

This report provides insights into the profiles, experiences, needs, routes travelled and intentions of migrants transiting through the Western Balkans.<sup>1</sup> IOM surveyed 1,698 migrants<sup>2</sup> from 1 February to 29 February 2024 in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo\*.<sup>2</sup>



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

**1,698**  
Migrants interviewed

Top **5** countries of origin of respondents



**638 days**  
Average length of time since leaving country of origin

**58%**  
Traveled throughout the region by bus

**38%**  
Also travelled by taxis



**3,768**  
Registrations by authorities and institutions<sup>3</sup> in February 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

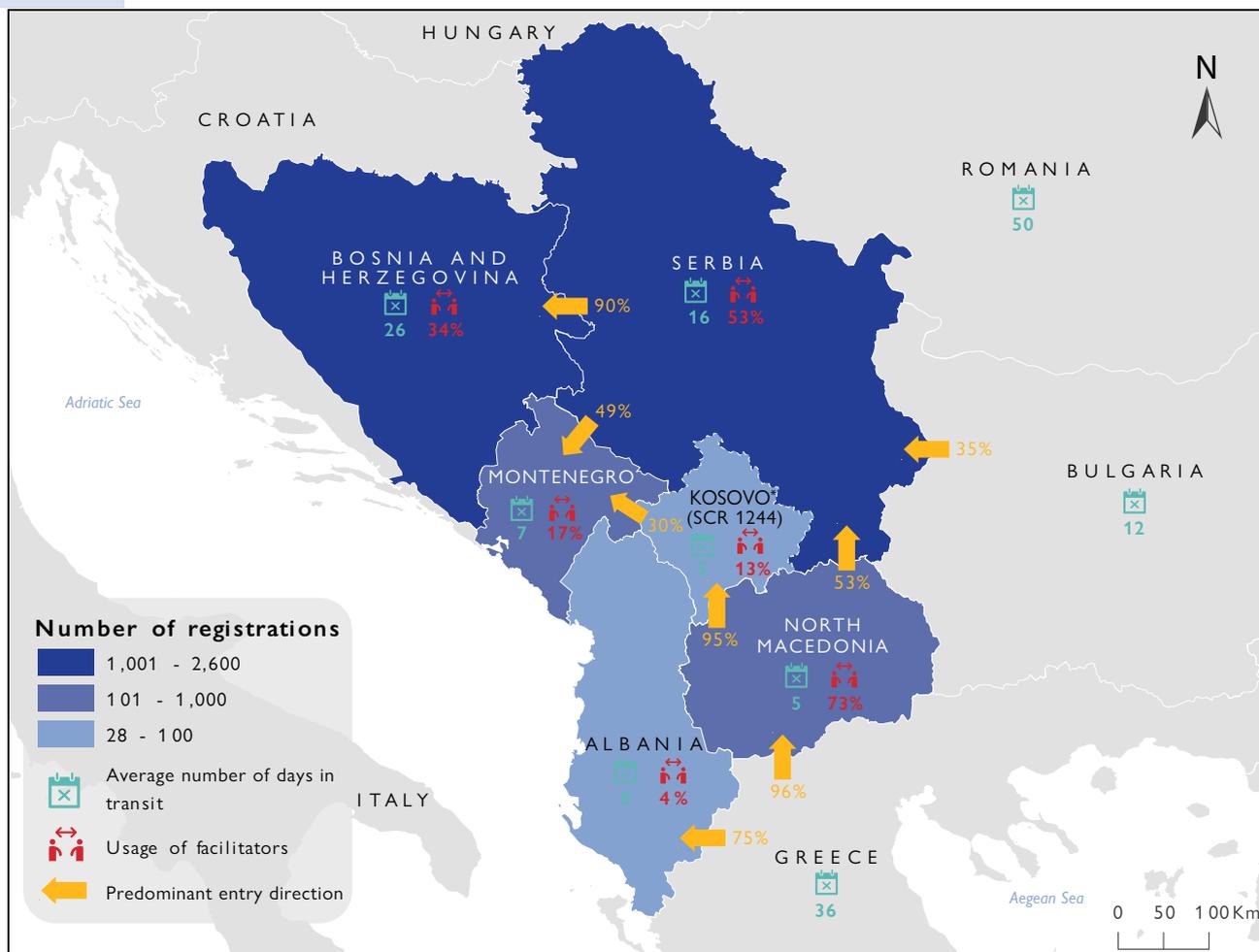
**38%**  
Slept outside or squatted in abandoned buildings in the Western Balkans  
**9,127**  
Total registrations in the Western Balkans in 2024

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**



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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, 90 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.

