

WOMEN

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research

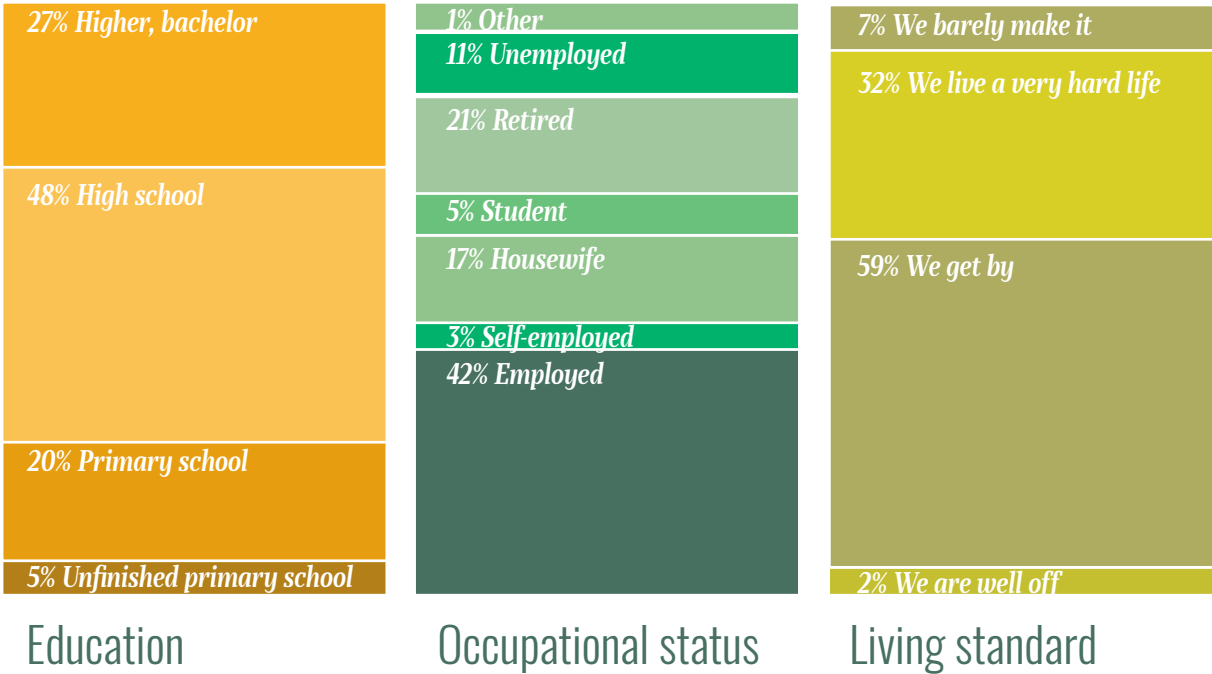
Women Voters – Definition and Size

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.



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?

