



365
Migrants interviewed



Data collected from
9 reception centres/
asylum centres



1,687
SCRM recorded in
February 2024

Top **3** countries of origin of respondents



Syrian Arab Republic



Afghanistan



Morocco



85% Travelled throughout the country by walking



64% Travelled by bus



49% Also travelled by taxis

**Multiple answers possible*

This report provides insights into the profiles, experiences and journeys of migrants transiting through the Republic of Serbia. Data was collected from 1 to 29 February 2024 together with the Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants of the Republic of Serbia (SCRM). IOM interviewed 365 migrants in Asylum Centre (AC) Banja Koviljaca, AC Sjenica, AC Tutin, AC Krnjaca, AC Obrenovac, Reception Centre (RC) Bujanovac, RC Pirot, RC Presevo, RC Bosilegrad across the country.

In January 2024, the SCRM reported a total of 2,782 recorded migrants. In the following month, February 2024, the total number of recorded migrants by SCRM decreased to 1,687.



PROFILES

This sample consists of 384 surveyed in reception facilities in Serbia. The average age of interviewees was 28, with the youngest respondent being 18 and the oldest 62 years old. Sixty-eight per cent of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 29. Most respondents (70%) were single. Nearly all the respondents were men (95%), while women made up five per cent of the sample.

In February 2024, the top three nationalities were broadly consistent with January. Syrian nationals were the largest nationality group making up 43 per cent of the sample, a six per cent increase from January. Afghani nationals follow with 20 per cent, which is a 16 per cent decrease from January. Moroccan nationals made up seven per cent of the sample, a slight two per cent decrease from January.

Most of the respondents reported completing primary (48%) or secondary (38%) education. Three per cent hold university level degrees and less than one per cent also hold a PhD degree.

KEY FINDINGS

- The number of SCRM-recorded migrants decreased in February by 39 per cent.
- Migrants are rerouting their journeys through North Macedonia. Entries from Bulgaria decreased by 32 per cent, while entries from North Macedonia increased by 28 per cent.
- Key informant interviews revealed instances of extortions from various authorities throughout their journeys, as well as increasing threats of exploitation and abuse by smugglers.

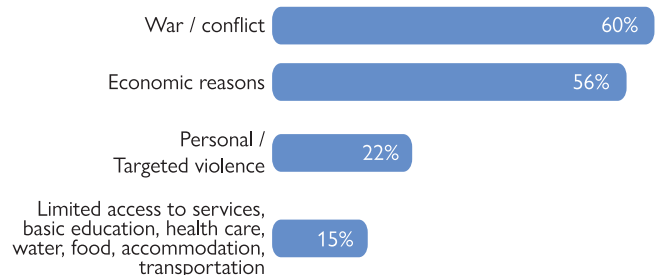


Figure 1: Reason for leaving the country of origin (n=365)
(Respondents may choose more than one answer on certain questions)

* References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

JOURNEYS

Bulgaria (35%) and North Macedonia (53%) remain the main entry points into Serbia. None of the respondents who entered in February reported entering by plane. However, the entries from Bulgaria dropped by nearly a half, while entries from North Macedonia nearly doubled in February 2024. According to key informant interviews, this is reported to be due to increased border patrols at the Bulgarian border which led to migrants rerouting their journeys through North Macedonia. When asked about the next intended destination, the majority (82%) stated Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nine per cent expressed the intention to enter Hungary and seven per cent Croatia, directly from Serbia.

The main modes of travel for migrants moving through Serbia were walking (85%), taxi (64%), and bus (49%). Most (78%) of respondents report traveling with a group, while 22 per cent report travelling alone. Key informants describe the journeys to be treacherous, particularly walking through mountains in difficult weather conditions, so according to their experience, traveling in a group setting offers somewhat of a support network. Female informants explain that they felt safer travelling with a group of friends and relatives.

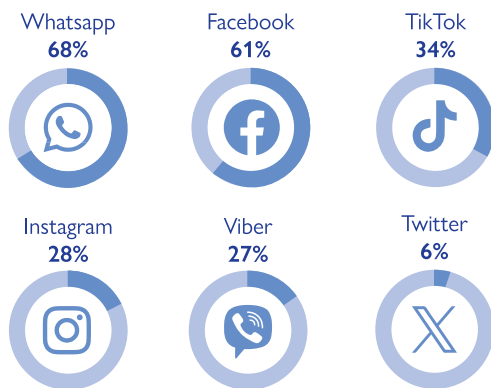


Figure 2: Most frequently cited platforms migrants use to plan their journeys (multiple answers possible) (n=365)

BORDER CROSSING TRENDS

When asked if they were accompanied by people who facilitated their border crossing, 35 per cent of respondents stated that they were accompanied, which is a 18 per cent decrease from January. Key informant interviews reveal that the use of border crossing facilitation is well organized and suggests that this practice could be more prevalent than the individual survey data indicates. Migrants negotiate the cost of the border crossings with the smugglers and prices therefore fluctuate.

In February, over half (56%) of the respondents who entered from Bulgaria stated that they were facilitated to cross the border, while 19 per cent reported the use of facilitation to enter from North Macedonia. In February, there was a decrease in reported instances of border crossing facilitation.

Respondents who confirmed they were facilitated and stated the price, paid on average 1,000 EUR. Furthermore, they paid on average 1,300 EUR to be facilitated from Bulgaria, slightly higher than in January, and 600 EUR from North Macedonia, slightly lower than in January.

