

This report provides insights into the profiles, experiences, needs, routes travelled and intentions of migrants transiting through the Western Balkans. IOM surveyed 893 migrants¹ from 1 to 31 December 2024 in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo.²



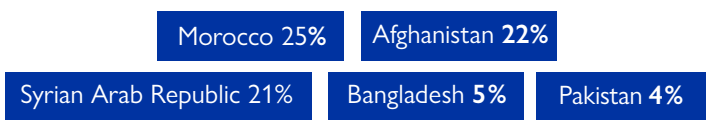
Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM

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



893
Migrants interviewed

Top **5** countries of origin of respondents



529 days
Average time since leaving country of origin



3,100

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



63%
Travelled throughout the region by bus



38%
Travelled by taxi

4% **96%**
Sex

79%
Single

32
years old
Average age



Average number of failed border crossing attempts per person
3

34%

Were facilitated across at least one border in the Western Balkans



55%
Slept outside or squatted in abandoned buildings in the Western Balkans

56,213

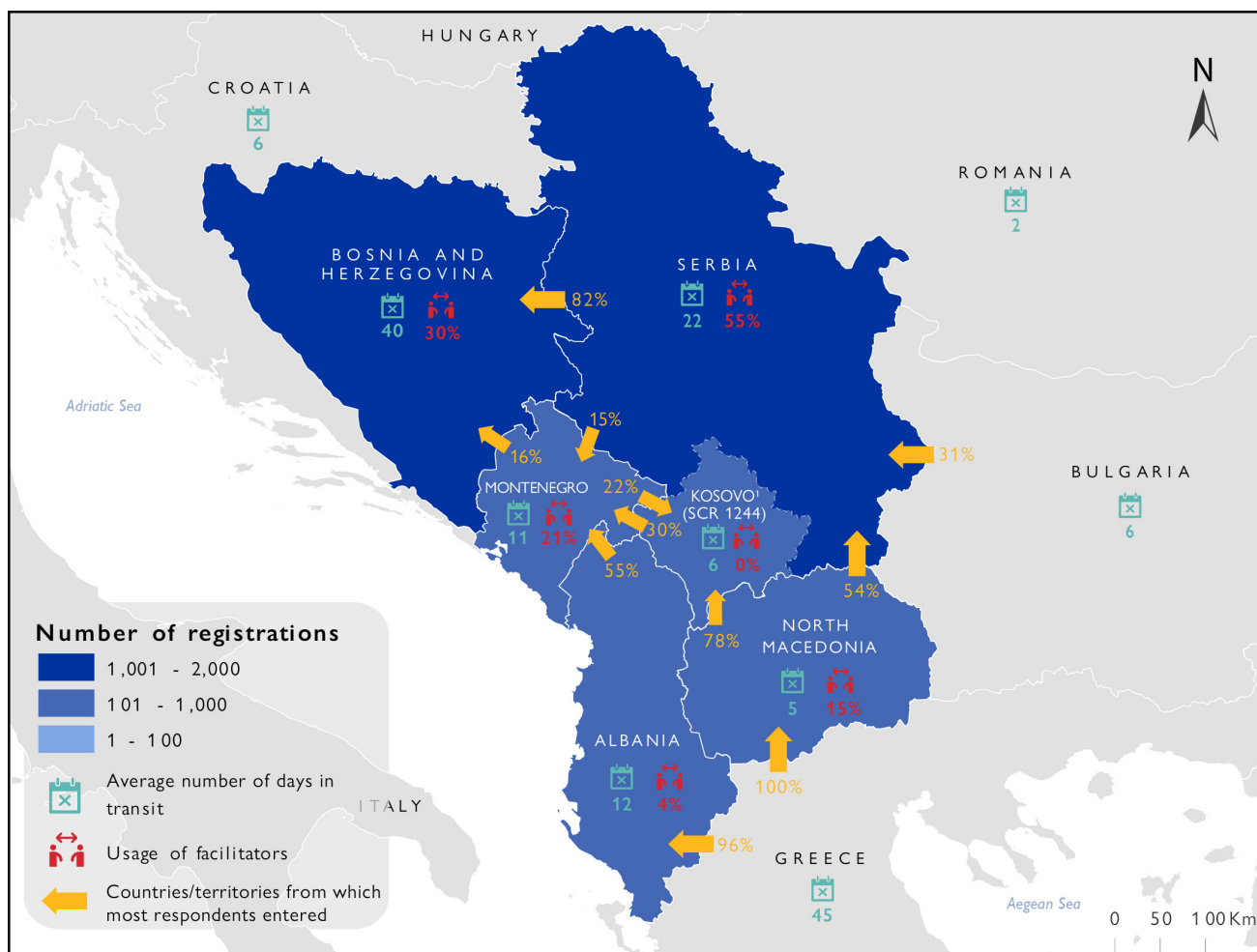
Total registrations in the Western Balkans as of 31 December 2024

¹ Interviewees include migrants in an irregular situation, refugees and asylum-seekers as the reference population consists of mixed migration flows.

