

This report provides insights into the profiles, experiences, needs, routes travelled and intentions of migrants transiting through the Western Balkans. IOM surveyed 924 migrants¹ from 1 August to 31 August 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 on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM
Map 1: Most prevalent routes travelled by migrants in the Western Balkans

924
Migrants interviewed

Top **5** countries of origin of respondents



520 days

Average time since leaving country of origin



5,573

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



27
years old
Average age



57%

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



30%

Slept outside or squatted in abandoned buildings in the Western Balkans

37,546

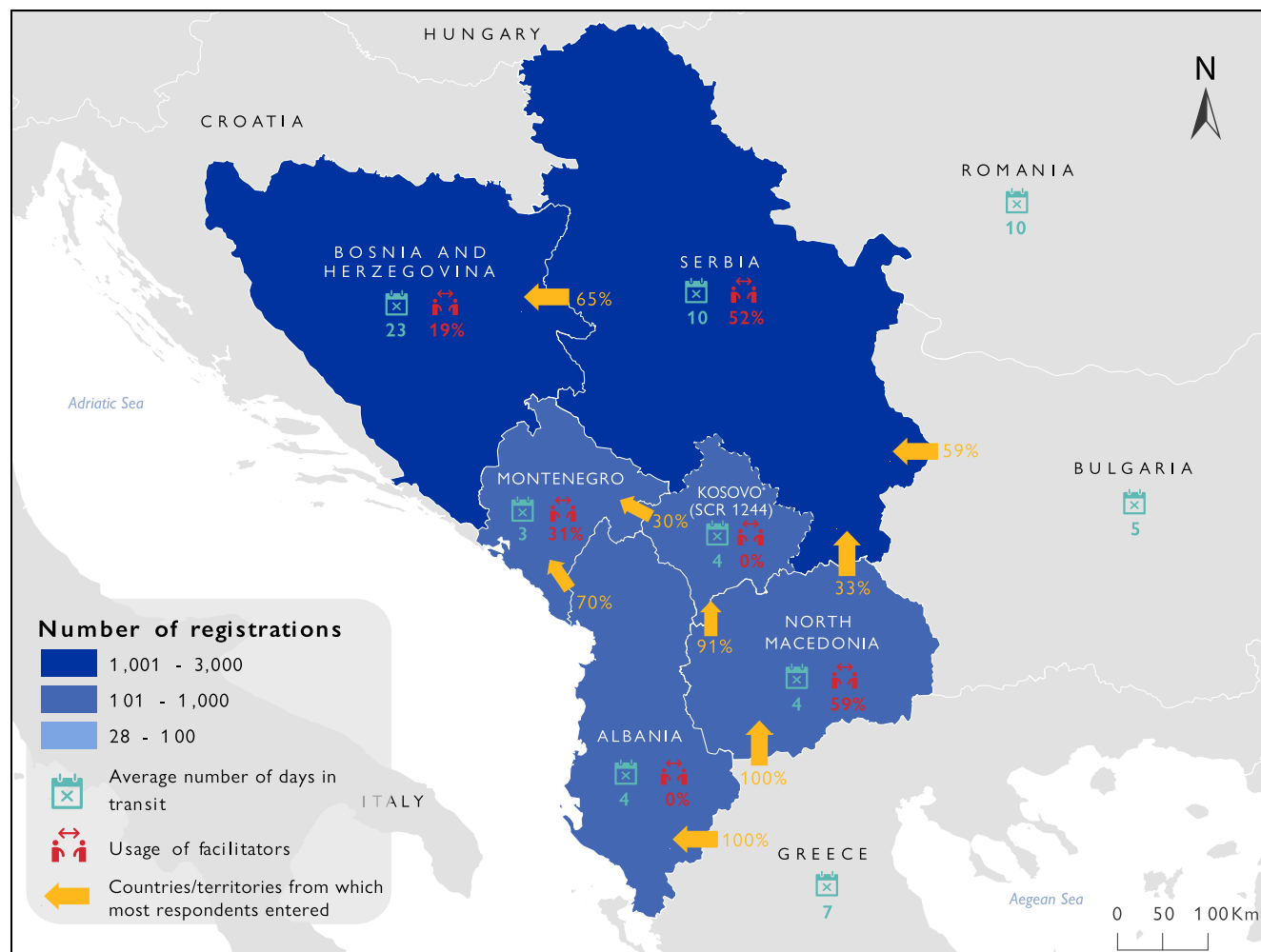
Total registrations in the Western Balkans as of 31 August 2024

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



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Map 2: Information on migrant movements in the Western Balkans – August 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 the 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.

