

This report provides insights into the profiles, experiences, needs, routes travelled and intentions of migrants transiting through the Western Balkans. IOM surveyed 1,484 migrants¹ from 1 March to 31 March 2024 in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo*.²

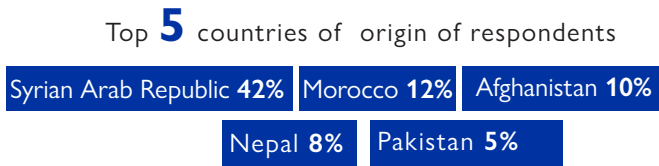


Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.



1,484
Migrants interviewed

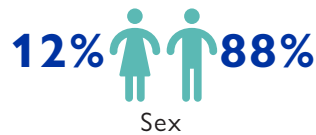
Map 1: Most prevalent routes travelled by migrants in the Western Balkans



675 days
Average length of time since leaving country of origin



4,743
Registrations by authorities and institutions³ in March 2024 in the Western Balkans



28
years old
Average age



63%
Traveled throughout the region by bus



27%
Also travelled by taxis



3
Average number of failed border crossing attempts per person



Were facilitated across at least one border in the Western Balkans

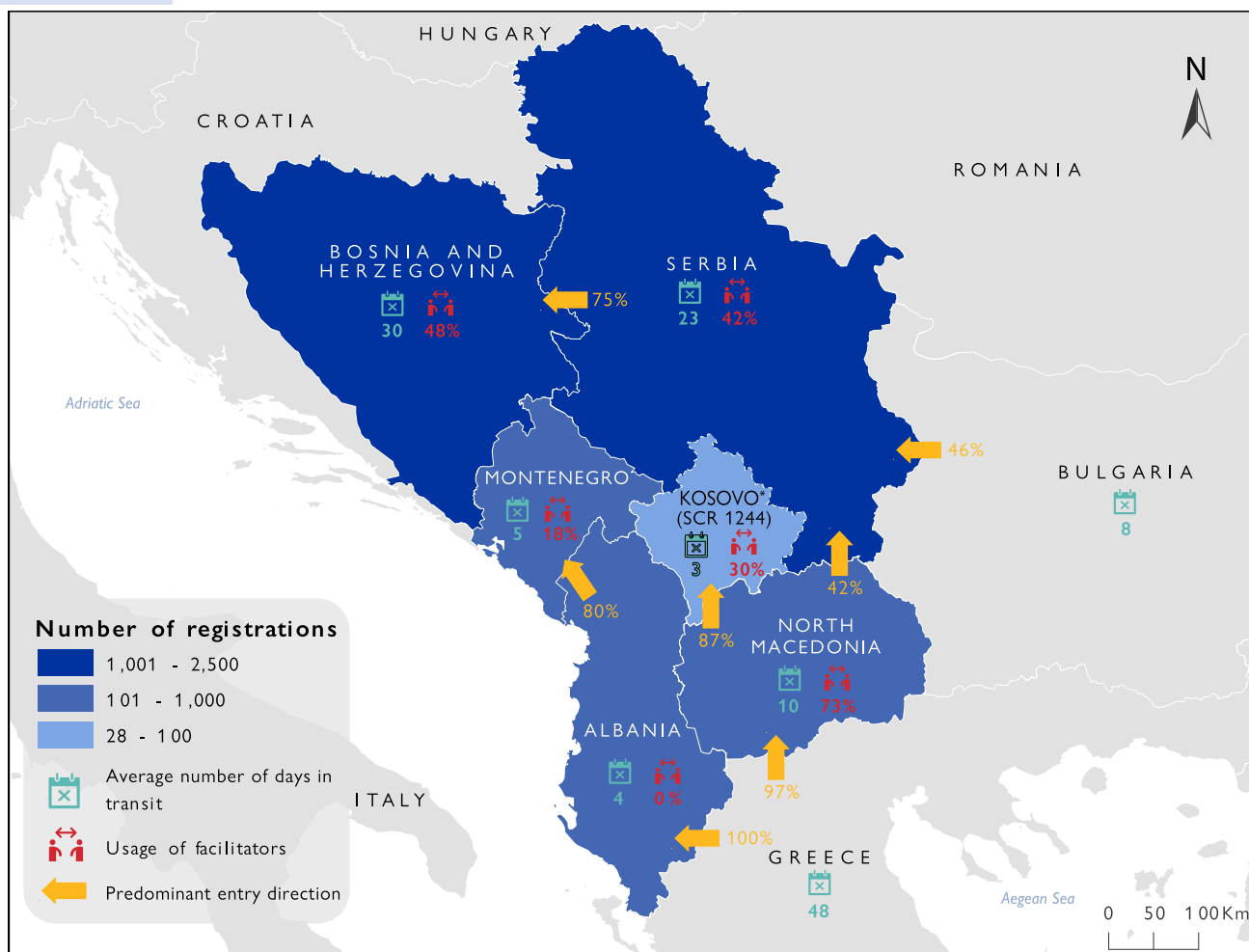


35%
Slept outside or squatted in abandoned buildings in the Western Balkans

15,246
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 movements in the Western Balkans – February 2024

Map 2 above provides a detailed look into 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. For example, 75 per cent of respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina entered from Serbia 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.