Thirty-two per cent of respondents reported that they had attempted and failed to cross a border at least once. Of those respondents who stated that they had attempted and failed to cross a border at least once, 72 per cent travelled alone while 28 per cent travelled with a facilitator. Nine per cent reported attempting to enter Croatia, while thirteen per cent reported they tried to enter Hungary. Out of all crossing attempts, 73 per cent reported being returned by authorities, while 22 per cent reported route closure, which is a thirteen per cent increase from January. Route closures were particularly reported as a major obstacle in reaching Hungary.

REASONS FOR LEAVING

Survey respondents cited war and conflict as the primary driver for leaving their countries of origin (60%), followed by economic reasons (56%), personal targeted violence (22%) and limited access to basic needs such as food, accommodation, and education (15%). Of those surveyed, 40 per cent reported residing in a transit country for longer than a year. This is nearly double the amount reported in January. Türkiye remained the most frequently cited country (74%), followed by Greece (17%).

Türkiye is the main location from where migrants depart for the Western Balkans and is a country in which migrants tend to stay longer. Nationals of the Syrian Arab Republic (63%) and Afghanistan (13%) were the main nationalities departing from Türkiye. The top three reasons reported on why they left the country of departure were due to poor economic conditions (74%), fear of being deported to the country of origin (28%), and persecution (11%).

INTENDED DESTINATION COUNTRIES

Figure 3 below provides a percentage breakdown of top five intended countries of destination:

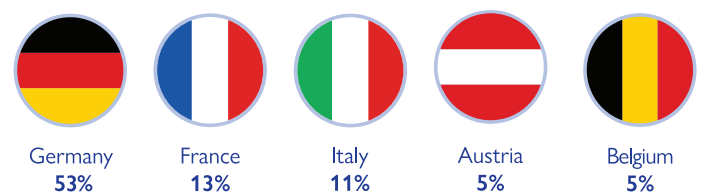


Figure 3: Top five countries of destination reported by migrants. (n=365)

Most respondents reported Germany as their final destination, followed by France, Italy, Austria, and Belgium. Respondents chose their final destinations based on the potential for economic prosperity (46%), family and co-nationals' connections (35%), and safety (6%).

SPECIAL FOCUS – WOMEN

To contextualize the journeys, experiences and complex needs of people on the move, IOM carries out group interviews, alongside quantitative data collection, with specific migrant groups every month. This section aims to give context to the quantitative data. It does not claim to be representative but portrays one of many possible experiences of individuals and groups transiting through Serbia. For this section, key informant interviews were held in RC Bujanovac. The sample consisted of 10 women from the Syrian Arab Republic, Islamic Republic of Iran, Yemen, and the Republic of Congo.

- 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. The migration experiences of women, offer insights into the dynamics of decision-making processes and the unique hardships encountered, particularly when travelling with children. While some women interviewed expressed attachment to their homeland, the escalating conflict and safety concerns led them to follow the guidance of their husbands. The interviewees travelling with their husbands revealed the decision to migrate was joint, while the planning of the journey, and negotiations with facilitators was handled by their spouses.
- Throughout their difficult journeys, the women interviewed revealed they grappled with multifaceted challenges, magnified by the presence of children. Inadequate hygiene conditions, harsh weather, and safety concerns impacted their physical and emotional well-being. Accommodation safety varied, with Serbia emerging as a relatively secure destination. However, instances of mistreatment by authorities throughout the journey underscored the vulnerabilities faced by migrant women, including detainment, strip searches, and extortion. Some interviewees revealed multiple instances of extortion from various authorities throughout their journeys, which varied from 100 EUR to 1,400 EUR. Upon refusal or inability to pay, the women were arrested and detained, some up to two months without being allowed to contact their family.
- Travelling with children increased the complexity and hardship of the journey. Interviewed women unanimously agreed that the emotional toll of witnessing distressing sights, such as lifeless bodies along the road, and navigating strenuous conditions alongside their children was profound. The constant fear for their children's safety, coupled with limited access to essential resources and medical care, compounded the challenges they faced.
- Smugglers posed significant challenges and threats during migrants' journeys. Migrants spoke of instances of theft, deception, and misinformation and expressed feeling unsafe, given that the smugglers withheld crucial information such as to which country were they taking them. Respondents revealed that the smuggling networks are very problematic for the migrants because smugglers often rob, threaten, deceive and endanger them.

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 Serbia.

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 Serbia, registration information and movement modalities within the country. 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.

Some information which serves as context or explanation for particular concepts or trends are repetitive in each report, as it is important for new readers to be able to understand the information.

Data was collected from 1 February to 29 February 2024 in RCs/ACs (AC Banja Koviljaca, AC Sjenica, AC Tutin, AC Krnjaca, AC Obrenovac, RC Bujanovac, RC Pirot, RC Presevo, RC Bosilegrad).

Key informant interviews

Key informants can help provide information on the modus operandi of migrant mobility. The purpose of the key informant interviews is to contextualize the quantitative data gathered through the survey.

Special focus - group interviews

Group interviews are carried with migrants inside reception centers are conducted by IOM and SCRM staff who are trained in leading qualitative focus group discussions with vulnerable populations. SCRM is always present in the centers. The information is not representative and does not intend to draw general conclusions about migration nor all migrants in Serbia

LIMITATIONS

The data collection is conducted in the context of the following limitations:

1. This data is based on a convenience sample of migrants in the survey locations during the time frame indicated and can therefore not be generalized to the broader population of migrants in Serbia, or anywhere else.
2. The data collection is limited to the RCs/ACs; therefore, no data collection occurs outside of centers settings. Entry points, bus stations, and railroads are known locations of migrant movements, however, in Serbia IOM and SCRM does not collect data at such locations. no data collection occurs outside of camp settings. Entry points, bus stations, and railroads are known locations of migrant movements, however, in Serbia IOM and SCRM does not collect data at such locations.