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Quantitative and qualitative study

Assessment of knowledge gaps in the electoral field and level
of civic engagement



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context

The overall objective of the survey was to identify knowledge gaps and to assess the level of civic engagement of the population with a focus on certain vulnerable groups.

The survey was based on a poll in a sample, which was national-level and representative of general adult population, covered all regions of Moldova and included both urban and rural residents; it was supplemented by two boost samples – those of persons with disabilities and Roma people. The focus group was adult population aged 18 or older, persons with disabilities and Roma people from 160 localities. A total of 1,507 respondents were interviewed face-to-face at home, including 1,158 persons representing general public and additionally 192 ethnic Roma and 157 persons with disabilities. Thus, the applied method was that of layered semi-probability sampling with four sampling steps. The error margin for a sample of this size representing general public is $\pm 3\%$. The information was gathered between 27 October and 30 December 2023.

The survey also included a qualitative component. Six focus group discussions (FGDs) were held to this end with an average of 7.5 participants per group. The total number of FGD participants was 45. The discussions were held with the groups of young people representing rural and urban residents, women, the elderly, persons with special needs, and Roma people.

Main findings of the quantitative component (FGDs)

Level of information and specific knowledge gaps regarding politics and current events

- The average score for interest in social and political life in the Republic of Moldova was 6 points for general public, 5.7 points for persons with disabilities, and 5.2 points for Roma people, i.e. a moderately high score. Persons with a low level of interest made 26%, those with a medium level of interest – 39%, those with a high level of interest – 35%.
- 84% of the respondents voted in the parliamentary elections on 11 July 2021 and the most recent local elections on 5 November 2023, without any statistically significant differences in case of persons with disabilities and Roma people. The non-voting rate was higher among young people (28%), urban residents (22%), residents of the Chisinau municipality (30%), ethnic Ukrainians and Russians, persons with low interest in social-political life, civically passive respondents, and those with a low level of confidence in state institutions and media.
- The main driver motivating people to vote in the elections is their belief that their vote counts (88%). The three most frequent obstacles (with an approximately equal weight) that prevent people from voting in the elections are: their skepticism regarding possibilities of a change for the better in the policies of Moldovan authorities (27%), being abroad on the election day (26%), and general lack of interest (23%).
- Respondents know the right-wing political doctrine relatively better: 42% correctly attributed at least one statement, as compared to 35% of those who correctly attributed at least one statement relating to the left-wing doctrine and at least one statement (out of the two featuring on the list) equally valid for both doctrines; 18% of the respondents did not attribute correctly any of the eight statements on the list, and not a single one correctly attributed all eight statements.
- The institutions distrusted most are political parties (66%), courts of justice (64%), the Parliament (60%) and the Government (59%). The percentage of respondents who have no confidence in the institutions on the list was higher than the percentage of respondents who have confidence in at least eight out of the ten listed institutions.

- Persons with a low level of confidence in main institutions account for 71%, those with a medium level of confidence – 15%, and those with a high level of confidence – 17% of the respondents.
- The prevailing positive attitude (2.5-fold of the percentage of respondents with a negative attitude) was registered in respect of the role played by the European Union (51%) and international financial agencies such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (42%) in the Republic of Moldova. Negative perceptions prevailed in case of NATO and the Eurasian Union. The positive and negative perceptions of the role played by the UN are split evenly.
- Only 20% of Moldova's adult general public firmly support the idea of democracy as the most suitable state system for Moldova. The portion of people with a positive attitude towards democracy is four-fold of that of respondents with a negative attitude among general public, three-fold among persons with disabilities, and six-fold among Roma people.
- Most respondents have a neutral attitude (39%) towards the way democracy is actually practiced in Moldova at present, followed by 31% with a negative attitude and only 27% with a positive attitude.
- Every tenth respondent among general public and every fourth Roma does not believe it important to know the electoral programs of the candidates running in local elections.
- Although most people believe in the importance of knowing the electoral programs of the candidates in local elections, only 44% stated they knew them well (of which less than half believed they knew such programs very well).

Level of civic involvement

- The most popular information channels out of the six on the offered list are TV news bulletins and shows (with an average score of 2.4 points for frequency of their use, which means almost weekly use) as well as friends, neighbors and family (2.5 points).
- One in every ten respondents neither watches TV news bulletins and shows nor uses their friends, neighbors and family as a source of information at all. Every fourth respondent never uses social media and news portals. Every second respondent does not listen to the radio at all, and two thirds never read newspapers.
- Passive information consumers, i.e. people who frequently (at least once a week) use maximum 2 information channels account for 36%, moderately frequent consumers, i.e. persons that use frequently maximum 3-4 information channels - for 46%, and advanced information consumers, i.e. people using frequently at least 5-6 information channels - for 18% of the respondents.
- 75% of the adult population are of the opinion that their interests are not represented at all or under-represented in national politics. Every third respondent does not believe that their interests are represented at all.
- 87% agree that young people should be involved and represented in political life in Moldova; 85% agree that their vote matters; 83% agree that women should be equally involved and represented in political positions in Moldova; 43% claim that access to information about how public authorities function and make decisions is limited; 42% believe that only influential people and financiers have a chance to influence decisions.
- 70% of the surveyed population are satisfied with the community where they live.
- In the views of 57% of the adult population, their interests are not represented at all or under-represented in local politics. This percentage is significantly lower (by 18%) as compared to the perceptions of national-level representation.
- Four in every ten respondents have a positive perception of their LPA's responsiveness, consultations with and involvement of the community, while another four out of every ten respondents have a negative attitude in this respect.
- 67% of the respondents do not want to hold any political office.
- Civically passive persons account for 52% and persons with a low level of civic activity - for 11% of the adult population; at the same time, 19% have a moderate level and 18% - a high level of civic activity.
- The most popular way of civic involvement is participation in addressing a community/ neighborhood problem; it has been practiced at least once by 34% of the respondents. The other two popular ways

of civic and political involvement are participation in meetings or public debates on local/national-level issues (24%) and participation in civic education programs (21%).

Level of stability and promotion of pro-social values in society

- Nine in every ten respondents consider it important to be honest, responsible, independent and useful to the community, but only 53% consider it important to participate in volunteering activities, 31% - to be active in politics, and 25% - to participate in civic actions such as protests and petitions.
- The main reasons on whose account people are discriminated against include income level (scoring on an average 1.4 points on the 5-point scale, or 10% of the population) and political views (1.3 points, or 9%). Discrimination is a little less frequent on account of one's language, level of education and age.
- 65% of the respondents never felt they were discriminated against on account of any of the eleven characteristics featuring in the survey; 15% were discriminated against on account of one characteristic, 11% - on account of two or three characteristics, and 9% - on account of more of the characteristics on the list.
- 41% of the respondents would do nothing (ignore the situation) if they witnessed someone offering or accepting a bribe.

Knowledge of the voting procedure

- Almost every second respondent believes they are moderately or insufficiently informed about the electoral procedure in respect to five aspects (the voting procedure, electoral candidates and their electoral programs, conditions for participation in voting, and involvement in organization of the elections); that belief was especially frequent regarding the possibility of getting involved in organization of the elections within an electoral committee.
- Overall, 26% of the respondents admitted that they did not know at least one of the first four aspects well enough. Moreover, 10% claimed to have insufficient knowledge of all four of those aspects. The percentage of the population with a poor level of knowledge is as high as 46% if the calculation takes all five aspects of the electoral process on the list for the respondents into account.
- Seven in every ten respondents rated the level of information accessibility as good or very good for the first four aspects on the list, but the percentage is significantly lower regarding information about the possibilities to get involved in the organization of elections within an electoral committee (46%).
- 19% of the respondents believe that information is hardly or not at all accessible for at least one of the listed aspects.
- None of the statements used to assess actual knowledge of the voting procedure by respondents was attributed correctly by all respondents. The lowest levels of knowledge were registered regarding the right to request a mobile ballot box and the possibility to vote online.
- Only 11% of the respondents attributed correctly all nine statements used to assess actual knowledge of the voting procedure (another 18% correctly attributed eight statements), and 5% attributed correctly not more than two statements.
- 69% of the respondents claimed they knew about the possibility of verifying their personal data at the polling station, but only 31% knew they could do this online on www.cec.md.

Knowledge of and level of satisfaction with key civic involvement types

- The population knows relatively better (a higher percentage of responses in the affirmative) where and how they can apply in case they need social assistance services (75%), support services (where to apply for them) in case of discrimination or violation of human rights (63%) and support services in case they have been provided non-conforming/inferior services (57%).
- The level of knowledge is moderate regarding practical aspects, such as performing work and services of public interest (46%), ways of getting involved in decision-making (45%), and how fee rates are calculated for public services (43%).

- The lowest levels of knowledge about practical aspects of LPA work were registered in respect of how development strategies are adopted (32%), decisions made (32%), and public finance is managed (24%).
- Persons with a low level of knowledge about the nine local processes on the list (i.e. those who have some knowledge about up to three processes out of the nine) account for 46% of the respondents; 34% have moderate knowledge (i.e. know something about four to six of the processes), and 20% have a high level of knowledge (i.e. know something about at least seven out of the nine listed processes).
- Persons with a low level of knowledge about civic involvement types (i.e. those who know up to three out of the seven types on the list) account for 32%; 37% have a moderate level of knowledge (i.e. know something about four to six listed civic involvement types); another 32% are persons with a high level of knowledge who know all seven civic involvement types on the list.
- The best-known civic involvement type is participating in volunteer actions in the community (73%); the least-known type is contributing funds or resources to an NGO or a charitable cause (55%).
- Local authorities organize community-level general meetings (53%) and local council meetings (44%) most often. The least popular types are public hearings (23%), community/ neighborhood oversight committees for monitoring and assessing local-level activities (20%), and review/audit committees (14%).
- Community-level general meetings, associations of users (e.g. of water, gas) and street committees/neighborhood-level initiative groups are the local engagement types enjoying the highest degree of interest on the part of respondents (every second respondent expressed their interest in those types).
- 31% of the respondents stated their LPA did not organize any of the seven types of civil involvement activities on the list.
- 31% of the respondents are not interested in getting involved in community administration in any way.
- The main driver of interest in local-level involvement is pride of being useful for the community (71%). The other frequent drivers are the desire to contribute to improvement of local services (55%), the desire to express their opinions/needs (46%), and the desire to ensure that decisions are made with account of the needs and interests of the community (54%).
- The main reason invoked by respondents not interested in getting involved at local level is lacking/insufficient time (61%); the other frequently mentioned reasons were lacking confidence in the responsiveness of the authorities (36%), lacking desire to seek information about such events (29%), and the fact that such events are organized during their working hours (20%).

Main findings made in the qualitative component (FGDs)

Baseline for the level of knowledge

- According to the FGD participants, the term 'voting procedure' means a complex electoral process that includes the expression of your political preferences as well as the stages and institutions involved in the election. The voting procedure is considered an essential tool enabling people to express their will and to contribute to building of the country's leadership.
- Most FGD participants assessed their level of knowledge about the voting procedure as medium to advanced (3-5 points), while young rural residents considered themselves more knowledgeable in this respect.
- Respondents were mainly interested to know more details about practical aspects of voting, technicalities and fairness of the vote counting procedure, selection and legitimacy of representatives, as well as ways to detect possible illegal practices.
- Most respondents perceived the state system of the Republic of Moldova as parliamentary, but there were also some people with unclear understanding of this aspect, especially among persons with disabilities and Roma people. The respondents that demonstrated their correct understanding of the current electoral system were few in number.

- Overall, the received responses demonstrated vague understanding of the national-level election types, although most participants knew their options for the local, parliamentary and presidential elections. The CEC was considered to be the main entity responsible for organizing and managing elections at national level, while polling stations were associated with the electoral process at local level. Roma people were less knowledgeable in this regard.
- Regarding the differences in the organization of elections, some participants spoke of the number of voters, the number of ballot papers, the procedure for registering candidates and the duration of the electoral campaign, while others stated that there are no significant differences between those types of elections.
- Although most FGD participants did not face any significant problems in connection with voting during the last four years, some people faced restrictions because of living in a locality that was not their registered place of residence, persons with disabilities (especially those who use wheelchairs) faced challenges associated with poor polling station accessibility and inadequate infrastructure.
- Information and opinion-shaping
- Most respondents demonstrated some level of interest in getting informed and awareness of the need to be informed, driven by a desire to be properly informed and to understand in which direction Moldova is moving.
- Most respondents assessed their level of knowledge of social and political life in Moldova as moderate (fair), referring to gaps and ambiguities in the available information. Those with a lower self-assessed level of knowledge spoke of time constraints and general lack of interest or their desire to avoid negative news. Older people are better informed about events in Moldova.
- Most respondents prefer to discuss politics within the circle of persons close to them socially: family, other relatives, friends, neighbors and acquaintances. The frequency of such discussions depends on the context, the electoral period and the level of closeness with the person with whom one is having this conversation.
- Most common sources of information about the electoral process and the candidates are: TV, the Internet, social media, radio, newspapers, as well as discussions with family, friends and neighbors. However, respondents were expressing their dissatisfaction regarding accuracy of the information and concerns about possible manipulations during election campaigns.
- Participants apply differing approaches to form their opinions and attitudes towards events or problems in society, including contextual analysis and significant influence on the part of one's social interactions and used sources of information. Choosing this or that candidate, respondents are guided by the candidate's previous performance, electoral promises, attitude towards local-level or national-level issues, integrity and personality.
- The most preferred sources of information are television, the Internet and social media, with younger people demonstrating a pronounced preference for online sources. Participants clearly prefer digital content, such as podcasts, social media posts and video coverages. The languages in which information is consumed are Romanian and Russian - with an obvious preference for Romanian.
- Most respondents perceive the media as a tool to influence public opinion; they pointed out the risk of manipulations through provision of poor-quality information. Suggestions intended to improve media coverage of elections include ensuring objectivity, independence and truthfulness of information, application of fines for disinformation, and creating specialized agencies to monitor media coverage.
- Political issues of interest include integrating Roma people and persons with disabilities into workforce, responsibility and sanctioning of politicians, combating corruption, actions of ruling parties, payroll, and distribution of aid.

Awareness of electoral/political issues

- The participants demonstrated differing perceptions of democracy, focusing on the importance of human rights, correct and transparent functioning of the legislative system, freedom of expression, free and fair elections, and the power of the people. In contrast, some respondents had more pessimistic views and associated democracy with chaos.