² References to Kosovo¹ shall be understood in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

³ Albania: the Directorate for Borders and Migration; BiH, Service for Foreigners' Affairs; Montenegro: Ministry of Interior; North Macedonia: Department of Border Affairs and Migration; Serbia: Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants; Kosovo*: the Directorate for Migration and Foreigners

JOURNEYS



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 2: Information on migrant movements in the Western Balkans – December 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 map also illustrates monthly reported facilitation rates, transit country stay durations, and monthly registrations.

Journeys: travel modality

Most respondents (70%) reported travelling in a group, out of which 61 per cent were travelling with non-relatives.

Journeys: border crossings

Thirty-four per cent of the respondents in December 2024 stated that they were facilitated across a border to enter the country of survey, which is consistent with November 2024. On average, respondents paid 489 EUR to cross a border within the Western Balkans.

Half of the respondents had attempted and failed a border crossing at least once. Almost all (98%) of the respondents stated that the main reason for failing was being returned by authorities. Leaving Serbia, 20 per cent of crossing attempts were made at the border with Hungary.

	ALB	BIH	XKX*	MNE	MKD	SRB
	84%	97%	89%	84%	100%	70%
	48%	82%	78%	100%	44%	30%
	4%	3%	11%	0%	31%	21%
	0%	48%	11%	21%	1%	38%

Figure 1: Mode of travel in the Western Balkans (multiple answers possible) (n=893)

Eighty-two per cent of respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina reported entering from Serbia, while Serbia continues to record most entries from North Macedonia (54%) and Bulgaria (31%), consistent with November. Nearly all respondents (96%) that entered into Albania in December stated that they entered from Greece. Most entries into Montenegro were from Albania (55%) and Kosovo* (30%).

Migrants use social media and instant messaging to organise their journeys to Western Europe.

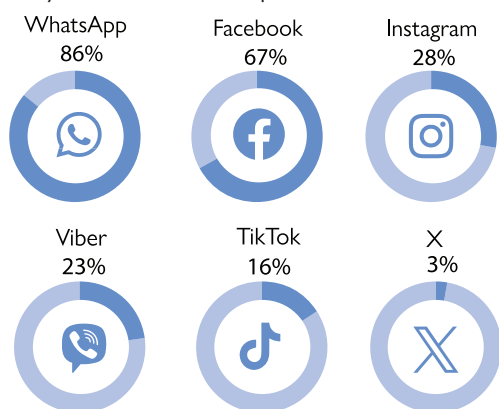


Figure 2: Most frequently cited platforms migrants use to plan their journeys (multiple answers possible) (n=893)

Journeys: secondary movements⁴

Thirty-five per cent of the respondents stated that they had been living in a country other than their own country of origin for a year or more.⁵ Seventy-three per cent of these respondents had been living in Türkiye.

When asked why they decided to move after living in transit countries for over a year, the primary reason cited was the deteriorating economic conditions (51%), fear of deportation to the country of origin (41%), and persecution (21%).⁶ For Türkiye specifically, the main reason was fear of deportation (40%).

Journeys: needs

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

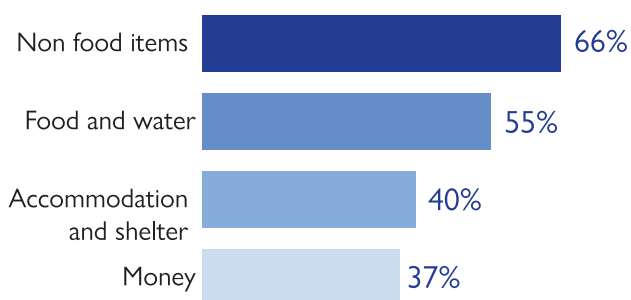


Figure 3: Most important needs outside reception facilities (multiple answers possible) (n=893)

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.

ACCOMMODATION

More than three quarters of the respondents (77%) reported having been accommodated in a reception facility at least once during their journeys through the Western Balkans.

In December 2024, over a half (55%) of the respondents also stated that they had either slept outside or squatted in an abandoned building at one point during their transit in the Western Balkans. On average, respondents paid 14 EUR per person, per day for private accommodation or hotels and hostels in the Western Balkans.

Figure 4 provides a breakdown of where migrants were accommodated in the Western Balkans.

