenegro from Albania decreased from 87 per cent in April 2024 to 66 per cent in May 2024, while entries from Kosovo* to Montenegro increased from no entries in April 2024 to 16 per cent in May 2024. In May 2024, a small number of respondents (3%) entered Serbia from Romania.

On average, people transited more quickly through Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Kosovo* compared to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Respondents also spent fewer days in Bulgaria than in Greece. The average length of stay of migrants transiting through Serbia decreased from 12 days in April 2024 to 7 days in May 2024.

	ALB	BIH	MNE	MKD	SRB	XKX*	WB
	96%	91%	63%	100%	73%	100%	86%
	18%	70%	99%	26%	42%	94%	60%
	–	1%	–	57%	18%	11%	10%
	–	25%	34%	18%	53%	17%	31%

Figure 1: Mode of travel in the Western Balkans (multiple answers possible) (n=1,307)

Journeys: travel modality

Most respondents (75%) reported travelling in a group. Of those who were travelling in a group, 52 per cent stated they were travelling in non-family groups, while 30 per cent reported they were travelling with facilitators and 18 per cent said they were travelling with family members.

Journeys: border crossings

In May 2024, 40 per cent of respondents stated that they were facilitated across a border to enter the survey country. On average, respondents paid 356 EUR to cross a border within the Western Balkans. Forty-two per cent of respondents had attempted and failed a border crossing at least once. Almost all respondents (99%) stated that the main reason for failing was being returned by authorities while the remaining one per cent said it was due to route closure.

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

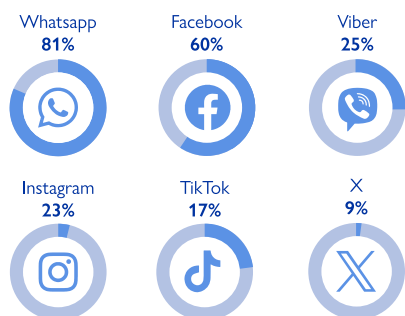


Figure 2: Most frequently cited platforms migrants use to plan their journeys (multiple answers possible) (n=1,307)

Journeys: secondary movements⁴

Forty per cent of respondents stated that they had been living in a country other than their own country of origin for a year or more.⁵ Eighty per cent of these respondents had been living in Türkiye, followed by Greece (14%), Lebanon (3%), Albania (1%), the Islamic Republic of Iran (1%), Tunisia (1%) and other countries (1%).

When asked why they had decided to move after having lived in these countries for a year or more, the three most frequently cited responses were economic reasons (65%), a fear of being returned to their country of origin (53%), and personal or targeted violence (38%).⁶

Journeys: needs

Respondents' most frequently cited needs tend to relate to prolonged journeys from their country of origin and into the Western Balkans.

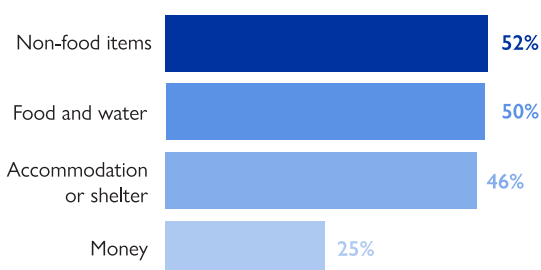


Figure 3: Most important needs outside reception facilities (multiple answers possible) (n=1,307)

ACCOMMODATION

Figure 4 provides a breakdown of where migrants were accommodated in the Western Balkans. Most respondents (63%) reported having been accommodated in a reception facility at least once during their journeys through the Western Balkans.

⁴ "Secondary movement" refers to the movement of a migrant from their first country of destination to another country, other than the country in which he or she originally resided and other than the person's country of nationality. [International Migration Law: Glossary on Migration](#), IOM, 2019.

⁵ This question is only asked in Serbia. The sub-sample is 347 respondents.

⁶ This question allows respondents to choose more than one answer. The total therefore does not add up to 100 per cent.

In May 2024, 36 per cent of respondents stated that they had either slept outside or squatted in an abandoned building at one point during their transit in the Western Balkans, compared to 27 per cent in April 2024. The use of private accommodation was the highest in Albania (79%), while the highest percentage of camp residencies was recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina (85%) and Kosovo* (100%). On average, respondents paid 15 EUR per person per day for private accommodation or hotels and hostels in the Western Balkans.

