

This report provides insights into the profiles, experiences, needs, routes travelled and intentions of migrants transiting through the Western Balkans.¹ IOM surveyed 2,178 migrants² from 1 January to 31 January 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



2,178

Migrants interviewed

Top **5** countries of origin of respondents

Syrian Arab Republic **43%** | Afghanistan **22%** | Morocco **16%**

Pakistan **3%** | Islamic Republic of Iran **3%**

4% **96%** Sex

77% Single

27 Average age



571 days

Average length of time since leaving country of origin



54%

Traveled throughout the region by bus



42%

Also travelled by taxis



5,359

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



3 Average number of failed border crossing attempts per person

45% Were facilitated across at least one border in the Western Balkans



83%

Accommodated in reception facilities in the Western Balkans

5,359

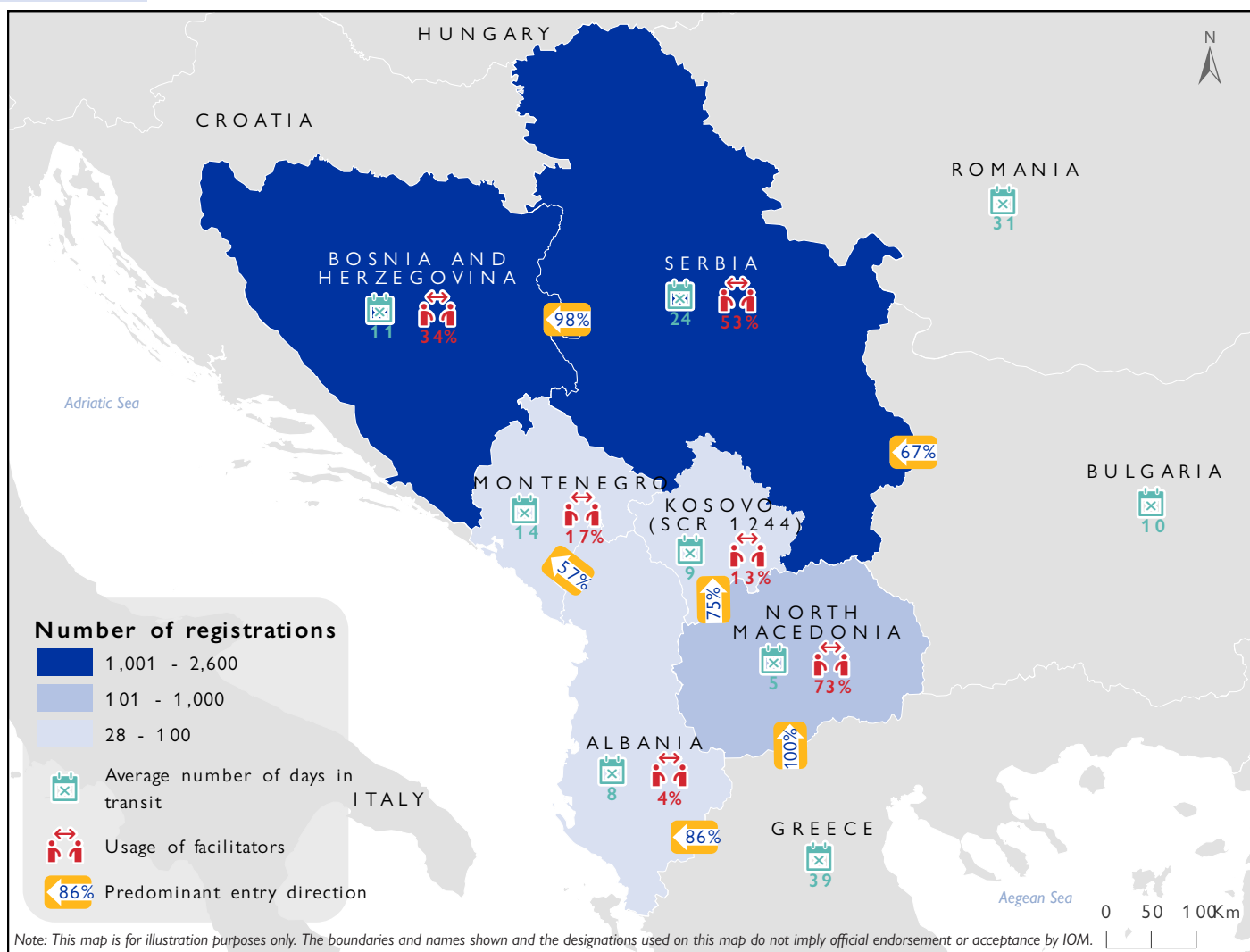
Total registrations in the Western Balkans in 2024

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



Map 2: Information on migrant flow in the Western Balkans - January 2024

Map 2 above provides a detailed look into the main border crossings migrants take into each country or territory in the Western Balkans. The yellow arrows show the country or territory from which most of the respondents entered and the red icons show the percentage of respondents who were facilitated at that particular border. The map also shows the average length of stay in days in each transit country or territory.

