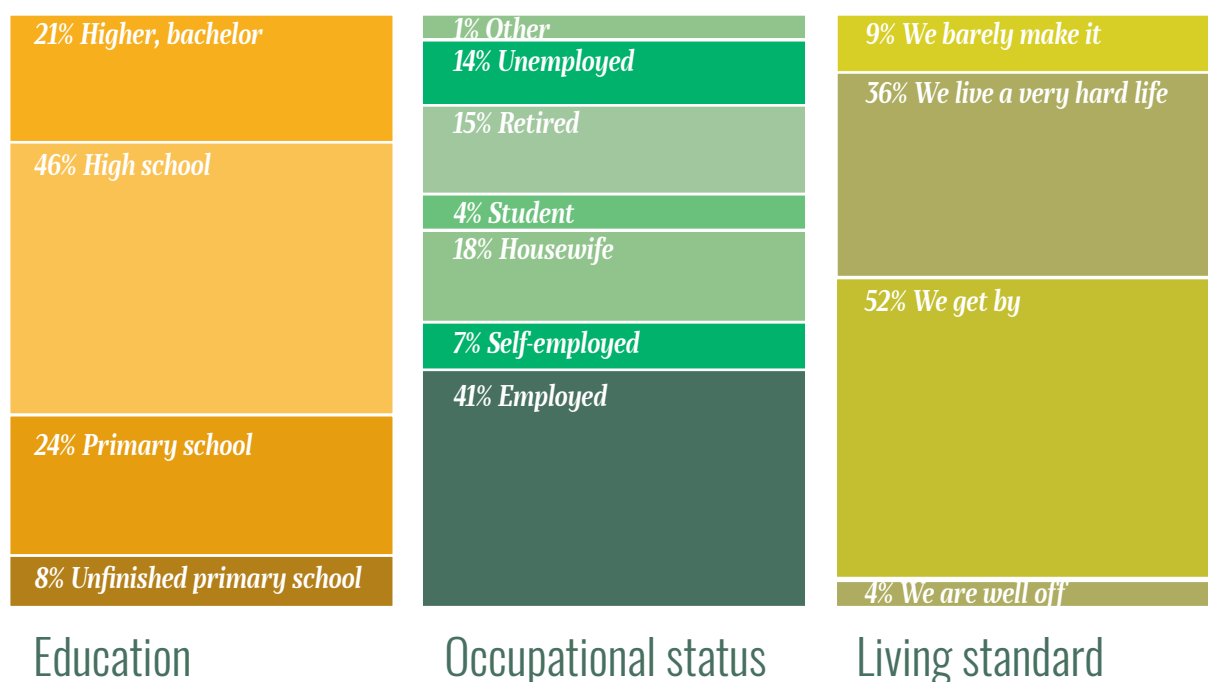# REMOTE
COMMUNITIES

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%	**45**%	**24**%	**18**%
Very	Somewhat	Not much	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.