- The survey participants named a range of developed economies as examples of stable democracies, with frequent mention of the United States, the UK, Germany and France. Other countries mentioned by some respondents, such as Romania, Belgium, Italy, the Czech Republic, Switzerland and the Nordic countries, reflect varied perceptions of democracy among the population.
- According to FGD participants, the Republic of Moldova lacks certain essential aspects required to be considered a stable democracy. The most significant of them are: the lack of fair justice and equality before the law, prosperous economy and motivating jobs, inclusive policies and adequate representation – as well as the need for a more up-to-the-date mentality and an upgraded social and political system.
- Two of the most urgent problems identified in the electoral field in Moldova (they coincide with the concerns expressed by the CEC) are: streamlining of the voting process by implementing electronic voting, and addressing the issues of vote falsification and buying, as evidenced by the need for effective and rigorous measures to prevent electoral fraud. Other issues mentioned as significant - such as having candidates in a number that is too high, and introducing more severe criteria for their registration - reflect concerns of the population regarding clarity of the electoral process.
- Respondents find some aspects of the electoral process difficult to understand. Such aspects include confusion about the requirement to present your identity card at each voting, understanding the voting process and the phenomenon of buying votes, checking data on the progress of elections.
- The survey identified limited knowledge by respondents of electoral processes in other countries. Thus, the participants believe it would be beneficial to implement electronic voting in Moldova's electoral system, considering it an essential aspect of any ideal electoral system.
- Participants believe that an ideal electoral system should include electronic voting, eliminate corruption practices, such as buying and selling votes, and prevent marginalization in the electoral process, especially in case of persons with disabilities. They also emphasized the importance of introducing mandatory voting for everyone with possible application of fines for non-participation in or evasion from voting.
- In addition to the implementation of electronic voting, some other changes are needed to achieve an ideal electoral system, such as making voting more accessible, introducing stricter CEC oversight over the entire electoral process, reviewing the process of registering candidates by implementing finer filters, introducing electronic vote counting, and the territorial reform needed to address certain electoral process issues.

Civil education

- Respondents attribute differing meanings to the term 'civic involvement', including participation and involvement in social and political life, contributing to policy-making, engaging in activities that contribute to social progress, participating in the electoral process through participation in electoral debates and voting, getting involved in volunteering activities other than to pursue some financial or political personal gain.
- Most participants have a positive view about the importance of civic involvement, as evidenced by the maximum score awarded on a scale of 1 to 5. Civic involvement drivers include feeling important, contributing to problem-solving, and aspirations for a better life.
- The main civic involvement types include volunteering within the framework of local development projects, participating in public manifestations to express dissatisfaction, voting in elections, donating money for a public cause, participating in electoral debates, cultural events and civic education. Some participants were actively involved in these civic activity types during the last 2 years.
- Although the level of satisfaction with the results of civic engagement is high, the relevant self-assessment exercise revealed that many respondents do not consider themselves to be civically active. This low self-assessment is explained by certain objective obstacles, such as personal and professional priorities, a negative perception in the society, and lack of confidence in the ability to generate real changes.
- The drivers for getting involved in addressing community issues are complex and include personal, community-related and socio-economic factors. Personal factors include the desire to change a

perception prevailing in society in respect of some marginalized group, getting inspired by an example of others, and the feeling that collective efforts are needed. Community-related factors include having a leader and a coordinating team in place, along with initiatives that take specific needs of the community into account. Socio-economic drivers for civic involvement include the desire to improve living standards, and recognizing the value of volunteering.

- Most participants had no experience of participating in civic education programs on elections. Participation in these programs seems to be targeted specifically at those directly involved in the electoral process, such as counsellors, observers or electoral committee members, to deliver them the required training on electoral procedures. Frequent reasons for non-participation are lack of interest and lack of information.
- Survey participants suggested a number of topics they believed to be useful in a civic education program on electoral processes. They included explaining the consequences of voting, the importance of voting and influence thereof on the political directions chosen by the country, details of how votes are counted and verified, how elections should be organized to ensure transparency, voting security (especially in case of electronic voting), and a possibility of applying sanctions for unsubstantiated non-voting.
- Confidence in electoral institutions and the electoral process
- Overall, the level of confidence in Moldovan electoral institutions is low, especially in case of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) and regional electoral councils; however, young people more often have a moderate or even high level of confidence in this respect. The expressed concerns focus on the lack of transparency, non-functioning of relevant institutions, and an apprehension that they engage in improper or dishonest practices.
- Factors significantly influencing the level of confidence in the electoral process in Moldova include failures on the part of electoral candidates to deliver on their promises, corrupt acts and lacking transparency.
- Although most respondents believed that the last elections were free and fair, there were concerns about the situations of having only one candidate in some localities, and critical attitudes to random voting, buying of votes and other adverse influences.
- Suggestions for improving the electoral process in the Republic of Moldova include reducing the number of candidates through the implementation of finer filters and criteria for their registration, as well as eliminating certain negative aspects in election campaigns to promote more respect to opponents in electoral speeches and provision of relevant information.
- Optimistic views regarding involvement in local-level decision-making are in contrast with skeptical or pessimistic views expressed regarding the ability of ordinary people to influence decision-making at national level. Perceived ways of contributing to local level decision-making include better knowledge of candidates, the possibility to attend local council meetings, and participation in protests.
- Most participants voted in the local elections on 5 November 2023. Those who did not vote invoked reasons of personal nature and poor logistics: lack of confidence in any of the registered candidates, being absent from the locality on the election day, or lack of information about the candidates.
- The freedom of expressing the respondents' political views is affected by their peers, level of confidence, similarity of their opinions to those of others, personal fears, and the level of confidence in their ability to publicly express their views.
- Some respondents (especially young people) criticized the electoral process in Moldova. In their view, incorrect practices extended to the exclusion of the Chance political party from the poll papers without a good reason, the ways of monitoring party funding sources that raised concerns, lack of details on funding, lacking transparency, banning some parties from running in the elections, and unequal distribution of funding among political parties. On the other hand, the electoral practices considered fair included banning parties with dubious funding sources, penalizing candidates for campaigning on the eve of the elections, and early presentation of preliminary election results, although some respondents criticized the latter practice.

Voter registration and participation

- Although a significant percentage of the FGD participants claimed they were well informed about the voter registration process, describing in detail the steps in the entire procedure from registration to voting, there are still some people with limited knowledge, especially among young urban residents and the elderly.
- People face various obstacles in the electoral process, including poor accessibility of polling stations, manipulations, errors in voter lists, and misinformation. There were some explicit comments regarding the lack of support tools for persons with disabilities.

Digital literacy

- The number of those who have some experience of using the digital platform cec.md is low; most participants - especially among the elderly and ethnic Roma - have never used such platforms. The reasons include lacking awareness of the existence of such platforms and preference for alternative sources of information. Obstacles to use of such platforms include some technical difficulties, such as having to find the required location on the map.
- Some practical measures were suggested to improve the level of digital literacy relevant for the elections, including handing out of information leaflets, intensifying the campaign to promote use of <http://www.cec.md/> the platform www.cec.md, making its use simpler by adding a list of localities, and providing training and assistance, especially to the elderly.

Representation

- Participants' views regarding representation of their interests at national and local level demonstrated that representation is perceived as more satisfactory at local level where direct impact on the community was acknowledged and dissatisfaction focused on issues such as corruption, poverty and insufficient opportunities.
- Disappointment was registered regarding insufficient representation at national level, with an emphasis on lacking representation for persons with disabilities and other minority groups. Respondents support the idea of broader representation for underrepresented groups, including persons with disabilities, but some participants believed that an emphasis should be on having relevant skills rather than belonging to a certain category.
- As regards involving the community in decision-making and planning, suggestions include attending local council meetings, using social media more actively to inform the community, recognizing and appreciating the contributions of community members, and ensuring a possibility for direct interaction for example by means of video conferences with the mayor.
- The main approaches practiced by town halls to involve the community in local-level decision-making are the traditional ones: holding community meetings, and placing the information on the town hall's website. There were complaints about the lack of continuous communication between national-level officials and ordinary people; such communication is believed to exist only in the run-up to the elections.
- The levels of satisfaction with consultations and involvement of the community in decision-making at local level differed depending on the extent of community involvement. There were positive opinions, giving examples of mayors responsive to community needs, and criticisms about a low level of community involvement and excessive highhandedness of town hall staff.
- Most respondents expressed their disappointment about the extent of town hall consultations with vulnerable groups and an opinion that the extent of such consultation depends largely on the mayor's personality.
- Participants preferred diverse ways of expressing their opinions regarding planning, management and decision-making in the community, such as participation in meetings open for the public, phone surveys, use of online platforms, and petitions.

Feedback channels

- The percentage of those who are aware of the existence of such channels (e.g. the CEC website or the hotline) to provide feedback on the electoral process is low.
- The suggestions made by respondents to improve communication and interaction between the institutions involved in the electoral process and ordinary people indicate the need for more effective and open communication channels. The suggestions included creating a separate website for complaints, organizing conferences, implementing mobile tools, making TV shows, holding local meetings, and conducting surveys. All those suggestions reflect a desire for higher transparency and involvement to improve the level of confidence in the electoral process.

STUDY DESIGN

Objectives and geographical coverage

Main objective of the assignment was to assess quantitatively and qualitatively the knowledge gaps and the level of civic engagement of the Moldovan population, with a focus on vulnerable groups.

Specific objectives – identify the answers to the following questions:

- Level of information and particular knowledge gaps regarding politics and current events;
- Issues and reasons that impact on the overall negative political perception;
- Level of civic engagement (prosocial civic values, active citizenship orientation, willingness to participate in civic and political activities, motivation to participate in decision-making process etc.);
- Level of stability and motivation of prosocial values in the society;
- Level of public knowledge regarding the voting procedure, as well as its information process and attitude towards civic education;
- Knowledge of population of the main civic engagement mechanisms and level of satisfaction with civic engagement levels in Moldova

The study was conducted at the national level, covering all regions, districts and representing both rural and urban areas, with the exception of the Transnistrian region. In total, the study included 160 localities.

Research methodology

The study included two research components: quantitative and qualitative.

A. Quantitative component

Research method: representative quantitative survey at the national level.

Research technique: face-to-face interview based on a structured questionnaire.

Interview method: CAPI – computer assisted personal interview. The data was collected through tablets connected online to the database server.

Target groups and sample size:

- general population 18 years old and more for the main sample of 1158 respondents with sampling error of $\pm 3\%$
- Roma ethnic group for one boost sample of 192 respondents
- people with disabilities for the second boost sample of 157 respondents

Total resulted sample size was 1507 respondents compared to 1500 planned.

Research tool: structured questionnaire with closed and open questions. The working language is Romanian and Russian, depending on the respondent's preferences. 74% of the questionnaires were completed in Romanian and 26% in Russian.

The questionnaire includes 7 sections:

- General questions / warm-up

- Level of information and specific knowledge gaps regarding politics and current events
- Level of civic engagement
- Level of stability and motivation of prosocial values in society
- Knowledge of the voting procedure
- Knowledge of the main mechanisms of civic engagement and the level of satisfaction
- Demographics

Average duration of the interview: 27 minutes.

Data collection period: October 27 – December 30, 2023.

Sample design:

- Stratified, based on two stratification criteria – 11 regions similar to the administrative territorial units and the type of residence (rural, urban and municipalities);
- semi-probabilistic – settlements will be selected based on a probabilistic scheme, while households will be randomly selected with step approach;
- with multiple stages – 4 types of sampling units (locality level, route level, household level and respondent level).

Reference population: totality of population and households existed in the surveyed country. The information for sample design was based on the most recent data available for Current evidence of population for 2022. No area of the population was excluded from the sample, except Transnistrian region.

Principles of replacement: closest 1-2 households to the primary selected household that was not possible to interview due to certain reasons. Each interviewer kept records of visits and refusals.

Quality control of collected data: Following the control of the quality of the work in the field, 94 questionnaires were rebutted, due to several reasons: 57 questionnaires had too short length, 25 questionnaires were fake interview and 12 interviews were with wrong selection methodology.

Participation rate: To carry out 1507 valid interviews, 4967 households / addresses have been visited. Thus, the gross rate of participation in the survey (resulting from the total number of contacted households / addresses) was 30%. The net survey participation rate (excluding households / respondents with non-contact status, non-residential addresses or uninhabited households) was 58%. 0.7% of total initiated interviews were abandoned by respondent at a certain time during interviews process.

Database weighting: The final database was weighted to reflect the official population distribution (according to 2023 data). The only variable used for the weighting procedure was age groups (18-34 years, 35-59 years and 55+ years). The structure of the natural sample obtained registered relatively significant differences at the level of age groups (under-representation of people aged 18-34 in relation to the official statistical data on January 1, 2023). The weighting coefficient used was the average value between the profile of the official statistics and the profile of the survey sample, to balance the de facto population in the country and exclude those involved in labor migration, on the one hand, and balance internal mobility – which is predominantly from villages to (large) cities (mainly capital of the country), especially for young people.

B. Qualitative component

The qualitative component was carried out based on the group discussion method. A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions and beliefs about a particular topic. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members, thus providing the opportunity to identify specific ideas and unforeseen issues.

Focus groups, their design and implementation are strictly related to the surveyed topic.