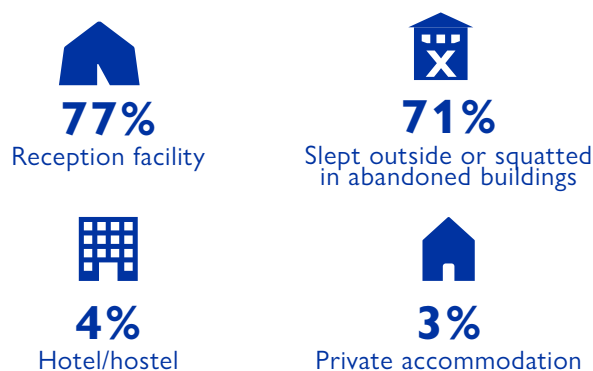


Figure 4: Accommodation in the Western Balkans (multiple answers possible) (n=893)

INTENDED DESTINATION COUNTRIES

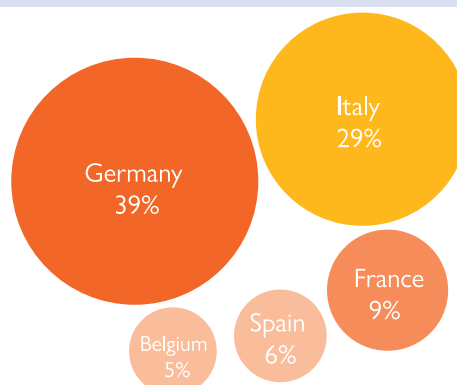


Figure 5: Top five intended destinations (n=893)

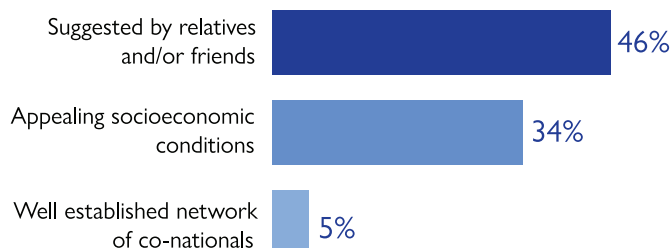
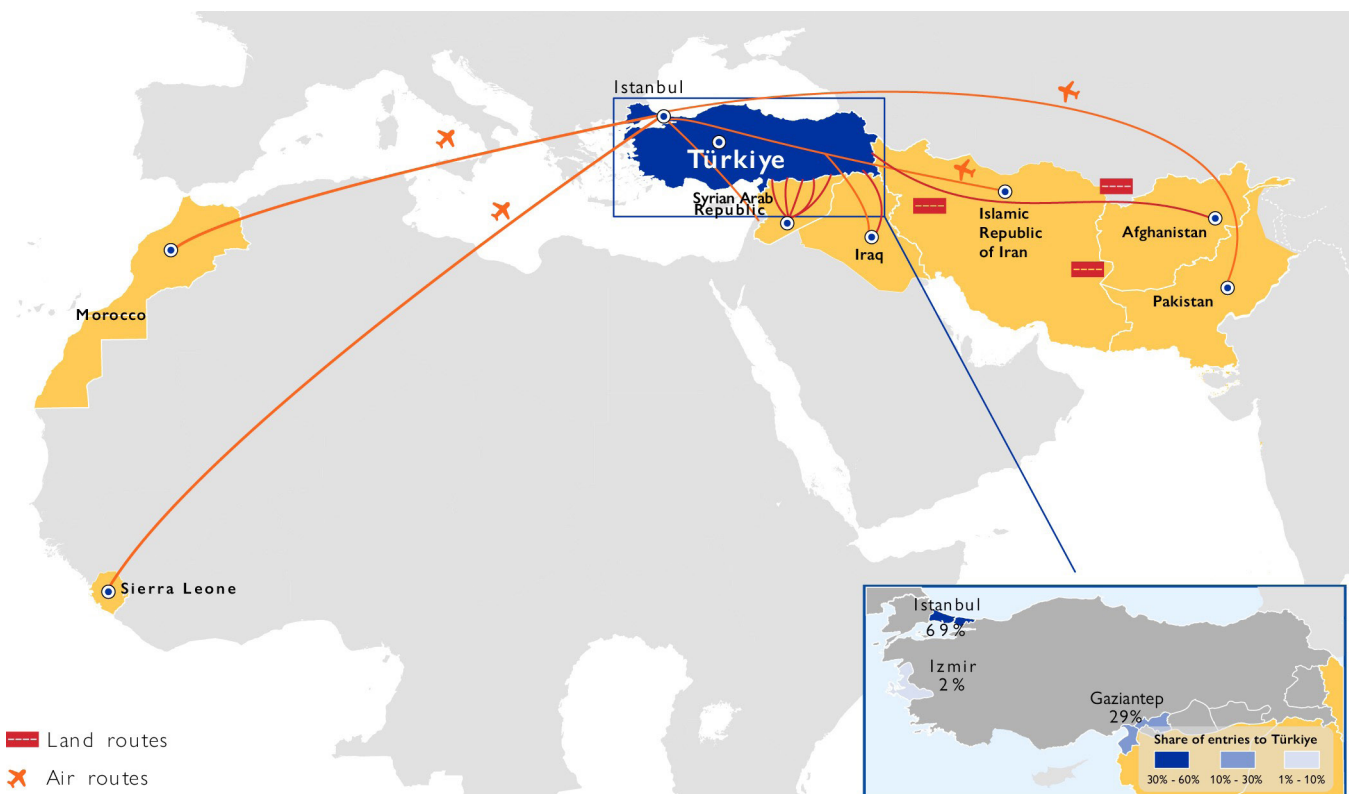


