



1,030
Migrants interviewed



Data collected from
9 reception centres/
asylum centres

Top **3** countries of origin of respondents



Syrian Arab Republic



Afghanistan



Morocco



79% Travelled throughout the country by walking



41% Travelled by bus



49% Also travelled by taxis

**Multiple answers possible*



2,782

SCRM recorded in January 2024

This report provides insights into the profiles, experiences and journeys of migrants transiting through the Republic of Serbia. Data was collected from 1 to 31 January 2024 together with the Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants of the Republic of Serbia (SCRM). Total of 1030 migrants were interviewed in six centres (Asylum Centre (AC) Banja Koviljaca, AC Sjenica, AC Tutin, AC Krnjaca, AC Obrenovac, Reception Centre (RC) Bujanovac, RC Piroć, RC Presevo, RC Bosilegrad) across the country.

PROFILES

This sample consists of 1,030 individual migrants surveyed in reception facilities in Serbia. The average age of interviewees was 26, with the youngest respondent being 18 and the oldest 69 years old. Seventy-four per cent of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 29. Most respondents (73%) were single. Nearly all the respondents were men (97%), while women made up two per cent, and one per cent constitutes other.

In January 2024, the top three nationalities were broadly consistent with December 2023. Syrian nationals remain predominant with 37 per cent, followed by Afghani nationals with 36 per cent, which is nearly a 10 per cent increase from last month. Moroccan nationals made up nine per cent of the sample, followed by Pakistani nationals (4%).

Most (75%) of respondents possess some level of education, with primary (37%) and secondary (32%) most prevalent. Four per cent hold university level degrees and less than one per cent also hold a PhD degree.

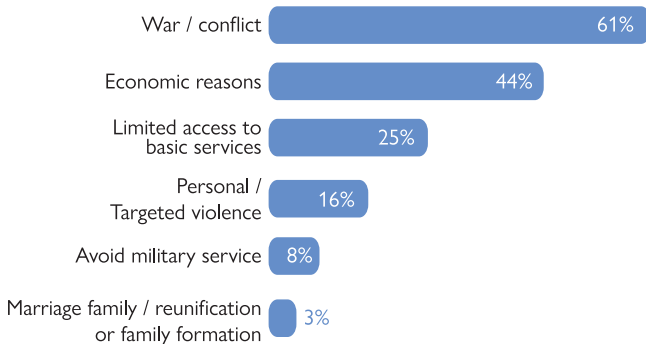


Figure 1: Reason for leaving the country of origin (n=1,030)

(Respondents may choose more than one answer on certain questions)

In December 2023, the SCRM reported a total of 5,001 recorded migrants. In the following month, January 2024, the total number of recorded migrants by SCRM decreased to 2,782.



December 2023



January 2024



SCRM enumerator 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

Twenty-four per cent of the respondents stated they remained in a transit country for more than a year. Türkiye (72%) and Greece (13%) were the most reported transit countries where those respondents remained. Nationals of the Syrian Arab Republic (59%) and Afghanistan (28%) were the main nationalities departing from Türkiye.

Bulgaria (67%) and North Macedonia (25%) remain the main entry points into Serbia. When asked about the next intended destination, the majority (81%) stated Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), an increase of over 15 per cent in comparison to December 2023. The recent increase of border patrols in Serbia (with Croatian and Hungarian borders), as well as route closures has led to an increased observation of migration flows in BiH in the past months. Only eight per cent of the respondents intended to enter Croatia directly from Serbia, while nine per cent intended to enter Hungary.

The main modes of transportation used by migrants to move through Serbia were walking (79%), taxi (49%), and bus (41%). A fraction of migrants are exclusive walkers, this term describes migrants who only walk. According to information gathered from key informant interviews, although much more challenging, many migrants choose to walk due to limited or no funds, and the perceived lower chance of being apprehended by the police in fear of being returned to their country of origin. In January, 27 per cent reported exclusively walking through Serbia.

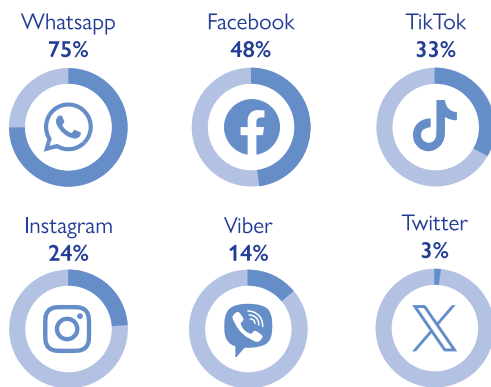


Figure 2: Most frequently cited platforms migrants use to plan their journeys (multiple answers possible) (n=1,030)

BORDER CROSSING TRENDS

When asked if they were accompanied by people who facilitated their border crossing, 53 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.