In total, 6 focus groups were organized with an average of 7.5 participants per group. 45 people participated in focus groups. The groups were structured according to the following categories:

FGD 1: youth from rural areas (7 participants)	FGD 4: elderly people (8)
FGD 2: youth from urban areas (8)	FGD 5: people with disabilities (8)
FGD 3: women (7)	FGD 6: Roma (7)

I. RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

Figure 1. Basic socio-demographic characteristics of the adult population sample

	Unweighted data		Data weighted to official statistics	
	1158	Percent	1158	Percent
TOTAL				
GENDER				
Male	539	46%	544	47%
Female	619	54%	614	53%
AGE GROUP				
18-34 years	209	18%	252	22%
35-59 years	486	42%	499	43%
60 years +	463	40%	407	35%
LEVEL OF EDUCATION				
Basic (up to grade 11)	385	33%	378	33%
Middle (high school, college, professional school)	508	44%	511	44%
High (university degree and higher)	261	23%	266	23%
TYPE OF LOCALITY				
Urban	515	44%	524	45%
Rural	643	56%	634	55%
DEVELOPMENT REGION				
North	321	28%	318	27%
Center	333	29%	336	29%
South	221	19%	216	19%
Chisinau	283	24%	287	25%
INCOME LEVEL *				
Low	627	54%	618	53%
Middle	341	29%	339	29%
High	89	8%	94	8%
Refusal	101	9%	107	10%
ETHNIC GROUP 1				
Moldovan / Romanian	955	82%	961	83%
Ukrainian	68	6%	64	6%
Russian	42	4%	40	3%
Other	92	8%	91	8%
EMPLOYMENT STATUS				
Employed	469	41%	493	43%
Unemployed	684	59%	660	57%
DISABILITY STATUS				
Person with disability	90	8%	89	8%
Person without disability	1068	92%	1069	92%

ETHNIC GROUP 2				
Ethnic majority (Moldovan / Romanian)	955	83%	961	83%
Ethnic minority (other ethnic groups)	202	17%	196	17%

* Low – up to 3000 MDL (minimum level of existence per person for 2023); Middle – 3001-6000 MDL; High – more than 6001 MDL per household member

Figure 2. Basic socio-demographic characteristics of Roma and the people with disabilities

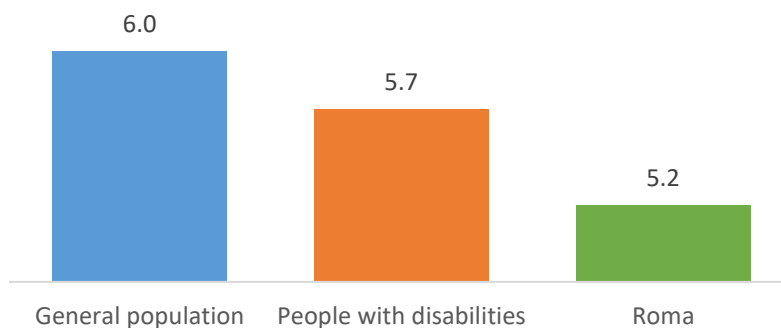
	People with disabilities		Roma ethnic group	
TOTAL	247	Percent	223	Percent
GENDER				
Male	124	50%	86	39%
Female	123	50%	137	61%
AGE GROUP				
18-34 years	32	13%	64	29%
35-59 years	96	39%	102	46%
60 years +	119	48%	57	25%
LEVEL OF EDUCATION				
Basic (up to grade 11)	110	44%	142	64%
Middle (high school, college, professional school)	101	41%	46	21%
High (university degree and higher)	26	11%	3	1%
Refusal	10	4%	32	14%
TYPE OF LOCALITY				
Urban	113	46%	142	64%
Rural	134	54%	81	36%
DEVELOPMENT REGION				
North	84	34%	145	65%
Center	67	27%	27	12%
South	44	18%	49	22%
Chisinau	52	21%	2	1%
INCOME LEVEL *				
Low	160	65%	186	83%
Middle	68	28%	17	8%
High	3	1%	2	1%
Refusal	16	6%	18	8%
ETHNIC GROUP 1				
Moldovan / Romanian	190	77%		
Ukrainian	13	5%		
Russian	13	5%		
Other	31	13%		
EMPLOYMENT STATUS				
Employed	34	14%	55	25%
Unemployed	211	86%	167	75%
DISABILITY STATUS				
Person with disability			15	7%

Person without disability			208	93%
ETHNIC GROUP 2				
Ethnic majority	190	77%		
Ethnic minority	57	23%		
TYPE OF DISABILITY				
Physical / motoric	117	47%		
Sensorial, visual	35	14%		
Visceral	95	39%		

II. LEVEL OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS REGARDING POLITICAL AND CURRENT EVENTS

2.1 Interest in social and political life in the Republic of Moldova

Figure 3. How interested are you in social and political life in the Republic of Moldova? (C1) Average value on a scale of 10 pts



The interest of the respondents in social and political life in the Republic of Moldova was measured on a scale of 10 points, where 1 = *Not interested at all* and 10 = *Very interested*. The findings demonstrated a moderate level of interest in the social-political life in their home country in the three surveyed categories of the respondents (Fig. 3): General population yielded an average score of 6 points, people with disabilities 5.7 points, and

Roma people 5.2 points.

Depending on the extent of their interest in social and political life in Moldova, the respondents can be subdivided into 3 groups:

- people with a low level of interest, i.e. with scores of 1 to 4 points (26%), especially people with a low level of education (37%) and income (29%), ethnic minorities (30%), people not active civically (34%), those who have low confidence in public institutions and media (28%),
- people with an average level of interest, i.e. with scores of 5 to 7 points (39%),
- people with a high level of interest, i.e. with scores of 8 to 10 points (35%), who are mainly people aged over 35 (37%), with a high level of education (49%) and income (46%), the ethnic majority (40%), civically active people (53%), those who have high confidence in public institutions and media (51%).

Thus, the percentage of people with a high level of interest exceeds rather significantly (by 9%) that of people with a low level of interest, while the difference is negative (-12%) in the case of Roma people. In the case of persons with disabilities, those 2 groups are of approximately the same size.

The correlation analysis of the responses received in the sample of people with disabilities shows that the interest in the social and political life of their home country is higher in case of men, persons aged over 60, residents of rural areas and the Central part of Moldova, with a medium or high level of education.

In the case of the Roma people, the interest was higher among men and respondents aged up to 59.

Degree of interest in social and political life in the Republic of Moldova among the participants in the qualitative survey (focus group discussions, FGDs)

The participants demonstrated varying degrees of interest in the social and political life of their home country. Most respondents are interested and aware of the need to be informed about what happens in their country; some people are even actively participating in meetings and protests. Some others demonstrated a more limited degree of interest that was focused only on matters with a direct impact on them personally. There are also some people who have no interest in social-political life in Moldova (FGD 2).

According to some respondents, the interest in social and political life of their home country arises from the need to be aware of what is happening in society to be properly informed, given the extent to which fakes are in circulation (FGD 5), or to be aware of the direction in which the country is heading.

I am interested; you need to know what happens in the country because you cannot be indifferent; unless you are interested, you cannot be properly informed. There are lots of fake news. (FGD 5)

I am interested - even to a major extent; I am interested in absolutely everything. I am active, I participate in meetings, protests. (FGD 4)

Everyone wants changes for the better and we are interested in what is happening in our country. (FGD 6)

Self-assessment of the level of awareness of social and political life in Moldova

The participants were assessed their degree of awareness of social and political life in Moldova differently, which reflects differences in their personal circumstances and environment. Overall, the degree of awareness is moderately high on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = Not at all and 5 = Very well. This assessment is substantiated by the belief that not all information is available and that some details are not clear or have even been concealed.

Few respondents perceived themselves as very well informed about social and political life in Moldova. Such persons dedicated much of their time to follow all events - especially in case of the elderly. On the other hand, those who gave their awareness 2 points argued they are not very knowledgeable about political events because of their busy work schedule and lack of free time. They also highlighted possible lack of interest and a tendency to avoid negative news. These respondents are predominantly Roma people.

I assess my awareness of social and political life in the country at 3 points because I know some things, but not very much... not all information is disclosed. Some things are concealed... There is too much misinformation. You don't know which TV station to watch because they present things differently and you don't know who to believe. (FGD 1, 5)

I have no time for that and I don't want to. There is an overabundance of negative and stressful news. (FGD 1)

I assess my awareness at 5, I watch TV round the clock. My mother follows political events round the clock. (FGD 5)

I assess my awareness at 2. I don't understand anything about politics, I'm always on the road, working. If I were interested in politics, I think I would have nothing to eat... I do not have enough skills to read or get on the Internet, and sometimes I don't even want to listen to the news, there is too much negative information. (FGD 6)

Frequency of discussions about political events

The responses received regarding frequency of discussions about political events demonstrated various attitudes and behaviors in place among the respondents. A significant number of the respondents avoid political discussions, perceiving them as harmful to their relationship with their friends or family. Some participants stated they discuss political events from time to time or before elections, while others have a reserved attitude towards political topics, saying that some opinions are hard to change and that this sphere

is generally believed to be 'dirty'. Some participants pointed out that the frequency of such discussions depends on the context or the interlocutor's personality (FGD 1, 2, 3, 4).

Therefore, attitudes towards political discussions varied considerably, ranging between keeping out of any political topics and active involvement in such discussion; the exact attitude can be influenced by diverse factors such as the context, approaching elections and the person(s) to whom you are speaking.

If you touch on political topics, you tend to degrade... On some occasions relatives quarreled on political grounds because some of them were supporting a certain [political] party and others a different one - and that is how quarrels started - and so you would be better off refraining from any political discussions... We rarely discuss politics because such discussions can lead to conflicts, especially if you discuss politics with someone who has a different opinion. That's why we avoid discussing politics. (FGD 1, 2, 5)

It is a topic discussed more often shortly before elections. (FGD 6)

It was found based on the received responses that people often prefer to discuss political events with those who are close to them socially. Thus, most respondents preferred to discuss politics with their family, relatives, friends, neighbors and acquaintances.

Mostly in the family; we can express our opinions at work, but without any in-depth discussions to avoid quarrels. (FGD 3)

Opinion and attitude drivers regarding social events or issues

The participants form their opinions and attitudes towards an event or issue in the society in various ways that include pro-active approach, contextual analysis and significant influence of social interactions and diverse information. Some form their opinion by analyzing various sources, including official ones (websites of relevant ministries, the website of the Moldovan government), while others participate in debates or are driven by particular facts and actions, which shows the impact thereof on general public (FGD 2, 3, 5). The opinions of friends and family as well as assessments and actions of responsible officials holding high positions are also significant drivers of personal opinions (FGD 1).

There were also some respondents who found it hard to explain how their opinions are formed (FGD 4, 6).

If it's about a charity event, it's one thing; if it's a political event, then it's somewhat more complicated - depending on the event and its purpose. For example, if it is a charity event for people with disabilities, you see it in a positive light; but on the other hand, there is some tragic event where human rights are violated. And this gives rise to a contradiction - it feels both good and bad. (FGD 5)

I believe each person looks up at some more influential authoritative people whose opinion matters. I find it hard to form a constant opinion; I analyze a lot [of information] first to form my personal opinion. I analyze what people from different spheres have said. I don't believe in 'shock' news. I prefer to analyze in order to form an opinion. (FGD 1)

Top three information channels: Reasons for their use and importance thereof as opinion-drivers

The responses regarding preferred sources of information reflected the range of information channels used by FGD participants. They get information mainly from watching TV (channels TV8, Moldova 1, PRO TV, Jurnal TV, TVR Moldova, Prime, TNT, Realitatea TV and Soroca TV). The Internet is another important source of information: on various news portals, such as *point.md*, *stiri.md*, *diez*, *unimedia*, as well as government websites and social media (TikTok, Instagram, Facebook). The participants stated furthermore that discussions with their friends, family, other relatives and acquaintances are an important source of information. It should be pointed out that young people more often source their information from the Internet and social media.

Less participants use newspapers (for example, Ziarul de garda) as a source of information.

These sources are preferred because of their accessibility and diversity of their content. The participants stated that all those sources contributed to shaping of their opinions and perceptions of as well as attitudes to social and political events and issues.

TV channels: TV8, Moldova 1, ProTV, Jurnal TV, TVR Moldova, Soroca TV; radio stations: FM radio, Noroc radio, Internet – various websites such as point.md; social media: TikTok, Instagram, Facebook... newspapers: Ziarul de garda; discussions with friends, family, relatives. (All FGDs)

Next to the above-mentioned sources, the participants also mentioned certain international channels (such as EuroNews) and internationally known personalities (such as Yury Shvets and Alexander Nevzorov) among their opinion drivers.

Information content types of interest for the respondents

The survey participants obviously preferred digital content, such as podcasts, posts in social media, and videos. These content types are perceived as relevant, authentic and suitable for reflecting reality. In addition, respondents demonstrated their significant interest in news bulletins and interviews, believing them to provide a more detailed and in-depth overview of the issues. It was further noted that respondents tend to like infographics, articles and surveys.

As regards traditional sources of information, there is still some interest in news bulletins on the radio as well as on TV. While some respondents consider TV shows boring, some others like them - especially shows like *Black Box* [Cutia Neagra] with Mariana Rata and *Light* [Lumina].

I think those who use Internet follow podcasts and social media posts. (FGD 5)

I like podcasts very much, they are now in trend - news, voxes... I think they reflect reality quite a lot and fairly truly... all issues are covered in Lorena Bogza's show... Composition and statistics make them more credible for me. (FGD 3)

News bulletins and interviews. Interviews present the matter in more detail, more in-depth. Shows have already become boring. (FGD 6)

If we are talking about ratings, I prefer infographics. (FGD 1)

Language of the information

Most respondents stated they consume information in the media both in Romanian and in Russian with an obvious preference for Romanian. There is also some interest in media content in Romany that reflects the linguistic identity of Roma people. Few people consume information in other languages, including in English or in Ukrainian.

I watch and listen both in Romanian and in Russian, but I prefer Romanian. (All FGDs)

I prefer [content] in my native language, Romany. (FGD 6)

Perceptions of the political issues, aspects or current events about which more information is desired

The responses received regarding the political issues, aspects or current events about which the respondents would like to know more or think they should be discussed in more detail identified a variety of concerns and interests, including:

- Employment: The participants are interested to know more about integration of Roma people and persons with disabilities into workforce, with a focus on discrepancies between current law and the actual labor market practices (FGD 5, 6).
- Making politicians responsible. The interest is directed here towards sanctioning of those who do not fulfill their promises, and combating corruption among them (FGD 1, 2).
- Actions taken by parties in power: There is interest in information on actions taken by political parties while in power.

- Payroll and allocation of assistance aid. This concerns payroll in various areas, and approaches to allocation of aid in difficult times, with focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups.