Figure 5: Main reasons for choosing intended destination country (n=893)

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 December 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 83 migrants of the overall sample in December.⁷



Figure 6: Average length of stay in Türkiye (n=83)

Interviewees from Eastern Asia, North and Central Africa all stated that they flew to Istanbul before continuing their journeys, while those from Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, 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.



Figure 7: Employment status in Türkiye (n=83)

On average, respondents spent 300 days in Türkiye prior to leaving. Just over half of respondents (51%) reported they were not registered in Türkiye, which is an increase of 20 per cent compared to the previous month.



Figure 8: Registration by authorities in Türkiye (n=83)

Thirty-six per cent stated they left Türkiye due to the deteriorating economic conditions, and persecution. Conflict, usually not among the top three reasons for departing Türkiye, is the third main reason in this sample (13%). All of the respondents had departed Türkiye from an unofficial border crossing. Thirty-nine per cent left Türkiye from the Edirne province.

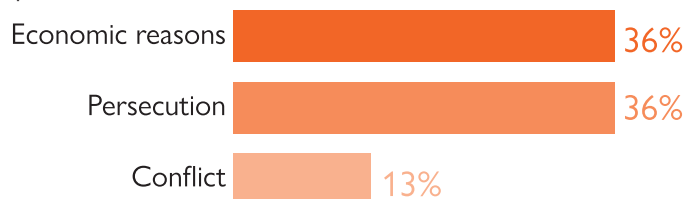


Figure 9: Main reasons for leaving Türkiye (multiple answers possible) (n=83)

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 – Sleeping outside

To contextualise 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.

- In December, 55 per cent of the 893 individuals interviewed stated they had experienced sleeping in either an abandoned building or outside whilst travelling through the Western Balkans. IOM conducted interviews in BiH with nationals from Morocco, Syrian Arab Republic and Occupied Palestinian Territory to further understand the challenges that migrants face while travelling during winter.
- All participants, except one, reported that they flew to Türkiye and then travelled through Bulgaria, Serbia, and BiH. The Syrian respondent mentioned a slightly different route, stating that he travelled to Türkiye, Greece, Albania, Kosovo¹, Serbia, and then BiH. All respondents indicated that they left their home countries due to economic difficulties.
- After leaving Türkiye, they did not sleep indoors until they reached the camps in Serbia. They explained that this was a deliberate choice to save money, as they could not afford accommodation costs.
- All the respondents mentioned that they primarily slept outside, as most of the abandoned buildings they attempted to use for shelter were already occupied. As a result, they would light fires and sleep around them for warmth. The respondents reported that they hardly slept at all, fearing that if they fell asleep outside, they would become ill. They said that they only managed to sleep for a few hours each night and spent the majority of their time walking.
- One of the most difficult nights they faced was when they had to cross a river from Serbia to BiH. They stated that after crossing the river, they were wet and had to travel for two days until they could find somewhere to dry off, further saying that no one slept and that they were exposed to freezing temperatures.
- Respondents mentioned that now they have reached BiH, they will stay in the camp until the weather improves, stating that it has become too cold for them to continue.
- Respondents indicated that they aim to reach their destination country as quickly as possible, and therefore, they do not expect to stay in any other camps. This is because the camps are not located along the route they plan to take, and they wish to avoid any detours.

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 to 31 December 2024 by enumerators in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo¹. Interviews took place in reception facilities in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo*.

In Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo¹ 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.

Key informant interviews

Key informants provide information on the modus operandi of migrant mobility when IOM field teams are not present. Key informants can be migrants 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

The 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:



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs



UK Government



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
and International Cooperation of Italy