One of the notable changes in February compared to January was the 32 per cent decrease in entries from Bulgaria to Serbia. In January 2024, no respondents entered Montenegro from Serbia while in February 2024, 49 per cent reported entering from Serbia, which indicates that migrants are rerouting their journeys.

On average, people transited more quickly through Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo\* and Montenegro compared to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In February 2024, the average length of stay of migrants transiting through Serbia decreased from 24 to 16 days, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina it increased from 21 days in January 2024 to 26 in February 2024. Respondents also spent fewer days in Bulgaria compared to Greece.

	ALB	BIH	MNE	MKD	SRB	XXK	WB
Walking	98%	96%	96%	98%	85%	97%	92%
Bus	29%	74%	76%	66%	64%	80%	58%
Car	2%	44%	16%	14%	49%	29%	38%
Motorcycle	2%	2%	1%	18%	9%	9%	15%

Figure 2: Mode of travel in the Western Balkans (multiple answers possible) (n=1,698)

**Journeys: travel modality**

Most respondents (78%) reported travelling in a group. Of those who were travelling in a group, 78 per cent stated they were travelling in non-family groups, while 22 per cent stated they were travelling with family members.

**Journeys: border crossings**

In February 2024, 47 per cent of respondents stated that they were facilitated across a border to enter the survey country. This is a 24 per cent increase compared to January 2024. This could be due to the reported increase in police patrols in the entry and exit locations in Serbia. Forty-six per cent of respondents had attempted and failed a border crossing attempt at least once, an increase of sixteen per cent compared to January. The reasons for failing were being returned by authorities (95%) and route closure (5%).

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

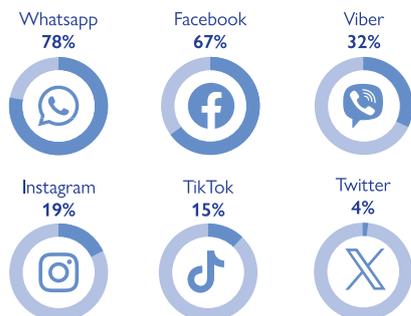


Figure 2: Most frequently cited platforms migrants use to plan their journeys (multiple answers possible) (n=1,698)

### Journeys: secondary movements<sup>4</sup>

The survey asks respondents if they had been living in a country other than their country of origin for a year or more. Sixty per cent of respondents reported that they had lived in a country other than their own for a year or more, most of whom (74%) had been living in Türkiye, followed by Greece (17%) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (3%).

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 (73%), a fear of being sent back to their countries of origin (28%), personal or targeted violence (11%), family reunification (9%) and limited access to basic services (9%).

### Journeys: needs

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

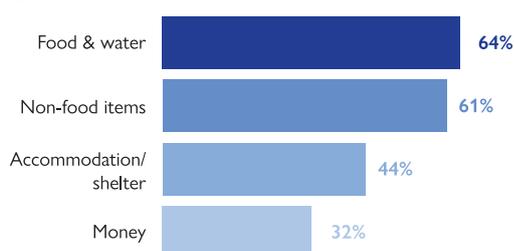


Figure 3: Most important needs outside reception (multiple answers possible) (n=1,698)

## ACCOMMODATION

There was a 12 per cent decrease in the number of respondents who reported having been accommodated in a reception centre in February compared to January 2024. Figure 4 provides a breakdown of where migrants were accommodated in the Western Balkans.