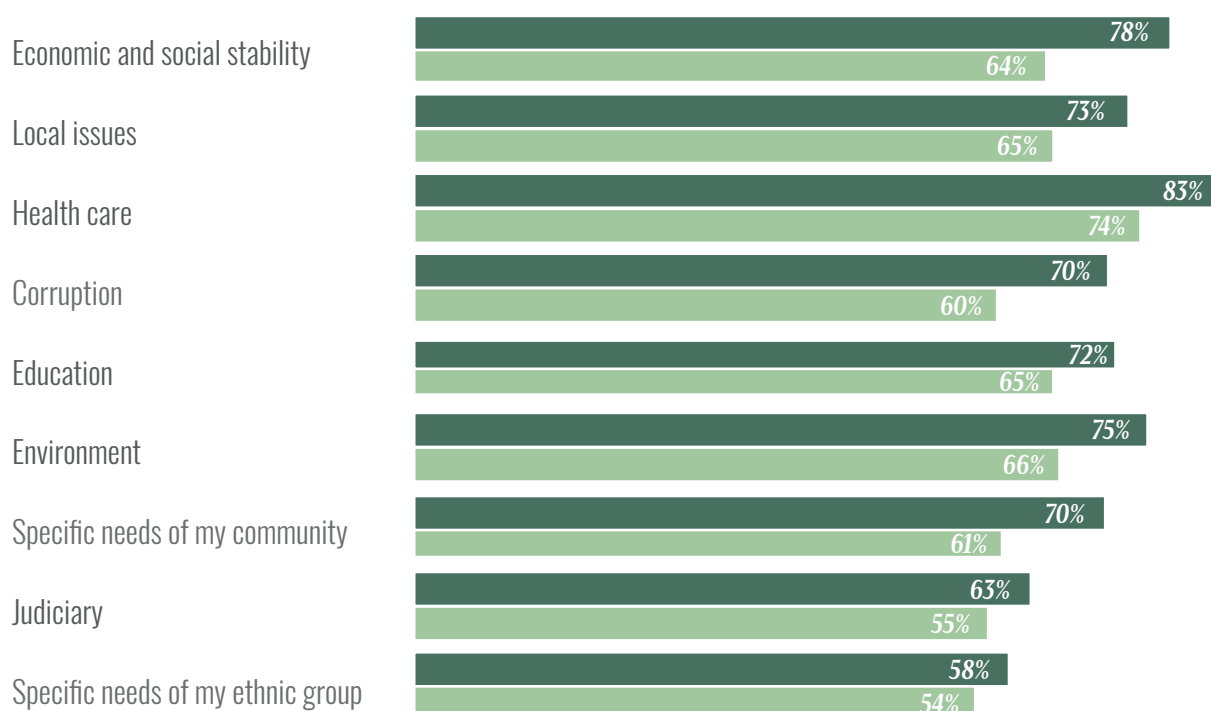


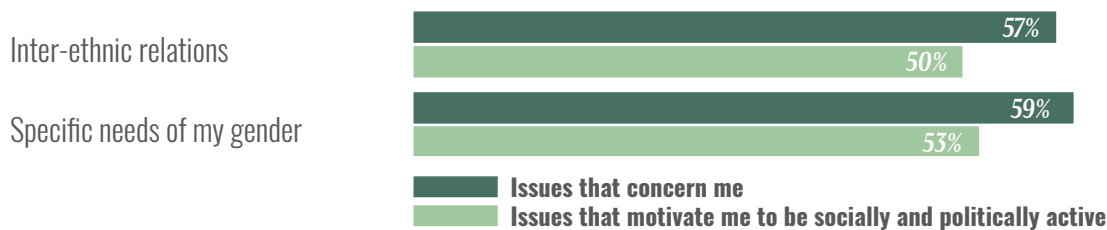
The research shows that 52% of the respondents are “not at all” or “not very interested” in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world, while 47% are “very” or “somewhat interested.” Slightly over half (51%) rarely or never discuss these issues with other people. Further 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?





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?



Are you interested in a more active civic involvement?



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

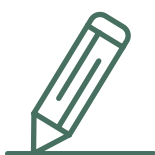
Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

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”.



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?



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

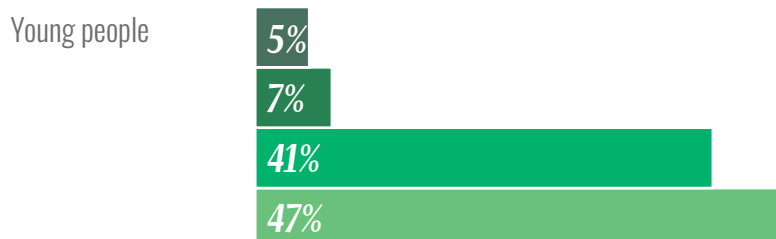
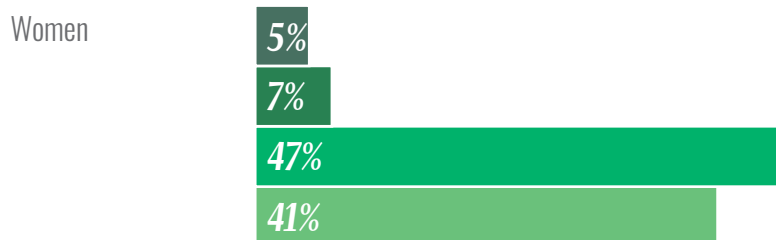
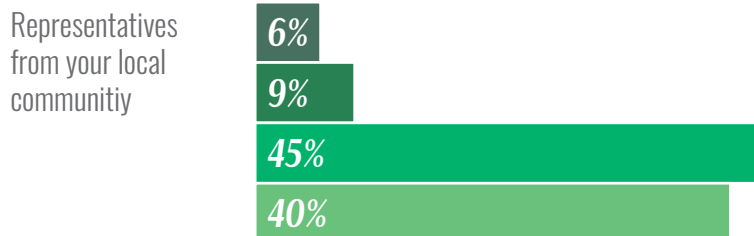
The top three factors that positively influence respondents' turnout are: perception that voting is a civic right and duty (53%), prospects for a better future (41%), and fear that their vote would be stolen (26%).

