

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 unemployed 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.

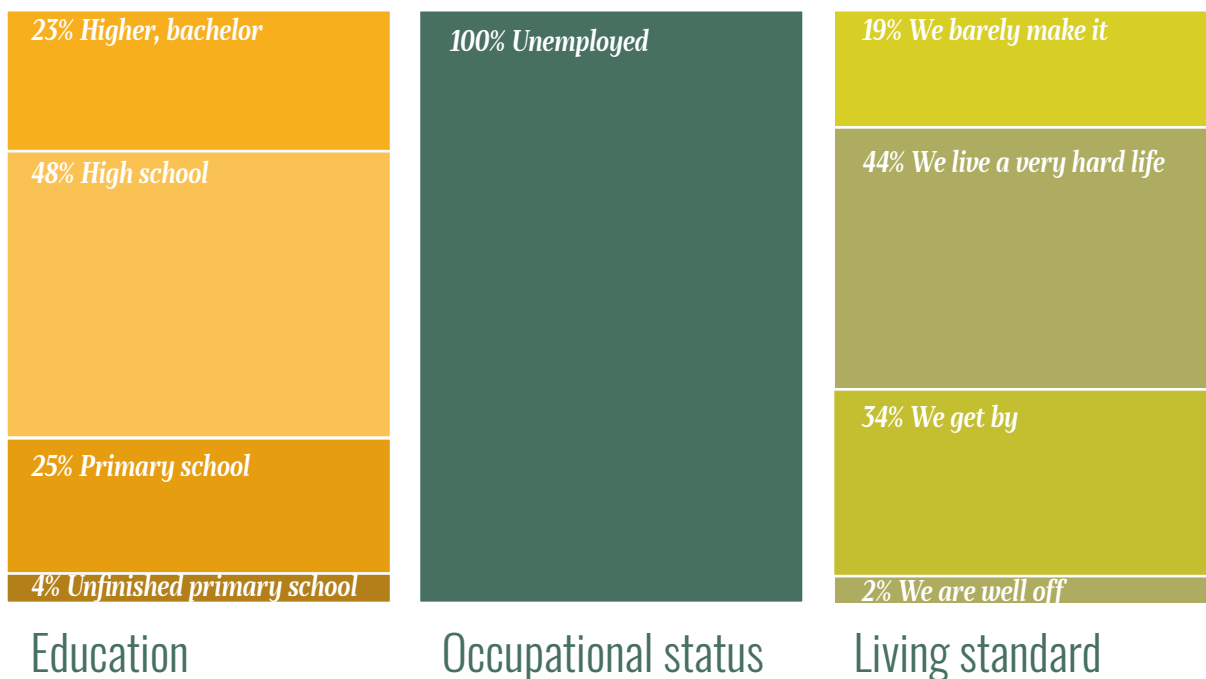
Demographic Profile

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.

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.



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?