The use of private accommodation was the highest in Albania (60%), while the highest percentage of camp residencies was recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina (91%). In Kosovo\*, 78 per cent of the respondents reported having slept outside at one point during their journey. On average, respondents paid 12 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=1,698)

## 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=1,698)

Destination countries varied by the nationality of the respondents. Seventy-four per cent of respondents from the Syrian Arab Republic stated that they wanted to travel to Germany. Respondents from Morocco split their answers between Italy (39%), France (22%), Germany (17%) and Spain (14%). Nationals of Afghanistan stated Germany (63%) and Italy (12%). See Figure 6 below for a breakdown of the main reasons respondents selected these countries of destination.

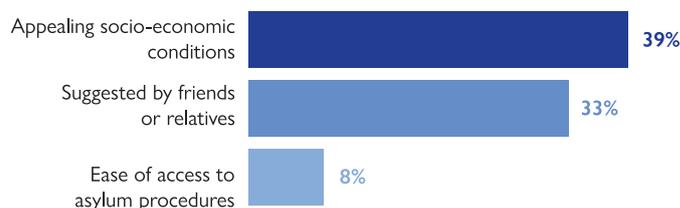
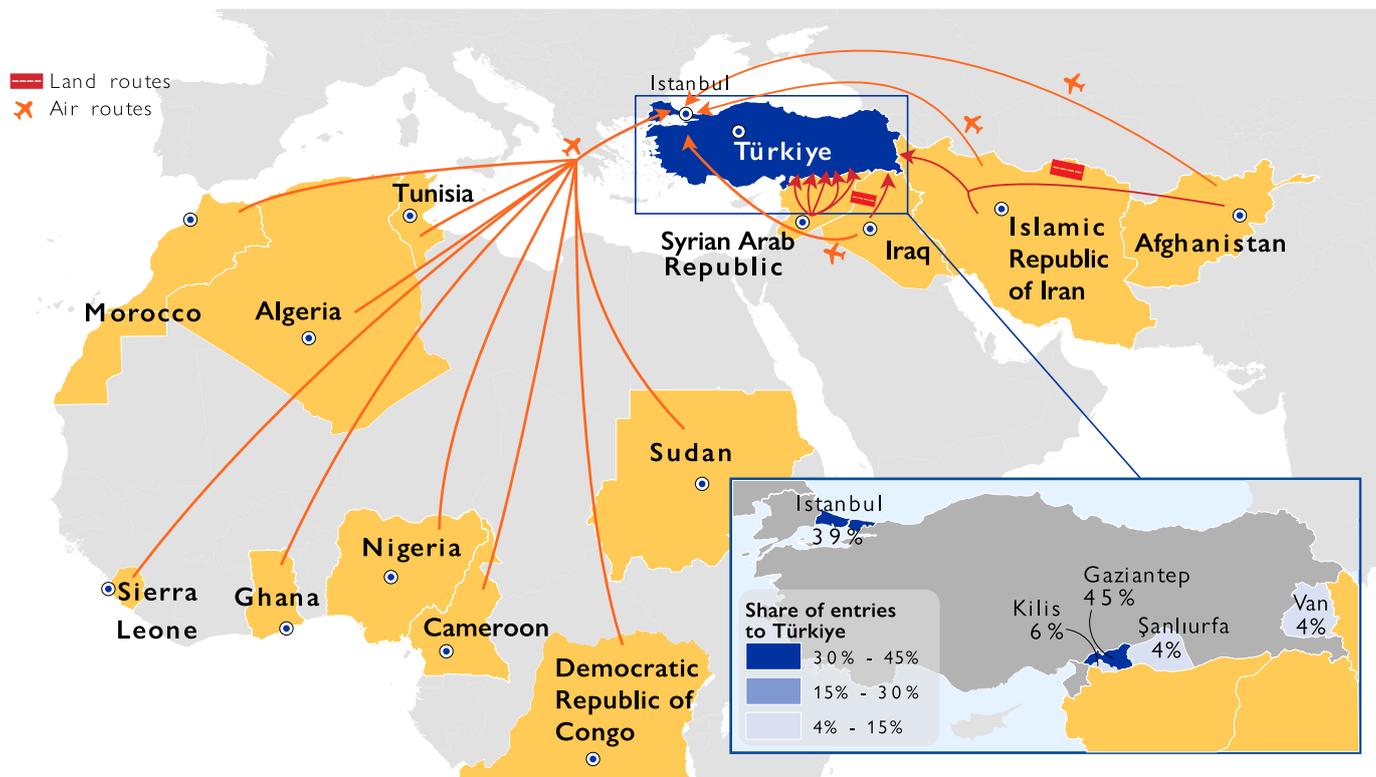


Figure 6: Main reasons for choosing intended destination country (n=1,698)

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 TÜRKIYE**



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Map 3: Countries of origin of the respondents in February 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 228 migrants of the overall sample in February.

