

Migration Trends in the Western Balkans in 2022



DTM

IOM DISPLACEMENT
TRACKING MATRIX

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Migration Trends in the Western Balkans in 2022

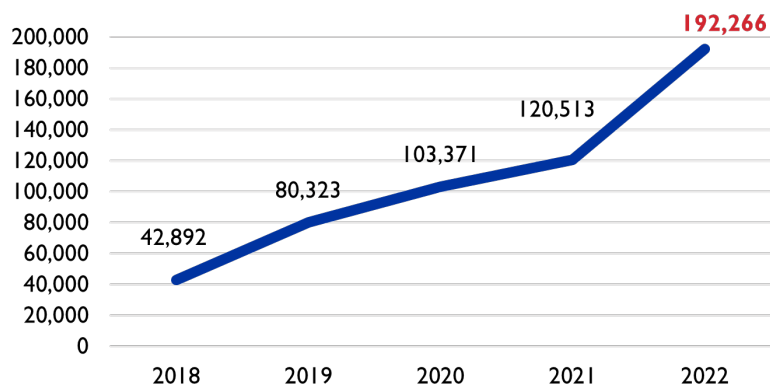
This report presents key data and trends of migration patterns in the Western Balkans in 2022. The data presented in this document come from sources collected from authorities and institutions in the Western Balkans, as well as various data collection modules from IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

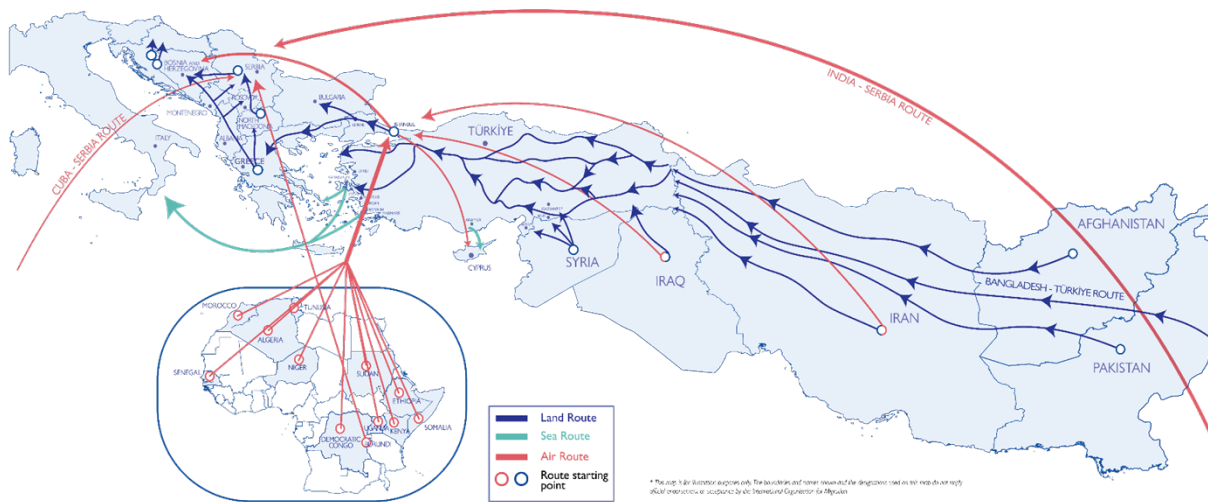
2022 was a paradigm shifting year for migration in the Western Balkans. More migrants arrived in the region, but transited rapidly through, spending fewer and fewer days in each country or territory before attempting to cross the external borders of the European Union.

Historically high arrival numbers

In 2022, authorities registered 192,266 migrants in the Western Balkans - a **59.5 per cent increase in arrivals compared to 2021** and a **348 per cent increase when compared to 2018**.



In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, migrants spent on average 58 days in transit reception centres in December 2021 compared to 8 days in December 2022. This shift is also reflected in the patterns of those migrants who reside outside transit reception centres. Migrants used to camp in national parks or squat in abandoned buildings for days, weeks and sometimes even months in their attempts to cross borders. This is no longer the case, **as people are moving rapidly through the region, often in a few days**.



Migration Trends in the Western Balkans in 2022

Most migrants travel through the Republic of Türkiye before crossing into Greece (by land or sea) or Bulgaria. People from the Central and South Asia (Afghans, Bangladeshis, Iranians, Pakistanis) and the Middle East (Iraqis, Syrians) tend to conduct most of their journeys via the land route, often walking great distances in the process. The sole exception to this is nationals from India who have a greater ability to travel via air due to visa free regimes.

In contrast, most people from the African continent start their journeys by plane either directly to the Western Balkans or through a transit country to the Republic of Türkiye. Until October 2022, nationals of Burundi were able to travel visa free to Serbia. The cancellation of this policy has led to a significant reduction in the numbers of Burundian nationals in the region. Likewise, Cuban nationals can also travel directly to the region visa free, via the direct flights to Belgrade or through Moscow.

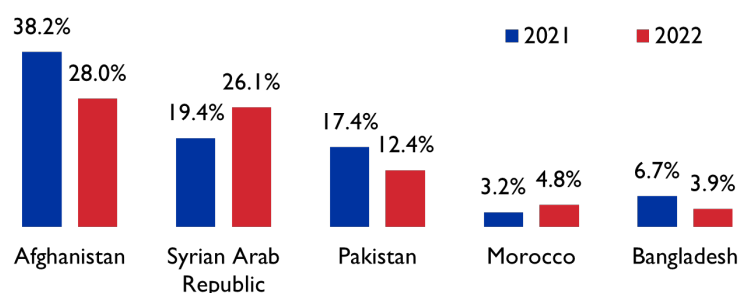


Once in the Western Balkans, the most active routes are through North Macedonia, Serbia and then directly attempting to cross into the EU through the Hungarian border. Alternatively, once in Serbia, many others cross the border into eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina and then attempt the crossing into Croatia from the north and north-western part of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Profiles and intentions

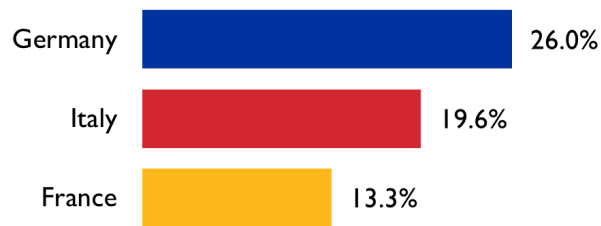
As a part of IOM's Flow Monitoring efforts, IOM surveyed 1,069 adult migrants in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo* in the summer and fall of 2022 to provide a snapshot of the migrants travelling through the Western Balkans.

