Demographic Effects on Civic Engagement and Voter Education in North Macedonia

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Introduction

The report on Demographic Effects on Civic Engagement and Voter Education is a result of a comprehensive evidence-based research that provides unique respondent data and insights about priorities, confinements, and responsiveness to motivational stimuli for 13 demographic profiles of voters.

The report includes a wide spectrum of recommendations for each of the analysed demographic profiles with regards to modalities of civic education, raising awareness on the importance of the election process, choice of media, tools and channels for communication and types of messages.

Stakeholders that deal with civic and voter education may use the findings and recommendations of the Report which are aimed to help enhance the effectiveness and efficacy of voter and civic education campaigns as well as to provide alternative modalities for increased voter engagement.

The report is a joint effort of the TIM Institute[1] and the Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities[2], part of the Project "Support to Electoral Reforms in North Macedonia" of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), implemented by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and its partner, the National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM).

The Project's overall objective is to support democratic and credible election processes that facilitate political participation and social integration by enabling voters to freely select their representatives and hold them accountable.

The project activities have been channelled to support the overall objective through the achievement of three outcomes:

Outcome 1: Strengthened institutions conduct fair and efficient election processes.

Outcome 2: Internally democratized political parties present citizen-oriented policies and election programs.

Outcome 3: Empowered citizens hold political parties and elected officials accountable.

Beneficiaries of the Project are election management bodies at all levels, government agencies such as Ministry of Information, Society and Administration, Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, State Statistical Office, Ombudsperson Institution, State Audit Office, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice; political parties, non-government organizations, voters and citizens in general.

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1 http://www.timinstitut.mk
2 http://www.isshs.edu.mk/

OVERVIEW

The quantitative face-to-face survey was conducted on a nationally representative sample of 1209 respondents (aged 18 years and above), with an estimated margin of error of +2.81 percentage points at 95% level of confidence. The margin of error is larger among subgroups of respondents.

Methodology

The extensive demographic research entailed a combination of quantitative computer-assisted face-to-face survey and qualitative research, carried out from 30 July to 31 August 2020.

The sample was designed to reflect the demographic characteristics of the country, with representative distribution within demographic groups and regions (according to the latest census and estimations by the State Statistical Office)[3]. It was d i stributed proportionally among permanent residents of households in urban and rural areas of the eight statistical regions in North Macedonia. Interviewees included members of the Macedonian, Albanian, Roma, Turkish and other ethnic communities.

To ensure further comprehensiveness and quality of the research, 9 targeted booster interviews were conducted with citizens from the following nine groups:

- Rural women
- First time voters (18-20)
- Rural youth
- Very poor
- Chronically unemployed
- Persons with disabilities
- Remote communities
- Roma
- Other ethnic communities (Turks, Serbs, Vlachs, Bosniaks, etc.)

For each of the nine target groups, 32 respondents from eight statistical regions in the country were included in the survey as a booster.

As such, the total number of respondents who participated in the quantitative face-to-face survey for both samples is 1,497 citizens.

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3 https://www.stat.gov.mk/Default_en.aspx

In addition, a qualitative research included 12 focus groups and 4 in-depth interviews with the following demographic groups:

- Urban population
- Rural population
- Women
- Women from rural areas
- Youth general
- Youth from rural areas
- First time voters
- Persons with disabilities
- Persons from remote communities
- Roma people
- Other ethnic communities
- The very poor
- Chronically unemployed

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, focus groups were organized online via the Zoom platform.

In-depth interviews were conducted only with the group of very poor persons. This method was selected to address the lack of respondents' access to online and technical resources required for the participation in the online focus group.

Research data were collected by the TIM Institute[4].

The findings for each target group are structured under the following sections[5]:

- Topics of interest
- Information souces
- Civic participation
- Election process
- Communication with candidates and parties
- Barriers
- Recommendations

This report presents only the findings for the variables that have statistical significance and those that appear noteworthy for the readers.

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4 TIM Institute is a member of ESOMAR, a membership organization representing the interests of data, research and insights professionals at an international level. As a member of ESOMAR, every employee of TIM Institute must work according to the ESOMAR code of conduct and comply with the European Union General Data Protection Regulation. Every employee goes through systematic education on ethics and aspects related to data collection, management and protection.

5 The research findings provide opinions and thematic information which vary over time. The sample surveys may be subject to multiple sources of error and unforeseen factors, including sampling, coverage, and measurement errors. Due to the rounding of numbers, the sum of the percentages may not always be 100.

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in socio-political developments in the country

Slightly over half of the general population (54%) are "very" or "somewhat interested" in the current socio-political developments in the country and the world, while almost half of the citizens (46%) are "not at all" or "not very interested".

In the general population group, the interest in the socio-political developments is more pronounced among:

- Men
- Ethnic Macedonians
- Elderly
- Citizens with higher education
- Retirees or public sector employees

How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?

Remote communities	14%	45%	24%	17%
Urban in general	17%	37%	29%	17%
General population	16%	38%	29%	17%
Rural in general	16%	38%	29%	17%
Other ethnicities	17%	35%	31%	17%
Women in general	10%	37%	31%	21%
Rural women	9%	37%	33%	20%
Rural youth	10%	35%	35%	19%
Very Poor	13%	32%	34%	22%
Chronically unemployed	7%	36%	32%	22%

	Very	Somewhat	Not very	Not at all
Persons with disabilities	11%	31%	35%	20%
Youth in general	8%	31%	34%	26%
Roma	8%	30%	31%	32%
First time voters	3%	18%	34%	46%

Legend:
- Very
- Somewhat
- Not very
- Not at all
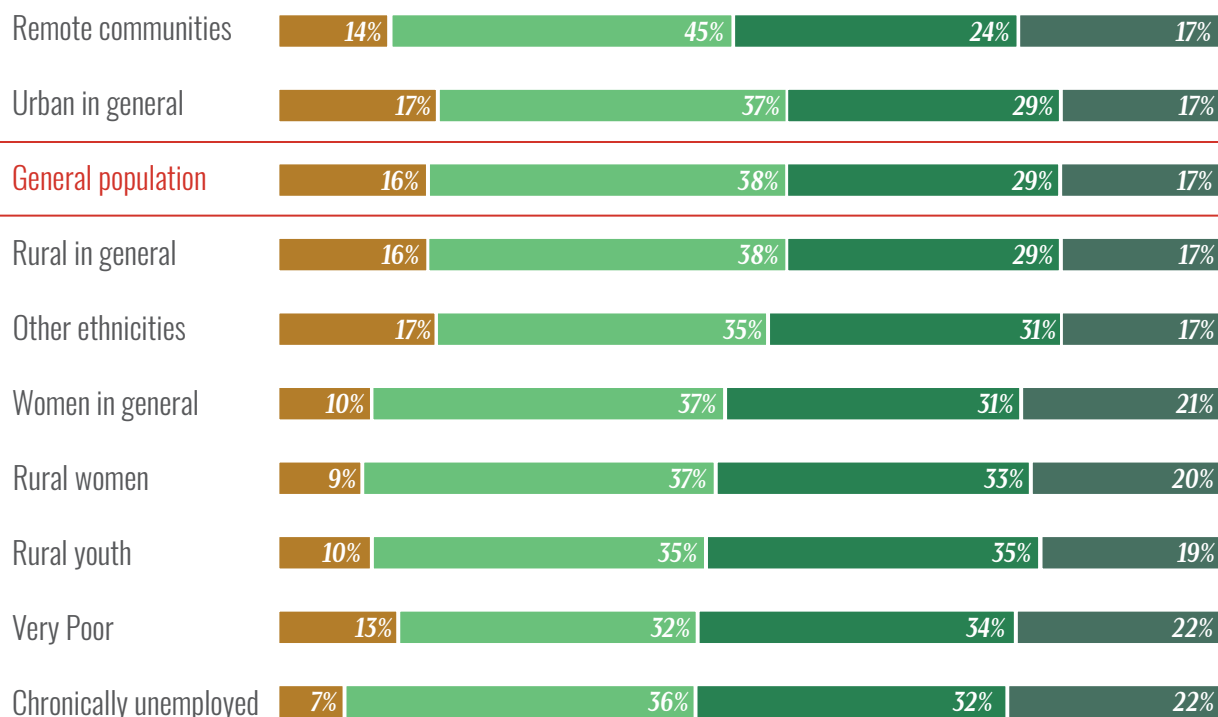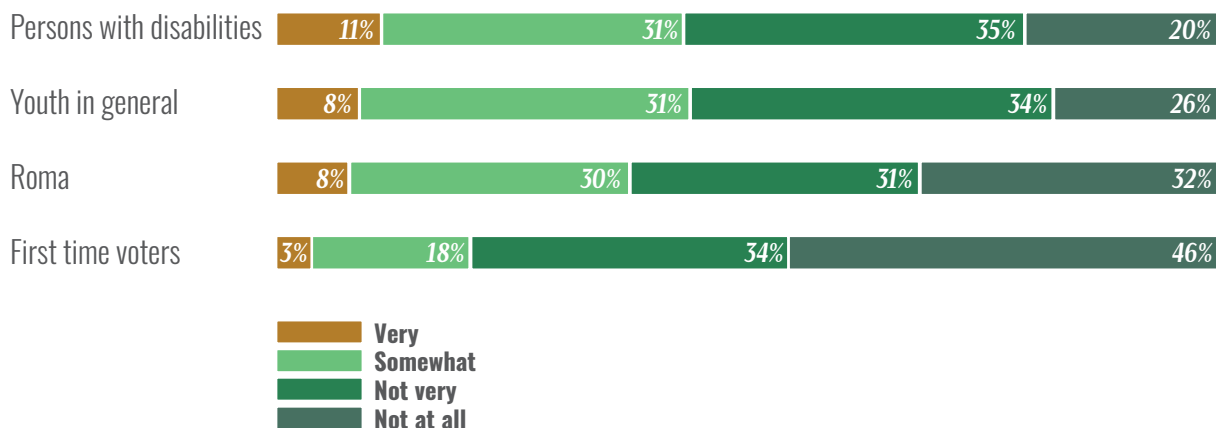
> Compared to the general population, people living in urban areas and those in remote communities tend to be more interested in the socio-political developments in the country and in the world.

Roma and first time voters appear to be the least interested in socio-political developments.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the formation of the new Government rank the highest among the socio-political issues of interest among all demographic groups, which were affected by the developments during the conduct of the survey.

However, there are specifics with regards to the interest in current issues across different demographic groups, mostly related to issues that affect their lives and immediate surroundings.

Youth are mostly interested in education during the pandemic, sports events, entertainment and local cultural events, as well as projects of youth organizations and student exchange programs.

Women share similar concerns with youth about the COVID-19 impact on education processes, kindergartens, unemployment, and youth problems.

People living in rural settlements and in remote communities are struggling with access to services such as: health care, clean water, electricity, sewerage system, roads, while people in urban settlements are concerned about air pollution in the cities, urbanisation and urban mafia (improper and illegal urban planning and construction work, mostly related to corruption in the local government).

Roma's issues of concern are related to informal Roma settlements, construction of illegal buildings, lack of personal documentation, infrastructure, water supply and sewerage, social and health care.

Persons with disabilities are often faced with isolation in the community where they live. In addition to the unfavourable socio-economic relations of persons with disabilities, there is a need for social protection in all spheres of social life: health care, education, employment and other activities.

Similarly to other marginalized and vulnerable demographic groups, chronically unemployed and very poor people are mostly concerned to "make-ends-meet" due to poor socio-economic conditions. They report being less interested in the socio-political developments as their primary interest is how to survive the day.

How often do you discuss the current political developments in the country?

Group	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Does not know
Remote communities	9%	27%	34%	30%	
Urban in general	10%	31%	38%	21%	
General population	11%	33%	35%	20%	
Roma	19%	27%	39%	11%	5%
Very poor	11%	35%	38%	16%	
Rural in general	11%	36%	31%	20%	1
Persons with disabilities	5%	44%	36%	11%	4%
Other ethnicities	12%	38%	29%	21%	
Women in general	13%	38%	35%	14%	
Rural women	14%	41%	33%	12%	1
Chronically unemployed	15%	40%	29%	14%	1
Rural youth	15%	44%	26%	15%	
Youth in general	25%	41%	26%	9%	
First time voters	33%	54%	13%		

- **Never**
- **Rarely**
- **Sometimes**
- **Often**
- **Does not know**

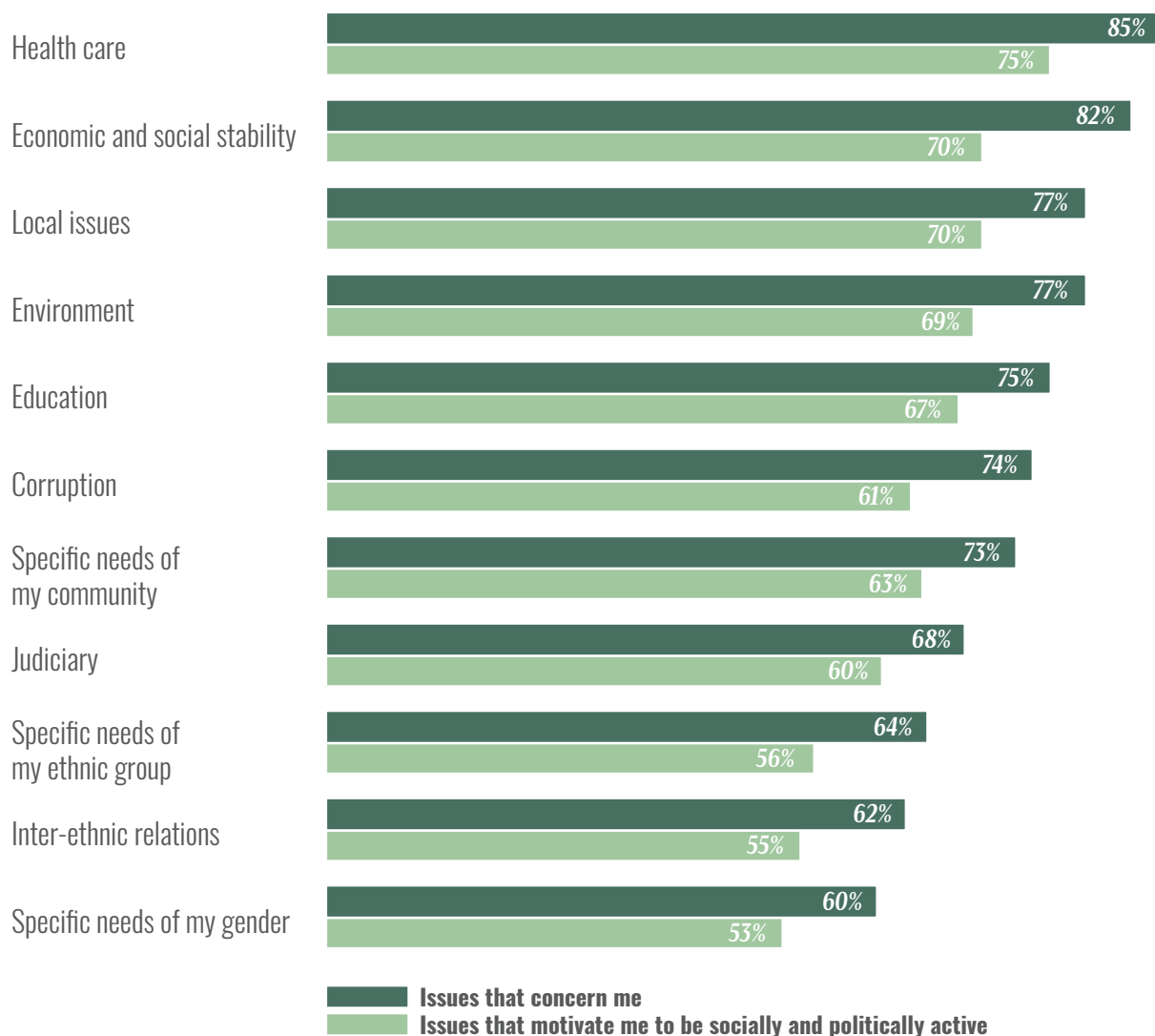More than half (55%) of the general population sometimes or often discuss the current socio-political developments in the country, while 44% rarely or never do.

Most willing to discuss these issues are people living in remote communities and the urban population, which also show the greatest interest is socio-political developments, whereas the least willing are all youth groups, especially first time voters.

Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/topics concern you?

How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially and politically active?

Issue	Concern me	Motivate me
Health care	85%	75%
Economic and social stability	82%	70%
Local issues	77%	70%
Environment	77%	69%
Education	75%	67%
Corruption	74%	61%
Specific needs of my community	73%	63%
Judiciary	68%	60%
Specific needs of my ethnic group	64%	56%
Inter-ethnic relations	62%	55%
Specific needs of my gender	60%	53%

■ **Issues that concern me**
■ **Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active**

Health care (85%) and economic and social stability (82%) are the most important issues that concern the general population living in the country. These issues are considered the key motivators for their social and political activation.

Concerns about these issues are more noticeable among men, older respondents, those with higher education, retirees or employees in the public sector.

All demographic groups are interested in tangible and relatable issues that could improve the quality of their lives. They are less interested in abstract and political issues and care more about health care, economic and social stability, local issues, environment and education. Specific needs related to their gender, their ethnic group and the inter-ethnic relations are of low interest.

Fifty-nine per cent (59%) of women find the specific needs of their gender very or somewhat important, compared to 61% of men. These data indicate that gender issues are of moderate interest for women respondents.
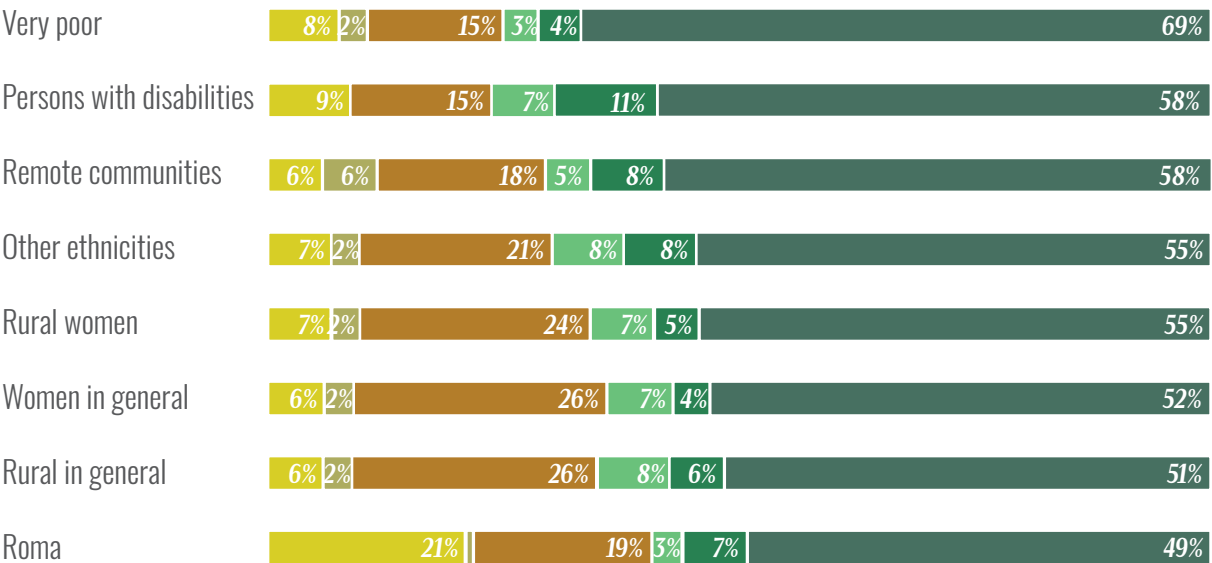
INFORMATION SOURCES

Almost half of the general population (49%) indicated they source information primarily from television and 27% learn about current socio-political developments via social networks. One out of ten citizens tends to get informed via web portals, 5% through their family and friends, while 7% do not seek out information.

> Almost half of the general population (49%) indicated they source information primarily from television
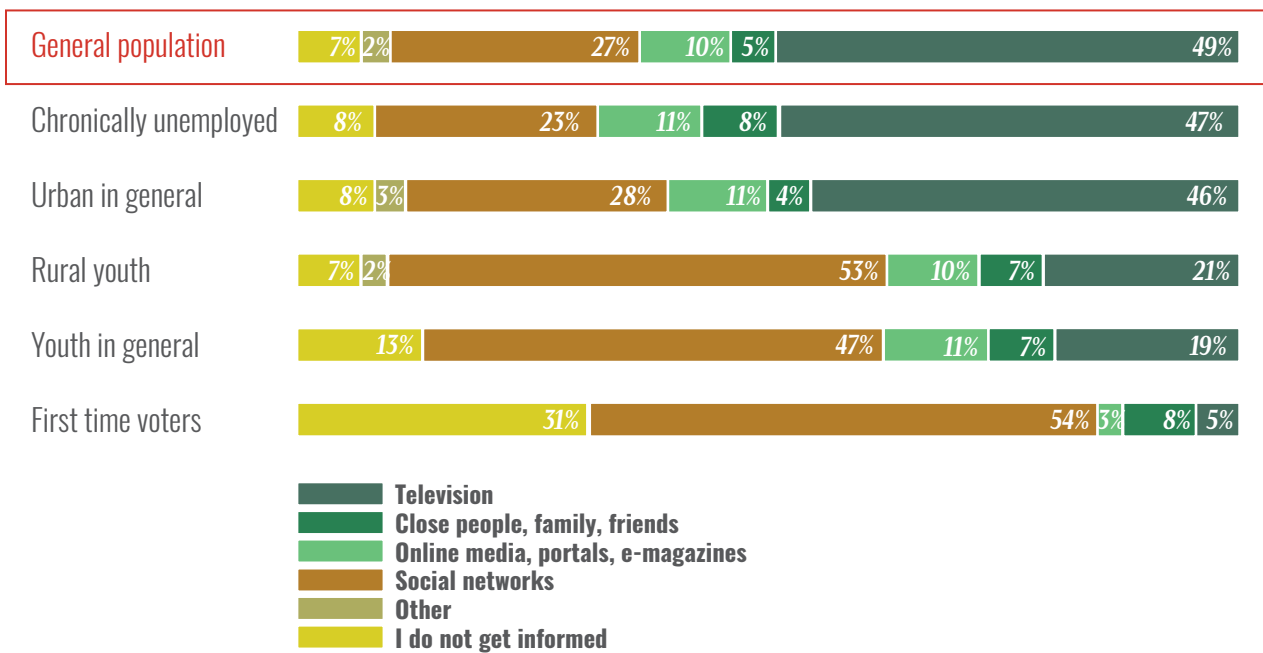
TV 49%
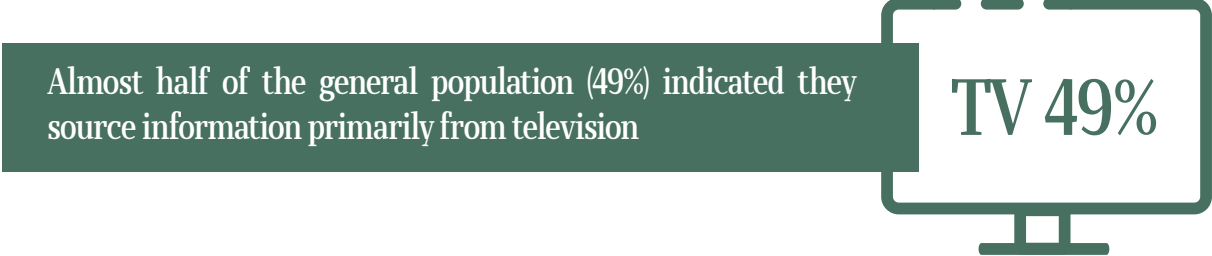
Socio-demographic analysis shows that television is the most commonly used source of information by older respondents, aged 65+ (87%), and least used by the younger respondents, aged up to 24 (20%). Those with lower education tend to get informed via television more (70%) than those with higher education (33%). Retired citizens (83%) and housewives (63%) tend to use TV as a main source of information the most.

Social media is more frequently used by younger respondents, aged up to 24 (52%), students (40%) and those with higher education (35%).

What sources do you most commonly use to get informed about the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?

Very poor	8%	2%	15%	3%	4%	69%
Persons with disabilities	9%		15%	7%	11%	58%
Remote communities	6%	6%	18%	5%	8%	58%
Other ethnicities	7%	2%	21%	8%	8%	55%
Rural women	7%	2%	24%	7%	5%	55%
Women in general	6%	2%	26%	7%	4%	52%
Rural in general	6%	2%	26%	8%	6%	51%
Roma	21%		19%	3%	7%	49%

General population	7%	2%	27%	10% 5%	49%
Chronically unemployed	8%		23%	11% 8%	47%
Urban in general	8% 3%		28%	11% 4%	46%
Rural youth	7% 2%		53%	10% 7%	21%
Youth in general	13%		47%	11% 7%	19%
First time voters	31%		54%	3% 8% 5%	

Legend:
- **Television**
- **Close people, family, friends**
- **Online media, portals, e-magazines**
- **Social networks**
- **Other**
- **I do not get informed**

As far as demographic groups are concerned, the group of very poor, persons with disabilities, women and people living in remote communities and rural areas (except rural youth) tend to use television more.

All youth groups, especially first time voters and rural youth, source information largely via the social networks.

As noted before, first time voters (31%) and Roma (21%) tend to be less informed about the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world.

Very low trust in the media is common among all demographic groups. There is a widespread perception of the media as biased and prone to proliferation of fake news.

All groups tend to believe that the partial and biased reporting of the media contributes to deepening the gap among the people and causes additional confusion and concerns.
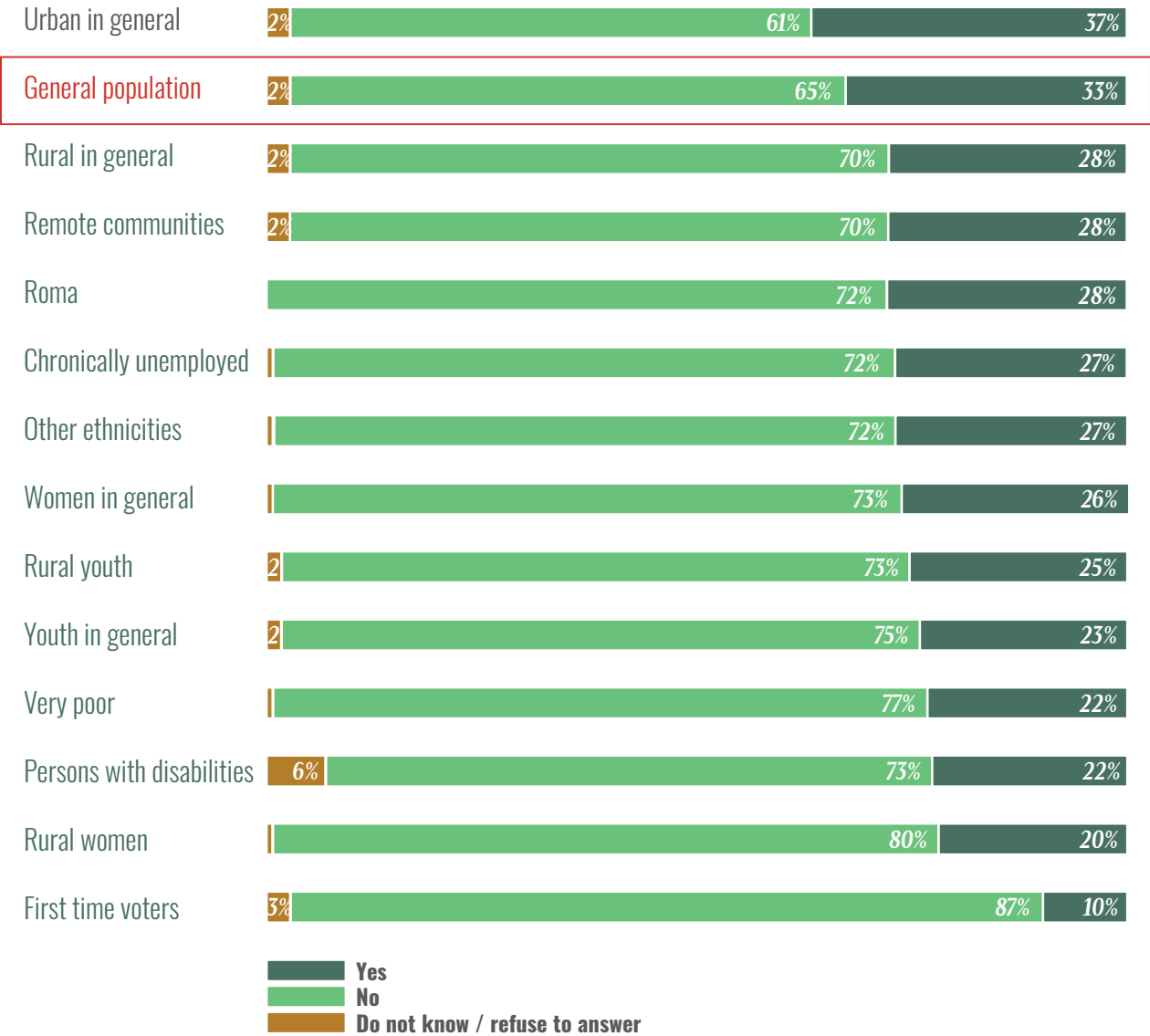
There is a tendency to follow information from several different media in order to compare the presented information and form a personal opinion.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Men tend to be more civically engaged (40%) than women (26%). In addition, respondents with higher education (46%) are significantly more engaged compared to those with secondary (32%) and primary education (17%).

One third of the population has been involved, whereas two thirds have never been involved in any event, activity, or process that could have effected change in the community or the place where they live.
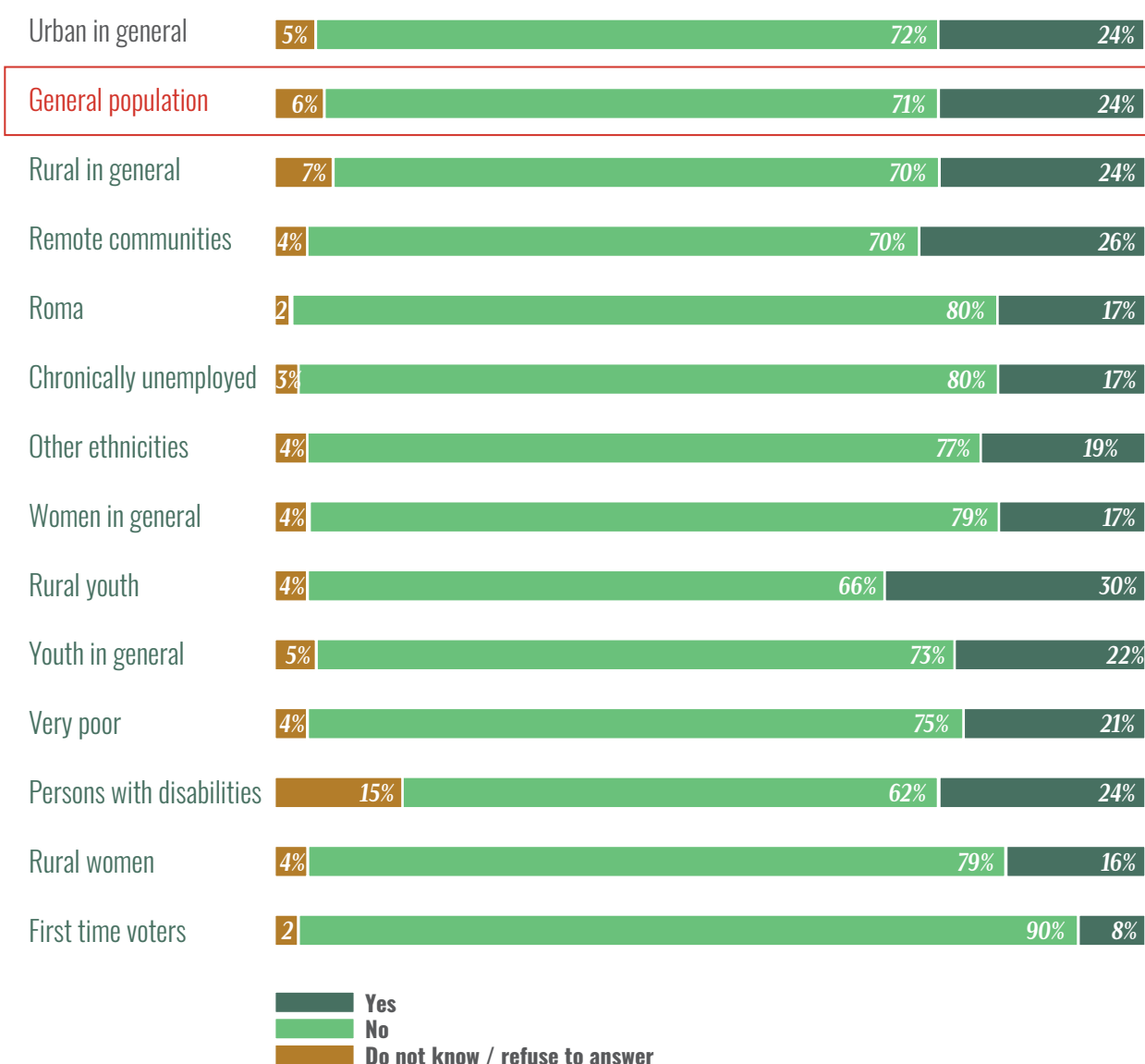
Have you been involved in any event, activity, or process that could have effected any change in the community or the place where you live?

Group	Do not know / refuse to answer	No	Yes
Urban in general	2%	61%	37%
General population	2%	65%	33%
Rural in general	2%	70%	28%
Remote communities	2%	70%	28%
Roma		72%	28%
Chronically unemployed		72%	27%
Other ethnicities		72%	27%
Women in general		73%	26%
Rural youth	2	73%	25%
Youth in general	2	75%	23%
Very poor		77%	22%
Persons with disabilities	6%	73%	22%
Rural women		80%	20%
First time voters	3%	87%	10%

- ■ Yes
- ■ No
- ■ Do not know / refuse to answer

The urban population tends to be the most civically engaged among all demographic groups, likely due to the privileged access to NGOs, availability of participation channels, and higher level of education and social status.

The least engaged are the first time voters, rural women and persons with disabilities.

Are you interested in a more active civic involvement?

Group	Do not know / refuse to answer	No	Yes
Urban in general	5%	72%	24%
General population	6%	71%	24%
Rural in general	7%	70%	24%
Remote communities	4%	70%	26%
Roma	2	80%	17%
Chronically unemployed	3%	80%	17%
Other ethnicities	4%	77%	19%
Women in general	4%	79%	17%
Rural youth	4%	66%	30%
Youth in general	5%	73%	22%
Very poor	4%	75%	21%
Persons with disabilities	15%	62%	24%
Rural women	4%	79%	16%
First time voters	2	90%	8%

■ Yes
■ No
■ Do not know / refuse to answer

Nearly one quarter of the general population (24%) is interested in a more active civic involvement, while 71% do not share this interest.

People living in rural areas (especially rural youth), remote communities and persons with disabilities are the most interested in civic activism. These groups (especially persons with disabilities) have been less involved compared to the general population, likely due to lack of access or opportunities to participate.

The likelihood for recurrent civic engagement is lower compared to the rate of previous engagements, since only 24% of the general population show interest to engage more, compared to 33% who report previous involvement.

The findings show that people with a previous track record of civic activism tend to be disappointed with the results of their actions.

The focus groups provide indications of the reasons for the low civic involvement along with the factors of participation specific to different demographic groups.

The factors common to all demographic groups that contribute to low civic participation can be summarized as follows:

Mindset

- Indifference and passiveness.
- Lack of will, perseverance, and proactiveness to resolve problems.
- Insufficient motivation to persevere in pursuing initiatives.
- Unwillingness to take up responsibility.

Focus on personal benefits

- Focus on personal instead of collective interests.
- Lack of unity and collective action to achieve goals.
- No solidarity and lack of common goals.

Fear of labeling and retaliation

- Political parties attribute civic activities to opponent parties and label civic activities as politically motivated.
- People fear retaliation (fear of losing their employment gor having expressed dissatisfaction).

Family, education, and social system

- Education system that does not stimulate students' civic participation.
- Family system that fails to nurture proactive children.
- Social system that does not recognize, stimulate or award youth activity.

Institutions

- Institutions are perceived as not responsive to citizens' demands.
- Employees in public institutions lack competence, motivation, and enthusiasm.
- Networking instead of merit dominates career prospects.
- Institutions lack transparency, responsiveness, and accountability.

Strong party influence and concentration of power in the political parties

- Strong political influence in the public institutions and the private sector.
- Strong division among citizens along political lines.
- Politically biased non-governmental organizations.

Disappointment and loss of faith

- There is a widespread perception that civic initiatives are ineffective.
- People are disappointed and lack trust in the state institutions.
- Citizens feel helpless and powerless.

Lack of information

- Lack of information where to report problems.

The factors outlined below are specific only to certain demographic groups.

- The very poor, chronically unemployed and Roma indicate that they are preoccupied with basic survival. Dealing with existential problems on a daily basis is an additional reason why these demographic groups have limited time and resources for civic involvement.

- In addition to the challenges faced by both genders, women, especially the rural group, have been traditionally expected to provide family-related care, which diminishes their leisure time and opportunities to engage in civic activities. Furthermore, engrained gender prejudices and stereotypes about women in the society (caregivers, irrational, unassertive and not confident) are demotivating factors specific for women.

- Persons with disabilities face other types of challenges including unresponsive institutions, limited access to public facilities, as well as stereotypes that they avoid work and civic activity. Cumulatively, these factors contribute to the low civic engagement of this group.

Factors that promote involvement

Genuine responsiveness of the system is the key motivator for the general population to become more involved in activities that could influence change in the community, as noted by 28% of the respondents. Other motivating factors concern personal or family benefits (14%), representation of their interests (13%) and transparency and accountability of the institutions (12%). These factors tend to be common across all demographic groups. The key motivating factor for civic involvement is the responsiveness of the system as noted by the youth, rural youth, first time voters, urban population, women, rural women, rural population, chronically unemployed, and other ethnicities.

Community interaction (4%), improving democracy (7%), and societal impact (7%) are the factors that promote civic involvement the least among all demographic groups.

Few groups such as persons with disabilities, very poor, people living in remote communities and Roma, are primarily motivated by obtaining personal or family benefits.
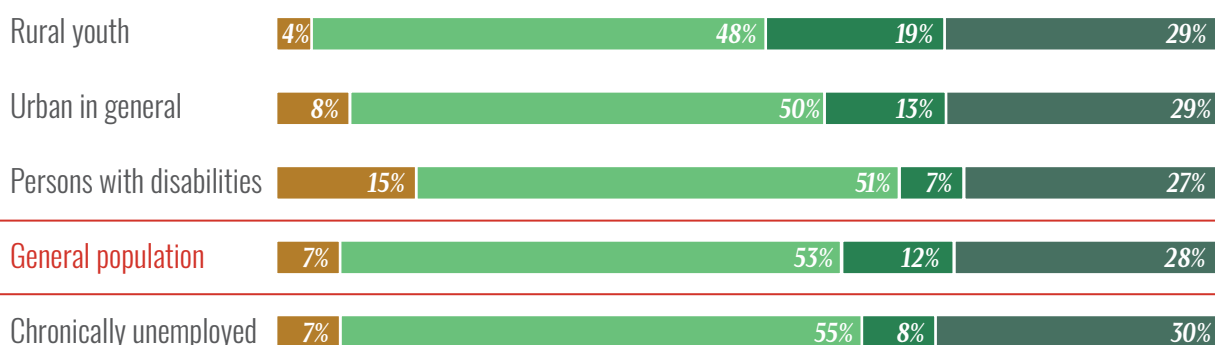
Slightly over half of the general population (53%) do not believe they can make an impact as a citizen, while more than one quarter (28%) consider that they can make a meaningful impact in their municipality.
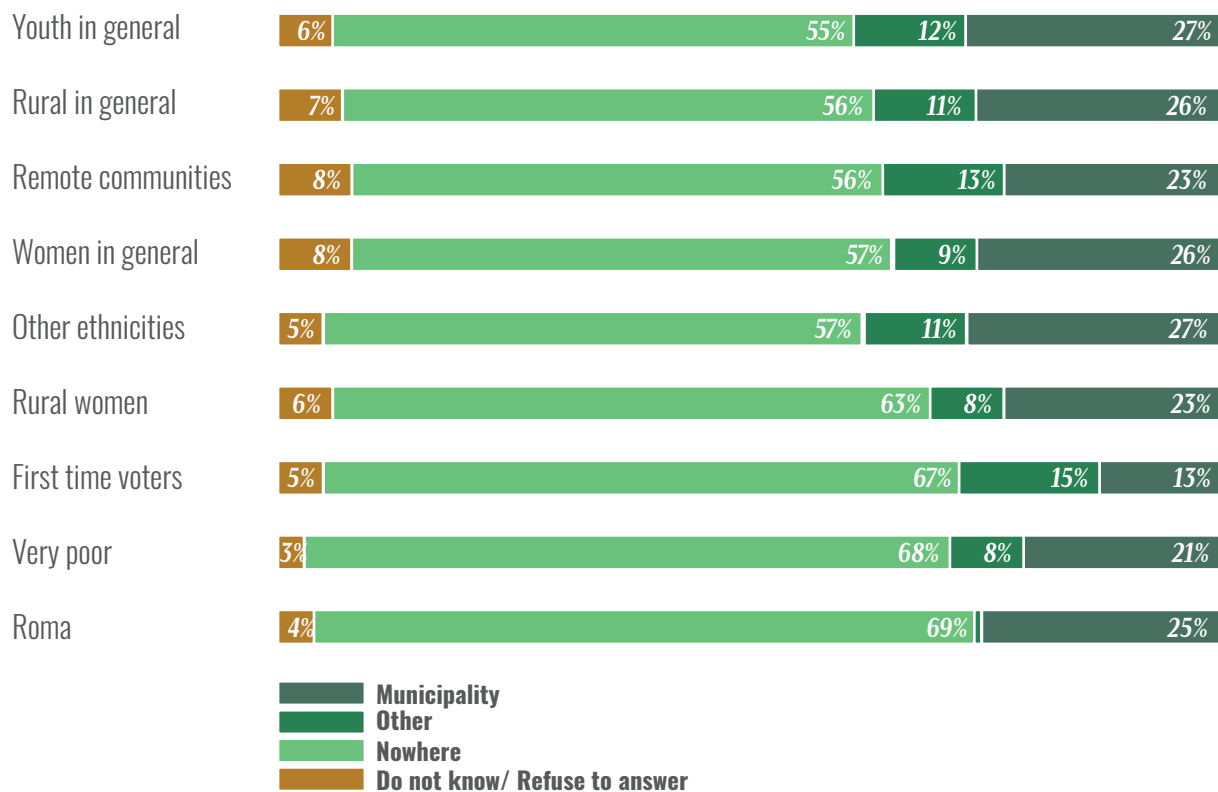
More women (57%) than men (48%) believe they cannot make an impact as a citizen. Respondents from other minorities (Turks, Roma, Serbs, etc.) tend to be more skeptical of their impact as citizens (65%), compared to the ethnic Albanians (55%) and ethnic Macedonians (50%).

In addition, among the general population, disbelief in one's own impact is most noticeable among:

- Younger respondents, aged up to 24 (58%),
- Respondents with primary education (68%),
- Low-income group – up to 12.000 MKD (70%),
- Housewives (83%), farmers (65%) and chronically unemployed (58%).

Where do you think you can have the greatest impact as a citizen?

Group				
Rural youth	4%	48%	19%	29%
Urban in general	8%	50%	13%	29%
Persons with disabilities	15%	51%	7%	27%
General population	7%	53%	12%	28%
Chronically unemployed	7%	55%	8%	30%

Youth in general	6%	55%	12%	27%
Rural in general	7%	56%	11%	26%
Remote communities	8%	56%	13%	23%
Women in general	8%	57%	9%	26%
Other ethnicities	5%	57%	11%	27%
Rural women	6%	63%	8%	23%
First time voters	5%	67%	15%	13%
Very poor	3%	68%	8%	21%
Roma	4%	69%		25%

- Municipality
- Other
- Nowhere
- Do not know/ Refuse to answer

Comparison between different demographic groups shows that Roma, very poor and first time voters are the most skeptical that they can have a civic impact, followed by rural women and people from other ethnic communities.

Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

Concerning participation in public life, the general population cited a preference to meeting colleagues/friends to discuss an issue of personal or family concern (46%), whereas a significant percentage prefer responding to a questionnaire (44%) and reading a brochure or a leaflet (44%). A significantly smaller portion of the respondents are willing to participate in public debates (21%), party gatherings (19%) and online meetings (17%).

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

44%
Respond a questionnaire

44%
Read a brochure or a leaflet

46%
Meet colleagues, friends to discuss

In general, women and respondents with lower education report less interest to participate in the activities mentioned above.

Compared to the general population and other demographic groups, youth (11%), rural youth (15%), first time voters (10%), women (12%), rural women (8%) and the unemployed (11%) are less inclined to participate in party gatherings.

The research shows that 58% of the respondents do not believe in making positive change by individual engagement (35%) or by engagement in NGOs, and as members or participants in NGO activities (23%), while 25% lack interest in politics, which explains the low motivation for civic participation.

Women, younger respondents, respondents from other ethnic minorities and those with lower education tend to indicate lack of interest in politics.

ELECTION PROCESS

Widespread negative perception about voting in elections is notable among all demographic groups.

The negative association of elections common for all demographic groups can be summarized as follows:

Empty promises

- "demagogy", "fake promises", "lies", "good acting", "asphalting" "salary and pension raise"

Charade

- "soap opera", "complete madness" "people and politicians live in parallel universes"

Unnecessary

- "waste of the state budget", "too frequent", "in vain"

Decided by the international factor

- "prearranged", "the international factor is the decisive factor for the election outcome", "does not reflect people's will", "decided by the USA"

Bad election campaigns

- "expensive pre-election campaigns", "attacks and slander instead of good party programs"

Fear and pressures

- "strong political pressure", "fear of job loss", "political pressure and blackmailing", "fear among the citizens"

Election irregularities

⋆ "framed results", "manipulation", "forgery", "corruption" "green market", "bribing votes"
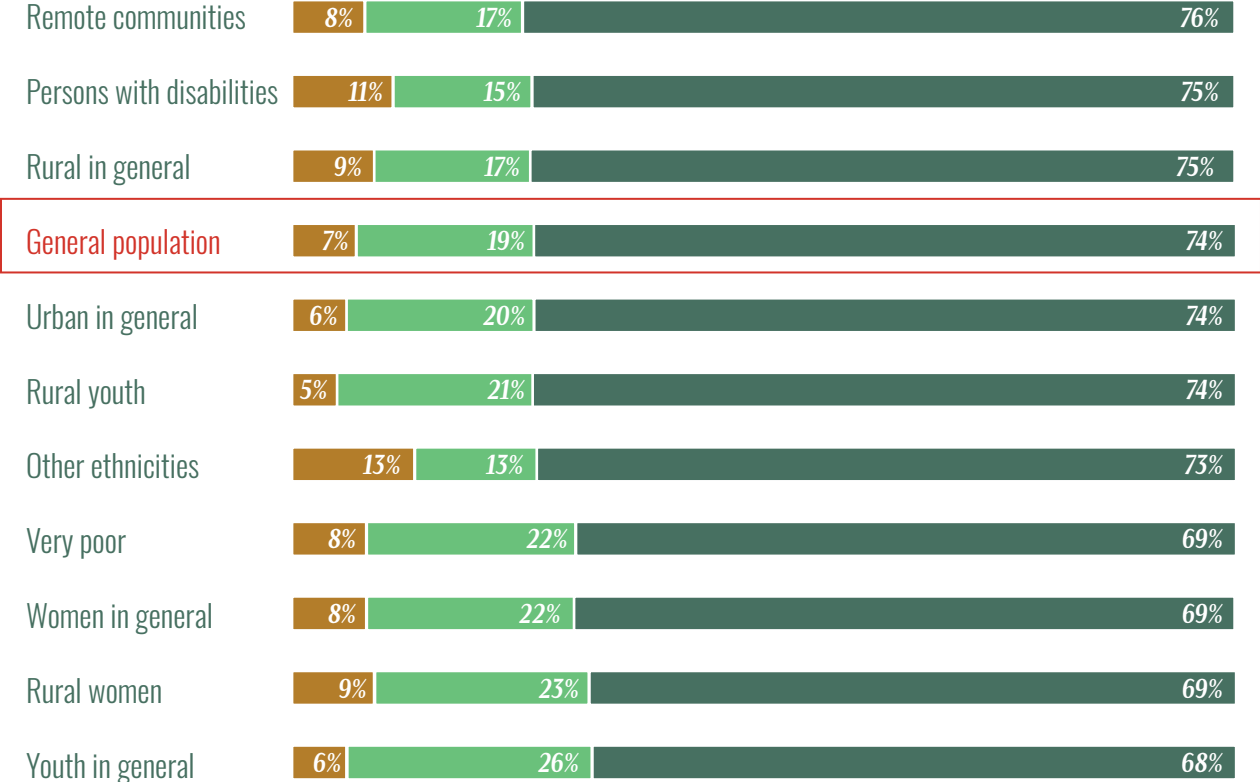
More of the same

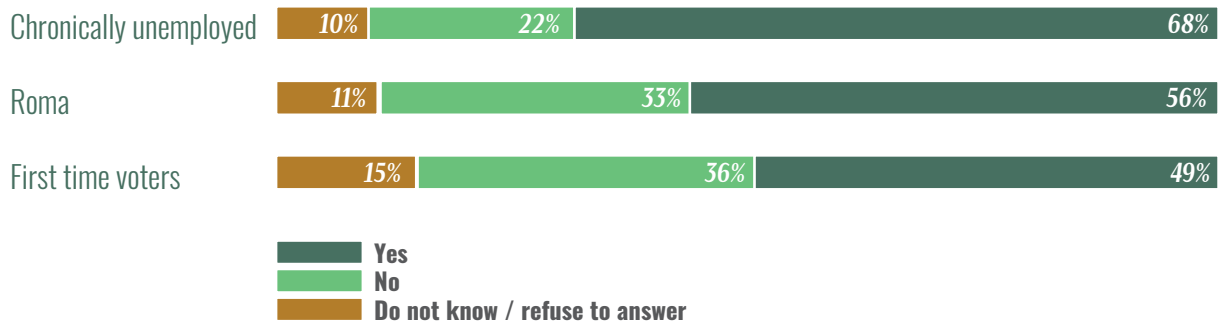⋆ "stagnation", "no changes, the same people"

The focus group findings show that a portion of the participants believe that the Election Day proceeds peacefully, with no significant irregularities, compared to the elections in 2000 which were marred by incidents, gun fires, and breaking and filling in ballot boxes. However, they note that pressures, intimidation, political employments, and bribes persist.

Nearly three quarters of the respondents believe every vote is important and can impact election results (74%), while 19% do not believe in the importance of voting.

More women (22%) than men (15%) do not believe in the importance of voting. More sceptical are younger respondents (28%), and least sceptical are older ones (13%). As far as ethnicity is concerned, disbelief in the importance of every vote is most noticeable among ethnic Albanians (26%) compared to other ethnic minorities (20%) and ethnic Macedonians (16%).

Do you think that every vote is important and can impact election results?

Group	No	Maybe	Yes
Remote communities	8%	17%	76%
Persons with disabilities	11%	15%	75%
Rural in general	9%	17%	75%
General population	7%	19%	74%
Urban in general	6%	20%	74%
Rural youth	5%	21%	74%
Other ethnicities	13%	13%	73%
Very poor	8%	22%	69%
Women in general	8%	22%	69%
Rural women	9%	23%	69%
Youth in general	6%	26%	68%

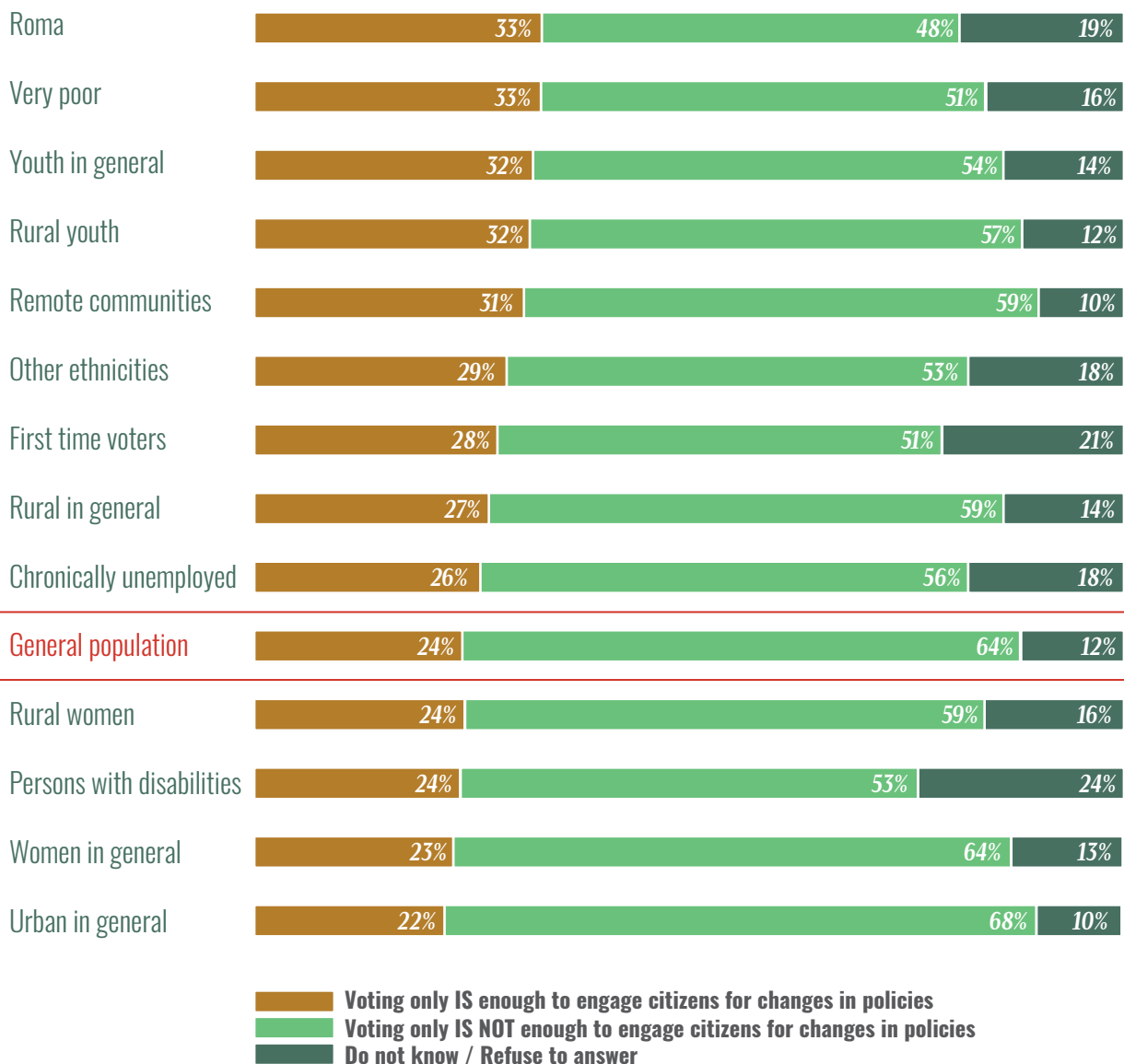|		
Chronically unemployed	10%	22%	68%
Roma	11%	33%	56%
First time voters	15%	36%	49%

- ■ Yes
- ■ No
- ■ Do not know / refuse to answer

Comparison between different groups shows that first time voters and Roma are the most skeptical about the effects of voting, while people living in remote communities, persons with disabilities, and the rural population are the least.

Almost two thirds of the respondents (64%) believe that voting is not sufficient to bring about policy change, one quarter believe so, while 12% are not aware.

Which of the following statements best reflects your opinion?

Roma	33%	48%	19%
Very poor	33%	51%	16%
Youth in general	32%	54%	14%
Rural youth	32%	57%	12%
Remote communities	31%	59%	10%
Other ethnicities	29%	53%	18%
First time voters	28%	51%	21%
Rural in general	27%	59%	14%
Chronically unemployed	26%	56%	18%
General population	24%	64%	12%
Rural women	24%	59%	16%
Persons with disabilities	24%	53%	24%
Women in general	23%	64%	13%
Urban in general	22%	68%	10%

- ■ Voting only IS enough to engage citizens for changes in policies
- ■ Voting only IS NOT enough to engage citizens for changes in policies
- ■ Do not know / Refuse to answer

Motivation to vote

Fifty-six per cent (56%) of the general population indicate they vote regularly, 20% often, 12% sometimes, 6% usually abstain and 4% regularly abstain from voting.

Older citizens (87%), those with higher education (82%), public sector employees (91%), and retired citizens (85%) are the most regular voters during different election cycles.

Compared to the general population, there are more regular voters among people living in remote communities (79%) and other ethnic communities (78%) and less regular voters among persons with disabilities (54%), youth (60%) and Roma (63%). There are more regular voters among ethnic Macedonians (81%) compared to ethnic Albanians (66%)

Forty-three per cent (43%) of the citizens vote for different political parties during different election cycles, whereas 39% regularly vote for the same party.

There are no significant differences with regards to the party loyalty across gender, ethnicity, education and household incomes for the general population.

Which of the following best describes you?