In January, border crossing facilitation from Bulgaria was 66 per cent, and 27 per cent from North Macedonia. Respondents who confirmed they were facilitated and stated the price, paid on average 900 EUR. Furthermore, they paid on average 900 EUR to be facilitated from Bulgaria, slightly higher than December, and

700 EUR from North Macedonia. A fraction of respondents' report cost of the entire journey from Türkiye to Serbia, which on average amounts to 4,000 EUR.

Eighteen per cent of respondents reported attempting to cross the border with a facilitator, while sixteen per cent reported attempting it alone. The most attempted crossing was into Croatia and Hungary, and out of all crossing attempts 88 per cent report being returned by authorities, while 9 per cent reported route closure. There was a 10 per cent increase in returns by the authorities in comparison to last month, especially Croatia (96%) and Hungary (83%).

REASONS FOR LEAVING

Survey respondents cited war and conflict as the primary driver to leave their origin country (61%), followed by economic reasons (44%) and limited access to basic needs such as food, accommodation, and education (25%). Of those surveyed, 24 per cent reported residing in a transit country for longer than a year. This is half the amount reported in December. Türkiye remained the most frequently cited country (72%), followed by Greece (13%).

Key informant interviews reveal that a combination of economic conditions, such as high inflation, and the perceived shift in public attitudes toward migrants, are acting as push factors for the migrants in the country. The top three reasons reported on why they left the country of departure were due to poor economic conditions (60%), fear of being deported to the country of origin (35%), and persecution (16%).

Türkiye is the main location from where migrants depart for the Western Balkans and is a country in which migrants tend to stay longer. Migrants reported that they left Türkiye primarily due to economic challenges, safety concerns arising from xenophobia, and the fear of deportation to their home country.

INTENDED DESTINATION COUNTRIES

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

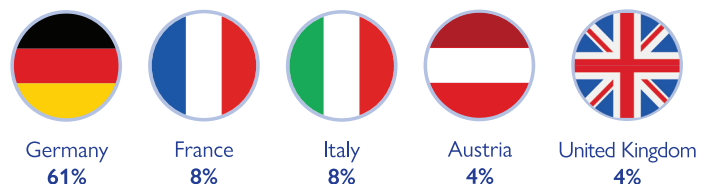


Figure 3: Top five countries of destination reported by migrants. (n=1,030)

Most respondents reported Germany as their final destination, followed by France, Italy, Austria, and the United Kingdom. Respondents chose their final destinations based on family and co-nationals' connections (38%), potential for economic prosperity (45%), perceived more lenient asylum and migration laws (7%), and the overall safety and stability of the country (5%).

SPECIAL FOCUS – MIGRANTS IN SERBIA: EDUCATIONAL PROFILE²

To contextualize the journeys, experiences and complex needs of people on the move, IOM carries out group interviews, alongside quantitative data collection, 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 Serbia.

- IOM gathered data on the educational attainment of select migrant populations across various centers. This data was complemented by group interviews, offering insights into their educational experiences, perspectives, and aspirations.
- Interview findings indicate diverse educational backgrounds among migrating populations, which can perhaps support their integration into transit or destination societies. The knowledge and skills they possess can positively contribute to a country's economy, irrespective of their formal education.
- Education emerges as an important driver of migration, cited as the third most common reason for leaving their country of origin and primary motive for selecting the destination country. This is particularly evident with Germany being the top choice due to its appealing socio-economic opportunities, including educational prospects. France, Italy, and the Netherlands follow as the perceived nations which offer appealing socio-economic opportunities, including education. Syrian, Moroccan, Afghan, and Iranian nationals most often cite appealing socio-economic prospects and education opportunities as their main motivations for migrating and selecting the destination country.
- Key informant interviews highlight migrants' existing education levels and their desire to enhance them in the destination country. Aspirations range from pursuing programming to culinary arts, gardening, tailoring, and butchery certification, reflecting diverse interests and ambitions.
- All the key informants emphasize the importance of education in fostering awareness, personal growth, cultural understanding, and successful integration into a given society. They view education as impactful in self-improvement, parenthood, and earning respect, underscoring its pivotal role in shaping their lives and aspirations for integration.

² Please be aware that this information is based on data collected by IOM with its' limitations and does not intend to draw general conclusions about migration nor all migrants in Serbia. Check the methodology section for more information.

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 1 January to 31 January 2024 in RCs/ACs (AC Banja Koviljaca, AC Sjenica, AC Tutin, AC Krnjaca, AC Obrenovac, RC Bujanovac, RC Pirot, RC Presevo, RC Bosilegrad).

Key informant interviews

Key informants can help provide information on the modus operandi of migrant mobility. 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 and SCRM staff trained in leading qualitative focus group discussions with vulnerable populations. SCRM is always present in the centers.

LIMITATIONS

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

1. This data is based on a convenience sample of migrants in the survey locations during the time frame indicated and can therefore not be generalized to the broader population of migrants in Serbia, or anywhere else.
2. 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 and SCRM does not collect data at such locations.