I am interested to know more about employment of people with disabilities. Law says that we must be employed, but in real life it is not respected, and you cannot go to court. (FGD 5)

In what way can we kick out those who have not kept their promises? (FGD 5)

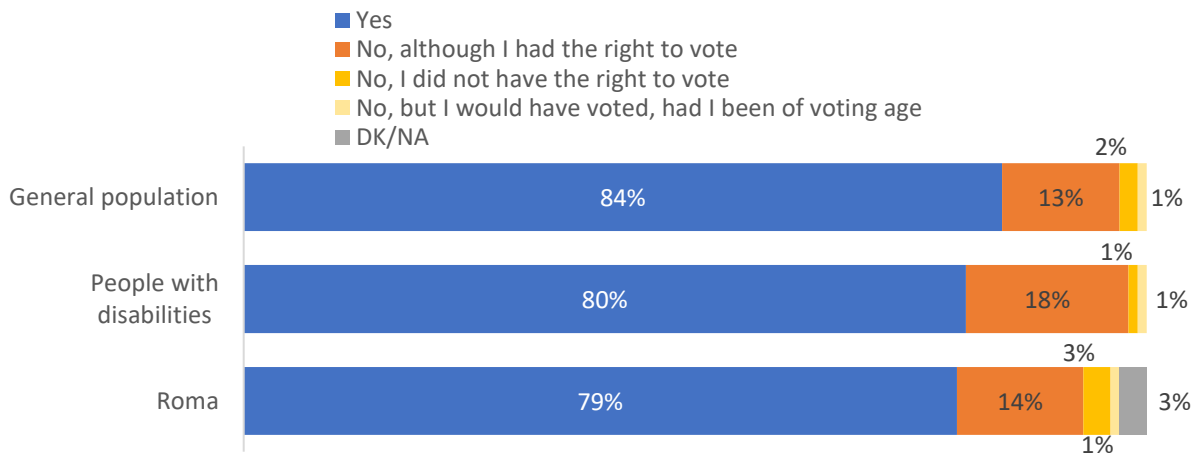
Regarding all politicians - what they are doing, what they have done during their 4 or 5 years in the parliament, what projects they have implemented. (FGD 4)

The issue of jobs for Roma people to prevent our migration. (FGD 6)

2.2 Voting in elections

The survey found that 8 out of 10 surveyed respondents voted in the parliamentary elections on 11 July 2021, without any statistically significant differences in the three categories of the respondents (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. Did you vote in the last parliamentary elections on 11 July 2021? (C5)

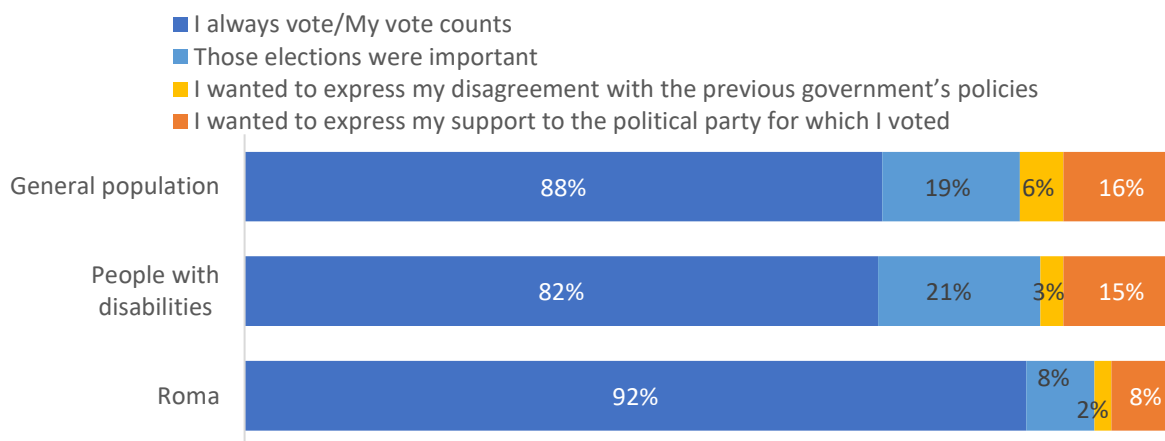


Another 3% didn't vote because they were not yet of voting age at the time of those elections.

A higher rate of non-voters in the elections was found among young people (21%), residents of the Chisinau municipality (19%), ethnic Russians (28%), persons with a low level of interest in social and political life in their country (21%).

In the case of persons with disabilities, every fifth person with a physical or sensory disability did not vote in the elections, as compared to 12% in case of persons with a visceral disability.

Figure 5. Why did you vote in [the parliamentary elections on 11 July 2021]? / Why would you have voted in [the parliamentary elections on 11 July 2021]? (C6) *Multiple response*



Sample: 975/201/180 respondents who voted in the parliamentary elections on 11 July 2021 - or would have voted if they had been of voting age at that time

The main reason that drove people to vote in the elections is their belief that their vote counts - and that is why they vote in all elections (Fig. 5). This reason was given less frequently by persons with disabilities.

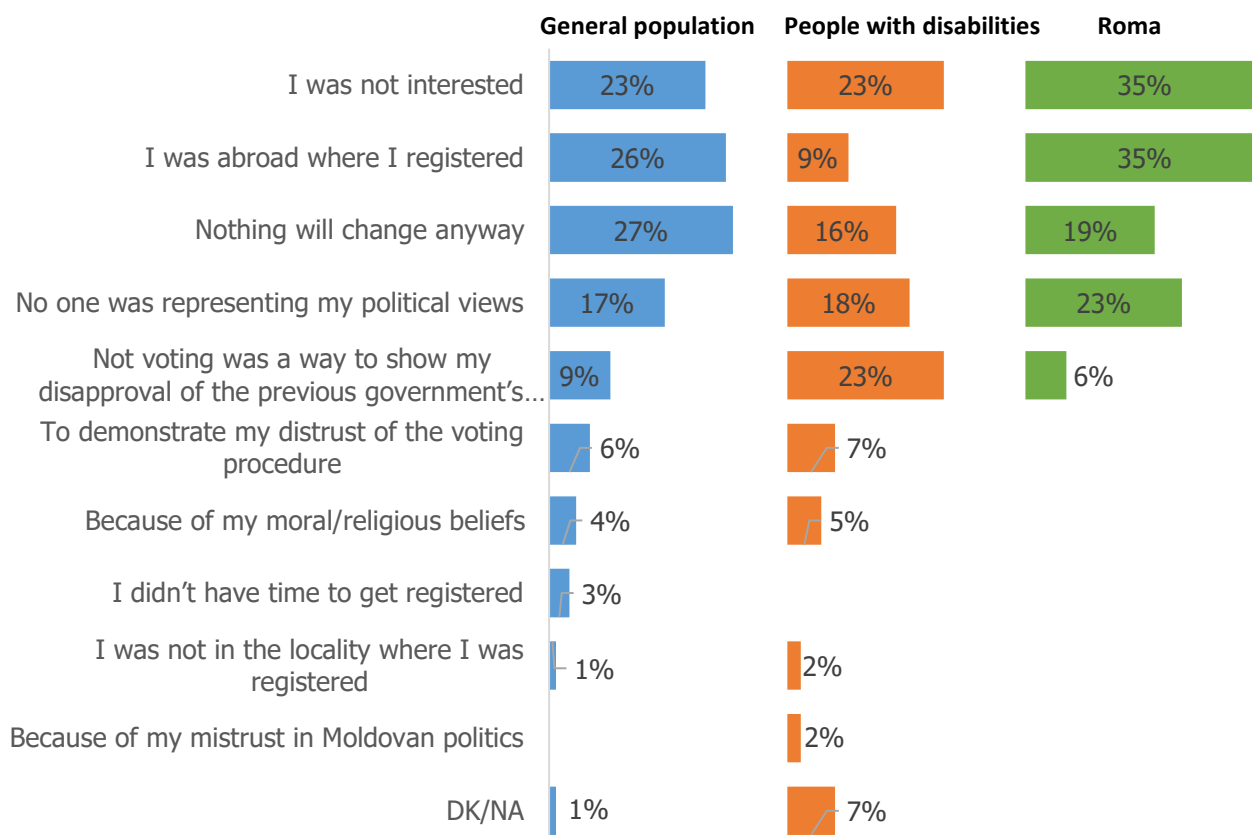
The two other less frequent reasons, which are however significant in terms of statistics are the importance of the most recent parliamentary elections (especially for the general public and persons with disabilities) and the desire to express their support to their favorite political party (especially in case of the general public and persons with disabilities). The importance of the last parliamentary elections was mentioned more often by people with a high level of education and residents of the Northern part of Moldova and Chisinau.

Disagreement with the policies of the previous government was mentioned as their voting driver by an insignificant percentage of the respondents.

The top 3 reasons for non-voting in the elections (mentioned by approximately similar percentages of the respondents) are: skepticism about the possibility of changes for the better in the policies of those in power, being outside Moldova on the day of the elections, and lack of interest (Fig. 6). Another important reason mentioned by 17% of non-voters, especially among Roma people, was lack of time for registration in the register of voters.

In the case of persons with disabilities, an important reason is their state of health or non-availability of a mobile ballot box (in case of 23% of those who did not vote).

Figure 6. What was the reason for your NOT voting in [the parliamentary elections on 11 July 2021]? (C7) *Multiple response*

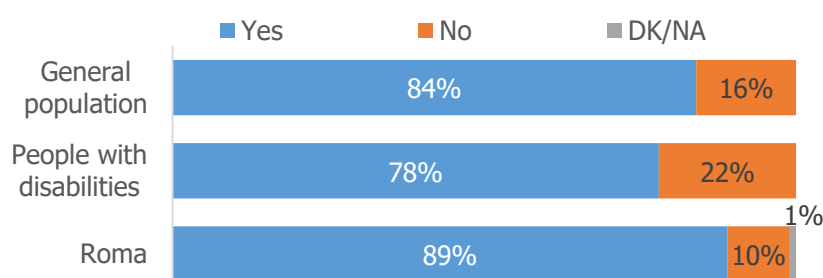


Sample: 147/44/31 respondents who did not vote in the parliamentary elections on 11 July 2021

The weight of respondents who voted in the last local general elections on 5 November 2023 is similar with the percentage of those who voted in the last parliamentary elections (Fig. 7).

The percentage of non-voters was higher among young people (28%), urban residents (22%), residents of the Chisinau municipality (30%), ethnic Ukrainians and Russians, persons with a low level of interest in social and political life, civically passive respondents, and persons with a low level of confidence in state institutions and media.

Figure 7. Do you intend to vote / Did you vote in the general local elections on 5 November 2023? (C8)



Most participants in focus group discussions (FGD) also confirmed that they had participated in the local elections on 5 November 2023. However, there were also some respondents who stated they had not voted. The reasons invoked by them to explain why they had or had not voted in the elections varied and included certain subjective factors such as

their confidence or lack of confidence in the electoral candidates, as well as logistical or their personal availability factors. Some respondents stated they had not voted because of the lack of confidence in the electoral candidates, some of whom were considered 'very toxic' (FGD 1).

Other factors that led to non-participation of some respondents in the elections included their absence on the election day from the locality where they were registered as voters, lack of a registered residence address in Chisinau, insufficient information about the candidates, or being at work on the election day. Women and the elderly were found to be the most active groups in terms of voting in the elections.

I did not [vote] because I do not confide anyone... On that day I was not in the locality [where I am registered as a voter]. (FGD 5)

I did not have a registered residence address in Chisinau... I did not know sufficiently much about the candidates... I had to choose between two very toxic personalities. (FGD 1)

Most FGD participants stated they had not encountered any difficulties or problems when they had been voting in the elections during the last four years. However, a young rural resident pointed to an issue with residence-related restrictions that had prevented him from voting in the national elections.

Judging by the experiences of the participants, despite the invitation to request a mobile poll box in order to vote at home, access to polling stations and adequate infrastructure are still significant challenges for people with disabilities, especially those using wheelchairs.

I haven't had any issues... I am a disabled person and so they offered to bring a mobile poll box to my place, but I refused. (FGD 5)

I could not vote in the presidential elections because I was in Chisinau at that time, while my registered residence is in the village of Pelinia, Drochia region. I think there should be a possibility to simplify things so that we could vote without filing a statement. (FGD 1)

Speaking of accessibility, it's a complicated issue. Their staircase steps are very high and there is no ramp, only a banister... If there are ramps somewhere, they have only been made for the sake of appearance. For example, there are two train tracks on the way, and I am not able to cross them. It is always difficult for those who use a wheelchair. Adequate infrastructure is lacking. (FGD 5)

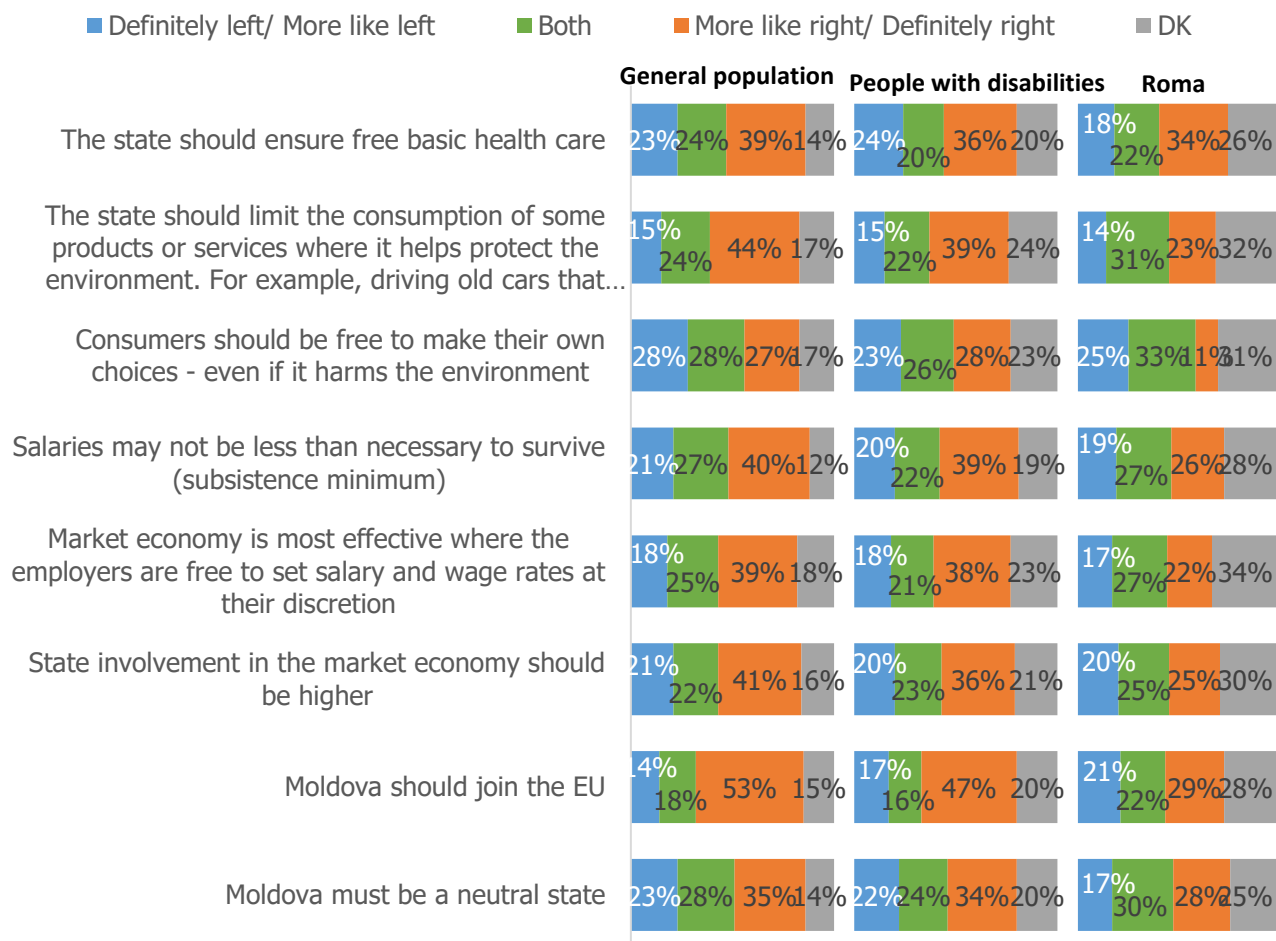
2.3 Level of knowledge about the left and the right political ideologies

Next, the survey assessed the respondents' understanding of the meaning and the differences between the left and the right political views by asking them to assign a number of statements to the corresponding political ideology.