The top five nationalities in 2022 were the same as in 2021, but the proportions change reflecting changing global circumstances.



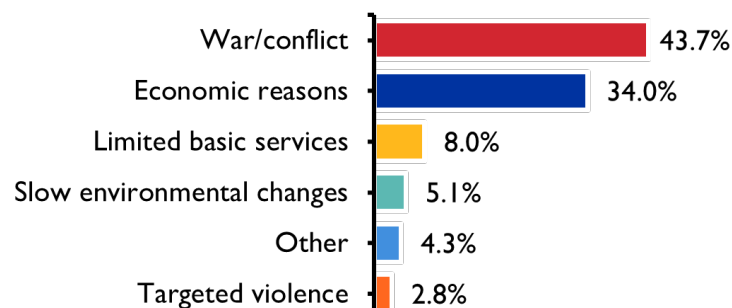
Migration Trends in the Western Balkans in 2022

Afghan nationals arrived in large numbers in 2021 as a result of the Taliban takeover in August 2021, but this has decreased proportionally in 2022. Trends from 2022 also indicate that [more Syrians are leaving](#) the Syrian Arab Republic as well as from the Republic of Türkiye.



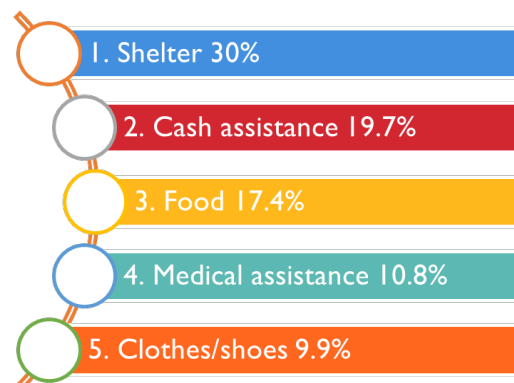
When asked about their intended countries of destination, most migrants stated Germany, Italy or France. Different nationalities have different preferred countries of intended destination. Most Pakistanis say Italy, whereas Afghans largely want to travel to Germany and to a lesser extent Italy and France. Most (58.7%) nationals of the Syrian Arab Republic say they want to travel to Germany while for Moroccans, France and Italy are the top intended destinations.

The most frequently cited drivers of migration are war and conflict as well as economic reasons.



Needs and vulnerabilities

Based on the survey of 1,069 migrants in 2022, migrants in the Western Balkans report having gone through varying experiences. Almost **one-fifth (19.8%) of migrants tell us they have experienced at least one form of violence, exploitation or abuse along the route**. In addition, 16.6% have been robbed during their journeys and 11.5% have reported some health issues. Many of the most frequently cited needs during the migration journeys relate to the people having travelled for prolonged periods of time without basic amenities.



INTRODUCTION

This briefing note provides information on the key migration trends and patterns in the Western Balkans in 2022. The briefing note will show key data on migration as well as IOM activities in the region. The data presented in this document come from sources collected from authorities in the Western Balkans, as well as various data collection modules from IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix.

What is DTM?

IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a data collection and analysis system that tracks and monitors multi-layered information on displacement and population mobility. DTM analyses the profiles, intentions, vulnerabilities, and needs of displaced and mobile populations to enable decision makers and responders to provide context-specific assistance.

DTM is present all of the Western Balkans and Türkiye and is therefore in a unique position to provide route-based data analysis of mixed migration movements along the Eastern Mediterranean Route. Every year, DTM teams interview thousands of migrants across the entire region to gauge their profiles and needs, as well as their intentions. DTM works closely with migration agencies in the Western Balkans to build capacity and to improve evidence-based decision making and programming.

KEY MIGRATION TRENDS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

I. Increasing number of migrant arrivals in the Western Balkans in 2022

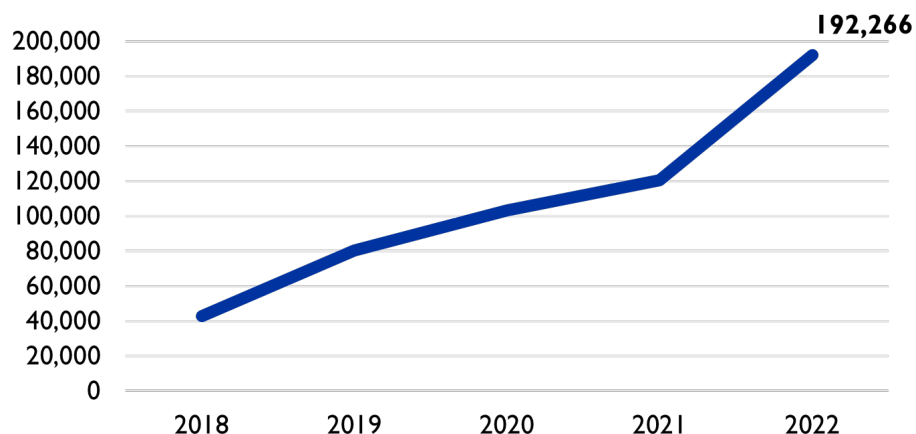


Figure 1: Number of arrivals in the Western Balkans

Since 2018, authorities in the Western Balkans have consistently been registering more migrant arrivals. In 2022, authorities registered 192,266 migrants in the Western Balkans. This is a 59.5 per cent increase in arrivals compared to 2021 and a 348 per cent increase when compared to 2018. These numbers refer to any registration of a migrant in one of the six countries or territories of the Western Balkans.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Albania	1,627	3,067	3,628	18,496	12,216
Bosnia and Herzegovina	24,067	29,196	16,150	15,740	27,429
Montenegro	4,645	8,695	3,007	3,336	8,318
North Macedonia	3,132	19,716	37,937	17,919	22,379
Serbia	8,827	17,611	39,648	63,535	120,883
Kosovo*	594	2,038	3,001	1,487	1,041
TOTAL	42,892	80,323	103,371	120,513	192,266

Figure 2: Yearly arrival figures broken down per country or territory

Figure 2 shows that there has been an increase in the number of migrants registered in all countries or territories in the Western Balkans in 2022 compared to 2021, except for Albania and Kosovo*. This reduction for Albania and Kosovo* is possibly because fewer migrants are using the Albania-Kosovo*-Serbia route in 2022 and instead using the Albania-Montenegro route. Serbia remains the main transit hub in the region, accounting for almost two-thirds of all registrations.