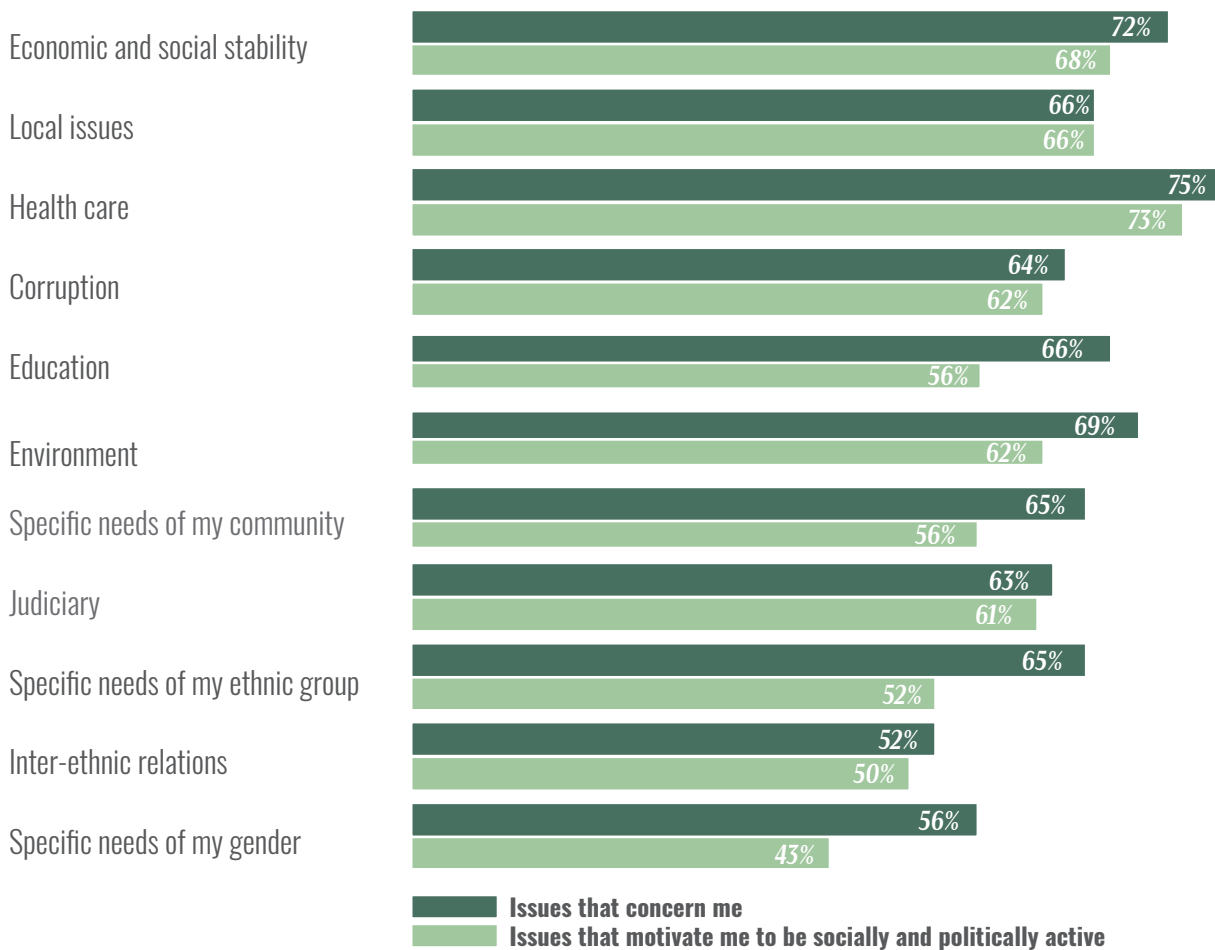
Compared to the general population, the chronically unemployed persons appear less interested in socio-political developments and less often discuss these issues with other people. The research shows that 43% of the survey respondents are “very” or “somewhat interested” in socio-political development 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?



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 disproportionately 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?



Are you interested in a more active civic involvement?



