



RURAL WOMEN

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research

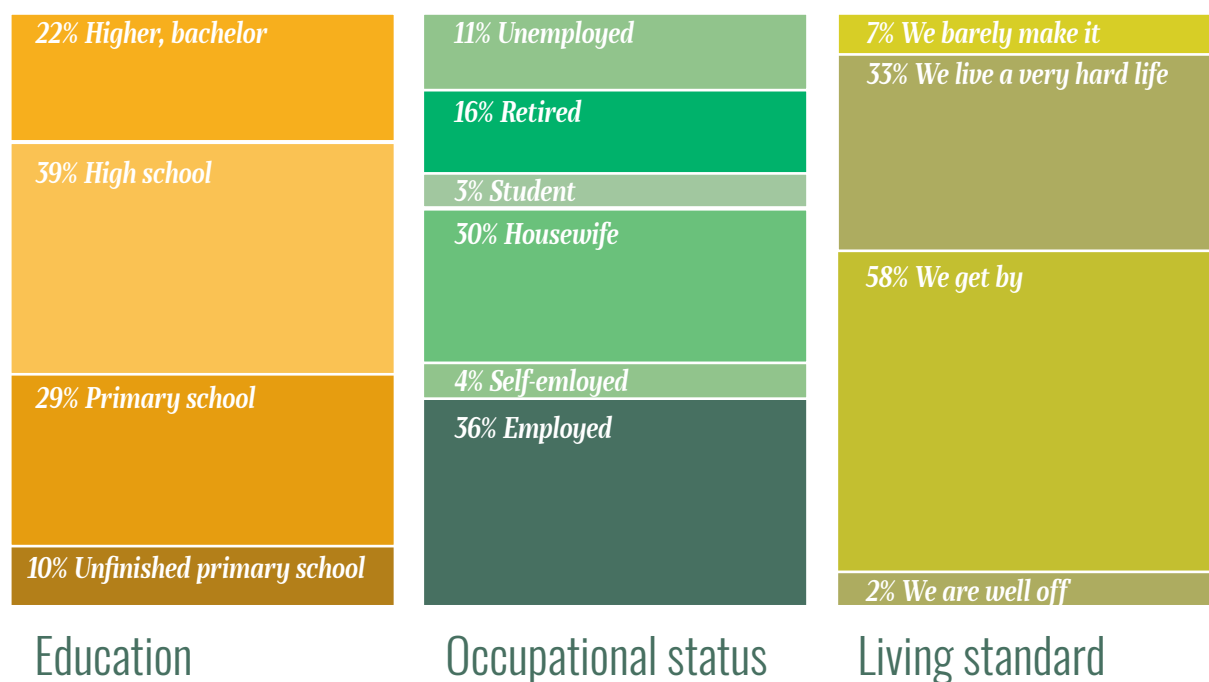
Rural Women - Definition and Size

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.



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?



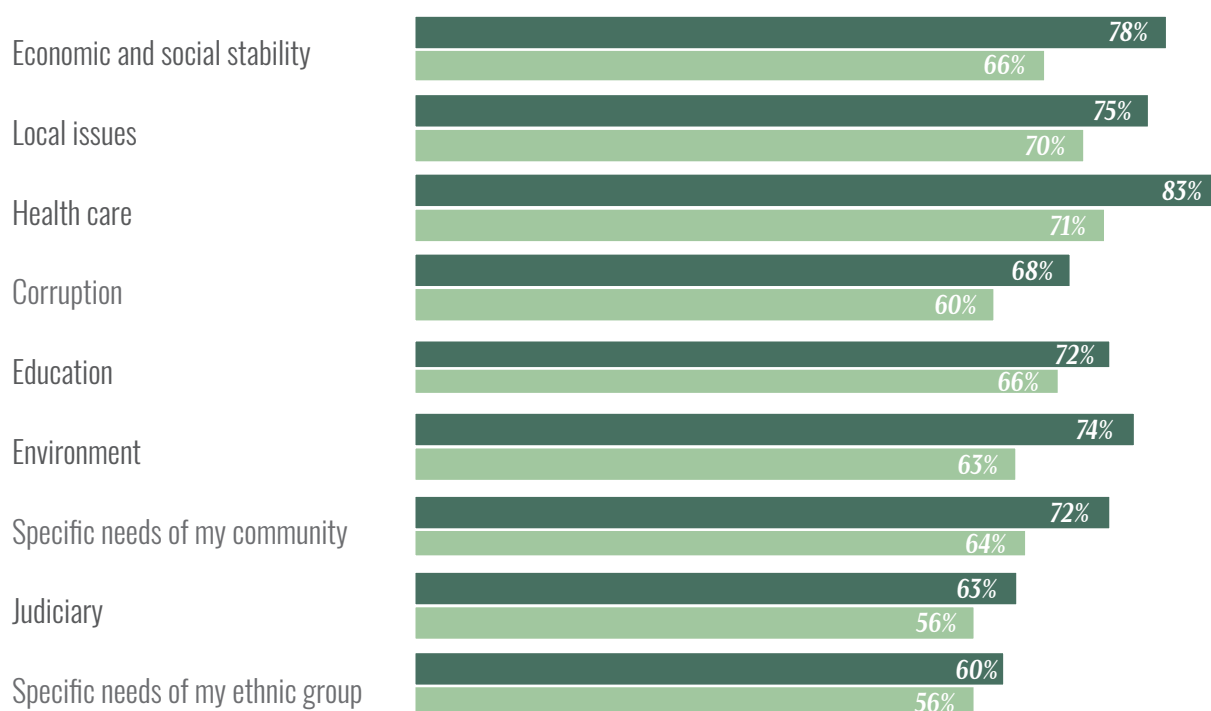
The research shows that 53% of women respondents living in rural settlements are “not at all” or “not very interested” in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world, while 46% are “very” or “somewhat interested.” There is no difference related to the interest shown compared to urban women.

