



SOCIAL INCLUSION AND PARLIAMENT

QUALITATIVE SURVEY

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Prepared by:



Prepared for:



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BASIC INFORMATION



To support the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia's efforts for greater openness and transparency, qualitative research was conducted to ensure that the specific needs of groups 'at-risk-of-social-exclusion' are adequately addressed. Six groups are in primary focus: unemployed, youth, Roma, women, persons with disabilities and poor as targeted at-risk-groups. The qualitative research was conducted on behalf of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) by GfK. The research is made possible with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.



Research method

- Qualitative survey: 12FGs with 6-8 participants per group
- Length of the discussion: 1.5h
- Location: Skopje, Tetovo, Kumanovo, Stip, Prilep and Bitola
- Fieldwork dates: 15-22.09.2017



Target group

	City	Group	Nationality	Average age	Gender	Av. income per household member	Number of respondents
	Tetovo	Youth	Albanian	21.6	4 female; 4male	7400 mkd	8
	Tetovo	Women	Albanian	40.6	8 female	5063 mkd	8
	Bitola	Unemployed	Macedonian, Turk	30.7	5 female; 3 male	6167 mkd	8
	Bitola	Youth	Macedonian	20.5	4 female; 2 male	6000 mkd	6
	Prilep	Persons with disabilities	Macedonian	54.0	3 female; 5 male	No answer	8
	Prilep	Poor	Macedonian, Roma	48.5	4 female; 4 male	1767 mkd	8
	Kumanovo	Roma	Roma	45.9	3 female; 4 male	3660 mkd	7
	Kumanovo	Women	Macedonian, Serbian	42.4	8 female	8063 mkd	8
	Skopje	Unemployed	Macedonian	33.3	4 female; 2 male	6000 mkd	6
	Skopje	Persons with disabilities	Macedonian	44.5	3 female; 3 male	No answer	6
	Stip	Poor	Macedonian	41.7	3 female; 4 male	3833 mkd	7
	Stip	Roma	Roma	36.5	3 female; 3 male	4188 mkd	6

SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION PERCEPTION

Without any difference among the respondents' at risk, the **general socio-economic situation** in Macedonia was evaluated as “**negative**”, “**bad**”, “**awful**” or “**catastrophic**”.

Main problems for all citizens at risk:

- Low level of household income,
- No possibility to find a job,
- Very low salaries.

Women emphasized, young people leaving the country is an important problem

Bad education system is more important problem for **young** respondents.

Low amounts of social care benefits and discrimination are more important problems for

Roma and **persons with disability**.



The responsibility lies with the:

- Government and its institutions,
- Ministry for Labor and Social Policy,
- Ministry for Health,
- Ministry for Education,
- Parliamentarians and political parties.

Based on their experience while trying to achieve some of their rights and when felt discriminated or not supported and finally did not have their right, these groups of citizens feel that the Government does not work in their favor.

BARRIERS TO ACHIEVE MORE QUALITY LIFE

Lack of money facing higher life expenses

“There is no perspective in this Country. The salary is 400 Euros and the monthly expenses are 600 Euros.” – Youth, Tetovo

“Young people may find a job maybe, but working for 100 euros will not be enough to have a quality life. The money is not even enough for basic life expenses.” – Unemployed, Bitola

Discrimination

“When I announced to my employer that I have Multiple Sclerosis he fired me a few months later. He did not want me to be a burden to the company.” – Person with a disability, Prilep

Not loyal competition, grey economy

“I have for example registered business, but because there are many unregistered business as mine, they are cheaper and I cannot success on the market.” – Unemployed, Bitola

Corruption

“I learned and studied but cannot find a job because someone else, using corruption, had already taken my job.” – Unemployed, Skopje

Nepotism

“My kids were going to faculty and we’ve spent a lot of money for their education but someone else with nepotism employs their own children.” – Woman, Tetovo

Politicization in every part of the life

“I am a Law graduate, but whenever I apply for a job I am asked if I am a member of a political party.”- Young, Tetovo

Inefficient Institutions (Centers for Social Work, Health institution)

“I cannot get my health insurance benefits for medicines, because the health institution requires a document from me that no other institution issues. It is if they ask from me to provide something that does not exist.” – Person with a disability, Prilep

Lack of jobs

“Many factories have been closed down and there are not enough jobs.” – Woman, Kumanovo

Wrong economic policies in the past two decades

“Unprofessional and wrong persons are put on important positions. And since they don’t know how to do their job, they poison us with politics, instead to work for the good of the citizens.” – Poor, Stip

THE ASSEMBLY SPONTANEOUS ASSOCIATIONS

Out of all stated associations, almost all have negative connotation.