	I always vote for the same political party	I have voted for different political parties	Refuses to answer	Do not know
Rural youth	49%	31%	15%	6%
Youth in general	43%	26%	24%	8%
Rural in general	41%	41%	14%	4%
Rural woman	41%	43%	13%	4%
General population	39%	43%	15%	3%
Remote communities	39%	43%	15%	3%
Women in general	38%	42%	15%	4%
Chronically unemployed	38%	44%	13%	4%
Urban in general	38%	44%	15%	3%
Very poor	34%	48%	15%	3%
Persons with disabilities	33%	51%	13%	4%
Other ethnicities	30%	56%	11%	3%
Roma	27%	51%	15%	8%

Legend:
- I always vote for the same political party
- I have voted for different political parties
- Refuses to answer
- Do not know

Compared to the general population, the rural population is more likely to vote for the same political party, whereas Roma, other ethnic communities and persons with disabilities are most likely to give their vote to different political parties.

Factors that influence the decision to vote

The top three factors that positively influence citizens' turnout are: perception that voting is a civic right and duty (56%), prospects for a better future (42%) and fear that their vote would be misused (29%).

56%
Civic right and duty

42%
Better future

29%
Fear that someone will steal their vote
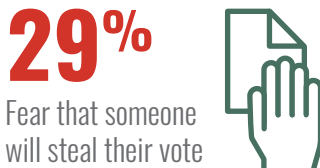
The factors that positively influence citizens' turnout are the same for all demographic groups. Of these, the perception that voting as a civic right and duty tends to be the most important factor for all groups, except for the first time voters who tend to vote to ensure prospects for a better future.

Sixty per cent (60%) of the population indicate that their voting preference is the same or most often the same as that of their families, while 29% state that they vote the same or most often the same as their friends. There is no significant differences across different ethnic groups.

Citizens would like to see more people they know, young people, representatives from their local community and women on the candidate lists. There is no significant differences across different ethnic groups.

If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?

People you know
- 5%
- 8%
- 36%
- 51%

Representatives from your local community
- 5%
- 8%
- 47%
- 40%

Young people

- 5%
- 7%
- 43%
- 45%

Women

- 5%
- 7%
- 54%
- 32%

More likely   **No impact**   **Less likely**   **Do not know**
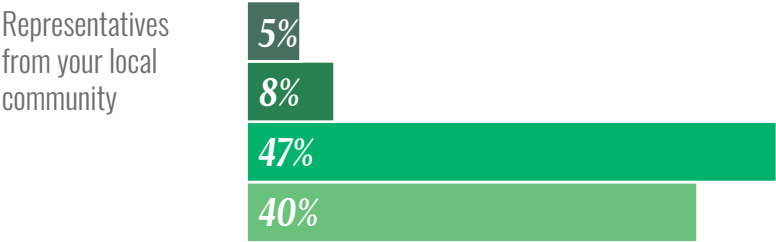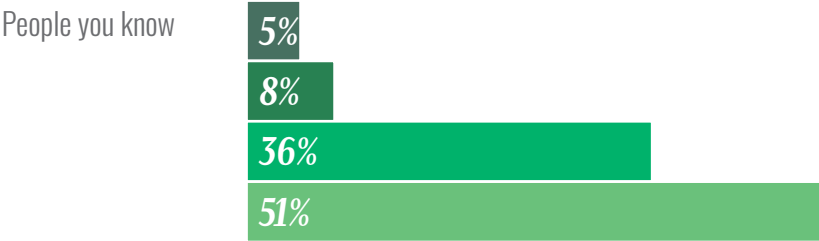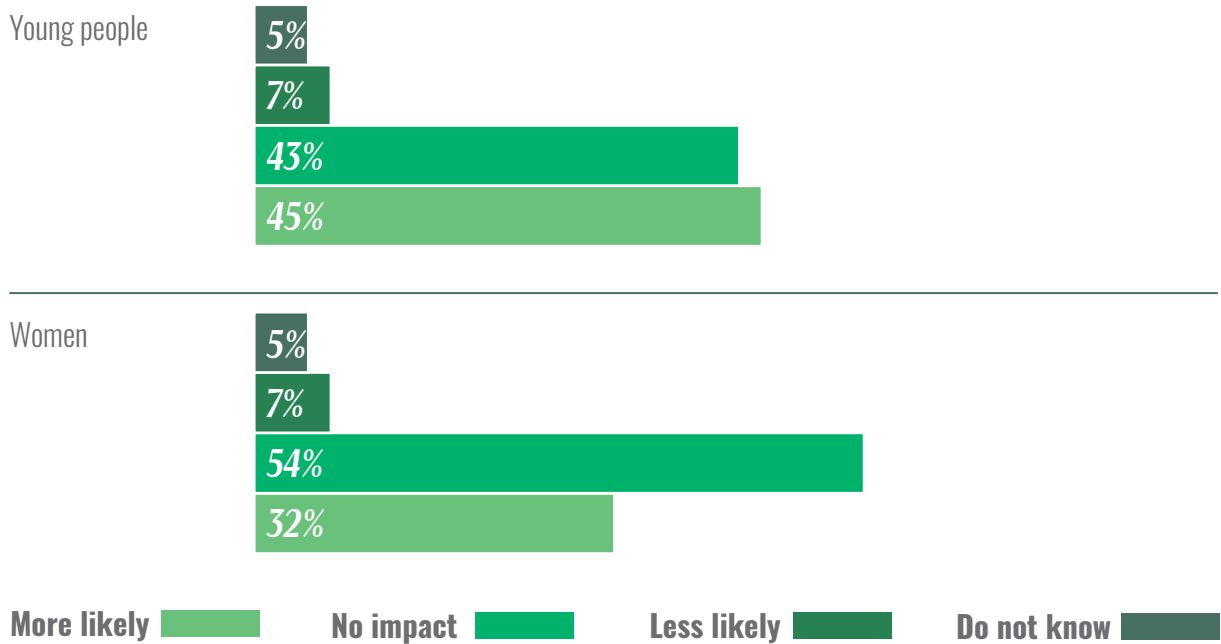
Women prefer other women on the candidate lists (41%), especially rural women (44%), while youth (51%), women (48%) and Roma (51%) prefer young representatives.
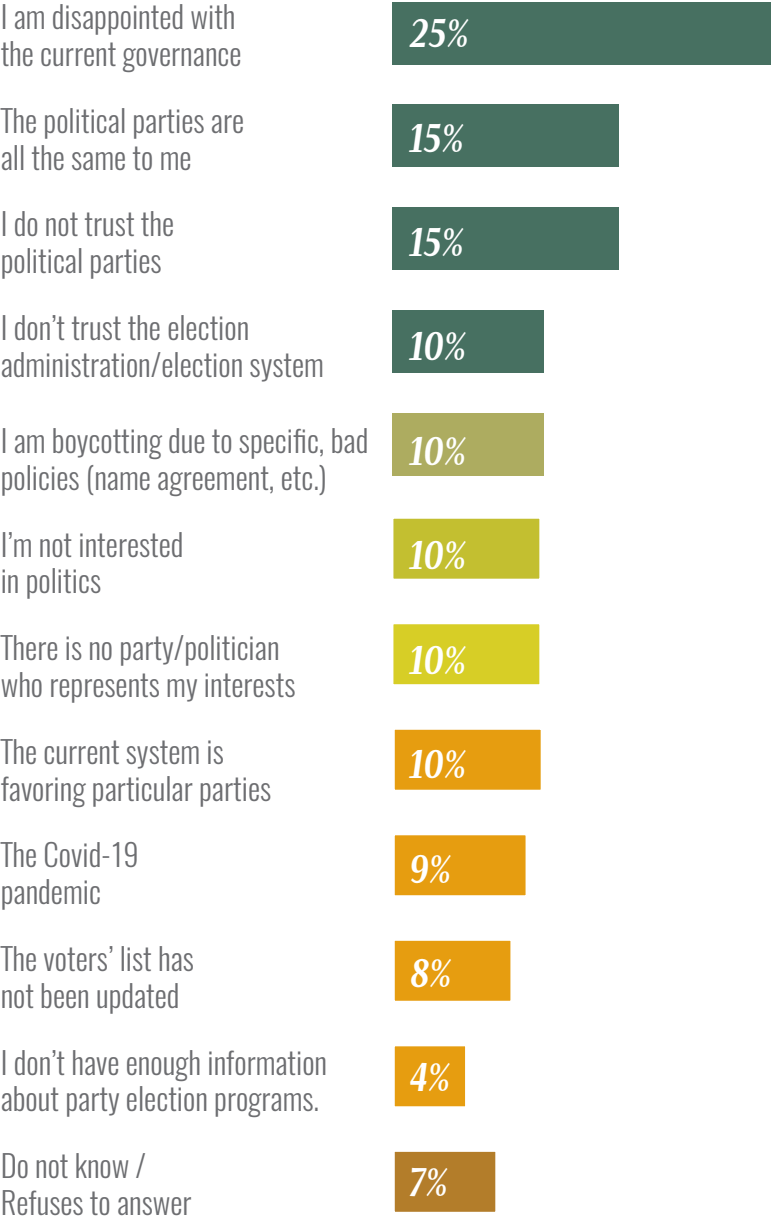
Rural representatives on candidate lists are important for the rural population, but have no impact on other demographic categories.

Roma citizens (59%) are more likely to vote for a political party if the candidate lists include Roma representatives. As far as other demographic groups are concerned, Roma are the least preferable representatives. One quarter of the general population, 28% of the rural population and 31% of the people living in remote communities indicate they are less likely to vote for a political party if Roma representatives are on the candidate lists.

Demotivation to vote

In general, the dissatisfaction with the governance and the political parties demotivates people to go out and vote.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

I am disappointed with the current governance	**25%**
The political parties are all the same to me	**15%**
I do not trust the political parties	**15%**
I don't trust the election administration/election system	**10%**
I am boycotting due to specific, bad policies (name agreement, etc.)	**10%**
I'm not interested in politics	**10%**
There is no party/politician who represents my interests	**10%**
The current system is favoring particular parties	**10%**
The Covid-19 pandemic	**9%**
The voters' list has not been updated	**8%**
I don't have enough information about party election programs.	**4%**
Do not know / Refuses to answer	**7%**

Different demographic groups (urban population, youth, women) indicate that an increasing number of citizens decide not to vote due to dissatisfaction with the political parties in the country. Despite the prevailing opinion that voting is a civic duty, the focus group findings show that many demographic groups (youth, women, people with disabilities) believe that abstention from voting is a legitimate behavior by which to express disappointment and revolt against the political parties that fail to fulfill promises.

Furthermore, all demographic groups believe that the political parties are not interested to be more responsive to the needs of the citizens.

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

TV (52%), social media (14%), web portals (13%), and friends and family members (8%) are the predominant sources of election information.

52%
TV

14%
Social Media

13%
Web portals

8%
Close people
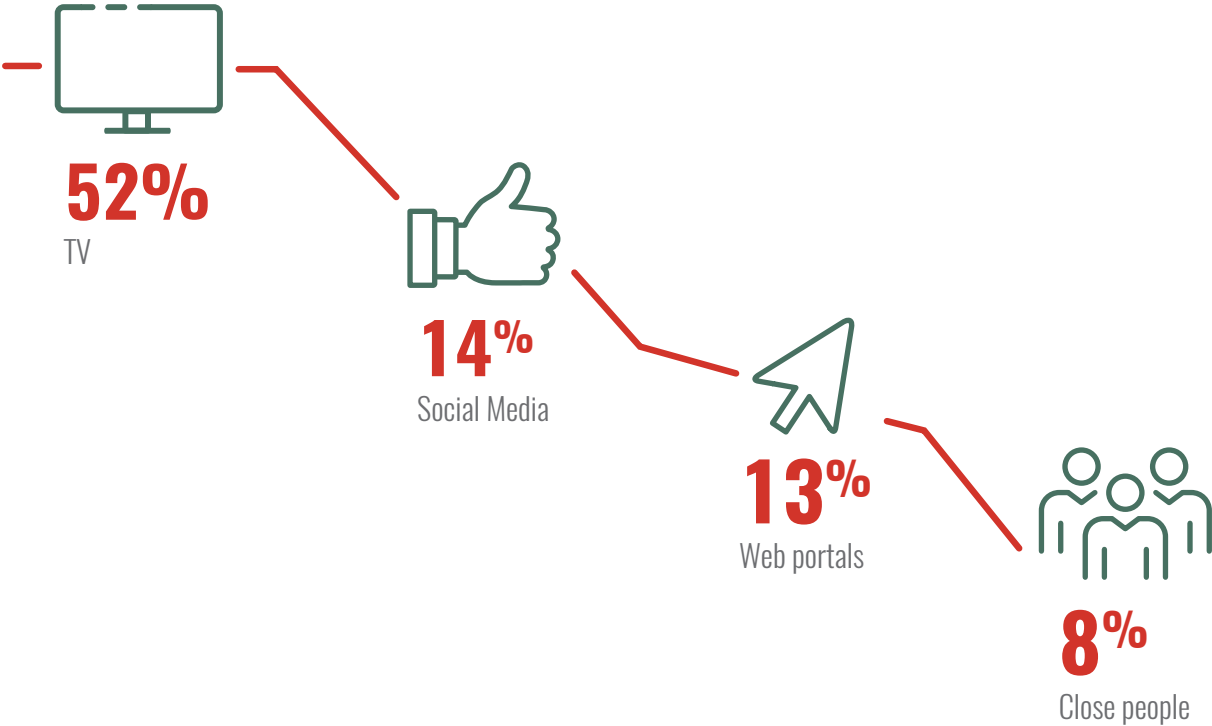
TV is more frequently used by respondents aged above 65 (84%) compared to respondents aged up to 24 (29%), respondents with primary education (69%) compared to those with higher education (39%), and those with income lower than 12.000 MKD (69%) compared to respondents with income higher than 60.000 MKD (39%).

The predominant sources of election information for different demographic groups are similar to those about socio-political development in the country and in the world.

As noted, the very poor, persons with disabilities, women, other ethnic communities and people living in remote communities and rural areas (except rural youth) use television as a predominant source of election information.

All youth groups, especially first time voters mostly get informed about elections via social networks.

Compared to the general population and other demographic groups, first time voters are least informed about elections, and 21% indicated they do not get informed at all.

Various newscasts (48%) and debates (32%) are the most useful methods of obtaining election information, whereas one in ten (11%) indicate that they do not get informed about elections at all.

Preference for debates is more noticeable among:

  * Men.
  * Ethnic Macedonians.
  * People with higher education.
  * People with higher monthly household income.

Preference for newscasts is more noticeable among persons with disabilities, other ethnic communities, poor and women.

> With regards to the type of communication with the candidates before elections, respondents prefer to be informed regularly about the previous achievements and results of the candidates (21%), by the media (18%), via personal communication door-to-door (16%) and in person, but in smaller groups (15%).

The least preferred are the political party programs (5%), rallies (3%), and communication via social media (10%).

The preference for different types of communication with party candidates before elections is similar between different demographic groups. However, few specifics should be noted.

The youth is largely reliant on social media as a type of communication, whereas all other groups are less so. Persons with disabilities prefer media, while people living in remote communities, rural women and Roma prefer in-person communication in smaller groups over personal door-to-door communication.

There is a widespread perception among different demographic groups, especially among the rural population and the remote communities, that the parties visit the communities and contact the citizens only in the pre-election period. Respondents believe that party members cater to their own needs more than to those of the citizens, and are solely guided by political marketing and the number of expected votes.

The most preferable types of communication with the candidates in the period between elections are the same: information about previous achievements and results of the candidates (20%), media (18%), personal door-to-door communication (15%) and in person communication. but in smaller groups (16%). Again, rallies, party programs and social media are at the bottom of the list.

Focus groups findings provide an explanation about the respondents' general lack of interest in political party programs. The belief is that the programs are identical with those from previous elections, "about 80% copy-paste", and the parties fail to fulfill the promises. Therefore, the citizens are reluctant to read a lengthy political party program (sometimes over 300 pages).

In addition, there is a perception, especially among the chronically unemployed, that the political parties' programs offer unrealistic solutions to problems. They make generous promises in the pre-election period such as foreign investments, high average salaries, employments. However, once in office, they forget about the people, especially those who are not members of their political party.

The very few respondents who expressed interest in the political parties' programs do so out of curiosity to find out what promises the political parties make, evaluate how tangible and manageable they are, or see if they cater to their needs.

BARRIERS

Representative democracy can only work when citizens are well informed, actively engaged in voting and other civic activity, and equipped with the skills of advocacy, debating, negotiation, and leadership. Yet, the research shows that almost half of the population is not interested in the socio-political developments in the country, with the exception of the elderly ethnic Macedonian men, with previous experience in public services. Increasing the interest and participation of other demographic groups is of paramount importance and it is the subject of analyses and recommendations in other sections of the Report.

The research has identified a set of common barriers for all groups that affect their willingness and ability to be politically and civically active. These, in addition to a range of barriers deriving from the socio-economic status and previous experience, inform their attitudes and behaviour. The barriers specific to each group are the subject of analysis of the group-specific reports.

The research has identified the following barriers to political and civic involvement experienced by all demographic groups:

- No established culture for civic activism and participation in all demographic groups, especially among rural, vulnerable groups and women.
- Lack of participation channels.
- Skepticism about their power to influence politics and policies in the country.

- Poor responsiveness of the system – lack of interest for citizens' concerns or capacity to act upon it.

- Lack of civic and political skills. Even an informed voter needs more tools to become a full participant in civic life. To make communities better, engaged citizens need to learn the skills of communication, networking, as well as running for public office.

- Fear of pressure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to these identified challenges and barriers, a set of interventions are recommended that may effectively contribute to improving civic and political participation:

Raise awareness about the importance of participation in socio-political life and civic activism among the general population, especially among the youth, women, people with disabilities and the vulnerable groups.

- Focus on outlining the benefits from civic engagement: talk about tangible benefits that improve life quality.

- Connect social and political participation to issues that affect the quality of life: health, economic stability, ecology as the most common. When talking to specific demographic groups relate to their specific topics of interest (e.g. youth and education).

- Promote positive examples of activism. Examples should be demographically diverse (women, youth, other ethnicities, vulnerable groups, etc).

- Demonstrate the power of the group by initiating civic projects and activities with tangible goals (eco-initiatives, humanitarian activities, social projects).

- Identify role models and influencers and promote their activities and impact, especially among the younger population and women.

- Promote NGO activities and visibility.

Promote channels and procedures to encourage participation in the civic life

People tend to lack information about the channels for participation in the socio-political life or they lack opportunities thereof. This is especially the case for the young, inexperienced, and vulnerable groups, such as the very poor or chronically unemployed group.

- Educate the general population about the ways, formats and institutions where people can actively participate.

- Reach out to marginalized communities and help them familiarize about participation channels.

- Create more participation opportunities for the rural population and people with disabilities. While rural youth, people in remote communities and people with disabilities have the highest interest for civic involvement, they lack opportunities to participate or are unaware of the participation channels.

- Establish alternative channels for participation of rural women tailored to the specific barriers they are facing (lack of time, daily agenda, child care, etc.)
- Educate the younger population via school/university educational projects for civic and democratic culture.

Increase the belief in their power to make an impact in their community or society

- Promote positive examples that are recognized and respected by the community. Use examples that prove that activism matters and has the power to correct the society. Consider diversity when choosing examples.
- Put special focus on promotion of achievements of the unemployed, those with lower education or the very poor community. Skepticism in the power to influence is more pronounced among the vulnerable groups and those with fewer educational or financial resources.
- Monitor the needs of different groups continuously.
- Promote smaller community projects and initiatives that tackle various issues of concern, especially those that increase the quality of life.
- The inexperienced youth groups should be targeted separately and be offered opportunities to participate in relevant projects (education, ecology, human rights, etc).

Improve the negative perception of being under-represented by the elected officials

Despite being a valid barrier for all demographic groups, this is especially emphasized among smaller demographic groups, as well as low-income and low-education groups (very poor, unemployed, Roma).

- Include and keep issues relevant for these demographic groups in the public agenda of political representatives.
- Regularly follow up on the communities' concerns in the period between elections.
- Establish channels for continuous communication with different groups.

Empower by facilitating the development of skills and knowledge for confident civic engagement

Because there is a difference in the level of participation related to education, social status and gender, there is a need to strengthen the capacities of other demographic groups, to increase their confidence and incite participation.

- Strengthen capacities of low-income and low-education groups, rural communities, Roma etc.
- Women should be empowered by the development of skills and knowledge to confidently manage their participation without fear of sexist, misogynist abuse and hate speech, intimidation, and violence. Adjust formats to their daily responsibilities and agenda.

Create alliances

With the media (digital and traditional)

- Contribute to building a culture that encourages civic participation at all levels from different demographic groups. Raise awareness about the benefits of active civic participation.

- Promote narratives focused on positive civic participation examples, especially those of less active groups (Roma, women, citizens with lower socio-economic status and young).

- Dedicate more time and space in the programming for covering topics from civic life and activism.

- Promote channels and ways for civic participation.

- Promote diversity of candidates (women, youth, rural) during election campaign.

- Include citizens in debates and talk shows and provide an opportunity to talk about the issues of interest. Debates should be based on the principle of diversity.

With NGOs

- Promote participation, especially among youngsters, by creating awareness about their role and mission and their potential to impact the quality of life.

- Create supporting spaces and opportunities for citizens to come together and act on issues they care about. This is especially important for groups that lack confidence and skills to participate as well as for women interested in collaborative participation.

- Provide guidance and resources that will encourage citizens to confidently participate in civic life.

- Provide a mechanism that will support dialogue between citizens and the authorities. Advocate for the interests of vulnerable groups that lack the knowledge and skills to initiate dialogue with the authorities.

- Due to the limited access to NGOs, the rural population, especially the remote communities, would benefit from guidance on establishing participation networks and channels.

- Promotion of NGOs and their work, especially among groups with lower education and socio-economic status, could help increase their participation.

With influencers/celebrities

Partner with micro-influencers relevant for different demographic groups to promote civic participation.

- Influencers are regarded as more trustworthy by their followers and therefore better positioned to encourage participation, especially among young people and first-time voters.

- Influencers also have a great potential to mobilize women for a specific cause and to increase their participation.

- Influencers should be selected based on their power to influence the community and the degree to which they relate to a specific group.
- The influencer strategy should ensure diversity of influencers to appeal to various demographic groups.

Choose relevant communication channels and apply both traditional and non-conventional approaches

Different media should be used to reach specific demographic groups. Use TV to reach the majority of the population.

TV is especially important to reach the elderly, women, and people on the lower spectrum of income and education.

- Use formats that give opportunities to contextualize the information and increase its relevance.
- Use simple language and present the information in an illustrative manner, especially about the voting process, voting rights, reporting election irregularities.
- Consider other formats in addition to newscasts and debates, editorials, short stories and testimonials that provide perspective into the local concerns and the voting process.
- Ensure wide outreach by use of translated content or sign language.
- Use local TV stations to reach the Roma group, rural communities, and other ethicities.
- Use a variety of programs (political, entertainment, lifestyle, morning programs, etc.).

Use social media to reach the youth, educated and employed segments of the population

Social media has a great potential to ensure engagement and participation of the youth.

Techniques to consider:

- Foster two-way communication
- Promote relevant topics
- Give space for citizens to be heard
- Partner with influencers/celebrities
- Develop candid portrayals of candidates and provide opportunities for the public to interact with them
- Share your opinion on different issues of interest
- Inform about the progress of different issues of interest
- Include a clear call to action

Use other digital media, including web portals and blogs, that have a higher appeal to these segments of the population

Organize direct/face to face meetings or other community events

Building relationships with voters are key to ensuring civic participation. It makes citizens feel appreciated, important and heard.

- This format is beneficial to ensuring participation of citizens who are reticent and lack the confidence and/or time to participate in the public life (Roma, very poor, unemployed). They tend to participate in the public domain in less formal settings.

- Due to the busy schedule of rural women and their affinity for direct contacts and meetings, direct and informal meetings can incentivize their participation.

- The low trust in the media reported by all groups can be countered by organising direct informal meetings and open discussions.

- These should include coffee gatherings, debates, community projects and other forms of communication.

Pilot other non-traditional channels

- Consider ways to reach citizens in their daily lives to disseminate information. Choose modalities that fit well with the daily agenda and habits of each group.

- Consider the use of parks, malls, buses and other facilities to attract the urban population.

- For the rural, Roma, and vulnerable groups use local stores, open markets, barber shops, food packages, bags, etc.

- Organize entertaining activities and events to spark interest, especially among the rural population that lacks entertainment.

- To engage the youth, organize artistic, cultural, or sports activities to strike a balance between education and entertainment.

URBAN
POPULATION

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research
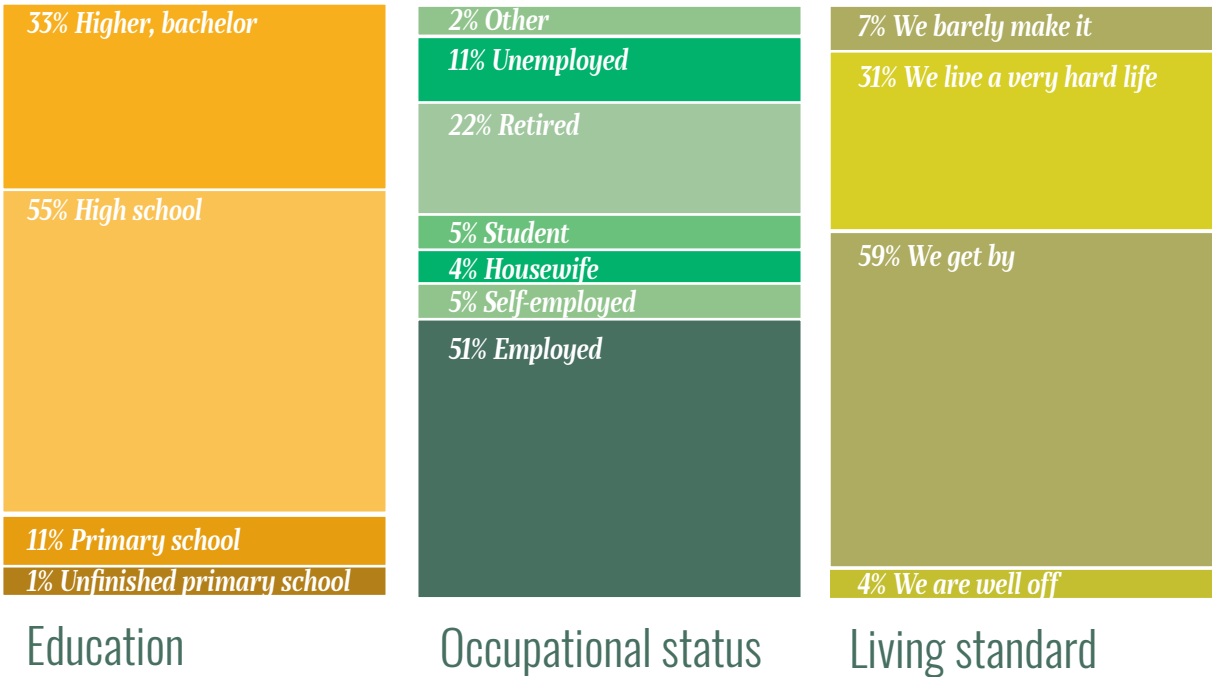
Urban Population – Definition and Size

According to the statistics based on the World Bank population estimates and urban ratios from the United Nations World Urbanization Prospects, in 2019 in North Macedonia there were 1,212,740 people living in the urban areas, or 58.2%.[6]

In line with the current global trends, the urban population in North Macedonia has easier access to quality health care services, state institutions, administration, education, employment and other services.

Demographic profile

A total of 691 inhabitants of urban settlements took part in the quantitative face to face survey.

In order to gain an in-depth insight into the background, perceptions and opinions of this group, the quantitative survey was complemented by one focus group.

Education	Occupational status	Living standard
33% Higher, bachelor	2% Other	7% We barely make it
55% High school	11% Unemployed	31% We live a very hard life
11% Primary school	22% Retired	59% We get by
1% Unfinished primary school	5% Student	4% We are well off
	4% Housewife	
	5% Self-employed	
	51% Employed	

Education   Occupational status   Living standard

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6 Official website of macro trends stats, available at: https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/MKD/north-macedonia/urban-population, accessed on October 14, 2020.

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in the socio-political developments in the country

How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?

16% Very   **37%** Somewhat   **29%** Not much   **18%** Not at all

> Similarly to the rural population, more than half (53%) of the urban population are "very" or "somewhat interested" in socio-political developments, while 47% are "not at all" or "not very" interested.

Six out of ten respondents sometimes or often discuss these issues with other people, while four out of ten rarely or never do. People in urban areas tend to be more willing to share their opinion on socio-political developments compared to people living in rural areas (51% sometimes or often discuss these issues with other people).

According to the focus group participants, the COVID-19 pandemic ranks the highest among the socio-political issues of relevance to the quality of life.

Significant for this demographic group are the concerns related to air pollution, urbanisation, and urban mafia, stray dogs and other local problems.

Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/topics concern you?

How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially and politically active?

Economic and social stability	83% / 70%
Local issues	77% / 68%
Health care	87% / 78%
Corruption	76% / 64%
Education	76% / 73%
Environment	80% / 71%

Specific needs of my community	73% / 63%
Judiciary	70% / 60%
Specific needs of my ethnic group	64% / 55%
Inter-ethnic relations	62% / 54%
Specific needs of my gender	58% / 53%

■ Issues that concern me
■ Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active
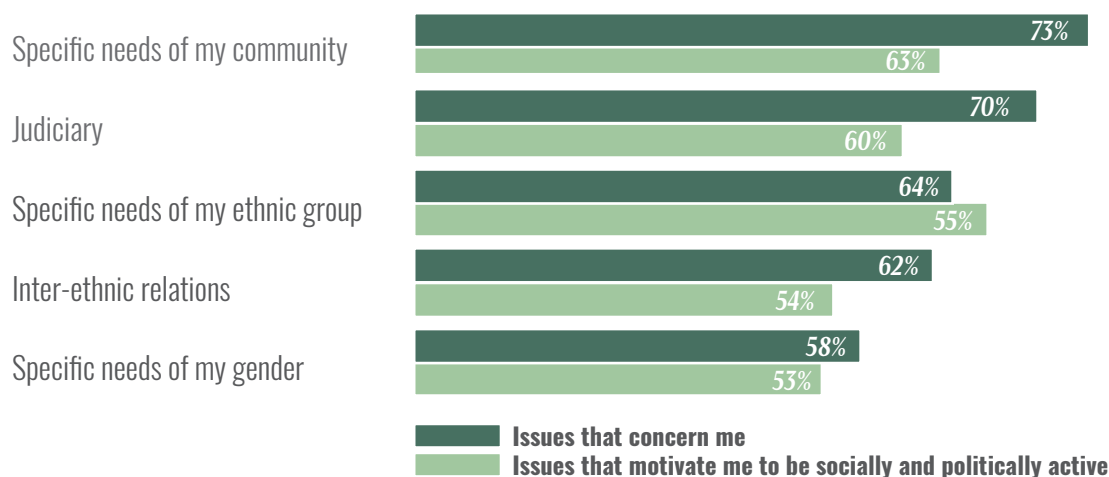
Health care (most likely because of the COVID-19 pandemic), economic and social stability and environment are the three most important issues for people living in urban settlements, as indicated by more than 80% of the respondents. In addition, these issues are the key motivators for their social and political activation.

Common across all profile groups subject to this research is the little concern about the specific needs of their gender, their ethnic group or interethnic relations in general.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Low level of trust in the media is common across all participants in the focus group as well as across all profile groups. The media is generally perceived as politically inclined and biased as a result of which people tend to source information from various media to be able to form a personal understanding of the social and political developments in the country.

> *I follow different media and I always make comparisons. The information presented in different TV channels is so drastically different as if they report from different countries.*
> *Female, 54, Prilep*

Almost half of the participants (46%) indicated that television is their predominant source of information and 28% learn about current socio-political developments via social networks.

TV 46%

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

People living in urban areas tend to be more involved in meaningful community events or activities in comparison to the other demographic groups (37%), however the likelihood for increased civic engagement is lower (only 23% show interest for more active involvement).

Have you been involved in any event, activity, or process that could have effected change in the community or the place where you live?

37%
61%
2%

Are you interested in a more active civic involvement?

23%
72%
5%

0%   **100%**

Yes   No   Do not know / Refuses to answer

The focus group findings indicate the reasons for the low interest to engage in civic activities. Namely, the interest of the respondents dissipates with time due to the lack of effective impact of their civic efforts. The impression of the respondents is that the institutions are very passive in that they transfer their responsibility to other bodies and institutions, make promises, do not keep them and fail to take action to provide answers to the citizens.

Fifty-five per cent (55%) of the survey participants do not believe they can make a positive change either by individual or through NGO engagement, while 29% lack interest in civic activities, which explains the low motivation for civic participation.

Similarly to the other profile groups, this group classifies the local government units as the most responsive institutions that they would address to solve an issue of concern. Furthermore, this group is mostly interested to engage in civic activities concerning improvement of the responsiveness of the system.

The factors that negatively influence the civic involvement are summarized below:

+ The system does not stimulate self-initiative and proactivity.

+ People are disappointed and lack trust in the state and the institutions.

+ Lack of awareness of the instances where to report local problems.

- Pronounced politicisation of the institutions.
- Lack of competence and motivation among the employees in public institutions.
- Fear of retaliation against civic involvement.

> *" Throughout history people have been reluctant to state their personal opinion. This, along with the ineffective and corrupt authorities produce a sense of disappointment, apathy and despair as the ultimate stage. "*
> *Male, 26, Tetovo*

Factors that promote involvement

Responsiveness of the institutional system is a key motivator for this group to be more involved in activities that could effectuate change in the community, which is cited by a quarter of the respondents. Other factors are related to obtaining personal or family benefits (indicated by 15%), representation of their interests (indicated by 19%) and transparency and accountability of the authorities (indicated by 13%). The first three factors are common for all demographic profiles and the general population.

While half of the respondents do not believe they can make an impact as a citizen, 29% believe they can make a meaningful impact in their municipality and 6% believe they can impact the Parliament.

Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

To the question whether they would be willing to participate in civic activities, 43% of the respondents indicated they would respond to a questionnaire, 48% would meet colleagues, friends, or family to discuss an issue of concern and 45% would read brochures or leaflets. On the other hand, 77% would not attend a political party gathering; 77% would not attend a public debate, and 80% an online meeting.

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

43%
Respond a questionnaire

45%
Read a brochure or a leaflet

48%
Meet colleagues, friends to discuss

ELECTION PROCESS

The urban demographic group associates elections with phrases such as: "demagogy", "fake promises", "soap opera" and "complete madness".

Do you think that every vote is important and can affect the election results?	**74**% Yes	**20**% No	**1**% Refuses to answer	**5**% Does not know

Similarly to the rural population, almost three quarters of the survey participants who live in urban areas think that every vote is important and can impact election results (74%), while one fifth (20%) do not share the same opinion.

Seven out of ten respondents living in urban areas (68%) indicate that voting per se is not sufficient to motivate citizens to change or influence policies, which is 10% more compared to the rural population (58%). Two out of ten (22%) believe that voting is sufficient, while one out of ten is ignorant on the issue.

Motivation to vote

How regularly do you vote?

77% regularly or often	11% sometimes	6% usually not	4% never

The research shows that 77% vote almost regularly or often, 11% sometimes, 6% usually do not vote and 4% never vote.

In addition, 38% state they always vote for the same political party, while 44% vote for different parties. This indicates that they are likely to abandon loyalty to a given political party should other political opportunities arise.

Factors that influence their decision to vote:

Similarly to the rural population, the top three factors that influence the urban population to go out and vote are: perception that voting is a civic right and duty (57%), better prospects for the future (45%), and fear that someone would misuse their vote (30%).

57% Civic right and duty

45% Better future
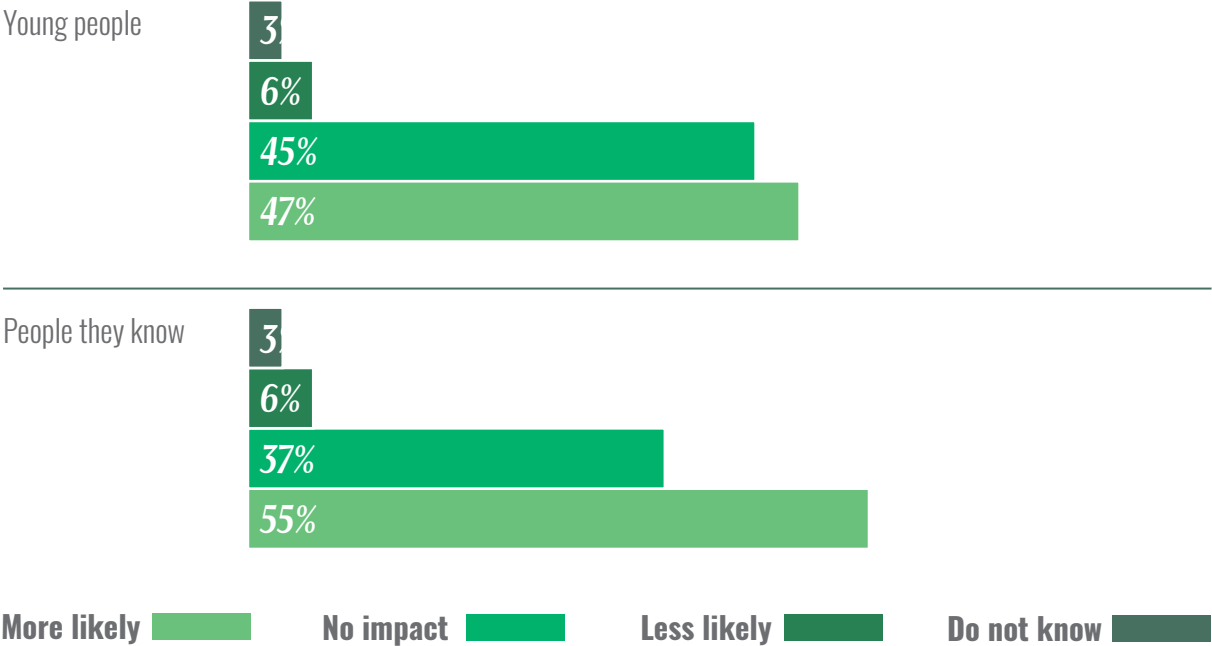
30% Fear that someone will steal their vote
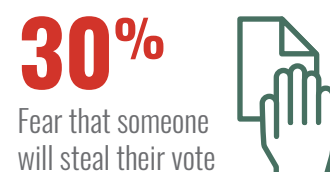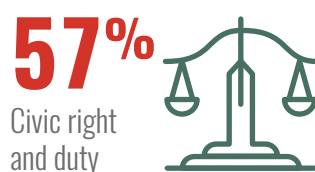
More than half of the respondents (57%) indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families (7% less than the rural population), while 41% vote differently than their families.

Six out of ten respondents' decision to vote is not influenced by their friends.

Similarly to the other profile groups, this group would like to see more familiar and local people, as well as youth as candidates on the party lists for elections or as elected officials (e.g. in municipal councils).
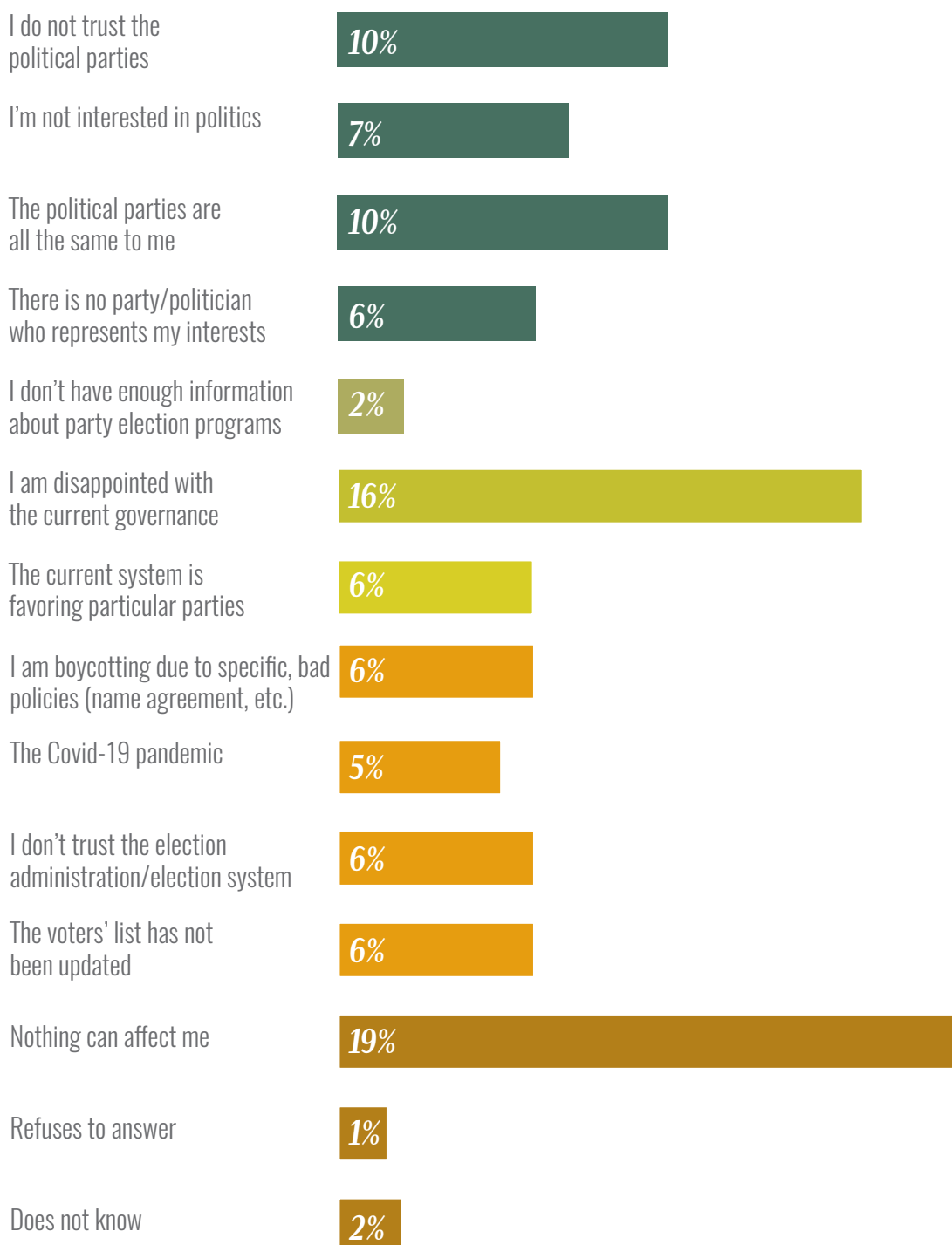
If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?

Young people

3%
6%
45%
47%

People they know

3%
6%
37%
55%

More likely **No impact** **Less likely** **Do not know**

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and the political parties demotivates people from remote communities to go out and vote.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

Response	Percentage
I do not trust the political parties	10%
I'm not interested in politics	7%
The political parties are all the same to me	10%
There is no party/politician who represents my interests	6%
I don't have enough information about party election programs	2%
I am disappointed with the current governance	16%
The current system is favoring particular parties	6%
I am boycotting due to specific, bad policies (name agreement, etc.)	6%
The Covid-19 pandemic	5%
I don't trust the election administration/election system	6%
The voters' list has not been updated	6%
Nothing can affect me	19%
Refuses to answer	1%
Does not know	2%

In addition, focus group participants noted that an increasing number of citizens decide not to vote due to dissatisfaction with the political parties in the country. Although the prevailing opinion is that voting is a civic duty, many participants believe that abstention from voting due to dissatisfaction is not an irresponsible behavior, but rather an expression of revolt and sending a clear message to all political parties.

Although in smaller percentage (52%), the respondents share the perception of the rural population (64%) that the interests of the rural population are not equally addressed by the political parties in terms of their inclusion in the party programs, on candidates lists, etc).

Do you think that political parties equally address the interests of the rural and the urban population?

20% Yes
31% No
1% Refuses to answer
18% Most often yes
21% Most often no
9% Does not know

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

The predominant sources of information about elections are TV (49%), social media (15%), web portals (15%), friends and family members (8%).

49% TV

15% Social Media

15% Web portals

8% Close people
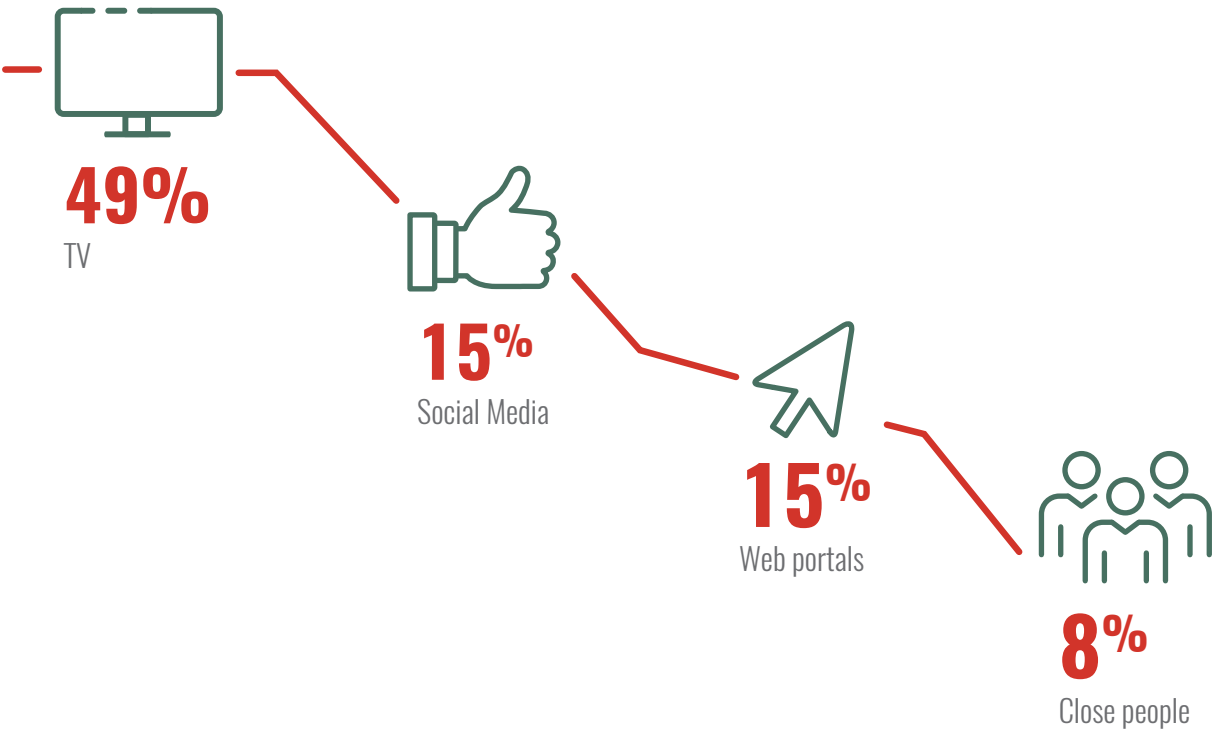
Fewer people living in urban areas use TV as a source of information about elections compared to the rural population (56%), whereas more of them use social media (12%).

News (46%) and TV debates (33%) are the most useful ways of sourcing election information for the survey participants.

With regards to the type of communication with the candidates (both before and in the period between elections), this group prefers continued information about the political achievements and results of the candidates to information broadcasted on traditional media or in-person communication (door-to-door or in smaller groups).

Only 4% of the respondents prefer to receive election information through political programs before elections.

The expectations of this demographic group from the political parties are to:

- Keep the promises made in the election party programs.
- Improve the communication with the citizens in order to understand citizens' concerns, rather than to market themselves and promote the party.
- Work for the country, not for personal and party interests.
- Free the judiciary from political influences to ensure a good basis for democracy and good governance.

BARRIERS

In view of the education, social status and availability of options, it is expected that the urban population would play a more active part in the civic and political developments in the country. Yet, the research shows that their interests and motivation to participate does not differ from those of the general and the rural population.

Almost half of the population is not interested in the socio-political development of the country, face the same barriers as the other groups and are reluctant to engage with the institutions.

- Scepticism about their power to influence politics and policies in the country.
- Lack of information on participation channels.
- Lack of civic and political skills.
- Fear of pressure and consequences.
- Poor previous experience with the institutions undermines their motivation for social and civic participation resulting with active citizens soon become disappointed with the results.
- Widespread politicisation of the society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To increase the civic and political participation of the urban population in the country:

Raise awareness about the importance of participation in socio-political life

- Focus on outlining the benefits of civic engagement.
- Connect activism with issues of concern such as ecology, urbanisation, etc.
- Identify role models and influencers and promote their activities and impact.

Promote channels and procedures to encourage participation in civic life

Promote changes and improvements within the communities as a result of active participation in socio-political life

Provide mechanisms that will support dialogue between citizens and the government to increase civic participation

- Improve responsiveness of state institutions and political parties to the needs of the citizens.

Increase the belief in their power to make an impact in the community or society.

- Promote positive examples and their impact in the community. Use examples that prove that activism matters and has the power to influence the society.
- Promote smaller community projects and initiatives that tackle various issues of concern.
- Initiate and promote targeted campaigns on ecology, air pollution, transport, etc.
- Use formats to cater to the variety of attitudes, lifestyles, and interaction of the urban population including women, youngsters, first time voters, unemployed, employed. Use TV, social media testimonials, third-party stories, interviews, project tracking, before and after scenarios, etc.
- Empower by developing skills and knowledge for confident civic engagement.
- Use a variety of online (preferred by the urban population) and in-person tools to educate and help develop skills such as webinars, forums, blogs, live video, educational web articles, free training, etc.

Contribute to building a political culture that encourages participation at all levels of society, without fear of consequences, intimidation and violence

Promote diversity and inclusion of candidates by age, gender, ethnicity, etc.

Create alliances

With the media (digital and traditional)

- Raise awareness about the benefits of active civic participation.
- Report on the outcomes of civic initiatives.
- Promote channels and ways for civic participation.
- Include citizens in debates and talk shows to promote their interest in participation.
- Promote narratives focused on positive and successful examples of civic participation.

With the NGOs

Compared to the other demographic groups, the urban population is more privileged in terms of access to a variety of NGOs.

- Use NGOs as a hub to spark participation. Highlight the effective role of NGOs, their visibility, as well as their field of interest.
- Create supporting spaces and opportunities for citizens to come together and act on issues they care about (ecology, health, urbanisation, culture, art, etc.)
- Provide guidance and resources that will encourage citizens to confidently participate in civic life.
- Use them as a mechanism that will support dialogue between citizens and the institutions.

With influencers/celebrities

- Partner with micro-influencers relevant for different demographic groups to promote civic participation.
- Use influencers to gather a critical group around different issues of interest.
- Use influencers as leaders in smaller community projects.

Choose relevant communication channels and apply both traditional and non-conventional approaches.

Use TV to reach the majority of the urban population.

The most recommended options are newscasts, debates, talk shows, open studios, etc.

Use social media to reach the youngsters, including the educated and employed portion of the population.

Social media is the key information channel (28% source socio-political information) with great potential for engagement and participation of the younger part of the population (42% of youngsters under 25 years of age use social media as a source of information).

Techniques to consider:

- Foster two-way open communication.
- Promote relevant topics.
- Give space for citizens to be heard.
- Partner with influencers/celebrities.
- Promote direct interaction with candidates.
- Share opinions on different issues of interest.
- Inform about the progress of various issues of concern.

Organize direct meetings or other community events.

The format of these meetings should be informal, such as coffee gatherings, debates, joint community projects.

Pilot non-traditional channels

- Organize entertaining events and activities to spark greater interest and attendance, including sports events, concerts, picnics, etc.
- Consider effective outreach methods to disseminate information, e.g. in buses, malls, local stores, parks, and other facilities.

RURAL POPULATION

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research

> *I would ask politicians to listen to us. They should come to our village, ask about our opinion, meet with us at least 3 times a year, so that we express our ideas, are heard and included.*
> *Female, 28, Tearce*

Demographic profile

A total of 518 respondents living in rural settlements took part in the quantitative face-to-face survey. The Law on Territorial Organization of the Local Self-Government defines the rural settlement as a type of settlement with one functional purpose in which one activity prevails, has agricultural features and functions (Official Gazette, No. 55/2004).

In order to gain an in-depth insight into the background, perceptions and opinions of this group, the quantitative survey was complemented by one focus group.

Education	Occupational status	Living standard
23% Higher, bachelor	2% Other	7% We barely make it
47% High school	13% Unemployed	31% We live a very hard life
24% Primary school	16% Retired	60% We get by
6% Unfinished	5% Student	2% We are well off
	14% Housewife	
	7% Self-employed	
	43% Employed	
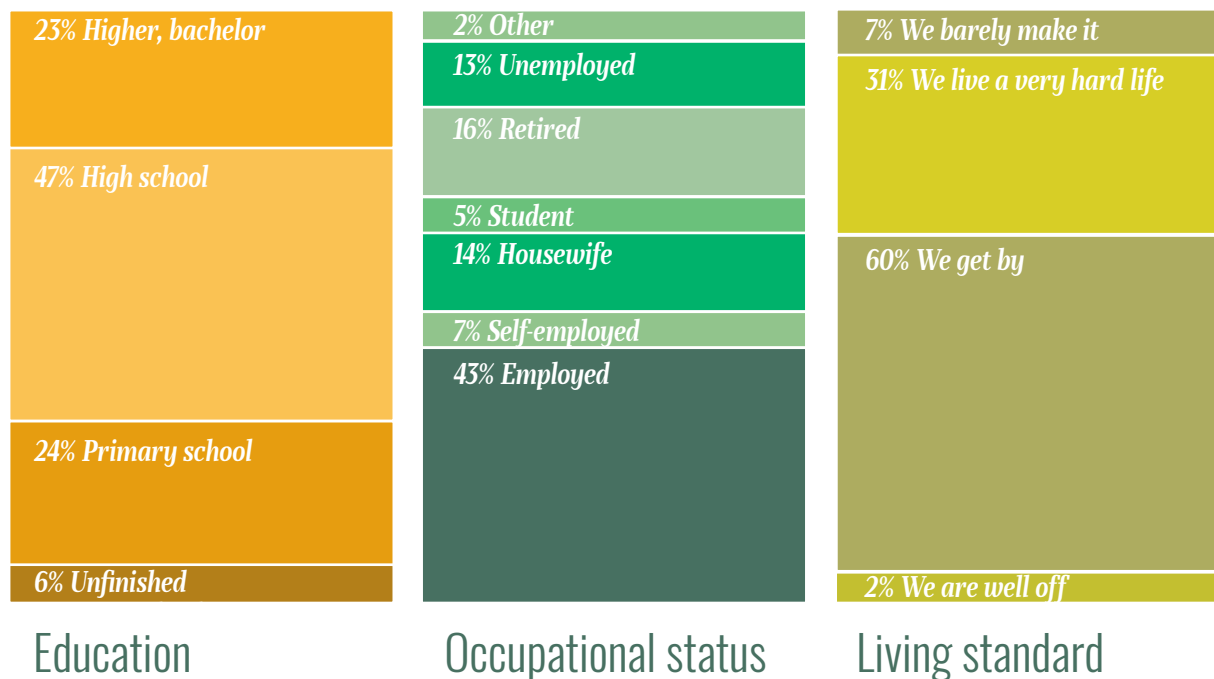
TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in socio-political developments in the country and sources of information

How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?

16%	38%	29%	17%
Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not much interested	Not at all interested

The research shows that slightly over half of the respondents (54%) are very or somewhat interested in the current socio-political developments in the country, while 46% are not interested. Similarly to the trends in the general population, the highest interest within this demographic group is observed among men and respondents with higher education, while farmers and housewives are less interested in socio-political developments. Fifty-two per cent (52%) of the respondents discuss socio-political developments sometimes or often, while 48% rarely or never do.
Women and young people from this group discuss these issues less often.

Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/topics concern you?
How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially or politically active?

Topic	Issues that concern me	Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active
Health care	82%	72%
Economic and social stability	80%	71%
Local issues	77%	72%
Environment	73%	65%
Specific needs of my place of living	73%	63%
Education	72%	67%
Corruption	71%	65%
Judiciary	66%	60%
Specific needs of my ethnic group	64%	60%
Inter-ethnic relations	63%	56%
Specific needs of my gender	63%	54%
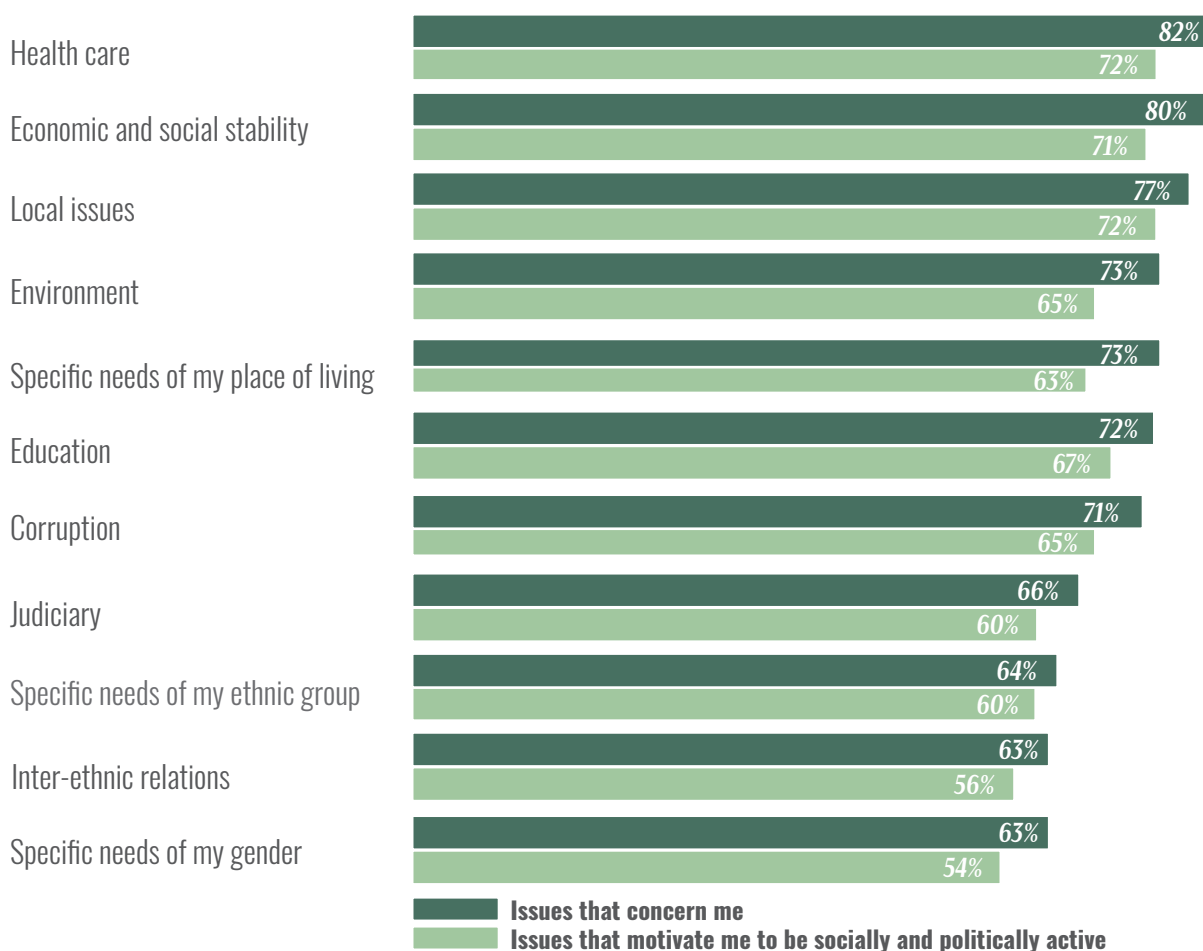
Health care, economic and social stability and local concerns rank the highest on the list of concerns specific to this group, as indicated by more than three quarters of the respondents. These are considered the key driving factors for their social and political activation.