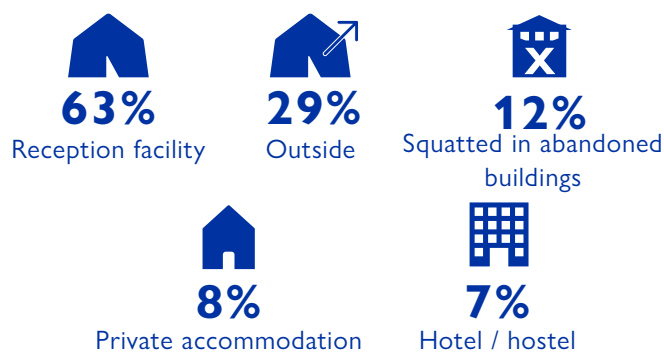


Figure 4: Accommodation in the Western Balkans (multiple answers possible) (n=1,307)

INTENDED DESTINATION COUNTRIES

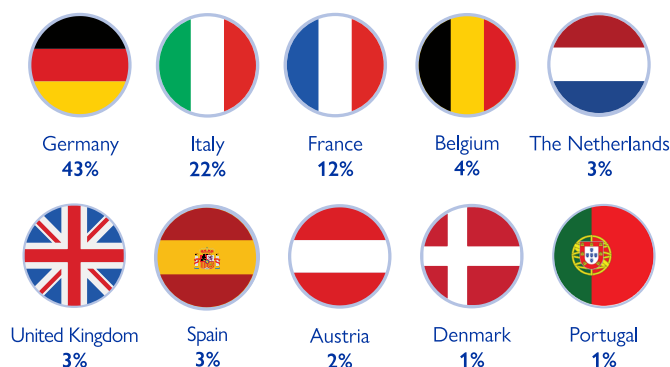


Figure 5: Top ten intended destinations (n=1,307)

Destination countries varied by the nationality of the respondents. Seventy-two per cent of respondents from the Syrian Arab Republic stated that they wanted to travel to Germany. Respondents from Morocco mentioned Italy (34%), France (34%) and Germany (15%). Nationals of Afghanistan stated Germany (60%), Italy (16%) and France (8%). See Figure 6 below for a breakdown of the main reasons respondents selected these countries of destination.