The findings presented in Fig. 8 make it possible to conclude that the general public as well as persons with disabilities and Roma people are not aware in most cases of the exact differences between the left and the right ideology:

- Statements 1, 2, 4 and 6 are true of the leftist ideology, but most respondents believed they are true of the right-wing doctrine or both ones.
- Statements 3 and 5 are true of the right-wing ideology, but only 27% could correctly allocate Statement 3 and 39% - Statement 5; all other respondents (i.e. the majority) either allocated them erroneously or found it hard to answer (especially Roma people).
- The last two statements are equally true of both doctrines, but the prevailing opinion was that they are true of right-wing views, especially regarding integration in the EU.

Figure 8. When people speak of their political beliefs, they often speak of the *left* and the *right*. In your opinion, which position in the following list is closest to the left or to the right? (C11)



An in-depth analysis found that the respondents have slightly better knowledge of the right-wing doctrine: 42% correctly identified at least one statement true of the right-wing ideology, as compared to 35% who correctly identified at least one statement true of the left-wing doctrine and at least one statement (out of the two offered) equally true of both doctrines.

The calculated overall percentages show that 18% of the respondents could not correctly attribute any of the eight offered statements and not a single respondent correctly attributed all eight statements.

The percentages of respondents who did not correctly associate any statement were higher in the groups of low-educated people (24%), residents of the Chisinau municipality (23%), and respondents with a low level of interest in social and political life in Moldova (27%).

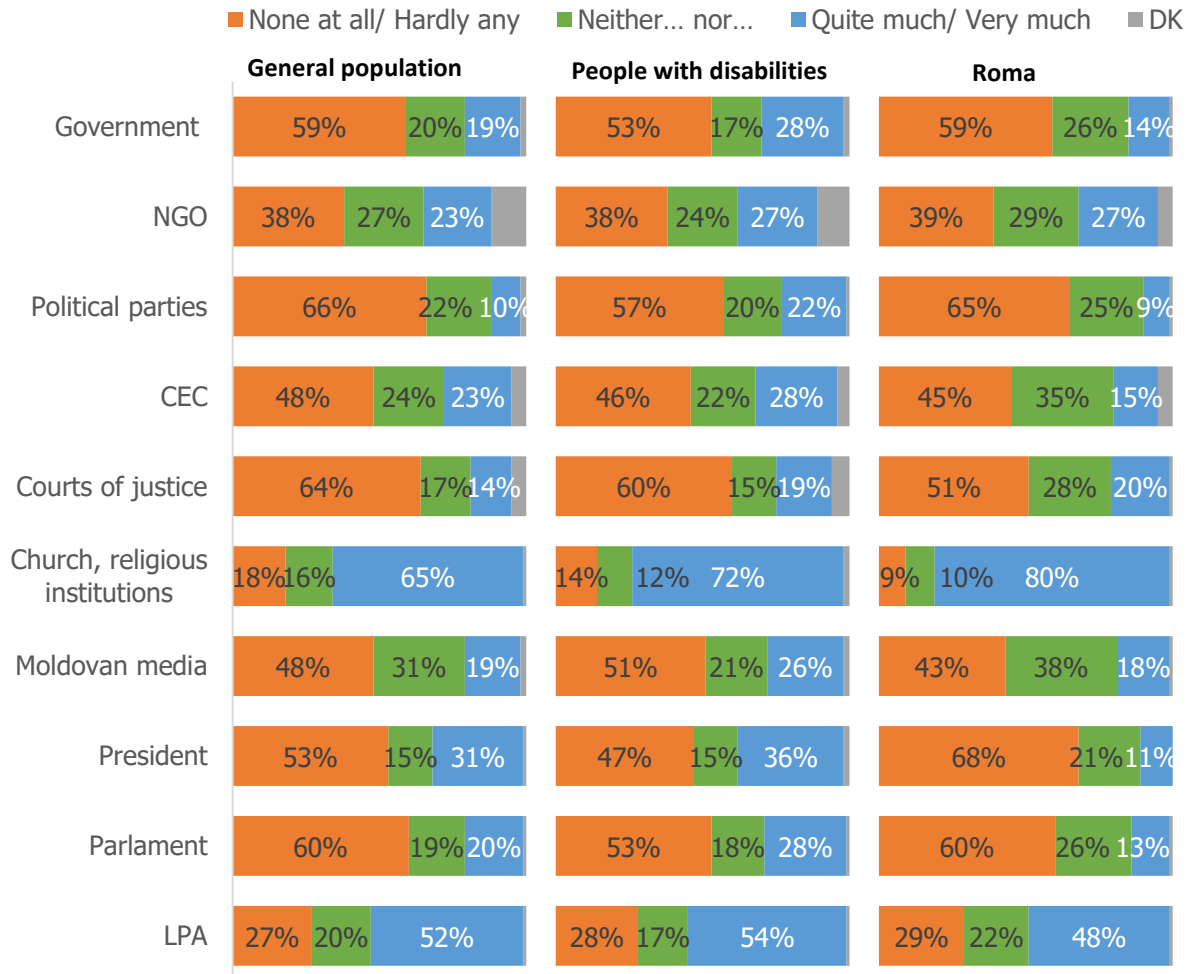
The statements true of the left-wing ideology were attributed wrongly more frequently by people with a low level of education (69%), rural residents (70%), residents of the Central part of Moldova (82%), the ethnic majority (70% versus 36% in case of ethnic minorities).

On the other hand, the statements true of the right-wing doctrine were attributed wrongly more often by people with a low level of education (58%), urban residents (55%), residents of the South (72%), ethnic minorities (73% versus 48% in case of the ethnic majority).

2.4 The level of confidence in the main state institutions

The institutions with the lowest level of confidence are political parties (66%), courts (64%), the Parliament (60%) and the Government (59%) (Fig. 9.1).

Figure 9.1. How much confidence do you have in the following institutions on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = None at all and 5 = Very much? (C12)



There are only two institutions at the opposite end, enjoying a significantly higher level of confidence than the other assessed institutions: This is the Church (65%), and local public administrations (52%).

Significant differences among the three surveyed respondent categories in the levels of their confidence in certain surveyed institutions were registered in respect of religious institutions – the level of confidence therein is higher among Roma people (80%) and persons with disabilities (72%); in case of courts, the level of mistrust among Roma people is significantly lower (51%) while in case of the President – the level of mistrust among Roma people is significantly higher (68%).

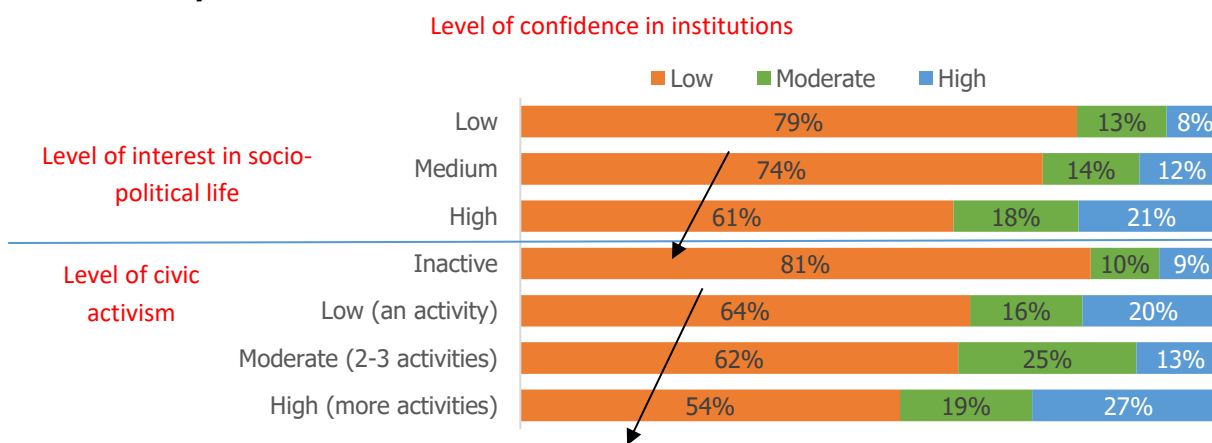
Overall, the portion of respondents who do not confide in the assessed institutions is higher than the portion of those who confide in eight out of the ten assessed institutions. Moreover, this difference is very significant: two-fold (in the case of NGOs and CEC) to six-fold (in the case of political parties).

Depending on their general level of confidence in the ten assessed institutions, the respondents were subdivided into 3 groups:

- persons with low confidence: They confide maximum in three out of the ten assessed institutions (71% among general public / 65% among persons with disabilities / 77% among Roma people),
- persons with a medium/moderate level of confidence: They confide in four or five out of the ten assessed institutions (15% / 10% / 12%),
- persons with a high level of confidence: They confide in six or more of the assessed institutions (14% / 25% / 12%).

Persons with a low level of confidence are mostly from the South (78%) and the North (76%) of Moldova, with a low level of education and income (75%), ethnic minorities (88%). Another finding made by the survey is that the level of confidence in main institutions is in sync with the level of interest in social and political life in the home country and with the level of civic activity: the higher the interest in social and political life and the level of civic activity, the higher is the level of confidence in main institutions.

Figure 9.2. Correlation between the level of interest in social and political life and the level of civic activity with the level of confidence in main institutions



The perceived level of confidence in the electoral institutions in Moldova among the participants in the qualitative survey

Overall, the level of the participants' confidence in Moldovan electoral institutions, including the CEC and the district-level electoral committees, is low. However, when rated on a scale of 1 to 5, young people registered a moderate to even high level of confidence, awarding higher scores that ranged between 2.5 and 4.5. In contrast, other respondents gave very low scores ranging from 1 to 3; expressing their distrust in the way these institutions are functioning; this attitude was especially pronounced among persons with disabilities. The elderly were very skeptical for the most part, choosing the option "I have no confidence at all". However, some of them mentioned an increase in their level of confidence over time, stating that they are now more confident than in prior years.

I give 1 with reservations, because we don't trust them. They are not working well. (FGD 5)

The participants' arguments regarding their level of confidence focused on issues such as lacking or insufficient transparency, inadequate operation of the assessed institutions, and the perception that their integrity is insufficiently high.

I believe they deserve some trust, but still I have no full confidence where they are concerned – they are not transparent enough. I give 4. There has been a lot of changes, and the elections are fairly honest. (FGD 1, 2)

I used to have more reservations [about them], but now I have more confidence. (FGD 3, 4)

In addition, some responses showed that the level of confidence in electoral institutions can vary depending on local context and the respondent's personal experience.

We are low-skilled workers, Gypsies, ordinary people - and how do we know who to trust?... In Soroca we trust our committee - because we know them. (FGD 6)

Factors affecting the level of confidence in the electoral process

Significant factors affecting the level of confidence in the electoral process include a history of electoral candidates coming up short on their promises, corruption and low transparency. The received responses show that politicians' actions and the level of confidence in the electoral process are directly connected. More exactly, the level of confidence falls where politicians do not honor their commitments. Corruption was also mentioned as a negative factor diminishing confidence in the electoral process. Several respondents expressed their concern about the transparency and speed with which the election results are published as well as dissatisfaction with the way the members are chosen for the electoral committees, mentioning misinformation and practices that contradict democratic principles. There are more young people from rural areas, women and the elderly in this group of respondents.

Other factors that determine one's confidence in the electoral process also include the influence of opinions expressed by one's parents and teachers, the changes initiated in the electoral process, and the existence of a certain percentage of error considered inevitable.

Politicians coming up short of their promises. Corruption. (FGD 5)

Their transparency level, the speed with which the results are published. The fairness of the electoral process... We do not know how members are chosen to the electoral committee... Misinformation - they do not tell us everything... Some things are done that are far from being democratic. (FGD 1, 3, 4)

Perceived freedom and fairness of the recent elections in the Republic of Moldova

Perceptions expressed by the respondents regarding freedom and fairness of the recent elections in Moldova demonstrated divergences of opinions. However, most respondents believed that the elections were free and fair, with some differences in different localities. One of the aspects mentioned by them is that there was only one candidate. They said that in some localities there was only one candidate on the list, leading to limited options in some localities and thus limiting the voters' options.

There are, however, critical perceptions expressed by some other respondents who believe that the elections were free but not necessarily fair. The concerns expressed by the respondents included random (uninformed) voting, purchase of votes, and other types of adverse influence on the electoral process (FGD 1, 3). Some respondents also mentioned impediments created to the *Chance* political party, which was removed from ballot lists.

That depends on the locality. There were some villages where there was only one candidate - and who else can you choose in this case? But I think they were fair and free in general. (FGD 1, 5)
Free - yes, fair - less so. We have been talking here that we need to vote in an informed way. In our locality many people voted randomly. Probably everyone knows that votes are bought... there are deviations, influencing - lots of that. (FGD 1, 3)

Obstacles were created for some candidates ... in Comrat, the CHANCE party was removed from the voting list on the very day of the election. (FGD 3)

Of special note is the opinion expressed regarding Soroca, where the elections were not free according to a certain respondent, who elaborated that local voters' decisions were strongly influenced by the local Roma baron (king).

No, in my opinion they were not particularly free in Soroca. People's decisions for whom to vote are greatly influenced by the baron. (FGD 6)

Perceptions of a fair electoral process in Moldova

The respondents made some suggestions regarding issues a fair electoral process in Moldova should address, such as:

- To reduce the number of candidates because of the confusion arising from their multitude; this can be done by introducing filters when registering candidates or parties. These filters should be based on clear criteria such as known facts about the candidate/party, their political history, experience and education, even IQ test results (FGD 2).
- To exclude negative aspects from election campaigns, promoting mutual respect and providing relevant information (FGD 1).
-

It should be mentioned that quite many respondents were unable to make any suggestions in this regard.