This group is the least concerned about the specific needs of their gender, ethnic group or interethnic relations.

The concerns of this demographic group also relate to unemployment, nepotism and political party membership as a precondition for employment, low standard of living, migration (youth in particular), poor infrastructure, sewage and wastewater problems, frequent power outages, lack of kindergartens, parks/playgrounds, and recreational facilities for children, homeless animals, poor public transport, poor living conditions for people with disabilities, and lack of freedom of speech/fear to express their personal opinion.

Of note is that people living in rural settlements are still struggling with access to social services such as health care, clean water, electricity, sewerage system, and roads.

People living in rural settlements are interested in the current socio-political situation in the country, as well as the pandemic crisis. However, primary points of concern remain their local problems and immediate surroundings.

> *I was expecting that the current local self-government would make a difference, for example, to provide us with access to sewerage. Also, the street is not paved, we walk in mud. But there is no change, only party employments.*
> *Female, 70, Kisela Jabuka*

INFORMATION SOURCES

Predominant users of television as a primary source of information about current socio-political developments are people over the age of 55, with primary education and monthly household income below 12,000 denars.

Television is the predominant source of information for people living in rural settlements, as indicated by 51% of the respondents, followed by social networks (26%) and web portals (7%).

TV 51%

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

The interest in civic involvement is more pronounced among men, ethnic Macedonians and respondents with higher education.

The research shows that 61% of this demographic group does not believe in making positive change by individual engagement or engagement in NGOs, whereas 20% lack interest in politics, which explains the low motivation for civic participation.

> Seven out of ten people living in rural settlements have never been involved in an event, activity, or process that could impact the community or their local surroundings, nor are they interested in a more active civic involvement.

Have you been involved in any event, activity, or process that could have effected change in the community or the place where you live?

- 28%
- 70%
- 2%

Are you interested in greater civic involvement?

- 24%
- 70%
- 7%

0% ──────────────────────────── **100%**

Yes ▮▮▮   **No** ▮▮▮   **Do not know** ▮▮▮

Below is an overview of other factors that contribute to the low level of civic participation:

- People fear they will lose their jobs/incomes if they openly express dissatisfaction;
- Institutions are perceived as not responsive to citizens' demands;
- Institutions are believed to be under strong political influence;
- Perception of the judiciary as a dysfunctional system that fails to protect the citizens and of the law as not applicable equally to everyone.

> *I see that most young people are silent. They think - I will hold still, otherwise I will get fired. People are afraid of being punished.*
> *Female, 23, Tearce*

> *People do not believe that they can change anything. It is obvious that the system is made for the politicians to steal and never get punished. The political parties are not fond of people who think independently of party views; they do not support or encourage proactivity or self-initiative. Only obedience.*
> *Male, 44, Miletino*

Factors that promote involvement

Responsiveness of the institutional system, cited by 32% of the respondents, is the key motivator for this group to be more involved in activities that could effectuate change in the community. Other motivating factors pertain to the representation of their interests (cited by 14%) and prospects for obtaining personal or family-related benefits (cited by 12%).

Whereas slightly over half of the respondents (56%) do not believe they can make an impact as a citizen, 26% believe they can make a meaningful impact in their municipality and less than 5% believe they can influence the Prime Minister (4%), the Parliament (3%), ministers (3%) and the President of the country (1%).

Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

To the question whether they would be willing to participate in civic activities, 45% of the respondents cited a preference for participation in polling, 42% preferred meetings with colleagues/friends on personal or family issues, and 41% cited a preference for brochures or leaflets as information means.

The percentage of actions they would avoid is more prominent: 78% would not attend a political party meeting, 78% would not participate in a public debate, and 74% would not participate in online meetings.

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

45%
Respond a questionnaire

41%
Read a brochure or a leaflet

42%
Meet colleagues, friends to discuss

ELECTION PROCESS

The focus group participants perceive elections as "unnecessary", "waste of state budget", and "too frequent".

The qualitative research shows that this demographic group is suspicious of the legitimacy of all elections in the country, believing that everything has been pre-arranged and that "the international factor" is predominant in determining the election outcome.

Do you believe every vote is important and can impact the election results?	**75%** Yes	**17%** No	**14%** Refuses to answer

Almost three quarters of the respondents are of the opinion that every vote is important and can impact the election results (75%), whereas 17% do not believe so.

Six out of ten respondents indicated that voting per se is not sufficient to effectuate change or influence policies; three out of ten believe that voting can effectuate change or influence policies, whereas one out of ten claimed ignorant on the issue.

Motivation to vote

How regularly do you vote?

75% always or often	14% sometimes	5% usually not	3% never

The research shows that 75% of the respondents vote almost always or often, 14% sometimes, 5% usually abstain, and 3% regularly abstain from voting.

Forty-one per cent (41%) of the respondents regularly vote for the same party, and an equal percentage vote for different political parties. This indicates that they would vote for another party if the policies of the party they support prove to be unsuccessful.

> " *I always say - if this person or party has not been good so far, they should be punished.* "
> *Male, 44, Miletino*

Factors that influence the decision to vote

The top three factors that influence the respondent's decision to vote are: perception that voting is a civic right and duty (56%), prospects for better future (39%), and fear that their vote would be stolen (27%).

56%
Civic right
and duty

39%
Better
future

27%
Fear that someone will
vote instead of them

Whereas the percentage of reported difficulties during voting is small, most cases in this category concern non-possession of valid personal documents (7%).

Almost two thirds of the respondents (64%) stated that their decision to vote regularly or most often, overlaps with that of their families, whereas one third (33%) claimed that it differs from their families.

Six out of ten respondents' decision to vote is not influenced by their friends.

Nevertheless, this demographic group points out the "pressure by their friends" to vote for a particular political party in order to improve their friends' employment prospects.

> *I used to go out and vote because my friends asked me to and I did so to do them a favour. I am glad I could help, they are struggling to get an employment either in REK Bitola or in education.*
> *Female, 37, Krklino*

People living in rural areas would like to see more people from their local community, and familiar people as candidates on the party lists for elections or as elected officials, e.g. in municipal councils.

If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?

Rural places
- 8%
- 8%
- 45%
- 39%

Women
- 8%
- 10%
- 51%
- 32%

Young People
- 8%
- 9%
- 41%
- 42%

Representatives from your local community
- 9%
- 8%
- 42%
- 42%

People you know
- 9%
- 10%
- 35%
- 47%

More likely **No impact** **Less likely** **Do not know**

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and the political parties is the key factor that influences the respondents' decision to abstain from voting.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

Factor	Percentage
I am disappointed with the current governance	23%
I do not trust the political parties	12%
The political parties are all the same to me	12%
I don't trust the election administration / system	11%
The Covid-19 pandemic	10%
Boycotting due to bad policies (name agreement, etc.)	10%
System favoring the same limited number of parties	10%
There is no party/politician who represents my interests	10%
I'm not interested in politics	9%
The voters' list has not been updated	6%
I don't have enough information about party election programs	5%
Does not know	7%
Refuses to answer	3%
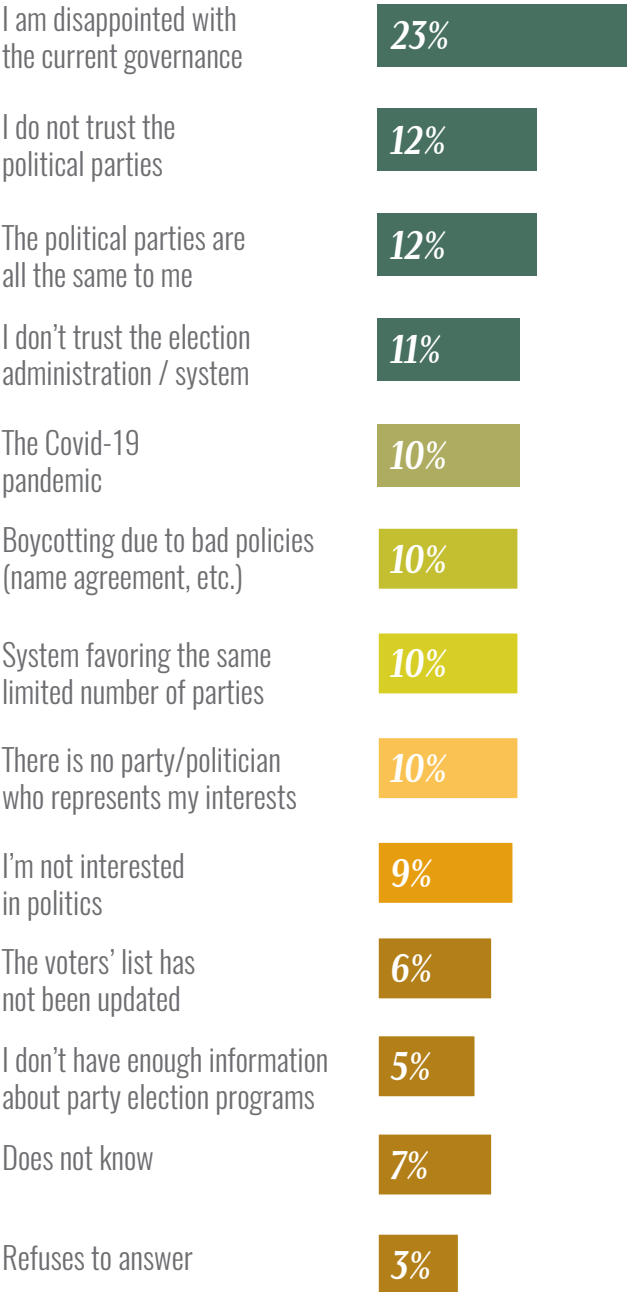
Slightly over half of the responses (57%) concern dissatisfaction with the governance and the political parties in general (disappointment, perception that all the parties are the same, that there is no party or politician representing their interests and values, and distrust).

The vast majority of people living in rural settlements (64%) believe that the interests of the rural population are not considered equally by the political parties in comparison to the urban population.

Do you think that the interest of the rural populaton are considered equally by the political parties	**15%** Yes	**13%** Most often yes	**21%** Most often no
	43% No	**2%** Refuses to answer	**6%** Do not know
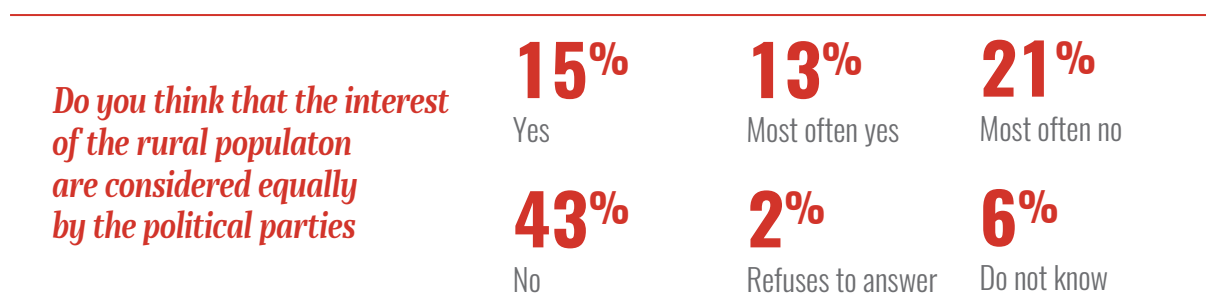
The belief is that there is a strong discrimination of the rural areas in the country across political programs and political parties. As inhabitants in the rural areas, they feel rejected and unacknowledged at local and central level.

> *In rural areas nobody is interested to do something for us, for the citizens. We live in a divided society, as if we are not there or as if we are some other part of the country. We feel discriminated and rejected. We are only a leftover of the city.*
> *Female, 37, Krklino*

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

Television (56%), social media (12%), web portals (11%), friends and family members (7%) are the predominant sources of election information.

Newscasts (50%) and debates (32%) are the most practiced methods of sourcing election information by this group.

With regards to the type of communication with the candidates, this group prefers in-person and door-to-door communication (18%) and communication in smaller groups (17%), and relies on the candidates' track record in making an informed political decision.

A preference for in-person receipt of election-related information or via TV programmes can be observed, whereas only 6% of the respondents favour political programs and 2% political rallies.

Where do you get information about election?

56%
TV

12%
Social Media

11%
Web portals

7%
Close people
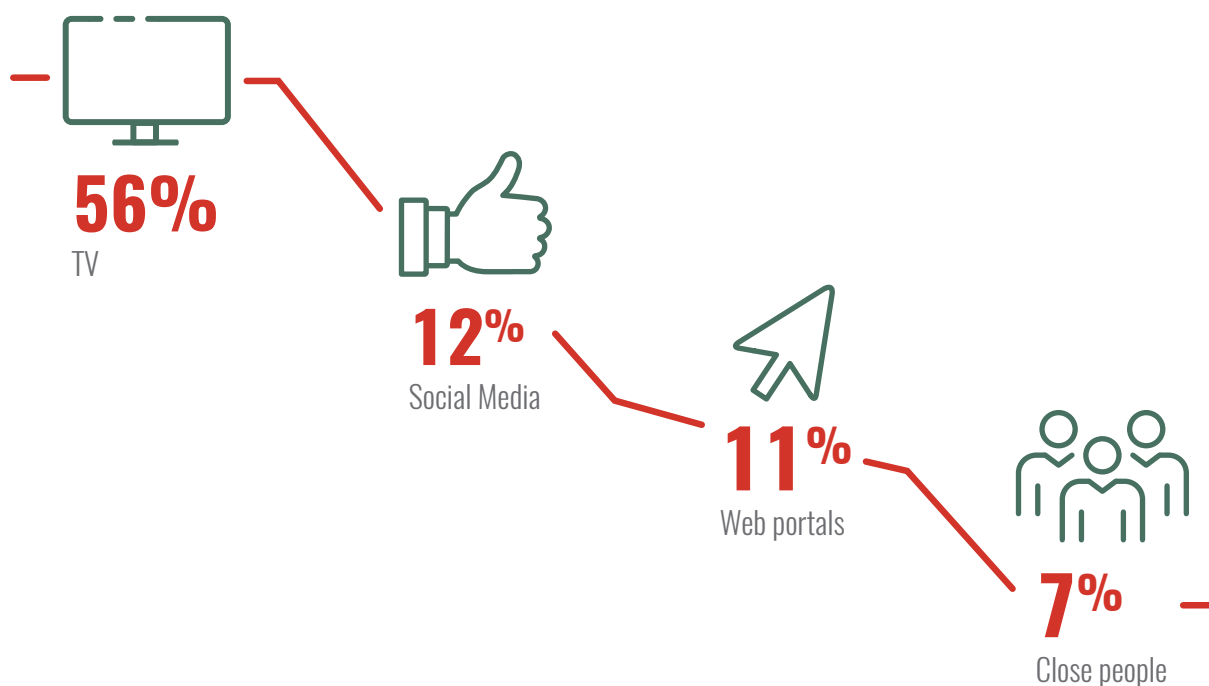
" I would ask them to listen to us. To come to our village, ask about our opinion, meet with us at least 3 times a year, so that we can express our ideas. "
Female, 23, Tearce

The focus group findings indicate strong dissatisfaction with all political parties in the country. Respondents feel strongly about the unfulfilled promises made by the parties and the conditioned employment or institutional services with party membership. These are cited as the main reason for the low level of interest in the political parties' pre-election programs.

> *They oversell their lies and promises, people are disappointed and dissatisfied. We only see lies, they promise and then they do not deliver.*
> *Male, 46, Volkovo*

Furthermore, this demographic group points out that the parties visit the rural areas and contact the citizens only in the pre-election period. A prevalent concern among the respondents is the parties' tendency to cater to their own needs and interests instead to those of the citizens and to gather more votes for the next elections.

The polled group of people in rural settlements has the following expectations from the political parties:

- To promote and support frequent communication and exchange of opinions with the citizens;
- To be open for the citizens and interested in solving the common problems in the municipality;
- To take agriculture into consideration, provide the farmers with irrigation water system for their land;
- To propose a strategy on improving the living standards in the rural areas, revive trade and stop migration;
- To consult with the young people from the municipality, offer prospects for their future in order to keep them in the villages;
- To address the problems with stray dogs.

BARRIERS

Comprising a significant share of the overall population in the country (42%, World Bank), the civic and political participation of the rural population is very important. Their disengagement from civic and political life tends to increase their perception of being marginalized and not represented.

Compared to the general population, there is no difference in the level of interest for the socio-political development of the country as well as in the level of their involvement. The polled differences in the interest and participation levels are mostly contingent upon factors such as age, gender, and educational level rather than on location. This is subject to further analysis and recommendations in the report (under the profiles of rural women and rural youth).

However, some particularities persist in terms of attitudes and beliefs of this demographic group.

> Although they share the same concerns with regards to: healthcare, socio-economic prosperity, and environment, this group is more concerned about the perceived influence of politics on the personal economic prosperity (employment, nepotism, etc.), quality of life and migration of young people.

Most significant barriers specific to this group are:

- **Underrepresentation:** strong feeling that their concerns are not addressed by their representatives, accentuated by the feeling of marginalization which reflects negatively on their active participation

- **Low interest in civic participation** due to disbelief in the genuine interest of politicians in the rural communities

- **Scepticism** about their power to influence politics and policies in the country

- **Lack of channels and avenues** for participation and sharing of ideas

- **Issues with personal identification documents** which reflect during elections/voting

- **Fear of retaliation** against social activism and criticism

RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to the identified challenges, a set of interventions are recommended that may effectively contribute to improving civic and political participation of the rural population in the country:

Conduct voter registration campaign and/or caravan to monitor, verify and address issues with documents

Strengthen the belief that they can make an impact in the community or society

- Promote positive local examples that are recognized and respected by the community and highlight their impact. Use examples that show that activism matters and has the power to influence and change the society.

- Promote and facilitate smaller community projects and initiatives that address various issues of concern.

- Consider different formats of participation, such as informal meetings with influential local representatives and activists, third-party narratives, community projects facilitated by a political party or other organization.

Alleviate the negative perception of being underrepresented by elected officials

- Include and keep high in the public agenda issues important for the rural population.

- Carry out frequent monitoring and follow-up of the rural community's concerns in the period between elections.

- Encourage politicians and activists to advocate for the needs of the rural population.

- Use variety of tools to promote two-way communication such as: regular monthly visits to the community, promotion of the concerns of the rural population in the media, as well as regular updates on the progress made; promotion of issues and concerns of the younger rural community on the social media.

Promote local channels and methods to encourage rural population to participate in the civic life

- Consider various formats: regular meetings, polls or other formats for expression of opinions on a specific subject matter, etc.

Create alliances:

With local civil society organisations to:

- Identify issues on micro level that are important for the local communities.

- Support small projects initiated by the local organisations.

- Establish close contact with the rural communities.

- Strengthen the capacities, position, and networking of local organisations within the rural community to increase their credibility and influencing power.

With the media (digital and traditional)

- Promote issues relevant for the rural population, in particular those focused on improving the quality of rural life.
- Monitor progress of projects relevant for the rural population.
- Promote positive and success stories of rural activists.
- Promote diversity of candidates (woman, youth, rural) during election campaigns.
- Promote new channels and avenues for civic participation of the rural community.

Choose relevant communication channels and apply both traditional and non-conventional approaches

Use TV to reach the rural population.

- Promote representatives and topics relevant to the rural population via debates, talk shows or interactive debates focused on improvement of the quality of life, youth migration, etc.
- Use formats that enable to contextualize and leverage the information e.g. use TV to reach out to the elderly, women, and people on the lower spectrum of income and education.

Organize face-to-face meetings or other community events

Harness the potential of familiar formats, such as informal discussions, at the expense of larger events.

- Use different formats for direct interaction such as small gatherings or informal neighbourhood meetings.
- Propose community projects or activities conducive to gathering people or specific groups in the community.

Use social media to reach out to the younger rural population

Social media is the key information channel with a great potential to engage the younger portion of the population. It can help promote topics of rural youth life, promote positive examples of the rural youth, and provide opportunities for expression of opinion (polls, debates, incite debates and comments) etc.

Pilot other non-traditional channels

- Organize entertainment activities and events and introduce new content to activate specific target groups.
- Explore ways to reach out to the rural population by dissemination of information in the means of public transport, at bus stations, local stores and other local facilities.

YOUTH

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research

Introduction

Youth is one of the most important groups in the electoral process because the foundation of tomorrow's democracy is built on the habits of democratic participation of youth.

This research examines civic and political participation of youth to better understand the barriers and motivating factors that influence their participation. It explores three groups of youth: 1) youth in general, 2) first time voters, and 3) rural youth and aims to identify common barriers, motivating factors, and specific characteristics of each group in regards to their level of knowledge, political awareness, attitudes, and motivation. The findings of this research help define a number of actionable recommendations to increase youth participation, particularly in the election and political processes.

The importance of youth participation in civic and political life

When young people are disengaged from civic and political life, they are excluded from the decision-making process, which may lead to frustration, distrust, and further disconnection from the overall political and public environment. Political participation is a necessary precondition for a democratic society.

> *Young people are oftentimes not heard by authorities and decision makers. They have better chances to achieve something if they are a big group, therefore, they should be encouraged and empowered to unite their voices.*
> *Woman, 27, Tetovo*

Youth - Definition and Size

Youth is often defined as "the passage from a dependent childhood to independent adulthood" when young people are in transition between a world of rather secure development to a world of choice and risk.[7] That is why, as a category, youth is more fluid and evasive to statistical prediction than other fixed age groups.

There is no universally accepted definition of the term youth. "Youth" in North Macedonia is defined as a socio-ethical category of the population aged 15-29.[8]

This research targets youth aged 18 to 29. Of the total number of voters, this group represents around 19% or 338,000 voters.[9]

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7 "Defining youth in contemporary national legal and policy frameworks across Europe" Youth partnership, available at: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261653/Analytical+paper+Youth+Age+Bojana+Perovic+4.4%.1%6.pdf/eb59c5e2-45d8-4e70-b672-f8de0a5ca08c, accessed on October 20, 2020.

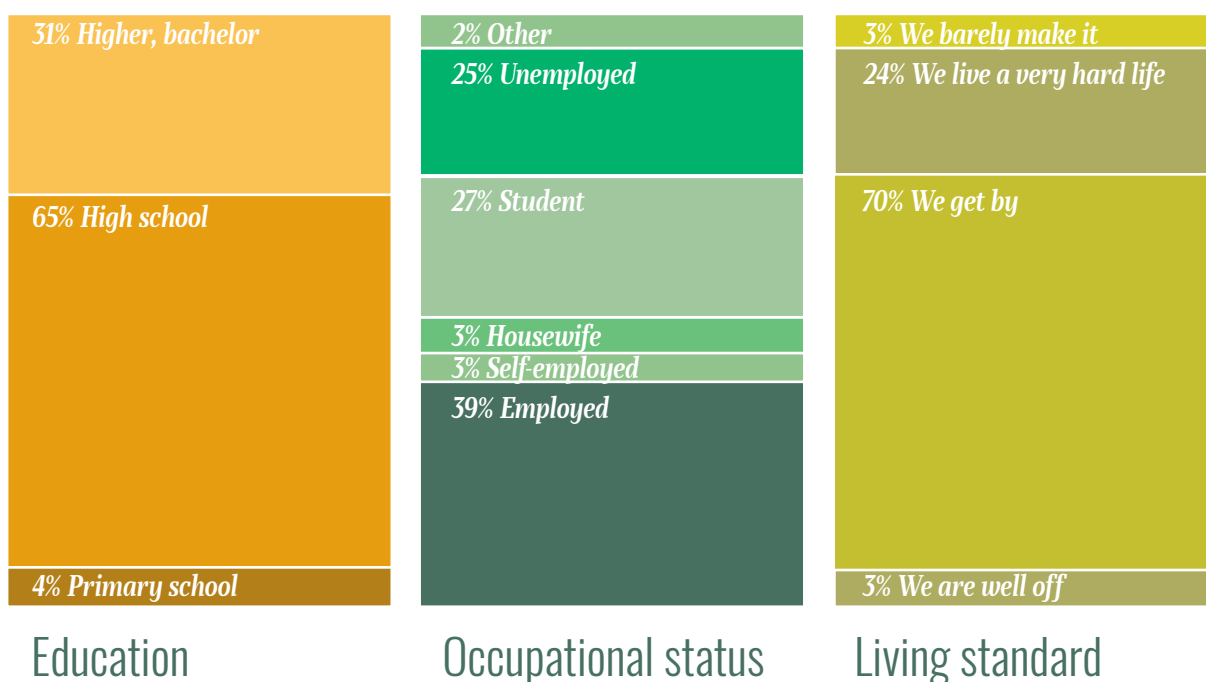8 Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies of the Republic of North Macedonia, p.2

9 State Statistical Office, Estimations 2019, "Population of the Republic of North Macedonia, according to age and sex", https://www.stat.gov.mk/

Demographic profile

A total of 208 young respondents took part in a quantitative face-to-face survey.

In order to gain an in-depth insight into the background, perceptions, and opinions of the group, the quantitative survey was complemented by one focus group.

The demographic structure of the young respondents in the quantitative face-to-face survey shows a similar distribution of the place of living, gender, and standard of living with the distribution in the general population.

Education	Occupational status	Living standard
31% Higher, bachelor	2% Other	3% We barely make it
	25% Unemployed	24% We live a very hard life
65% High school	27% Student	70% We get by
	3% Housewife	
	3% Self-employed	
	39% Employed	
4% Primary school		3% We are well off

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in the socio-political developments in the country

How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in our country and in the world?

8%	**31%**	**34%**	**26%**	**1%**
Very	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all	Does not know

> The research shows that 60% of the survey respondents are "not at all" or "not very interested" in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world, while 39% are "very" or "somewhat" interested.

Focus group findings show that some young people tend to avoid political news, while others are prone to incidental sourcing of information on the social networks of their choice.

Almost two thirds of the survey respondents (65%) rarely or never discuss political developments with other people.

There are no significant differences in regards to the interest in current socio-political developments across gender, ethnicity, education and household incomes for this group.

On the other hand, this research shows that young people who were previously engaged in civic activities or show interest to be engaged, are also more interested in socio-political developments and more often prepared to take part in discussions on these issues.

Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/ topics concern you?
How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially or politically active?

Topic	Concern	Motivate
Health care	73%	63%
Education	72%	64%
Economic and social stability	70%	66%
Environment	70%	62%
Local issues	66%	64%
Corruption	66%	64%

Specific needs of my community	57% / 57%
Inter-ethnic relations	57% / 52%
Judiciary	55% / 55%
Specific needs of my ethnic group	53% / 54%
Specific needs of my gender	50% / 48%

Issues that concern me
Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active
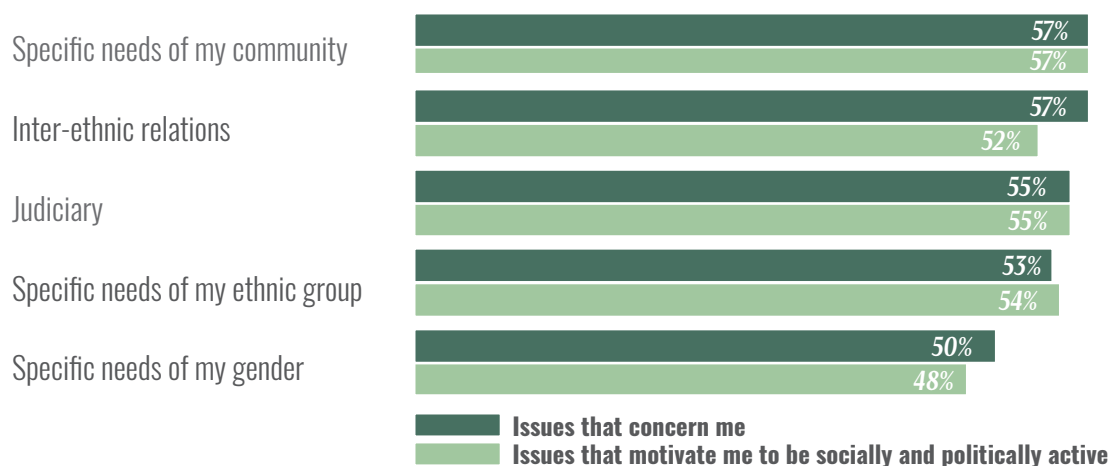
Health care, education, and economic and social stability are the top three issues of concern for young survey respondents, indicated by more than 70% of the respondents. In addition, these are the key motivators for social and political activism among youth.

Young survey respondents are the least concerned about specific needs of their gender group, ethnic group, and the judiciary.

In addition, the participants in the youth focus group are mostly interested in learning about education and the start of the new academic year during the pandemic, local sports events, entertainment and cultural events as well as projects of youth organization and student exchange programs.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Almost half of the young people (47%) indicated that social media (Facebook and Instagram) are the predominant sources of information.

Two out of ten young people are typically informed about the current socio-political developments via television.

> Almost half of the young people (47%) indicated that social media (Facebook and Instagram) are the predominant sources of information.

f 47%

Although social media is the most frequently used source of information by young people across all ethnic groups, the ethnic Albanian youth are more informed through television, family, friends and relatives.

> *I am mainly interested in sports. As far as political topics are concerned, I follow the latest news and my social media feeds. If I get information – it's OK, if don't get it – I don't actively search for it...*
> *Male, 21, Kumanovo*

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

> Seventy-five per cent (75%) of the young people in general have never been involved in any event, activity or process that could have an impact in the community or their local surroundings and 73% have no interest in becoming more civically engaged.

Compared to the rural youth, the percentage is similar (25%), but younger generation (first time voters) are less involved in events or activities in the community (10%) showing that when entering adulthood, young people become more interested to be involved in the civic life.

Have you been involved in any event, activity, or process that could have effected change in the community or the place where you live?

23%	
75%	
2%	

Are you interested in greater civic involvement?

22%	
73%	
5%	

0%   **100%**

Yes ■■■■■   No ■■■■■   Do not know / Refuses to answer ■■■■■

Young men and youth with higher education tend to indicate involvement and interest to become more civically engaged.

Interestingly, half of the young people who were previously involved in civic activities indicate an interest in more active civic involvement. Only 14% of young people who have never been involved in any civic activity before are interested in more active civic involvement.

The research shows that more than half of the survey respondents indicate disbelief in positive change (both by individual engagement and by NGO engagement), while almost a third point out the lack of interest in politics as the main reason for abstention from civic activities.

In addition, the young people in the focus group discussion indicate the following factors that contribute to insufficient civic involvement and low level of civic participation:

- Indifferent and passive youth.
- Young people focus on personal interests and benefits, instead of collective interests.
- Political parties attribute civic activities to opponent parties and most of the civic activities are labeled as being politically biased/motivated.
- Perception that civic initiatives are a waste of time and effort, since most of them are unsuccessful.
- Lack of positive examples/role models and lack of influential public figures showing support to civic initiatives.

> *Unfortunately, in a heavily politicized society, the fear of standing up for your beliefs is strong. The last student attempt to gather to protest was immediately politicized. Everyone present there was labeled as opposition*
> *Male, 21, Kumanovo*

Factors that promote involvement

Responsiveness of the institutional system is a key motivator for the survey participants to be more involved in activities that could effect change in the community, as cited by one third of the respondents. Other important motivating factors are related to their representation (indicated by 23%), and transparency and accountability of the authorities (indicated by 9%).

In addition, young people emphasise the need for positive examples showing that civic involvement can have an impact while at the same time calling for unity and solidarity in the civic activities.

> *Young people do not have a voice in the institutions. They could achieve something only if they are a big group. They should be encouraged to unite.*
> *Woman, 27, Tetovo*

More than half of the survey participants do not believe they can make a positive impact as a citizen (55%), whereas more than one quarter (27%) believe they can make a meaningful impact in their municipalities. Less than 5% believe they can influence the Prime Minister, the Parliament, ministers and the President of the country.

Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

With regards to participation in public life, young people prefer opinion polling (38%), meetings with colleagues/friends to discuss personal or family issues (35%) and brochures or leaflets (34%).

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

38%
Respond a questionnaire

34%
Read a brochure or a leaflet

35%
Meet colleagues, friends to discuss

ELECTION PROCESS

Focus group participants tend to perceive elections in the country as "frequent", "not legitimate", "decided by the USA", "fake democracy", "strong political pressures" and "fear of loss of employment".

Do you think that every vote is important and can affect the election results?	**67%** Yes	**26%** No	**1%** Refuses to answer	**6%** Does not know

More than two thirds of the respondents believe that every vote counts and can impact election results (67%), while 26% do not believe in the importance of every vote.

Half of the respondents indicate that voting per se is not sufficient to engage citizens to effectuate changes in policies, three out of ten believe voting is sufficient, while one out of ten claimed ignorant on the issue.

Motivation to vote

How regularly do you vote?

According to the research, 44% of the respondents indicate they vote almost regularly, 16% often, 17% sometimes, 10% usually do not vote and 7% never vote.

44% regularly	16% often	17% sometimes	10% usually not	7% never

In addition, 43% of the respondents state they regularly vote for the same party and 26% vote for different political parties.

Factors that influence their decision to vote:

The research shows that the top three factors that influence young people's decision to vote are: belief that voting is a civic right and duty (48%), better prospects (38%), and fear that someone would steal their vote (18%).

48%
Civic right
and duty

38%
Better
future

18%
Fear that someone
will steal their vote
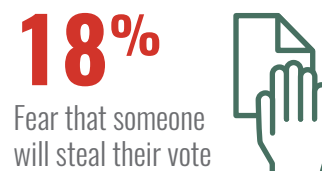
The group further underlines the importance of voting in terms of ensuring accountability and fulfilment of promises made by the elected officials.

> *If you don't vote today, you don't have the right to complain tomorrow or ask for responsibility.*
> *Male, 18, Gostivar*

Almost half of the respondents (48%) indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families, while almost the same percentage (47%) state their decision is not the same or most often not the same as that of their families.

With regards to their friends' influence on voting, two thirds of the young people point out that their decision to vote is not the same or most often not the same as that of their friends.

> Young people prefer youth representatives, local and familiar people on the candidate lists.

If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?

Young people
6%
12%
31%
51%

People you know
7%
14%
30%
49%

73

Representatives from your local community

- 8%
- 14%
- 42%
- 37%

Women

- 6%
- 14%
- 45%
- 34%
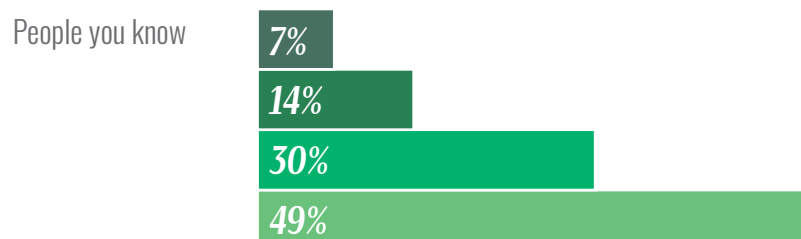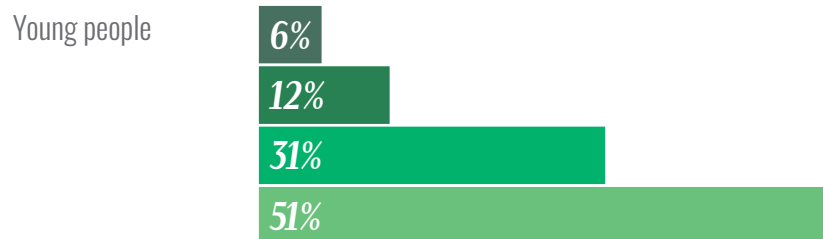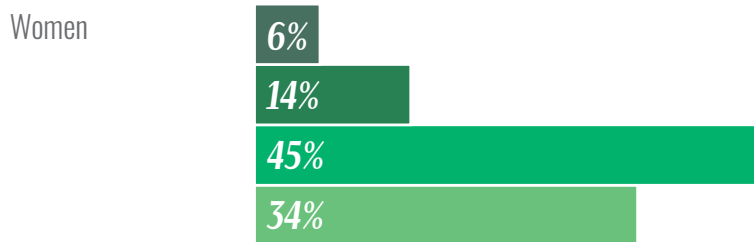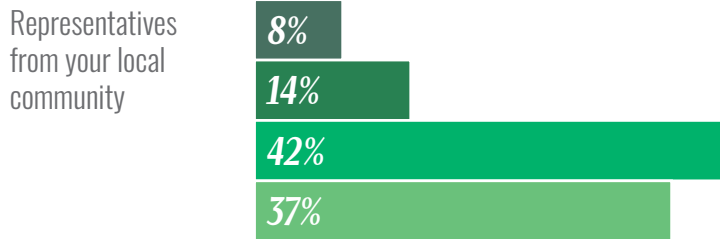
More likely   **No impact**   **Less likely**   **Do not know**

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with political parties, lack of interest in politics and lack of trust in the election system/election administration are the key factors that influence first time voters' decision to abstain from voting.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

Reason	Percentage
I am disappointed with the current governance	18%
I'm not interested in politics	18%
The political parties are all the same to me	16%
I don't trust the political parties	14%
I don't trust the election administration/election system	11%
There is no party/politician who represents my beliefs	8%
The current system is favouring selected parties	8%

The voters' list has not been updated	8%
The Covid-19 pandemic	8%
Boycotting due to bad policies (name agreement, etc.)	8%
I don't have enough information about the party election programs	7%
Refuses to answer	5%
Does not know	3%

Focus group findings show that women from rural areas state that pressures from the parties were particularly strong in rural areas and that political party membership is often the most important condition for employment.

> *Only if there is a massive boycott of the elections, a message will be sent to the political parties, a message of dissatisfaction and revolt about their work.*
> *Female, 26, Strumica*

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

Predominant sources of election information are TV (30%), social media (25%) and web portals (17%).

Election-related information is mostly sourced via newscasts (cited by 43% of the respondents) and debates (cited by 24%). Almost one in five youngsters (21%) indicates that they do not get informed about elections at all.

30%
TV

25%
Social Media

17%
Web portals
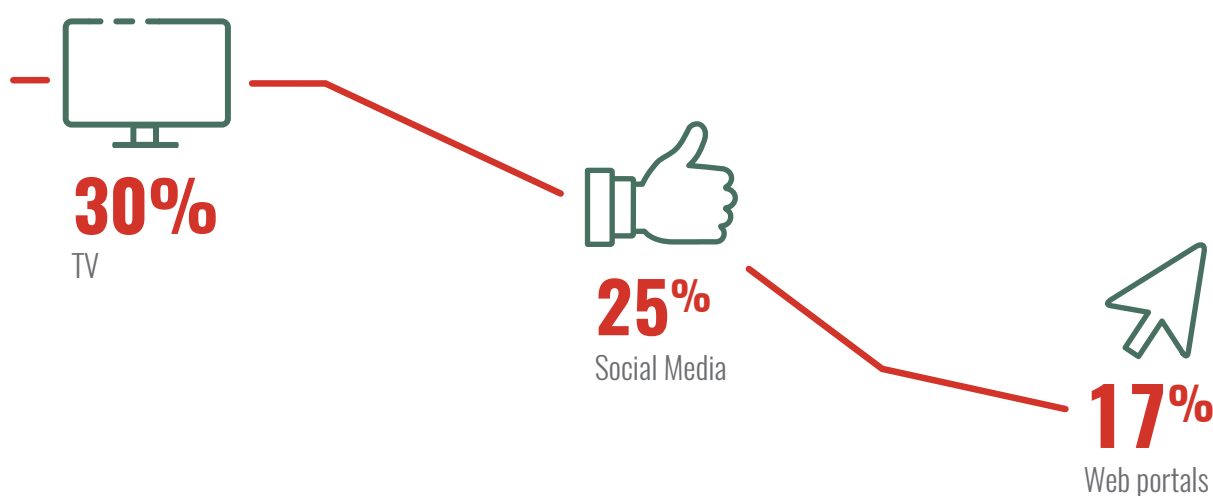
Social media and traditional media are the most preferable types of communication with candidates and elected representatives between elections and young people mostly rely on the candidates' political track record in making an informed decision.

> " *I personally read the election programs to see what they have invented this time, but I do not believe anything that is written. Our experience shows that they do not follow what they write in the programs.* "
> *Female, 26, Strumica*

In addition, young people demand political parties to focus on:

- Improving the standards of living.
- Increasing youth employment opportunities.
- Keeping young people in the country.
- Rule of law, independence of the judiciary and equal laws for all citizens.
- Reducing corruption.
- Protecting national history and values.

BARRIERS

It is vitally important and challenging to ensure that the next generations participate in democracy. It requires commitment from governments, political parties, candidates, non-governmental organizations, and democratic citizens and groups. Indeed, numerous stakeholders play a critical role in creating conditions for increased and more equitable civic and political participation of the youth.

The research identifies the following barriers to more active civic and political participation:

Scepticism about their power to influence: Young people do not believe they can influence policies in the country.

Underrepresentation: Young people do not feel they are sufficiently represented and/or involved in addressing issues of concern in decision-making processes.

Lack of knowledge and skills to confidently participate in the civic and political life

Lack of channels for participation and expression of opinions

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are a set of recommendations that are:

- ⋆ Youth centric.
- ⋆ Context specific.
- ⋆ Focused on using the right channels.
- ⋆ Actionable.

The recommendations are clustered in three groups as follows:

Increase the importance and relevance of the election process

Talk social, not political: I care for a lot of things - education, health, environment

- ⋆ Connect elections and voting to issues that affect the lives of the youth.
- ⋆ Promote issues that impact youth the most and those that young people are likely to be more knowledgeable of and interested in (e.g. education, health, ecology).
- ⋆ Conduct single-issue campaigns relevant to youth that address issues of concern to young people and relevant policy issues or upcoming political decisions that can motivate the youth which is otherwise alienated from institutional politics.
- ⋆ Explicitly include youth issues in political party manifestos.
- ⋆ Initiate joint activities with organizations and experts dealing with the issues of interest, e.g. environmental civic organizations.

Focus on the impact they can make: I want to know that my vote and involvement in community life have an impact.

- Promote different young activists, present their activities, and their impact.

- Promote small community projects that tackle specific issues, e.g. donations to libraries, eco-activism, healthy habits, etc.

- Promote ways in which young people can make an impact.

- Use examples that can prove that activism matters and has the power to influence/ improve society.

- Consider different formats such as: testimonials, peer endorsement, third-party narratives, community projects on micro-level facilitated by political parties or other organizations.

Provide channels for expression of opinion: I want space and opportunities to be heard

- Create opportunities for direct and regular communication with the youth

Make them feel visible: I would like to know that my needs and concerns as a young person are equally important and represented in electoral and political processes.

- Top government leaders should promote and give attention to young activists and politicians to demonstrate their interest and support the important role of young people in democratic societies. Given their unique position and the intense media attention they attract, top government leaders can do more to place and keep youth issues on the public agenda and also promote young politicians and representatives as well as other successful young professionals.

- Social media and other online tools should be utilized to allow youth to participate in national and local decision-making. This could include sharing policy information in a youth-friendly fashion, providing direct youth feedback to the government on certain policies (e.g. through feedback forums), holding consultations between youth and politicians through social media or other online platforms, making use of structured citizen surveys, opinion polls, online petitions, policy consultations, and dialogues and involving youth in development planning.

Formats and channels to consider include: social media, open day, coffee gatherings, joint projects as well as debates and conferences.

Create alliances.

With the media (digital and traditional)

- Promote narratives focused on the positive and successful examples of youth activism (ex. Greta Thunberg).

- Promote young politicians and activists' presence in the media and increase their media coverage.

- Promote new channels and ways for civic participation of the youth.
- Include more young people in debates, talk shows, etc. and give them an opportunity to talk about issues that interest them.

With youth organizations

- Create supportive spaces and opportunities for youth to come together and act on issues they care about.
- Provide guidance and resources that will encourage young people to confidently participate in civic life.
- Provide mechanisms that will support dialogue between young people and the government.
- Be more proactive in approaching young people to help increase visibility and public awareness.

With influencers and celebrities

- Partner with micro-influencers relevant in different areas to young people's life to promote civic participation.

Choose the right communication channels.

Social media plays a dominant role in the media habits of young people as it is typically their main source of information and channel for participation

- Use social media accounts dedicated to communication with youth, managed by young people within the organization/institution/party.
- Use a mix of all available direct communication channels (direct messaging, comments, reactions, chatbots, etc.)
- Promote youth-relevant social topics and issues.
- Provide space for young people to express their opinions.
- Partner with influencers/celebrities.
- Use more dynamic formats: motion, video, live streams, stories, etc.

Use traditional media and TV to educate them about the election process or present candidates. News and debates are the most popular formats.

Use direct, informal meetings to build relationships with young voters making them feel appreciated, valued, and heard

Consider formats such as informal coffee gatherings, debates, community projects that cater to youngsters, lectures on topics of interest, etc.

Organize artistic, cultural or sports activities to strike a balance between education and entertainment.

FIRST TIME VOTERS

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research

> *I may go out and vote, although I don't think my vote will change anything. The voice of young people in the country is not heard. A few people lead the society and youth are not perceived as important.*
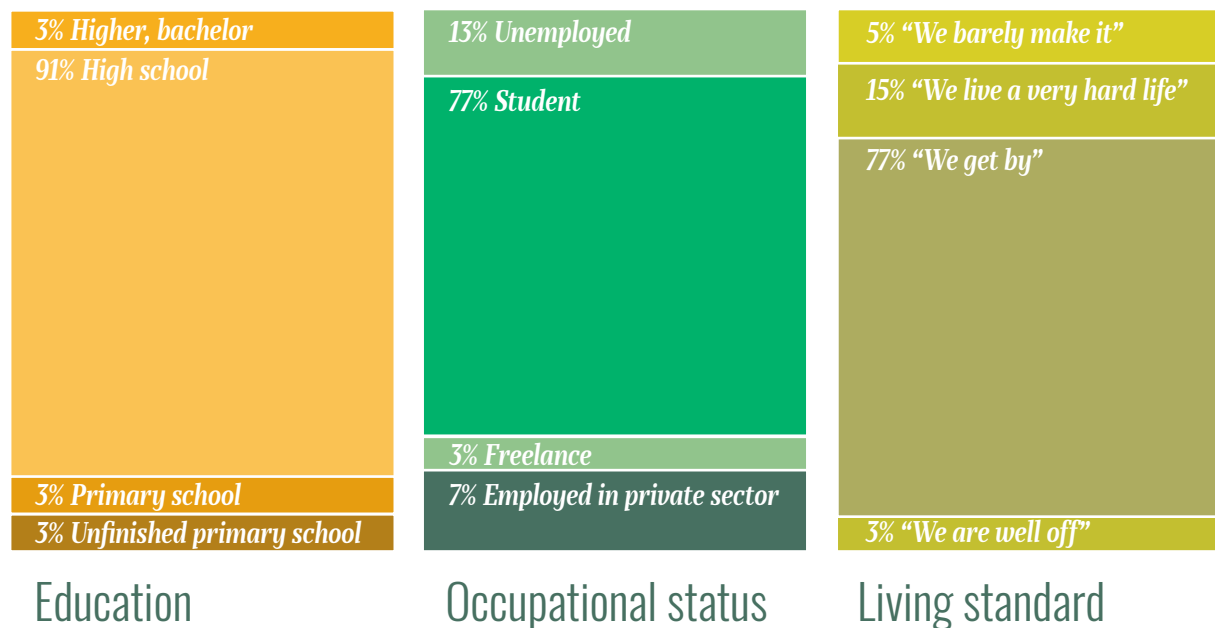> *Female, 18, Skopje*

First Time Voters - Definition and Size

"First time voters" represent a group of young people of up to 20 years who have never voted at elections before.

They are a particularly important group in the electoral process due to their formative role in the democracy of tomorrow which is built on the habits of democratic participation of youth, including first time voters.

From a political perspective, successfully mobilizing first time voters has long-term rewards. Studies show that youth who participate in elections are more likely to continue voting later in life.[10] When young people develop healthy civic habits, skills, and commitments, decision-making becomes more representative, communities benefit, and democracy prospers.

Civic participation of new generations of citizens is essential for democracies, including transitional democracies that struggle with engaging the young population in civic activities.

Demographic profile

Education	Occupational status	Living standard
3% Higher, bachelor	13% Unemployed	5% "We barely make it"
91% High school	77% Student	15% "We live a very hard life"
		77% "We get by"
3% Primary school	3% Freelance	
3% Unfinished primary school	7% Employed in private sector	3% "We are well off"

Education · Occupational status · Living standard

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10 Franklin, Mark N. Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–12, Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945

In addition, a total of 39 first time voters took part in the quantitative face-to-face survey. In order to gain an in-depth insight into the background, perceptions and opinions of the group, the quantitative survey was complemented by one focus group.

The demographic structure of the respondents shows a similar distribution by region, place of residence, gender, ethnicity, and standard of living to the general population.
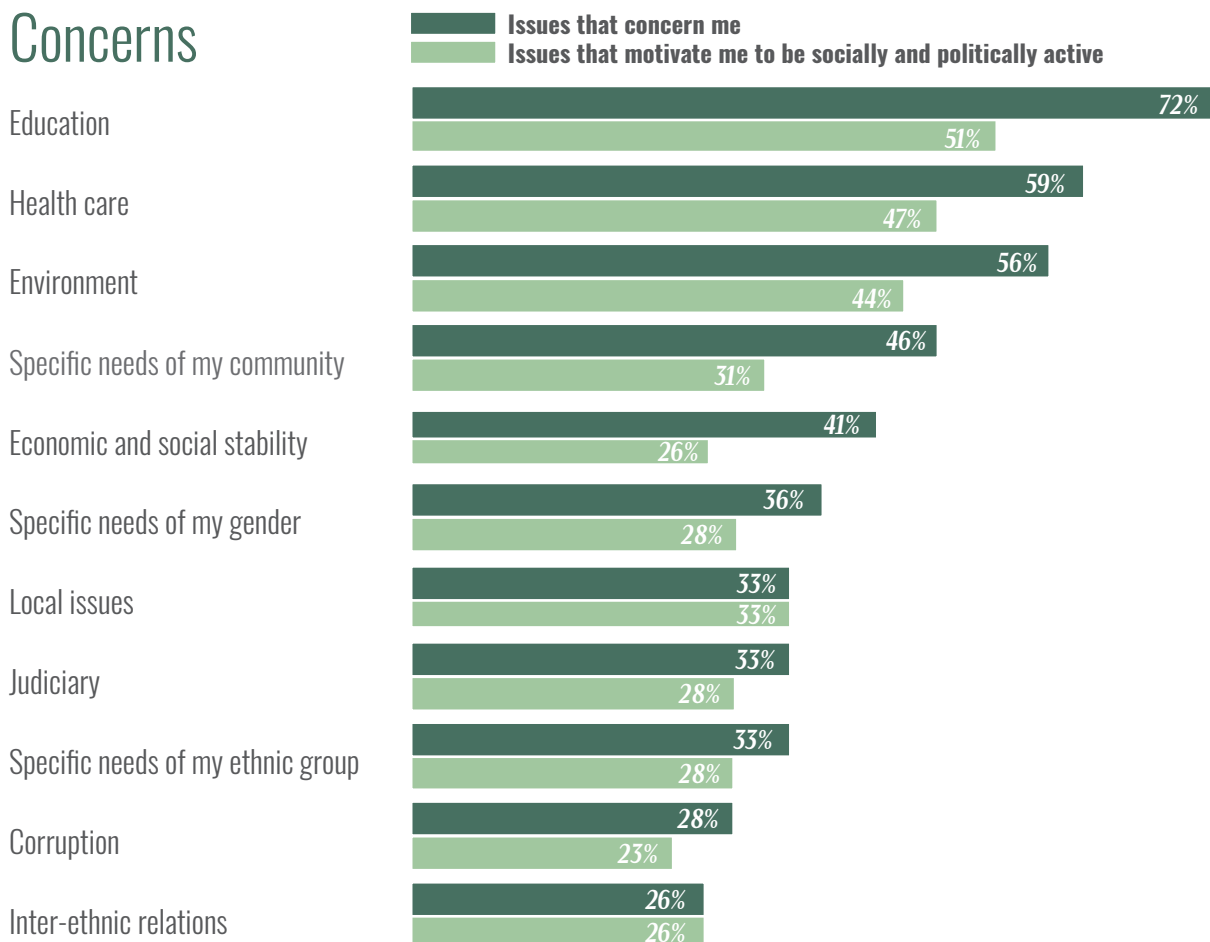
TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in the socio-political developments in the country

How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?

3% Very interested

18% Somewhat interested

33% Not much interested

46% Not at all interested

> The research shows that almost 80% of the first time voters are not at all or not very interested in the current socio-political developments in the country or in the world. Nine out of ten respondents (87%) rarely or never discuss these issues with other people.

Concerns

- Issues that concern me
- Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active

Concern	Issues that concern me	Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active
Education	72%	51%
Health care	59%	47%
Environment	56%	44%
Specific needs of my community	46%	31%
Economic and social stability	41%	26%
Specific needs of my gender	36%	28%
Local issues	33%	33%
Judiciary	33%	28%
Specific needs of my ethnic group	33%	28%
Corruption	28%	23%
Inter-ethnic relations	26%	26%

Education, health care, and environment are the top three concerns that incentivise social and political participation of the first time voters.

While seven out of ten survey respondents cited education as the top area of concern, half of the respondents expressed interest in becoming socially and politically active on issues related to education.

Despite the high percentage of respondents concerned with these issues, they tend to be less motivated to be socially and politically active.

They are the least concerned with the specific needs of their ethnic group, corruption, and inter-ethnic relations.

The focus group findings show that this group is mostly interested in information concerning education, sports, music, and entertainment, and compared to the general population and other demographic groups, they are the least interested in socio-political developments.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Social media (Facebook and Instagram) are the predominant sources of information among the first time voters (54%). Three out of ten respondents state that they do not get informed about socio-political developments.

f 54%

There is no significant difference with regards to the interest and use of various sources of information across gender, ethnicity, and place of residence for this group.

Furthermore, the group indicated sporadic search for specific information and incidental consumption of information.

" *I am not really interested in politics. I sometimes read posts on Facebook, but in general, I don't consume such information.* "
Male, 18, Stip

" *I sometimes get updated on political issues in the country, but I'm not genuingly interested in it. I source information only from the social networks, such as Facebook and Instagram. I don't watch TV at all.* "
Female, 19, Prilep

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

> Majority of the survey respondents have never been involved in any event, activity or process that could impact the community or their immediate surroundings, nor are interested in more active participation.

Compared with other demographic profiles, first time voters have the lowest civic involvement or interest in more effective participation in the community.

Have you been involved in any event, activity that could have affected any change in the community?

- 10%
- 87%
- 3%

Do you have a desire for greater civic involvement?

- 8%
- 90%
- 2%

0%   **100%**

Yes   No   Do not know

> The findings of the research show that absence of belief in positive change and lack of interest in civic engagement (both in NGOs or as an individual) are the main reasons for the continued low level of civic participation in socio-political life in the country.

The focus group participants state the following factors that contribute to the low levels of civic involvement and participation:

- Lack of will and perseverance among young people.
- Education system that does not stimulate students' civic participation.
- Family that does not nurture children to show proactive behavior.
- Lack of social acknowledgement, stimulation, and merit for youth activism.

> *The problem is rooted in the society itself, starting with the parents. They don't teach their children how to approach the society. On another hand, good action should be rewarded by the society.*
> *Female, 19, Prilep*

Factors that promote involvement

Responsiveness of the institutional system is the key motivator for first time voters to be more involved in activities that could effectuate change in the community. This was cited by every fourth respondent in the quantitative survey. Other motivating factors are related to representation of their interests (cited by 18%) and personal or family benefits (cited by 15%).

First time voters urge the NGO sector to be more visible, involved, transparent, and active. NGOs can rely upon different media channels, primarily social media, to inform young people about current initiatives and activities and incentivise them to participate.

> *I think the NGOs should have more visible online presence or a more extensive network of organizations. Their initiatives should be more transparent. Facebook isn't enough. They should use more portals or Instagram.*
> *Female, 18, Skopje*

Whereas two thirds of the citizens do not believe they can make any civic impact, 13% believe they can make a meaningful impact in their municipality, 8% in the parliament, 5% with regards to the decisions of the Prime Minister and 3% of the ministers.

Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

With regards to participation in public life, 41% cited preference for opinion polling, 31% prefer brochures and leaflets as a source of information, 26% prefer direct meetings with colleagues and friends to discuss personal or family concerns, and 21% prefer online meetings or discussions.

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

41%
Respond a questionnaire

31%
Read a brochure or a leaflet

26%
Meet colleagues, friends to discuss

ELECTION PROCESS

A broad negative perception about voting is prevalent among first time voters.

"Fictional", "in vain", "stagnation", "no real choice", "low turnout", "invalid ballots", "political pressure and blackmailing", "fear among the citizens" are the most common associations for elections in the country among the participants in the focus group discussion.

Do you think that every vote counts and can impact election results?	**49%** Yes	**36%** No	**15%** Does not know

A significant portion of respondents doubt the importance of citizens' vote and its impact on election results. The research shows that almost half of the respondents believe that every vote is important and can impact election results (49%), more than one third do not believe so (36%), while 15% claimed ignorant on the issue.

Half of the first time voters indicate that voting per se is not sufficient to engage citizens in policy making, three out of ten believe voting is sufficient, while two out of ten claimed ignorant on the issue.

Motivation to vote

Curiosity to experience the voting process for the first time is the dominant motivation for this group to go out and vote.

Nevertheless, the enthusiasm for voting, decision-making, and active participation in policy making is not high. The respondents indicated indifference, including belief that the citizen's vote does not have a significant impact and that election results are not reflective of the will of the people. The respondents indicate that young people are generally not interested in voting and that the initial enthusiasm diminishes over time.

> *I think that the family also has a great impact. If your parents don't vote on elections, that issue is no longer debatable at home. Politics is completely ignored because many parents are not satisfied with it. There seems to be a great division. Some families are helped by the party and all family members are employed, whereas some families survive on one salary.*
> *Male, 17, Bitola*

Furthermore, the research shows that the top three factors that influence first time voters' decision to vote are: prospects for better future (36%), fear that someone would steal their vote, i.e. vote instead of them (28%), and perception that voting is a civic right and duty (23%).
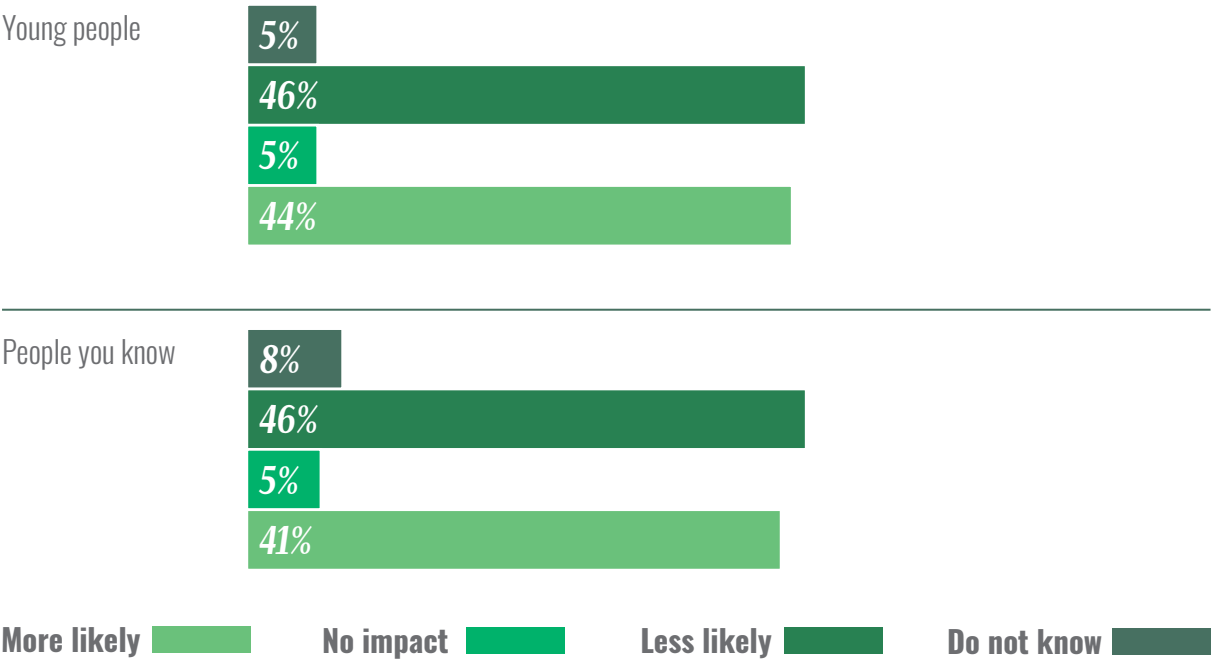
Family is another significant factor that affects the first time voters' turnout.

Half of the respondents indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families.

23% Civic right and duty

28% Fear that someone will vote instead of them

36% Better future

First time voters would like to see more youth representatives and people they know on the candidate lists.

If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?

Young people
- 5%
- 46%
- 5%
- 44%

People you know
- 8%
- 46%
- 5%
- 41%

More likely   **No impact**   **Less likely**   **Do not know**

These findings are confirmed by the focus groups.

" *I think that if young people were into politics, political parties would definitely target us as voters instead of the pensioners.* "
Female, 18, Kumanovo

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and the political parties, lack of interest in politics and lack of trust in the voter list are the key factors that influence first time voters' decision to abstain from voting.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

I'm not interested in politics	**26%**
I'm disappointed with the current governance	**21%**
The political parties are all the same to me.	**18%**
There is no party/politician who represents my interests	**15%**
I don't trust the political parties	**13%**
The voters' list has not been updated	**13%**
I don't trust the election administration / system	**8%**
The Covid-19 pandemic	**8%**
Boycotting due to specific, bad policies (name agreement, etc.)	**8%**
I don't have enough information about party election programs	**8%**
System favoring the same limited number of parties	**5%**

> **There's no one to vote for on elections.
> I don't like any of the candidates.**
> *Female, 19, Prilep*

89

66 Young people are not interested in politics. There is no party we would vote for. We don't plan to stay and live in this country. We do not see a future here. 99
Female, 18, Skopje

66 These elections were hilarious. The party campaigns were comical. They go to such an extreme that they could not be more unrealistic. 99
Female, 19, Strumica

> Low level of information and interest about the election process is prevalent among the first time voters.

Three out of ten first time voters know how to check their data on the voter list, while seven out of ten do not have this information.

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

Social media (33%), TV (26%), web portals (10%), friends and family members (10%) are the predominant sources of election information.

Newscasts, adverts, and debates are the most cited ways of consumption of election information among the survey respondents. A significant part of them (44%) indicates that they do not follow elections.

The focus group findings show that first time voters are interested in voter education campaigns conducted via the social media, which is widely used by this category of people.

Social media and personal interaction are the preferable types of communication with candidates and elected representatives between elections and first time voters mostly rely on the candidates' political track record in making an informed decision.

Where do you get information about election?

44%
Don't get
informed

33%
Social Media

26%
TV

10%
Close people

10%
Web portals
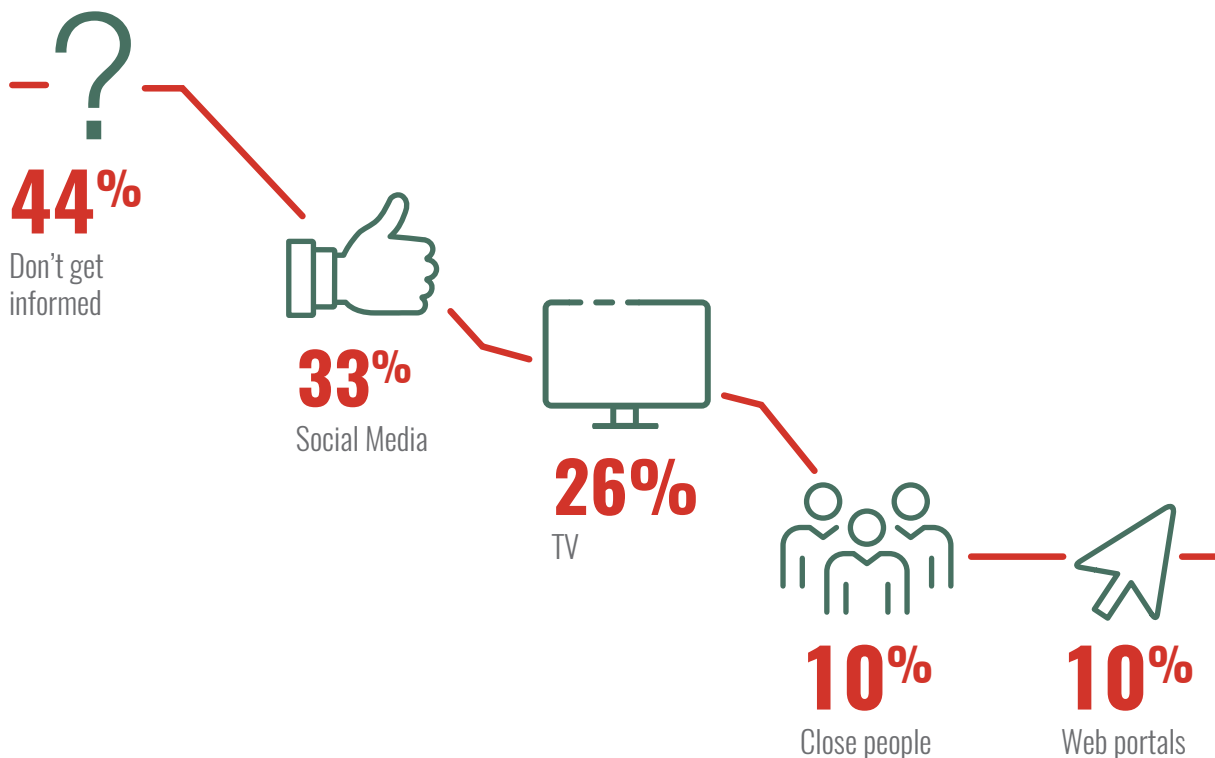
BARRIERS

In view of their lack of previous experience in civic and political life, first time voters tend to demonstrate lower interest and willingness to participate in elections and activism compared to the youth in general. The barriers identified among the youth category in general (lack of knowledge, doubts in their impact, underrepresentation, availability of communication channels) are more pronounced among first time voters.

Specific barriers for this group are following:

- Poor knowledge and awareness about the overall voting process and specific election stages (voter list scrutiny, registration, etc.).
- Need for empowerment and buildup of skills and knowledge to navigate civic life more confidently.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the recommendations referring to the youth in general, specific recommendations include:

Provide election information and education about access to the electoral process

- Create dedicated educational campaign providing necessary information for first time voters on voter registration, voter list scrutiny, voting procedures, etc.
- Use tailored tools and communication channels for effective outreach and delivery of messages: video tutorials, infographics or other visual presentations could be a good choice in view of the consumption preferences of this group. Communication should be largely online, using digital channels for precise targeting.
- Include youth representatives and experts in all phases of the voter information and education campaigns, to incorporate youth perspective in the design, evaluation, and validation of the activities.

Start early

Involve future voters into the democratic process early, before they reach voting age by arranging preregistration to facilitate voting or incentivize first time voters via text message, e-mail, or other communication channels specific to this group.

Increase the importance of the election process by focusing on the issues of their interest

Refer to education, health, and ecology, their role in the election process, positive examples of the civic participation impact and provide channels where they can express their opinions or address relevant topics. Details of possible activities are incorporated in the recommendations for the general youth group.

Create alliances

In addition to alliances with the media, creation of alliances with youth organizations and influencers are important to ensure mobilization of the first time voters. Partnering with micro-influencers relevant to different areas of young people's life is likely to increase their interest in the process and impact their willingness to engage.

Use the right communication channels

The current generation of first time voters are the first digital natives to be called to vote, thus their media habits are largely informed by the digital media, in particular the social media platforms. They are their main source of information and can be effective in incentivising personalized participation, based on their sentiments and conversations and establishing two-way communication channels.

Direct informal meetings can also be an effective vehicle for establishment of connections with first time voters, particularly if focused on relevant topics.

Effective communication outreach to young outgoing people can also be achieved by introducing artistic, cultural or sports activities and content.
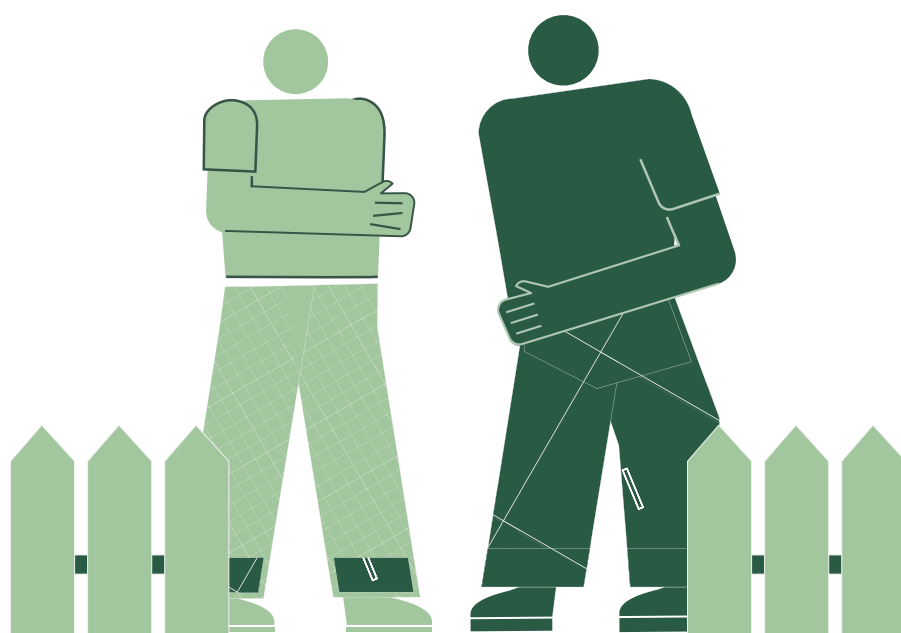
RURAL YOUTH

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research

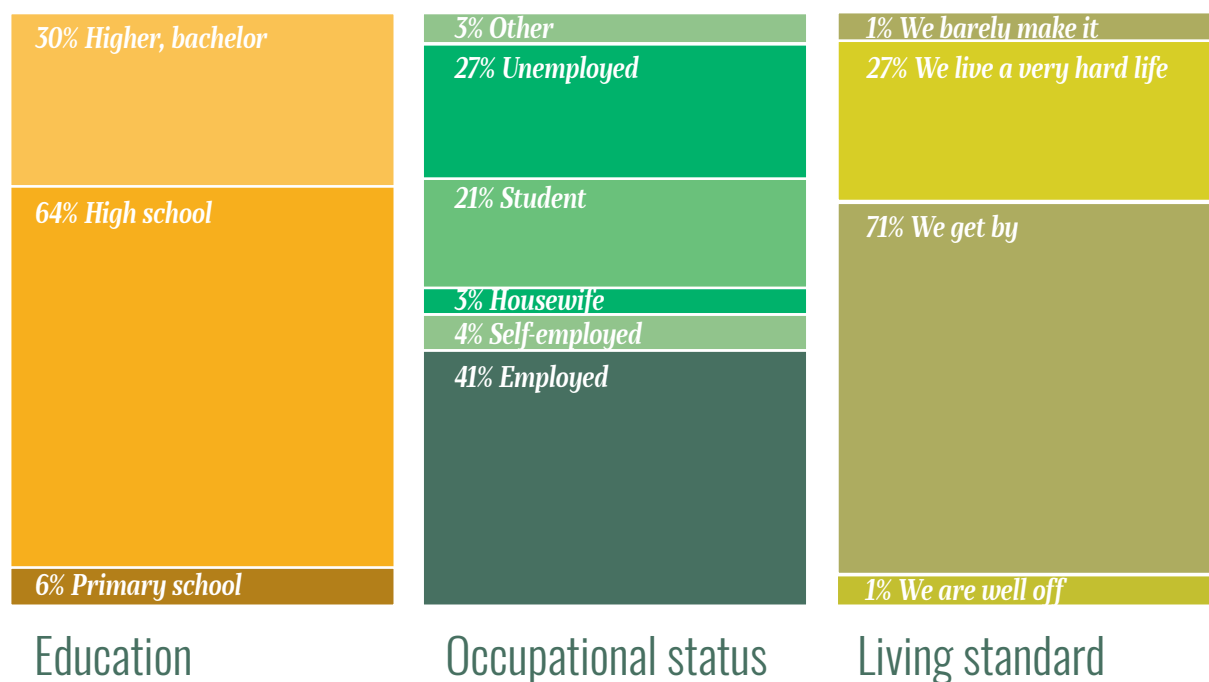# Rural Youth – Definition and Size

For the purposes of this study, rural youth is defined as young people aged 18 to 29 years living in rural settlements.

The Law on Territorial Organization of the Local Self-Government defines the rural settlement as a type of settlement with one functional purpose in which one activity prevails, has agricultural features and functions (Official Gazette, No. 55/2004).

Demographic profile

A total of 136 young people living in rural settlements took part in the quantitative face-to-face survey.

To get an in-depth insight into the background, perceptions and opinions of the group, the quantitative survey was complemented by one focus group.

Education	Occupational status	Living standard
30% Higher, bachelor	3% Other	1% We barely make it
64% High school	27% Unemployed	27% We live a very hard life
	21% Student	71% We get by
	3% Housewife	
	4% Self-employed	
	41% Employed	
6% Primary school		1% We are well off

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in the socio-political developments in the country

How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?

10%	**35%**	**35%**	**19%**	**1%**
Very	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all	Does not know

Compared to other youth groups (general youth and first time voters), rural youth tend to be more interested in socio-political-developments and are more civically engaged. The research shows that almost half (45%) of the respondents are "very" or "somewhat interested" in socio-political development issues, while 54% are "not at all" or "not very" interested. Respondents with higher education tend to have a more pronounced interest in socio-political development issues (76% are "very" or "somewhat interested"). Four out of ten respondents sometimes or often discuss these issues with other people, while six out of ten rarely or never do.

According to the focus group participants, the COVID-19 pandemic ranks the highest among the socio-political issues relevant to the quality of life. Other issues of concern include the current economic situation in the country, unemployment, and social stability.

Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/topics concern you?

How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially and politically active?

Economic and social stability	78%	70%
Local issues	74%	71%
Health care	74%	63%
Corruption	70%	65%
Education	68%	63%
Environment	67%	59%

Specific needs of my community	65%
	57%
Judiciary	63%
	58%
Specific needs of my ethnic group	60%
	62%
Inter-ethnic relations	60%
	55%
Specific needs of my gender	53%
	50%

Issues that concern me
Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active
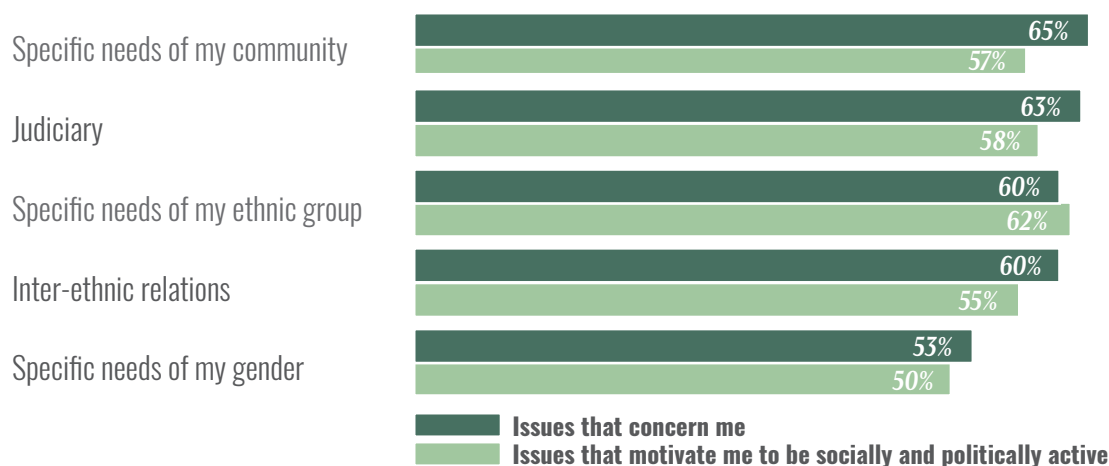
More than 70% of the survey participants indicated that economic and social stability, local issues, and health care (most likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic) rank the highest on the list of concerns specific to this group, and are the key driving factors for their social and political activation.

Compared to the other groups included in the research, this group is the least concerned about the specific needs of their gender, ethnic group or interethnic relations in general.

This demographic group expresses dissatisfaction with the quality of life of the young people in rural areas. Concerns were about the lack of cultural events, entertainment and engaging content, due to which young people tend to spend their free time in local cafes and gambling facilities.

Migration also ranks high among the issues of concern, with young people leaving rural areas and moving to bigger places and/or outside the country. The respondents also indicate disinterest in agriculture, a profession which is slowly dying.

Furthermore, the group faces difficulties with public transportation to neighbouring towns, which force young people to travel in groups together and use taxi services instead.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Young people in rural settlements are interested in information concerning sports, entertainment, science, and culture.

Similarly to the young people in general and first time voters, social media (Facebook and Instagram) are the predominant sources of information for rural youth, as indicated by 53% of the survey participants. Despite the popularity of the social media as a source of information, rural youth are concerned about the proliferation of fake news and lack of control over online media.

Two out of ten respondents source information about the current socio-political developments via television, while one out of ten obtains information online.

Social media (Facebook and Instagram) are the predominant sources of information for rural youth, as indicated by 53% of the survey participants.

f 53%

There is no significant difference with regards to the use of various sources of information across gender, ethnicity, and education profile in this group.

Furthermore, this demographic group is sceptical about the objectivity, independence, and political impartiality of the media in the country, which leads to very low trust in the media.

> *I think the media is inclined towards one or another political party. As if everyone is reporting what is in their favour, everyone is telling their own perspectives of the events, their own version of the truth.*
> *Male, 18, Mogila*

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Seventy-three per cent (73%) of the rural youth have never been involved in an event, activity or process that could impact the community or their immediate surroundings, nor are interested in becoming more civically engaged. Interestingly, this demographic group shows the highest motivation for civic engagement in their communities in comparison to first time voters and youth in general.

Have you been involved in any activity that could have affected any change in the community?

25%
73%
2%

Are you interested in more active civic involvement?

30%
66%
4%

0%   100%

Yes   No   Do not know

Survey respondents with higher education tend to have a pronounced interest in civic involvement.

> Fifty-eight per cent (58%) of the survey participants do not believe in making a positive change by individual or NGO engagement, while 25% lack interest in civic engagement, which explains the low motivation for civic participation.

The focus group findings show that young people from rural areas tend to have individualistic approach and become politically active for personal gains (e.g. obtain employment). With regards to political party participation, rural youth view the economic stability (the party as an employment agency) as the highest priority. However, their party membership does not appear to be very effective in policy making and addressing local issues of concern.

The factors that contribute to low civic involvement and participation can be summarized as follows:

- Young people lack unity and collective action to achieve goals due to strong division along political lines;
- Young people focus on personal interests and benefits, particularly employment;
- The family system does not stimulate young people to show proactive behavior.

> " *The voice of young people is not heard here. You can have any university degree, but if you aren't a member of a political party, you are nothing.* "
> *Male, 21, Kosturino*

> " *I think the problem is that we are all convinced that we have to be party members in order to achieve something and change something.* "
> *Female, 18, Mogila*

Factors that promote involvement

Responsiveness of the institutional system is a key motivator for this group to be more involved in activities that could effectuate change in the community, which is cited by four out of ten respondents. Other important motivating factors are related to their representation interests (indicated by 19%) and prospects for personal or family benefits (indicated by 10%).

Whereas almost half of the respondents (48%) do not believe they can make an impact as a citizen, 29% believe they can make a meaningful impact in their municipality and 7% believe they can impact the ministers (the central government).

Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

On the question whether they would be willing to participate in civic activities, 44% of the rural youth indicated they would rather prefer to respond to a questionnaire, 38% would meet colleagues and/or friends to discuss local personal or family concerns and 37% would prefer to seek information via brochures or leaflets. The percentage of rural youth that do not prefer to be more active is higher: 82% would not attend a political party meeting, 72% would not attend a public debate and/or an online/zoom meeting, 65% would not participate in civic activities, and 61% would not read an online brochure or leaflet.

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

44%
Respond a questionnaire

37%
Read a brochure or a leaflet

38%
Meet colleagues, friends to discuss

ELECTION PROCESS

Young people from rural areas associate elections with phrases such as: "disaster", "unnecessary waste of money", "unnecessary expense of the state budget", "irregular", "framed results". Compared to first time voters and youth in general, rural youth believe more in the importance of citizens' vote and its impact on election results.

Do you think that every vote is important and can affect the election results?	**74**% Yes	**21**% No	**4**% Refuses to answer	**1**% Does not know

Almost three quarters of the survey participants think that every vote is important and can impact election results (74%), while only 21% do not believe so.

More than half of the respondents (57%) indicate that voting per se is not sufficient to engage citizens in activities that can influence policies, three out of ten believe that voting is sufficient, while one out of ten is ignorant on the issue.

Motivation to vote

How regularly do you vote?

65% regularly or often	19% sometimes	8% usually not	4% never

Similarly to the youth in general and first time voters, also included in this research, youth is motivated by actions rather than words. This type of reasoning underlies both their motivation to vote as well as to be politically active and civically engaged.

The research shows that 65% vote almost regularly or often, 19% sometimes, 8% usually do not vote, and 4% never vote.

In addition, 48% of the respondents regularly vote for the same party, while 31% vote for different political parties. This indicates that their support for a particular political party may change if other political options arise.

Factors that influence their decision to vote

Similarly to the general population, the top three factors that influence young people's decision to vote are: perception that voting is a civic right and duty (55%), prospects for better future (37%), and fear that someone would steal their vote (21%).

55%
Civic right and duty

37%
Better future

21%
Fear that someone will steal their vote

In addition, this group emphasises the political pressure to vote because in small villages "everybody knows everything about everyone"

The survey participants would like to see more representatives of Roma people, youth, and familiar people on the candidate or council lists. More than half of the respondents (53%) indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families, while for 43% this differs from their families.

Six out of ten respondents' decisions to vote is not influenced by their friends.

> *If you don't vote, you're afraid someone might say you haven't voted. We don't know whether people vote for a certain political party or if they invalidate their ballot, but we know that there is political influence in everything. I think people are too frightened to stay at home.*
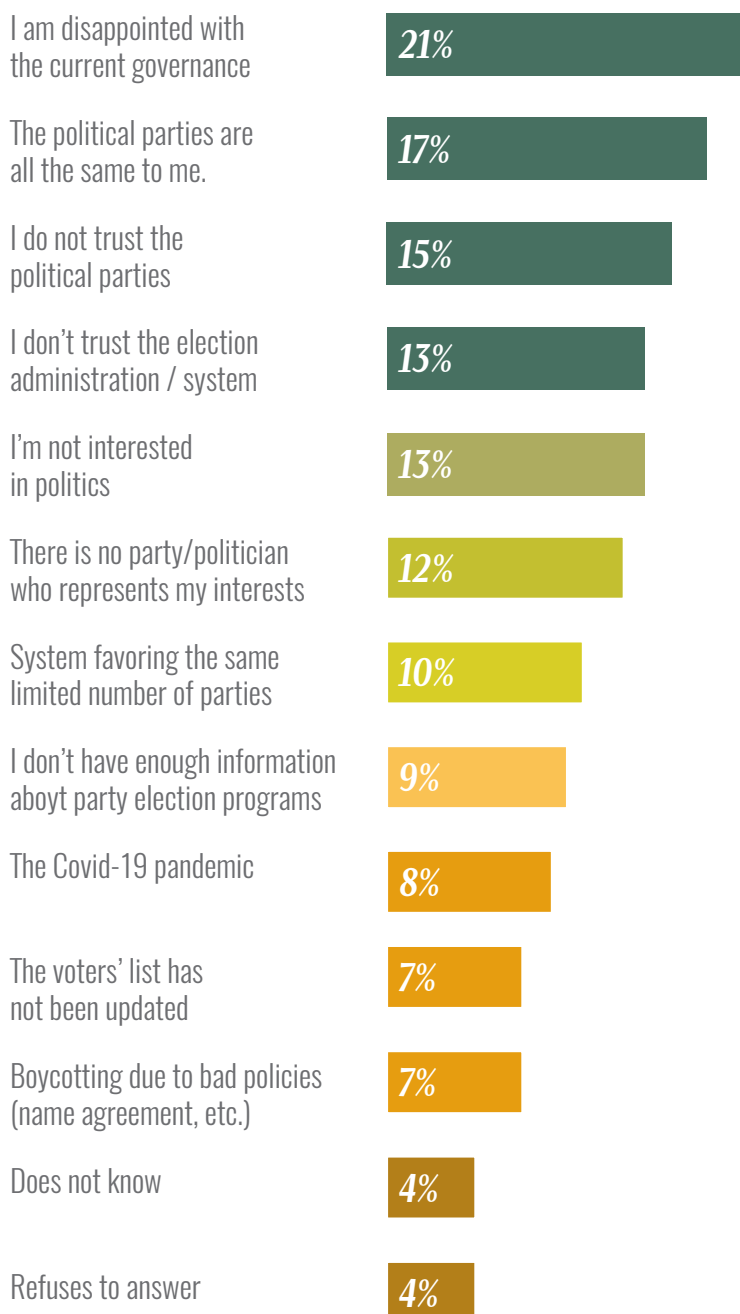> *Male, 24, Kalaslari*

If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?

Young people

- 7%
- 13%
- 36%
- 45%

People you know

- 7%
- 15%
- 35%
- 43%

Representatives from your local communitiy

- 7%
- 12%
- 45%
- 36%

Rural places

- 7%
- 11%
- 51%
- 32%

More likely   **No impact**   **Less likely**   **Do not know**
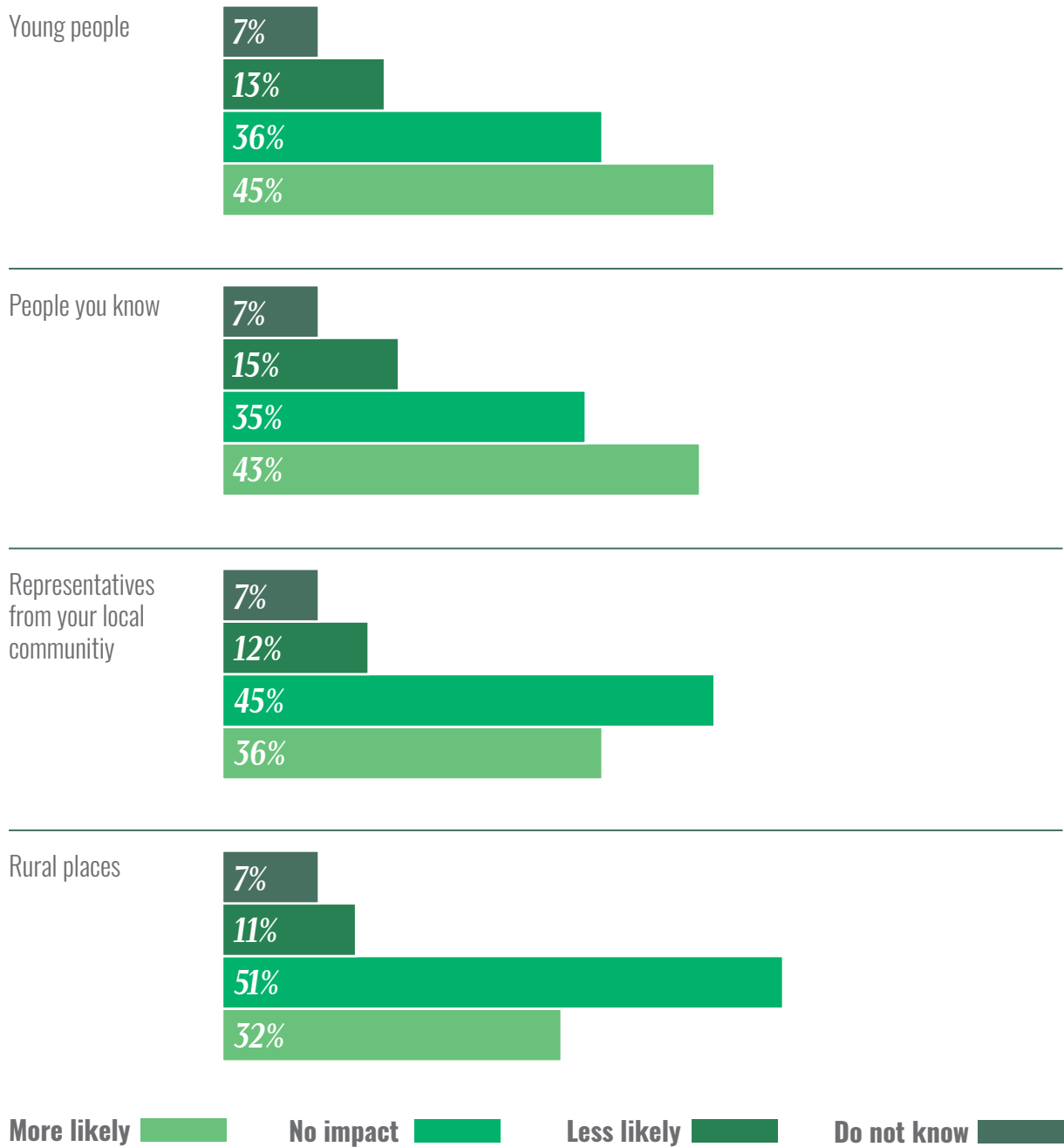
Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and the political parties is the key factor that influences the rural youth to abstain from voting.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

I am disappointed with the current governance	**21%**
The political parties are all the same to me.	**17%**
I do not trust the political parties	**15%**
I don't trust the election administration / system	**13%**
I'm not interested in politics	**13%**
There is no party/politician who represents my interests	**12%**
System favoring the same limited number of parties	**10%**
I don't have enough information aboyt party election programs	**9%**
The Covid-19 pandemic	**8%**
The voters' list has not been updated	**7%**
Boycotting due to bad policies (name agreement, etc.)	**7%**
Does not know	**4%**
Refuses to answer	**4%**

" *I think there are two types of people who do not vote. The first are those who are disappointed with the political parties, and the second are people who do not depend on political parties, therefore the election results do not have a significant effect on the quality of their life.* "
Female, 26, Prshovce

The majority believe that the interests of the rural population are not addressed equally by the political parties

22%	**13%**	**40%**	**20%**	**5%**
Yes	Most often yes	No	Most often no	Does not know

" *I think the rural areas are neglected. It happens to see road repair two days before the elections, they only start working then. You can understand their strategy very easily.* "
Male, 24, Kalaslari

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

The predominant sources of election-related information are TV (35%), social media (21%), web portals (18%), friends and family members (12%).

News (42%) and TV debates (30%) are the most practiced ways of sourcing election information by the survey participants.

Where do you get information about election?

35%
TV

21%
Social Media

18%
Web portals

12%
Close people
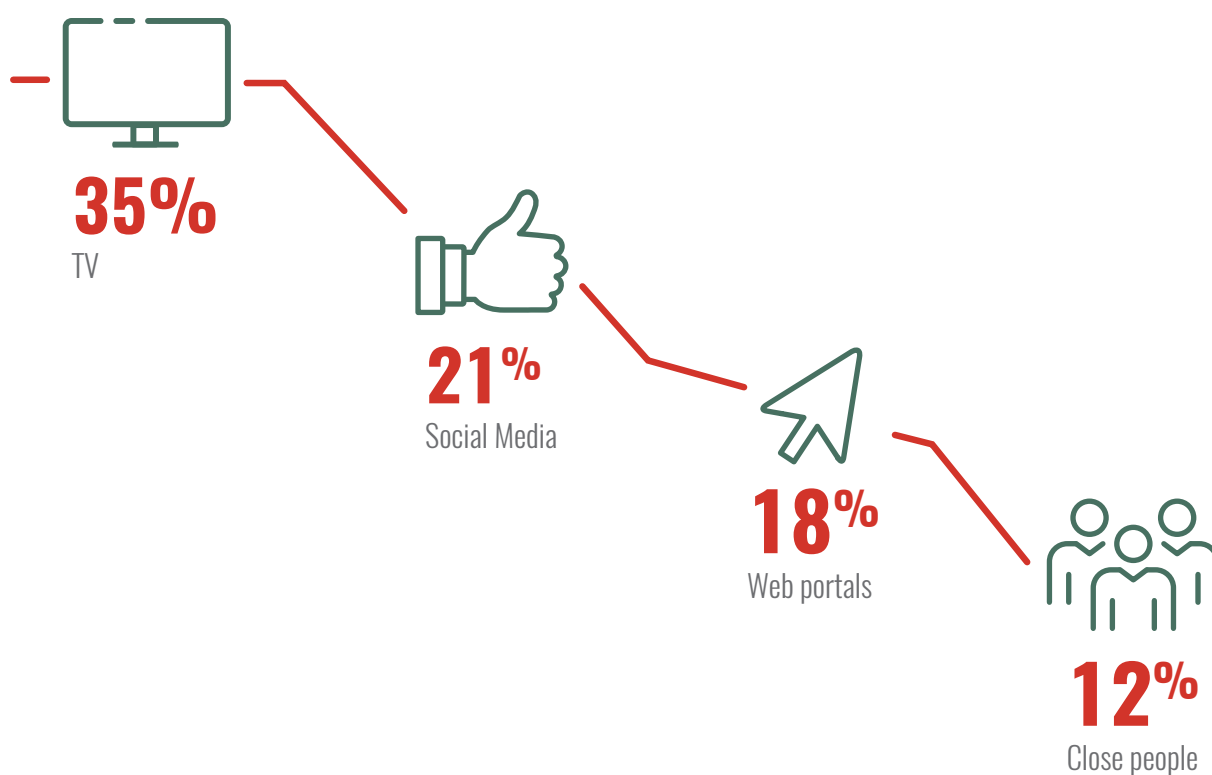
With regards to the communication with candidates, this group prefers personal or door-to-door communication (18%) and communication in smaller groups (17%). The tendency is to rely on the previous track record of the politicians when making an informed decision. With regards to obtaining information about the candidates in the election period, rural youth also rely on the candidates' track record and the social media.

Of note is that only one in ten respondents both before and in-between elections prefer to receive information through political programs. They would like to be informed about previous achievements and results of the candidate rather than be introduced with political programs in the election period.

Nevertheless, the survey participants point out that the political parties visit their villages only during the pre-election period. With bitterness, they state that these visits have only one goal - promoting the party and winning votes.

> *We have only one road that we use in order to reach another regional road and the biggest promise before every election is that the road will be constructed. Many years have passed, but the road was not asphalted until the village decided to boycott the elections. After we did this, they finally asphalted the road.*
> *Male, 24, Kalaslari*

This demographic group has the following expectations from the political parties and government:

- Economic development and stability
- Creating opportunities for youth employment
- Improving the educational system
- Improving basic conditions of the rural population such as sewerage and water supply

BARRIERS

Compared to the youth in general, rural youth are more willing to actively participate in civic and political life. As a group, they are more interested in socio-political developments and have a good understanding of the election process and its importance.

> The political participation of every underrepresented or politically marginalized group or lack thereof is very important. Some of the barriers identified by youth in general - doubts about their impact, youth underrepresentation, availability of channels to express their needs and concerns - are more pronounced by this group. Similarly to the general youth group, rural youth voters should be further motivated to engage in civic and political activities.

- **Stronger feeling of underrepresentation:** Rural youth feel that their concerns are not addressed by their representatives, and no elected officials from this demographic group hold office
- **Disbelief in their power** to influence issues and policies of their concern
- **Lack of communication** with officials, candidates, and non-government organizations
- **Belief in general politicization** of the society and reduced focus on policies and issues of concern for the citizens

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations for the general youth are also relevant and applicable to this group.

One of the most important recommendations to engage rural youth voters is to harness their higher willingness to participate in civic and political activities by creating and promoting conditions and channels that will facilitate such participation.

The specific recommendations for communication and interaction with rural youth are:

Focus on issues that concern rural youth

Local issues that can contribute to a better quality of life such as transportation, entertainment, and employment, being the key concerns expressed by survey participants.

Improve their negative perception of being underrepresented by elected officials

Consistently include, discuss, and address issues of concern to the rural youth in the public agenda of relevant political representatives both during and in-between elections.

- Encourage politicians and activists affiliated to major political parties to promote rural youth needs.

Strengthen their belief that they can make an impact in the community and society

- Promote positive examples of recognized and respected rural youth activists in the community and emphasize the impact of their accomplishments. Showcase examples that prove that activism matters and has the power to rectify the society.
- Promote small community projects and initiatives that tackle various issues of concern for the rural youth.
- Disseminate positive examples using different formats such as testimonials, third-party stories and community projects on a micro-level facilitated by a political party or other organization.

Establish channels for regular and close communications with rural youth

- Harness the potential of personal/direct contact to motivate and influence rural youth involvement and participation in civic activities and the election process.
- Consider formats and channels such as: informal meetings, community projects, regular check-ups, organization of small entertainment events or visits to events in other cities, etc.

Strengthen the capacities of rural youth to participate in civic and political life

Organize free programs on public speaking, debating, and project management to develop confidence to participate in civic and political life.

Create alliances

In addition to creating alliances with the media, establishing alliances with local youth organizations and influencers are also important in order to mobilize the rural youth. Partnering with local micro-influencers active in different areas of young people's life will increase their interest and willingness to engage.

Use relevant communication channels

- Focus on direct communication with rural youth. Consider direct, informal meetings focused on relevant topics.

- Use social media as the main information channel as it has the greatest potential for engagement and participation: promote topics of rural youth life, promote rural youth positive examples, provide opportunities to express their opinion (polls, debates, commentaries, etc.)

- Use TV during the election process, particularly news, debates and candidates' presentation.

- Organize entertaining activities and events. Such events could spark interest and attendance due to a general lack of organized entertainment in rural areas.
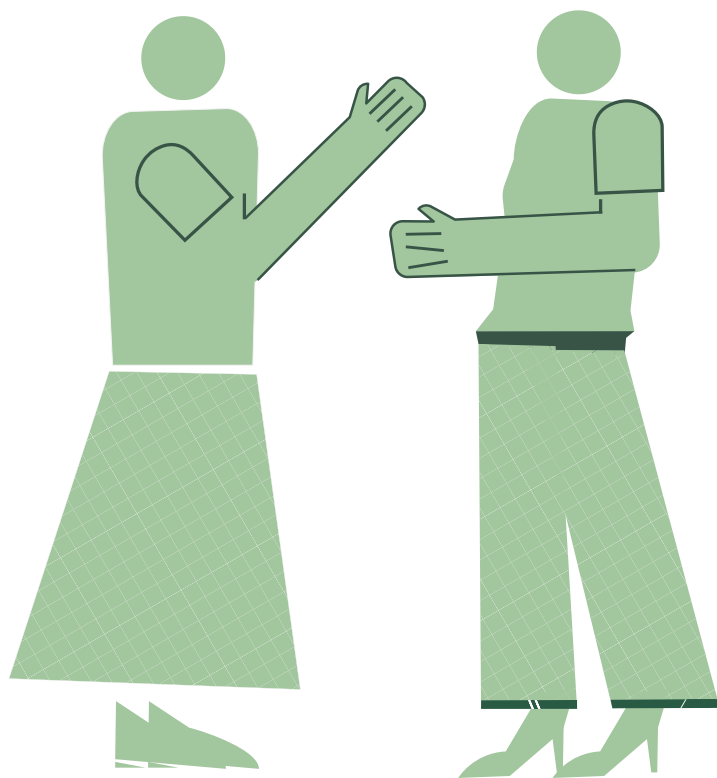
WOMEN

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research

Women Voters – Definition and Size

According to data from the State Statistical Office as of June 2020, there are a total of 839,730 women above the age of 18 in North Macedonia.

Women have been subject to discrimination and unequal treatment throughout history. Patriarchal norms and values that have dominated societies for centuries persist to this day and the historical footprint of inequality cannot be tackled solely by legal action. Its remnants affect the way women engage in civic activities and how they relate to politics, including the electoral process. The socio-cultural context generally discourages women from active participation in political life, both as voters and as civic activists. Although this is an issue of global proportions, the degree to which women face societal and institutional barriers varies from one country to another.

Demographic profile

The quantitative face-to-face survey was administered to a representative sample of 603 women respondents in four categories: region, urban-rural, and education. The quantitative research was complemented by a focus group, adding qualitative input to the overall analysis.
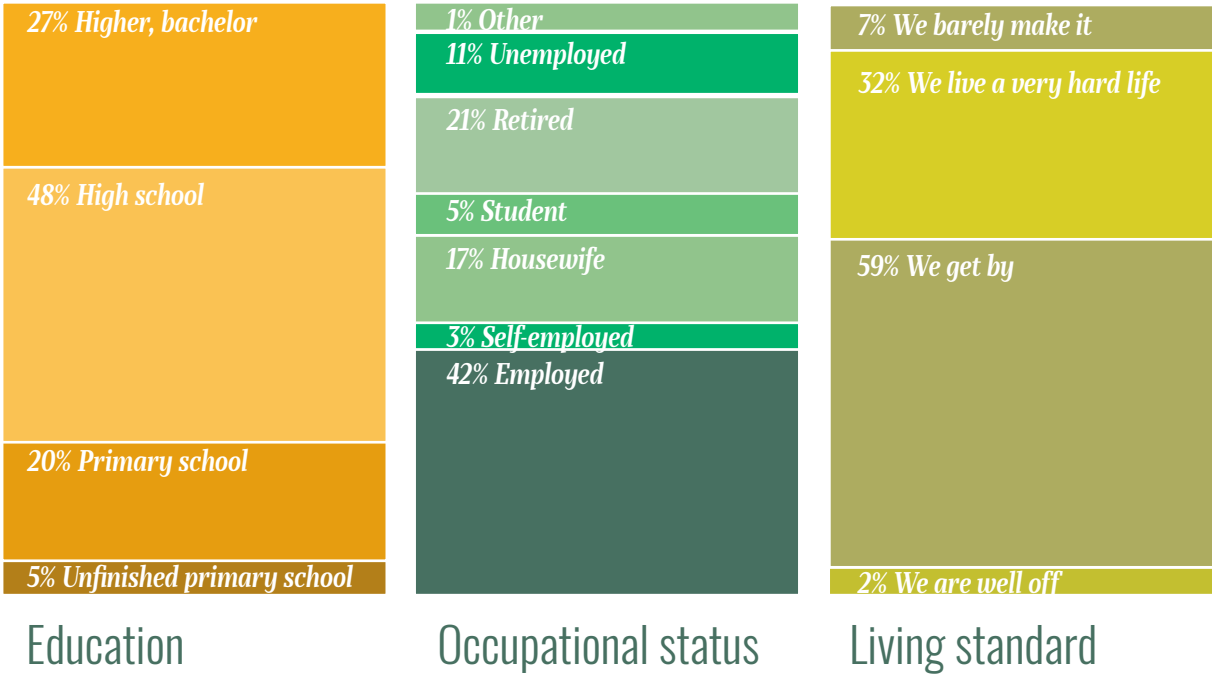
Education	Occupational status	Living standard
27% Higher, bachelor	1% Other	7% We barely make it
48% High school	11% Unemployed	32% We live a very hard life
20% Primary school	21% Retired	59% We get by
5% Unfinished primary school	5% Student	2% We are well off
	17% Housewife	
	3% Self-employed	
	42% Employed	

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in the socio-political developments in the country

How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?

10% Very   **37%** Somewhat   **31%** Not much   **21%** Not at all   **1%** Does not know

The research shows that 52% of the respondents are "not at all" or "not very interested" in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world, while 47% are "very" or "somewhat interested." Slightly over half (51%) rarely or never discuss these issues with other people. Further analysis shows that 13% fewer women than men indicate interest in socio-political developments and readiness to discuss these issues with other people.

Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/topics concern you?
How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially or politically active?

Topic	Concern	Motivate
Economic and social stability	78%	64%
Local issues	73%	65%
Health care	83%	74%
Corruption	70%	60%
Education	72%	65%
Environment	75%	66%
Specific needs of my community	70%	61%
Judiciary	63%	55%
Specific needs of my ethnic group	58%	54%

Inter-ethnic relations	57%
	50%
Specific needs of my gender	59%
	53%

■ Issues that concern me
■ Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active
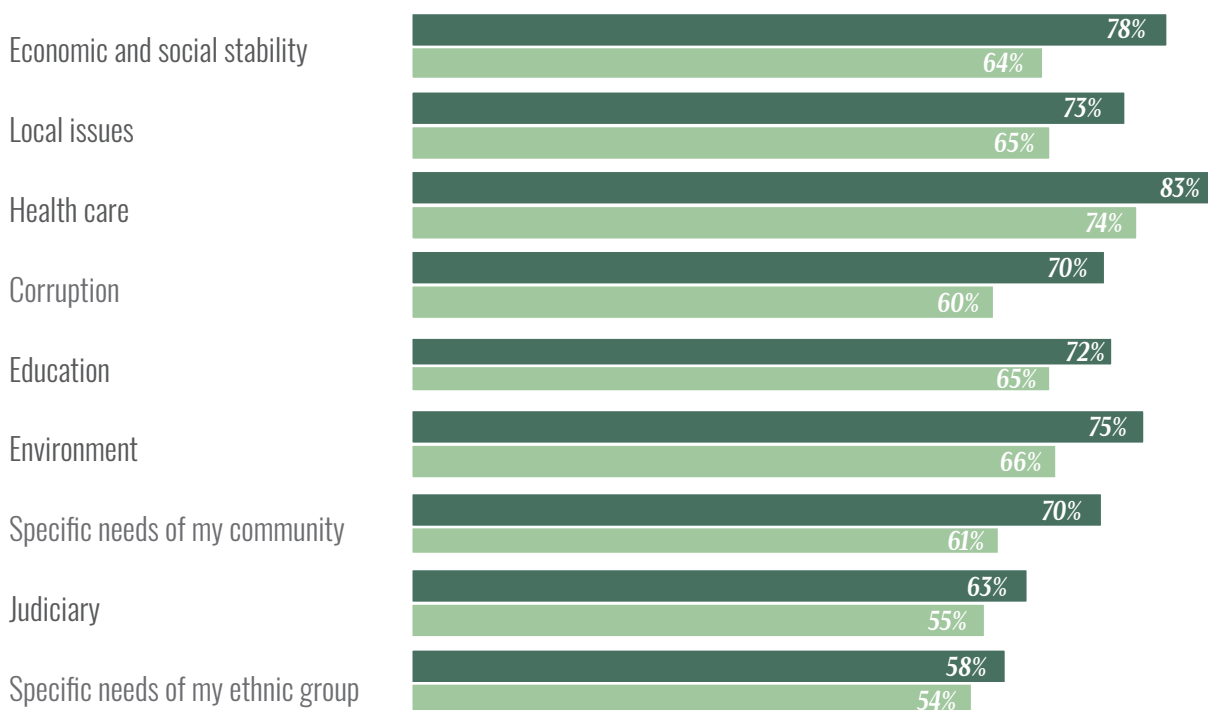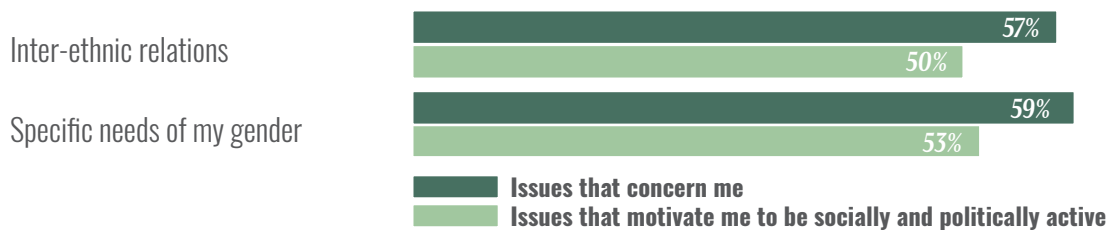
Health care (83%), economic and social stability (78%), and environment (75%) are the top three prevailing concerns of the respondents and are considered the key motivators for their social and political activation, followed by education and local governance concerns.

Women respondents are the least concerned with specific needs related to their ethnic group, interethnic relations, and interestingly, with the specific needs of their gender.

Both qualitative and quantitative research demonstrates that women's major priorities are of social and infrastructure nature concerning child care, kindergartens, schools, and safe neighbourhoods. Women are mostly interested in tangible and specific issues that could improve their lives and those of family members, and are less interested in abstract and political issues.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Women participants in focus groups (with rural and urban women) are mostly interested in information concerning COVID-19 and its effects on education, education process, kindergartens, unemployment, youth problems, as well as the current political situation and formation of the new government.

> " *I am interested in information concerning everything that affects me in my everyday life, from education to health and economics. For example, it is very important whether schools will resume in September [with physical presence of the children]* "
> *Woman, 39, Skopje*

More than half of the women respondents (52%) indicated that television is their predominant source of information, a slightly higher percentage compared to men (45%).

Twenty-seven per cent (27%) of the respondents point out they learn about socio-political developments via social networks, 7% via web portals, 4% through their family and friends, while 9% are not informed at all.

Similarly to the trends in the general population, social media is more frequently used by younger women aged up to 24 (54%), students (46%), and those with higher education (39%).

Focus group findings show a low level of trust in the media among the female participants, mostly due to fake news and perceived media bias. Therefore, there is a tendency to follow information from several different media to compare and analyse the information.

I do not have a specific media I trust because in my opinion all news is censored and 90% of the information is false and meaningless.
Woman, 35, Skopje

More than half of the women respondents (52%) indicated that television is their predominant source of information, a slightly higher percentage compared to men (45%).

TV 52%

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Eight out of ten survey respondents are not interested in increasing their civic activity.

Have you been involved in any event, activity, or process that could have effected change in the community or the place where you live?

- 33%
- 65%
- 2%

Are you interested in a more active civic involvement?

- 24%
- 71%
- 5%

0%   **100%**

Yes   No   Do not know / Refuses to answer

There are less civically engaged respondents among women (26%) than among men (40%).

Also, more men (30%) compared to women (17%) are interested in more active civic involvement.

Women respondents indicated the following factors that contribute to the low level of civic participation:

- Lack of transparency, responsiveness, and accountability of the institutions.
- Lack of professionalism, competence, and motivation among public employees.
- Insufficient motivation to persevere in pursuing initiatives and their perception as "already lost battles".

- Persistence of stereotypes and prejudices against women.
- Low self-confidence and human rights awareness among women.
- Excessive workload with households responsibilities and child and elderly care.

> The above outline of factors shows that female civic participation is affected by challenges in complex ways. In addition to the challenges faced by both genders, women have been traditionally expected to provide family-related caregiving services which in turn diminish their leisure time and opportunities to engage in civic activities.

" I believe that we distrust the institutions because they are playing ping-pong with us. Whenever we complain, they say that it is not in their domain. So you are referred to another institution, and there again they say they are not in charge. This continues until you get tired of playing ping-pong, you withdraw and give up. "
Woman, 45, Shtip

Factors that promote involvement

Responsiveness of the system is the key motivator for the women respondents to participate in activities that could effectuate change in the community, as noted by 26% of the respondents. Other important factors pertain to prospects for obtaining personal or family-related benefits (15%) and representation of their interests (11%).

More than half of the respondents (57%) believe that they cannot make an impact as a citizen, whereas, similarly to other demographic groups, 26% believe they can make a meaningful impact in their municipality. Less than 5% believe they can influence the Prime Minister, the Parliament, ministers and the President of the country.

More women (57%) than men (48%) believe that they cannot make an impact as a citizen. This is not surprising given that women are less active than men and have lower awareness of their citizen rights.

Further breakdown of the survey data suggests that disbelief in own impact is most pronounced among women in the following categories:

- Women - members of ethnic Albanian or other ethnic: non-majority ethnic community
- Women with lower education
- Women - housewives
- Women in rural areas

Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

Concerning participation in civic activities, 39% of the respondents cited a preference for brochures or leaflets as information means, 37% preferred meetings with colleagues/friends to discuss personal or family issues, and 36% cited a preference for participation in polling. A significantly smaller percentage of the respondents is willing to participate in civic activities, notably party gatherings (12%), online meetings (13%), and public debates (14%).

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

36%
Respond a
questionnaire

39%
Read a brochure
or a leaflet

37%
Meet colleagues,
friends to discuss

In general, women tend to participate less in the above civic activities compared to men.

The research shows that 56% of the respondents do not believe in making positive change by individual engagement (34%) or engagement in NGOs (22%), while 31% lack interest in politics, presumably due to low motivation resulting from excessive household workload and caregiving activities. Women tend to indicate a increased lack of interest in politics (31%) compared to men (19%).

Female participants in the focus group discussions share the perception that this is a "men's world" where the voices of women are not seriously considered. They believe female initiatives are less effective compared to male or mixed-gender initiatives. The respondents underline that the effectiveness of female initiatives is contingent upon a variety of factors including cooperation with other people, teamwork, mutual support, persistence and willpower, which compensate for the lack of institutional support and fend off persistent systemic barriers that disadvantage women.

Another issue emphasized by the respondents is the education of girls, stimulation of their self-confidence, assertiveness and persistence, as well as raising gender equality awareness. They also stressed that boys should be brought up to respect women and promote gender equality instead of patriarchal gender roles at home and in the society.

> " *In fact, I believe women are more active. Unfortunately in this chauvinistic and patriarchal society, when women take initiative, we get very little attention. Our initiatives may even be ridiculed, unlike the mixed initiatives or male initiatives. I get the impression that we are perceived as being always dissatisfied; always looking for something we don't have... so I think that although women take initiatives, there is no serious consideration.* "
> *Woman, 28, Kumanovo*

ELECTION PROCESS

Focus group participants tend to associate elections in the country with the following phrases: "too frequent", "huge expense for the country's budget", "expensive pre-election campaigns", "monotony", "false promises" and "attacks between the political opponents".

