



# URBAN POPULATION

Key findings from the qualitative  
and quantitative research

# Urban Population – Definition and Size

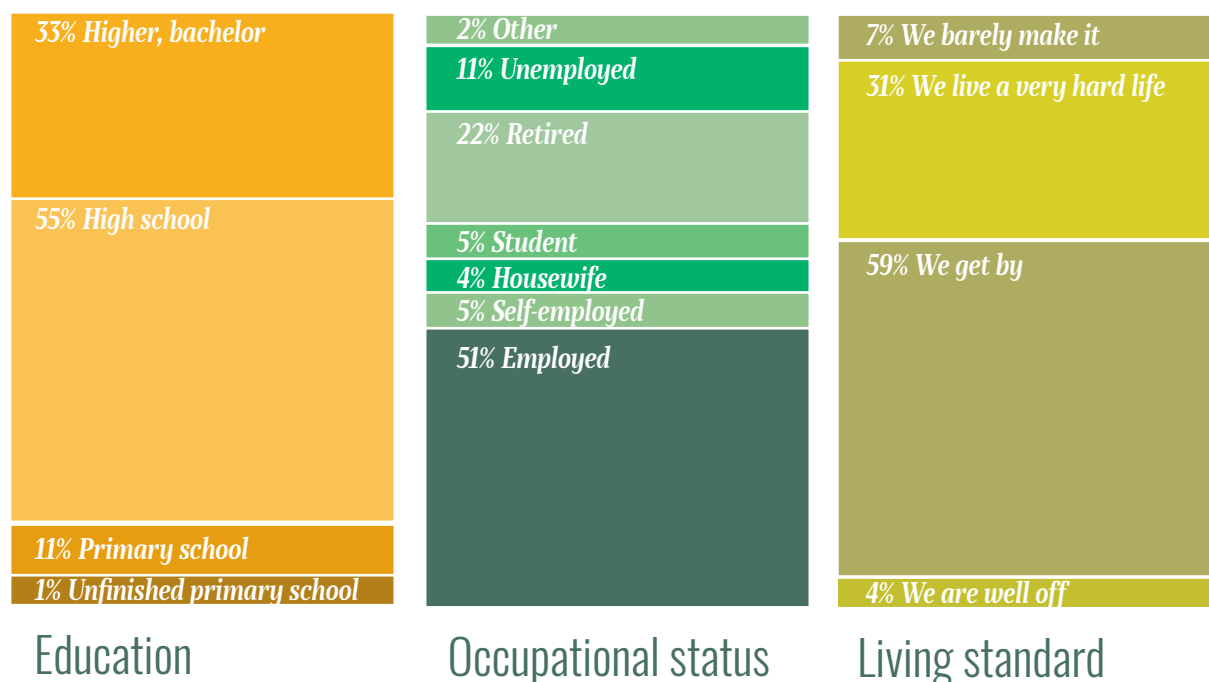
According to the statistics based on the World Bank population estimates and urban ratios from the United Nations World Urbanization Prospects, in 2019 in North Macedonia there were 1,212,740 people living in the urban areas, or 58.2%.<sup>6</sup>

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.



<sup>6</sup> 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?*



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.

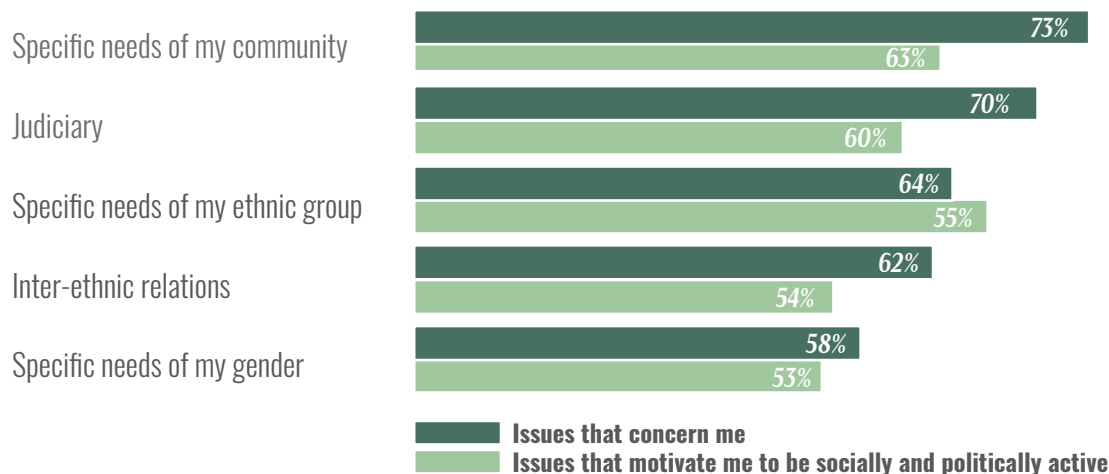
Significant for this demographic group are the concerns related to air pollution, urbanisation, and urban mafia, stray dogs and other local problems.