The lists of candidates should be reduced - there are so many of them that you get confused, especially where you do not know anything about them. There should be some filters at registration of individuals or parties... they are to be selected based on known facts... such as studies in political science, experience, maybe even IQ test results - to filter random persons away... only persons with some experience of civic involvement should be admitted as independent candidates. (FGD 2)

Respondents' comments regarding correct and incorrect aspects of the electoral process in Moldova

When speaking of the electoral process aspects in Moldova considered correct and incorrect, respondents – and especially young people - made multiple critical comments, mentioning the following among the aspects considered incorrect:

- exclusion of the Chance party from the ballot lists on the eve of the elections without giving any good reasons (an injustice),
- criticisms of the current arrangements for monitoring party funding sources; concerns were expressed (especially by young people) about the fairness of this process and violations of laws and regulations on elections,
- lacking details regarding matters such as funding, violations and transparency of the electoral process,
- no parties should be prohibited from running in elections in a democratic state,
- unequal distribution of funds among political parties; it was proposed that they be financed exclusively from the state budget,
- avoiding exclusion of candidates from the electoral race for political reasons (FGD 2).

Removing Shor's party Chance from the ballot lists was not fair, they had no right to do so on the eve of the elections and without giving any valid reasons. (FGD 2, 3, 5)

It is good that financing of political parties is monitored, but they do not do this in an honest and correct way... party funding sources should be analyzed more thoroughly. (FGD 1, 2, 6)

They violate rules, laws on the electoral process... They vilify other parties to maintain own position. (FGD 2)

People are not informed in detail about all aspects of the electoral process – such as financing, violations, lack of communication, transparency. (FGD 3) In a democratic state, you cannot ban certain parties from running in elections. (FGD 1)

On the other hand, respondents believed the following aspects of the electoral process in Moldova to be correct:

- Banning parties with dubious funding sources from running in elections,
- Banning vilification of opponents, and penalizing candidates for campaigning on the eve of the election day.

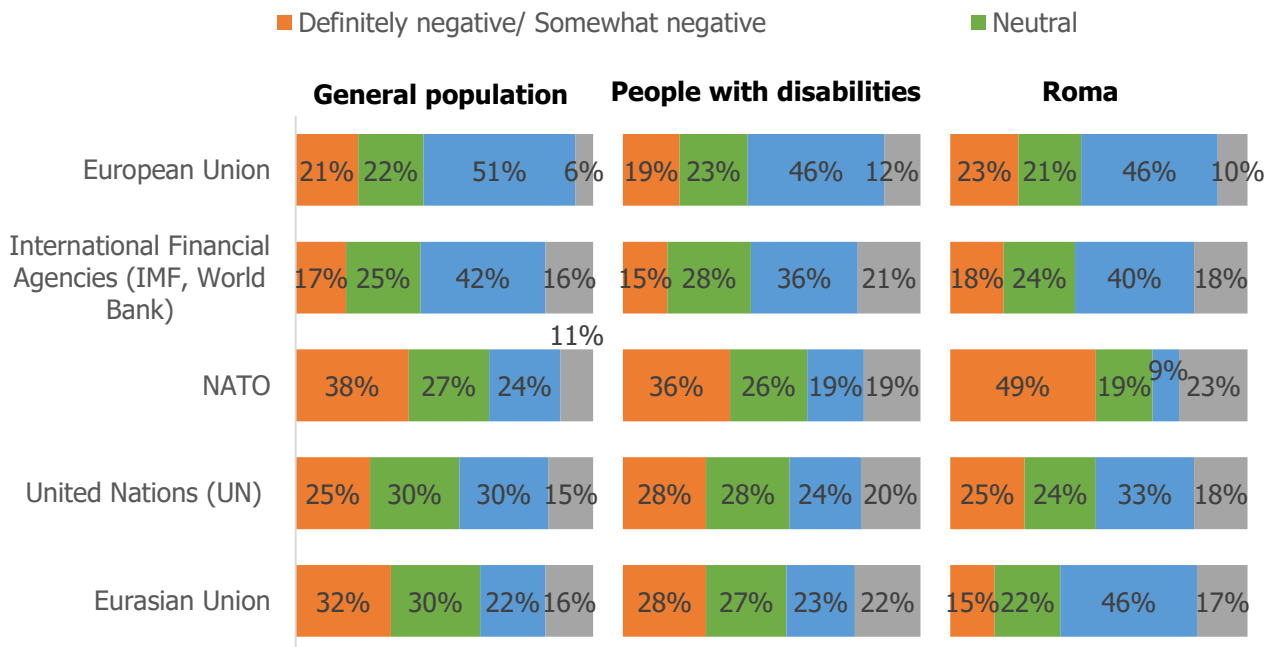
Respondents also approved presentation of preliminary results and monitoring of party funding. There were some respondents however who believed that presentation of preliminary election results is not correct.

I think it is correct to present preliminary results, because the likelihood of something changing at the last moment is low. (FGD 3, 5)

2.5 Perceptions of the role of international agencies in the Republic of Moldova

Next, the survey researched people’s perceptions of the role played by five (types of) international agencies in the Republic of Moldova (Fig. 10).

Figure 10. What role do you think the following international agencies play in the Republic of Moldova? (C13)



The predominantly positive opinion (the portion of the respondents expressing it was 2.5-fold of the percentage of respondents with a negative attitude) was expressed concerning the European Union (51%) and financial agencies such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (42%), without any statistically significant deviations in the three categories of the respondents. The perception that the European Union plays a negative role in the Republic of Moldova was found more often among respondents from the South of Moldova (especially from Gagauzia) and ethnic minorities (especially the Gagauz).

At the opposite pole is NATO, which has a predominantly negative image: 38% believe that NATO plays a negative role in Moldova, as compared to 24% expressing a positive opinion and 27% with a neutral opinion. The percentage of negative opinions was significantly higher in case of Roma people (49%). Regarding the dependence on other socio-demographic categories, it was found that the negative perception of NATO's role was more frequent among persons with a low or medium level of education, ethnic minorities (two-fold of that among the ethnic majority representatives).

Another agency believed (by 32% of the respondents) to exercise a predominantly negative influence is the Eurasian Union; this opinion prevailed especially among highly educated people, residents of Chisinau and the Central part of Moldova, the ethnic majority, persons with a high level of interest in social and political life, civically active respondents, persons with a medium or high level of confidence in Moldova's main institutions.

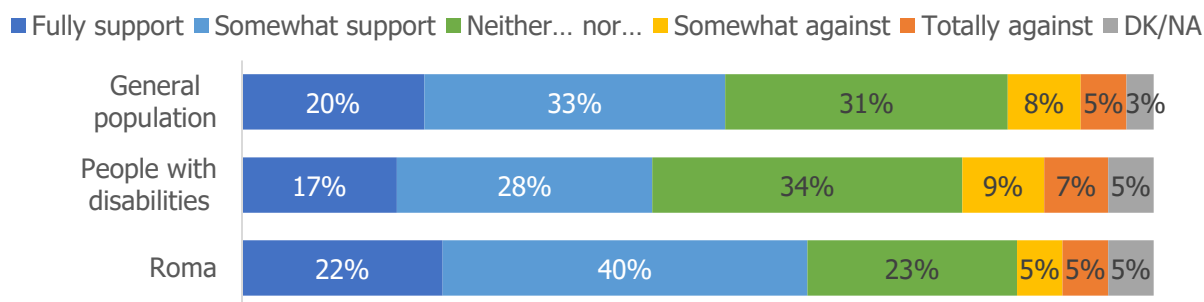
As regards the role played by the UN, the respondents were divided in three groups of approximately the same size in terms of percentages.

Another finding is that, on an average, every sixth respondent in the general public category and every fifth respondent among persons with disabilities and Roma people found it hard to assess the role of the agencies on the list (excepting the European Union). This is especially true in case of women, persons with a low level of education, ethnic Gagauz, people with a low level of interest in social and political life in Moldova, civically passive people, and respondents with low confidence in state institutions.

2.6 Perceptions of democracy

Every second adult respondent in the overall sample supported (to a greater or a lesser extent) the idea that democracy is the most appropriate state system for Moldova (Fig. 11), as compared to 13% who are against democracy and 31% who have a neutral perception.

Figure 11. What do you think about the idea that democracy is the most appropriate system of government for the Republic of Moldova? (C14)



However, a critical analysis has revealed that only one in every five adult Moldovans is a strong supporter of the idea of democracy. This category mainly includes people with a high level of education, urban residents, residents of the South of Moldova, people with a medium or high level of income, those highly interested in social and political life, civically active people, respondents with a high level of confidence in state institutions and the media. In this respect the survey found no statistically significant differences depending on the respondent's gender or age.

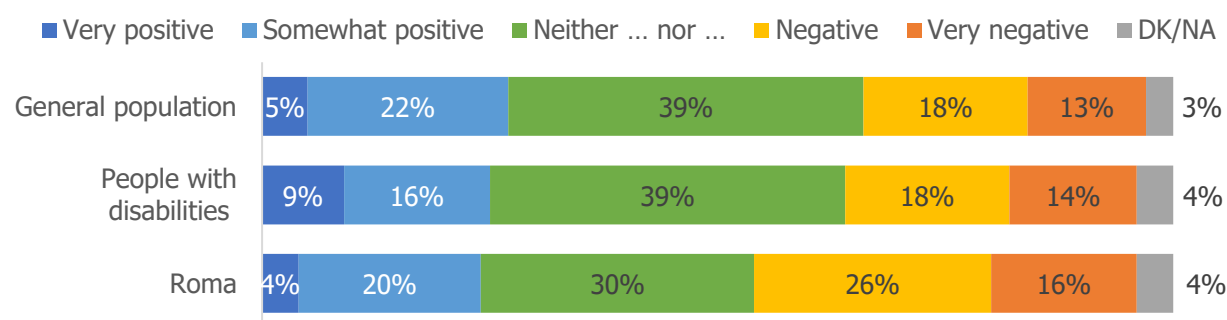
Respondents with a neutral attitude towards democracy are mostly young people (39%) and residents of the Central part of Moldova (40%).

Regarding the three categories of respondents, it was found that positive perceptions of democracy are more frequent among Roma people (62%) and significantly less frequent among persons with disabilities (45%).

Overall, the share of general public respondents with a positive attitude towards democracy is four-fold of respondents with a negative attitude in this category, three-fold among persons with disabilities and six-fold among Roma people.

When requested to assess the actual ways democracy is practiced in Moldova at present, most respondents took a neutral position (39%), as compared to 31% with a negative assessment and only 27% with a positive assessment (Fig. 12). Those percentages are similar among persons with disabilities, while respondents with negative attitudes prevailed among Roma people (42%).

Figure 12. How would you rate the way democracy is currently practiced in the Republic of Moldova? (C15)



The correlations analysis found that positive perceptions are in sync with the level of interest in social and political life (14% among respondents with a low level of interest and 36% among those with a high level of interest), the level of civic activity (respectively 18% and 46%) and the level of confidence in state institutions (16% and 56% respectively).

Knowledge of state system forms in general and in Moldova (by the FGD participants)

The level of knowledge of diverse state system forms demonstrated by the FGD participants varied within a broad range. They mentioned presidential and parliamentary, semi-presidential and semi-parliamentary state systems, a republic, absolute and constitutional or parliamentary monarchies.

Presidential, parliamentary. (All FGDs)

Semi-presidential and semi-parliamentary. (FGD 1)

Absolute, constitutional or parliamentary monarchy... a republic. (FGD 2)

However, the responses given by some participants demonstrated their questionable understanding of the term *state system*. This understanding should extend beyond being able to recount state system forms in general – they should also be able to distinguish between the scope of authority of diverse components thereof, such as executive and parliamentary authority. For example, a certain participant even included the term *town hall* in this definition (FGD 5), while another one mentioned *local public administration* (FGD 3).

Governmental and non-governmental... Executive and parliamentary... Town hall... (FGD 5)

Most respondents stated that the parliamentary system was the state system in the Republic of Moldova. This response was more frequent in the focus groups composed of young people, women and the elderly.

On the other hand, the responses of some respondents (FGD 5, 6) demonstrated ambiguous understanding of the state system in the Republic of Moldova: They spoke of the presidential system as well as the parliamentary system, which is an indication of their questionable understanding of how their country is governed and limited awareness of the state structure.

Respondents' answers regarding the current electoral system in Moldova showed that not all FGD participants are clear about whether it is a majoritarian, mixed or pro rata representation one. Thus, only some responses demonstrated their correct understanding of the current electoral system in the Republic of Moldova.

General perceptions and associations of democracy

The FGD participants demonstrated their varying perceptions of democracy, highlighting some of its specific characteristics and aspects, such as the guarantee of individual human rights (the right to opinion, vote, health, rest and leisure) and correct and transparent functioning of the legislative system. Thus, some people - especially young people and women - associate democracy with freedom of expression and freedom of choice, while others focus on free and fair elections, mention the importance of honoring their promises by electoral candidates, and consider this aspect an integral component of democracy. Some respondents - especially young people - believe that democracy means significance of power for the people, while others emphasize features such as transparency and fair representation.

There were also some opinions that democracy means freedom to act at one's discretion if legal limitations are respected (FGD 5).

In my opinion, democracy means doing what you want as long as this is legal... Democracy means respecting all rights: the right of expression, the right to vote, the right to healthcare, the right to play, the copyright... Democracy means correct functioning of the legislative system in compliance with law. If we are speaking of elections, this means true and fair choices. (FGD 5)

In the opinion of young people and women democracy is identical to freedom to act, freedom of expression, freedom of choice (FGD 1, 2, 3)

Democracy means the power of the people. (FGD 1, 2)

Transparency in everything one is doing, including incomes and including people in power... this means taking the opinion of everyone, including the elderly, into account. Here nobody listens to the voice of pensioners. (FGD 4)

On the other hand, some responses reflected more pessimistic views, associating democracy with 'something like chaos' (FGD 6). Furthermore, some participants found it hard to associate democracy with anything.

States perceived as exemplary democracies

When asked to give an example of a stable democracy, the survey participants recounted diverse developed countries. The USA, the UK, Germany and France ranked the highest by the frequency of their mention. Other mentioned democracies included Romania, Belgium, Italy, Czech Republic, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland), Austria, Poland, Slovenia and Hungary.

One participant also stated that, in his opinion, Russia is also a stable democracy (FGD 5).

The few arguments given to substantiate the choice of this or that country as an example of a stable democracy were articulated on the idea that whenever people are dissatisfied with some aspects, state institutions consider their claims (FGD 2), with specific reference to France in this respect.

Perceived weaknesses/shortcomings of the democracy in Moldova

In the respondents' opinions, the Republic of Moldova lacks the following essential aspects to be considered a stable democracy:

- fair justice and equality before the law,
- thriving economy and motivating jobs,
- inclusive policies and representation, with an emphasis on appropriate representation of persons with disabilities in the parliament (FGD 1, 2, 4, 5),
- new mentality and a new social and political system.

They also highlighted the need to eradicate or significantly reduce corruption and expressed their concerns about the fairness of electoral processes (FGD 1, 3). Moreover, they emphasized the importance of civic education for children to exhibit a stronger feeling of national pride and to build a democratic society.