In March 2024, the proportion of respondents who entered Bosnia and Herzegovina from Serbia decreased from 90 per cent to 75 per cent, while the share of entries from Montenegro to Bosnia and Herzegovina increased from five to 15 per cent. This could indicate that migrants are re-routing their journeys within the Western Balkans.

On average, people transited more quickly through Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Kosovo* compared to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. In March 2024, the average length of stay of migrants transiting through Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to increase from 21 days in January, 26 days in February and 30 days in March. In Serbia, the average length of stay increased from 16 days in February to 23 in March. Respondents also spent fewer days in Bulgaria than in Greece.

	ALB	BIH	MNE	MKD	SRB	XKX*	WB
Walk	100%	94%	80%	7%	77%	100%	90%
Bus	20%	73%	100%	12%	65%	92%	63%
Car	0%	1%	1%	65%	9%	26%	10%
Truck	0%	29%	14%	3%	49%	15%	27%

Figure 2: Mode of travel in the Western Balkans (multiple answers possible) (n=1,484)

Journeys: travel modality

Most respondents (77%) reported travelling in a group. Of those who were travelling in a group, half stated they were travelling in with family members, while 46 per cent stated they were travelling in non-family groups and the remaining four per cent stated they were traveling with facilitators.

Journeys: border crossings

In March 2024, 44 per cent of respondents stated that they were facilitated across a border to enter the survey country. On average, respondents paid 500 EUR to cross a border within the Western Balkans.

Forty-eight per cent of respondents had attempted and failed a border crossing attempt at least once. The main reasons for failing were being returned by authorities (96%) and route closure (4%).

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

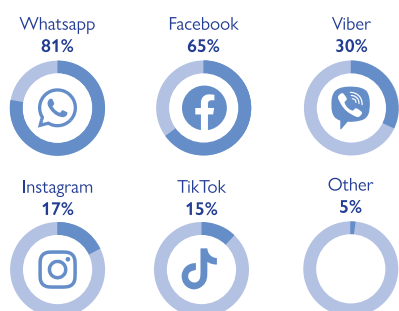


Figure 2: Most frequently cited platforms migrants use to plan their journeys (multiple answers possible) (n=1,484)

Journeys: secondary movements⁴

The survey asks respondents if they had been living in a country other than their country of origin for a year or more. Thirty-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 (66%) had been living in Türkiye, followed by Greece (27%), the Islamic Republic of Iran (3%), Lebanon (3%) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (1%).

When asked why they had decided to move after having lived in these countries for a year or more, the most frequently cited responses were economic reasons (59%), a fear of being sent back to their countries of origin (31%), or personal or targeted violence (21%).

Journeys: needs

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

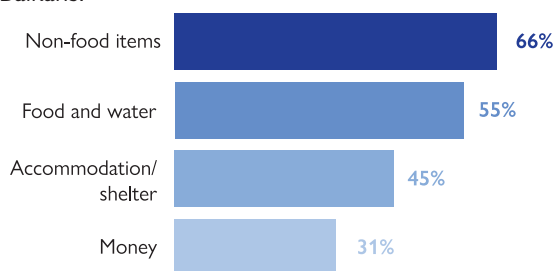


Figure 3: Most important needs outside reception (multiple answers possible) (n=1,484)

ACCOMMODATION

Figure 4 provides a breakdown of where migrants were accommodated in the Western Balkans. Overall, most respondents (69%) reported having been accommodated in a reception facility at least once during their journeys through the Western Balkans.

The use of private accommodation was the highest in Albania (69%), while the highest percentage of camp residencies was recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina (83%) and Kosovo* (83%). On average, respondents paid 13 EUR per person per day for private accommodation or hotels and hostels in the Western Balkans.

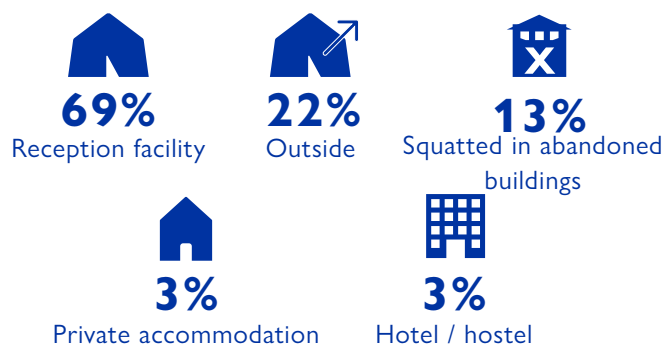


Figure 4: Accommodation in the Western Balkans (multiple answers possible)(n=1,484)

INTENDED DESTINATION COUNTRIES

See Figure 5 below for a percentage breakdown of the top ten intended countries of destination.