Journeys: travel modality

Most respondents (77%) reported travelling with a group of persons. Of those who were travelling in a group, 69 per cent stated they were travelling in non-family groups, while 41 per cent stated they were travelling with family members.

The predominant modes of movement throughout the territories of the Western Balkans vary depending on the resources and context. Eighty-eight per cent of respondents stated that they walked between key locations, fifty-three per cent took a bus, forty-two per cent paid for taxis and eight per cent took private vehicles. The use of taxis was less commonly reported in Kosovo* (22%), North Macedonia (4%) and Albania (<1%) compared to Montenegro (67%), Serbia (49%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (40%)

Journeys: border crossings

On average, people transited more quickly through Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo* and Montenegro compared to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Respondents also transited more rapidly through Bulgaria compared to Greece, as is indicated in Map 2 above.

Overall, 23 per cent of respondents stated that they were facilitated to enter the country or territory in which they were surveyed.

Thirty per cent of respondents had failed a border crossing attempt at least once, of whom, 94 per cent said that they were 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 TikTok. See Figure 1 on the next page for a percentage breakdown the platforms migrants use to plan their journeys.

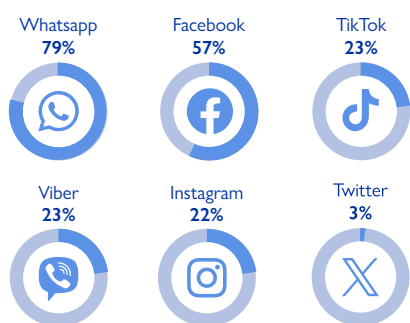


Figure 1: Most frequently cited platforms migrants use to plan their journeys (multiple answers possible) (n=2,178)

Journeys: secondary movements

In Serbia, the survey asks respondents per cent of respondents if they had been living in a country other than their country of origin for a year or more. Seventy-six per cent of respondents reported that they had lived in a country other than their own for a year or more, most of whom (72%) had been living in Türkiye, Greece (13%) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (7%).

When asked why they had decided to start their secondary movements after having lived in these countries for a year or more, the most frequently cited responses were economic reasons (60%), a fear of being sent back to their countries of origin (35%), personal or targeted violence (16%) and limited access to basic services (13%).

Journeys: needs

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

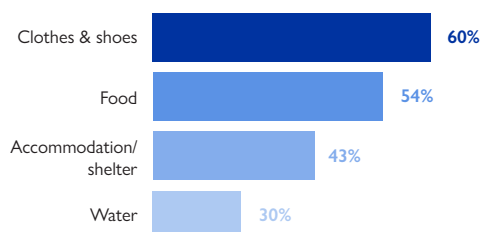


Figure 2: Most important needs outside reception (multiple answers possible) (n=2,178)

ACCOMMODATION

Eighty-four per cent of all respondents stated that they had resided in a reception facility at one point during their journey through the Western Balkans. Thirty per cent slept outside, twenty-three per cent squatted in abandoned buildings while three per cent resided in private accommodation and three per cent in hostels or hotels. Private accommodation was most frequently used in Albania (80%), while the highest percentage of camp residencies was recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina (90%). In Kosovo*, half of the respondents reported having slept outside at one point during their journey. On average, respondents paid 16 EUR per person per day for private accommodation or hotels and hostels in the Western Balkans.

INTENDED DESTINATION COUNTRIES

See Figure 3 below for a percentage breakdown of the top ten intended countries of destination.

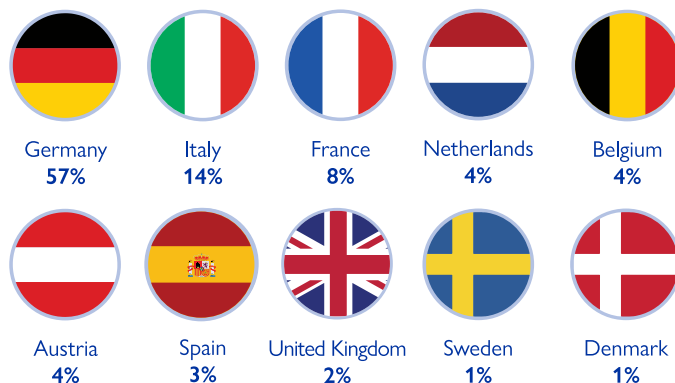


Figure 3: Top ten intended destinations (n=2,178)

Destination countries varied by the nationality of the respondents. Sixty-five per cent of respondents from the Syrian Arab Republic stated that they wanted to travel to Germany. Respondents from Morocco split their answers between France (36%), Italy (26%), Germany (17%) and Belgium (10%). Nationals of Afghanistan stated Germany (64%) and Italy (23%). See Figure 4 below for a breakdown of the main reasons respondents selected these countries of destination.