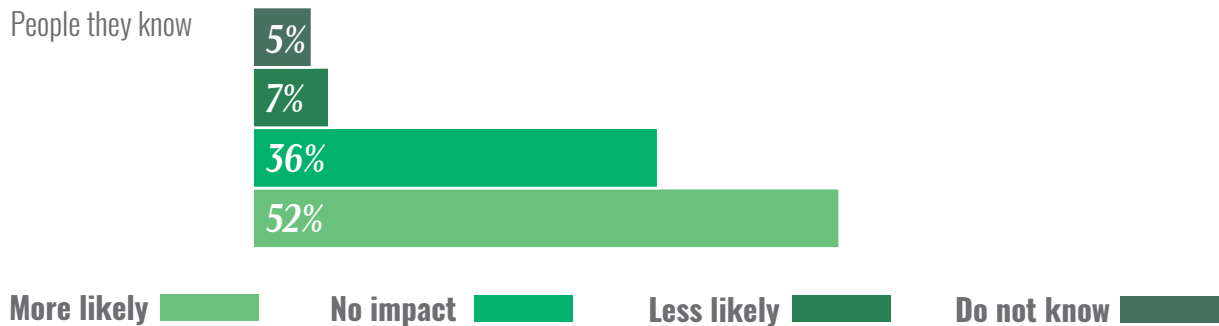
Sixty-two per cent (62%) of the women respondents indicate that their decision to vote regularly or most often overlaps with that of their families, while 26% claimed that their decision is the same or most often the same as that of their friends.



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?





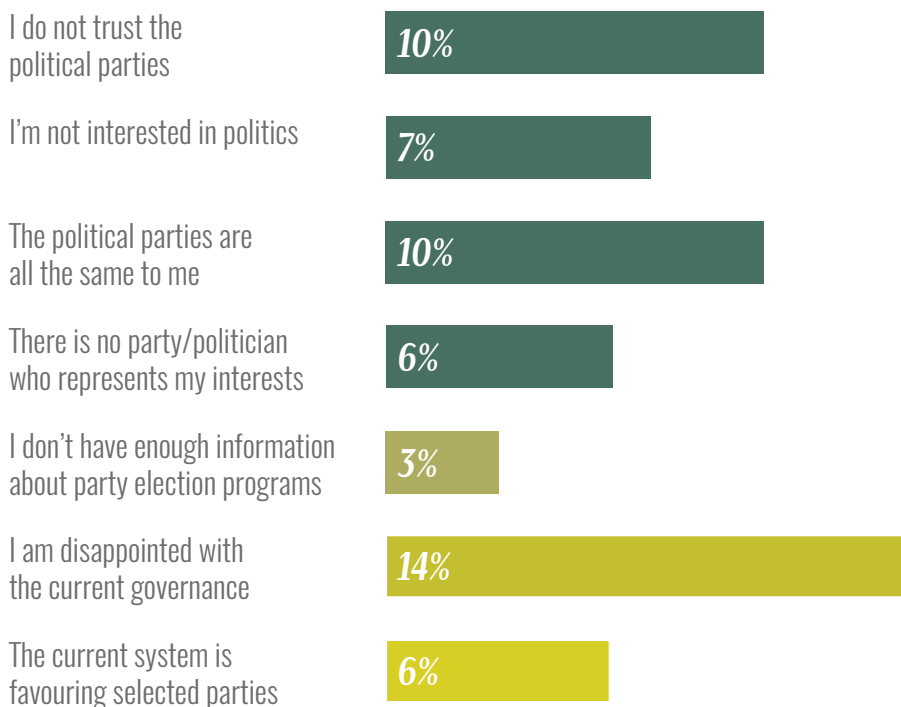
Interestingly, while women are not concerned with the specific needs of their gender or with equal gender representation, they tend to express satisfaction when women are active in politics and prefer to vote for women.