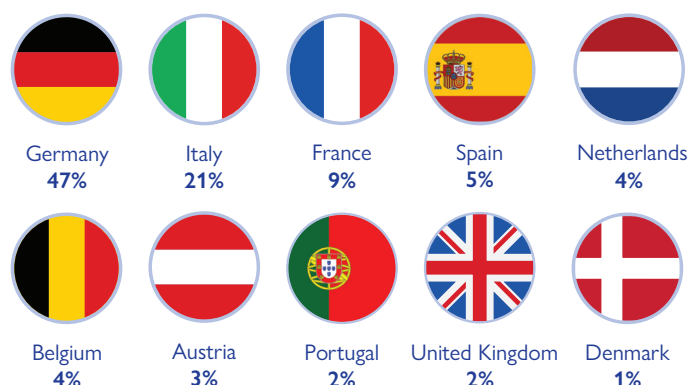


Figure 5: Top ten intended destinations (n=1,484)

Destination countries varied by the nationality of the respondents. Seventy-one per cent of respondents from the Syrian Arab Republic stated that they wanted to travel to Germany. Most respondents from Morocco mentioned Italy (44%), France (18%), Germany (17%) and Spain (15%). Nationals of Afghanistan stated Germany (56%) and Italy (24%). See Figure 6 below for a breakdown of the main reasons respondents selected these countries of destination.

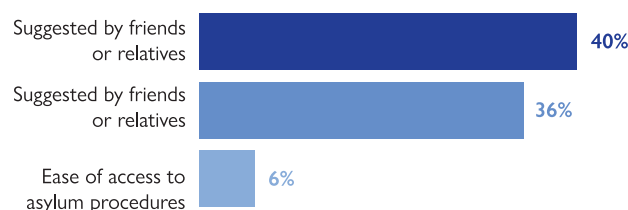
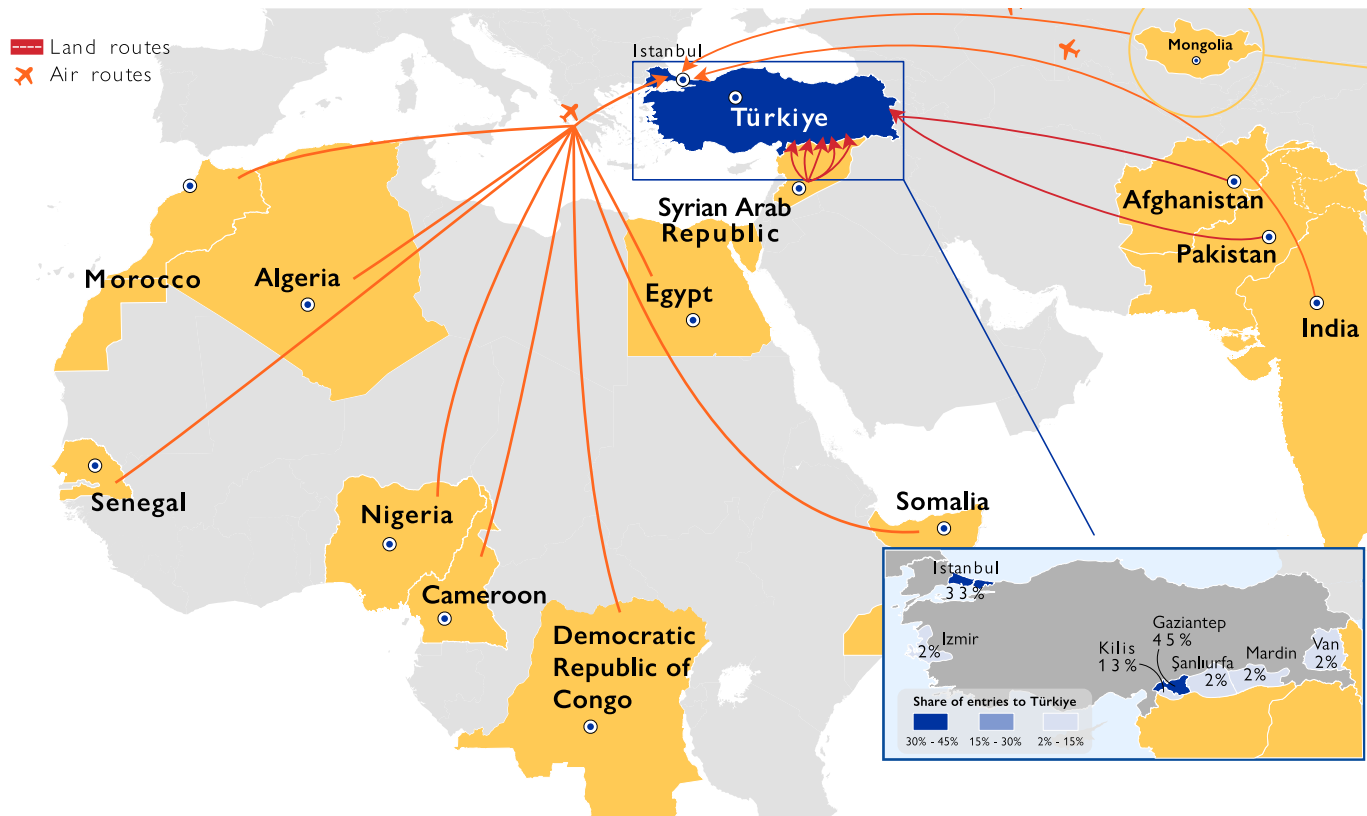