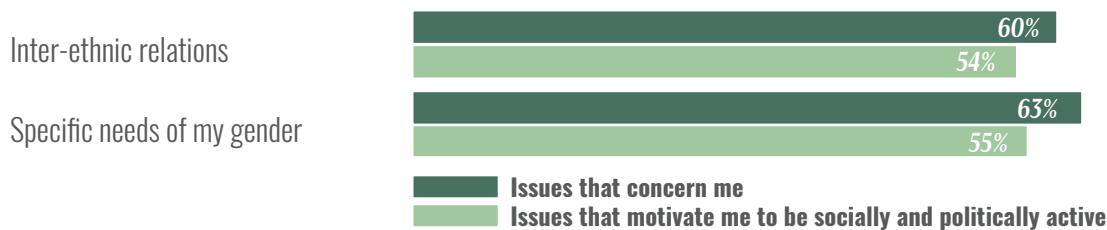
Slightly over half of these women (55%) rarely or never discuss these issues with other people, compared to 46% of urban women who are not willing to discuss the socio-political issues.

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?





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 conjunction 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

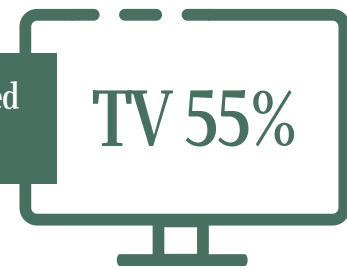
Their principal concerns are related to local issues and problems including:

- ♦ 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

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



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?



Do you have a desire for greater civic involvement?



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 recommendations 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%)), whereas 25% lack interest in politics, which 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%

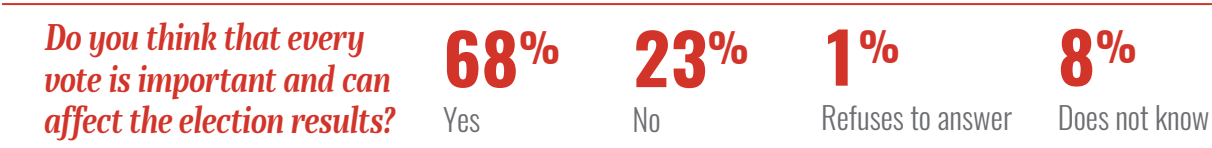
Meet colleagues, friends to discuss



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”.



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?



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%).