Migration Trends in the Western Balkans in 2022

2. High Mobility migration patterns

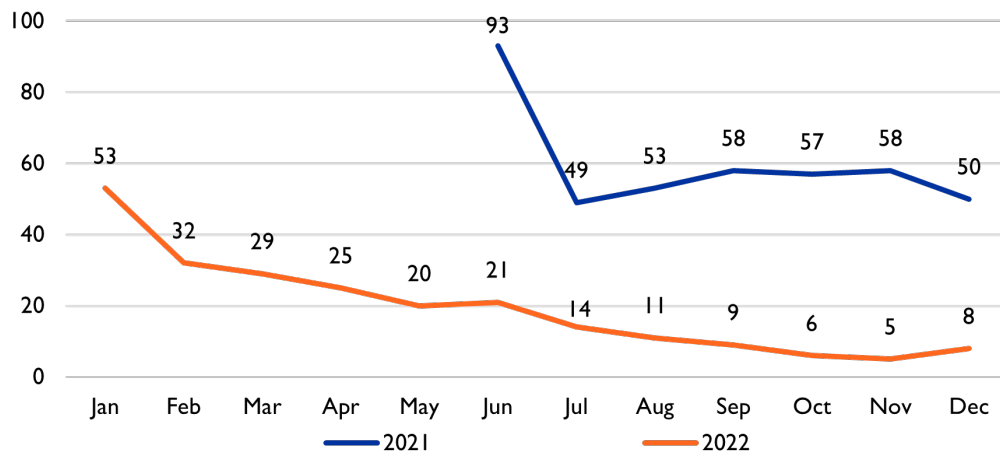


Figure 3: Average number of days migrants are staying in transit reception centre, Bosnia & Herzegovina

Migrants are spending fewer and fewer days in each country or territory before attempting to cross the borders into Western Europe. Figure 3 shows that on average in BiH migrants spent 58 days in transit reception centres in December 2021 compared to 8 days in December 2022.

The increasing number of arrivals and high turnover rate are presenting significant resource challenges to IOM and other humanitarian actors in the region, as each person receives a basic package of services when arriving in the centres. This includes basic medical screening, protection screening, a package of non-food items and food. For example, in Blazuj – a camp for single men and the largest transit reception facility in Bosnia and Herzegovina – 189 people registered on average per day in October 2022, compared to 21 people in October 2021.

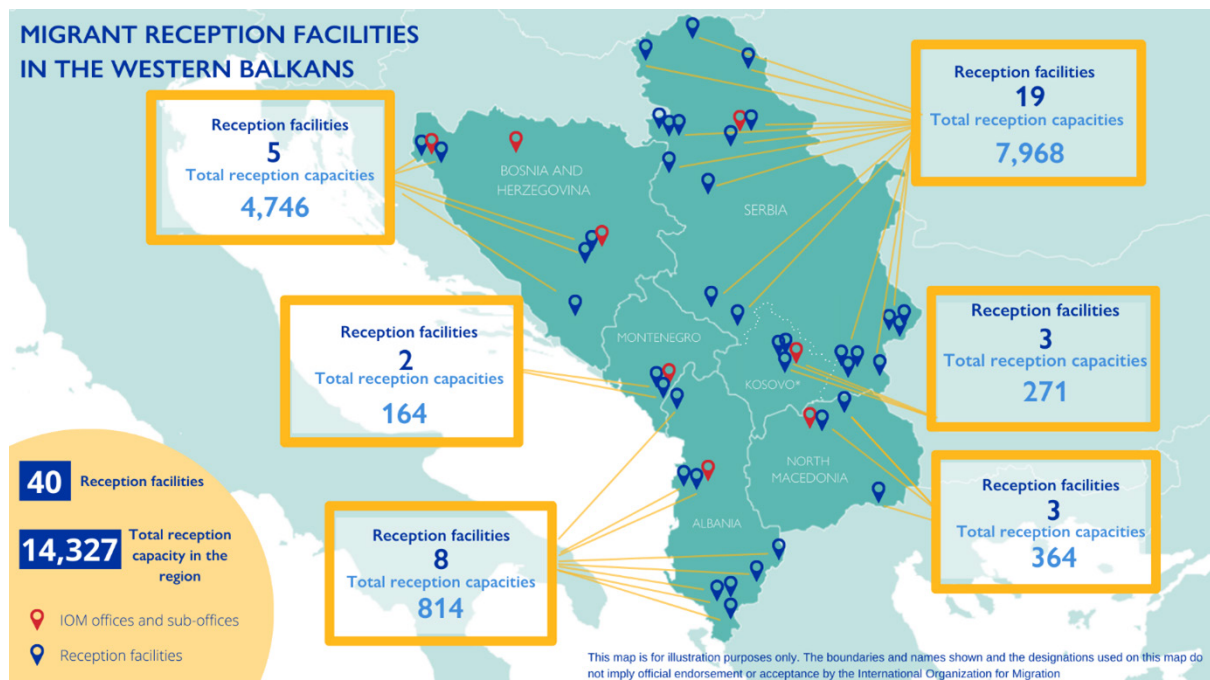


Figure 4: Reception facilities in the Western Balkans

Migration Trends in the Western Balkans in 2022

In total, there are 40 reception facilities across the six countries or territories of the Western Balkans, with the capacity to host around 14,000 migrants. Occupancy rates in the Western Balkans remained relatively stable in 2022, which indicates that many migrants are passing quickly toward the borders of the European Union rather than remaining in the Western Balkans.