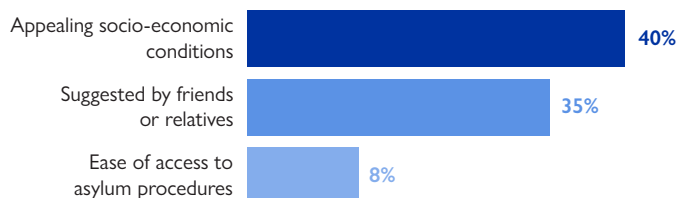
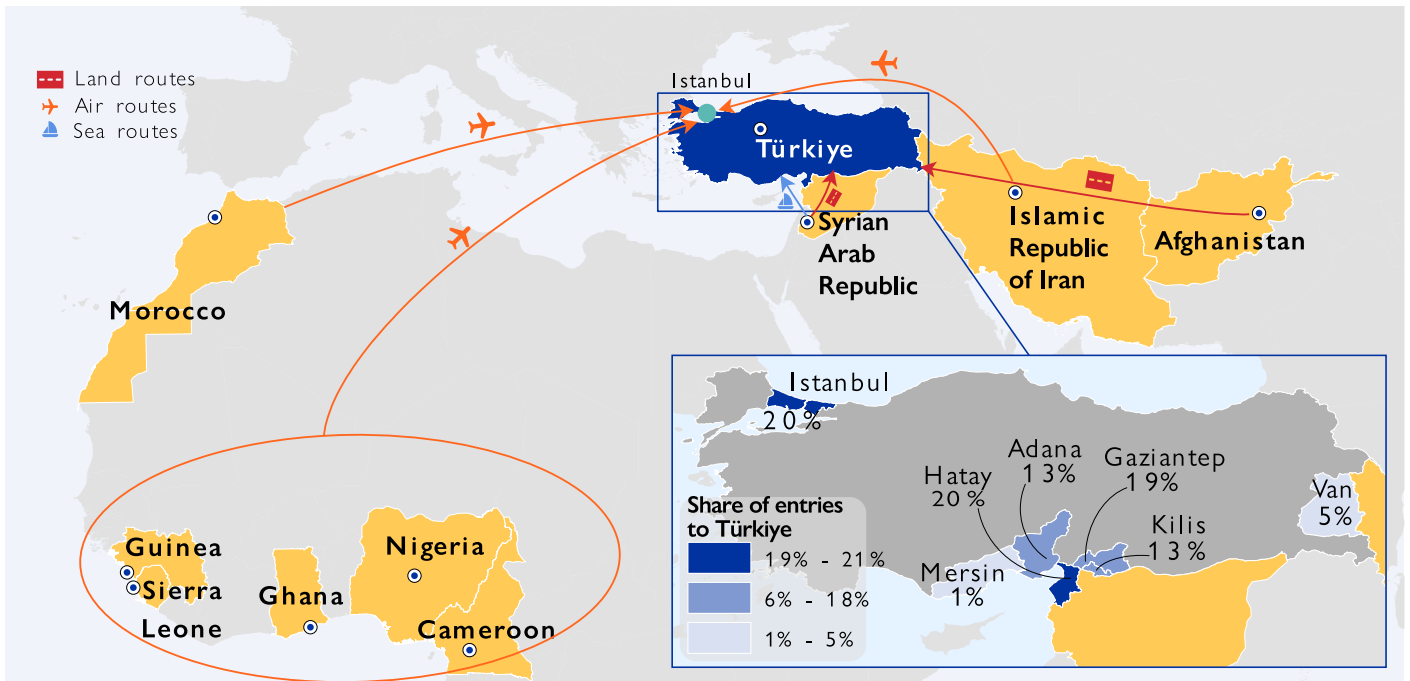


Figure 4: Reasons for choosing intended destination country (n=2,178)



Picture 1: DTM enumerator speaking to migrants in Crnaja, Una Sana Canton after a pushback around three kilometres from the Croatian border

TRANSIT THROUGH TÜRKIYE



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Map 3: Main routes into and provinces of arrival in Türkiye.

According to survey results, Türkiye is the main hub from which migrants depart into the Western Balkans. To better understand movements from Türkiye, this section aims to provide further context on the journeys and experiences of those migrants. This section consists of a set of questions asked to 377 migrants of the overall sample in January.

Eighty-five per cent of all registrations happened in Istanbul, suggesting that the Istanbul province serves as the main area where migrants tend to reside as well as to organize their onward journeys.