Figure 6: Main reasons for choosing intended destination country (n=1,484)

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.

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 March 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 a insights into the journeys and experiences of those migrants. This section consists of a set of questions asked to 317 migrants of the overall sample in March.



Feared being returned to their country of origin (n=317)



Average length of stay in Türkiye (n=317)

Interviewees from Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Morocco, and Senegal all stated that they flew to Istanbul, while those from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Syrian Arab Republic mainly used the land route. Respondents from India also used the air route 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=317)

On average, respondents spent over a year (372 days) living in Türkiye prior to leaving. Forty-nine per cent of the respondents stated that they registered with authorities in Türkiye.

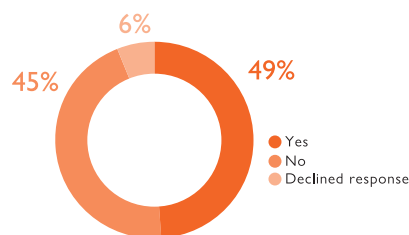


Figure 6: Registration by authorities in Türkiye (n=317)

When asked where they had departed Türkiye from, 90 per cent said it was at an unofficial border crossing. Most respondents stated that they left Türkiye due to economic reasons.

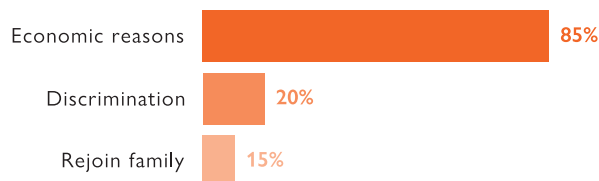


Figure 7: Reasons for leaving Türkiye (multiple answers possible) (n=317)

SPECIAL FOCUS - NATIONALS OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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 March, IOM carried out interviews with nine migrants from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in transit reception centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

- Nationals of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) began arriving in significant numbers in BiH in 2023 when the SFA registered 659 persons from DRC, compared to just five people in 2022.
- Nationals of DRC tend to be a more heterogenous group compared to the other top nationalities, with proportionately more women and children. For example, more than half (51%) of DRC nationals in the TRCs in BiH in 2023 and 2024 were families compared to 13 per cent of the overall camp population.
- The Congolese nationals interviewed spoke of travelling to the Western Balkans either directly through various visa (work or student visas) or travelling regularly to Istanbul.
- Those who had arrived directly in a country of the Western Balkans stated that they had arrived in the Western Balkans with the intention of staying in the region either as student or through specific work arrangements. However, they spoke of discrimination in the labour market, housing market as well as in accessing public services such as healthcare, preventing them from settling in the region.
- These interviewees mentioned persistent issues around unpaid wages, working over-hours, or being paid less than what was in their contracts. Several interviewees also mentioned the difficulty in finding decent living conditions, because of a perceived unwillingness in letting their apartments to people from Africa. These interviewees mentioned that the cumulative effects of this had triggered their onward movement toward Western Europe.
- When asked if they had considered returning to DRC, those respondents mentioned that this was not possible, because their families or communities had invested too much in their journeys to the Balkans.
- Once they had decided to embark on their onward journeys, some respondents mentioned receiving contacts from other migrants while others were approached by smugglers in bus stations. From here, they entered the mixed migratory flows with other migrants, in the hope of reaching Western Europe.

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 March to 31 March 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. IOM staff in Bosnia and Herzegovina carried out the group interviews with Turkish nationals for the special focus section in BiH. Eighteen people 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. 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, and especially late at night or early in the morning before the break of dawn.

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