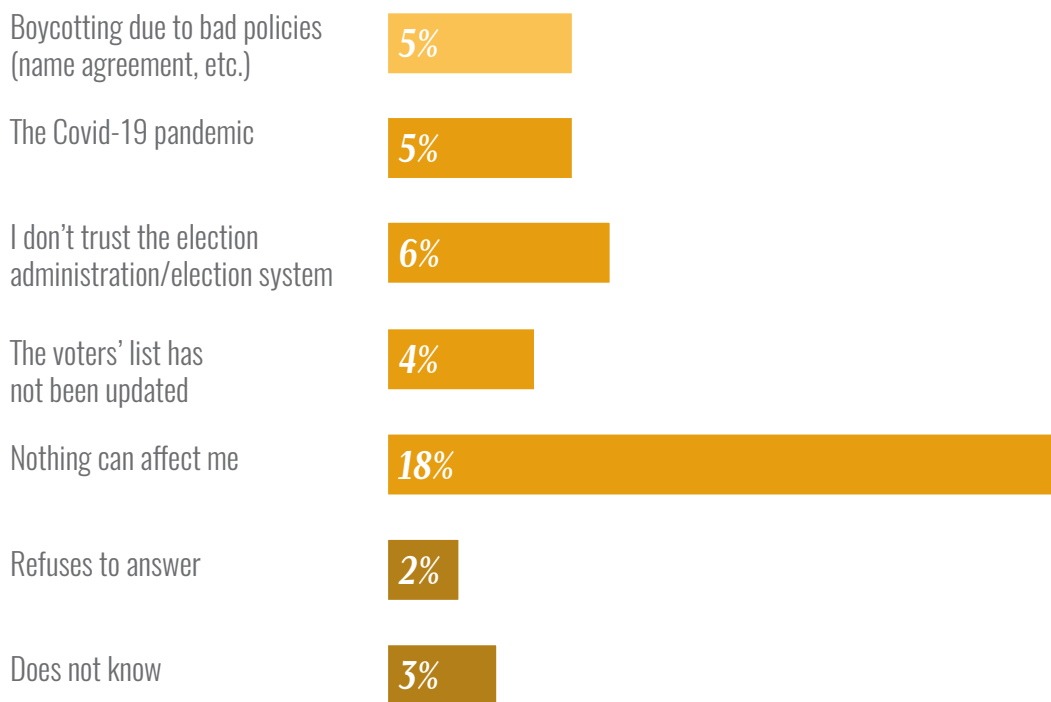
Thus, there is a discrepancy between the understanding of gender equality and its practical implementation (e.g. women running for political office). This discrepancy may be a result of the insufficient efforts of the education institutions, civil society, media to raise public awareness on the importance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





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. ”

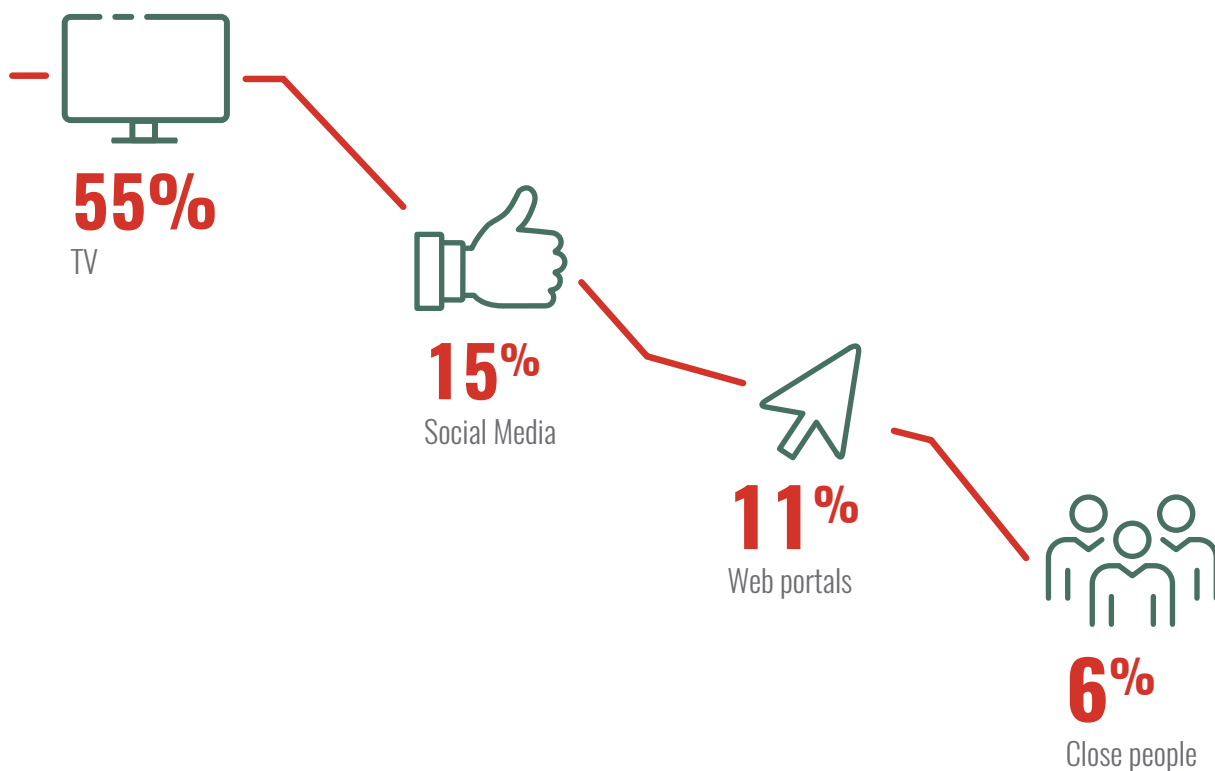
Woman, 39, Skopje

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?



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.