One respondent added that Moldova needs a strong leader - someone like the Russian President Vladimir Putin (FGD 6) – in order to become a stable democracy.

To be [considered] a stable democracy, our country lacks fair justice where everyone is equal before the law. We must change our mentality, live by rules and laws... we lack inclusive policies (for persons with disabilities) and persons with disabilities to represent us in the parliament. (FGD 1, 2, 4, 5)

We lack a prosperous economy, motivating jobs because our country is very poor. (FGD 1, 3, 6)

We cannot become a true democracy until we change our obsolete mentality and the entire system... we are afraid to express ourselves, to protest. (FGD 1, 2)

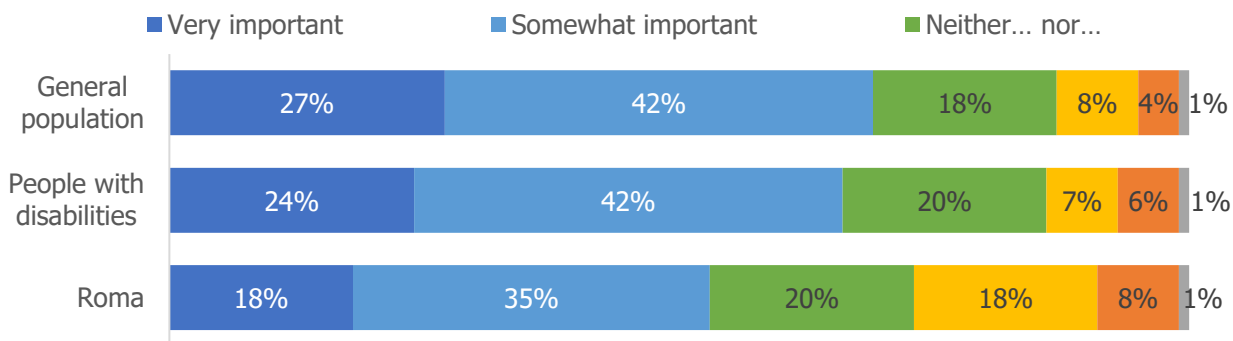
We lack the feeling of national pride and civic education is needed for the children. (FGD 3)

2.7 Self-assessed level of knowledge of the electoral programs of candidates in the local elections

Two of every three respondents in the categories of general public and persons with disabilities as well as a half of the respondents in the category of the Roma people stated that it is important for them to know the electoral programs of the candidates in local elections (Fig. 13).

Only one in every ten respondents in the category of general public and every fourth Roma does not believe it is important to know the electoral programs of the candidates in local elections. This group of respondents includes young people (18%) and persons with a low level of interest in the social and political life of the country (20%).

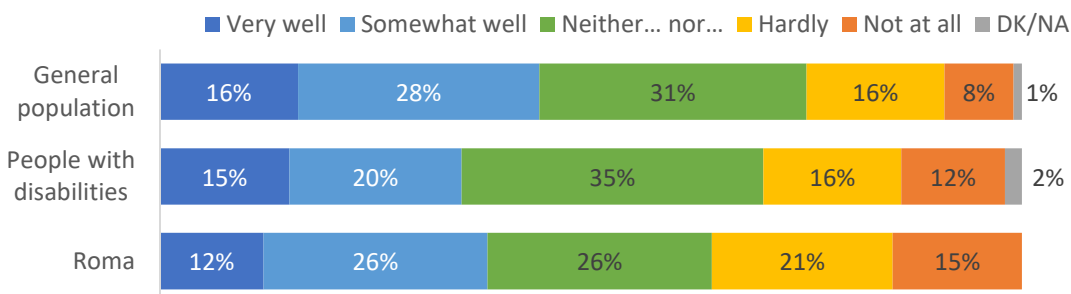
Figure 13. Generally, how important is it for you personally to know the electoral programs of the candidates in the local elections? (C18)



A neutral attitude towards the importance of knowing electoral programs was more frequent among respondents with low education, civically passive persons and those with low confidence in main institutions.

Although most people in the population think it is important to know the electoral programs of candidates in local elections, only 44% could say they know them well (of which less than a half stated they know them very well). Curiously, the survey did not identify any significant differences in the responses of the three categories of respondents in this respect (Fig. 14).

Figure 14. How well do you know the electoral programs of the candidates in the local elections? (C17)



Poor knowledge of the electoral programs was more frequent among young people, persons with a low level of education, urban residents (especially those of the Chisinau municipality), ethnic minorities, persons with low interest in the social and political life in Moldova, civically passive persons, respondents with a low level of confidence in main institutions.

Sources of information about the electoral process and candidates for FGD participants

Respondents usually get to know the electoral processes and the candidates from a variety of sources, which include television (*TV8, Jurnal TV, Moldova1, ProTV, TVR Moldova*), the Internet, social media, radio and newspapers, including those distributed by political parties. They also get information by interacting with other people, such as their parents, relatives, neighbors and friends. Some respondents expressed certain skepticism regarding information originating from Facebook and preferred traditional information sources, such as television and radio.

I get information about the electoral process in the village from other local residents. (FGD 1)

From the Internet, social media, Facebook groups, TV and interaction - that is, information heard from my parents, friends, relatives, acquaintances, neighbors. (FGD 1, 2)

I do not really believe in the information on Facebook because I have experienced some occasions where it turned out to be false and so I prefer to listen to the radio now. (FGD 3)

From TV - I watch TV8, Jurnal TV, Moldova1, ProTV, TVR Moldova... from [political] party newspapers. (FGD 4)

Level of satisfaction with the accuracy and truthfulness of information about the electoral process and candidates

The responses to the question regarding satisfaction with the accuracy and truthfulness of information about the electoral process and the candidates demonstrated the existence of differing opinions. Most participants expressed their dissatisfaction, mentioning several concerns which included the need for accessible and truthful information, difficulties in managing an extensive flow of information, manipulations during election campaigns, discrepancies between public statements and actual actions of candidates. Thus, the respondents have more confidence in local election candidates rather than national election ones.

We're not too happy. Information must be accessible and truthful, not accessible and false... There is too much information, and you are misguided because they manipulate people... When they remove a candidate from the electoral race, they say there have been some scheming, but they do not show the investigation, they are just saying it, but they should show [facts] to people, everything should be supported with documents. (FGD 4, 5)

I'm fairly skeptical. I am not sure about the truthfulness of the information provided. I have more confidence in public officials elected locally because I know them personally, which is not the case at national level... How do we know that opponents contradicting each other in public do not actually sit together and make some other agreements and understandings? (FGD 1, 2)

I have not seen anyone to come and do something. They say one thing and do the opposite... or they do very little of what they have promised. (FGD 2, 6)

There were also some respondents – few in number - who stated they were satisfied and believed that information coming from state sources is generally truthful. However, some of those opinions referred to possible lack of electoral culture.

I am satisfied, I think it is truthful because it comes from government sources. We do not have much electoral culture – but that is something different. (FGD 3)

Methods of verifying and/or validating the received information

Participants practice diverse approaches to verifying and validating the information received by them. Most respondents use multiple information sources, including television and the Internet, looking for evidence and arguments to validate the information. Some rely on independent sources or verify information on the official governmental websites. There are also those who trust TV news bulletins and believe that social media provide more false information than state-run TV channels (FGD 3, 5). Some other respondents stated that they discuss information in the family or rely on concrete facts to validate information (FGD 6). One respondent stated that they check the information "on the CEC's website" (FGD 3).

We use several sources to get information - TV, the Internet - we visit multiple websites. We look for evidence, arguments. If some information is false, it is only mentioned on top, and the title can be manipulative. (FGD 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

I get information from independent websites or channels... from official governmental websites, such as the government's or the parliament's webpages. (FGD 2)

TV is more convincing for me [as a source of true information]. I trust TV news bulleting. If we compare social media and state TV, social media have more false information. (FGD 3, 5)

Criteria underpinning the decision to vote for this or that electoral candidate

The choice of an electoral candidate is determined by multiple criteria according to the received responses. Many respondents emphasized the importance of assessing candidates and parties based on their previous performance in forming voting opinions (FGD 5, 6). Other significant criteria include analysis of the proposals and electoral programs of the candidates (FGD 1,2,3,4) as well as their attitude towards local or national issues (FGD 1). Decision drivers also include the candidate's integrity and personality: Some respondents prefer candidates who avoid vilification of their opponents and slander (FGD 2).

Account is also taken of the candidate's professional experience, training and skills, the achievements of the party to which the candidate belongs as well as the level of credibility accumulated over time. (FGD 1, 2)

A certain Roma respondent stated that for them a selection criterion is the candidate's way to address the issue of discrimination against Roma people.

Because I like the [candidate's political] party... based on their deeds and the positive changes generated by them... whether their deeds are in line with their words. (FGD 5, 6)

I make my decision based on the candidate's electoral proposals... if they have previously held some office, I also decide depending on their performance. (FGD 5)

Based on facts... I analyze what the person had done before they became a candidate, their actions, the results, the projects implemented by them - as well as their integrity - and I compare them with other candidates. (FGD 1, 2, 3, 4)

I would choose the one who is the least to slander others. In the previous elections, some candidates were making wrongful accusations about others to get elected. If a person does that [to other candidates], it is not excluded they will do the same to the people. (FGD 2)

III. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

3.1 Consumption of information about politics and current events

Consumption of information about politics and current events was assessed in respect of six information channels on a scale of 7 points where 1 = *Daily* and 7 = *Never* (i.e. the respondent never uses the information channel concerned):

1. Almost daily
2. 1-2 times a week
3. 1-2 times a month
4. 1-2 times in 3 to 4 months
5. 1-2 times a year
6. Less than once a year
7. Never

Figure 15. In your day-to-day life, how often do you turn to the following sources for information about political and current events? (D3) Average values

	General populati	People with Roma disabilities	
TV news broadcasts and programs	2.4	2.1	2.7
Radio news broadcasts and programs	4.8	4.6	5.5
Newspaper articles	5.7	5.7	6.2
News portals	3.2	3.8	3.7
Social media	2.9	3.8	3.8
Friends, neighbors, family	2.5	2.5	1.9

The findings (Fig. 15) show that, out of the six information channels on the list, the channels most popular in case of general public are TV news bulletins and shows (with an average frequency of use at 2.4 points, i.e. almost weekly), and friends/neighbors and family (2.5 points). However, one in every ten respondents does not use these two information channels at all.

The next two information channels with monthly frequency of use are social media (2.9 points) and news portals (3.2 points). Each

fourth respondent never uses those two information channels (as compared to one in every three respondents in case of persons with disabilities and Roma people).

Radio news bulletins and broadcasts, and newspaper articles are unpopular information channels used on an average several times a year or even less often. Every second respondent never listens to the radio and two thirds never read printed press.

The channel most popular among persons with disabilities is TV news bulletins and shows (2.1 points), but news portals and social media are less popular (3.8 points each). Roma people most frequently get information from their friends, relatives and family (1.9 points) and rarely use all other information channels on the list.

TV news bulletins and shows are significantly less popular among young people (3.5 points), persons with a high level of education (2.6 points), urban residents (2.6 points), residents of the Chisinau municipality (2.7 points), and people with a low level of interest in social and political life in Moldova (2.9 points).

Radio news bulletins and broadcasts are significantly less popular among people aged up to 60 (5.1 points), persons with a low level of education (5.1 points), ethnic minorities (5.6 points), respondents with a low level of interest in social and political life in Moldova (5.3 points), civically passive persons (5 points) and respondents with a low level of confidence in main institutions (5.1 points).

Newspaper articles are significantly less popular among male respondents (5.8 points), young people (5.9 points), persons with a low level of education (5.9 points), ethnic minorities (6.1 points), people with a low level of interest in social and political life in Moldova (6.1 points), civically passive persons (6 points), and respondents with a low level of confidence in main institutions (5.9 points).

News portals are significantly less popular among the elderly (4 points), people with a low level of education (3.7 points), persons with a low level of interest in social and political life in Moldova (4.2 points), and civically passive respondents (3.6 points).

Social media are significantly less popular among the elderly (4 points), people with a low level of education (3.5 points), rural residents (3.1 points), people with a low level of interest in social and political life in Moldova (3.7 points), and civically passive respondents (3.1 points).

An in-depth analysis of the popularity of the six information channels on the list and frequency of their use makes it possible to subdivide all respondents into three groups:

- passive information consumers, i.e. persons who frequently (at least once a week) get information from maximum two information channels (36%, of which 5% do not use any information channel on regular basis) - especially young people (42%), persons with a low level of education (42%), people with a low level of interest in social and political life in their country (53%), hardly ever active and totally passive citizens (39%), and respondents with a low level of confidence in main institutions (39%),
- moderately frequent consumers, i.e. people who frequently use maximum three to four information channels (46% of the respondents),
- advanced consumers, i.e. people who frequently use five to six information channels (18% of the respondents), especially people with a high level of education (24%), persons with a high level of interest in the social and political life in Moldova (26%), civically active respondents (30%), and persons with a high level of confidence in main institutions (28%).

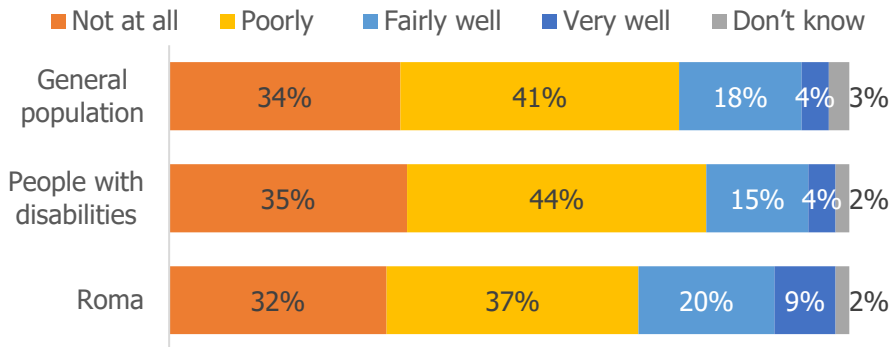
3.2 Representation and participation at national level

Respondents' perceptions of their representation and participation in decision-making at national level were assessed by means of two questions concerning:

- representation of political interests at national level, and
- agreement or disagreement with a set of 5 statements.

The opinion prevailing among most adult respondents in the general public category (75%) is that their interests are not represented at all or under-represented in national politics (Fig. 16). Moreover, every third respondent believes that their interests are not represented at all. The percentages were similar in case of persons with disabilities and Roma people. The average value of the perceived extent to which the interests of general public are represented in national-level politics is 1.9 points (i.e. poor representation level) on a 5-point scale where 1 = *Not at all* and 5 = *Very well*.