## 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?*





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?*



*Are you interested in a more active civic involvement?*



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



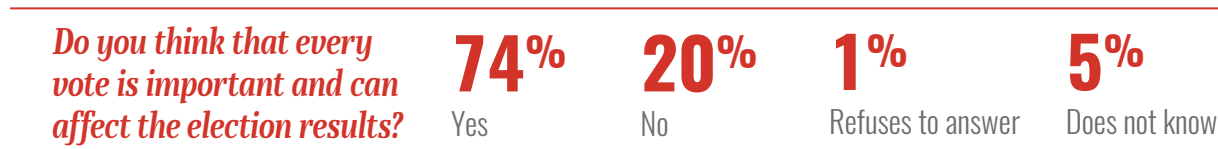
**48%**

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”.



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?*

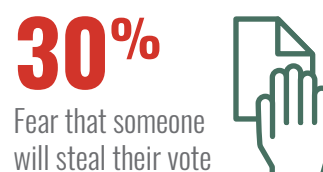
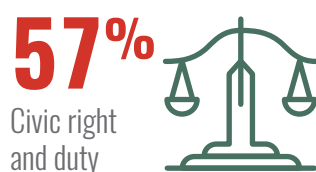


The research shows that 77% vote almost regularly or often, 11% sometimes, 6% usually do not vote and 4% never vote.

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%).