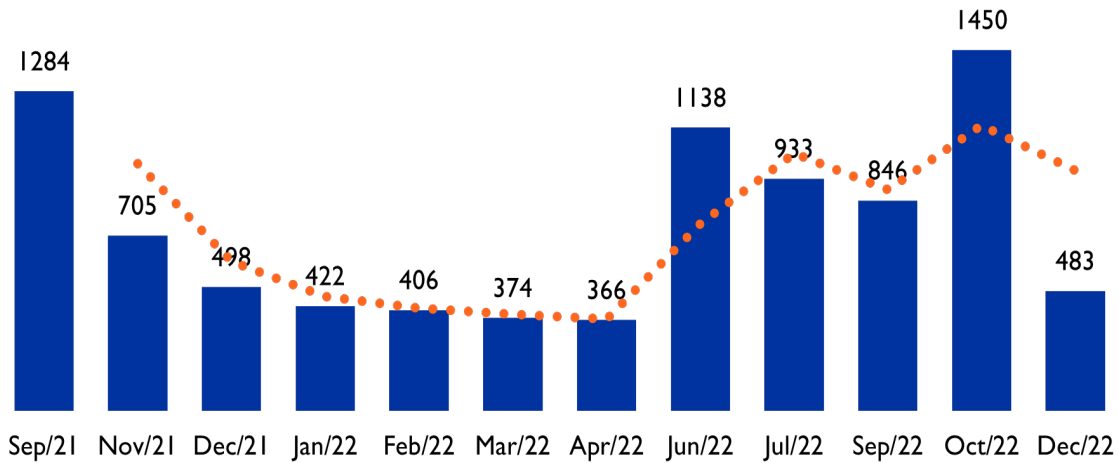


Figure 5: Estimated migrants' presence outside of reception centres in the Western Balkans 6

There has also been a change in the migration patterns of those migrants who reside outside transit reception centres. They used to camp in national parks or squat in abandoned buildings for days, weeks and sometimes even months in their attempts to cross borders. This is no longer the case, as people are moving rapidly through the countries or territories of the Western Balkans, often in less than 24 hours. This is a paradigm shift. People who live in makeshift camps or are squatting in buildings for prolonged periods of time have specific needs, which can, to an extent, be planned and addressed by humanitarian actors through follow-up. However, contexts where people are moving rapidly through the country present specific programmatic challenges.

3. The main routes into Europe and movement within the Western Balkans

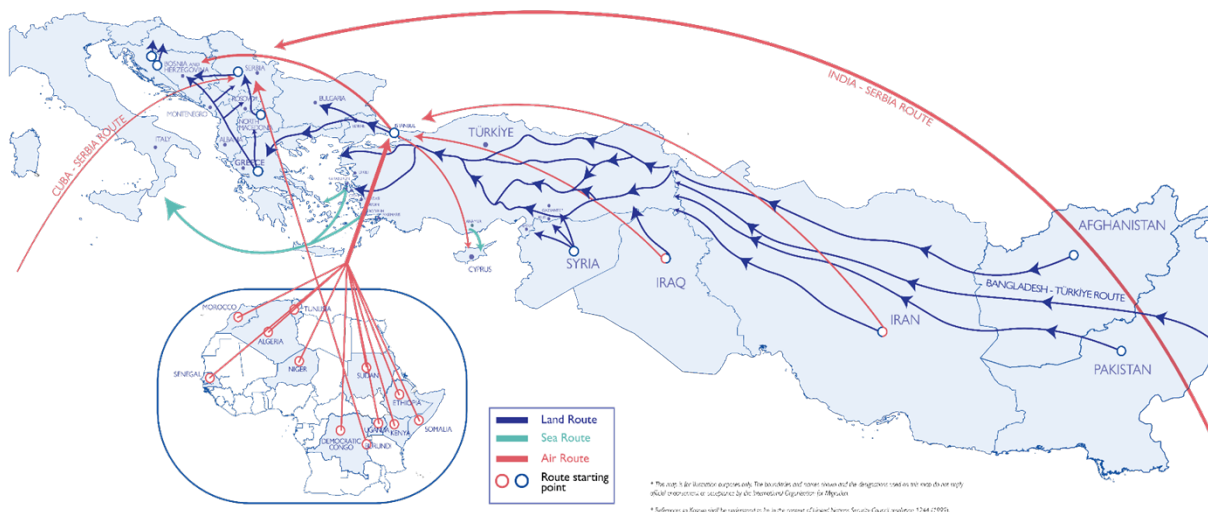


Figure 6: Main travel routes from third countries to the Western Balkans

Migration Trends in the Western Balkans in 2022

As a general pattern, most people pass through Türkiye before entering either Greece or Bulgaria and taking the land route to Western Europe or and continuing their journeys in the Western Balkans. People from the Central and South Asia (Afghans, Bangladeshis, Iranians, Pakistanis) and the Middle East (Iraqis, Syrians) tend to conduct most of their journeys via the land route, often walking great distances in the process. The sole exception to this is nationals from India who have a greater ability to travel via air due to visa free regimes.

In contrast, most people from the African continent start their journeys by plane either directly to the Western Balkans or through a transit country to the Republic of Türkiye. Until October 2022, nationals of Burundi were able to travel visa free to Serbia. The cancellation of this policy has led to a significant reduction in the numbers of Burundian nationals in the region (see nationality section below).

Likewise, Cuban nationals can also travel directly to the region visa free, via the direct flights to Belgrade or through Moscow.



Figure 7: Main travel routes within the Western Balkans

Once in the Western Balkans, the most active routes are through North Macedonia, Serbia and then directly attempting to cross into the European Union through the Hungarian border. Alternatively, once in Serbia, many others cross the border into eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina and then attempt the crossing into Croatia from the north and north-western part of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

IOM surveyed 1,069 adult migrants in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo* in the summer and fall of 2022 to provide a snapshot of the migrants travelling through the Western Balkans. This survey was a part of IOM's Flow Monitoring data collection modules in the Western Balkans. Sections 4 to 9 below present the findings of that survey.