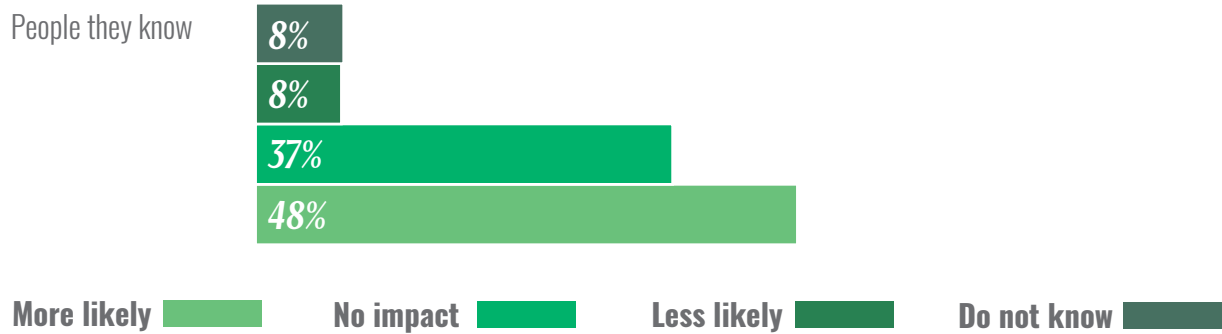


Sixty-six per cent (66%) of the respondents indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families, while 28% state their decision is the same or most often the same as that of their friends.

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?





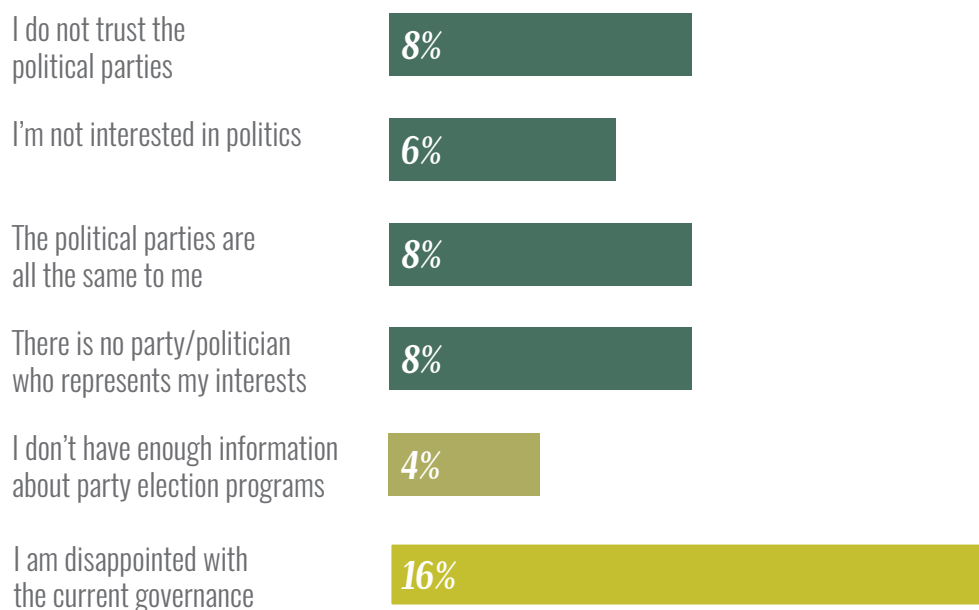
“ We have to fight alone and not underestimate our abilities, because, let’s be honest, we are smarter than men. We are persistent, if we set a goal, we do not give up and go to the end. That is why we must not allow ourselves to be second-class citizens and we should be more involved in politics. ”