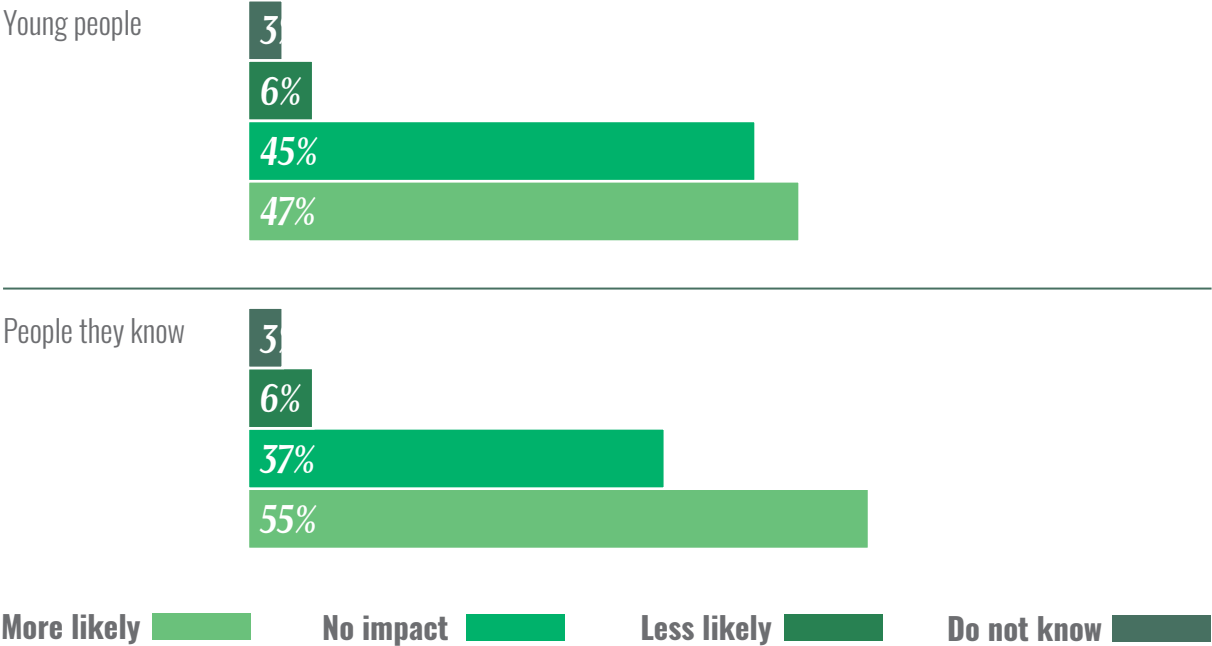


More than half of the respondents (57%) indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families (7% less than the rural population), while 41% vote differently than their families.