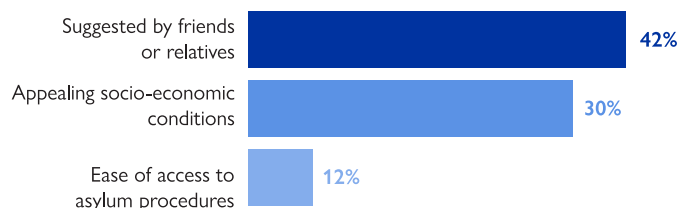
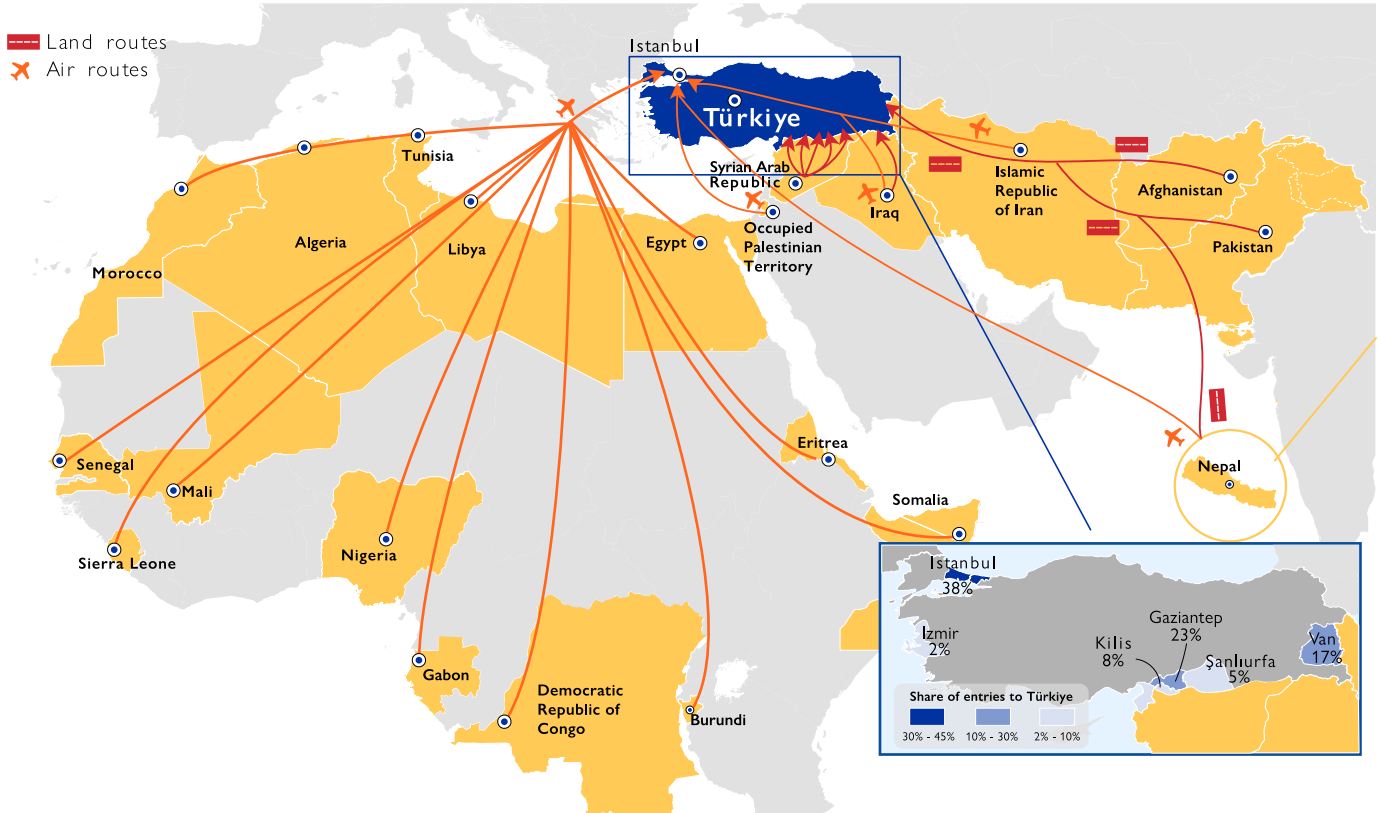


Figure 6: Main reasons for choosing intended destination country (n=1,307)

MIGRANTS TRANSITING THROUGH TÜRKİYE



Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM. The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

Map 3: Countries of origin of the respondents in May 2024 and provinces of arrival in Türkiye

According to survey results, Türkiye was the main hub from which migrants departed into the Western Balkans. To better understand movements from Türkiye, this section provides insights into the journeys and experiences of those migrants. It consists of a set of questions asked to 216 migrants of the overall sample in May.⁷



Fear of being returned to country of origin (n=216)



Average length of stay in Türkiye (n=216)

Interviewees from North, Central, West and East Africa all stated that they flew to Istanbul, while those from Afghanistan, Iraq, Nepal, Pakistan and the Syrian Arab Republic mainly used the land route. A small number of respondents from Iraq, Pakistan and Nepal stated that they took the air route to Istanbul. Respondents from the Occupied Palestinian Territory also flew to Istanbul. See Map 3 above for an overview of the main provinces of entry into Türkiye.



Employed



Unemployed

Figure 5: Employment status in Türkiye (n=216)

On average, respondents spent almost a year (341 days) living in Türkiye prior to leaving. Thirty-seven per cent of the respondents stated that they registered with authorities in Türkiye.

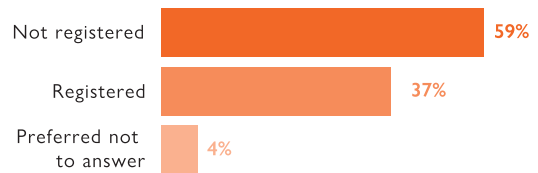


Figure 6: Registration by authorities in Türkiye (n=216)

When asked where they had departed Türkiye from, 95 per cent said it was at an unofficial border crossing. Most respondents stated that they left Türkiye due to economic reasons.