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

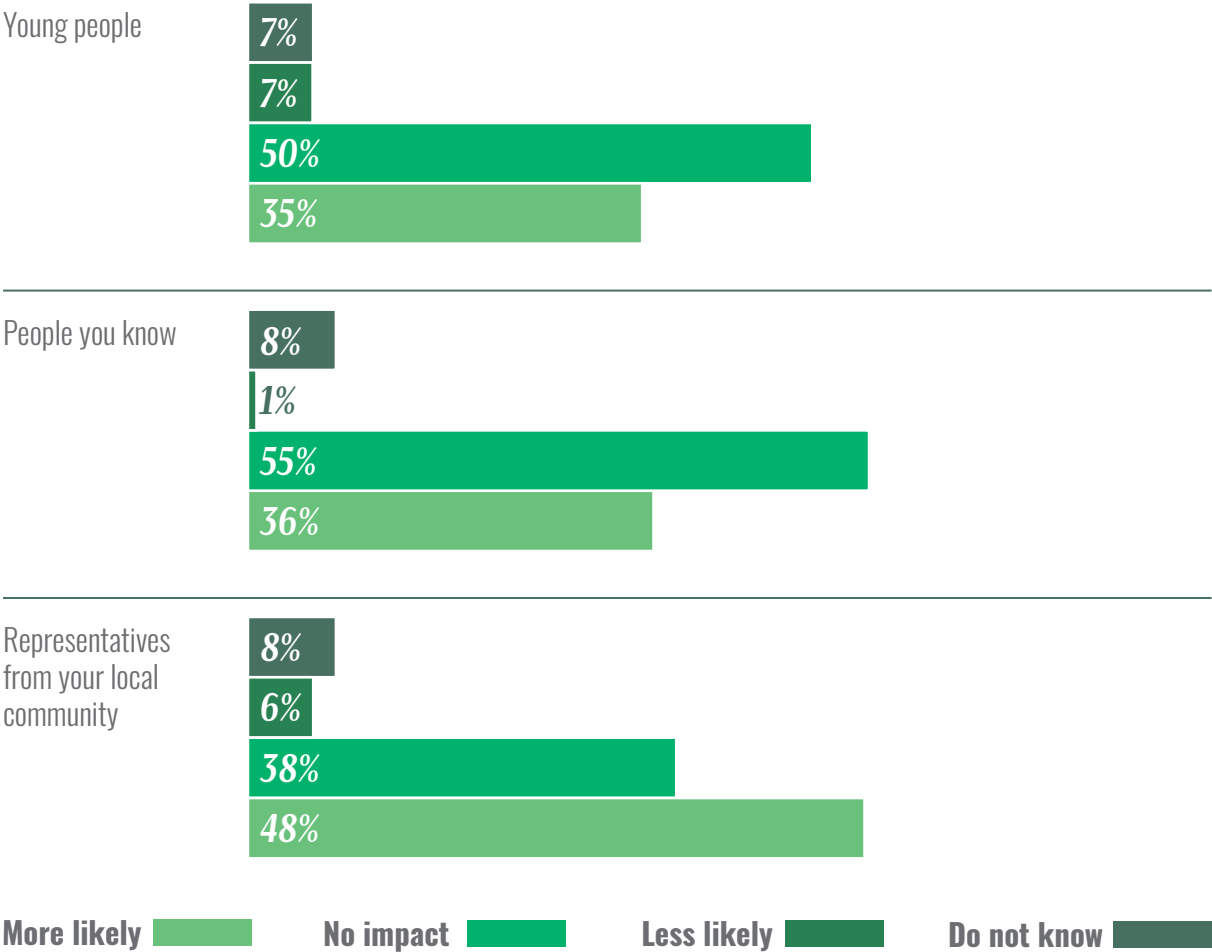


More than half of the respondents (56%) indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families, while 38% vote differently.

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.

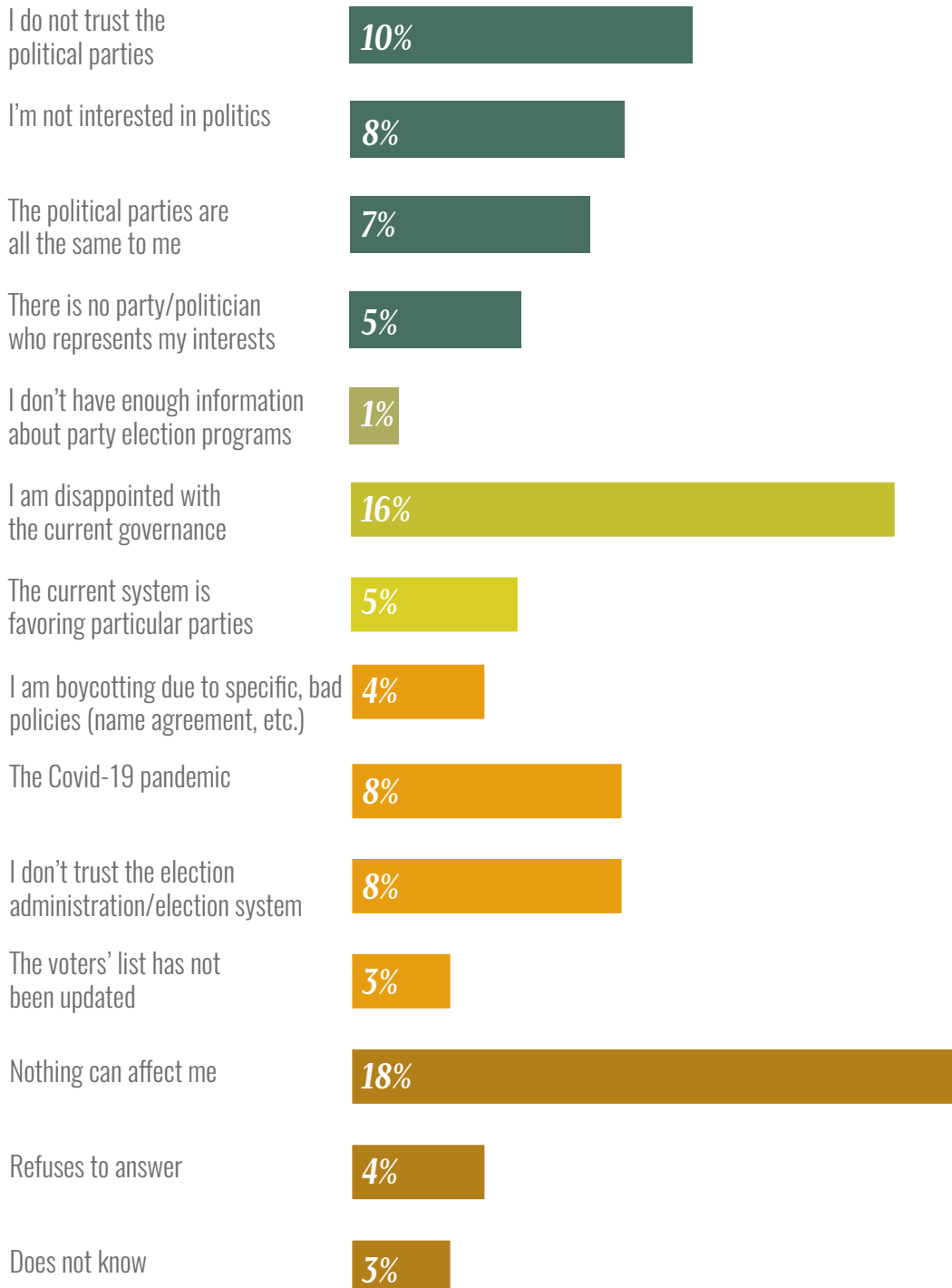
If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?