Most respondents (60%) stated that they were unemployed in Türkiye. However, half of the Syrian respondents were employed, which could be a reflection of the fact that many of them had been living in Türkiye for many years. Most respondents from Morocco (95%), the Islamic Republic of Iran (92%) and Afghanistan (73%) were unemployed, possibly because they may have transited more rapidly through the country.



Average length of stay in Türkiye (n=377)



Feared being returned to their country of origin (n=377)

Interviewees from Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea, Morocco, Nigeria and Sierra Leone all stated that they flew to Istanbul, while those from Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic mainly walked or used vehicles. Map 3 above shows the main provinces of entry into Türkiye.

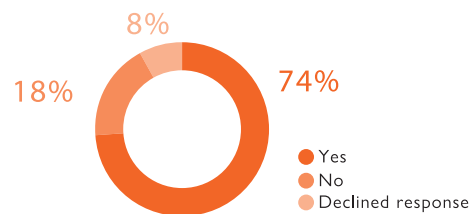


Figure 6: Registration by authorities in Türkiye (n=377)

When asked where they had departed Türkiye, 94 per cent said it was at an unofficial border crossing. Only two per cent said they were accompanied by a facilitator to cross while 21 per cent declined to answer.

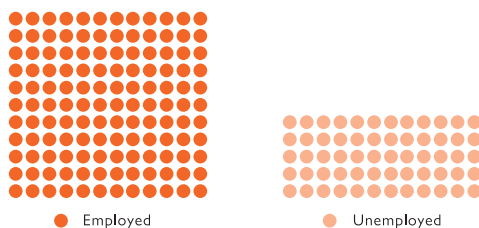


Figure 5: Employment status in Türkiye (n=377)

On average, respondents spent 514 days living in Türkiye. Seventy four per cent of respondents stated that they registered with authorities in Türkiye, while eighteen per cent were not registered. The remaining eight per cent declined to answer this question.

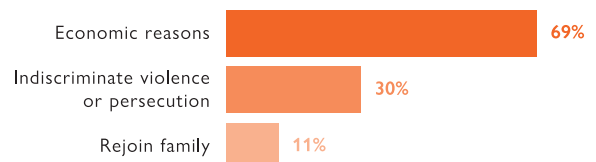


Figure 7: Reasons for leaving Türkiye (multiple answers possible) (n=377)

SPECIAL FOCUS - WOMEN

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 region. In January, IOM carried out interviews with nine women from Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic, Nepal and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

- Gender shapes every aspect of the migrant's journey from the decision to migrate and where to transit, to settling in the country of destination, or deciding to return home.⁵ Although the majority of migrants arriving in the Western Balkans are men, female migrants and families have been arriving consistently in the Western Balkans since 2015.
- Many of the interviewees had been living in Türkiye for longer than six months and spoke of leaving Türkiye because of economic instability and a perceived increase in hostility towards migrants.
- Some married interviewees spoke of joint decision-making to migrate with their spouses. They stated that their the decision was mutual and that they participated in planning their journey but that the contact with facilitators and logistics were left to their husbands.
- The women interviewed spoke of specific obstacles and challenges they faced on their journeys, relating to female hygiene. They mentioned that they would need to stock up on female hygiene products for the stages in which they would be without the support of a migrant reception facility. This was particularly challenging in contexts where the duration of the journey would be uncertain. One respondent mentioned taking a contraceptive pill so as to prevent menstruation during a particularly long and arduous stage without accommodation through a mountainous and forested area.
- Those women who were travelling in a family with children spoke of not being able to travel for longer than around six hours per day. They mentioned that they would try to meet all of their family's needs and rest once they had reached a reception facility. Women in families with children tend to on average travel for longer periods than single men or women.
- The single women that were interviewed all arrived regularly to the Western Balkans, but then irregularized their stays in order to continue their journeys to Western Europe.
- The journeys of the single women interviewed were well organized and took less time as they had less need for resting in between the stages of their journeys.
- All of the participants interviewed spoke of a desire to work along their journey to raise funds along the migration journey.

5. IOM Global Data Institute. *Women and Girls on the Move: A Snapshot of Available Evidence*. 7 March 2023.

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 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 January to 31 January 2024 by enumerators in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo*.

Interviews take 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 interview 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 origin is only asked in Serbia. The Türkiye module is only deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina as this is where the most migrants are hosted in the Western Balkans and therefore. As most migrants transiting through the Western Balkans usually end up in either Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina, these questions can still provide some interesting analysis and findings for the overall sample.

The special focus section on women was carried out by IOM staff in transit reception centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nine women were interviewed.

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 TRCs. They 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, and especially late at night or early in the morning before the break of dawn.

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