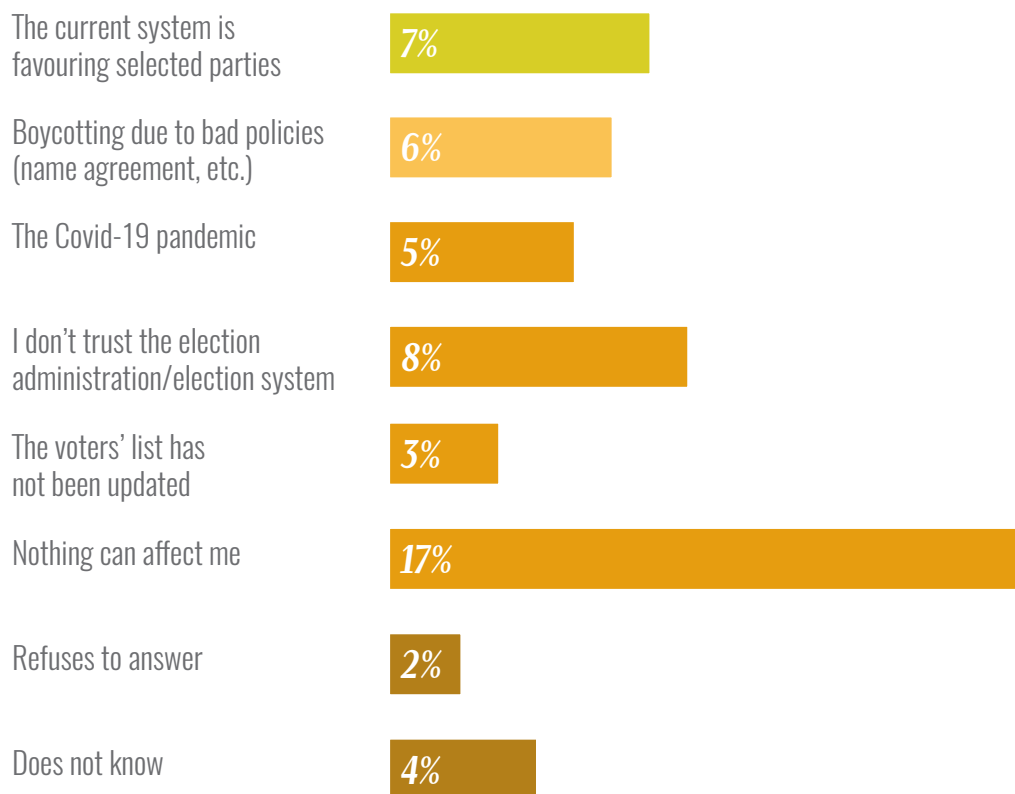
Female, 38, Tearce

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the incumbent 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?





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. ”

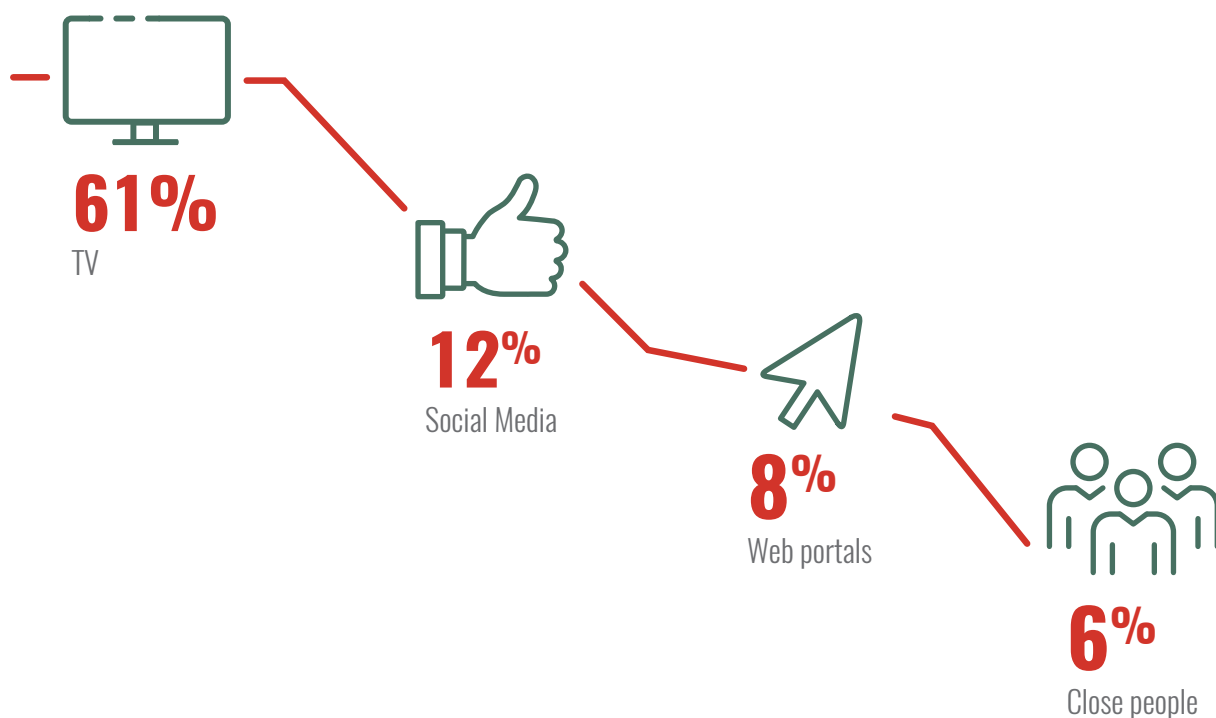
Female, 38, Tearce

“ 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.



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 apply 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.

Strengthen 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.