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?



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.

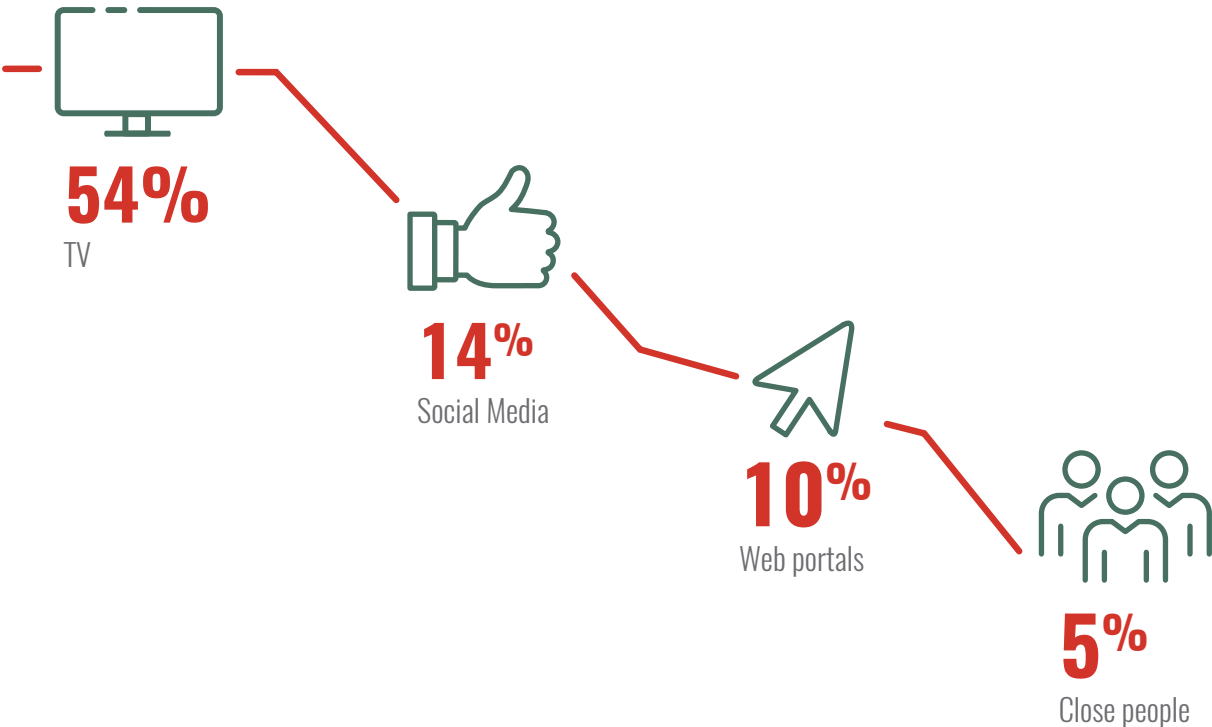
COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

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.



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, as 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).