4. The top nationalities

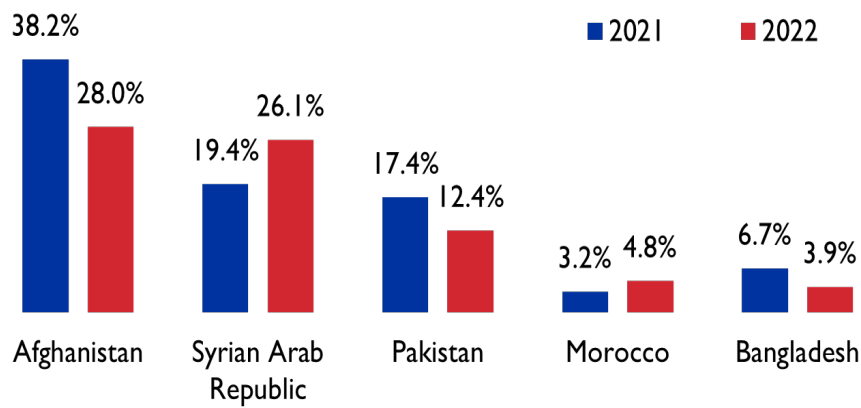


Figure 8: Top five nationalities in Western Balkans

There were no changes in the top five nationalities arriving in the region in 2022 compared to 2021. However, the proportions do change. In light of the events of the Taliban takeover in 2021, Afghans were the most represented nationality whereas 2022 saw proportional increases in the numbers of Syrians and Moroccans in the region.

5. Profiles of the migrants travelling through the Western Balkans

- 93.8% were men
- 74.6% of the total sample were under the age of 29
- 76.1% were single
- 21.3% had children
 - 61.4% of those who had children, had them in the country of origin
 - 3.5% of those who had children, had them in the intended country of destination

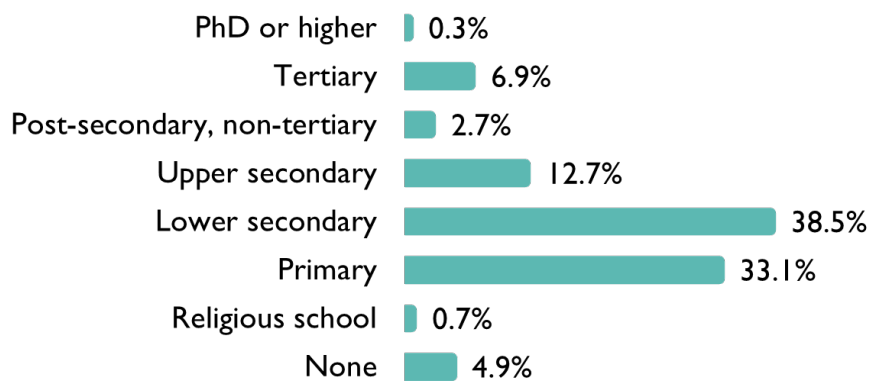


Figure 9: Highest level of educational attainment

- Most of those surveyed had completed primary or lower secondary school

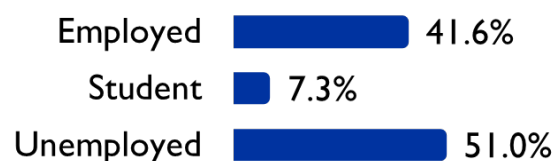


Figure 10: Employment status in the country of origin

Migration Trends in the Western Balkans in 2022

- There was a roughly even split between those who were unemployed and those who were employed or in full-time education
- The most frequently cited professions or occupations in the country of origin were
 - o Skilled manual labourers
 - o Services or sales workers
 - o Craft trade workers
 - o Clerical support workers
 - o Technicians

6. Reason for leaving country of origin

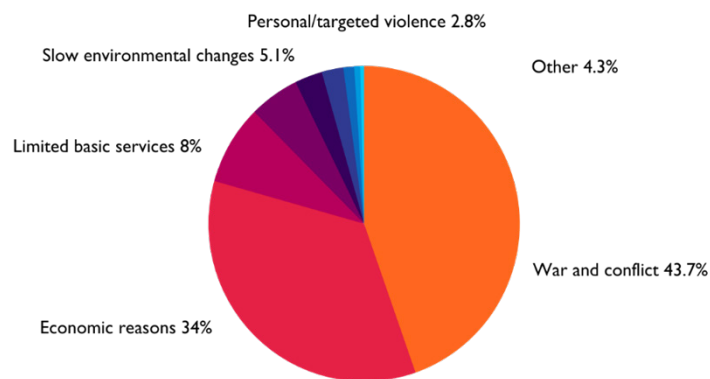


Figure 11: Most frequently cited reasons for leaving country of origin

When asked why they had left their country of origin, the two most frequently cited reasons were war and conflict (43.7%) and economic reasons (34%). Most nationals from the Syrian Arab Republic (93.5%) and Afghanistan (72.5%) cite war and conflict as the main reason they left their country of origin. This percentage drops to 17.5 per cent for nationals of Pakistan, half of whom cite economic reasons for having left their country of origin. Most Moroccan nationals (84.2%) cite economic reasons whereas Burundians most frequently cite economic reasons (43.8%) or war and conflict (22.9%).

7. Intended countries of destination

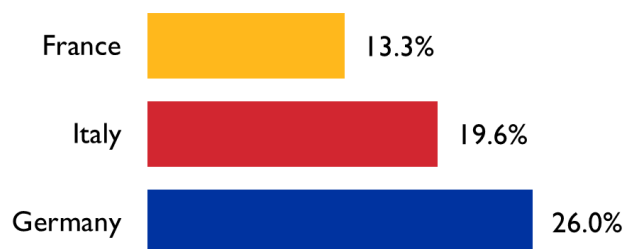


Figure 12: Top three intended countries of destination

Different nationalities have different preferred countries of intended destination. Most Pakistanis state that Italy is their country of intended destination, whereas Afghans largely want to travel to Germany and to a lesser extent Italy and France. Nationals of the Syrian Arab Republic tell us they want to travel to Germany.