Do you think that every vote is important and can affect the election results?	**70%** Yes	**22%** No	**1%** Refuses to answer	**7%** Does not know
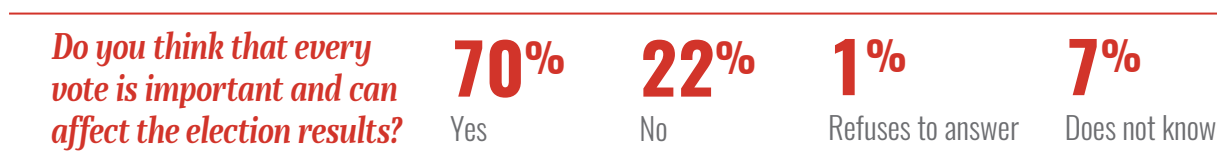
Seven out of ten respondents believe that every vote is important and can impact election results, while two out of ten do not believe so.

More women (22%) than men (15%) do not believe in the importance of every vote and the reason for the scepticism may be due to women's lower degree of confidence and trust in the institutions of the system, including those responsible for election administration.

Almost two-thirds of the respondents (64%) indicate that voting per se is not sufficient to engage citizens in policy changes, 23% believe that voting can effectuate change or influence policies, while 11% claimed ignorant on the issue.

The generally accepted opinion that women shy away from public participation is also applicable here. Namely, while the majority of women believe that voting is not sufficient to engage citizens in policy changes, they are also hesitant to engage more. Therefore, the lack of engagement is a complex issue, not dependant solely on the lack of political awareness and as such requires further analyses and interpretation.

Motivation to vote

How regularly do you vote?

52% regularly	21% often	13% sometimes	6% usually not	5% never

Fifty-two per cent (52%) of the survey respondents indicate that they vote almost regularly, 21% often, 13% sometimes, 6% usually abstain, and 5% regularly abstain from voting.

Forty-two per cent (42%) of the survey respondents vote for different political parties during different election cycles, while 39% regularly vote for the same party.

Factors that influence the decision to vote

The top three factors that positively influence respondents' turnout are: perception that voting is a civic right and duty (53%), prospects for a better future (41%), and fear that their vote would be stolen (26%).
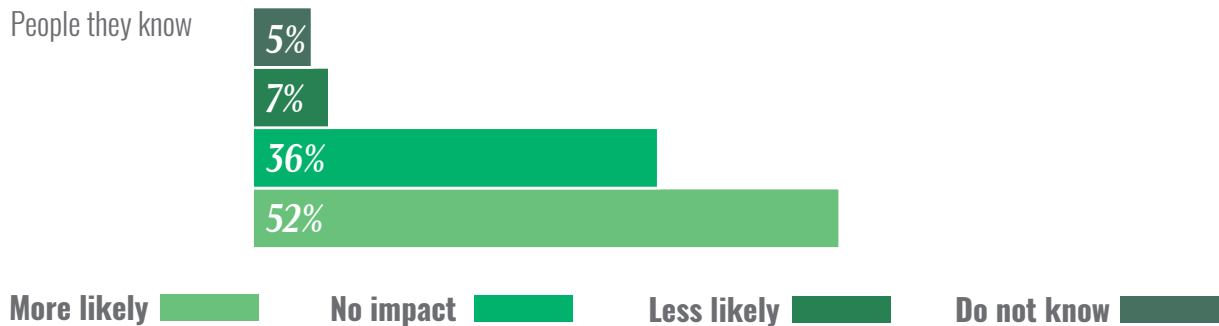
Sixty-two per cent (62%) of the women respondents indicate that their decision to vote regularly or most often overlaps with that of their families, while 26% claimed that their decision is the same or most often the same as that of their friends.

53%
Civic right and duty

41%
Better future

26%
Fear that someone will steal their vote

> The survey respondents would like to see more familiar people, and young people on the candidate lists.

If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?

Representatives from your local communitiy
- 6%
- 9%
- 45%
- 40%

Women
- 5%
- 7%
- 47%
- 41%

Young people
- 5%
- 7%
- 41%
- 47%

People they know

5%

7%

36%

52%

More likely | **No impact** | **Less likely** | **Do not know**

Interestingly, while women are not concerned with the specific needs of their gender or with equal gender representation, they tend to express satisfaction when women are active in politics and prefer to vote for women.

Thus, there is a discrepancy between the understanding of gender equality and its practical implementation (e.g. women running for political office). This discrepancy may be a result of the insufficient efforts of the education institutions, civil society, media to raise public awareness on the importance of gender equality and deflect stigmatization of the word "feminism".

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and the political parties is the key factor that influences the respondents' decision to abstain from voting.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

I do not trust the political parties
10%

I'm not interested in politics
7%

The political parties are all the same to me
10%

There is no party/politician who represents my interests
6%

I don't have enough information about party election programs
3%

I am disappointed with the current governance
14%

The current system is favouring selected parties
6%

Boycotting due to bad policies (name agreement, etc.)	5%
The Covid-19 pandemic	5%
I don't trust the election administration/election system	6%
The voters' list has not been updated	4%
Nothing can affect me	18%
Refuses to answer	2%
Does not know	3%
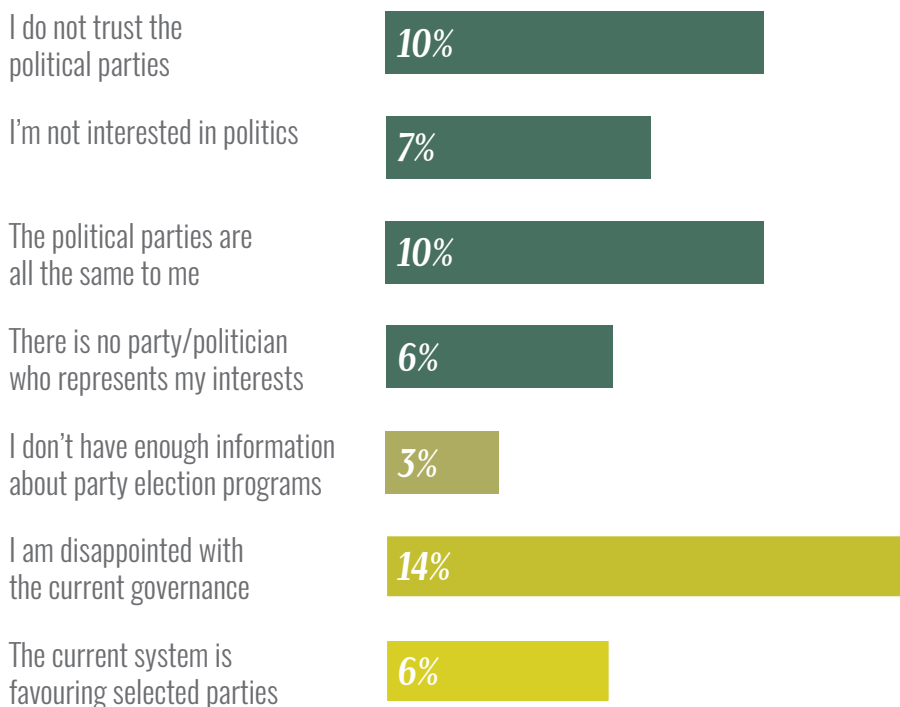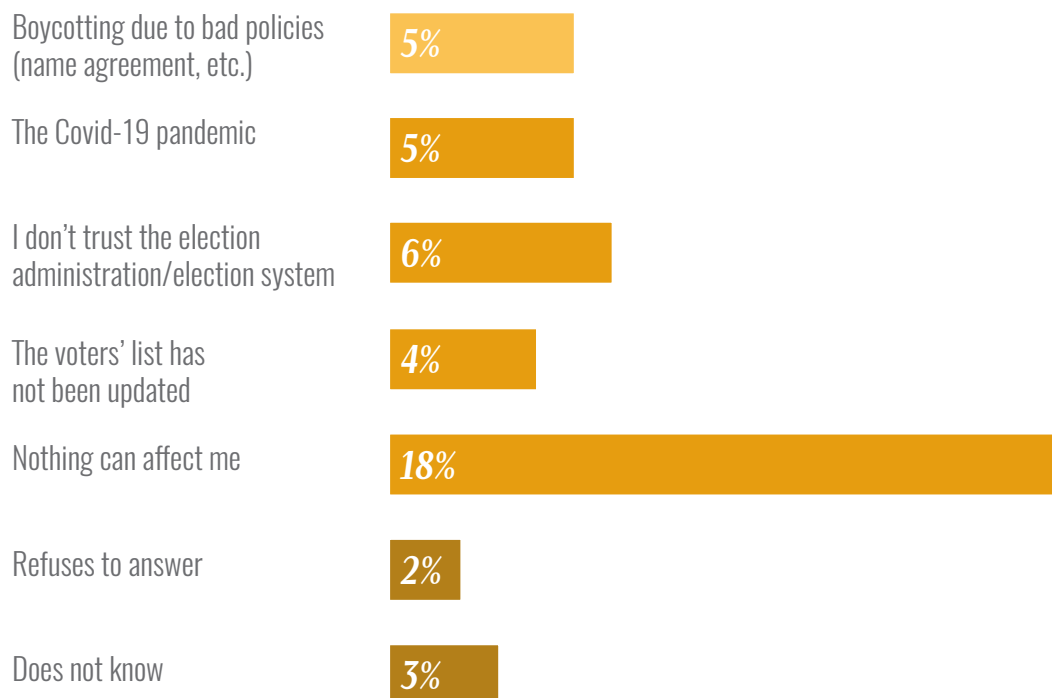
The high percentage of women (7 out of 10) who believe that every vote is important overlaps with the focus group findings that one part of the dissatisfied female voters contemplate boycotting elections as a way of expressing disappointment and revolt against the political parties and seek punishment for their unfulfilled promises.

> " *Maybe it would be better if the majority of the people did not go out to vote. If there is a large number of dissatisfied voters who do not turn out to vote, then the political parties may be alarmed that something is really wrong. I think that would be a good message for them to start thinking about this country and these people.* "
> *Woman, 39, Skopje*

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COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

Television (55%), social media (15%), web portals (11%), friends and family members (6%) are the predominant sources of election information for the respondents.

Survey participants noted that news (51%) and debates (26%) are the most practiced ways of obtaining election information, whereas one in ten respondents (13%) indicates that they do not seek out election information at all.

Where do you get information about election?

55%
TV

15%
Social Media

11%
Web portals

6%
Close people
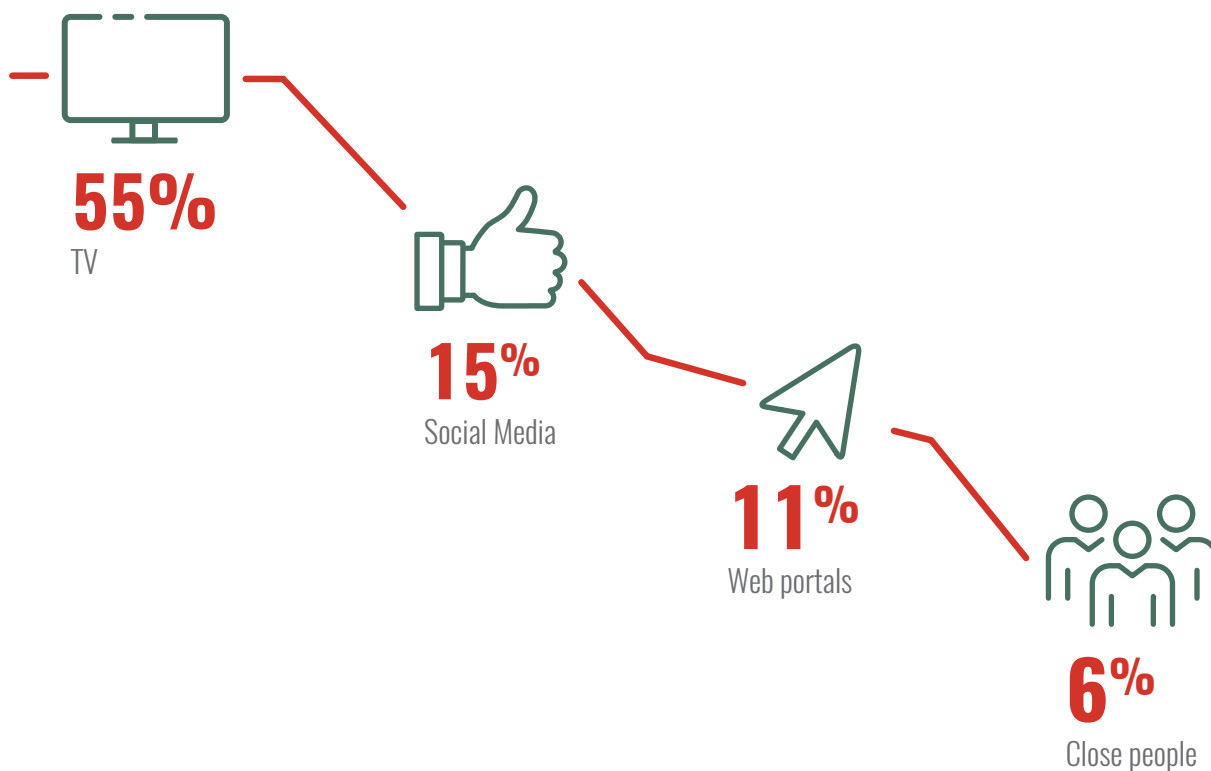
Media (19%), door-to-door communication (14%), and in-person communication in smaller groups (14%) are the most preferred types of communication with party candidates and elected representatives between elections. Twenty-two per cent (22%) of the respondents rely on the candidates' political track record in making an informed decision.

The same types of communication with the candidates are preferred before elections: media (30%), door-to-door communication (22%), and in-person communication in smaller groups (22%), whereas 32% of the respondents rely on the candidates' political track record in making an informed decision.

The survey participants expect political parties to:

- Foster open discussions with the citizens concerning local issues and suggest solutions.
- Familiarize with the municipality, the local concerns and problems.
- Take measures to improve child safety in schoolyards.
- Emphasize the need for centres for children with autism, support and protection programs for socially vulnerable categories, including single parents.
- Reduce corruption in state institutions.
- Respect human rights and freedoms.

BARRIERS

Unequal political and civic participation and representation in political life is the key challenge of every democratic society, including North Macedonia. Gender inequality is the underlying reason for the significantly lower participation of women in socio-political life compared to men. Despite the formal recognition of equal political rights of women and men, the socio-political participation (political party membership and participation, standing for office, being elected and holding office within legislative or administrative bodies) remains dominated by men. The development of the society is contingent upon the fully fledged acknowledgment of the experiences, skills, and concerns of women and their full participation and representation in the legislative decision making.

> The research has identified key factors and barriers that influence women's civic and political participation. Barriers are related to socio-economic factors, capacity, and cultural influence.

Patriarchal value system defining the place (at home) and the role (mother, sister, wife) of women in the society.

Related to the above, perceived lack of time due to the women's role as primary care provider in the family and household workload

Difficulty to relate with political topics and issues, especially those that do not affect them directly.

Lack of knowledge about different forms of civic and political participation: available opportunities for participation, benefits from participation, etc., especially among women with lower education and socio-economic status.

Scepticism about their power to influence politics in the country and to improve the quality of life.

Feeling of not being taken seriously and belief that initiatives raised by women are less effective compared to male or mixed-gender initiatives.

Lack of skills and knowledge to confidently participate, particularly in the political life due to historically rooted perception that men are suited for political life while women for reproductive and family-related caregiving roles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to these identified challenges and barriers, a set of interventions are recommended that may effectively contribute to improving civic and political participation of the women in the country:

Increase awareness about the importance of participation of women in civic and political affairs in democratic societies to counter gender stereotypes and to contribute to building a political culture conducive to participation of women at all levels of the society:

- Focus on the importance and benefits of socio-political participation.
- Deconstruct stereotypes and prejudice.
- Promote women's equality in political parties' policies and the society as a whole.
- Use positive image of women's political representatives in political campaigns.
- Ensure that the behaviour of the party members is in line with the values of gender equality.
- Build alliances with men and other women organizations to promote women's participation in public and political life.
- Strengthen civic and citizenship training in the formal education system at all levels and foster adult education on gender equality and non-discrimination.

Increase relevance and meaning of civic and political participation

- Educate women about the importance of participation.
- Relate tangible female concerns and issues with their power to influence policies and the decision making process in general.
- Conduct single-issue campaigns targeting women that address relevant policy issues or upcoming political decisions and have the power to engage.
- Initiate joint community based activities at micro level with organizations and experts dealing with issues of interest e.g. children, traffic safety, lighting of public spaces, water supply systems.
- Mainstream women's issues and concerns in party programmes and address them with special measures.

Strengthen their belief that they can make an impact in the community or society

- Promote different activists of both genders and use examples that can prove that activism, including for women's rights, matters and has the power to improve and influence the society.

- Promote success stories of smaller community projects resolving women's issues or concerns.

- Promote ways women can make an impact and emphasize the role of the woman as an agent for positive societal change.

- Increase visibility of female initiatives, garner attention and disclose institutional barriers that enforce gender bias practices.

- Establish mechanisms to consult and communicate with women in local communities when creating party programs or policies.

- Consider formats such as testimonials, third-party narratives, community projects on micro-level facilitated by political parties or other organizations, and direct contacts.

Initiate participation

- Due to lower self-initiative, woman should be directly and personally invited to engage in different civic activities).

- Demonstrate support and appreciation toward female initiatives.

- Promote channels, methods for participation and engagement that are sensitive to women needs and priorities.

- Provide support and flexibility taking into consideration their daily chores to ensure their presence and participation

- Use the power of collective motivation – invite groups of friends, colleagues, neighborhood, etc.

Strengthen capacities

- Build capacities to develop a skill set important for confident participation: leadership skills, public speaking, public appearance, etc.

- Provide media training to women activists and/or politicians to help enable effective media campaigns to promote their agenda.

Create alliances

With the media (traditional and nontraditional)

Media can play an important role in supporting women's balanced participation in political and public decision-making, including through equal coverage of female candidates, focus on the positive contributions of women in political and civic life, and avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes. These actions could help challenge negative attitudes towards women's political and civic participation or lack of confidence and support for female candidates among voters.

Media outlets should:

- Educate and sensitize about the importance of woman participation in socio-political life.
- Promote women's participation and interests.
- Emphasize the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination.
- Ensure that women and men have equal opportunities (air time, invitations to debates, topics for discussion) during election campaigns.
- Promote positive examples of female activism and political participation.
- Promote smaller community projects initiated and led by women.
- Promote ways and avenues for female participation, including promotion of NGOs.
- Contribute to building a political culture that encourages female participation at all levels of society, without fear of sexist, misogynist or bigoted abuse and hate speech, intimidation, and violence.
- Use the entertainment part of the program to raise awareness on the importance of active participation of women, e.g. film serial on female activism, content that promotes female leaders and positive examples.

With the NGOs (particularly those dealing with gender equality)

- Create supporting spaces and opportunities for women to come together and act on issues of concern.
- Provide guidance and resources that will encourage women to confidently participate in civic life.
- Provide formats for engagement of women.
- Serve as a source of support and empowerment for female initiatives.
- Use NGOs as a link between women in local communities and central authorities
- Provide mechanisms that will support dialogue between women and central authorities in support of increasing women's participation.
- Use NGOs to promote women leaders to set an example for other women.

With influencers/celebrities

Partner with influencers and celebrities, in particular with those who deal with issues relevant to women, to promote civic participation of women. Use their influence to raise awareness of the importance of women's participation for a better quality of life and influence by example.

Choose relevant communication channels

The research shows that women generally trust the media less and tend to scrutinize the information. Open and honest communication regardless of the channel is highly recommended.

Use TV to reach women

- Promote women activists and positive examples of women politicians.
- Promote topics relevant to women via debates, guest programs etc., especially those focused on their everyday life challenges.
- Include and promote women participants in the debates on topics not typically considered "women topics" and ensure women perspective is addressed.
- Promote principles of gender equality and non-discrimination.
- Use formats other than standard political TV shows. Include topics related to women participation in entertainment shows, morning programs, etc.

Organize face-to-face meetings or other community events

Harness the potential of the formats they are familiar with by discussing topics in an informal setting instead of organizing events they are unwilling to participate in.

- Use formats that facilitate direct interaction such as: small gatherings, local informal meetings to build trusting relationships and strengthen their positive self-perception.
- Use gender sensitive approach in the organization of meetings, and/or arrange or provide extra care and entertainment for their children
- Propose community projects or activities with the potential of gathering women from the community.

Use social media to reach younger women.

Social media as the key informational channel with great potential for engagement and participation of the younger part of the population:

- Promote youth topics
- Promote women candidates
- Promote positive examples of woman activism and their impact
- Promote party culture of non-discrimination and equality
- Enable free expression of opinion (polls, debate, commentaries) etc.
- Enable and support initiatives

Use other non-traditional channels

- Organize free training on leadership, public speaking, etc.
- Organize humanitarian activities and events to spark interest and attendance
- Organize fitness or hiking events
- Organize professional lectures, conferences, and workshops
- Organize film festivals dealing with women's activism issues
- Concerts, picnics and other events.

RURAL

WOMEN

Key findings from the qualitative
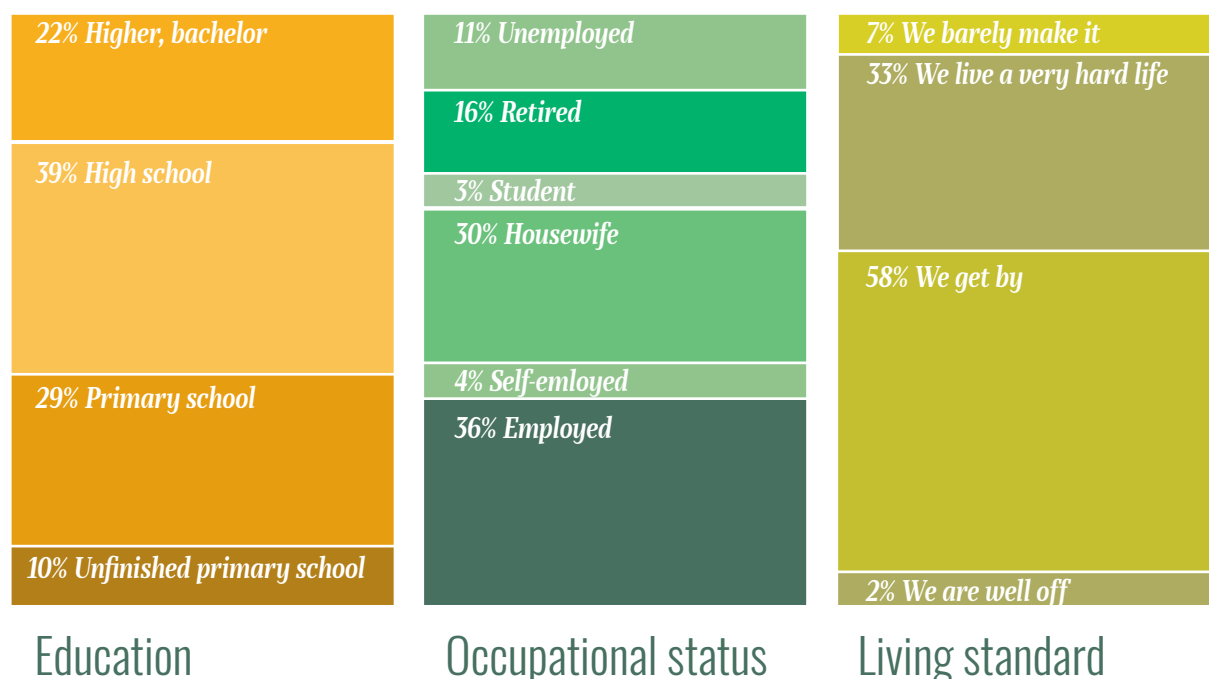and quantitative research

Rural Women - Definition and Size

According to data from the State Statistical Office as of June 2020, there are a total of 839,730 women at the age of 18 or above in North Macedonia, of which some 40% live in rural settlements.

A 2015 study on participation of rural women in politics found that active political participation of rural women in politics is negatively affected by their domestic responsibilities and the absence of infrastructure, such as available daycare.[11] With regards to family voting, there is a widespread opinion among experts that women in rural areas are exposed to strong spousal pressure concerning voting.[12] Rural women are also underrepresented in public discourse and in the public life.

Demographic profile

A total of 274 rural women respondents took part in the quantitative face-to-face survey. The survey was complemented with a focus group to provide additional qualitative analysis of the profile.

Education	Occupational status	Living standard
22% Higher, bachelor	11% Unemployed	7% We barely make it
39% High school	16% Retired	33% We live a very hard life
	3% Student	
	30% Housewife	58% We get by
29% Primary school	4% Self-emloyed	
	36% Employed	
10% Unfinished primary school		2% We are well off

Education   Occupational status   Living standard

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11 ISSHS and Akcija Zdruzenska: "Women's Equality in Decision Making and the Issue of Gender Equity Promotion in Polog Region" [„Состојба со еднаквоста на жените во одлучувањето и промоцијата на родова еднаквост во Полошкиот регион"], (Skopje, 2015), available at https://tinyurl.com/v4ot9k9 , accessed on October 30, 2020.

12 Interview with Xhabir Deralla, Executive Director of Civil, on February 10, 2020.

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in the socio-political developments in the country

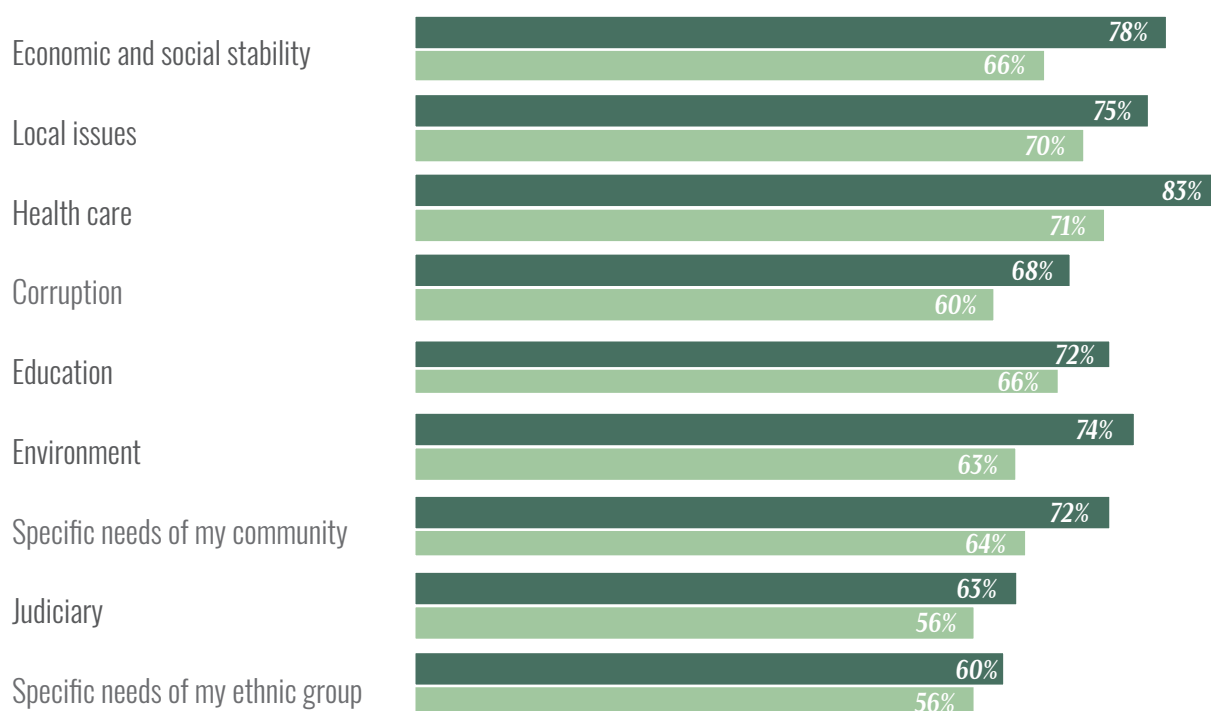*How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?*

9% Very   **37%** Somewhat   **33%** Not much   **20%** Not at all   **1%** Does not know

The research shows that 53% of women respondents living in rural settlements are "not at all" or "not very interested" in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world, while 46% are "very" or "somewhat interested." There is no difference related to the interest shown compared to urban women.

Slightly over half of these women (55%) rarely or never discuss these issues with other people, compared to 46% of urban women who are not willing to discuss the socio-political issues.

Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/ topics concern you?

How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially or politically active?

Topic	Concern	Motivate
Economic and social stability	78%	66%
Local issues	75%	70%
Health care	83%	71%
Corruption	68%	60%
Education	72%	66%
Environment	74%	63%
Specific needs of my community	72%	64%
Judiciary	63%	56%
Specific needs of my ethnic group	60%	56%

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Inter-ethnic relations	**60%**
	54%
Specific needs of my gender	**63%**
	55%

■ **Issues that concern me**
■ **Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active**
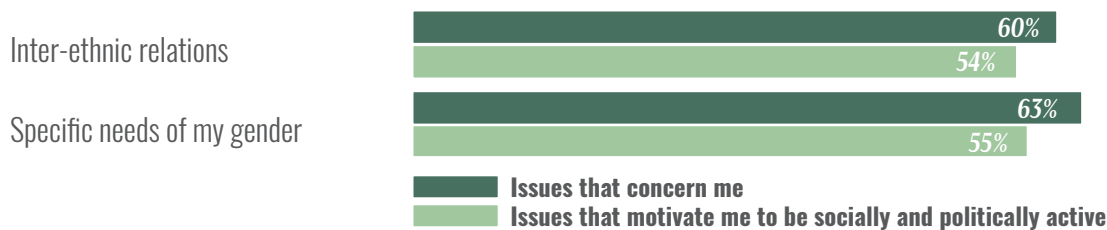
Health care (83%), economic and social stability (78%) and local issues (75%) are the top three prevailing concerns of the respondents. These issues, including education, are considered the key motivators for their social and political activation.

This group is the least concerned about the inter-ethnic relations and the specific needs of their ethnic group, their gender and the judiciary.

The results referring to the "specific needs of their gender" could be read in conjuction with the lack of knowledge and certain gender blindness in perceiving their social concerns as concerns in general, excluding gender inequality and the systemic disadvantage and discrimination against women.

INFORMATION SOURCES

The research, and in particular the discussions in the focus groups, show that rural women are mostly interested in information concerning COVID-19, education, unemployment, youth problems, as well as the current political situation and formation of the new government.[11]

Their principal concerns are related to local issues and problems including:

- Lack of clean drinking water
- Lack of sewerage and wastewater systems
- Poor infrastructure, unpaved streets, flooded streets due to heavy rainfall
- Stray dogs
- Lack of kindergartens
- Poor electrical power supply system resulting in frequent power outages

> " *I am together with my children at the moment... but I will try to share my opinion. As the other participants, I am also concerned about this pandemic and the health care in our country. I used to be interested in politics, but lately I am not. I stand aside.* "
> *Female, 38, Tearce*

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11 The field work (interviews and focus groups) of the research coincided with the consolidation of the government following the June, 2020 Parliamentary Elections.

More than half of the rural women respondents (55%) indicated that television is their predominant source of information

TV 55%
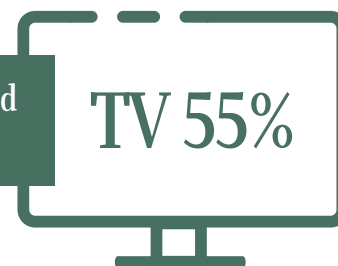
More than half of the rural women respondents (55%) compared to 52% women in general or 49% women from urban settlements, indicated that television is their predominant source of information, 24% of the respondents point out they learn about current socio-political developments via social networks, 7% most usually get informed via web portals, 5% through their family and friends, while 7% are not informed at all.

As is the case with women from urban settlements, focus group findings with rural women show low level of trust in the media and a tendency to follow information from several different media in order to compare the information and form their own opinion.

At the same time, some respondents stated they choose not to get informed at all by the websites of the institutions and municipalities because in their opinion all the information on these websites was outdated and incomplete.

> " *I do not use the social networks but I follow different TV channels, Alsat, TV 21, Telma ... I listen, I read the news, but I don't trust them. They report the news, but who knows if it's true.* "
> *Female, 38, Tearce*

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Eight out of ten survey respondents have never been involved nor do they intend to engage in civic activities.

Have you been involved in any event, activity, or process that could effect change in the community or the place where you live?

- 20%
- 79%
- 1%

Do you have a desire for greater civic involvement?

- 16%
- 79%
- 5%

0%   **100%**

Yes   No   Do not know / Refuses to answer

The discussion within the focus groups indicate several factors that contribute to low civic involvement and participation of the rural women:

- Stereotypes and prejudices against women.
- Lack of self-confidence and low awareness of their rights.
- Discrimination of women in terms of age, physical appearance, and political orientation.
- Excessive workload with households responsibilities, childcare and elderly care.

It should be noted that the factors mentioned are specific to rural women and are not typical for the general population.

> *I agree that women today are much more emancipated, educated and aware of their qualities. But, to be honest, women have more responsibilities at home than men. This is one of the reasons why we are prevented from attending gatherings and events as much as we want to. We are much more attached to our home than to what happens outside*
> *Female, 66, Ilinden*

Rural women perceive gender inequality as a factor of exclusion due to household, child and elderly care responsibilities which limits their opportunities for civic involvement and participation.

> *I think women have power, but the time has not yet come the world to acknowledge how powerful we are. Although it is said that women are equal with men, and they have rights and abilities, it is still very difficult. I say this because there are several grounds for discrimination. We are not discriminated only as women, but also by political party affiliation, whether we are beautiful or not, whether we are older or younger.*
> *Female, 31, Livada*

Rural women cite limited time and assistance with day-to-day responsibilities to get more involved in civic activities. In addition, gender prejudices and stereotypes, including low awareness, were mentioned as a demotivating factor. These are contextualized primarily within the limited conditions (for example, the infrastructure) rather than within the concept of gender equality.

Factors that promote involvement

Responsiveness of the system is the key motivator for the women respondents to become more involved in activities that could effect change in the community, as noted by 30% of the respondents. Other important motivating factors relate to the representation of their interests (15%) and prospects for obtaining personal or family-related benefits (14%).

Below is an outline of reccomendations that may help increase civic involvement and participation of rural women:

- Fair division of household chores and spousal or other family members support.
- Raising awareness about women rights through organized forums and informal meetings on municipal level.
- Building self-confidence, exercising public speech and speech in front of the media, in particular for the younger population of women.
- Stimulating persistence, assertiveness and gender equality when raising and educating young girls.

Sixty-three per cent (63%) of the women respondents living in rural settlements do not believe they can make a civic impact, 14 % more than women respondents living in urban settlements.

Twenty-three per cent (23%) per cent of the rural women respondents believe they can make a meaningful impact in their municipality. Less than 5% believe they can influence the Prime Minister, the Parliament, ministers and the President of the country.

Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

Concerning participation in public life, rural women cited a preference to polling (38%), brochures or leaflets as information means (36%), and meetings with colleagues/friends to discuss personal or family issues (34%). A significantly lower percentage of the respondents are willing to participate in political party gatherings (8%), online meetings (12%), and public debates (14%).

The research shows that 63% of the respondents do not believe in making positive change (both by individual engagement (43%) and by engagement in NGOs (20%)), wheras 25% lack interest in politics, whichs explain the low motivation for civic participation.

Among the polled group of rural women, the percentage of those who do not believe in making positive change by individual engagement (43%) is higher compared to urban women (27%).

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

38%
Respond a
questionnaire

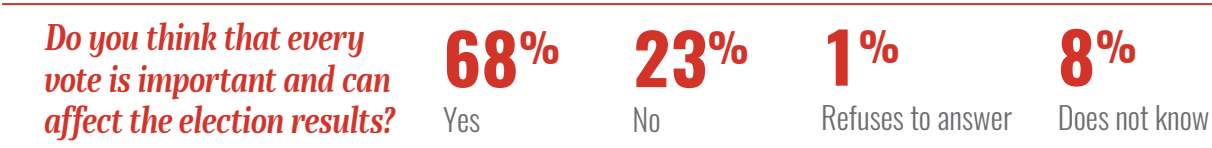**36%**
Read a brochure
or a leaflet

34%
Meet colleagues,
friends to discuss

Another issue emphasized by the respondents is the education of girls, stimulation of their self-confidence, assertiveness and persistence, as well as raising their gender equality awareness. They also stressed that boys should be brought up to respect women and promote gender equality instead of patriarchal gender roles at home and in the society.

ELECTION PROCESS

Focus group participants tend to associate elections in the country with the following phrases: "lies", "unfulfilled promises", "people and politicians live in parallel universes", "attacks and slander instead of good party programs".

Do you think that every vote is important and can affect the election results?	**68%** Yes	**23%** No	**1%** Refuses to answer	**8%** Does not know

Seven out of ten female respondents living in rural areas (68%) believe every vote is important and can impact election results, whereas two out of ten (23%) do not believe so.

Sixty per cent (60%) of the respondents indicate that voting per se is not sufficient to effect policy change, 25% believe that voting can effectuate change, whereas 13% claimed ignorant on the issue.

Motivation to vote

How regularly do you vote?

50% regularly	22% often	16% sometimes	6% usually not	4% never

Fifty percent (50%) of the respondents indicate they vote regularly, 22% often, 16% sometimes, 6% usually abstain, and 4% regularly abstain from voting.

Forty-three per cent (43%) of the respondents vote for different political parties during different election cycles, whereas 40% regularly vote for the same party.

Factors that influence their decision to vote

The top three factors that positively influence respondents' turnout are: perception that voting is a civic right and duty (52%), prospects for a better future (40%) and fear that their vote would be misused (27%).

52%
Civic right and duty

40%
Better future

27%
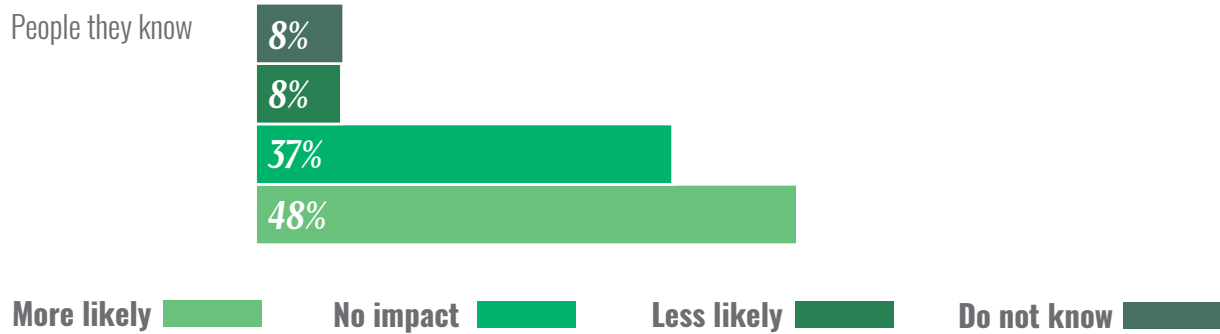Fear that someone will steal their vote

Sixty-six per cent (66%) of the respondents indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families, while 28% state their decision is the same or most often the same as that of their friends.

> The survey respondents would like to see more familiar people, young people and women as representatives on the candidate lists.

If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?

Rural places
- 7%
- 7%
- 47%
- 40%

Representatives from your local communitiy
- 7%
- 7%
- 44%
- 42%

Women
- 7%
- 7%
- 43%
- 44%

Young people
- 7%
- 8%
- 39%
- 46%

135

People they know	8%
	8%
	37%
	48%

More likely ▬ **No impact** ▬ **Less likely** ▬ **Do not know** ▬
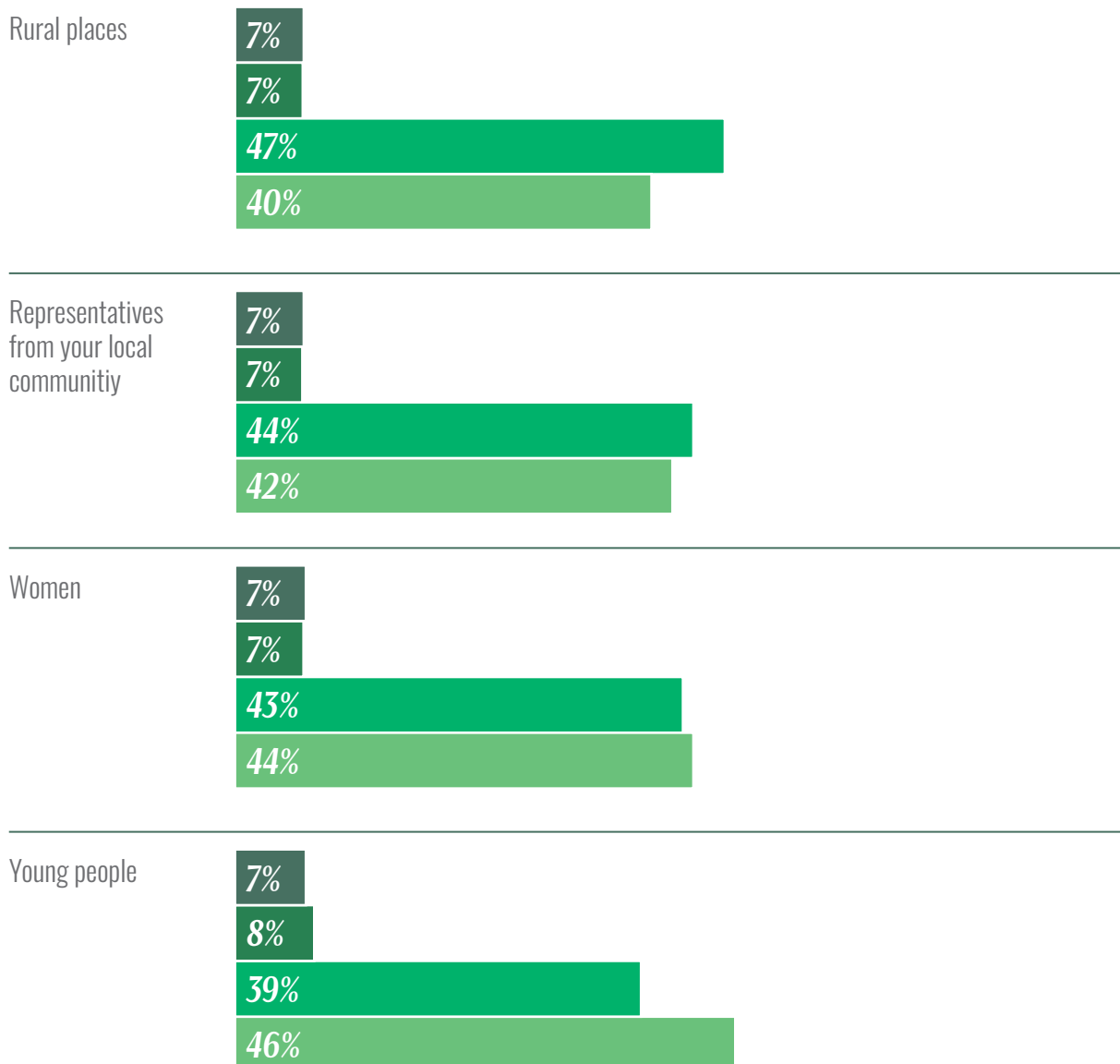
> " *We have to fight alone and not underestimate our abilities, because, let's be honest, we are smarter than men. We are persistent, if we set a goal, we do not give up and go to the end. That is why we must not allow ourselves to be second-class citizens and we should be more involved in politics.* "
> *Female, 38, Tearce*

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the incumbent goverment and the political parties is the key factor that influences the survey participants' decision to abstain from voting.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

I do not trust the political parties	8%
I'm not interested in politics	6%
The political parties are all the same to me	8%
There is no party/politician who represents my interests	8%
I don't have enough information about party election programs	4%
I am disappointed with the current governance	16%

The current system is
favouring selected parties — **7%**

Boycotting due to bad policies
(name agreement, etc.) — **6%**

The Covid-19 pandemic — **5%**

I don't trust the election
administration/election system — **8%**

The voters' list has
not been updated — **3%**

Nothing can affect me — **17%**

Refuses to answer — **2%**

Does not know — **4%**
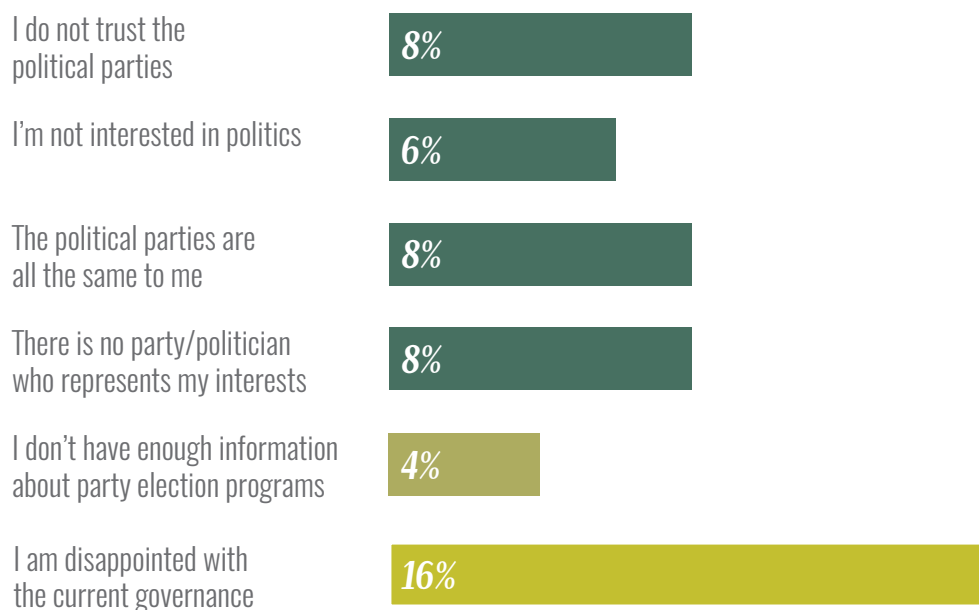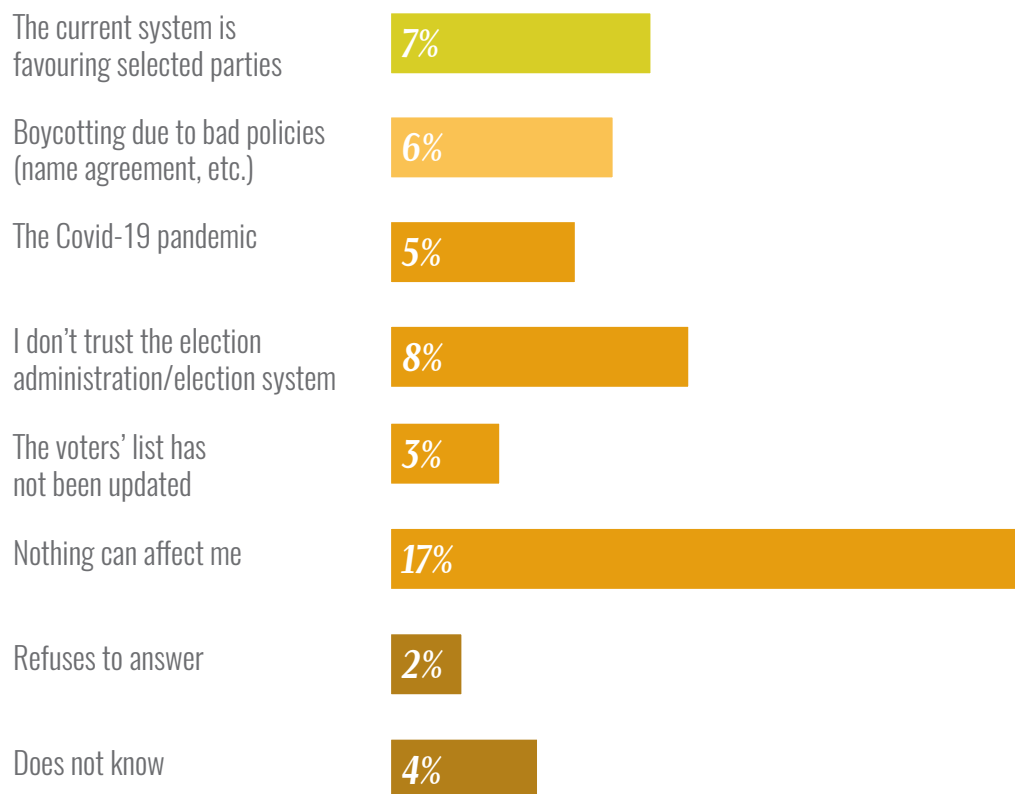
Women in the focus group from rural areas state that pressures from the parties were particularly strong in their communities and that political party membership is often the most important condition for employment.

> *Yes, I was under pressure and so was my husband. That was in 2016 before the elections, my husband was threatened that I would get fired if he did not vote for a certain political party. I can not forget how stressful that was. I do not want anyone to experience it.*
> *Female, 38, Tearce*

> *I do not know whether to call it a pressure, but they told me that if I want to get a job I have to vote for them. In the end, I did not get the job. I have not trusted any party since then.*
> *Female, 26, Prshove*

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

Television (61%), social media (12%), web portals (8%), friends and family members (6%) are the predominant sources of election information.

61%
TV

12%
Social Media

8%
Web portals

6%
Close people
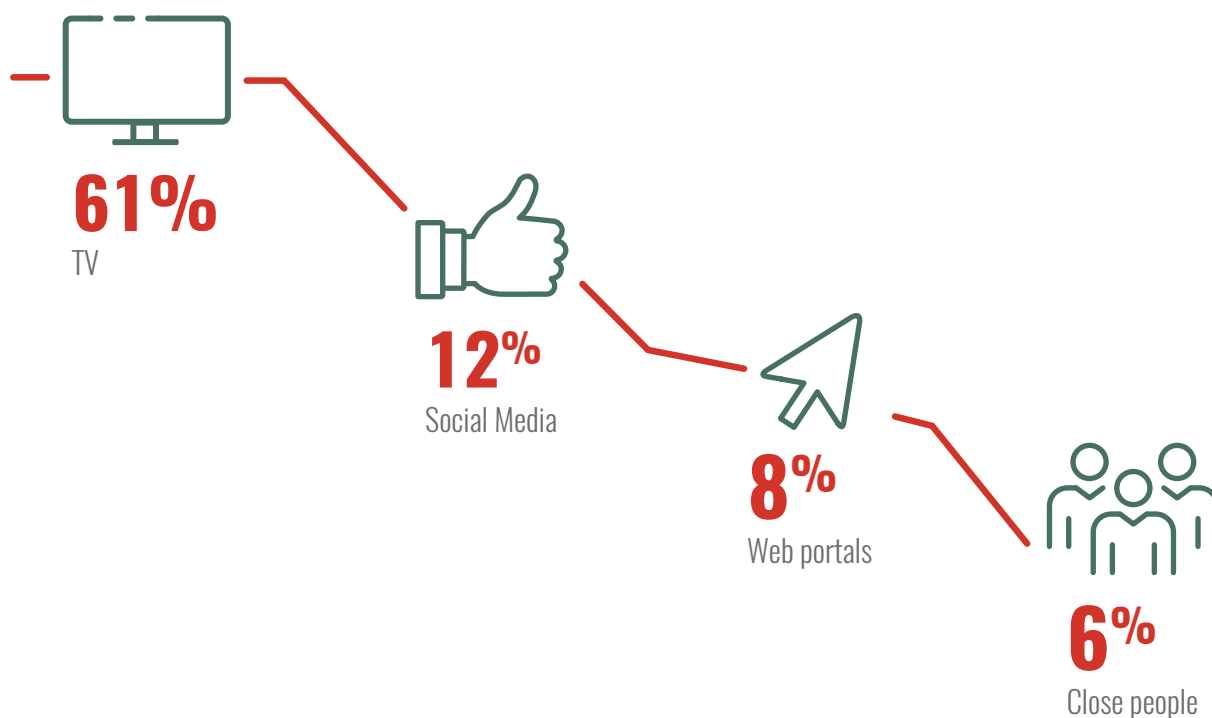
Survey participants noted that news (52%) and debates (26%) are the most useful methods for obtaining election information. One in ten respondents (11%) indicates that they do not get informed about elections at all.

Eighteen per cent (18%) of the respondents rely on the candidate's track record in making an informed decision whereas media (16%), door-to-door communication (15%), and in-person communication in smaller groups (19%) are the most preferable type of communication with party candidates and elected representatives between elections.

The respondents prefer the same type of communication with the candidates before elections. Namely, 33% rely on the candidate's political track record, whereas concerning forms and types of communication they prefer the media (28%), door-to-door (22%) and in-person communication in smaller groups (26%). With regards to priority areas, rural women prefer political parties to focus on:

  ⋆ Improving health care.
  ⋆ Stimulating young people to stay in the villages.
  ⋆ Reducing corruption in state institutions.
  ⋆ Ensuring respect of human rights and freedoms.
  ⋆ Improving media freedom and freedom of speech.

BARRIERS

The barriers identified in the women general group are significantly intensified among rural woman. The most prominent among these are the patriarchal value system, lack of time and focus on home and family, and scepticism about their power to influence.

Obstacles specific to rural woman that were not emphasized by women in general include:

- Lower awareness about the importance of civic and political participation of women
- Strong feeling of discrimination on the grounds of age, appearance, etc.
- Enhanced lack of self-confidence and competence
- Poor networking, support systems, and teamwork
- Poor transport infrastructure and connections to enable their participation
- Enhanced pressure by political parties and candidates during election period

RECOMMENDATIONS

The set of recommendations drawn for women in general applly to the community of rural woman with focus on the following priorities: awareness, confidence, belief in impact and channels/ways to participate.

Increase awareness about the importance of women's participation

- Focus on the importance and benefits of socio-political participation of women: encouraging trust in the democracy through participation, prioritizing health, education and other key development indicators; decision making process and policies reflecting the priorities of families, women, and ethnic minorities, life quality, etc.).
- Deconstruct stereotypes and prejudice.
- Use positive examples of women's political representatives and activists in political campaigns.
- Ensure that the behaviour of party members is in line with the values of equality.
- Build alliances with men and other women's organizations to promote women's participation in public and political life.

Strenghten the self-perception of rural women as a powerful agent of change

- Promote positive examples that are recognized and respected by the community.
- Establish mechanisms to consult and communicate with women in local communities when creating party programs or policies.
- Promote and facilitate smaller community projects and initiatives that tackle various issues of concern relevant to rural women.

- Frequent monitoring and follow-up of the rural community concerns in the period between elections.
- Encourage politicians and activists of major political parties to advocate for the needs of the rural population.
- Consider different formats of communication including informal meetings with influential local representatives and activists, third-party narratives, community projects facilitated by political parties, or other organizations, regular monthly visits to the community.

Empower rural women and boost self-confidence

- Build an atmosphere of trust, respect and non-discrimination.
- Ensure development of a specific skill set to facilitate confident civic participation, including leadership skills, public speaking, and public appearance. While taking into consideration daily household responsibilities of rural women.
- Focus on collective instead of individual participation.
- Contribute to building a political culture that encourages women's participation at all levels of society, without fear of sexist, misogynist or bigoted abuse and hate speech, intimidation and violence.

Promote new channels and avenues to encourage civic participation of rural women

- Formats to consider: regular meetings, polls or forums for expression of opinions on a specific subject matter
- Initiatives to tackle local concerns
- Humanitarian initiatives
- Skill-based initiatives (cooking, handwork etc.)

Create alliances:

With the local civic organisations to:

- Identify issues on community level that are important for the local women
- Support small projects initiated by the local women's organisations.
- Establish close contact with the rural communities.
- Strengthen the capacities, position, and networking of local organisations within the rural community to increase their credibility and influencing power.

With the media (digital and traditional)

- Promote issues relevant to the rural women, including issues focused on improving the quality of life of the rural population and rural women in particular.

- Monitor progress of projects relevant to the rural population and rural women
- Promote narratives focused on positive and successful examples of rural women activists.
- Promote diversity of candidates (women, youth, rural) during election campaigns.
- Promote new channels and avenues for civic participation of the rural community with focus on rural women.

Choose relevant communication channels and apply both traditional and non-conventional approaches.

Use TV to reach the rural population. Combine national and local TV stations

- Use formats that enable to contextualize and leverage the information, in particular given that TV is the main source of information for the elderly, women, and people on the lower spectrum of income and education.
- Use different types of programs, including political, entertainment, lifestyle shows, morning programs, etc.
- Promote representatives and topics relevant to the rural population and rural women via debates, guest programs etc., and place focus on improvement of the quality of life, youth migration, etc.

Organize face-to-face meetings or other community events

Due to the busy schedule of rural women and their affinity for direct contacts and meetings, direct and informal meetings may incentivise participation in civic and political activities.

- Use different formats that facilitate direct interaction such as small gatherings and local informal meetings, to build trusting relationships and increase their positive self-perception.
- Take gendered approach when organizing meetings, in terms of women's daily agenda and convenience or arrange extra care and entertainment for their children.
- Propose community projects or activities with the potential of gathering women from the community.