Sixty-five per cent of respondents in this sample in Bosnia and Herzegovina reported entering from Serbia. Of the respondents in Montenegro, 70 per cent entered from Albania while the other 30 per cent entered from Kosovo*. The main entries into Serbia by respondents there were Bulgaria (59%) and North Macedonia (33%), while three per cent entered from the airport, three per cent from Kosovo*, one per cent from Romania and one per cent from Hungary.

Journeys: travel modality

Most respondents (86%) reported travelling in a group. Of those who were travelling in a group, 55 per cent stated they were travelling with facilitators, which is a 23 per cent increase compared to the July 2024 sample. Ten per cent reported travelling with their families, out of which a third (33%) had children with them.

Journeys: border crossings

Thirty-one per cent of the respondents in August 2024 stated that they were facilitated across a border to enter the survey country, which is an eight per cent decrease compared to those interviewed in July 2024. On average, respondents paid 448 EUR to cross a border within the Western Balkans. Thirty-four per cent of respondents had attempted and failed a border crossing at least once. Almost all (93%) of the respondents stated that the main reason for failing was being returned by authorities.

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

| | ALB | BIH | MNE | MKD | SRB | XKX* | WB |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|
| | 97% | 90% | 80% | 97% | 85% | 100% | 90% |
| | 3% | 62% | 91% | 58% | 35% | 32% | 56% |
| | – | 1% | 5% | 24% | 13% | – | 8% |
| | – | 34% | 41% | 2% | 35% | – | 31% |

Figure 1: Mode of travel in the Western Balkans (multiple answers possible) (n=924)

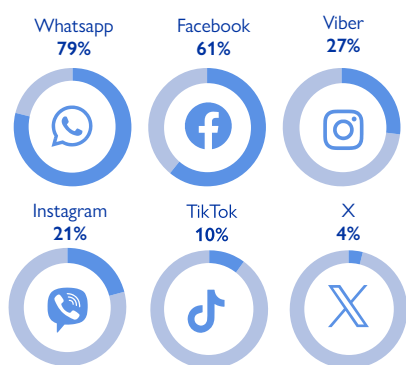


Figure 2: Most frequently cited platforms migrants use to plan their journeys (multiple answers possible) (n=924)

Journeys: secondary movements⁴

Sixty-two 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-six per cent of these respondents had been living in Türkiye, followed by the Islamic Republic of Iran (4%), and Greece (3%).

When asked why they decided to move after living in transit countries for over a year, the primary reason cited was the fear of deportation, which was reported by 80 per cent of respondents. The two other main reasons for leaving were the deteriorating economic conditions (58%), and personal targeted violence (53%).⁶

Journeys: needs

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

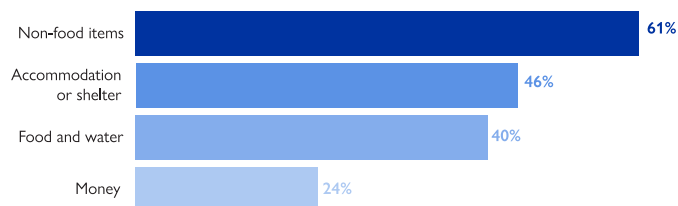


Figure 3: Most important needs outside reception facilities (multiple answers possible) (n=924)

ACCOMMODATION

Figure 4 provides a breakdown of where migrants were accommodated in the Western Balkans. Most respondents (56%) reported having been accommodated in a reception facility at least once during their journeys through the Western Balkans.

In August 2024, 30 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. The highest percentage of camp residencies was recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina (79%). The use of private accommodation was the highest in Albania (97%). On average, respondents paid 14 EUR per person, per day for private accommodation or hotels and hostels in the Western Balkans.

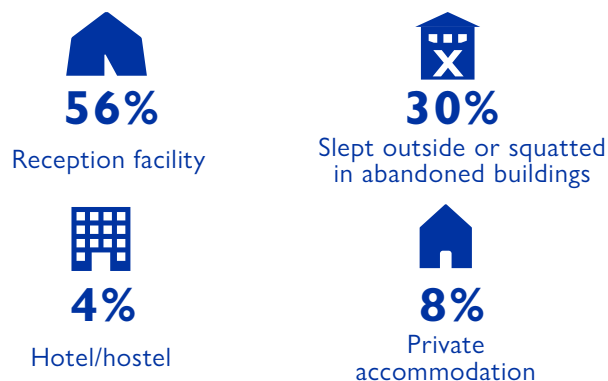


Figure 4: Accommodation in the Western Balkans (multiple answers possible) (n=924)