Only few of them are neutral or positive.

The strongest associations are: circus, lies, theater/acting and legislative house.



PERCEPTION OF THE ASSEMBLY

1

The most important legislative body

"Institution that brings all laws in the Country" – Young, Tetovo

2

A company with inefficient workers (parliamentarians)

"Not functional assembly, since parliamentarians do not do their job" – Stated by many different respondents at risk

"A structure of people that make the life of citizens sad and depressed" – Unemployed, Skopje

"Place where the highest level of corruption is happening" – Poor, Stip

3

Place for supporting political party interests

"Place where political parties' fight" –Roma, Stip

"All the time there are some conflicts and nobody pays attention to the important issues for citizens." – Stated by many different respondents at risk

4

Body that should work for promoting the interests of the citizens and improving the economy

The respondents have a strong attitude about parliamentarians not spending time at all in direct contacts with citizens. Their comments were *"Yes, they spend time with citizens only before elections."* – Stated by many different respondents at risk

EXPECTATIONS FROM THE ASSEMBLY

1

Solving citizens' problems

"Helping poor people" – Poor, Prilep

"Working for good of the 'working class' – Unemployed, Skopje

"Increasing the amount of the social benefits" – Person with a disability, Prilep

2

Law making

One can conclude, the citizens expect the following:

- Making quality and logical laws that can be respected by all citizens
- Making stable laws
- Making laws in the interest of all citizens, providing equal conditions for all citizens, protecting the rights of all citizens

3

Improving the efficiency of the parliamentarians

Should: "Lie less"; "Efficiently do their job"; "Work more closely with the citizens" - Stated in many different respondents at risk

4

Promoting citizens' interests including their economic opportunities. Assembly should make economic changes that will provide the country with a viable and stable economic foundation, which will lead to improvement of the living standards for all citizens.

MAKING AND PASSING LAWS



Respondents who consider that the Assembly is making laws for citizens' best interest emphasized

- the law on subsidies for farmers.
- laws and changes in laws were made in benefit of pupils/students (like changes in the law that eliminates external testing for students) or for pensioners (increase in pensions).

Many respondents consider that the Assembly does not pass laws for their best interests.

- **politicians take care only for themselves**, and not for the citizens in general.
- there are bad laws, **laws** that are adopted in the Parliament **only for the personal interests** of the parliamentarians.

Respondents feel discriminated in front of laws.

The existing laws are good and in favor of citizens, but the problem was with their **implementation** since laws must be **equally and fairly applied to all citizens**, without selectivity for certain groups.

The respondents also commented that the laws in the country change **too much and too often** which indirectly implies that the laws are not good.

“In some stable countries like Germany for example, the laws are not changed for many years.” – Unemployed, Bitola.



OUTREACH MECHANISM

Outreach
mechanism

<https://www.sobranie.mk/>



Visiting Assembly building



Visiting plenary
sessions



Talk to
Parliamentarians

Familiarity

Less Familiar

Very Familiar

Almost Not Familiar

Not Familiar

Less Familiar

Visited /
followed /
achieved
contact

Very few

Some

Very few

None

Very few

Room for
Improvement

- Information about scholarships, internships and studies abroad
- Facebook page of the Assembly
- Conduct surveys among citizens when a relevant law or topic is discussed

- Topics relevant to the youth, Roma, unemployment, etc.
- Early announcement broadcast / communicated TV program/schedule of the topics discussed
- Broadcasting debates with professionals or critics in the areas of economy or politics, during the pauses between the parliamentary sessions
- Assembly TV channel should come out and present the concrete conclusions of these laws and their effect

- Mobility and hearing accessibility for people with disabilities
- Organized visits for groups of citizens at risk, especially for those outside of Skopje
- Clear and widely spread information about when and how (clearly communicated procedures how) the Assembly can be visited

- Consider the opportunity to include citizens in the plenary debates allowing certain number of questions that the citizens can ask their MPs during these plenary debates

- Communication via email or post mail with the MP
- MPs to organize monthly meetings, gatherings with their constituents

Motivation to
get in touch

Low

Middle

Low

Very low

High

INCREASING GROUPS AT RISK INVOLVEMENT

How

Information about citizens' rights and possible ways to be included

Raising public awareness and education about the groups at risk and their needs.