Use social media to reach younger rural women. Pilot other non-traditional channels

- Organize entertainment activities and events and introduce tailored made content to activate the specific target group.
- Engage rural women in humanitarian events
- Explore ways to reach out to the rural population, including the rural women by dissemination of information in buses, at bus stations, local stores, and other community facilities.
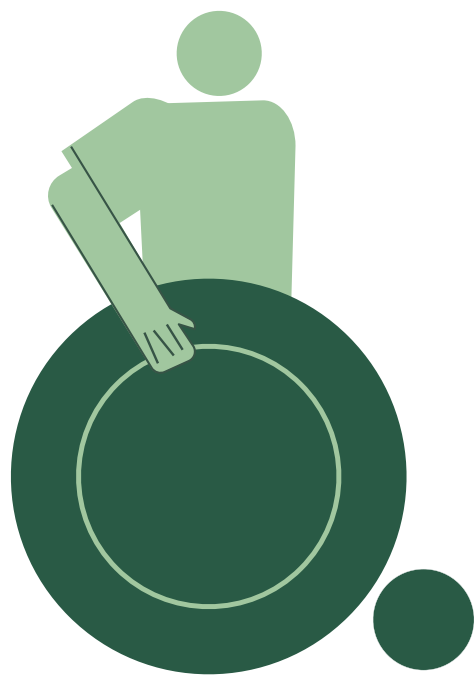
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

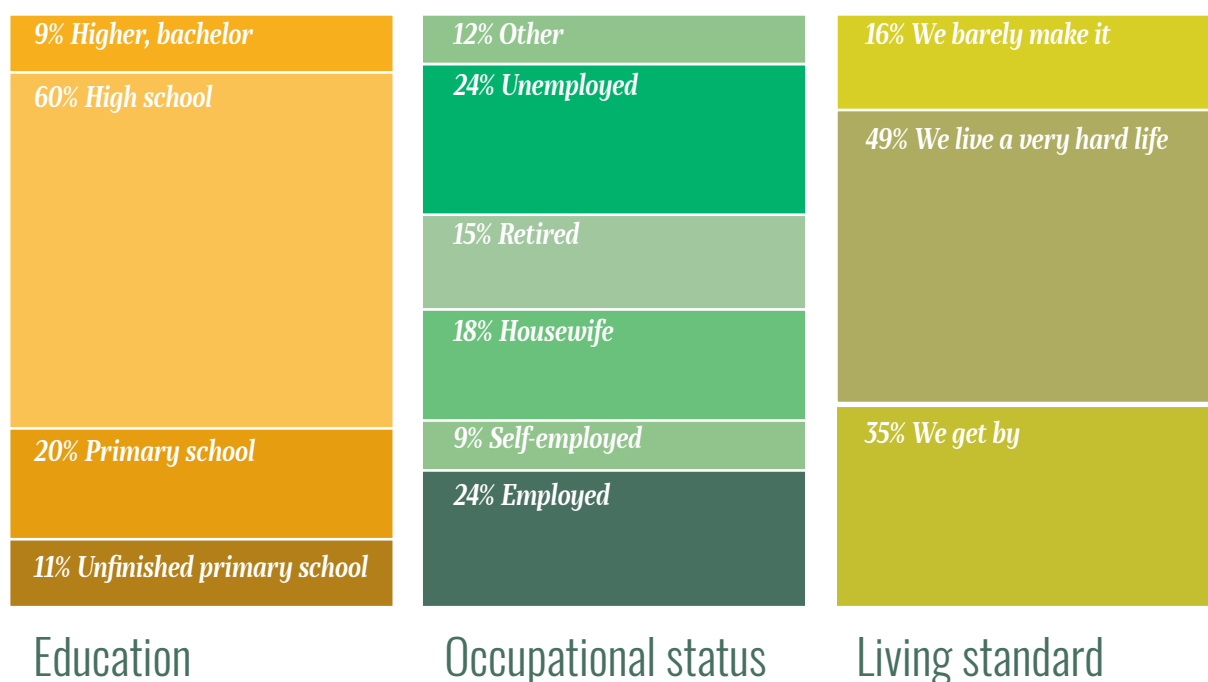Key findings from the qualitative and quantitative research

Persons with disabilities - Definition and Size

According to official data, it is estimated that 15% of the world's population has some type of disability. They are more likely to face poorer health outcomes, less education and lower employment.[13] North Macedonia ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on December 5, 2011.[14] The Convention is the first international binding instrument that sets minimum standards for the rights of the persons with disabilities. Currently, there is no official data about the number of persons with disabilities in the country. However, according to the Institute for Public Health, 2017, an estimated 10% of the population in North Macedonia or about 200,000 residents can be categorized as people with disabilities.[15]

Demographic profile

A total of 55 citizens with disabilities took part in the quantitative face-to-face survey.

In order to gain an in-depth insight into the background, perceptions and opinions of the group, the quantitative survey was complemented by one focus group.

Education	Occupational status	Living standard
9% Higher, bachelor	12% Other	16% We barely make it
60% High school	24% Unemployed	49% We live a very hard life
	15% Retired	
	18% Housewife	
20% Primary school	9% Self-employed	35% We get by
11% Unfinished primary school	24% Employed	

13 The World Bank, Disability Inclusion, (October 1, 2020), available at: https://tinyurl.com/y6lkt5ym, accessed on October 5, 2020.

14 Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, available at: http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/Konvencija%20za%20pravata%20na%20licata%20so%20invalidnost.pdf, accessed on October 13, 2020.

15 Institute for Public Health, available at: https://www.iph.mk/en/december-3-international-day-of-persons-with-disabilities/

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in the socio-political developments in the country

How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?

11% **31%** **35%** **20%** **4%**
Very   Somewhat   Not much   Not at all   Does not know'

The research shows that 55% of the survey respondents are "not at all" or "not very interested" in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world (9% more compared to the general population), while 42% are "very" or "somewhat interested". Almost half of the survey participants (49%) rarely or never discuss these issues with other people (5% more than the general population).

The group expressed concerns with regards to the COVID-19 pandemics and the restricted functioning of the institutions, primarily in the sphere of health care and education. They also expressed concerns about the situation in the private sector.

The persons with disabilities are a vulnerable group which is still on the margins of society.

They are often faced with isolation in the community where they live. In addition to the unfavorable socio-economic relations of persons with disabilities, there is a need for social protection in all spheres of social life including health care, education, and employment.

Furthermore, the unemployment rate of the persons with disabilities is three times higher than that of the general population[16] and most often these people take up low paid work and are segregated from the open labor market.
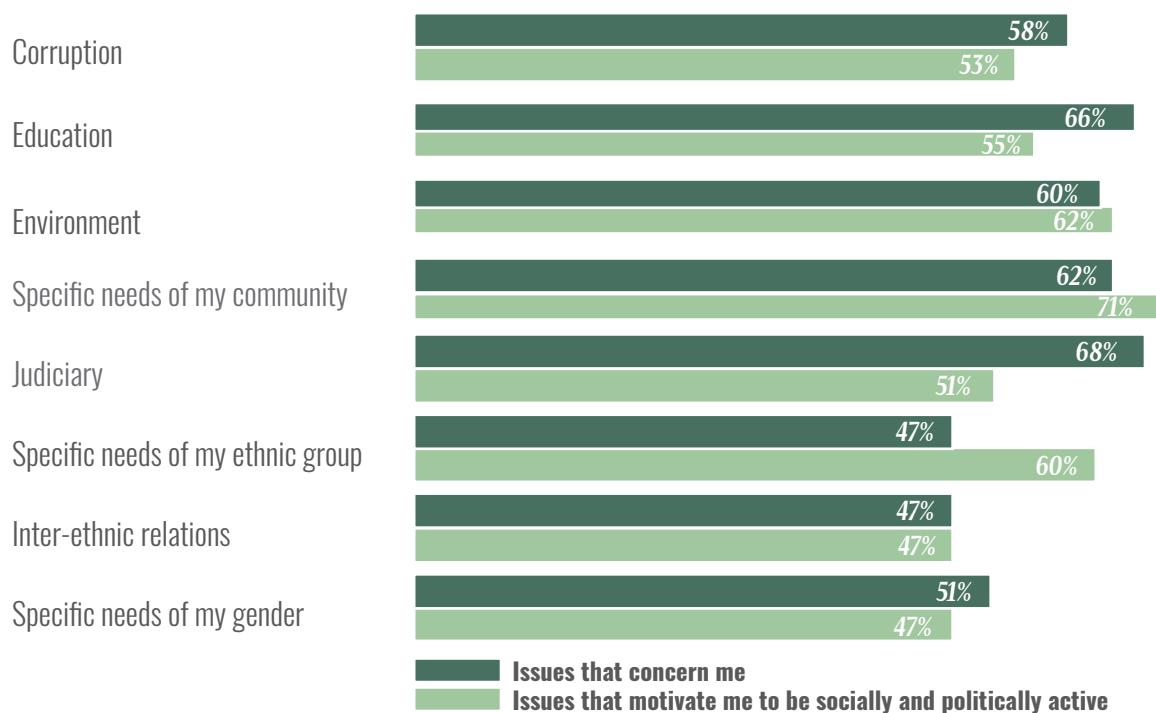
Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/topics concern you?
How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially and politically active?

Economic and social stability — 62% / 62%
Local issues — 66% / 53%
Health care — 75% / 73%

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16 http://iph.mk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Upatstvo-lica-so-posebni-potrebi-so-cip.pdf

Corruption	58% / 53%
Education	66% / 55%
Environment	60% / 62%
Specific needs of my community	62% / 71%
Judiciary	68% / 51%
Specific needs of my ethnic group	47% / 60%
Inter-ethnic relations	47% / 47%
Specific needs of my gender	51% / 47%

■ Issues that concern me
■ Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active

The survey respondents indicated that health care (75%), education (66%) and local issues (66%) are their primary issues of concern.

The respondents are the least concerned with the specific needs related to their ethnic group, interethnic relations and the specific needs of their gender.

Additionally, healthcare (73%), specific needs related to their place of living (71%) and economic and social stability (62%), along with the environment (62%) are the key motivators for this group to become more socially and politically active.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Similarly to the other groups, almost all participants in the focus group expressed a lack of trust in the media and a tendency to follow different media to compare and analyse information.

Many of them expressed revolt against the political bias of the media in the country, stating that the partial and biased reporting of the media deepens the division among the citizens. This is cited as the primary reason for the lack of interest about social and political events in the country. The vast majority of the respondents prefer to watch TV programs about culture, nature and healthy life, as well as documentaries, content which is rarely broadcasted in the media.

Six out of ten survey respondents (58%) indicated that television is their predominant source of information and 15% indicated that they learn also about the socio-political developments via social networks. Seven per cent (7%) of the respondents obtain information via web portals, eleven (11%) through their family and friends and nine per cent (9%) state that they are not informed at all.

Six out of ten survey respondents (58%) indicated that television is their predominant source of information

TV 58%

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Two out of ten respondents have been involved in civic activity and express interest to be more civically engaged.

Have you been involved in any event, activity, or process that could have effected any change in the community or the place where you live?

22%
73%
6%

Are you interested in a more active civic involvement?

24%
62%
14%

0%   **100%**

Yes ▬▬▬   No ▬▬▬   **Do not know / Refuses to answer** ▬▬▬

The focus group participants indicated the following factors that contribute to their low civic involvement and civic participation, which are very similar to the factors emphasized by other demographic groups:

- Most people are passive and wait for others to take responsibility i.e. wait for "someone else to do the job".
- People are disappointed and distrust the institutions.
- The institutions are dysfunctional, indifferent, and strongly politically influenced. "They are not aware that they are a service to the people. They act like gods".

However, a number of factors are specific only to this demographic group:

- The institutions are not familiar with the needs of the persons with disabilities.
- Institutions lack access points and elevators.

- A number of associations represent the interests of the persons with disabilities, however there is a lack of coordination of activities, while the presidents of those associations "manipulate us because they take money from the state".

- Discrimination against persons with disabilities: "mental barrier among people with regards to persons with disabilities"; stereotyping their behavior that they avoid work and are reluctant to engage in civic activities.

- No institution in the country takes the lead in the protection of the rights of the persons with disabilities.

> " *I think that the biggest problems are the stereotypes and prejudices about persons with disabilities. The society still does not perceive us as people with equal abilities, opportunities and capacities.* "
> *Female, 44, Skopje*

Factors that promote involvement

Personal or family benefits (24%) are the key motivators for most survey respondents to become more involved in activities that could effect change in the community. Other important motivating factors are related to their representation (18%) and responsiveness of the system (14%).

This group tends to be more motivated to participate in social and political life when there are tangible benefits to the quality of their life. Conversely, only 4% of the respondents believe that improving democracy is a factor that promotes involvement. There is an apparent tendency to generalize the efforts for "improving democracy" and to perceive them as an abstraction that does not resonate with the respondents.

Slightly over half of the respondents (51%) do not believe that they can have an impact as a citizen, while more than one quarter (27%) believe they can make a meaningful impact in their municipality.

The survey shows that the Parliament is perceived as a place where they can have the least impact as citizens, despite the direct election of their representatives.

Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

With regards to participation in public life, the survey respondents are most willing to meet colleagues/friends to discuss an issue of personal or family concern (46%), read a brochure or a leaflet (44%) and respond to a questionnaire (42%). The interest for participation in a public debate (14%), political party gathering (13%), and online meeting (7%) is significantly lower among this group of respondents.

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

42%
Respond a questionnaire

44%
Read a brochure or a leaflet

46%
Meet colleagues, friends to discuss

ELECTION PROCESS

Survey participants most often associate elections in the country with phrases such as "corruption" "green market", "irregularities", "bribing votes" and "charade".

Do you think that every vote is important and can affect the election results?	**75%** Yes	**14%** No	**2%** Refuses to answer	**9%** Does not know

Persons with disabilities belive that elections are marred by irregularities. They cite strong political influence and vote-buying in the period before elections, pressure and intimidation of citizens, photographing of ballots, etc.

The group further cites a pronounced non-compliance with the requirements concerning voting of persons with disabilities, including:

⬧ Limited access to polling stations (most of the polling stations are located in schools and there are very few schools with access for persons with disabilities.

⬧ Lack of ballot frames for the visually impaired persons or failure to provide them to the those in need– "they stay packed in a bag".

> *If you do not have access ramps for people in wheelchairs, if you do not display the ballot guides for the blind on the tables, it's a disaster. We have printed for everyone in the polling station an illustrative display of the needs of the persons with disabilities... but they were not displayed in any of the three polling stations I visited during the presidential election.*
> *Male, 51, Kumanovo*

Most of the respondents remarked that despite training the election board members on voting rights and raising their awareness on the needs of the persons with disabilities, these are not implemented on Election Day. A general observation is that the legal requirements have been put in place; however, there is no effective implementation. A portion of the participants indicates that persons with disabilities from rural areas are particularly discriminated in this regard, leading to their strong disappointment with the work of the

State Election Commission and the election administration.

Data from the survey shows that a significant percentage of persons with disabilities experience difficulties during the voting process due to lack of understanding of the voting procedures (20%). Fourteen per cent (14%) of the survey participants point out that they lack adequate access to the polling stations and 13% lack adequate transportation. However, in general, there are no major difficulties reported by the respondents with regard to voting.

Similarly to the general population, around three quarters of the respondents believe that every vote is important and can impact election results (74%), while 14% do not believe in the importance of every vote.

Compared to the general population, people with disabilities are less inclined to believe that voting per se is not sufficient to engage citizens in policy changes (53% or 11% less than the general population), a quarter (24%) believes that voting is sufficient, while 20% (11% more) claim ignorant on the issue.

Motivation to vote

How regularly do you vote?

34% regularly	20% often	22% sometimes	14% usually not	4% never

Thirty-four per cent (34%) of the survey respondents indicate that they vote almost regularly, 20% often, 22% sometimes, 14% usually do not vote and 4% never vote. This is indicative of the fact that there are fewer regular voters among persons with disabilities compared to the general population (76% always or often vote).

Nearly half of the survey respondents (51%) vote for different political parties, while 33% regularly vote for the same party, which is seven per cent lower than the general population (40% vote regularly for the same party).

Factors that influence their decision to vote

The top three factors that influence the respondents' decision to vote are: perception that voting is a civic right and duty (44%), better prospects (38%) and fear that someone would misuse their vote (29%).

People living in remote communities would like to see more representatives of people they know and young people as candidates on the party lists for elections (or as elected officials, for example in municipal councils).

> Six out of ten respondents (60%) indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families, while three out of ten (29%) state their decision is the same or most often the same as that of their friends.
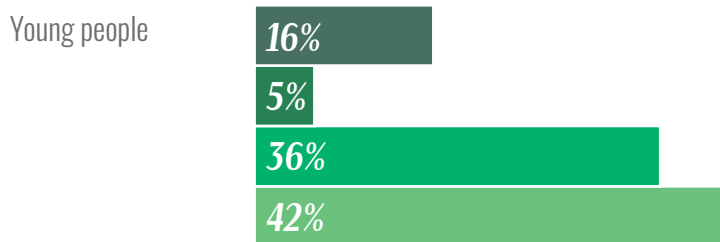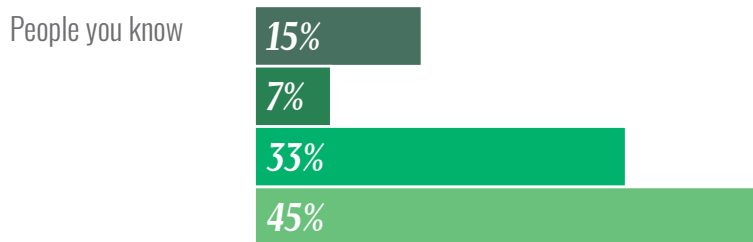
44%
Civic right
and duty

38%
Better
future

29%
Fear that someone
will steal their vote

If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?
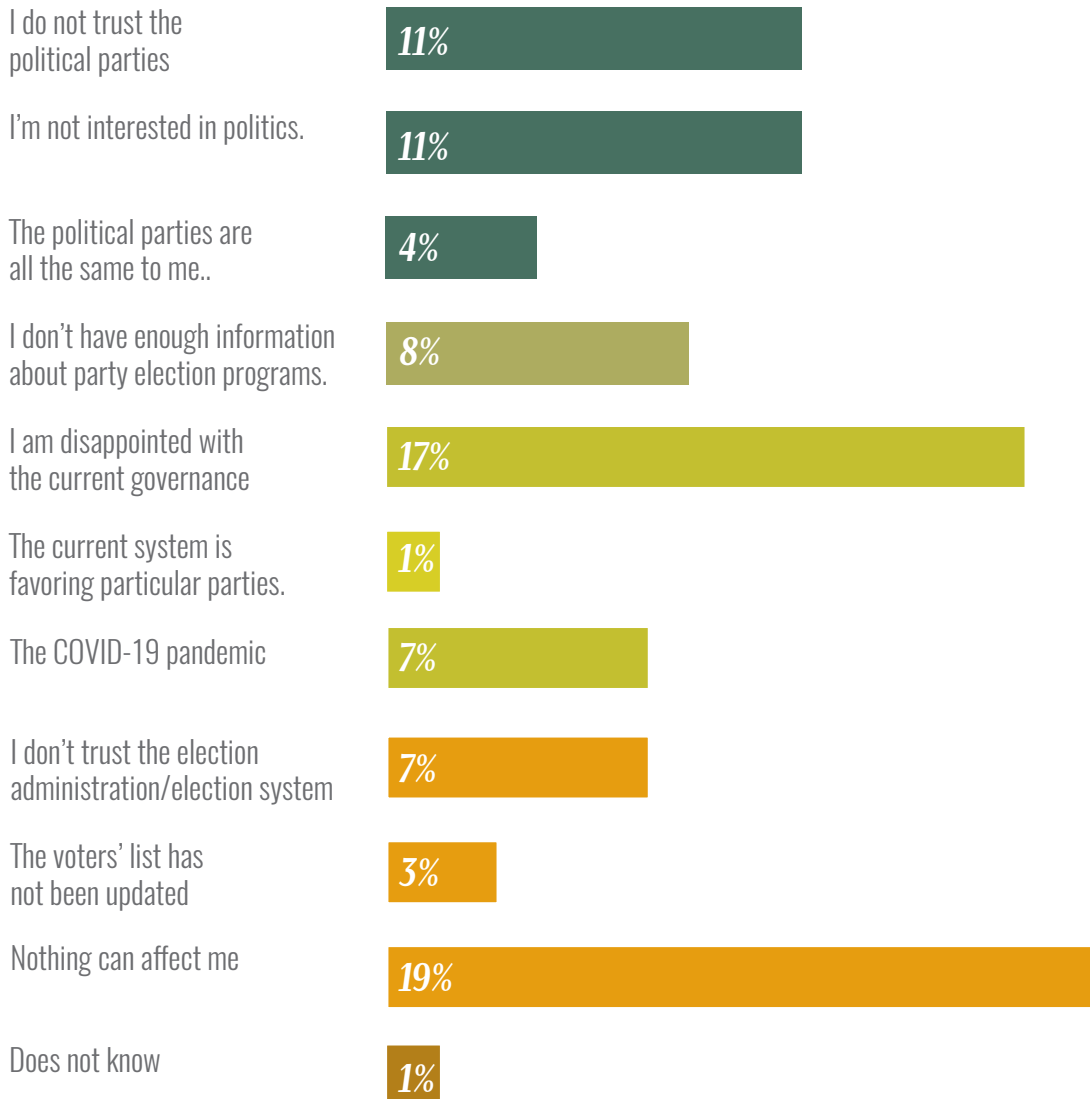
People you know
- 15%
- 7%
- 33%
- 45%

Young people
- 16%
- 5%
- 36%
- 42%

Representatives from their local community
- 13%
- 2%
- 55%
- 31%

More likely　　**No impact**　　**Less likely**　　**Do not know**

The survey participants would like to see more representatives of people they know, young people and representatives from their local community on the candidate lists for local and parliamentary elections.

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and the political parties demotivates people from remote communities to go out and vote.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

Response	%
I do not trust the political parties	11%
I'm not interested in politics.	11%
The political parties are all the same to me..	4%
I don't have enough information about party election programs.	8%
I am disappointed with the current governance	17%
The current system is favoring particular parties.	1%
The COVID-19 pandemic	7%
I don't trust the election administration/election system	7%
The voters' list has not been updated	3%
Nothing can affect me	19%
Does not know	1%

The focus group confirms the findings of the quantitative survey. Most of the participants in the discussion express their dissatisfaction and disappointment with the work of the political parties.

According to this group, abstention from voting is a legitimate right of every citizen and as such sends a significant message to the political parties. Nevertheless, the respondents believe that the political parties are not responsive to or interested in the needs of this category of people.

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

TV (58%), friends and family members (13%), and web portals (11%) are the predominant sources of information about elections.

58%
TV

13%
Close people

11%
Web portals

Survey participants indicated that newscasts (69%) and debates (13%) are the most useful ways of sourcing information about elections. Six per cent (6%) indicate that they do not source information about elections at all, whereas 48% find newscasts a more useful method of obtaining election information compared to the general population.

Twenty-seven per cent (27%) of the respondents rely on traditional media as a source of information on elections, whereas 22% rely on the track record of the party candidates and elected representatives when making an informed decision **in the period between elections.**

The focus group findings show that communication with political parties and institutions usually takes place through associations for persons with disabilities or non-governmental organizations that represent their interests.

All participants in the discussion show extreme dissatisfaction with the situation of persons with disabilities and the attitude of the country towards this category of citizens.

They believe that the political parties are interested in persons with disabilities only before elections when they make many promises in order to win votes, but once they assume power, they abandon them.

Most of the participants express interest in the political programs of the political parties, mainly out of curiosity, to see to what extent they cater to the needs of the persons with disabilities.

> *No party program includes a single line to address the needs of persons with disabilities. I live in a building and in the mailbox I receive party programs from almost all political parties. None of them mentions us. So, how can we expect anything when they behave as if we do not exist? In their programs, our problems do not exist.*
> *Male, 37, Gostivar*

Survey participants would like political parties to focus on:

- Equal representation of all citizens.
- Equal rights for all citizens in the country.
- Making realistic and objective promises that they can keep.
- Improving the rights of the persons with disabilities.
- Inclusion of the persons with disabilities.

BARRIERS

Persons with disabilities have the right to participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, but there continue to be significant barriers to inclusion of this community.

A set of actions should be undertaken to empower persons with disabilities to equally participate in the socio-political life of the country.

In addition to the barriers identified by the general population, persons with disabilities face:

Physical barriers to political and civic participation and to exercise their rights (limited accessibility to voting places, institutions, etc.).

Physical barriers in everyday life, such as access to public transport or adapted vehicles, which also impacts participation, particularly for the rural population.

Communication barriers - communication not tailored to their specific needs, as recipients of information but also as participants in debates or as guests in programs.

Attitude barriers – they are not perceived as persons with abilities, capacity and potential to contribute to the civic and political life.

The feeling of underrepresentation of their specific needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure that all requirements are met to effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis

- Ensure that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use.
- Use new technology where appropriate to enable them to participate.
- Ensure they have all the necessary voting information in understandable language and user friendly format.

Actively promote an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the socio-political life, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, and encourage their participation in socio-political life

- Promote electoral, political and/or public success of persons from these groups.
- Include and promote candidates from this group.

Create alliances:

With non-government organizations to empower and facilitate civic and political participation of persons with disabilities.

- Inform and educate about the voting process.
- Represent their needs.
- Inform and alarm about the barriers for participation.
- Give support and strengthen skills of persons with disabilities for confident participation.
- Set up links between the community of persons with disabilities and the institutions.
- Strengthen the capacities, position and networking of NGOs to increase their credibility and influence.

With the media (digital and traditional)

- Promote narratives focused on positive and successful examples of activists among persons with disabilities.
- Raise awareness about the needs of the people with disabilities.
- Contribute to building a political culture that encourages persons with disabilities to participate at all levels of society, without fear of discrimination.
- Make information and programs accessible to persons with disabilities, particularly the voter information.

Choose relevant communication channels

and apply both traditional and non-conventional approaches. Adjust communication and communication channels to their specific needs.

Use TV to reach the majority of the disabled population

- Use formats that give opportunities to adjust the accessibility of the information.
- Always add title and sign language to the information presented.
- Consider other formats in addition to newscasts e.g. debates, editorials, short stories, and testimonials.
- Whenever possible, present information in an illustrative manner, especially about the voting process, voting rights, reporting election irregularities.

Use social media to cater to the younger population such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter.

ROMA

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research

> *In the past years, we have seen different political parties in power. They always change, but none of them has ever shown any interest in the Roma community problems. I don't want anything on paper. I want acts – actual solving of real-life problems.*
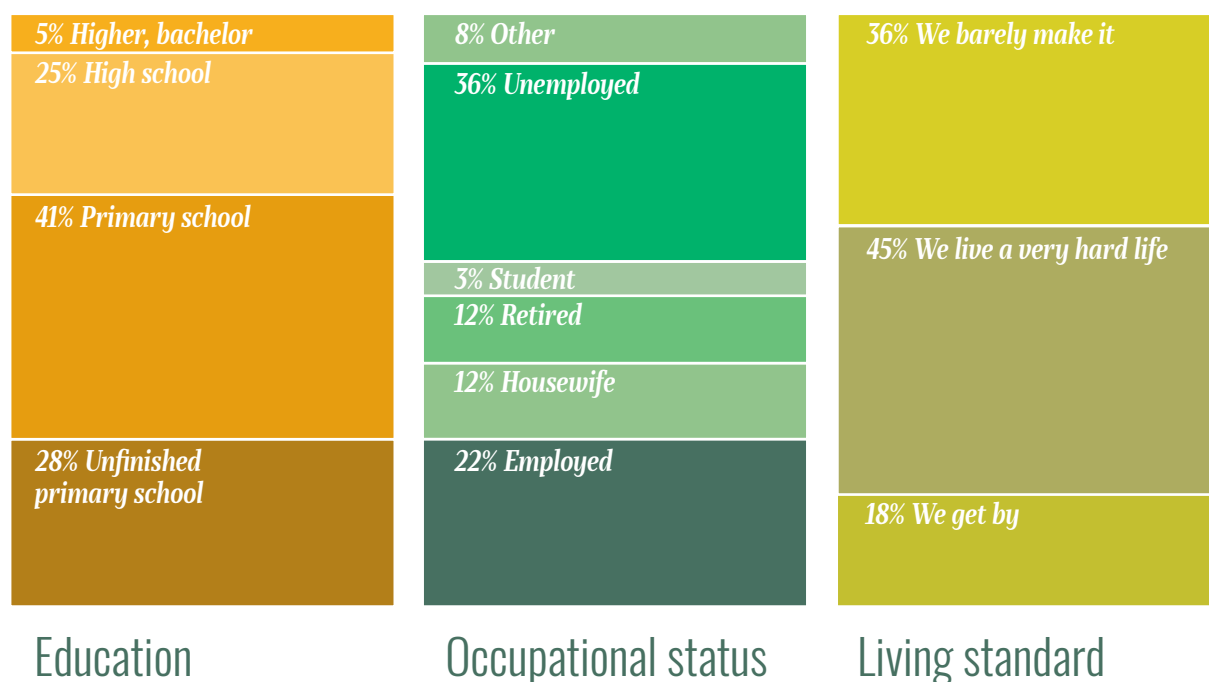> *Male, 40, Bitola*

Roma definition and size

According to the last official census in the country, conducted in 2002, a total of 2.7% of the population (53,879) identifies as Roma. North Macedonia's Roma population is the most vulnerable minority in the country and can be the target of electoral manipulation, including vote-buying.

Demographic profile

A total of 75 respondents took part in the quantitative face-to-face survey.

In order to gain an in-depth insight into the background, perceptions and opinions of the group, the quantitative survey was complemented by one focus group.

The surveyed individuals tend to have the lowest level of education in comparison to other groups. Although education is free in North Macedonia, there are still many costs associated with attending school. Compared to the general population and other demographic groups, this demographic group answered that they "live a very hard life" or "barely make it."

Education	Occupational status	Living standard
5% Higher, bachelor	8% Other	36% We barely make it
25% High school	36% Unemployed	45% We live a very hard life
41% Primary school	3% Student	
	12% Retired	
	12% Housewife	
28% Unfinished primary school	22% Employed	18% We get by

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in the socio-political developments in the country

How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?
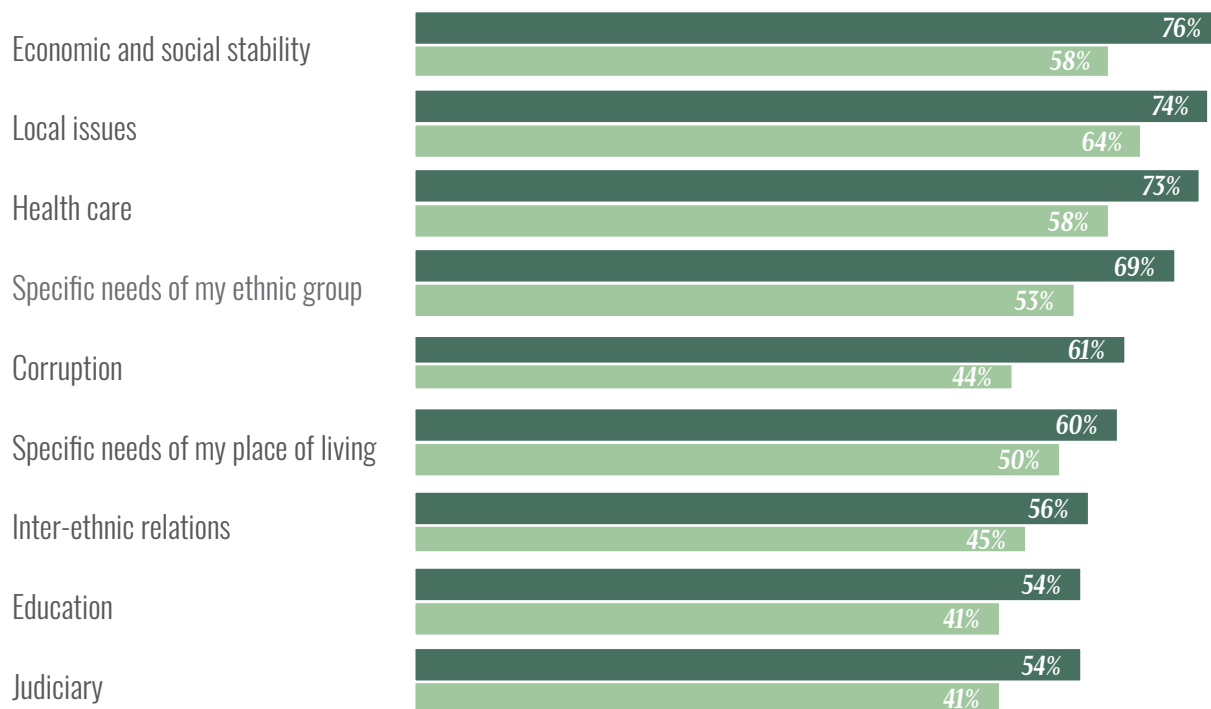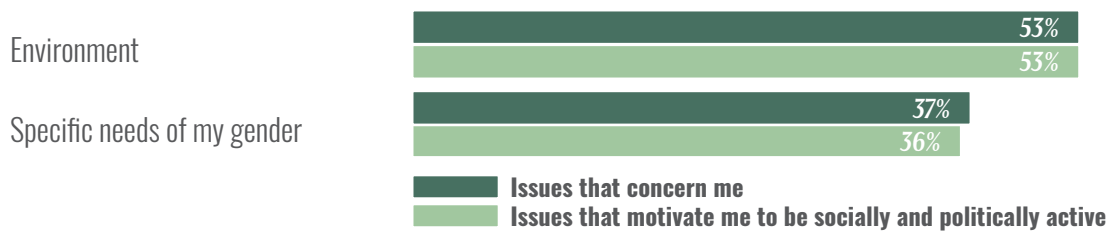
8%
Very interested

29%
Somewhat interested

30%
Not much interested

32%
Not at all interested

The research shows that 62% of the respondents are "not at all" or "not very interested" in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world, while 37% are "very" or "somewhat interested". Almost half of the survey participants (45%) rarely or never discuss these issues with other people. Roma citizens with completed high school or university tend to be more interested in the current socio-political developments.

Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/topics concern you?
How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially and politically active?

Economic and social stability	76% / 58%
Local issues	74% / 64%
Health care	73% / 58%
Specific needs of my ethnic group	69% / 53%
Corruption	61% / 44%
Specific needs of my place of living	60% / 50%
Inter-ethnic relations	56% / 45%
Education	54% / 41%
Judiciary	54% / 41%

Environment	53%
	53%
Specific needs of my gender	37%
	36%

■ Issues that concern me
■ Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active

More than 70% of the survey participants indicated that economic and social stability, local issues, and health care rank the highest on the list of concerns specific to this group and are the key driving factors for their social and political participation.

The survey participants are the least concerned with the specific needs related to their gender, the environment, and the judiciary. They are also concerned with everyday problems relating to informal Roma settlements, construction of illegal buildings, lack of personal documentation, infrastructure, water supply and sewerage, social and health care.

INFORMATION SOURCES

The survey participants indicated that they are most interested in obtaining information about health care, education, employment, measures for socially vulnerable groups, as well as infrastructure, water supply, and sewerage. With regards to local issues and concerns, the focus groups participants were interested in the organisation of events and activities, as well as in obtaining related information.

> " *I am mostly interested in the daily developments at the local level, with regards to the economy, investments, healthcare and most importantly - employment. I am the least interested in the current events in the world.* "
> *Male, 29, Prilep*

Almost half of the participants (49%) indicated that television is their predominant source of information and two out of ten survey participants (predominantly of up to 34 years of age) indicated that they source information about socio-political developments via social networks. Nevertheless, a significant percentage of 21% are not informed at all.

Television is the predominant source of information, indicated by almost half of the respondents 49%

TV 49%

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

The majority of Roma survey participants are not interested in more active civic engagement.

Have you been involved in any event, activity, or process that could have effected change in the community or the place where you live?

28%
70%

Are you interested in more active civic involvement?

17%
80%
2%

0%   **100%**

Yes   No   Do not know

Participants with higher education and public sector employees indicated a higher interest in more active civic engagement.

Respondents indicated that health care, economic and social stability as well as local concerns are the primary issues that spark their interest for social and political activity.

The research shows that they are not very interested in politics (25%) and they don't believe that their civic engagement can effectuate change (41%), which is likely the reason for their lack of interest in active civic life.

Similarly to other population groups on the lower spectrum of income, many members of the Roma community are primarily focused on survival, with excessive energy and efforts directed towards addressing basic, existential problems. According to VOA[17] News, poverty is considered a major factor of voter discouragement. Nevertheless, poverty may also comprise grounds for civic mobilization and activism.

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17 "Election Brings No Hope to Macedonia's Roma-run 'Ghetto,' say Voters", Voice of America (December 9, 2016), available at: https://www.voanews.com/europe/election-brings-no-hope-macedonias-roma-run-ghetto-say-voters, accessed on October 21, 2020.

The survey participants indicated the following factors that inform their low civic involvement and civic participation:

- The non-governmental organizations dealing with problems of the Roma population are politically biased and divided.
- The Roma population is not united and organized.
- There are too many political parties representing the ethnic Roma population.
- Roma people are typically not educated, are very poor, and deal with persistent existential problems due to which they don't usually have time and resources for civic involvement.
- Roma population is not united and not organized.
- There are too many political parties representing the ethnic Roma population.

> *When I talk about the Roma population, there are several political parties and NGOs in each city. For example in Bitola, there are three presidents of political parties and 3 non-governmental organizations. So a total of 6 relevant people appear as 'leaders' of the Roma population. So who will point out the problems Roma people have? We need good management and focus on the current and priority problems of the Roma population.*
> *Female, 37, Bitola*

Factors that promote involvement

Personal or family benefits are the key motivators to become more involved in activities that could effectuate change in the community, as noted by one quarter of the respondents of this group. Other important motivating factors are related to the responsiveness of the system and the institutions (13%) and the representation of their interests (13%). In other words, issues perceived as abstract and political, outside of the remit of their quality of life – such as high-level corruption, EU reforms – are generally not the primary reasons for Roma community members to become active voters or active citizens. Seven out of ten respondents (68%) do not believe that they can make an impact as a citizen, while two out of ten (21%) believe they can make a meaningful impact in their municipality. Less than 5% believe they can influence the Prime Minister, the Parliament, ministers and the President of the country.

Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

With regards to participation in public life, Roma community members are most willing to respond to a questionnaire (43%), read a brochure or a leaflet (29%) and meet colleagues/ friends to discuss personal or family issues (27%). Based on the focus group discussion, which confirms the findings of the field survey, the reasons for the low socio-political engagement are rooted in the overall marginalization of the Roma community, their existential problems, social divisions within their demographic group or polarization of the wider society, low level of education, excessive poverty, as well as general disappointment in politics and scepticism in their ability to effectuate change.

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

43%
Respond a questionnaire

29%
Read a brochure or a leaflet

27%
Meet colleagues, friends to discuss

ELECTION PROCESS

Survey participants most often associate elections in the country with phrases such as "stealing again," "good acting," "empty promises," "asphalting" and "salary and pension raise."

Do you think that every vote is important and can affect the election results?	**56%** Yes	**33%** No	**11%** Refuses to answer

More than half of the respondents believe every vote is important and can impact election results (56%), while one third (33%) do not believe so, a percentage which is significantly higher compared to the general population (18%). Almost half of the respondents (48%) indicate that voting per se is not sufficient to engage citizens in policy changes, one third believe that voting is sufficient, while 17% claim ignorant on the issue. Overall, the survey data indicates a marginalization and distrust in mainstream politics among the Roma population.

Motivation to vote

How regularly do you vote?

44% regularly	19% often	19% sometimes	5% usually not	13% never

Forty-four per cent (44%) of survey participants indicate they almost regularly vote, 19% often, 19% sometimes, 5% usually do not vote and 13% never vote.

Half of the survey participants (50%) vote for different political parties during different election cycles, while 27% regularly vote for the same party. This percentage is higher compared to all other demographic groups which shows that the Roma community can be vulnerable to manipulation.

Factors that influence their decision to vote

The top three factors that influence Roma people's decision to vote are: perception that voting is a civic right and duty (48%), personal interests and benefits (35%), and prospects for better future (31%).

48% Civic right and duty

35% Personal interests and benefits

31% Better future

The focus group participants note that election irregularities are much more pronounced in their community compared to the other ethnic communities. These range from bribery, vote buying, sale of IDs for money, organized transport of voters to polling places with vehicles of the political parties and local police forces.

> *The gravest manipulations, bribery and pressures occur among the uneducated citizens who are most exposed to manipulation.*
> *Male, 40, Bitola*

Slightly more than half of the respondents (52%) indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families, while almost a quarter (24%) state that their decision is the same or most often the same as that of their friends.

The survey participants would like to see more representatives of Roma people, young people, and familiar people on the candidate or council lists.

If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?

People you know
- 5%
- 8%
- 40%
- 46%

Young people
- 5%
- 9%
- 34%
- 50%

Roma people
- 5%
- 6%
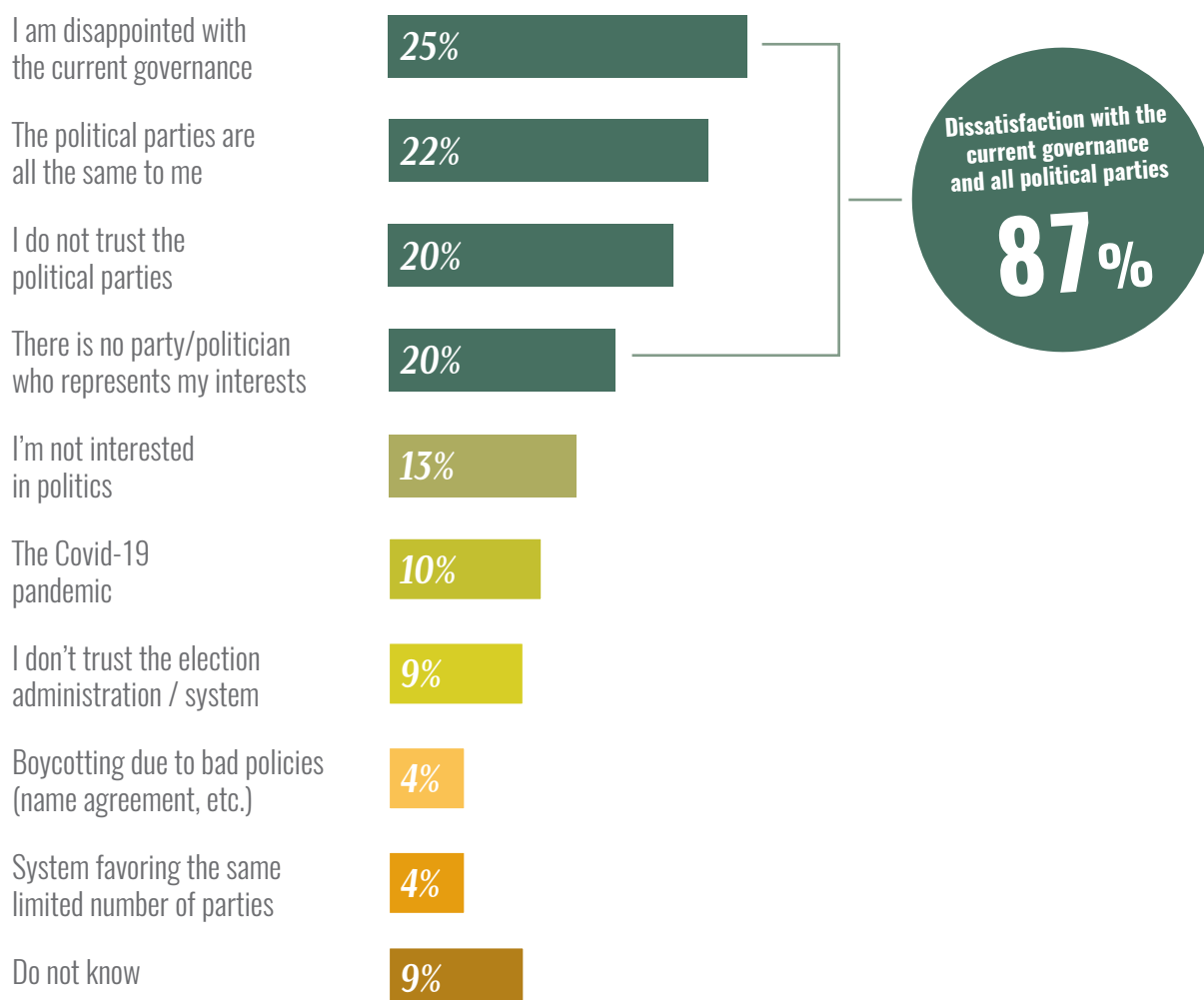- 29%
- 59%

0% 100%

More likely   No impact   Less likely   Do not know

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the governance and the political parties is the key factor that influences the survey participants' decision to abstain from voting.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

I am disappointed with the current governance	25%
The political parties are all the same to me	22%
I do not trust the political parties	20%
There is no party/politician who represents my interests	20%
I'm not interested in politics	13%
The Covid-19 pandemic	10%
I don't trust the election administration / system	9%
Boycotting due to bad policies (name agreement, etc.)	4%
System favoring the same limited number of parties	4%
Do not know	9%

Dissatisfaction with the current governance and all political parties 87%

The survey results demonstrate that Roma people are faced with increased difficulties during the electoral process in comparison to other groups. They scored highest with regards to: voter list errors, voting under pressure, and lack of knowledge of voting procedures. These challenges make the Roma community the most vulnerable population with regards to election-related irregularities. A challenge which is specific to the Roma community concerns the issue of undocumented children and citizens. This issue requires systematic approach to stimulate and enable the voting process.

Another burning issue for this group is the lack of voter education and limited access to basic election information. For example, among others, they do not know how to check if their personal information is included in the voter lists.

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

Survey participants noted that newscasts (62%) and debates (16%) are the most practiced ways of finding information about elections.

Similarly to the other polled groups, Roma voters tend to rely on the previous track record of the politicians to make an informed decision in the period between elections. Other preferred methods of obtaining election information are in-person communication with party candidates and elected representatives as well as traditional media.

In addition, the survey participants would like political parties to:

- Fulfil pre-election promises - "at least 50% of them".
- Develop realistic party programs that are context-specific and responsive to the needs of the citizens.
- Unite around the most important national interests and overcome the COVID-19 crisis.

Where do you get information about election?

55%
TV

19%
Social Media

11%
Close people

8%
Web portals

8%
Don't get informed
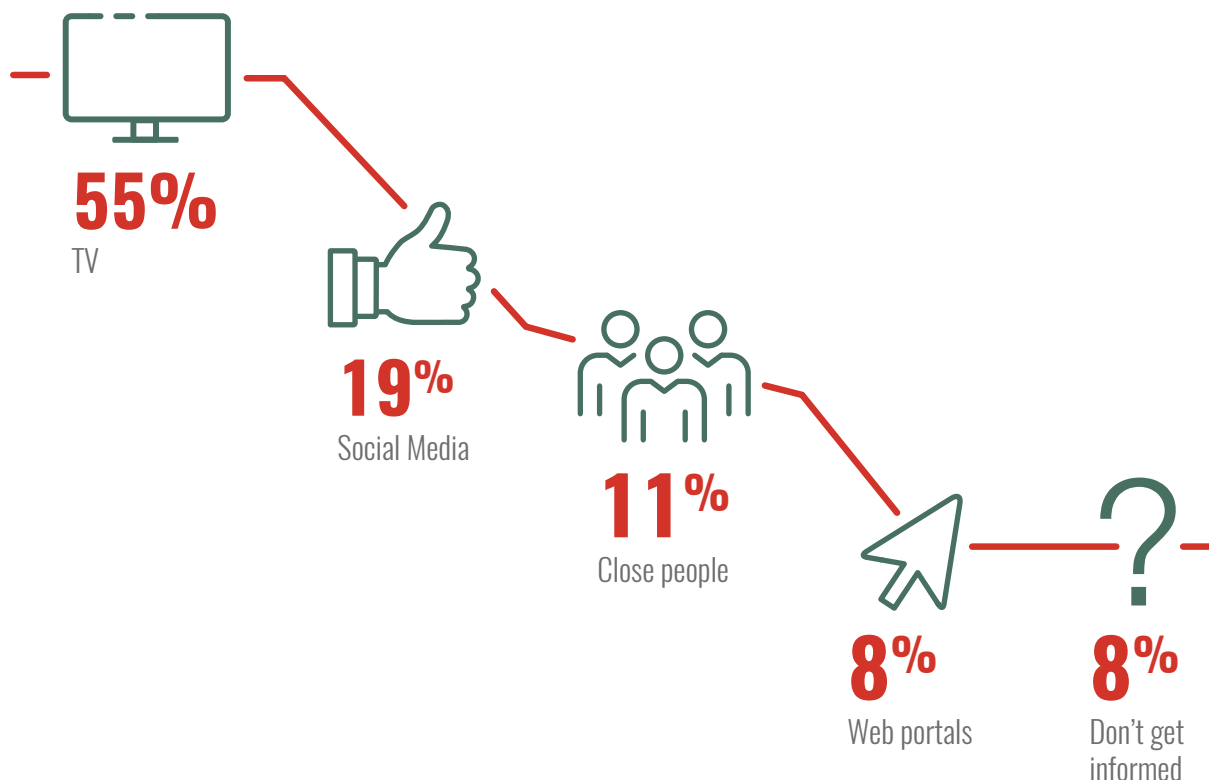
BARRIERS

The Roma population is faced with various social, political, and economic challenges that curtail their full integration and active participation in the society and the public life. Roma political and public marginalization is caused by many factors such as extreme poverty, illiteracy, substandard living conditions, language barriers, poor infrastructure, lack of resources, etc. a number of structural and social barriers are identified in this research:

> The political participation of every underrepresented or politically marginalized group (or lack thereof) is very important and should be addressed accordingly. Currently Roma are one of the most politically marginalized ethnic groups in North Macedonia.

Lack of knowledge and information to navigate the election process related to voter registration, voter list scrutiny, or reporting irregularities and manipulations

Lack of personal identification documents due to which Roma citizens are not included in the voter list

Insufficient understanding of political and electoral processes thereby limiting the interest in politics and political participation of Roma citizens with lower social status and/or educational background

Low level of involvement due to preoccupation with existential issues

Difficulties relating to abstract political and civic topics seemingly irrelevant to everyday life

Scepticism about their power to influence politics and policies in the country

Underrepresentation in state administration and perception that their concerns are not addressed by those who represent them

Lack of skills to confidently participate in political and civic life and lack of awareness of the need to participate. These are also influenced by existing divisions, lack of unity and structure among Roma political activists and within the community

Limited access to information and education due to limited resources: finances, time, living standard as well as skills such as literacy, digital literacy, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to these identified challenges and barriers, a set of interventions are recommended that may effectively contribute to improve civic and political participation of the Roma population in the country:

Continue and expand on civic education efforts

- Focus on outlining the benefits of civic engagement, forms and channels for participation, improved understanding of voting rights and Election Day activities. Stress the importance of the individual vote - its value and potential impact, the connection with a better quality of life, or protection of voting rights.

- Conduct information and education campaigns in the Romani language, in addition to the official language(s) of the country. Employ non-conventional approaches including direct meetings, radio programs, visual and illustrative presentation of printed materials, neighbourhood campaigns, community leader's partnerships to reach communities and individuals with literacy issues.

Raise awareness of the importance of the election process

Encourage political parties, public authorities, and the media to promote issues of interest and relevance for Roma population such as: unemployment, informal Roma settlements, illegal buildings, infrastructure problems, water supply and sewerage, social and health problems.

- Conduct single-issue campaigning targeting Roma communities that address relevant policy issues or upcoming political decisions.

Strengthen their belief that they can make an impact in the community or society

- Promote positive examples of prominent Roma activists and their impact. Use examples that prove that activism matters and has the power to influence/improve and influence the society.

- Promote micro community projects and initiatives that tackle various issues of concern specific to the Roma community.

- Consider different formats such as testimonials, third-party stories, local community projects facilitated by political parties or organizations.

Alleviate the negative perception of being underrepresented by elected officials

- Include and keep Roma-related issues in the public agenda of relevant political representatives.

- Follow-up and periodically check on the issues the Roma community is facing in the period between elections.

- Encourage Roma politicians and activists affiliated to the major political parties to advocate for the Roma community's needs.
- Use a variety of engagement tools such as regular open days in the community as a channel for two-way communication, promotion of Roma-specific issues on the social media.

Promote tailored communication for the younger Roma population

- Engage young, educated people as a link between the political parties and the wider Roma community.
- Harness the potential of personal contact to influence, educate, and help voters to navigate the electoral process.

Create alliances:

With non-government organizations, in cooperation with the authorities or independently, to:

- Inform and educate about the voting process and improve voter registration.
- Improve Roma representation in NGOs and other entities that advocate for Roma rights
- Strengthen the capacities, position and networking of NGOs within Roma community to increase their credibility and power to influence.

With the media (digital and traditional)
- Promote narratives focused on positive and successful examples of Roma activists.
- Promote new channels and avenues for civic participation of the Roma community.
- Educate and inform about the importance of voting, mechanisms to protect the voting rights and navigate the voting process during elections.
- Educate and raise awareness about electoral irregularities, violence, and hate speech.

Use relevant communication channels and apply both traditional and non-conventional approaches

Use TV to reach the Roma population

- Use formats that give opportunities to contextualize the information and increase its relevance.
- Consider other communication formats in addition to newscasts e.g. debates, editorials, short stories and testimonials portraying local concerns and providing perspective into the voting process.
- Focus on TV stations airing programs in the Romani language, as well as local TV stations

- Whenever possible, present illustrative information in Romani language, particularly with regard to the voting process, voting rights, reporting election irregularities.

Organize face-to-face meetings or other community events

- Use a variety of formats for direct interaction such as small gatherings, local informal meetings to build trusting relationships with Roma voters and increase their perception of self-appreciation and importance.

- Propose community projects or activities with potential of gathering people or specific groups from the community.

Pilot other non-traditional channels

- Consider ways to reach Roma community members in their daily lives in order to disseminate information, including in buses, at bus stations, local stores, open markets, barber shops, inside food packages, bags, etc.

Use social media to increase participation and influence, particularly of young Roma population through:

- A more personalized and direct communication based on demographics, location, and interest.

- Promotion of relevant topics and issues for Roma communities.

- Engagement of the young Roma community through focused discussions via commentaries, polls, forums, live video debates, etc.

- Higher communication frequency.

- Increased information relevance by using the potential of the influencers about the voting process, elections, and civic life.
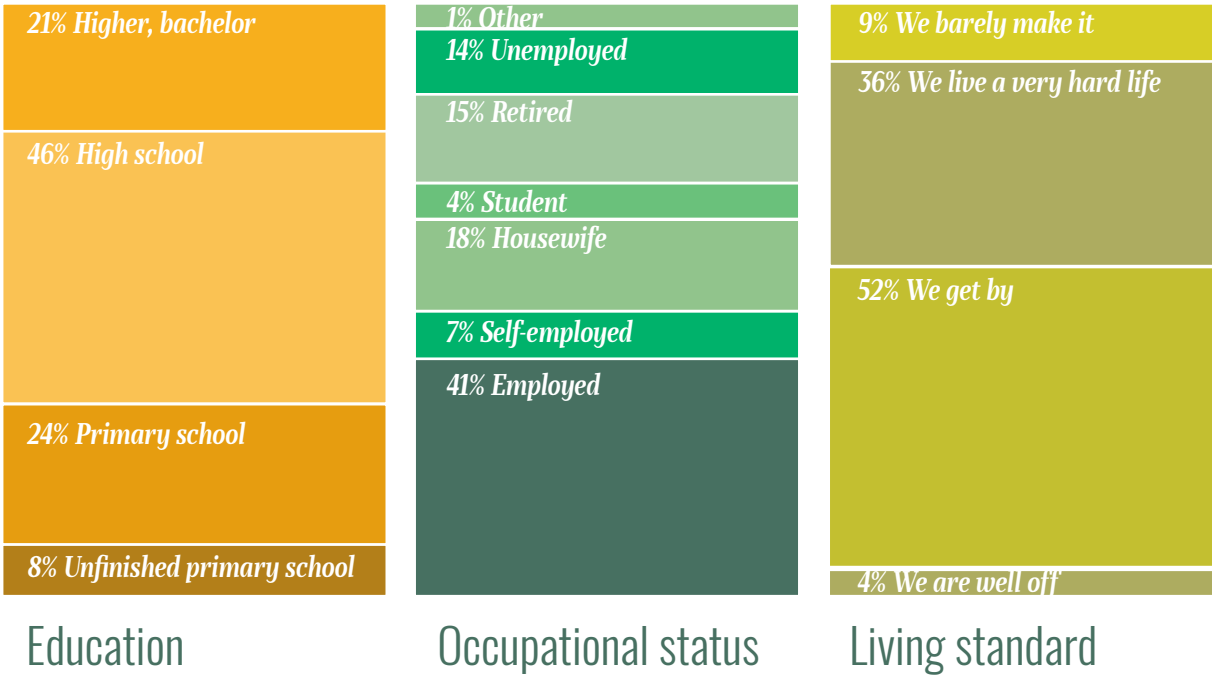
REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research

Remote Communities – Definition and Size

The Oxford Learner's Dictionaries defines remote community as a community set up "far away from places where other people live."[18] The remote communities in North Macedonia observed in the municipalities of Makedonski Brod, Debar, Berovo, Pehchevo, Delchevo and Kriva Palanka are predominantly rural by structure. For the purposes of this reaserch, communities located further away from larger cities and/or those with poor transport infrastructure will also be considered remote. Therefore, remote communities cannot simply be considered a subcategory of the rural population.[19] According to reaserch, there are no public opinion surveys indicating the voter behavior of people living in remote communities. Similarly, voter education campaigns do not target this specific sector of the population.

Demographic profile

A total of 150 respondents living in remote communities took part in the quantitative face-to-face survey which was complemented by one focus group.

Education	Occupational status	Living standard
21% Higher, bachelor	1% Other	9% We barely make it
46% High school	14% Unemployed	36% We live a very hard life
24% Primary school	15% Retired	52% We get by
8% Unfinished primary school	4% Student	4% We are well off
	18% Housewife	
	7% Self-employed	
	41% Employed	

18 Official website of Oxford Learner's Dictionary, available at: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/remote_1, accessed on October 14, 2020.