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?***

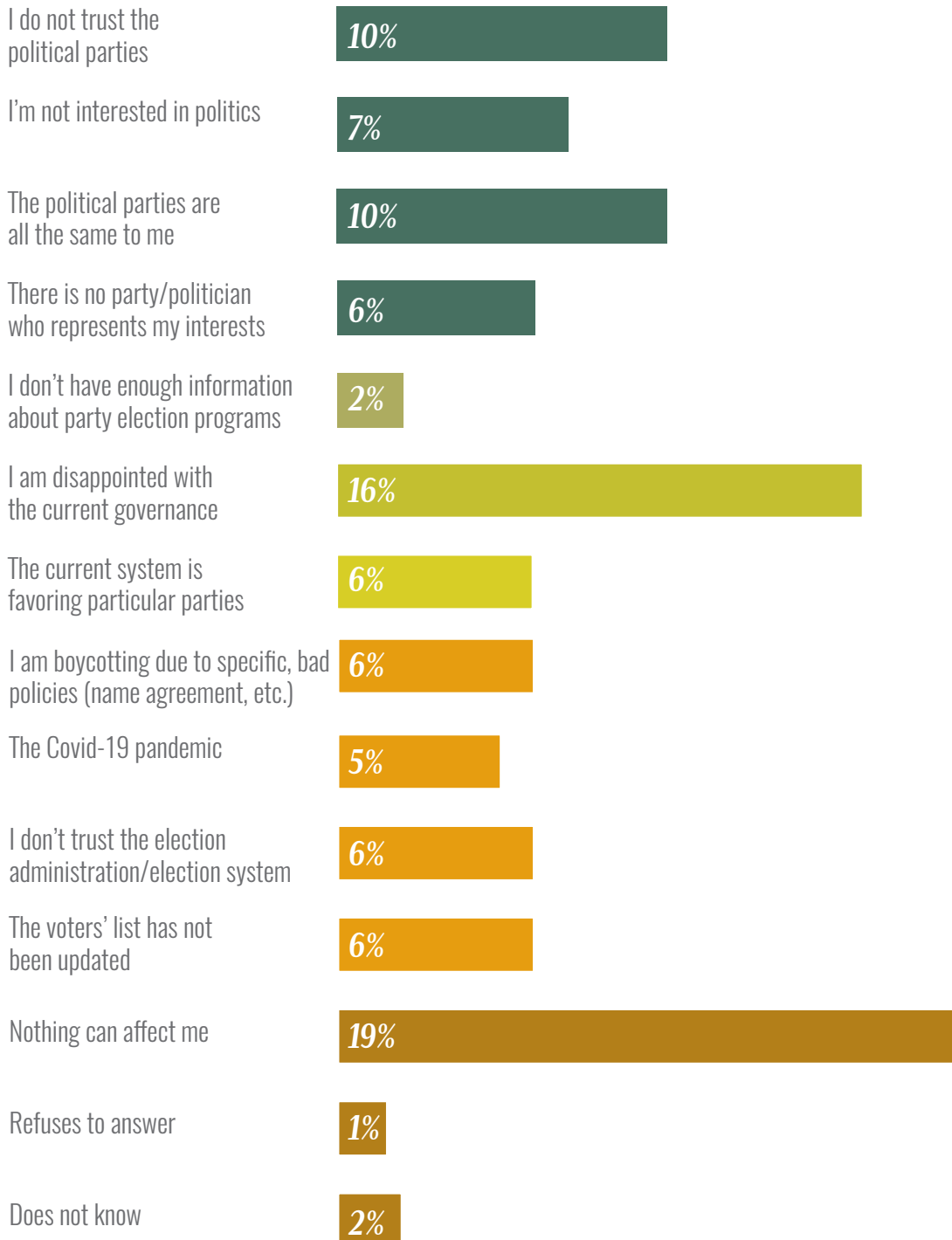




# Demotivation to vote

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?*



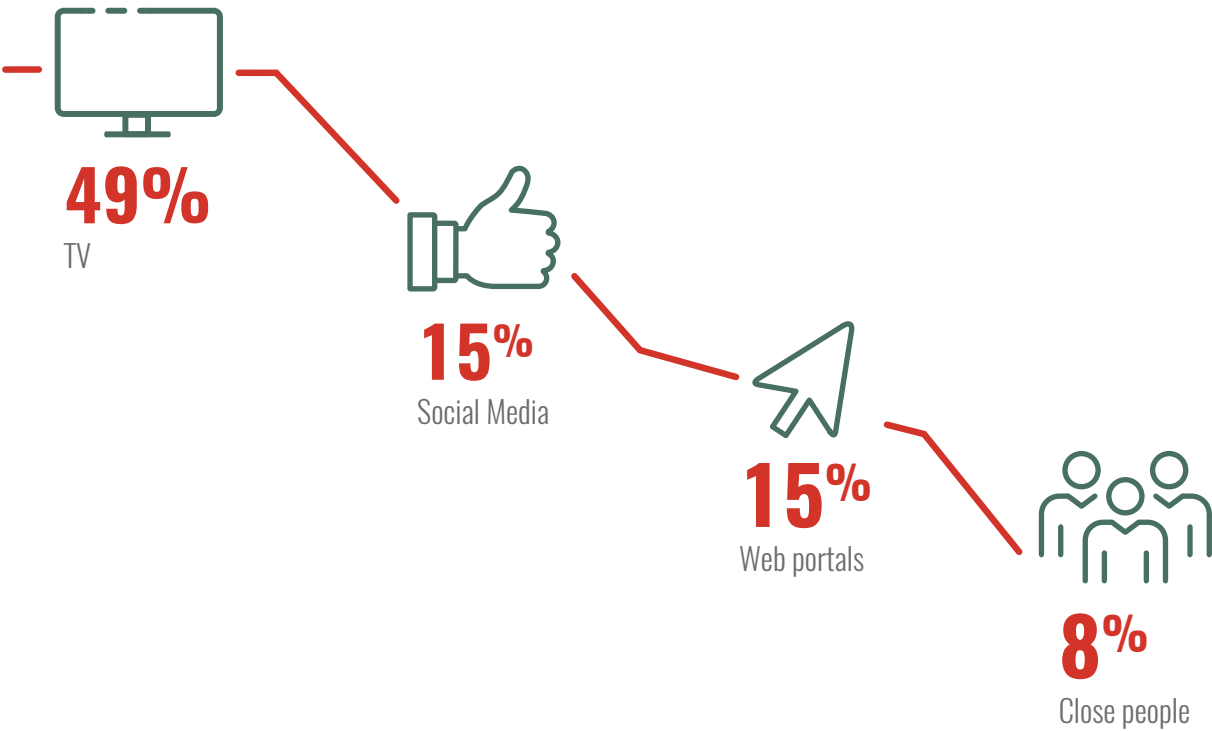
In addition, focus group participants noted that an increasing number of citizens decide not to vote due to dissatisfaction with the political parties in the country. Although the prevailing opinion is that voting is a civic duty, many participants believe that abstention from voting due to dissatisfaction 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).

<i>Do you think that political parties equally address the interests of the rural and the urban population?</i>	<b>20%</b> Yes	<b>31%</b> No	<b>1%</b> Refuses to answer
	<b>18%</b> Most often yes	<b>21%</b> Most often no	<b>9%</b> 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%).



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.