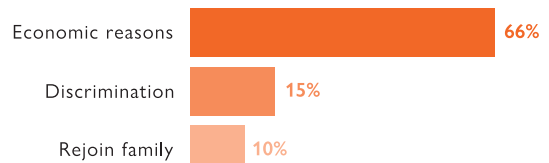


Figure 7: Reasons for leaving Türkiye (multiple answers possible) (n=216)

⁷ This question is only asked in transit reception centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina to keep the questionnaire brief and because most Turkish nationals in the mixed migratory flows eventually transit through Bosnia and Herzegovina.

SPECIAL FOCUS – NATIONALS OF ALGERIA

To contextualize the journeys, experiences, and complex needs of migrants on the move, IOM carries out group interviews with specific migrant groups every month. This section is not representative but aims to give context to the quantitative data, by portraying one of the many nuanced and diverse experiences of migrants transiting through the Western Balkans. In May, IOM carried out interviews with four people from Algeria in transit reception centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

- In 2024, the Service for Foreigners' Affairs (SFA) has registered over 100 Algerian nationals in BiH, representing around one per cent of all registrations. Based on camp registration data, men made up 99 percent of the registrations, with an average age of 25.
- The interviewees spoke of leaving Algeria due to a perceived lack of economic opportunities and because of the prospects of a better life in Europe. They specifically mentioned being drawn by how their co-nationals presented living in Europe on social media.
- Interviewees said they organised their journeys to Europe together with friends and community members who had previously departed and were now living in Europe.
- They managed to secure visas to Türkiye and flew to Istanbul directly from Algeria. They mentioned only spending a few days in Türkiye before making their way to Edirne by train. From there, they walked across the border into Bulgaria using the maps on their smartphones.
- They stated that they did not pay for facilitation but instead relied on advice from friends who had recently made the journeys. The friends also advised them on which entry points to use, which routes to travel and how to avoid detection by official authorities.
- Algerian nationals seem to rely less on organized facilitation to cross borders compared to other nationalities. Out of all the 7,678 people surveyed in 2024, Algerian nationals have the lowest reported rate of border crossing facilitation. Eighty-five per cent stated that they were not facilitated to cross a border compared to forty-five per cent of the overall sample.
- When asked if they had faced any difficulties or problems along the route, interviewees mentioned that the biggest problem came from the prolonged periods of walking through forests without food and water. One interviewee mentioned falling ill and not having access to medicines or medical attention.
- Interviewees mentioned that travelling as a small, cohesive unit of friends without relying on smuggling networks created a sense of safety and resilience among them as they had a high degree of trust in each other.
- The group stated that they wanted to travel to Spain as it was perceived as being a more tolerant country. Interviewees also stated that having friends and family in Spain was a strong pull factor, despite not having information on how to regularise their status once they had arrived.

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 the Western Balkans.

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 the Western Balkans, registration information and movement modalities within the country as well as their primary needs at the moment of the interview. 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. The survey is designed to last no longer than 15 minutes. Data was collected from 1 May to 31 May 2024 by enumerators in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo*. Interviews took place in reception facilities in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo*.

In Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo* enumerators also interviewed migrants outside formal reception facilities in transit locations, at entry or exit points and in locations where migrants are known to reside. Some questions are distributed across the different countries or territories of the Western Balkans, in order to keep the questionnaire brief. For example, the question on reasons for leaving the country of departure is only asked in Serbia and the Türkiye module is only deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As most migrants transiting through the Western Balkans usually exit from either Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina, these questions can still provide some interesting analysis and findings for the overall sample. IOM staff in Bosnia and Herzegovina carried out the group interviews with Algerian nationals for the special focus section in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Key informant interviews

Key informants can help provide information on the modus operandi of migrant mobility even when IOM field teams are not present. Key informants can be migrants themselves or persons familiar with the context.

Group interviews

The purpose of the group interviews is to contextualize the quantitative data gathered through the survey. These interviews are carried out with migrants inside reception centres in BiH and are conducted by IOM staff trained in leading qualitative focus group discussions with vulnerable populations.

LIMITATIONS

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 the Western Balkans.

IOM field teams collect data in shifts within IOM working hours (07:30 – 18:30). However, many migrants enter and travel throughout the country outside of these hours, especially late at night or in the early hours of the morning.

SUPPORTED BY:


 Norwegian Ministry
 of Foreign Affairs


UK Government


 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 and International Cooperation of Italy