On average, respondents spent 200 days living in Türkiye. Iraqi and Syrian nationals spent the most time living in Türkiye at 355 and 280 days respectively.

Half of the respondents stated that they registered with authorities in Türkiye.

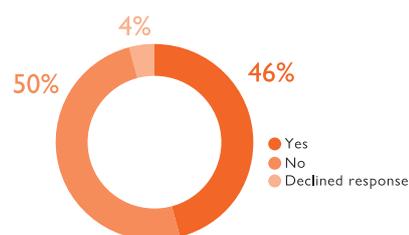


Figure 6: Registration by authorities in Türkiye (n=228)

Interviewees from Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, Morocco, and Sierra Leone all stated that they flew to Istanbul, while those from Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic mainly used the land route. Respondents from Iraq split their answers between the land route and the air route. See Map 3 above for an overview of the main provinces of entry into Türkiye.

When asked where they had departed Türkiye from, 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. Most respondents stated that they left Türkiye due to economic reasons.

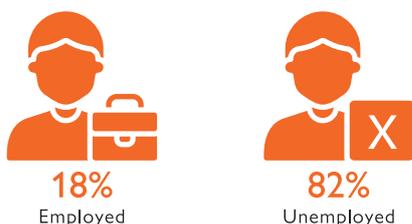


Figure 5: Employment status in Türkiye (n=228)

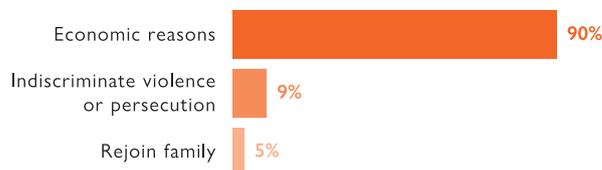


Figure 7: Reasons for leaving Türkiye (multiple answers possible) (n=228)

## SPECIAL FOCUS - TURKISH NATIONALS IN BiH

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 February, IOM carried out interviews with 55 migrants from Türkiye in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

- Turkish nationals have been arriving in increasing numbers in BiH. In 2023, registrations of Turkish nationals increased by 79 per cent in BiH compared to 2022. This trend of arrivals has continued into 2024.
- Turkish nationals can travel visa-free to BiH and therefore arrive in the country regularly. Some interviewees had been living in BiH for a few months working in the informal economy to raise funds for their onward journeys.
- Most respondents came from the provinces in the southeast and east of the country, including Diyarbakır, Hatay, Elazığ, Gaziantep and Muş. Many of these provinces were profoundly affected by the earthquake in February 2023.
- When asked why they had decided to leave Türkiye, almost all interviewees cited economic reasons, including high living costs and low wages even though they were employed in Türkiye prior to departing.
- Those who came from the earthquake-affected provinces in Türkiye spoke of how the consequences of the earthquake were compounded by low wages and the high cost of living in triggering their decision to migrate.
- Some interviewees stated that they were leaving Türkiye due to their political or religious beliefs.
- Those who were interviewed outside TRCs had arrived in BiH within a few days and were attempting to cross the Croatian border as soon as possible. Those who were interviewed inside TRCs had all tried and failed a border crossing and ended up in the TRC as a result of failing to cross the border.
- A few respondents who had tried and failed to cross the border into the European Union were despondent and had decided to return to Türkiye.
- The most common method of arranging their journeys was through contacts of smugglers or other travellers who could provide them with information on where to buy bus tickets and where to travel or where to exchange money.
- The most frequently reported intended destination country was Germany due to the perceived appealing economic conditions as well as the presence of a large Turkish diaspora. Those interviewees who had decided to leave Türkiye for political reasons cited France or Switzerland, also due to the presence of networks of Turkish communities.

## 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 February to 29 February 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.

SUPPORTED BY:



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