Open the assembly for: Youth activists, Unions representatives and NGOs groups representing the vulnerable groups of citizens.

“Lobbying” on ways to improve quality of life of vulnerable groups.

Public and direct communication with MPs, not only before election.

Active working groups in the Parliament.

MPs coming from variety of groups in the society.

Why?

Citizens at risk know less that they can be involved

Citizens at risk believe that common understanding leads to better quality of life for all

“Let’s play ‘a role change’ for one day so that others can see how it is to live one day as person with disability/Roma” – Roma and Person with a disability

Citizens at risk believe in civic engagement and the importance of advocacy groups

“There are a lot of NGOs that can help in increasing the level of participation of women, but the NGOs are not active.” – Woman, Tetovo

“It is necessary to review the law proposals before putting them into procedure. For example, we as students/pupils were not asked about the external testing. We protested against it but we did not achieve anything.” – Youth, Bitola

“I believe if MPs from our group are present in the Assembly, it will help, because they are aware about our situation. They will understand how it is not to have enough money to pay for the bills and food.” – ‘Poor’, Stip

Citizens at risk believe that common understanding leads to better quality of life for all


“There is an inter-parliamentary working group which includes people with disabilities. And it’s a shame what happens to us. We have everything on paper. We have almost all laws and amendments. We have them all, but only to show them, and say ‘here they are’. But, in fact, we don’t have anything.” – Person with a disability, Skopje


“I suspect that if we had more poor people in the Assembly it would be more beneficial for the poor. Once you give power to someone, you will see who they really are. He/she will forget.” – ‘Poor’, Prilep


SUMMARY


 **Common problems of citizens at risk are: low level of household income, no possibilities to find a job and very low salaries.**

 **Citizens at risk believe the main responsibility for the problems and barriers lies with the government and its institutions, especially with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education, as well as the parliamentarians and political parties. Many respondents consider that the Assembly does not pass laws for their best interests.**

 **Generally the survey do not indicate some major differences among different profile of citizens at risk especially when it comes to the perception and expectations from the Assembly. The expectations are high while the perception is not positive.**

 **Of all outreach mechanisms between the Assembly and the citizens, these groups of citizens are mainly familiar with the Assembly TV channel. They are less familiar with other outreach mechanisms like the web page and direct communication with the parliamentarians. There is almost no awareness about the possibilities to visit the Assembly building and follow a plenary debate.**

 **Also in regard to the suggestions how to increase the involvement of the citizens at risk in policies making there is no difference among different profiles. All citizens at risk, at first expressed a need of the information about their rights and possible ways to be included. Afterward suggestions were: raising public awareness and education about the groups at risk and their needs, open the assembly for: youth activists, unions, representatives and NGOs groups representing the vulnerable groups of citizens, public and direct communication with MPs, active working groups in the Parliament.**

 **Regarding the issue of having more representatives in the Assembly from groups at risk in the Assembly, at first all believe it would be good and beneficial, but after discussing the issue some respondents start to believe that once they became MPs, people from groups at risk would forget where they came from, and start to work for their own interest and not work for the good of the groups of citizens at risk.**

SUMMARY OF DIFFERENCES AMONG PROFILES OF GROUPS AT RISK

	Problems	Outreach mechanism	MPs coming from variety of groups at risk
Women	Young people leaving the country.	Albanian women are unfamiliar with all outreach mechanisms, while Macedonian women are familiar with website and TV channel mainly.	
Roma	Low amounts of social care benefits and discrimination.	Are familiar TV channel, but less with all other outreach mechanisms.	
Youth	Bad education system, bad student standard, young people leaving the country.	Albanian youth are less familiar with all mechanisms. Generally Macedonian youth are the most familiar with all outreach mechanism.	Youth believe that since they don't have enough experience it will be better if they are only initiators for some policies or changes in laws.
Unemployed	No possibilities to get a job, low amounts of social care benefits.	Are familiar with website and TV channel, as well and with possibility to talk to MPs, but less with others outreach mechanisms.	Unemployed believe that only a larger number of MPs coming from groups at risk can make difference.
Poor	Unemployment, low salaries and low amount of social assistance, no possibility to have health care.	Are familiar TV channel, but less with all other outreach mechanisms.	
Persons with a disability	Low amounts of social care benefits and discrimination.	Are familiar with website and TV channel, as well and with possibility to talk to MPs, but less with others outreach mechanisms.	The persons with disability believe that their presence in the Assembly even in smaller number may provoke compassion among others and initiate the other MPs to start thinking and working more in favor of persons with disability.

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