8. The cost of migration

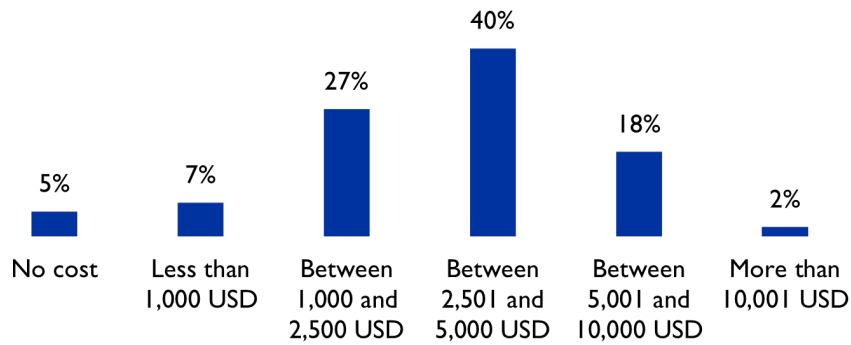


Figure 13: Cost of the journeys since leaving country of origin

Figure 14 shows the amount of money migrants had paid for their journeys since departing from their country of origin at the time they were interviewed.

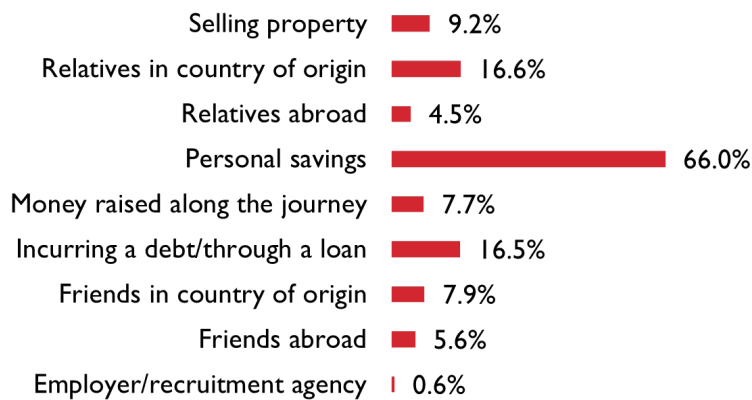


Figure 14: How was the money for the journey raised?

When asked how they had raised the funds to embark on their journeys, two-thirds responded that they had done it through personal savings.

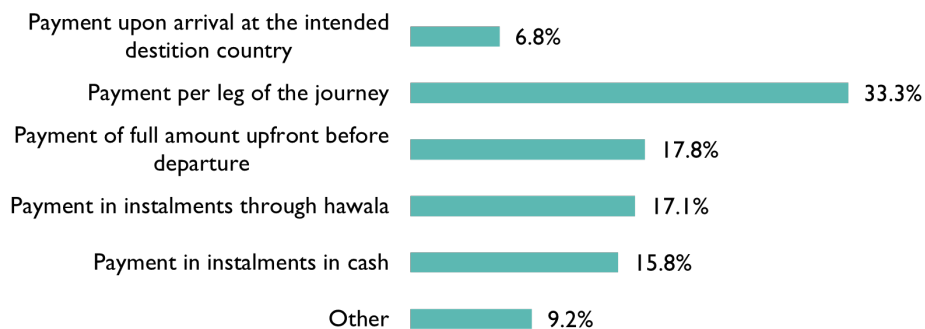


Figure 15: How did you pay for your journey?

Payment per leg of the journey was the most frequently cited payment modality, but methods of payment were generally mixed. ‘Hawala’ is an informal, trust-based alternative banking system prevalent in some Islamic countries.

Migration Trends in the Western Balkans in 2022

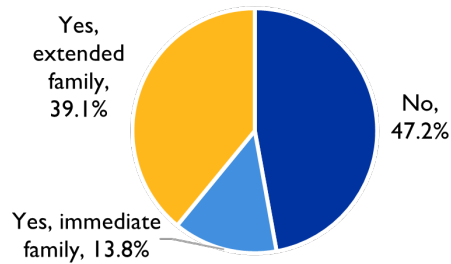


Figure 16: Do you have family in your country of destination?

Most of the people we surveyed stated that they had family (either immediate family or extended family) in their intended country of destination. When asked if they had tried to join their family members through legal or administrative processes, 98 per cent said that they had not.

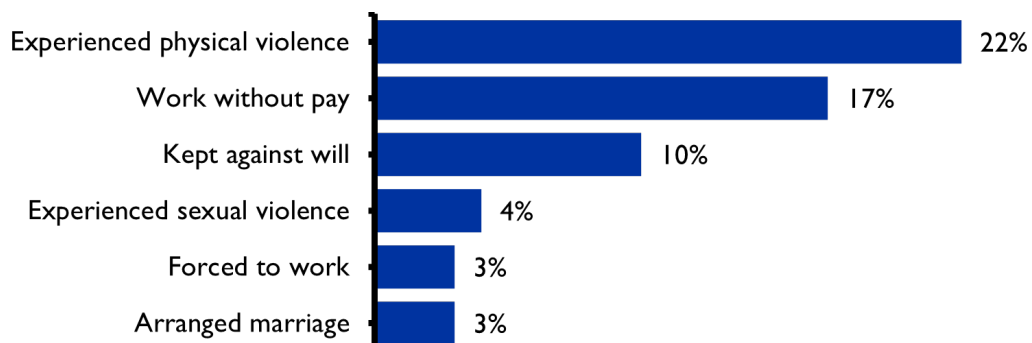
9. Needs and vulnerabilities



Figure 17: What has been your most pressing need during the journey?

Migrants in the Western Balkans have gone through varying experiences and have mixed needs. For example, those migrants who can fly directly to the region and have limited experiences of border crossings have different needs to those who may have crossed several borders prior to arriving in the region. Hardship during the journeys do not seem to be a deterrent for migrants trying to reach their destination. We asked people if at any point during their journeys they had considered returning home and 94% said that they had not.