INTENDED DESTINATION COUNTRIES

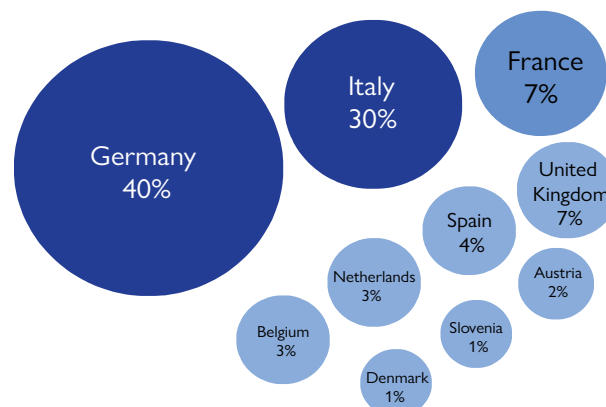


Figure 5: Top ten intended destinations (n=924)

When asked why they had chosen their destination countries, the most frequently cited responses were that it was suggested by friends and family (39%), because of appealing socio-economic conditions (31%), and due to ease of access to asylum procedures (9%).

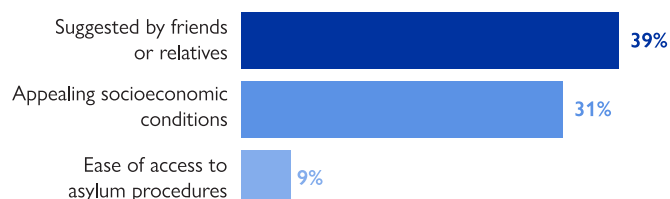


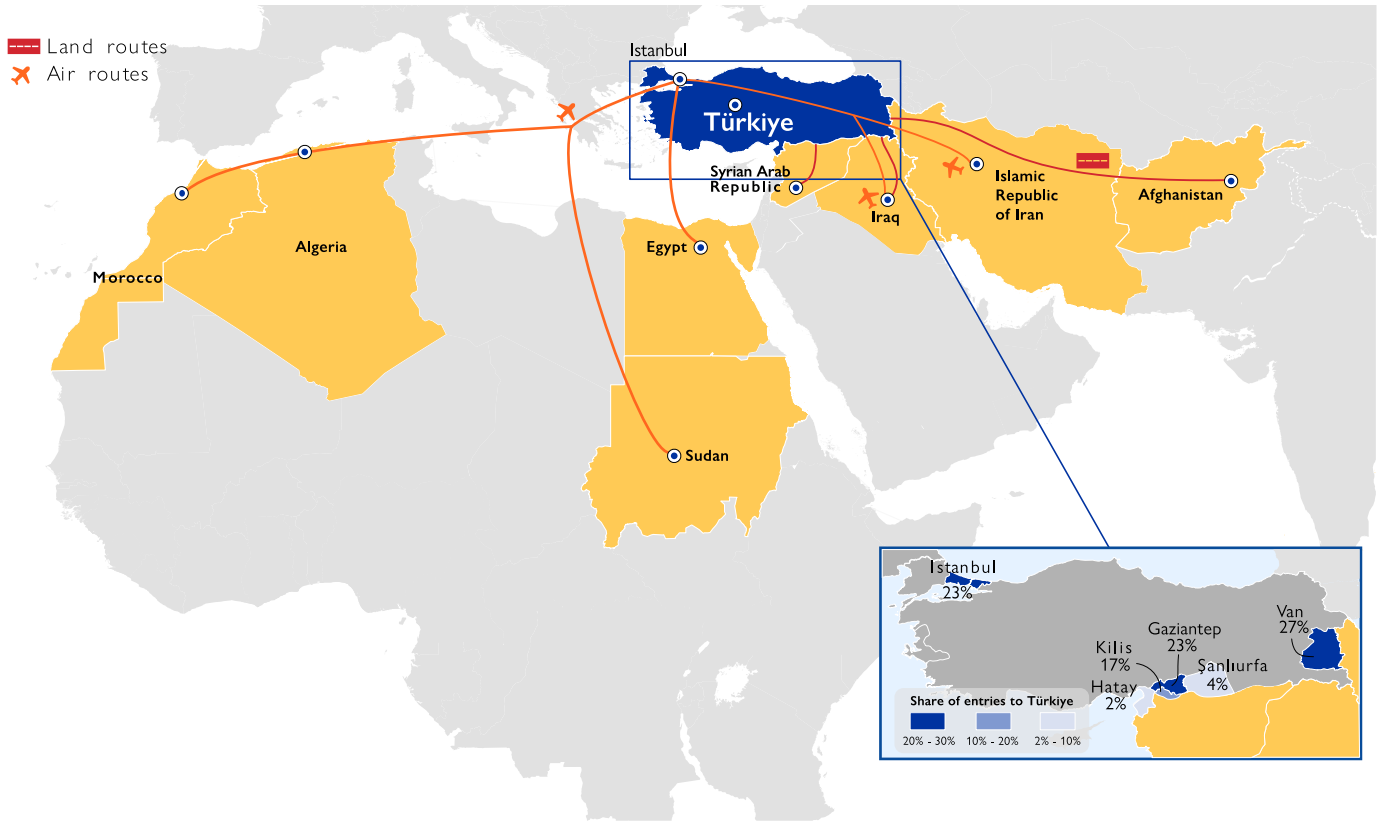
Figure 6: Main reasons for choosing intended destination country (n=924)