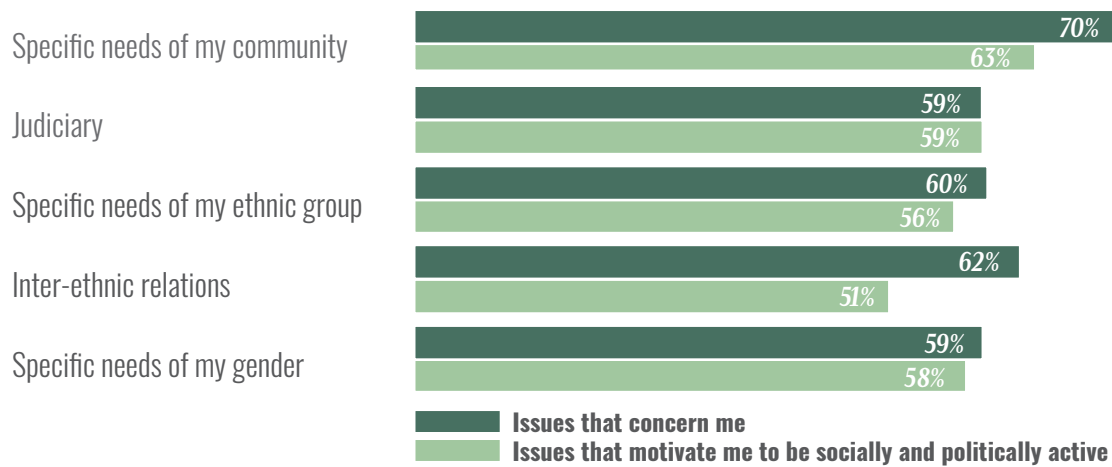
According to the focus group participants, the COVID-19 pandemic and the formation of the new government rank the highest among the socio-political issues of interest. These two prioritized issues were affected by the developments in the period of the conduct of the survey. Other issues of concern are 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%

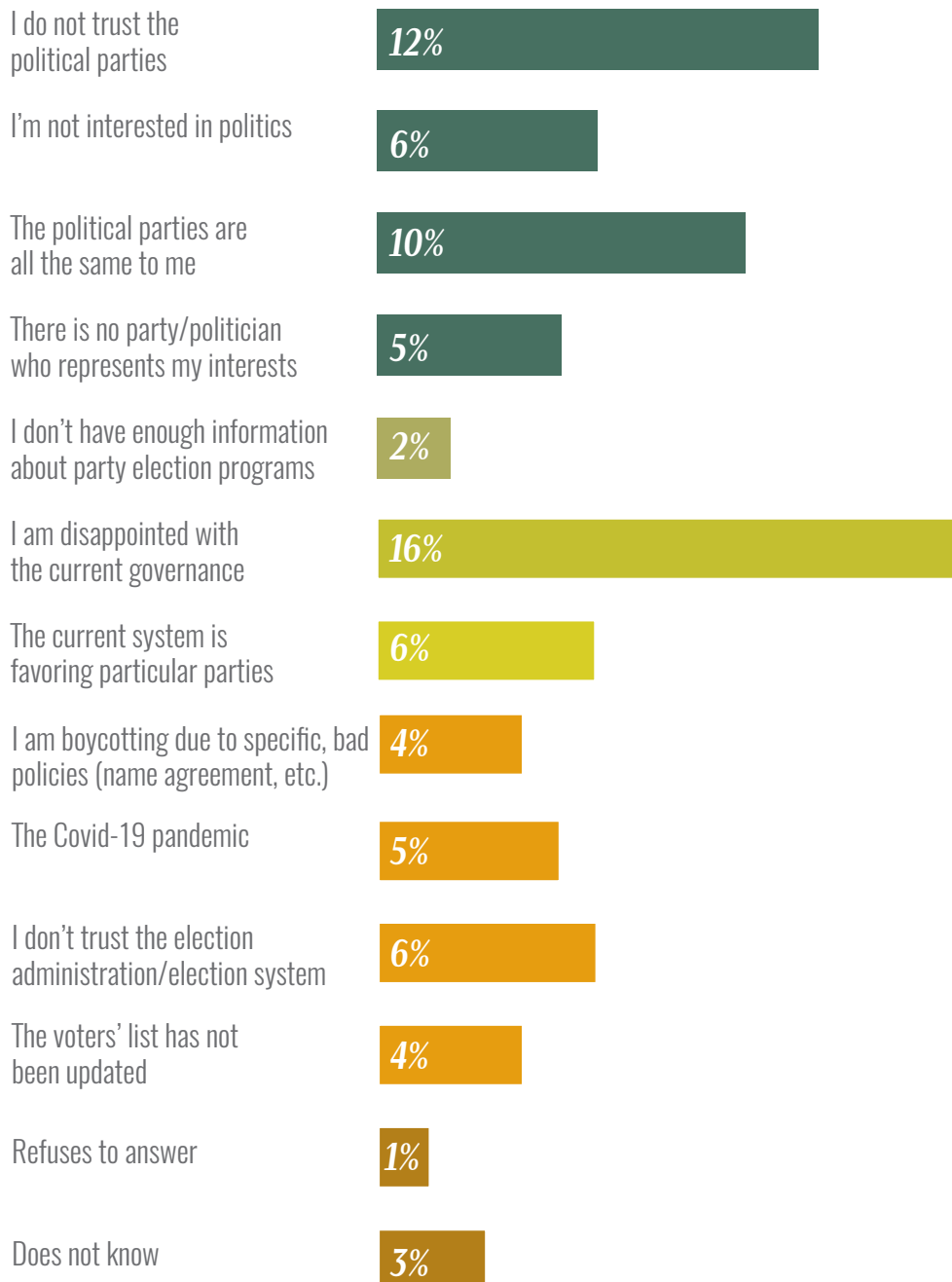**People you know**
- 4%
- 8%
- 40%
- 48%