Experiences of violence



Problems faced during journey:

- 16.8% had been robbed during their journey
- 9% reported lost or stolen documents
- 11.5% reported health problems
- 23% reported hunger

Trafficking indicators

- 5.1 per cent of people said that they had performed work without getting the expected payment
- 1.4 per cent of respondents said they had been forced to perform work against their will
- 0.9 per cent had been approached by someone offering marriage to them or their close family members, including 5 per cent of all female respondents
- 1.7 per cent of respondents had been kept against their will by persons other than official authorities
- 14.7 per cent responded positively to at least one counter-trafficking indicator

10. Key Flow Monitoring Points - Bosnia and Herzegovina

To better understand migratory movements, IOM established key flow monitoring points in the Una-Sana Canton in the north of the country on the border with Croatia. Key flow monitoring points are strategic transit and exit locations where we survey migrants on the move to track trends in migration patterns. IOM have carried out three rounds of this exercise in 2022 in [May and June](#), in [August](#), and in [September through November](#). The results below present the findings of the latest round of the Key Flow Monitoring Points exercise.



Figure 18: Exit points on the Western Balkan route

- More than one-third of respondents (34%) entered BiH with a facilitator.
- Most of respondents (84%) reported having been pushed back to BiH at least once. 96% of those who had tried to cross the border into the EU stated that they would try again in the future.
- The main nationalities were Afghans, Burundians, Pakistanis, and Libyans.
- The top countries of intended destination are Germany (33%), Italy (31%), France (24%) and Belgium (9%).
- The social networks most frequently used by respondents to facilitate their journey to the EU were Facebook (95%), WhatsApp (72.2%), Viber (38.8%), Instagram (32.3%), TikTok (9.6%), and Twitter (0.2%).

In 2023, IOM plans to link the entire Western Balkan route from key exit and transit points in the Republic of Türkiye all the way through to the external borders of the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. The aim is to provide decision-makers with real-time, route-based data analysis of trends and patterns throughout the entire route on a monthly basis.

11. Focus on Syrians

There was a significant increase in the number of Syrians travelling through the Western Balkan region in 2022. Authorities in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo* registered more than twice as many Syrians in 2022 than in 2021. In this context, IOM launched a survey with Syrian nationals to better understand the increasing arrivals and to gauge their profiles, needs and intentions. IOM interviewed 227 Syrian nationals in Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo* between 14 October and 8 November 2022.

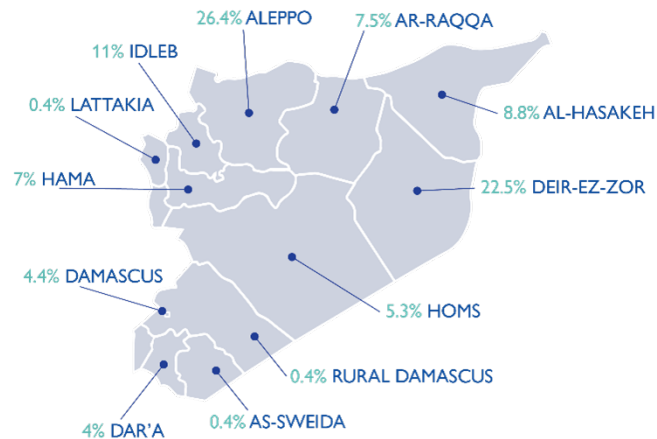


Figure 19: Regions of origin in the Syrian Arab Republic

- Almost all (95.2%) stated that they had left the Syrian Arab Republic due to war and conflict
- Many people (40%) had been living in Türkiye for one year or more prior to arriving in the Western Balkans
- Of those who had lived in Türkiye for over a year, the most frequently cited reason (43.5%) for triggering their secondary movement was economic reasons. A fear of being returned to the Syrian Arab Republic was the second most cited reason (37.5%)
- Almost equally as many people had only recently left the Syrian Arab Republic, with 39.4 per cent having departed within three months of the survey interview
- Half of all border crossings were facilitated
- Only 1.5 per cent of all entries took place at a regular border crossing
- Their main needs during these journeys related to the fact that they have been walking over prolonged distances (food, water, housing, the use to bathrooms, shoes, and cash assistance)
- Two-thirds wanted to travel to Germany, largely because of perceived ease of access to the asylum procedure
- Travel routes are dictated by smuggling networks and contacts. There has not been an increase in Syrians in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, where there continue to be very few Syrians.

12. Focus on Ukrainians

In response to the influx of Ukrainian refugees in the Western Balkans, DTM launched a series of rapid assessments of Ukrainian refugees in Montenegro, Albania and North Macedonia. IOM carried out three rapid assessments of Ukrainians in Montenegro in March and April, in May and in October. From 7 July to 15 August, IOM carried out a further rapid assessment of Ukrainian nationals in North Macedonia as well as in Albania from 22 November to 31 December 2022.

Here are the key findings of those rapid response surveys.

Country or area of Arrival	Entry	Estimated presence
Albania	30,841	2,727
Bosnia and Herzegovina	49,974	149
Montenegro	88,874	6,972
North Macedonia	27,786	6,322
Serbia	139,817	2,921
Kosovo*	693	12
TOTAL	337,985	19,103

Figure 20: Estimated presence and arrivals of Ukrainians 2022

Figure 21 shows that the vast majority of Ukrainians who have entered the countries or territories of the Western Balkans have since left. However, IOM estimates the presence of around 19,100 Ukrainian nationals.