19 Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities – Skopje "Initial Report - Desk research and analytical literature overview conducted by the team of ISSHS," IFES-commissioned study on Priorities, Rigidities, Motivation Regarding Elections and Voters' Education.

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in the socio-political developments in the country

How much would you say you are interested in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?

14% Very	**45%** Somewhat	**24%** Not much	**18%** Not at all

> Compared to the general and rural population, people living in remote communities tend to be more interested in socio-political-developments and more often discuss these issues with other people.

The research shows that around 59% of the survey respondents are "very" or "somewhat interested" in socio-political development issues, while 42% are "not at all" or "not very" interested. Sixty-four per cent (64%) of the respondents sometimes or often discuss these issues with other people, while 36% rarely or never do.

According to the focus group participants, the COVID-19 pandemic and the formation of the new government rank the highest among the socio-political issues of interest. These two prioritized issues were affected by the developments in the period of the conduct of the survey. Other issues of concern are the current economic situation in the country, social stability, private sector problems as well as family violence.

Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/topics concern you?

How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially and politically active?

Economic and social stability	76% / 69%
Local issues	75% / 72%
Health care	81% / 70%
Corruption	64% / 64%
Education	70% / 64%
Environment	65% / 59%

Specific needs of my community	70% / 63%
Judiciary	59% / 59%
Specific needs of my ethnic group	60% / 56%
Inter-ethnic relations	62% / 51%
Specific needs of my gender	59% / 58%

■ Issues that concern me
■ Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active
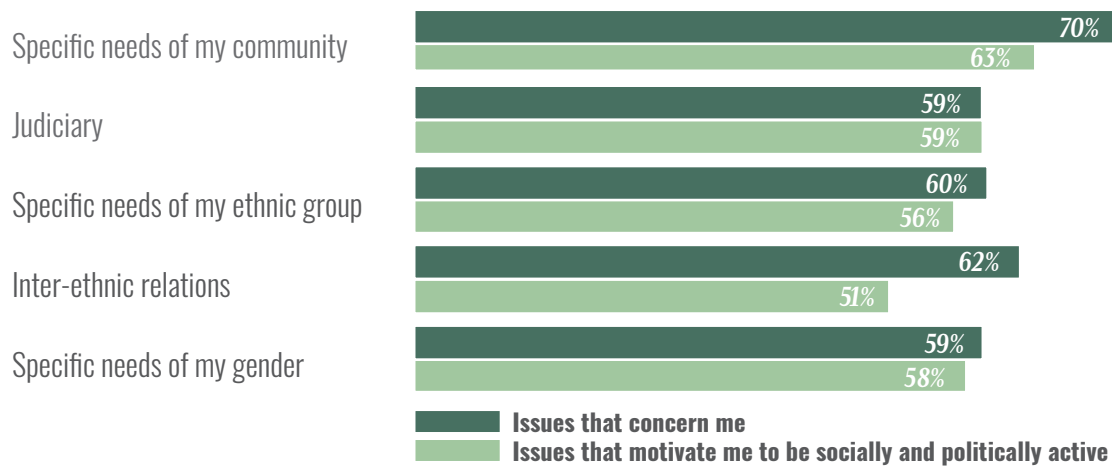
Health care, economic and social stability, and local issues are the most important issues for people living in remote communities, as indicated by more than three quarters of the respondents. Respondents further note that these concerns, in particular the local issues, are key motivators for them to be more socially and politically active.

This group is the least concerned about the specific needs of their gender, the judiciary and the specific needs related to their ethnic group.

People living in remote communities express dissatisfaction with the poor infrastructure, water supply, waste management, and landfill sites, poor public transportation and lack of health care services.

> *We pay the highest prices, we get the worst products and services. I'm talking about clothes, food and services. We can only be grateful for the clean air and no air pollution.*
> *Male, 33, Delcevo*

This group faces difficulties with unemployment, low standard of living and migration issues, with young people leaving rural areas and moving to bigger places, and/or outside the country.

> *There is no replacement for the retired doctors. There is no neurologist or gynecologist. In fact there is only one gynecologist for the for the whole Eastern region of the country.*
> *Female, 53, Pehcevo*

INFORMATION SOURCES

Similarly to the general population, television is the predominant source of information for people living in remote communities, as indicated by 57% of the survey participants. Two out of ten people living in remote communities source information about current socio-political developments largely via social networks, while 8% obtain information through friends and family.

Television is the predominant source of information for people living in remote communities, as indicated by 57% of the survey participants.

TV 57%

Furthermore, due to lack of trust in the presented information and the widespread perception of news as fake, this group demonstrates very low trust in media.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Seventy per cent (70%) of people living in remote communities have never been involved in any event, activity, or process that could impact the community or the place they live, nor do they want to become more civically engaged.

Have you been involved in any event, activity, or process that could have effected any change in the community or the place where you live?

28%
70%
2%

Are you interested in a more active civic involvement?

25%
70%
5%

0%   **100%**

Yes   No   Do not know / Refuses to answer

Sixty-six per cent (66%) of the survey participants do not believe in making a positive change (both by individual engagement and by NGO engagement), while 18% lack interest in civic engagement, which explains the low motivation for civic participation.

Focus group findings show that the participants perceive the civic activism as necessary, since they face many difficulties in their everyday life and "something must be done in this regard". Nevertheless, they indicate that civic involvement is insufficient in the remote communities.

The factors that contribute to minimal civic involvement and low levels of civic participation, among others, can be summarized as follows:

- Citizens lack persistence and proactivness to resolve problems.
- Citizens feel helpless and do not believe their efforts will have results.
- Citizens are disappointed in the political parties.
- Public sector employees are demotivated; something can be achieved only through "connections", i.e. if you know somebody.

I work in an institution and for me it is easy to get things done, but for someone else, especially for those who live in remote villages, things are not the same. Nobody in the institutions will talk to them and nobody will try to help them with their problem.
Female, 49, Kriva Palanka

Factors that promote involvement

Personal or family benefits are the key motivators for the majority of the survey participants to become more involved in activities that could effectuate change in the community, as noted by 22% of the respondents. Other important motivating factors are related to the representation of their interests (20%) and responsiveness of the system (16%).

Even though more than half of the respondents (56%) do not believe that they can make an impact as citizens, 23% consider that they can make a meaningful impact in their municipality and only 5% believe they can impact the parliament.

Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

When asked whether they would be willing to participate in civic activities, 48% of the respondents indicated they would respond to a questionnaire, 41% would meet colleagues and friends to discuss a personal or family issue and 39% would source information from a brochure or leaflet. This group is reluctant to join online coomunication, i.e 80% would not like to participate in online meetings. Furthermore, 76% would not attend a political party meeting and 74% would not participate in a public debate.

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

48%
Respond a
questionnaire

39%
Read a brochure
or a leaflet

41%
Meet colleagues,
friends to discuss

ELECTION PROCESS

People living in remote communities associate elections with phrases such as: "completely unnecessary", "does not reflect people's will", "USA and EU make the final decision about the outcome of the elections".

Do you think that every vote is important and can affect the election results?	**75**% Yes	**17**% No	**1**% Refuses to answer	**7**% Does not know

Similalry to the groups polled under the general and rural categories, a positive observation is that the vast majority of the respondents believe that they can influence election results i.e. think that every vote is important (75%), while 17% do not believe so.

More than half of the respondents (59%) indicate that voting per se is not sufficient to engage citizens in order to change or influence policies, whereas three out of ten believe so.

Motivation to vote

How regularly do you vote?

79% regularly or often	12% sometimes	4% usually not	2% never

The research shows that people from remote communities are regular voters: 79% vote almost regularly or often, 12% sometimes, 4% usually do not vote and 2% state that they never vote. There are more regular voters among people from remote communities, compared to rural women (72% almost regularly or often vote) and rural youth (65% almost regularly or often vote).

In addition, 39% state they always vote for the same party while 43% vote for different political parties. This indicates that their support for a particular political party may change if other political options arise.

Factors that influence their decision to vote

Similarly to the general population, the top three factors that influence the decision of the people from remote communities to vote are: perception that voting is a civic right and duty (46%), prospects for better future (32%) and fear that someone would steal their vote (32%), i.e. fraudilently vote instead of them.

46% Civic right and duty   **32%** Better future   **32%** Fear that someone will steal their vote

Two thirds of the respondents (66%) indicate that their voting preference is the same or most often the same as that of their families, while almost one third (32%) indicated different voting preference.

> Six out of 10 respondents' decision to vote is not influenced by their friends.

People living in remote communities would like to see more representatives of people they know and young people as candidates on the party lists for elections (or as elected officials, for example in municipal councils).

If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?
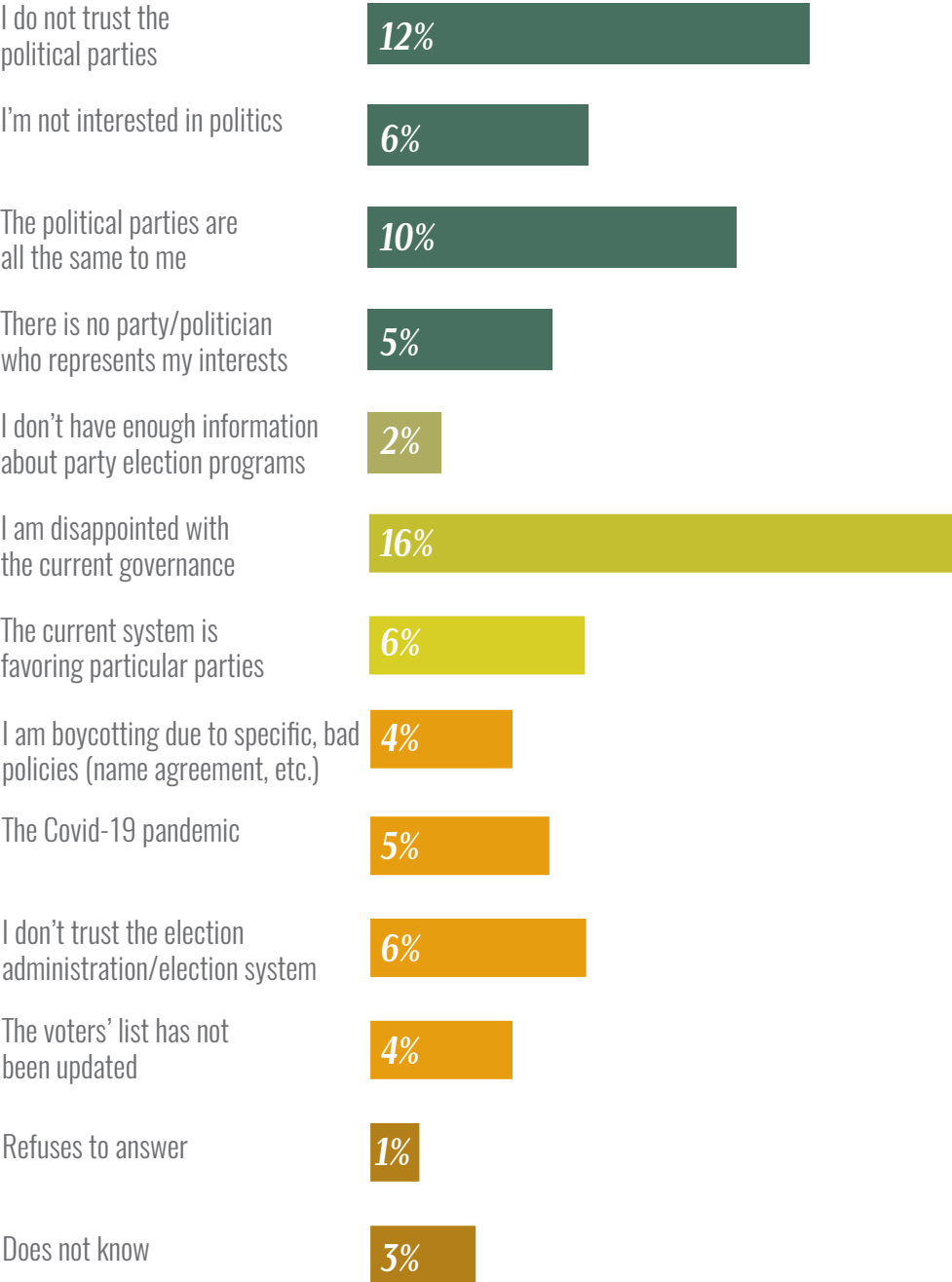
Representatives from your local community
- 3%
- 7%
- 48%
- 42%

Young people
- 3%
- 11%
- 43%
- 43%

People you know
- 4%
- 8%
- 40%
- 48%

More likely　　No impact　　Less likely　　Do not know

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and the political parties demotivates people from remote communities to go out and vote.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

Reason	Percentage
I do not trust the political parties	12%
I'm not interested in politics	6%
The political parties are all the same to me	10%
There is no party/politician who represents my interests	5%
I don't have enough information about party election programs	2%
I am disappointed with the current governance	16%
The current system is favoring particular parties	6%
I am boycotting due to specific, bad policies (name agreement, etc.)	4%
The Covid-19 pandemic	5%
I don't trust the election administration/election system	6%
The voters' list has not been updated	4%
Refuses to answer	1%
Does not know	3%

This demographic group believes the mass immigration of the citizens from remote communities is suffcent evidence that the political parties do not have successful developmental plans and strategies for the remote communities and the rural areas. They beleive that the focus of the political parties is mainly on the urban areas and big cities.

> *" The discrimination is not only urban versus rural, but also big towns versus small towns.* "
> *Female, 49, Kriva Palanka*

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

The predominant sources of election information are TV (35%), social media (21%), web portals (18%), friends and family members (12%).

Newscasts (42%) and TV debates (30%) are the most practiced ways of sourcing information about elections by the survey participants.
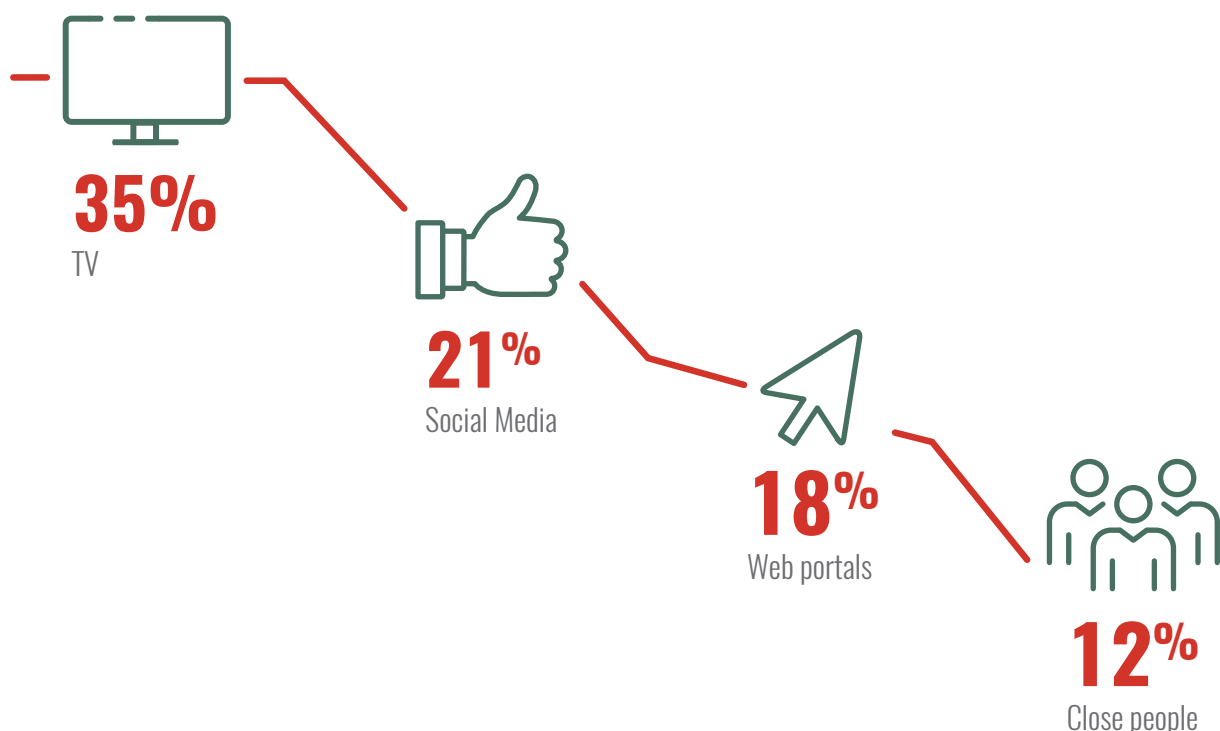
35%
TV

21%
Social Media

18%
Web portals

12%
Close people

With regards to the type of communication with candidates in the election period, this group prefers in-person communication in smaller groups (in the neighbourhood) and personal, door-to-door communication and relies on the candidates' political track record in making an informed decision. Nine per cent (9%) of the respondents are interested in political party programs.

With regards to communication with candidates or representatives from political parties between elections, people from remote communities prefer to be informed about previous achievements and results of the candidates (33%), have in-person communication in smaller groups (30%) and receive information via traditional media (28%).

The survey participants point out that the political parties visit their communities and have contacts with the citizens only during the pre-election period. In this regard, they underline that the political parties are not interested in the needs of the citizens and their visits have only one goal - political marketing and winning people's votes.

> *When they visit us before elections, they come only for party promotion and not to hear what our needs and problems are. I do not think that any politician would come to Makedonski Brod and listen to our local issues, urbanization, sewerage, etc.*
> *Female, 24, Makedonski Brod*

The expectations of this demographic group from the political parties are to:

- Fulfil their promises.
- Improve basic conditions of the rural areas and remote communities.

BARRIERS

Population from remote communities acts similarly to the rural population in terms of attitudes and behaviour toward civic and political participation. The general feeling of marginaisation and lack of representation is more prounounced among this group. They are concerened that even the basic requirements, such as transport and infrastructure, health care, drinking water supply and others are not met and that they do not appear on the political parties' agenda.

In terms of interest, compared to the general population, people living in remote communities tend to be more interested in socio-political developments and more often discuss these issues with other people.

The following specific barriers were identified:

- Lack of interest among institutions and politicians for improvement of the quality of life and harnessing a feeling of marginalization and exclusion.

- Underrepresentation: a strong feeling that their concerns are not addressed by those who represent them.

- Scepticism about their power to influence politics and policies in the country.

- Low self-initiative despite the well-recognized need for civic participation.

- Lack of opportunities and channels where they can participate and be civically engaged and low awareness thereof.

- Lack of skills to actively participate (preference for passive participation).

- Poor infrastructure (road infrastructure and connections) affect negatively their participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to the identified challenges and barriers, a set of interventions are recommended to help utilize their high interest for socio-political topics and improve their civic and political participation:

Improve the negative perception of being underrepresented by the elected officials

- Set regular communication with the remote communities to identify their needs and concerns.

- Include and keep issues important for the remote communities in the public agenda of relevant political representatives.

- Increase the visibility of the issues and needs of remote communities.

- Monitor and regularly follow-up on the issues of concern to the remote community in the period between elections.

- Encourage politicians and activists who are part of the major political parties to advocate for the remote population needs.

- Use a variety of tools such as regular monthly visits in the community, promotion of remote communities' concerns in the media, as well as regular update of the progress; promotion on social media of issues and concerns of the younger rural community.

Increase the belief in their power to make an impact in their community or society

- Initiate, promote and facilitate smaller community projects and initiatives that tackle various issues of concern.

- Promote positive local examples that are recognized and respected by the community and their impact. Use examples that prove that activism matters and has the power to influence/improve and influence our society.

- Consider different formats such as informal meetings with influential local representatives and activists, third-party stories, small community projects facilitated by a political party or other organization.

Empower and boost self-confidence

- Run education campaigns on methods of civic participation.

- Help develop skills for confident participation.

- Strengthen collaborations with the neighbouring communities.

Promote local channels and methods to encourage remote communities to participate in civic life

- Use the municipalities as they are perceived as most approachable to encourage further participation.

- Organize them around issues of interest.

- Focus on the benefits for the community.

- Consider various formats such as: regular in-person meetings, gatherings in smaller groups, polls or other forums where they can express their opinions on the issue of interest, opportunities to raise awareness about initiatives, etc.

Create alliances:

With local civic organisations to:

- Identify issues on micro level that are important for the local communities.

- Support small projects initiated by the local organisations.

- Establish close contact with the remote communities.

- Strengthen the capacities, position, and networking of local organisations within the remote community to increase their credibility and power to influence.

With media (digital and traditional)

- Promote relevant issues, especially those focused on improving the quality of life (health care, transport, migration,etc).

- Track progress of projects relevant for remote communities.

- Promote narratives focused on positive and successful examples of rural activists.

- Promote and introduce diversity of candidates (woman, young, rural, etc.) during election campaigns.

Choose relevant communication channels and apply both traditional and non-conventional approaches.

Use TV to reach the majority of the remote population.

- Promote representatives and topics relevant to the remote population via debates, guest programs etc., especially those focused on the improvement of quality of life, migration of young people, etc.

- Use formats that give opportunities to contextualize the information and increase its relevance, especially because the TV is the dominant channel for the elederly, as well as women and people on the lower side of the education and income spectrum.

Organize face-to-face meetings or other community events.

Although TV is the most effective way to disseminate information, direct meetings in an informal setting is the most preferred channel for communication for remote communities. Use various formats for direct interaction such as small gatherings, local informal meetings to build trusting relationships and increase their perception of self-appreciation and importance.

Use social media to reach younger people from remote communities.

Pilot other non-traditional channels

- Consider ways to reach remote communities in their daily lives in order to disseminate information, for example, in buses, at bus stations, local stores and other community facilities.
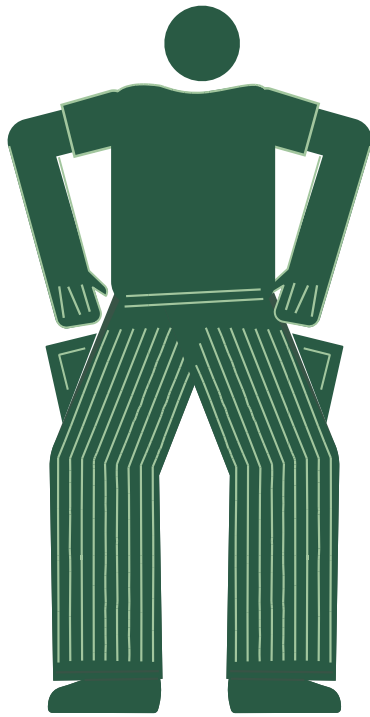
VERY

POOR

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research

> *Our basic existential needs are at stake, so we can't think about anything else. If a person has a normal life and income, maybe he would be an active citizen. If a person doesn't have that, then his only focus would be how to survive.*
> *Female, 42, Kumanovo*

Very Poor – Definition and Size

The very poor people is a group of people deprived of the basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter and education.[20] Institutions in North Macedonia only measure the relative poverty among the population.[21]

However, the most recent data on absolute poverty by the World Bank suggests that an estimated 4.4% in the country (around 92,100 persons) lived on 1.9 USD (46 MKD) per day in 2017, while in 2019 the State Statistical Office has calculated the at-risk-of-poverty rate in North Macedonia at 21.6%, affecting 448,100 persons.[22]

For the purpose of this research, the definition of persons in deep poverty was operationalized to encompass recipients of social welfare with a monthly household income of up to 8,000 MKD or 266 MKD per day.
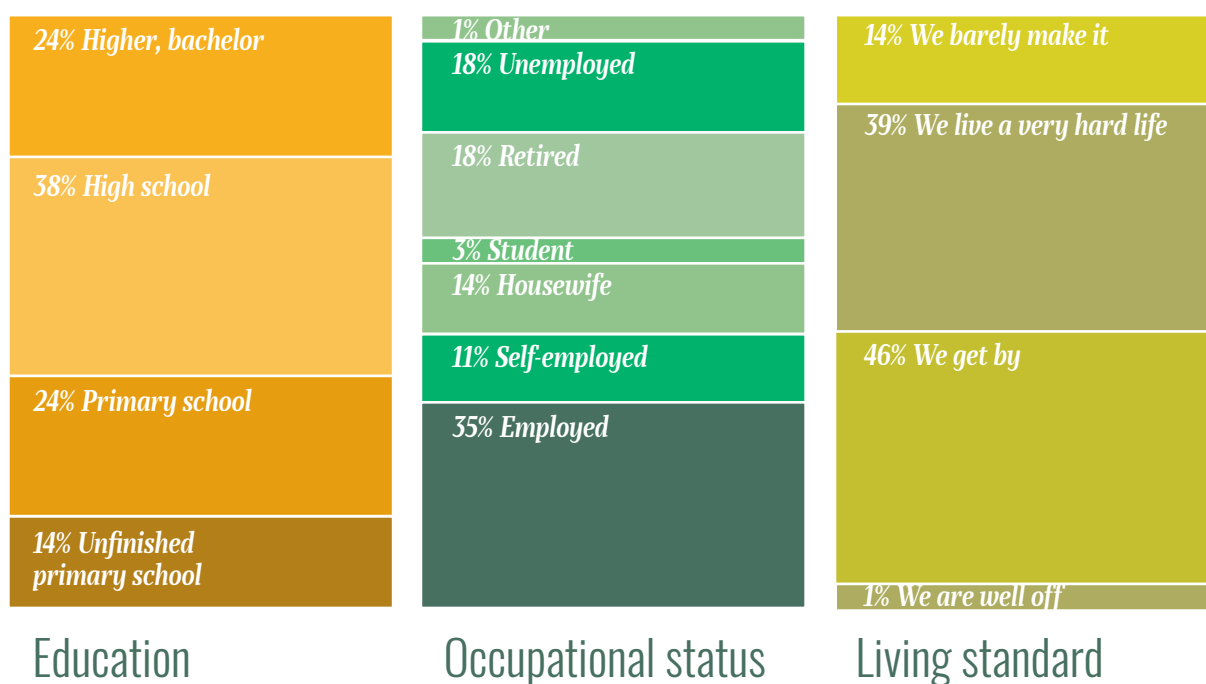
Demographic Profile

A total of 128 very poor people took part in the quantitative face-to-face survey, complemented with four in-depth interviews. This method was selected to address the lack of respondents' access to online and technical resources for the implementation of a focus group in the midst of the COVID-19 restrictions.

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20 https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/world-summit-for-social-development-1995/wssd-1995-agreements/pawssd-chapter-2.html

21 Absolute poverty refers to a set standard which is consistent over time and between countries. Relative poverty, in contrast, views poverty as socially defined and dependent on social context, based on "economic distance", a level of income usually set at 60% of the median household income

22 State Statistical Office, "Laeken poverty indicators in 2019", (SSO: Skopje, 2020), available at: https://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2020/4.1.20.113_mk.pdf, accessed on June 14, 2021

24% Higher, bachelor

38% High school

24% Primary school

14% Unfinished primary school

1% Other

18% Unemployed

18% Retired

3% Student

14% Housewife

11% Self-employed

35% Employed

14% We barely make it

39% We live a very hard life

46% We get by

1% We are well off

Education
Occupational status
Living standard

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in the socio-political developments in the country

How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?

13% Very

32% Somewhat

34% Not much

22% Not at all

Compared to the general population, very poor people tend to be less interested in socio-political developments in the country and in the world. Similarly to other marginalized and vulnerable demographic groups, this is likely due to the fact that the very poor are mostly concerned to "make-ends-meet" and survive the day.

This research shows that some 45% of the survey respondents are "very" or "somewhat interested" in socio-political issues, while 56% are "not at all" or "not very" interested.

Fifty-four per cent (54%) of the respondents sometimes or often discuss these issues with other people, while 46% rarely or never do.
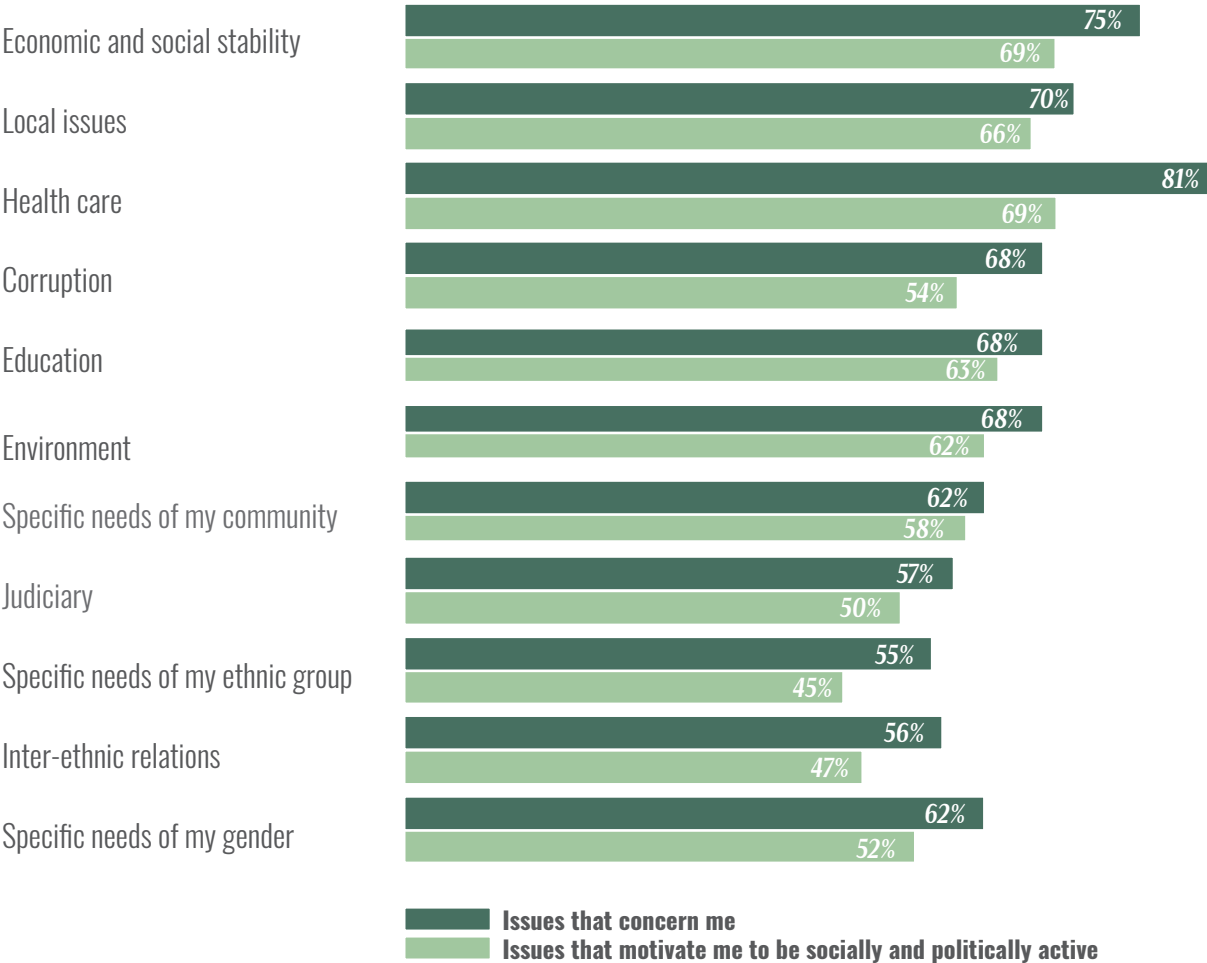
Given the extremely difficult financial situation of this demographic group, their primary concern is how to survive the day.

Similarly to other demographic groups, according to the focus group participants, the COVID-19 crisis, the economic situation in the country and employment rank the highest among the socio-political issues of relevance to the quality of life.

Disappointment in the political parties (mostly due to failure to keep promises), manipulations and pressures make this group less interested in national political issues.

Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/topics concern you?

How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially and politically active?

Issue	Issues that concern me	Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active
Economic and social stability	75%	69%
Local issues	70%	66%
Health care	81%	69%
Corruption	68%	54%
Education	68%	63%
Environment	68%	62%
Specific needs of my community	62%	58%
Judiciary	57%	50%
Specific needs of my ethnic group	55%	45%
Inter-ethnic relations	56%	47%
Specific needs of my gender	62%	52%

Issues that concern me
Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active

Health care (indicated by 81%), economic and social stability (indicated by 75%), and local issues (indicated by 70%) are the three most important issues for this group of respondents.

The above issues, primarily at local level, are the key motivators for them to be more socially and politically active.

Poor people are mostly interested in tangible and specific issues that could improve their lives and those of family members and issues they can relate to. They are less interested in abstract and political issues, which is confirmed by a low interest in socio-political developments.

This group is the least concerned about the specific needs of their ethnic group, education, interethnic relations and the judiciary.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Television is the predominant source of information for the very poor people, as indicated by 69% of the survey participants (20% more compared to the general population). Fifteen per cent (15%) of this group are informed about the socio-political developments mostly via social networks, while 4% obtain information through friends and family and 3% via web portals.

> Television is the predominant source of information for the very poor people, as indicated by 69% of the survey participants (20% more compared to the general population).

TV 69%
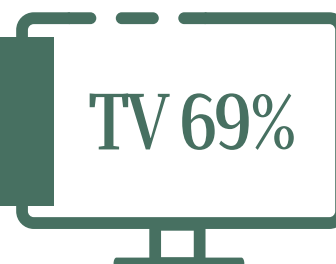
Of note is that this demographic group uses social networks less often compared to the general population (27%) as well as web portals (10%), likely due to limited technical resources.

Similarly to the general population and the other demographic groups, very poor people believe the media is biased and have low trust in the media.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

> More than three-quarters of the respondents have never been involved in any event, activity, or process that could impact the community or the place they live, nor do they want to become more civically engaged.

Have you been involved in any event, activity, or process that could have effected change in the community or the place where you live?

- 22%
- 77%
- 1%

Are you interested in a more active civic involvement?

- 21%
- 75%
- 4%

0%   **100%**

Yes   No   Do not know / Refuses to answer

Sixty-two per cent (62%) of the survey participants do not believe in making a positive change either by individual or NGO engagement, while 25% lack interest in civic engagement, which explains the low motivation for civic participation.

Due to the their difficult socio-economic situation, they do not contemplate civic activism and are primarily focused on survival.

> " *Our basic existential needs are at stake, so we can't think about anything else. If a person has a normal life and income, maybe he would be an active citizen. If a person doesn't have that, then his only focus would be how to survive.* "
> *Female, 42, Kumanovo*

The factors that contribute to minimal civic involvement and low levels of civic participation can be summarized as follows:

- Focus on survival - the energy is directed towards finding a solution to the basic existential problems.
- Lost trust in the system and institutions.
- Citizens feel helpless and powerless.
- Fear and pressure from the governing political parties.
- Lack of freedom of speech.

Factors that promote involvement

The prospects for personal or family benefits are the key motivators for most survey participants to become more involved in activities that could effectuate change in the community, as noted by 18% of the respondents. Other important motivating factors are related to their representation (17%) and the responsiveness of the institutions (16%).

Seven out of ten respondents (69%) do not believe they can make an impact as a citizen (17% more compared to the general population), whereas more than one fifth (21%) believe that they could make a meaningful impact in the municipality, but not in other public institutions.

Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

To the question whether they would be willing to participate in civic activities, 47% of the respondents indicated they would respond to a questionnaire, 47% would meet colleagues/friends to discuss a personal or a family issue and 32% would prefer reading a brochure or a leaflet. More notable are the percentages of the actions they would avoid. Namely, 86% would not like to participate in an online meeting, 81% would not attend a political party meeting and 81% would not attend a public debate.

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

47%
Respond a
questionnaire

32%
Read a brochure
or a leaflet

47%
Meet colleagues,
friends to discuss

ELECTION PROCESS

Very poor people associate elections with phrases such as: "forgery", "framed", "frustrating", "partially democratic", "the local sheriffs of the ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian political parties put pressure, manipulate and bribe the citizens to win votes".

Do you think that every vote is important and can affect the election results?	**72%** Yes	**20%** No	**1%** Refuses to answer	**7%** Does not know

Similarly to the general population, almost three-quarters of the survey participants think that every vote is important and can affect election results, while 20% do not believe that every vote counts.

Around half of the respondents (51%) indicate that only voting is not sufficient to engage citizens to change or influence policies, one third think voting is sufficient, while 11% claim ignorant on the issue.

Motivation to vote

How regularly do you vote?

| 75% regularly or often	16% sometimes	6% usually not	2% never

The research shows that similarly to the general population, very poor people are regular voters.
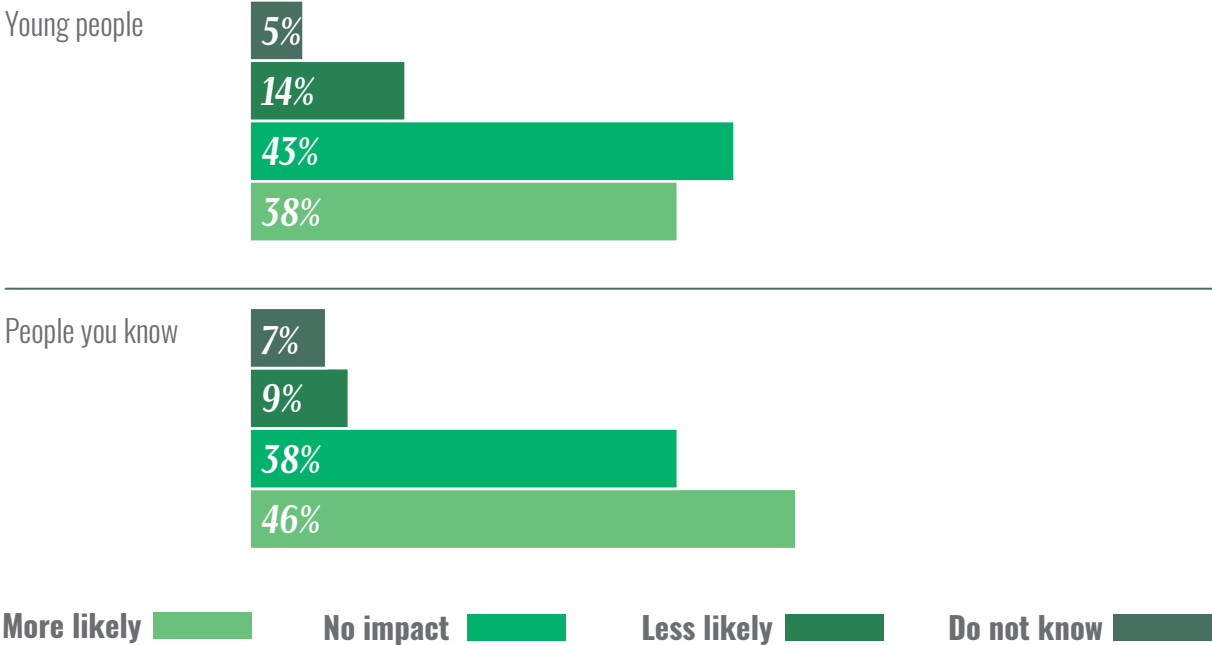
In addition, 34% state they vote for the same party, while 48% vote for different political parties. This indicates that their support for a political party may change if other political opportunities arise.

Factors that influence their decision to vote

Similarly to the general population, the top three factors that influence the decision to vote are: perception that voting is a civic right and duty (47%), better prospects for the future (34%) and fear that someone would misuse their vote (27%).
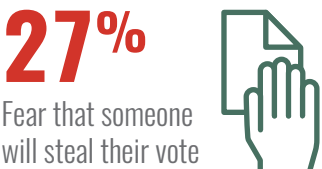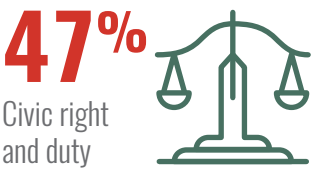
47%
Civic right and duty

34%
Better future

27%
Fear that someone will steal their vote

If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?

Young people
- 5%
- 14%
- 43%
- 38%

People you know
- 7%
- 9%
- 38%
- 46%

More likely   No impact   Less likely   Do not know

Similarly to the general population, more than half of the respondents (56%) indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families, while 38% state that their decision differs from their families.
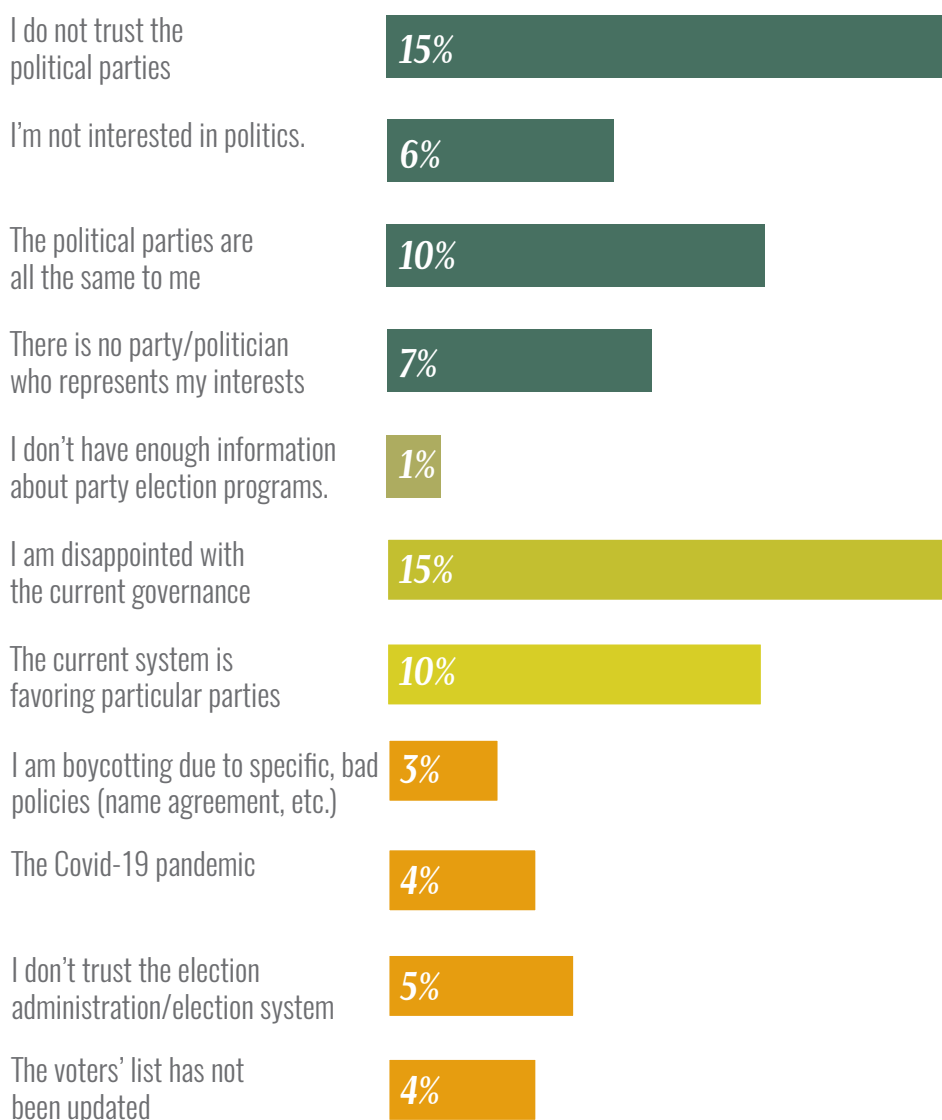
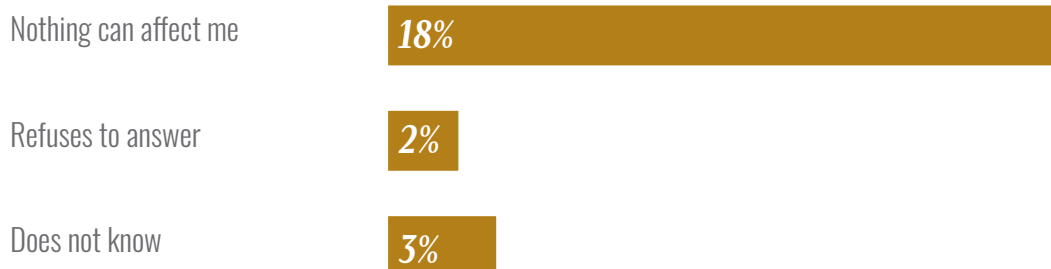Six out of ten respondents' decision to vote is not influenced by their friends.

Very poor people would like to see more familiar people as candidates on the party lists for elections or as elected officials (e.g. in municipal councils).

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and the political parties demotivates people from remote communities to go out and vote.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

I do not trust the political parties	**15%**
I'm not interested in politics.	**6%**
The political parties are all the same to me	**10%**
There is no party/politician who represents my interests	**7%**
I don't have enough information about party election programs.	**1%**
I am disappointed with the current governance	**15%**
The current system is favoring particular parties	**10%**
I am boycotting due to specific, bad policies (name agreement, etc.)	**3%**
The Covid-19 pandemic	**4%**
I don't trust the election administration/election system	**5%**
The voters' list has not been updated	**4%**

Nothing can affect me	**18%**
Refuses to answer	**2%**
Does not know	**3%**

This group believes that citizens are manipulated by the political parties and do not believe in positive changes and in the legitimacy of the election results; however, they are against boycotting elections.

> " *More damage is done by not voting compared to the benefits of sending a message of dissatisfaction to the political parties with boycotting.* "
> *Male, 62, Skopje*

Furthermore, they believe that abstention from voting benefits the incumbent government and helps them win votes.

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

The predominant sources of election information are TV (68%), social media (7%), web portals (8%), friends and family members (7%).

Of note is that this demographic group more often gets informed about elections via TV (68%) compared to the general population (52%) and uses social media twice less often (7%).

Newscasts (66%) and TV debates (17%) are the most useful ways of sourcing election information for the survey participants.

With regards to the type of communication with candidates in the election period, this group prefers personal communication i.e. door-to-door or in-person communication in smaller groups (small neighborhood gatherings) and sourcing information via traditional media.

Concerning communication with candidates or representatives from political parties in the period between elections, in addition to personal communication and communication in smaller groups, very poor people prefer to be continually informed about previous political achievements and results of the candidates.

The respondents claim they are interested in election political party programs to find out whether parties' promises are tangible and feasible.

The general impression of this profile group is that the political parties are not interested in addressing the needs of the very poor citizens.

68%
TV

7%
Social Media

8%
Web portals

7%
Close people
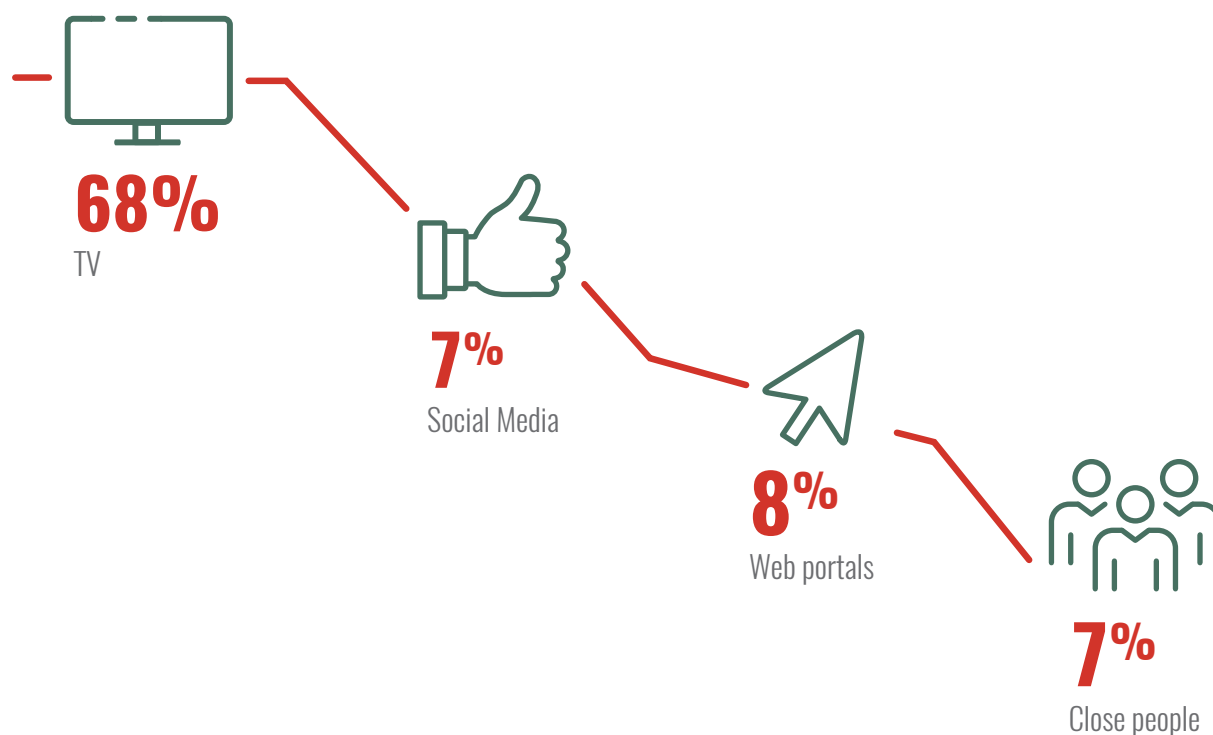
These citizens are especially sensitive to party - political manipulation and promises with regard to employment in the public sector.

> *The very poor citizens are not mentioned anywhere. Single-parent families are not mentioned either. This is absolute discrimination.*
> *Female, 42, Kumanovo*

> *It is utopia to believe that any party has a strategy to help the people.*
> *Male, 45, Tetovo*

The expectations of this demographic group from the political parties are to:

- Reduce unemployment and open new jobs.
- Help single parents and parents of children with disabilities.
- Increase social aid.
- Stop citizen manipulation to win votes.
- Stop dividing the citizens based on their party affiliation.

BARRIERS

Poverty is the strongest barrier for socio-political participation. However, it is necessary to further identify the barriers that inhibit poor people's activation, such as their perceptions, experience or attitudes.

They demonstrate a low level of interest in socio-economic developments in the country and a lower motivation to participate in civic and political activities. The barriers leading to this situation can be described as follows:

⬧ **Previous negative experiences** with political parties, candidates (manipulation, marginalization, lies, unfulfilled promises).

⬧ **Focus on existential concerns and survival** - time and energy are spent on addressing basic existential problems.

⬧ **Disbelief** in the interest of the public institutions to improve their quality of life.

⬧ **Scepticism** of their power to influence.

⬧ **Fear of pressure and consequences** - they believe that their survival and access to income, services or benefits depend on the relations with officials, and if challenged, they could lose what they already have.

⬧ **Lack of skills & knowledge** how and where to participate.

⬧ **Lack of knowledge about forms and means of engagement and participation** in socio-political life, especially knowledge about civic rights and how to protect and exercise the civic rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue and expand on civic education efforts

To empower and increase the importance of civic and political participation, education and information are critical.

⬧ Educate them about the protection of civic and political rights.

⬧ Educate them how to exercise their civic and political rights.

⬧ Educate them about relevant institutional pathways to express their interests, concerns and problems.

⬧ Focus on the benefits of civic engagement, forms and channels for participation, a better understanding of the individual voter's rights and election-day activities.

⬧ Employ non-conventional approaches due the limited time and resources such as direct meetings, visual presentation of printed materials, neighborhood campaigns, education in the social institutions, community leader's partnerships to reach communities and individuals with poor literacy.

Increase the belief in their power to make an impact in the community or society

- Create opportunities for meaningful involvement of the very poor people in local activities or projects on improving segments of their life (converting a local facility into a childcare centre or hygiene facility, small home improvement projects).

- Promote positive examples that prove that activism matters and has the power to influence and influence the society.

- Consider different formats such as small community projects facilitated by political parties or other organization, testimonials, third-party stories.

Improve the negative perception of being underrepresented and invisible

- Demonstrate empathy and understanding of the challenges they are facing.

- Include and keep poverty-related issues and proposals in the public agenda of relevant political representatives.

- Follow up and periodically check on the issues this community is facing in the period between elections.

- Encourage politicians and activists who are part of the major political parties to advocate for the low-income community's needs.

- Use a variety of tools such as regular meetings in the community, collaboration with social services to understand and work on designing a solution for problems, public advocacy of the poverty-related issues, etc.

Promote tailored communication for different low-income groups

The very poor group is highly heterogeneous. It includes:

- Single parents.
- Family with children with disabilities.
- Older people without pensions.
- Larger families with a single income source.
- Families without residential documents, etc.

They all have specific needs and concerns. Tailor the communication to be relevant to their needs.

Create alliances:

With the non-government organizations for improved civic and voter education, in cooperation with the authorities or independently.

Since civic organizations are increasingly involved in providing social services, they inherit both the responsibility and power to act as representatives and advocates for the communities they serve. They can play a key role to:

- Inform and educate about civic and political rights.
- Improve representation of very poor persons in NGOs and other entities that advocate for these communities.
- Facilitate responsiveness of the system: Act as a connection point between this group and the system and support them in protecting their rights and interests.
- Strengthen the capacities, position and networking of NGOs providing social services and help support them to increase their credibility and power to influence.

With the media (focus on traditional)

- Promote narratives focused on positive and successful examples of activism of underprivileged communities.
- Educate them about the ways they can exercise their civic and political rights.
- Promote topics related to issues and concerns of these underprivileged groups.
- Educate and inform them about the importance of voting, mechanisms to protect and exercise voting rights.

Choose relevant communication channels and apply both traditional and non-conventional approaches

Use TV to reach the very poor communities due to limited access to advanced technology

- Use formats that contextualize the information.
- Consider other formats in addition to newscasts e.g., debates, editorials, short stories and testimonials or concerns.
- In addition to political shows, consider using morning programs, lifestyle and specialized shows (e.g on health).
- Whenever possible, present information in an illustrative manner, especially concerning the voting process, voting rights, reporting election irregularities.
- Organize direct meetings or other community events.
- Use formats for direct interaction such as small gatherings, informal meetings in the neighborhood to build trust and increase their positive self-perception.
- Propose community projects or activities with the potential of gathering people or specific community groups.

Pilot non-traditional channels

- Consider effective outreach methods to disseminate information, e.g. in buses, at bus stations, local stores, open markets, barber stores, food packages, bags, etc.
- Use social centres and other institutions of interest for training on civic and political rights and as participation channels.
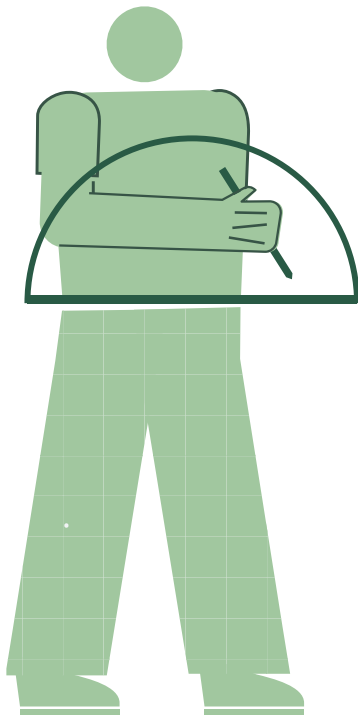
CHRONICALLY UNEMPLOYED

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research

> *It has happened to me too - join our party and we will hire you. I don't want to join your party. Hire me if I'm good, if I'm not, don't hire me. We all know who's employed in the public administration and who's unemployed, sitting at home with university degrees.*
> *Female, 32, Veles*

Chronically Unemployed – Definition and Size

Given that there is no universally accepted definition of the chronically unemployment persons, for the purposes of this report "a chronically unemployed person shall be considered a person out of regular employment for at least two consecutive years or longer, while being mainly in labour force."[23] As such, chronic unemployment is identical to the so-called very long-term unemployment (VLTU) which refers to persons who have not had employment for 24 months or more.[24] According to the latest data of the Employment Service Agency of North Macedonia, 56,856 registered unemployed persons have been unemployed for at least 24 months in 30.04.2021.[25] However, this number may be higher as it does not include the so-called "passive job seekers" i.e. persons unemployed for more than two years who have not registered in the Employment Service Agency.
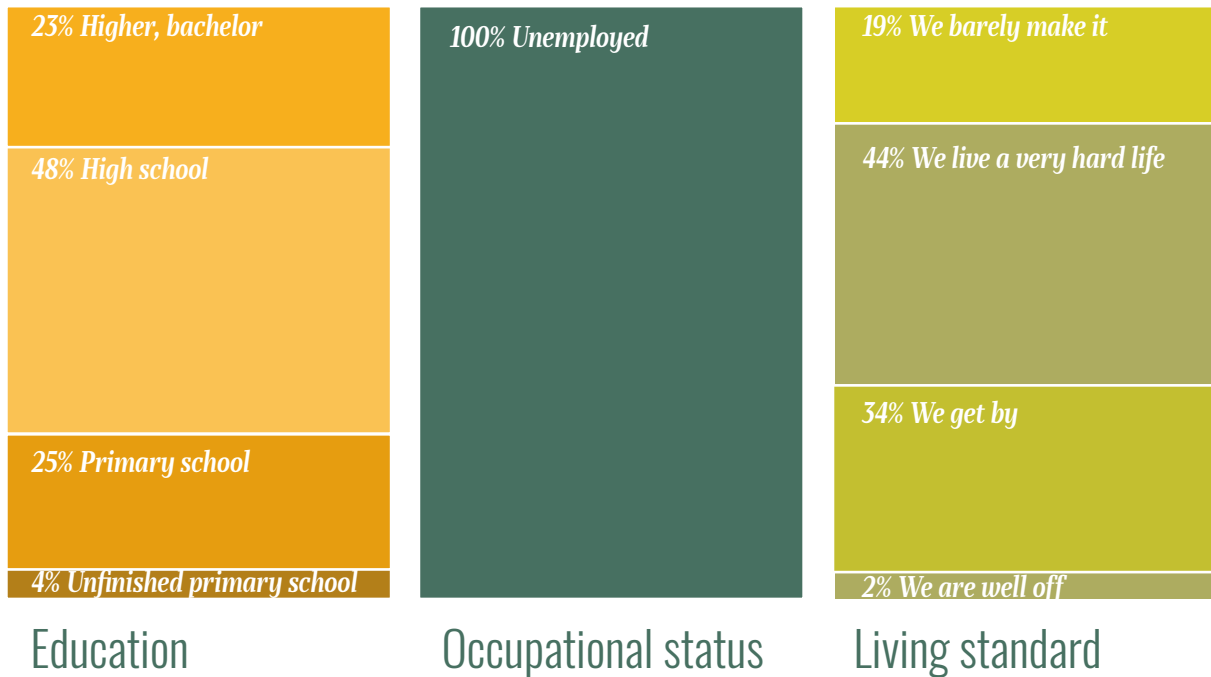
Demographic Profile

A total of 99 chronically unemployed persons took part in the quantitative face to face survey.