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 they 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.

MIGRANTS TRANSITING THROUGH TÜRKIYE



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 August 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 73 migrants of the overall sample in August.⁷

On average, respondents spent 350 days in Türkiye prior to leaving. Twenty-three per cent of the respondents stated that they registered with authorities in Türkiye.



Figure 7: Feared being returned to country of origin (n=73)



Figure 8: Average length of stay in Türkiye (n=73)

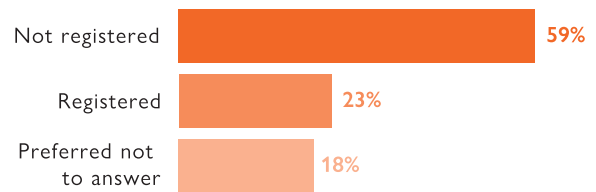


Figure 10: Registration by authorities in Türkiye (n=73)

Interviewees from North, Central, and West Africa as well as the Occupied Palestinian Territory all stated that they flew to Istanbul before continuing their journeys, while those from Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Syrian Arab Republic mainly used the land route. See Map 3 above for an overview of the main provinces of entry into Türkiye.

Almost all (97%) of the respondents had departed Türkiye from an unofficial border crossing. Twenty-six per cent stated they left Türkiye due to discrimination, while 23 per cent cited the deteriorating economic situation. Most (75%) respondents exited Türkiye from Edirne province, followed by Izmir (11%).

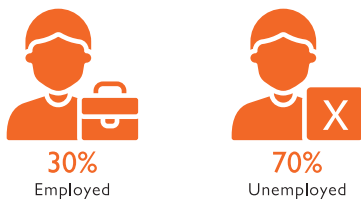


Figure 9: Employment status in Türkiye (n=73)



Figure 11: Reasons for leaving Türkiye (multiple answers possible) (n=73)

⁷ This module 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 – Border Crossing Facilitation

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 add context to the quantitative data, by portraying one of the many nuanced and diverse experiences of migrants transiting through the Western Balkans. Interviews focused on facilitation were conducted with migrants from The Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.

- In the first eight months of 2024, 43 per cent of interviewed migrants have stated they had used facilitators to cross a border at least once whilst travelling through the Western Balkans. DTM data suggest that out of those who stated yes, 40 per cent paid for packaged deals.
- Both interviewed groups paid for packages, explaining the unique experience of utilising facilitators to navigate across multiple borders in the Western Balkans.
- Payment for Iranian nationals was made in Türkiye, where 3,000 EUR per person was paid to travel from Türkiye to Norway and the UK. Payment for Pakistani nationals was made in Greece, and they paid between 1,800 and 2,000 EUR per person to travel from Greece to Italy. Both groups of respondents said they paid facilitators who were nationals from their own countries.
- Both groups of respondents crossed the border from Türkiye to Greece, with the Iranian respondents stating it took them multiple attempts to cross and, having faced violence from both the Turkish and Greek border guards. All respondents stated that crossing from Greece to Albania and then Albania to Montenegro was a different experience from crossing the Turkish and Greek border.
- Both groups of respondents stated that transport and border GPS coordinates were included in their packages. The group from Pakistan also said that accommodation was included in their package.
- Respondents reported receiving GPS coordinates through WhatsApp or Telegram, directing them to unofficial border crossing points. After crossing, they receive another set of GPS coordinates leading them to a taxi that takes them to a nearby town.
- Once in the town, they wait for the next set of instructions from the facilitators. The facilitators also delete all the messages corresponding to those completed steps.
- Both groups of migrants raised fears about crossing the border from Montenegro to BiH. They stated that they had heard stories of violent gangs that target migrants.

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 August to 31 August 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.

The survey asks migrants if they know the exact locations of their border crossings into the country or territory of interview. However, this question is not asked in Serbia. Information on exact border crossing points into Serbia are therefore not illustrated on the map on page 1.

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:



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