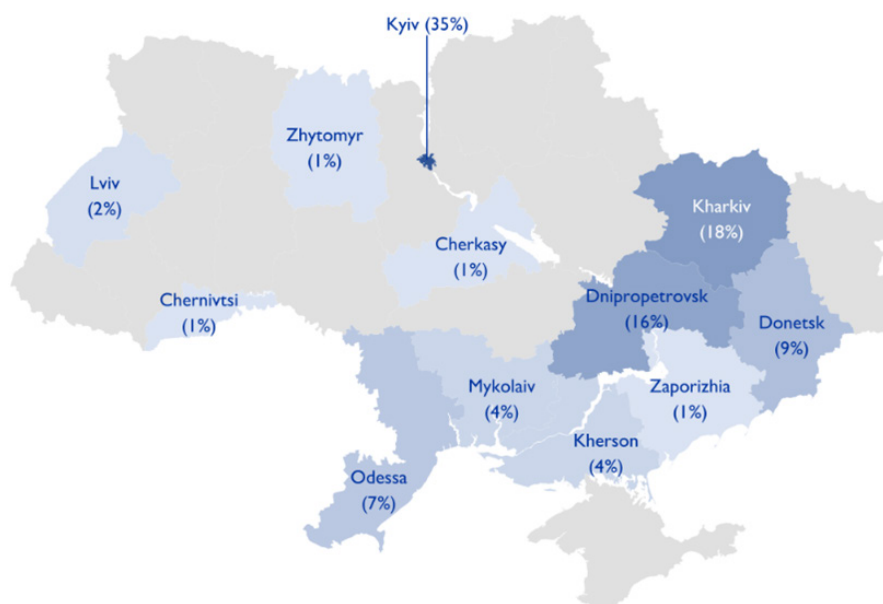


Figure 21: Regions of origin in Ukraine

The Ukrainians residing in the Western Balkans are women (84%) from cities in Ukraine (70%). In general, this is a highly educated population, with 39 per cent holding master's degrees. Their main needs are related to their integration in the communities in which they are hosted. Over two-thirds (71%) stated they needed language courses, half said they needed financial support, 47 per cent legal support, 46 per cent employment support and 44 per cent stated they wanted more spaces for their children.

13. Focus on Moroccans

There was a significant increase in the number of Moroccans travelling through the Western Balkans in 2022. Authorities in Serbia registered 487 per cent more Moroccans in 2022 compared with 2021. In this context, IOM launched a survey with Moroccan nationals to better understand these migration drivers. IOM surveyed 92 Moroccans from 8 to 15 December across six reception centres in Serbia.

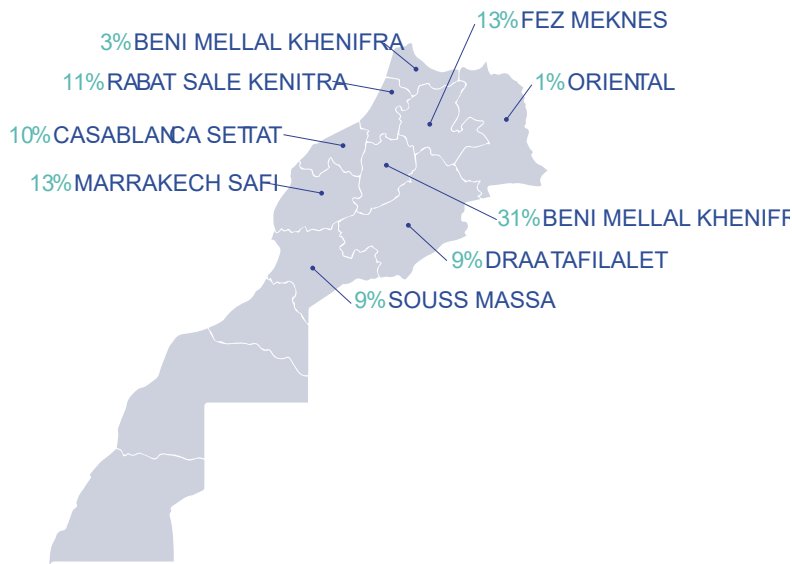


Figure 22: Regions of origin in the Morocco

- All the people interviewed were men
- Most of them (65%) were under the age of 29
- Almost all (95%) left Morocco for economic reasons (lack of jobs and income)



Figure 23: Routes travelled to Serbia

- The majority (90%) travelled visa-free to Türkiye using the air route to Istanbul
- Most respondents (75%) arrived in Türkiye between August and November 2022
- From Türkiye, 63 per cent crossed the border into Bulgaria, while 37 per cent travelled through Greece
- Of those who travelled to Greece, 70 per cent crossed the land border, and the other 30 per cent crossed by boat
- Of those who travelled to Bulgaria, nearly half were accompanied across the border by a facilitator
- The top three intended countries of destination were Italy, France, Spain

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

What does DTM do in the Western Balkans?

i. Key Flow Monitoring Points

Key flow monitoring points are strategic transit and exit locations where we survey migrants on the move to track trends in migration patterns. Our plan in 2023 is to link the entire Western Balkan route from key exit and transit points in Türkiye all the way through to the borders of the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. This will allow us to provide real-time data analysis of trends and patterns throughout the entire route.

ii. Migrants' Presence Outside Reception

Every month, we estimate the number of migrants that choose not to reside in the temporary reception centres. We select a day and mobilise our team of enumerators who visit locations where migrants outside reception centres are known to be present. Based on the number of migrants we encounter and based on triangulation with key informants, we can provide a snapshot of the stock of migrants outside reception areas as well as key qualitative information.

iii. Flow Monitoring Surveys

We survey thousands of migrants residing in reception centres across the region and to collect qualitative information about populations on the move in the Western Balkans. The objective is to provide a snapshot of the migrants currently present in the region. The aim is to better understand migration drivers, the profiles of people on the move, their intentions as well as their needs and vulnerabilities.

iv. Rapid Response Customised Surveys

We respond to rapidly unfolding situations by carrying out quick, ad-hoc rapid response surveys. If there are rapid, large increases of specific nationalities, we quickly mobilise our team of enumerators. Preliminary analysis of these flows is available within days. In 2022, we carried out customised surveys on Syrian nationals in the Western Balkans, Moroccan nationals in Serbia as well as Ukrainian nationals in Montenegro and Albania.

v. Labour market integration

In the context of the labour shortfalls caused by emigration in the Western Balkans, DTM, in collaboration with academia, will carry out studies with the private sector to gauge their needs as well as attitudes toward integrating migrants and refugees to make up for labour shortages. One such preliminary study is under way in Bosnia and Herzegovina and will be finalised in the first semester of 2023.

What is the unique value-add of DTM?

- i. Through voluntary and anonymised surveys, we hear directly from the migrants.
- ii. We are present in all of the Western Balkans and the Republic of Türkiye and can therefore provide route-based data analysis.
- iii. We combine this data with our expertise and our daily presence as front-line responders.

Strategic objectives in the Western Balkans

- i. Improve understanding of migration movements in the Western Balkans as well as migration movements to Europe.
- ii. Strengthen the capacities of authorities in the Western Balkans to analyze national and regional migration trends and migration management
- iii. Improve migration response through evidence-based findings