To gain an in-depth insight into the background, perceptions, and opinions of this group, the quantitative survey was complemented by one focus group.

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23 Simo Aho et al., "Magnitude, structure and dynamics of chronic unemployment in Denmark, Finland and Germany", IAB-Discussion Paper 9|2019, p. 9, available at: http://doku.iab.de/discussionpapers/2019/dp0919.pdf , accessed on 14.10.2020.

24 "Long-term unemployment: Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation – frequently asked questions", 17.9.2015, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_15_5562 , accessed on 14.10.2020.

25 Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, "Report on Unemployed Persons According to the Duration of Employment Expectance" ["Преглед на евидентирани невработени лица според време на чекање на вработување"], available at: https://av.gov.mk/content/Statisticki%20podatoci/%D0%90%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BB%202021/O4_vrcekanje042021.pdf , accessed on June 14, 2020.

23% Higher, bachelor	100% Unemployed	19% We barely make it
48% High school		44% We live a very hard life
25% Primary school		34% We get by
4% Unfinished primary school		2% We are well off

| Education | Occupational status | Living standard |

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in the socio-political developments in the country

How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?

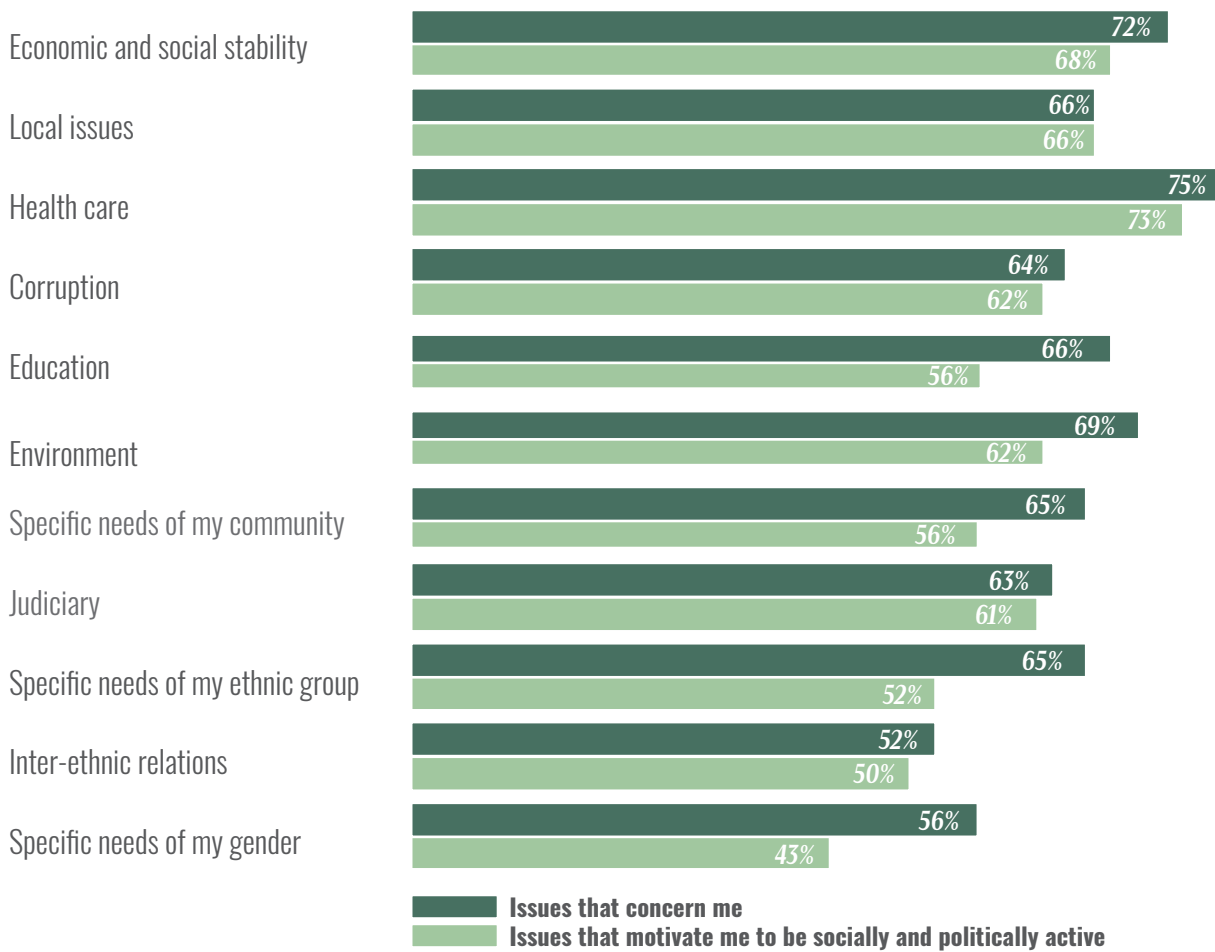| 7%	36%	32%	22%	2%
Very	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all	Does not know

Compared to the general population, the chronically unemployed persons appear less interested in socio-political developments and less often discuss these issues with other people. The research shows that 43% of the survey respondents are "very" or "somewhat interested" in socio-political development issues, while 54% are "not at all" or "not very" interested. Similarly to other marginalized and vulnerable demographic groups, this is likely due to the "make-ends-meet" attitude embraced by the society which faces socio-economic challenges. Four out of ten respondents sometimes or often discuss these issues with other people, while six out of ten rarely or never do.

According to the focus group participants, the COVID-19 pandemic ranks the highest among the socio-political issues of relevance to the quality of life. They are also worried about the current economic situation in the country, unemployment, social stability, education, and the judiciary.

Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/topics concern you?

How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially and politically active?

Issue	Issues that concern me	Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active
Economic and social stability	72%	68%
Local issues	66%	66%
Health care	75%	73%
Corruption	64%	62%
Education	66%	56%
Environment	69%	62%
Specific needs of my community	65%	56%
Judiciary	63%	61%
Specific needs of my ethnic group	65%	52%
Inter-ethnic relations	52%	50%
Specific needs of my gender	56%	43%

■ **Issues that concern me**
■ **Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active**

Health care and economic and social stability are the most important issues for chronically unemployed persons, as indicated by more than 70% of the respondents. In addition, these issues are key motivators for their social and political activation. This may be explained by the fact that the chronically unemployed persons, similarly to the poor population, are disproportionally more affected, and health care, economic and social stability is worsened.

This group does not have compensatory mechanisms such as savings, social capital and connections that will help them to accommodate to any new circumstances.

Similarly to the general population and other demographic groups, this group is the least concerned about the specific needs of their gender and the interethnic relations in general as they struggle to meet the basic existential needs.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Almost half of the participants (48%) indicated that television is their predominant source of information and nearly one quarter (23%) indicated that they learn about current socio-political developments via social networks. Nevertheless, every tenth respondent receives no information.

Almost half of the participants (48%) indicated that television is their predominant source of information.

TV 48%

Similarly to the general population and other demographic groups, the chronically unemployed persons perceive the media as biased and partisan - presenting the information from the point of view of the political party that finances the media outlet. This leads to very low trust in the media due to which respondents tend to follow information on various media and compare and analyse. The proliferation of fake news presented in the media causes additional confusion and concerns for this group.

I do not rely on social media at all, because they are very biased. They write what their party tells them to write. I believe that many have already seen through their lies and do not believe them anymore.
Male, 51, Strumica

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Eighty per cent of the respondents are interested in a more active civic engagement.

Have you been involved in any event, activity, or process that could have effected change in the community or the place where you live?

27%
72%
1%

Are you interested in a more active civic involvement?

17%
80%
3%

0%   **100%**

Yes   No   Do not know / Refuses to answer

Sixty-one per cent (61%) of the survey participants do not believe in making a positive change by individual engagement and by NGO engagement, while 25% lack interest in civic engagement, which explains the low motivation for civic participation.

The factors that contribute to minimal civic involvement and low levels of civic participation, among others, can be summarized as follows:

- Strong political influence in all state institutions and the private sector.
- Concentration of power in political parties.
- Citizens fear being labeled (political parties are attributing civic activities to opponent parties) and fear to openly express dissatisfaction.
- Weak rule of law and lack of good governance.
- Freedom of speech limitations.

> *I think that people are too scared, so they cannot get organized. They are afraid of losing their jobs, their incomes. When they talk to each other, they say: come on, let's go, let's show some strength, the strength and power are with the people. But when the time comes to go out, to say things loud and clear, the story changes. People start saying: but why should I go, let the others go and say that...*
> *Female, 59, Stip*

Factors that promote involvement

Responsiveness of the institutional system is the key motivator for this group to be more involved in activities that could effectuate change in the community, which is cited by a quarter of the respondents (25%). Other important motivating factors relate to representation of their interests (indicated by 15%) and obtaining personal or family benefits (indicated by 14%).

Despite that almost half of the respondents i.e. parliament, ministries, prime - minister (54%) do not believe that they can make an impact as a citizen, 30% believe they can make a meaningful impact in their municipality. Other institutions were mentioned by less than 3% of the respondents.

## Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

To the question of whether they would be willing to participate in civic activities, 46% of the respondents indicated they would respond to a questionnaire, 42% would meet colleagues/ friends to discuss a personal or family issue and 46% would read a brochure or a leaflet.

Similarly to the general population and the other demographic groups, the percentage of actions they would avoid is more pronounced: 83% would not attend a political party meeting, 76% would not attend a public debate and 79% would not participate in an online meeting.

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

46%
Respond a
questionnaire

46%
Read a brochure
or a leaflet

42%
Meet colleagues,
friends to discuss
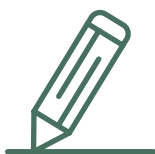
ELECTION PROCESS

Chronically unemployed citizens associate elections with phrases such as: "disaster", "chaotic, "manipulative", "forgery", "pressures", "empty promises", "no changes, the same people", "people are powerless".

Do you think that every vote is important and can affect the election results?	**78%** Yes	**22%** No	**2%** Refuses to answer	**8%** Does not know

Compared to the general population, chronically unemployed persons believe less in the importance of the citizens' vote and its impact on election results.

More than two-thirds of the respondents believe that every vote is important and can affect election results (78%) compared to 74% of the general population who believe in the importance of the citizens' vote.

In addition, focus group findings show that this group believes the elections are regular and peaceful on Election Day, but that the pre-election campaigns are brutal and vulgar.

More than half of the respondents (56%) indicate that voting is not sufficient to engage citizens to change or influence policies, more than one quarter (26%) believe voting is sufficient, while 16% have no opinion.

Motivation to vote

How regularly do you vote?

68% regularly or often	16% sometimes	9% usually not	4% never

The research shows that 68% vote almost regularly or often, 16% sometimes, 9% usually do not vote and 4% never vote.

Similarly to the general population, 38% of this group state they always vote for the same party, while 44% vote for different political parties.

Factors that influence their decision to vote

Similarly to the general population, the top three factors that influence the respondents in this group to go out and vote are: the perception that voting is a civic right and duty (44%), better prospects (28%) and fear that someone would misuse their vote (24%).

44% Civic right and duty   **28%** Better future   **24%** Fear that someone will steal their vote
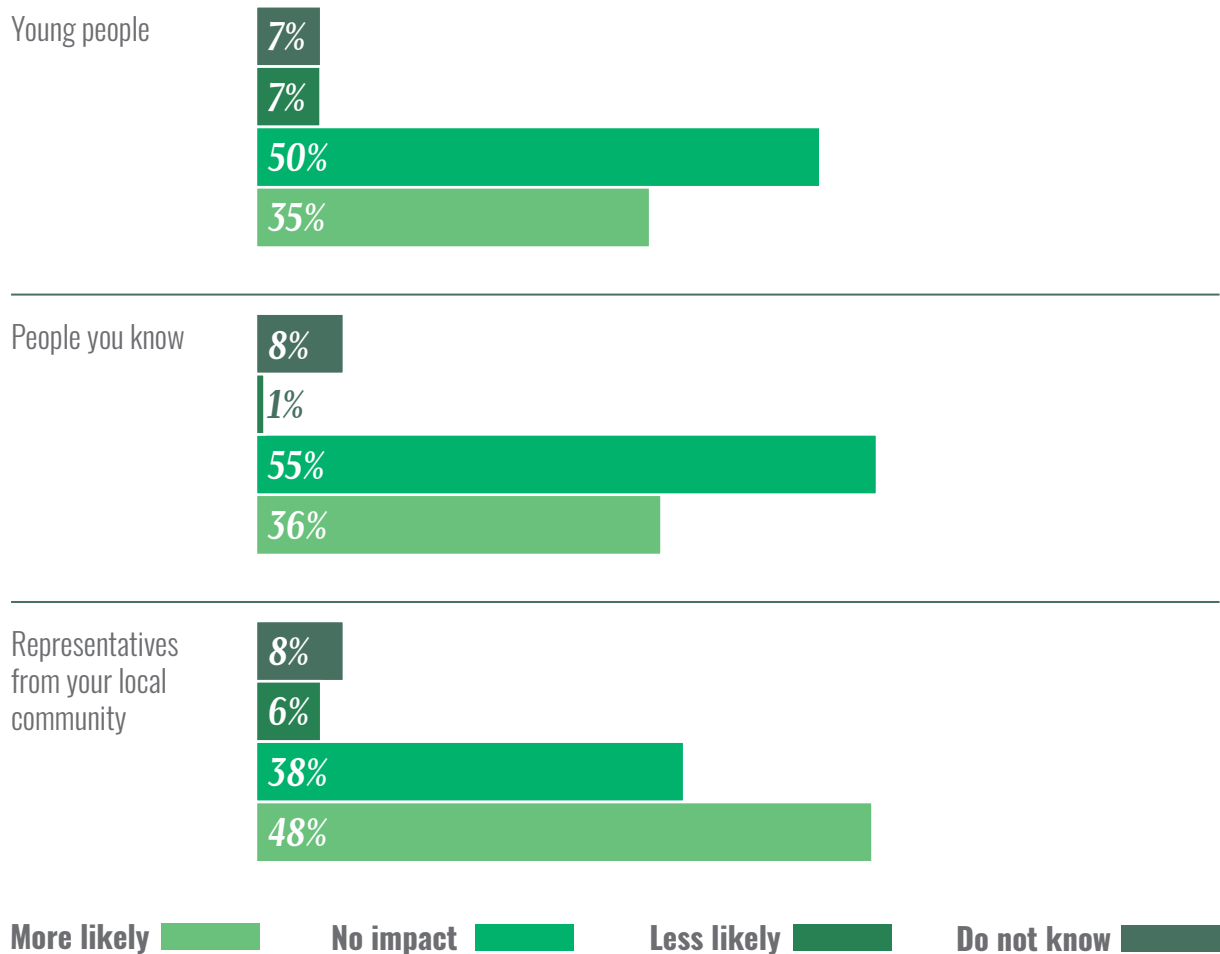
More than half of the respondents (56%) indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families, while 38% vote differently.

Six out of ten respondents' decision to vote is not influenced by their friends.

Similarly to the other demographic groups, the respondents of this group would like to see people from their local community as representatives on candidate lists or as elected representatives in the parliament or the municipal councils.
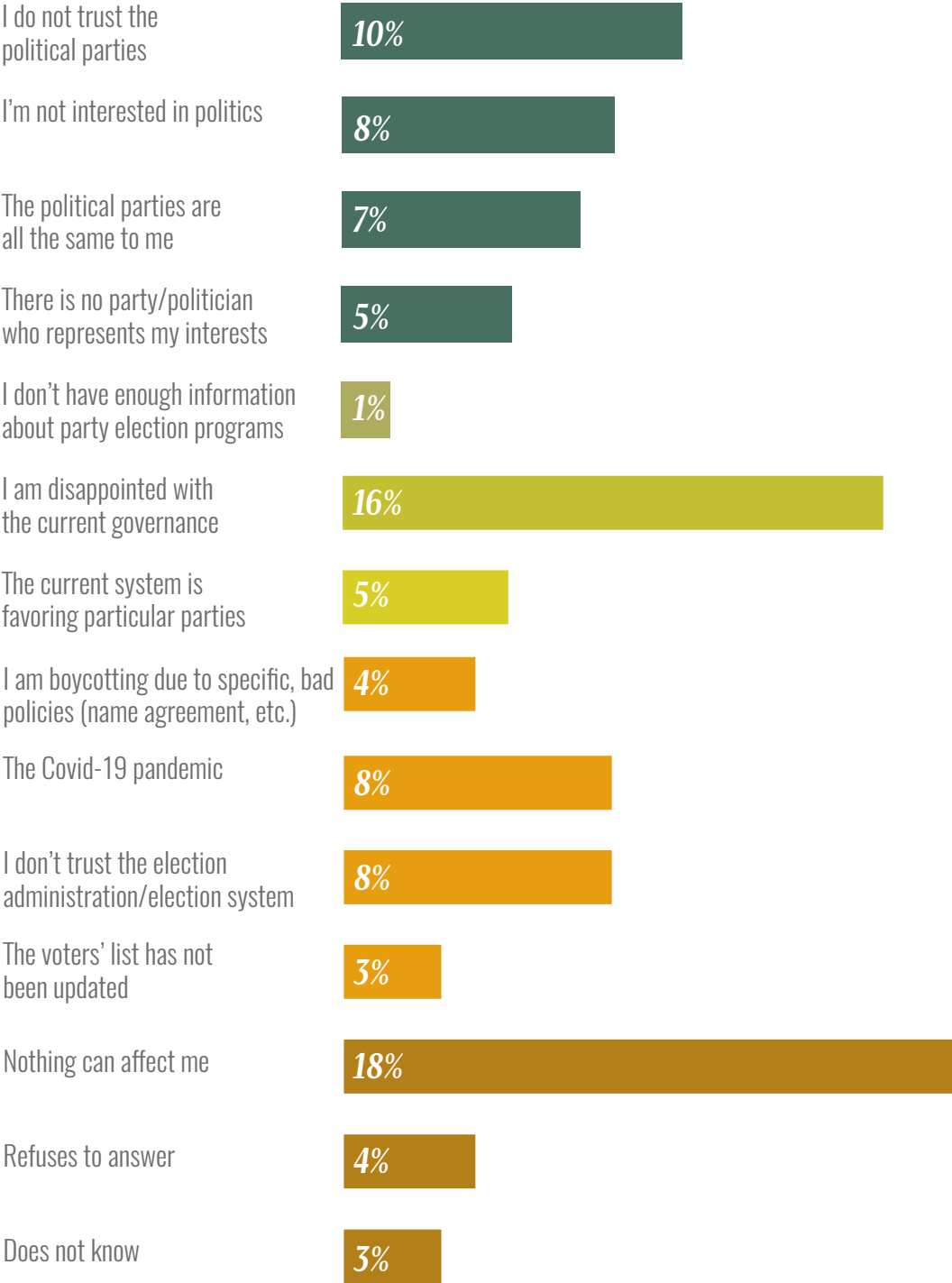
If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?

Young people
- 7%
- 7%
- 50%
- 35%

People you know
- 8%
- 1%
- 55%
- 36%

Representatives from your local community
- 8%
- 6%
- 38%
- 48%

More likely   **No impact**   **Less likely**   **Do not know**

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and the political parties demotivates people from remote communities to go out and vote.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

I do not trust the political parties	10%
I'm not interested in politics	8%
The political parties are all the same to me	7%
There is no party/politician who represents my interests	5%
I don't have enough information about party election programs	1%
I am disappointed with the current governance	16%
The current system is favoring particular parties	5%
I am boycotting due to specific, bad policies (name agreement, etc.)	4%
The Covid-19 pandemic	8%
I don't trust the election administration/election system	8%
The voters' list has not been updated	3%
Nothing can affect me	18%
Refuses to answer	4%
Does not know	3%

Similarly to the other groups, this demographic group believes that the strongest discrimination is based on political party membership, i.e. being a member of a political party is the major precondition for employment.

Regardless of gender, ethnicity or place of living, members and active members of the ruling political parties are more likely to secure employment. Nepotism and family connections cause a great revolt among the respondents. As a consequence, apathy and dissatisfaction grow, as well as the motivation to leave the country and seek employment abroad.

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

The predominant sources of information about elections are TV (54%), social media (14%), web portals (10%), friends and family members (5%).

Newscasts (46%) and TV debates (22%) are the most useful ways of finding information about the elections for the survey participants.

Regarding the type of communication with the candidates in the election period, this group prefers personal door-to-door communication (indicated by 19%) or in-person communication but in smaller groups (indicated by 20%).

Seventeen per cent (17%) of the respondents rely on the political track record of the candidates in making an informed decision.
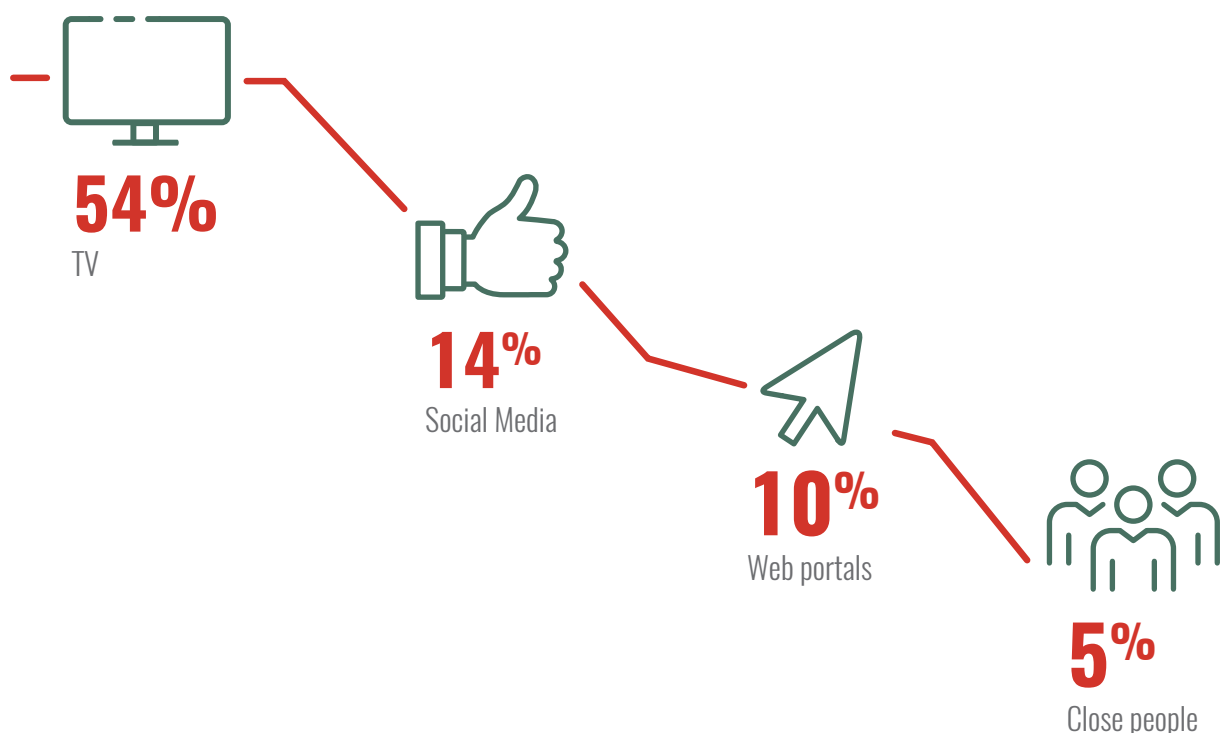
54%
TV

14%
Social Media

10%
Web portals

5%
Close people

With regards to communication with candidates or representatives from political parties in the period between elections, the respondents prefer to be informed in person (door-to-door or in smaller groups). Nevertheless, media is also an important source of information about candidates in-between elections, ac indicated by a third of the respondents.

Political party programs and rallies are the least preferred form of communication for this group during the election period and in-between elections.

Only 5% of the respondents mention the political party programs as an important type of information about the candidates in the election period.

In this regard, the focus group participants pointed out that the pre-election programs are full of empty and unreal promises, often repeated before each election.

The participants state that the parties in their election programs offer employment solutions that are usually not applicable in practice. They make big promises in the pre-election period – big foreign investments, higher average salaries, improved employment rate, but after winning a mandate, they forget the unemployed, especially those who are not members of any political party.

The expectations of this demographic group from the political parties are related to:

- Promises that could be kept.
- No lies and thefts.
- Responsiveness to citizens' demands, in-person meetings to discuss citizens' needs and problems.
- Ending the employments and discriminations based on party affiliation.

BARRIERS

The chronically unemployed group is very similar to the group of very poor in terms of interest and behaviour towards socio-political participation.

Similarly to the other polled groups the chronically unemployed group:

- **Feel underrepresented,** there are very few representatives or election candidates from the unemployed communities.
- **Don't believe** they have the power to influence policies in the country to improve the quality of life.
- **Have previous negative experiences** (manipulation, unfulfilled election promises, lies).
- **Disbelieve** that the institutions can improve their position and status.
- **Fear pressure and consequences** (opportunities for employment often hinges on party affiliation which, if challenged, could risk job opportunity).
- **Lack skills and knowledge** how and where to participate.
- **Have strong belief in the "party-isation"** of every segment of the society, especially with regards to employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase the belief in their power to make an impact in the community or the society

- Create opportunities for meaningful involvement of chronically unemployed persons in decision-making processes and promote the examples in which representatives of this group have leadership roles in community-based initiatives. If people believe that they can make a difference in their community/neighbourhood or improve the quality of life through their actions, then they will be more willing to participate in civic activities.
- Promote community projects and initiatives that tackle various issues of concern. Focus on civic projects rather than on political activities that have tangible benefits for the community or the neighbourhood and relate to their interests and skills (e.g. humanitarian initiatives, cooking for a different cause, taking care of the neighbourhood, playground renovation or maintenance, etc.)
- Promote positive examples that prove that activism matters and has the power to influence/improve and influence the society.
- Consider different formats such as micro-projects on community level, testimonials, third-party stories.

Improve the negative perception of being underrepresented by political parties, elected officials and other organization

- Include and promote unemployed civic and political activists.
- Include and keep unemployment issues and proposals in the public agenda of relevant political representatives.
- Use a variety of tools such as regular meetings in the community, collaboration with social services to work on resolving issues, public advocacy for the poor, etc.

Expand on civic education effort

- Raise awareness about the protection of their civic and political rights.
- Raise awareness about the ways they can exercise their civic and political rights.
- Raise awareness about appropriate institutional pathways for expressing these interests, concerns and problems.
- Focus on the benefits from civic engagement, forms and channels for participation, a better understanding of the individual voter's rights and election-day activities.
- Employ non-conventional approaches such as direct meetings, neighbourhood campaigns, informal gatherings in the neighbourhood, community leader's partnerships to reach communities and individuals and conventional channels where they can articulate their concerns (open days, surveys, etc.).

Strengthen their capacities for confident participation

- Build capacities for public speaking and debating.
- Raise awareness about civic and political rights.

Create alliances:

With the media (digital and traditional)

- Promote narratives focused on positive and successful examples of activism of vulnerable communities in general.
- Raise awareness about the ways they can exercise their civic and political rights.
- Promote topics related to issues and concerns of the unemployed.
- Raise awareness about the importance of voting, mechanisms to protect voting rights and to navigate the voting process.
- Raise awareness about electoral irregularities, violence, and pressure.

Choose relevant communication channels and apply both traditional and non-conventional approaches.

Use TV to reach the majority of unemployed.

- Use formats that give opportunities to contextualize information and increase its relevance.

- Consider other formats in addition to newscasts, e.g. debates, editorials, short stories and testimonials portraying concerns and providing insight into the voting process.

- Consider using morning programs, lifestyle and specialized shows in addition to political shows.

Organize face-to-face meetings or other community events.

- Use different formats for direct interaction such as small gatherings, informal meetings (e.g. in front of the traditional store or other meeting points in the neighbourhood, in private houses/backyards etc.), in their neighbourhoods to build trusting relationships and increase their perception of self-appreciation and importance. This is especially convenient in communities with a higher rate of unemployment.

- Propose projects or activities with the potential of gathering people or specific groups from the community.

Pilot non-traditional channels

- Consider effective outreach techniques to disseminate information in buses, at bus stations, local stores, open markets, barber shops, food packages, bags, or convenient places or products consumed by this group.

Use social media to increase participation and influence or to start initiatives as it allows more targeted and personalized communication. Social media is an important channel for the young and middle-aged members of this group (more than 20% obtain information about the socio-political situation and elections from social media).
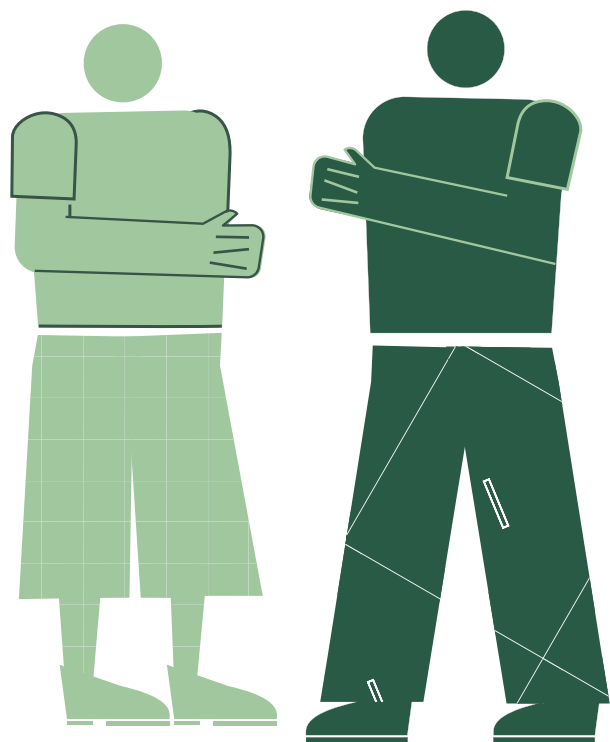
OTHER ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research

Other Ethnic Communities – Definition and Size

According to the 2002 census, ethnic Albanians are the largest ethnic community in the country, accounting for 25.1% of the total population, whereas other non-majority communities make up 10% of the total population. These include: ethnic Turks (e-Turks) 3.85%, Roma 2.66%, ethnic Serbs (e-Serbs) 1.78%, ethnic Bosniaks (e-Bosniaks) 0.84% and Vlachs 0.48%. The other ethnic communities (Croatian, Montenegrin, Slovenian, Russian and others) are represented by about 1%.
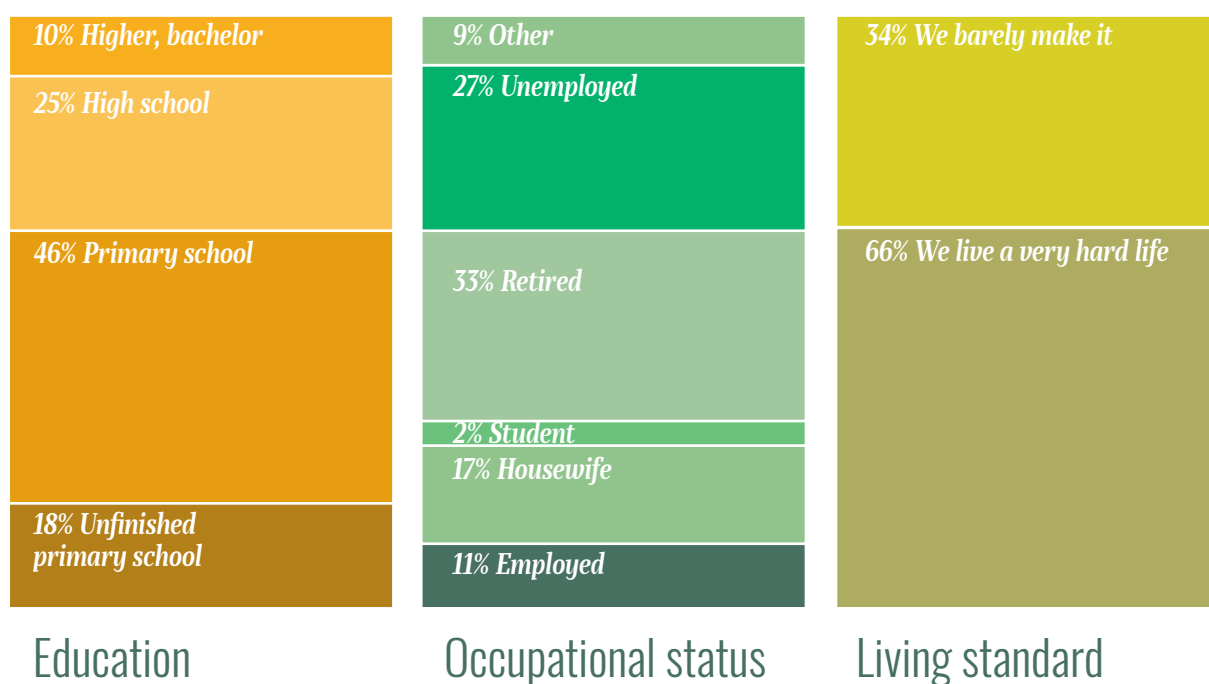
The ethnic demographic structure in North Macedonia comprises the ethnic Macedonian majority community (in some regions a non-majority community), the ethnic Albanian non-majority community (in some regions a majority community), and Roma, e-Turks, e-Serbian, Vlach and other non-majority groups.

The other ethnic communities are governed by the Law on Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Members of Ethnic Communities that make up less than 20% of the population of North Macedonia.

Demographic Profile

A total of 119 citizens from the other ethnic communities took part in the quantitative face-to-face survey.

To gain an in-depth insight into the background, perceptions, and opinions of this group, the quantitative survey was complemented by one focus group.

Education	Occupational status	Living standard
10% Higher, bachelor	9% Other	34% We barely make it
25% High school	27% Unemployed	66% We live a very hard life
46% Primary school	33% Retired	
	2% Student	
	17% Housewife	
18% Unfinished primary school	11% Employed	

Education   Occupational status   Living standard

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in the socio-political developments in the country

How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?
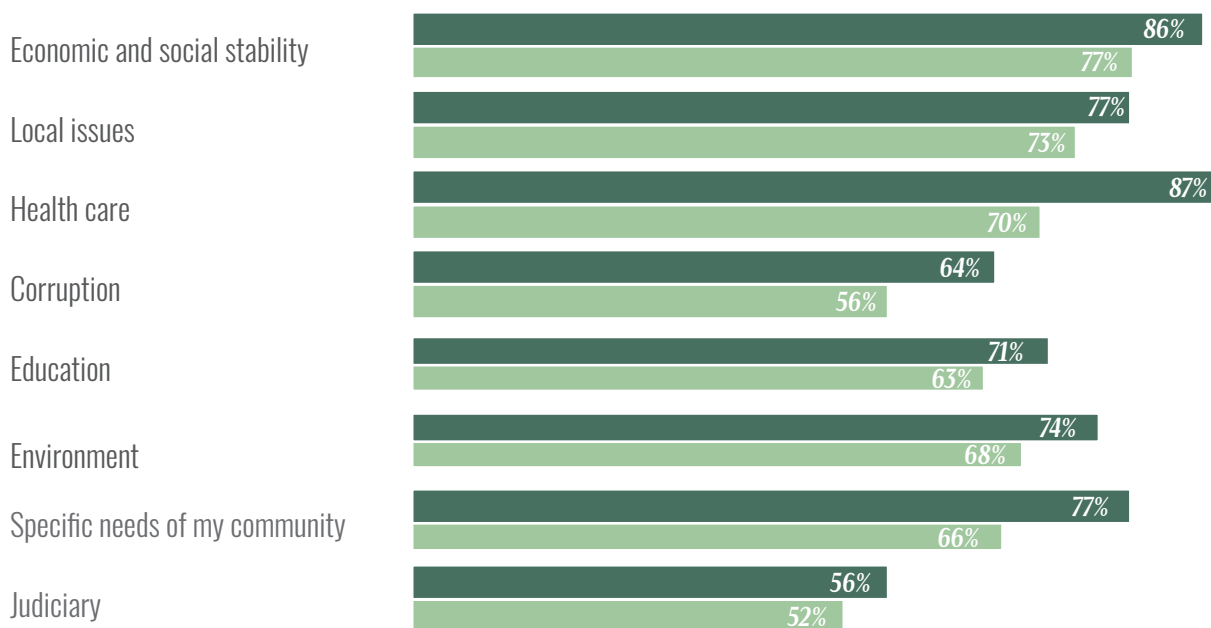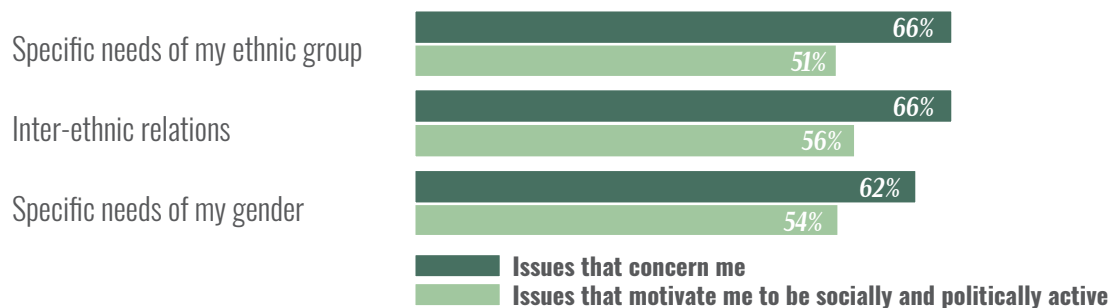
17%	**35%**	**31%**	**17%**
Very	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all
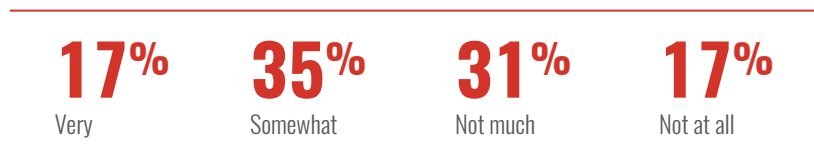
Nearly half of the respondents (48%) are "not at all" or "not very interested" in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world, while 52% are "very" or "somewhat interested". The research shows that there is no significant departure in the interest for socio-political developments compared to the general population. Half of the survey participants rarely or never discuss these issues with other people, six per cent more compared to the general population (44%).

Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/topics concern you?
How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially and politically active?

Economic and social stability — 86% / 77%
Local issues — 77% / 73%
Health care — 87% / 70%
Corruption — 64% / 56%
Education — 71% / 63%
Environment — 74% / 68%
Specific needs of my community — 77% / 66%
Judiciary — 56% / 52%

Specific needs of my ethnic group	66%	
	51%	
Inter-ethnic relations	66%	
	56%	
Specific needs of my gender	62%	
	54%	

■ **Issues that concern me**
■ **Issues that motivate me to be socially and politically active**

More than three quarters of the survey respondents indicated that health care (87%), economic and social stability (86%) and local issues (77%) are their primary issues of concern. The same issues are the key motivators for them to be more socially and politically active.

The survey participants are the least concerned with the judiciary, specific needs related to their gender and corruption.

INFORMATION SOURCES

The participants in the focus group discussion indicated they follow different media to source a variety of information. They predominantly follow national developments and, unlike the other profile groups, are also interested in global and regional developments. The respondents perceive the media as biased and strongly politicized and tend to avoid political news.

> More than half of the respondents (55%) indicated that television is their predominant source of information.

TV 55%

Almost all participants state they distrust the media due to lack of impartiality: "presenting information to suit a particular party". To counter this phenomenon, the respondents source and compare information from a variety of media.

Concerning national developments, the focus group participants are generally interested about the formation of the new government, COVID-19 pandemics, healthcare, resumption of school attendance and education in general.

More than half of the respondents (55%) indicated that television is their predominant source of information and two out of ten claim they learn about socio-political developments via the social networks. A significant portion of the respondents (34.8%) use web portals as a source of information and 8% their family and friends. Similarly to the general population, 7% of the respondents from other ethnic communities state they are not informed at all.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Seventy-seven per cent (77%) of the respondents are not interested to be more civically engaged.

Have you been involved in any event, activity, or process that could have effected change in the community or the place where you live?

27%
72%
1%

Are you interested in a more active civic involvement?

19%
77%
4%

0%   **100%**

Yes   No   Do not know / Refuses to answer

Furthermore, the survey participants outlined the following factors that contribute to their low civic participation:

⬥ Passive and indifferent mindset, culture, and education which does not recognize, stimulate or award active behavior.

⬥ Division of the people, lack of solidarity.

⬥ Strong political influence in the civic society sector.

⬥ Fear from sanctions.

> *Bring the people to the verge of existence, intimidate them and their mindset will no longer be a problem.*
> *Male, 46, ethnic Turk, Bitola*

Factors that promote involvement

Responsiveness of the system (24%) and personal or family benefits (23%) are the key motivators for the majority of the respondents to become more civically engaged and to effectuate change in the community, as noted by a quarter of the respondents. Other motivating factors concern representation of their interests (14%).

Six out of ten respondents (57%) do not believe they can make a civic impact, comprising a 5% increase compared to the general population (52%). More than one quarter (27%) believe they can make a meaningful impact in their municipality.

The bulk of the respondents believe that they cannot impact the work of the parliament despite the direct representation model. In line with the trend across all demographic groups, the respondents believe they cannot make a meaningful impact to any other institution except to their municipality.

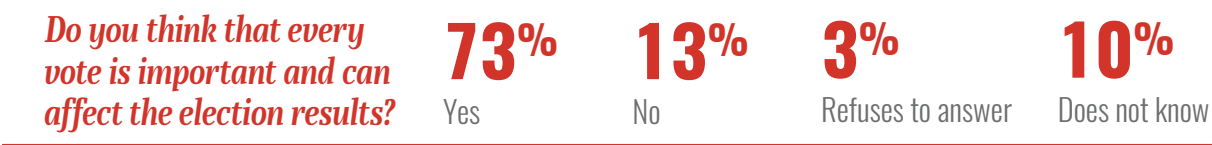## Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

Concerning participation in public life, the survey respondents are most willing to respond to a questionnaire (52%), meet colleagues or friends to discuss an issue of personal or family concern (46%), and read brochures or leaflets (40%).

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

52%
Respond a questionnaire

40%
Read a brochure or a leaflet

46%
Meet colleagues, friends to discuss
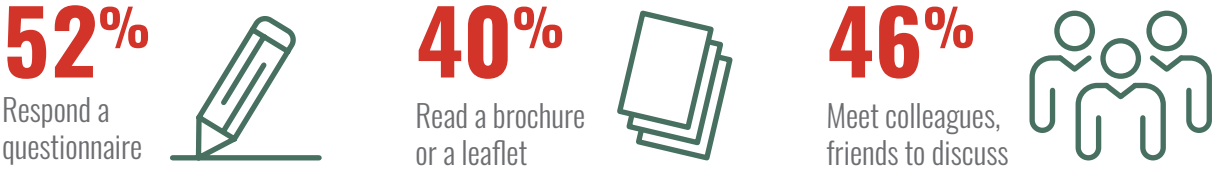
ELECTION PROCESS

Survey participants tend to associate elections in the country with phrases such as "irregular", "waste of money", "false promises", "election forgery" and "corruption".

Do you think that every vote is important and can affect the election results?	**73%** Yes	**13%** No	**3%** Refuses to answer	**10%** Does not know

A portion of the respondents believes that the Election Day proceeds peacefully, with no significant irregularities compared to polling days in the early 2000s which were marred by incidents, gun fires, and stuffing of ballot boxes; however, pressure, intimidation, political employments and bribery persist.

A significant proportion of the respondents believe in the importance of each vote. Some three quarters of the respondents believe that every vote counts and can impact election results (73%), against 13% who do not believe so. The latter percentage is significantly lower compared to the general population (18,5%).

More than half of the respondents (53%) indicate that voting per se is not sufficient to engage citizens in policy changes, three out of ten respondents (29%) believe voting is sufficient, while 11% do not have an opinion on the issue.

Motivation to vote

How regularly do you vote?

53% regularly	25% often	12% sometimes	3% usually not	3% never

Fifty-three per cent (53%) of the survey participants vote almost regularly, 25% vote often, 12% sometimes, 3% usually do not vote and 3% never vote.

The respondents tend to change their electoral choice more often than other profile groups. More than half vote for different political parties, while 30% regularly vote for the same party, which is a ten per cent decrease compared to the general population.

Factors that influence their decision to vote

In line with the trend observed with the general population, the top three factors that influence the respondents' decision to go out and vote are: perception that voting is a civic right and duty (48%), better prospects (44%) and fear that their vote would be misused (34%).

48%
Civic right and duty

44%
Better future

34%
Fear that someone will steal their vote

Nearly two thirds of the respondents (65%) indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families, while a third (34%) state their decision is the same or most often the same as that of their friends.

This demographic group is more likely to vote for a political party if women are included on the candidate lists for parliamentary or local elections.

If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists for parliamentary or local elections, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?

Representatives from your local community
- 8%
- 8%
- 46%
- 38%

People you know
- 7%
- 7%
- 48%
- 39%

People from other ethnic community
- 9%
- 5%
- 47%
- 39%

Women
- 7%
- 6%
- 40%
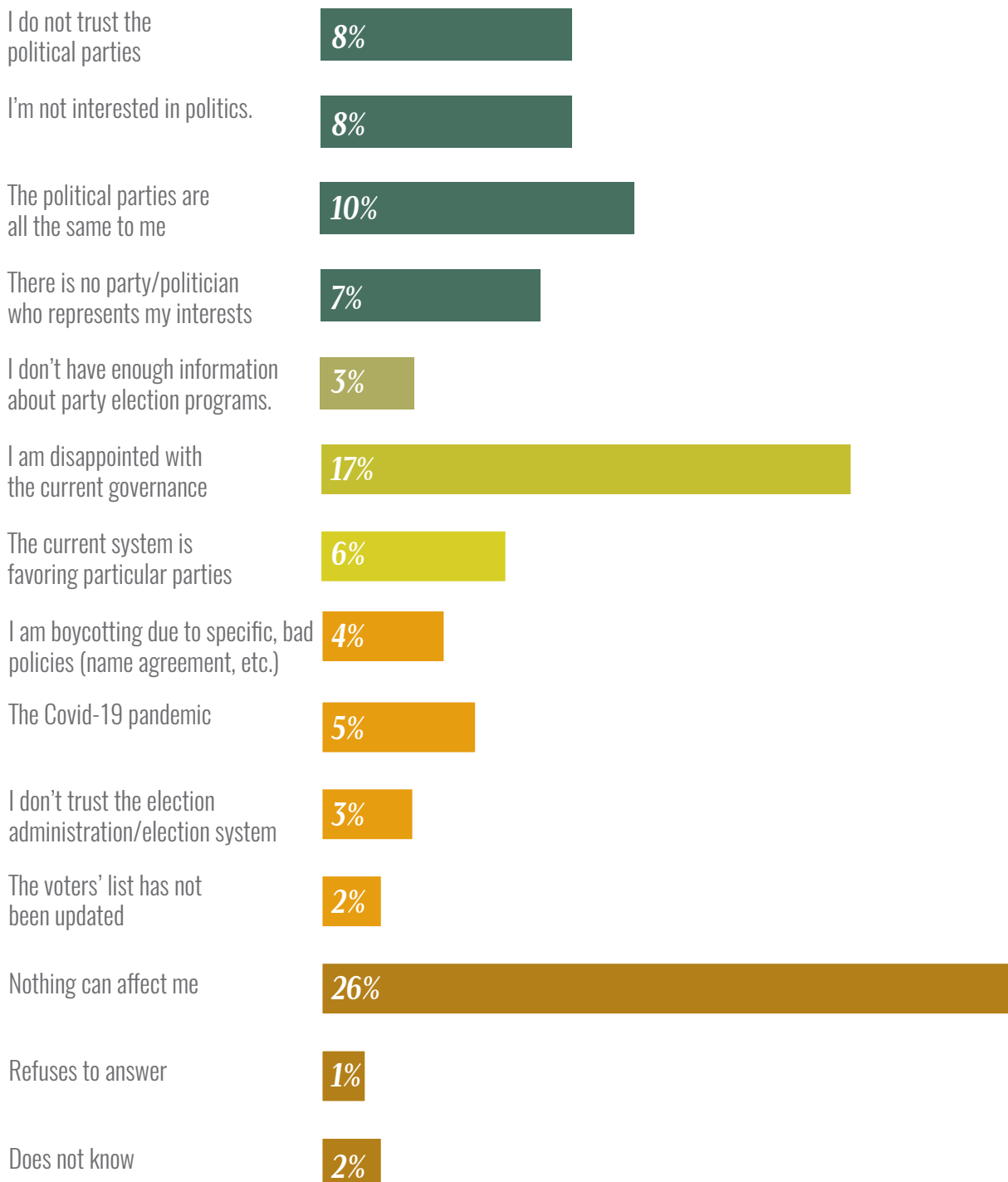- 46%

Legend:
- **More likely**
- **No impact**
- **Less likely**
- **Do not know**

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and the political parties is the key factor that influences the survey participants' decision to abstain from voting.

What can influence your decision not to vote?

I do not trust the political parties	8%
I'm not interested in politics.	8%
The political parties are all the same to me	10%
There is no party/politician who represents my interests	7%
I don't have enough information about party election programs.	3%
I am disappointed with the current governance	17%
The current system is favoring particular parties	6%
I am boycotting due to specific, bad policies (name agreement, etc.)	4%
The Covid-19 pandemic	5%
I don't trust the election administration/election system	3%
The voters' list has not been updated	2%
Nothing can affect me	26%
Refuses to answer	1%
Does not know	2%

The focus group confirms the findings from the quantitative survey. Most of the discussion participants express their dissatisfaction and disappointment with the work of the political parties.

The focus group findings show a shared perception that political parties abuse their powers when in public office and the state fails to hold them accountable. This creates frustration and distrust among the citizens, resulting in apathy and indifference to politics.

In summary, the factors that prevent citizens to go out and vote are:

- Perception that their vote will not change anything, since arrangements have already been made.

- Opinion that political parties calculate, make agreements, "play together".

- Indifference about the election outcome due to a widespread opinion that "nothing will change".

- Lack of accountability mechanisms for holders of public office.

- People have lost faith, "everything goes round in a circle, only the people lose constantly".

- USA is the deciding factor in the formation of the government coalition. "They fill in the last ballot".

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

TV (62%), social media (9%), web portals (7%), friends and family members (8%) are the predominant sources of information about elections.

Survey participants noted that news (59%) and debates (18%) are the most useful ways of sourcing election information whereas every tenth respondent (13%) does not follow elections at all.

Personal door-to-door communication (18%) and traditional media (18%) are the preferred **types of communication with party candidates and elected representatives in the period between elections** and respondents rely largely on the political track record of candidates (17%).
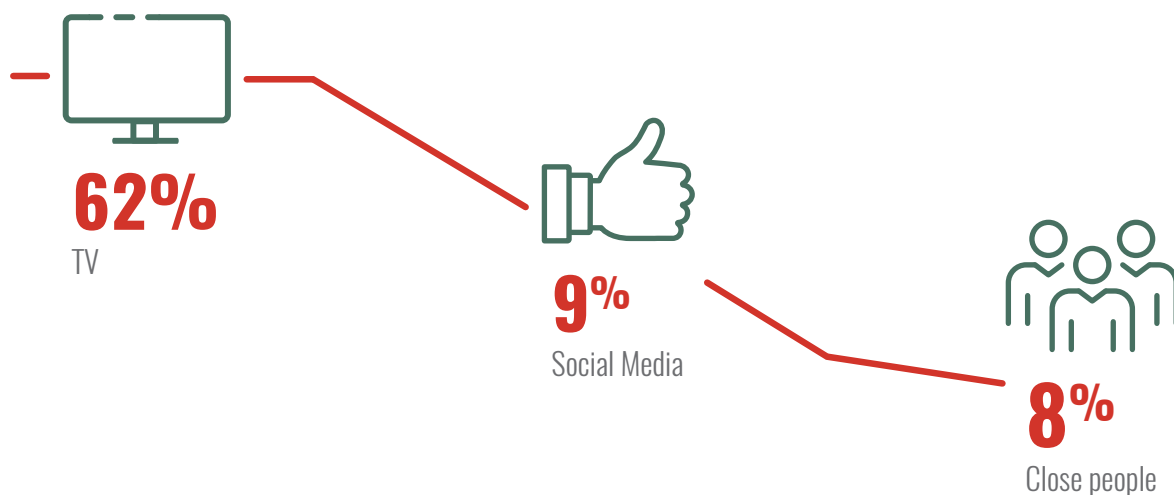
Focus group findings show that the respondents perceive the parties' pre-election contacts with the citizens as a marketing stunt. The respondents feel that political parties meet with people in the pre-election period to "beg for votes" and this is the only time when they are interested to learn about the needs of the people.

The focus group respondents express a high level of indifference concerning party programs, a finding which is consistent across all other demographic groups. Respondents tend to think the programs tackle the same issues ("about 80% copy-paste") and make unrealistic promises

which incites reluctance to read the lengthy programs.

In addition, the survey participants would like the political parties to:

- Make promises that they can keep.
- Effectuate change.
- Use the state funds for the public well-being.
- Be fair and honest.

62%
TV

9%
Social Media

8%
Close people

- Be more empathetic towards the citizens, instead of towards the elite.

Furthermore, the focus group findings show that the pronounced catering to the needs and the demands of different ethnic groups insults the members of other ethnic communities. Participants in the group discussion noted that ethnicity should not influence policy-making. The political parties' programs should not be based on the representation of the ethnic groups, but rather address all citizens' interests, regardless of their ethnicity. They perceive North Macedonia as a bi-national country where the other non-majority communities are neglected. They are frustrated with the ethnic Macedonian-Albanian dynamics and consider that the country should either embrace inclusivity or become ethnocentric. With regards to the question whether the political parties' programs equally address the needs of women and men and rural and urban population, the respondents believe that there is a pronounced division in the country. Party programs focus on the needs and demands of the members of the ruling party, while the interests of other citizens are neglected.

> *There has never been nor there will be "one society for all". There is bilingualism in this country and all other ethnic groups except ethnic Albanians are excluded. That slogan was a bait to win over other smaller ethnic communities.*
> *Male, 46, ethnic Turk, Bitola*

BARRIERS

People from other ethnic communities share the same attitudes and behaviour as the general population in terms of their interest for civic and political participation. Barriers relevant for all demographic groups that affect the willingness and ability to be politically and civically active, are also relevant for the other ethnic communities:

- **Scepticism** about their power to influence politics and policies in the country.
- **Low level of trust** in the intentions and capacity of politicians to improve the quality of life.
- **Lack of channels** for active participation.
- **Fear of pressure and retaliation** for civic activism.

However, the civic and political behaviour of this demographic group is shaped by specific barriers:

- The perception that the society is shaped by ethnic rather than civic values.
- Perception that they live in a bi-ethnic society, where their interests are not represented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to these identified challenges and barriers, a set of interventions are recommended to effectively contribute to improving civic and political participation of the other ethnicities.

Raise awareness about the importance of participation in the socio-political life

- Focus on outlining the benefits of civic engagement for democracy and civic society.
- Identify role models and influencers and promote their activities and impact.

Focus on the promotion of civic and democratic values, instead of the needs of the ethnic groups

- Promote inclusive instead of an ethnocentric society.
- Promote education, human rights, health, prosperity, good quality of life, etc.
- Report on and discuss community issues.

Focus on creating diverse candidate lists

- Promote ethnic, gender, and age diversity.

Increase the belief in their power to make an impact in their community or society

- Promote positive examples that are recognized and respected by the community.
- Improve the responsiveness of state institutions and political parties to the needs of the citizens.

Promote channels and procedures to encourage participation in civic life

This group has a lack of awareness of the participation channels in the socio-political life.

Create alliances

With the media (digital and traditional)

- Promote narratives focused on the positive and successful examples of civic participation.
- Raise awareness about the benefits of civic participation.
- Promote channels and ways for civic participation.
- Include citizens in debates and talk shows to spark discussion on issues of interest.

With influencers/celebrities

Partner with influencers to promote civic participation and civic and democratic values. The narrative should focus on the society as a whole rather than on ethnicity.

Choose relevant communication channels and apply both traditional and non-conventional approaches

Use TV to reach the majority of this group.

The most recommended options are newscasts, debates, talk shows, open studios, etc.

Consider using other types of programs to reach this segment, due to the reluctance towards political programs. Consider lifestyle programs, health, cooking shows, etc.

This group tends to prefer regional and foreign TV stations when sourcing ethnically-related information. Combine TV with social media and web portals to ensure effective outreach to this community.

Use social media to reach the young, educated, and employed segment of the population.

Social media is the key information channel with great potential for engagement and participation of the younger portion of this demographic group.

Organize face-to-face meetings or other community events.

The format of these meetings should be informal (coffee gatherings, debates, joint community projects).

Pilot non-traditional channels

- Organize regional entertainment or sports events.
- Organize entertaining activities and events to trigger interest and attendance.