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?*

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
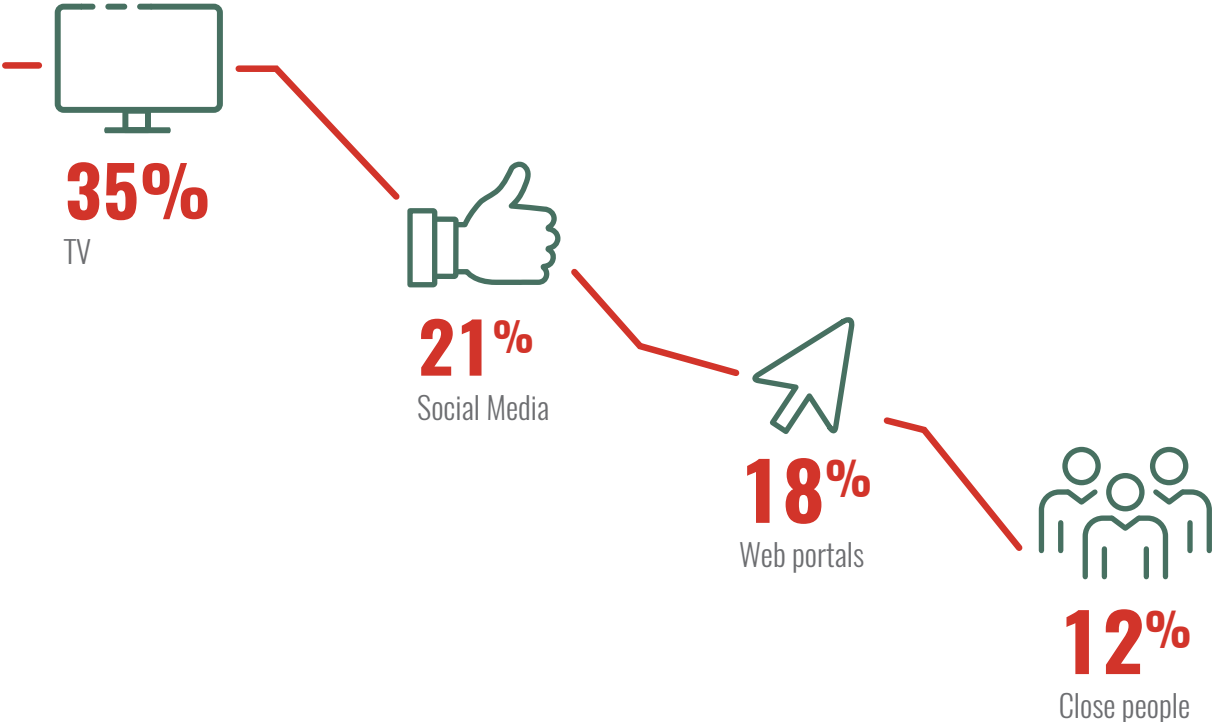
With regards to the type of communication with candidates in the election period, this group prefers in-person communication in smaller groups (in the neighbourhood) and personal, door-to-door communication and relies on the candidates' political track record in making an informed decision. Nine per 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.