Figure 16. How well do you believe your interests are represented in national-level politics? (C4.1)



That perception is more frequent among people with a low level of education (43%) and income (37%), residents of the South of Moldova (47%), ethnic minorities (63%), people with a low level of interest in social and political life in the country (62%), civically passive respondents (43%), and persons with a low

level of confidence in main institutions (41%).

Only one in every five respondents believed that their interests were represented fairly well. Those were mostly young people (31%), Roma (29%), persons with a high level of education (31%), the ethnic majority (25% as compared to 9% in case of ethnic minorities), people with a high level of interest in social and political life in Moldova (33%), civically active persons (38%), and respondents with a high level of confidence in main institutions (45%).

Views expressed by the FGD participants regarding representation of their personal interests in politics at national and local level reflected their differing perceptions and experiences and depended on multiple criteria, such as political party membership, civic activity and the needs of particular communities. A considerable portion of the participants pointed out significant differences between the two representation levels. While some respondents stated that their interests are hardly represented at all at the national level, while their representation is fairly good at the local level, some other respondents believed that the situation was just the opposite and said that their interests were represented at national level, while hardly ever or even not at all represented at local level. These perceptions were substantiated by the argument that representation of their interests at national level depends mostly on the elected or promoted party (FGD 1), while at local level it depends mostly by the civic activity level of each particular individual or the local mayor's dedication (FGD 5).

It should be noted that, according to most respondents, the level of representation of people's interests is perceived to be higher at local level, as compared to national level. The supporting arguments were about direct and visible impact of local representation on the community, such as road repairs, creation of parks, installation of garbage dumpsters, and taking opinions expressed by the community into account.

Some respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with slanted or weak representation of their interests at both levels, highlighting issues such as corruption, poverty, insufficient opportunities for persons with disabilities and unbalanced national policies. These concerns were expressed more often by women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and young urban residents. Among those least satisfied with their representation level are mainly Roma people, who mentioned limited access to public institutions, including the town hall.

However, there were also some respondents with positive views who claimed that their interests are promoted at both levels.

At local level, this depends on how active you are, but at national level they are hardly represented at all. (FGD 5)

The representation of our interests at national level depends on the party we support. If we want to be part of the European Union, we choose pro-European parties. Locally we can have polar opinions. (FGD 1)

At local level, it's fairly well, people are much more understanding. Issues brought to the mayor's or the local council's attention are addressed... There have been changes, road repairs, [new] public parks, garbage dumpsters. (FGD 2)

Slanted at both levels... there are few opportunities for people with disabilities. (FGD 5)

Not at all. We are not even allowed to enter the town hall. (FGD 6)

The participants expressed differing opinions regarding the situation with the representation of people's diversity by elected officials at national and local level. Some respondents were disappointed because of insufficient representation of various groups at national level, mentioning the absence of representatives for persons with disabilities and other minorities, although their representation is considered essential for the correct understanding of their problems (FGD 3, 5). Some other participants pointed out the need for broader representation, including that of young people, at national level (FGD 1).

In contrast, there were also some positive opinions regarding the representation of diversity at local level. Examples were given of mayors and local counselors with varied profiles, including young people and the elderly, men and women (FGD 1). One respondent mentioned an occasion of positive representation of Roma people at local level due to the existence of Roma mediators, while acknowledging the absence of such mediators at national level (FGD 6).

Several respondents believed that diversity is adequately represented by elected officials at both levels, suggesting an optimistic perception of representations in certain local and national contexts.

There is not a single person with a disability either in the Parliament or in any parliamentary committee to represent us... as well as other minorities. (FGD 3, 5)

At national level, they do not respect this rule; all those MPs are only in parliament thanks to their connections; ordinary people do not have a chance... there should be more young people there. (FGD 1)

I think they are represented. In my village, the mayor is a man, while most local councilors are women (including a teacher, a security guard and a housewife). There are young as well as old people among them. At national level, there are also some young and very young deputies. (FGD 1)

Not at national level, because we do not have a Roma in parliament. At local level, we have Roma mediators. They represent us. (FGD 6)

According to the presented situation, some respondents expressed a desire to see broader diversity in the electoral system, including representation of people with disabilities, candidates differently colored [politically?] and diverse religions (FGD 1, 5). In contrast, some other respondents argued that being part of a certain category is not essential and believed that having appropriate skills and competencies is more important than representing various groups, which opinion was mostly supported by young people and female respondents.

On the other hand, some participants commented on more balanced developments in terms of diversity being represented at national level: They indicated that women and Roma are represented in leadership positions (FGD 3).

Some respondents found it hard to give a clear response to this question (FGD 6).

I want persons with disabilities to be there as well... There have never been any colored people or persons with physical disabilities or representatives of a different religion among the candidates. (FGD 1, 5)

I don't think it matters if there are representatives from all categories, it is skills and competencies that matter. (FGD 1, 2, 4)

It has become better of late at national level - now there are also women and Roma in leadership positions. (FGD 3)

Then the perceptions of the population were assessed by means of their attitude to five statements covering five topics:

- importance of voting,
- importance of equal involvement and representation of women in political positions,
- importance of involving and representing young people in political life,
- access to information about how public authorities operate and make decisions,
- opportunities for ordinary people to contribute to decision-making.

The respondents were asked to assess their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point scale where 1 = *Fully disagree* and 5= *Totally agree*.

Almost 9 out of every 10 respondents agreed with/confirmed the importance of the first three statements (Fig. 17):

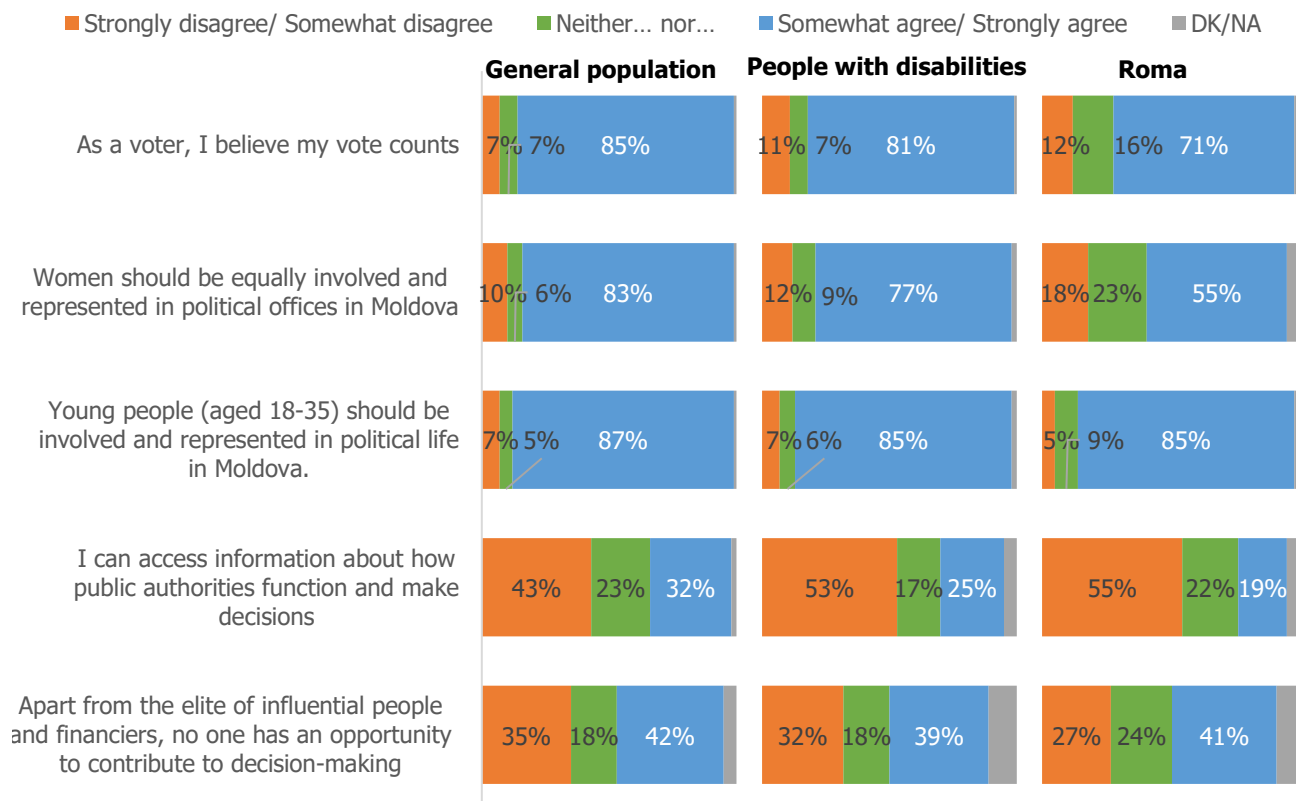
- 87% agreed that young people need to be involved and represented in political life in Moldova,
- 85% agreed that their vote counts, while the percentage of such responses was the lowest among Roma people (71%),
- 83% agreed that women should be equally involved and represented in political positions in Moldova; once again, the percentage of such responses was the lowest among Roma people (55%).

The dominant opinion regarding access to information about how public authorities operate and make decisions was that access to such information is limited (43%), as compared to only 32% of those who believed they had sufficient access to such information. The average score for access to such information is 2.8 points on the 5-point scale (i.e. moderate level of access).

An opinion that access is limited to information about how public authorities operate and make decisions was more widespread among the elderly (52%), persons with a low level of education (52%) and income (48%), ethnic minorities (66%), people with a low level of interest in social and political life in Moldova (53%), civically passive respondents (50%), and persons with a low level of confidence in main institutions (52%).

The percentages of those who had positive and negative perceptions regarding the opportunity and chances for ordinary people to contribute to decision-making were approximately similar (35% of those who believe they have chances to influence decision-making versus 42% of those who believe that only influential people and financiers have such opportunities). These perceptions were similarly widespread among persons with disabilities and Roma people. The average score awarded to access to decision-making is 3.1 points on a 5-point scale (i.e. a moderate level of access).

Figure 17. Now I will read some statements about public participation and representation. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (D4)



The opinions regarding limited access to decision-making were more frequent among the elderly (47%), ethnic minorities (66%), civically passive persons (47%), and respondents with low confidence in main institutions (47%).

Views of the FGD participants regarding the chances of ordinary people to contribute to decision-making at national level can be described as reserved or even pessimistic. Some respondents stated that involvement of ordinary people at national level is mostly limited to the electoral period, while they have few opportunities to express their will thereafter. Some others said that most national-level decisions were made in the parliament without active involvement of the population (FGD 1, 3). A certain respondent with an optimistic view of the possibility for ordinary people to influence decisions at national level mentioned protests as a way to achieve this purpose.

It is notable that concerns have been expressed about the lacking access to information and civic passivity of people in respect to decision-making - both locally and at national level. Lack of confidence in the ability to make a significant impact on decisions is also pronounced; this view is mostly shared by women and older people.

An ordinary person can contribute to decision-making only at the time of elections and can no longer do it thereafter... At country level, we can influence decisions for example through protests. (FGD 5)

At national level all decisions are made in the parliament, they do not come out into the street and ask people whether they agree or disagree... We do not have the power to influence decisions made in the parliament. (FGD 1)

There are people who write petitions, but I have never heard of a response to their questions... in fact, people lack confidence... We have this possibility at both levels, but either we don't know how to do it or we do too little - people are indifferent. (FGD 3, 4)

The opinions expressed regarding freedom of expression of your political views revealed diverse attitudes and perceptions among the FGD participants; those opinions have been influenced in part by peers, the level of confidence and the willingness to express similar opinions with others, personal fears and the confidence of respondents in their ability to openly express their views. Some claimed they feel quite free to express their political views but do that with certain reservations or selectivity to avoid conflicts. Other respondents argued that their freedom of expression depended on the person with whom they were interacting and that person's understanding. There were also some people who said they felt free to express their opinion despite a possible negative reaction or judgment from others; this group consisted mostly of women, the elderly and Roma people.

On the other hand, some respondents stated they did not feel free to express their political views, preferring to keep them secret to avoid conflicts and critical judgment or to protect their relationship with those close to them in case of a disagreement. Fear of being followed or having to face problems was also mentioned as a factor limiting one's freedom to express political opinions (FGD 4). The elderly and Roma people were most open in terms of expressing their political opinions.

Moreover, the responses highlighted the importance of social context in determining one's freedom of expression or reluctance to impair their well-being (FGD 3). Respondents claimed that it was easier to express your opinion at national level than at local level where you can easily be labeled by the community.

I do not feel free to do that... I do not say who I vote for, because everyone has their own opinion... I can only discuss such matters with my family... If you talk to an understanding person, then you feel free to do such things... it depends on the environment. If I am in an environment where my opinion is similar to that of others, then I will feel free to express it. But for the most part people keep their opinions secret to avoid conflicts. (FGD 1, 5)

I do not feel free, I am scared of how other people can react, of the fact that I will be judged for my opinion. We are frequently reproached for having been brainwashed. (FGD 3)

We can discuss such things at national level - but actually not at local level because information will get about and you will be labelled. (FGD 3)

3.3 Representation at local level

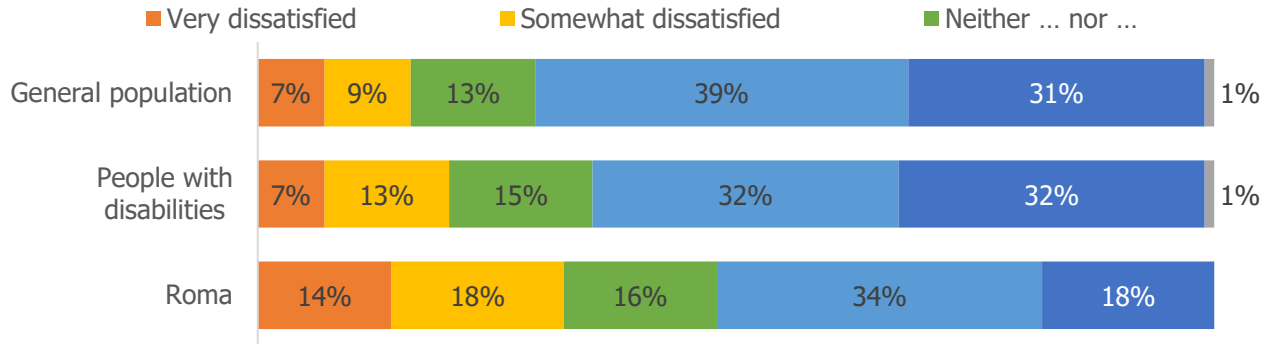
The respondents' perceptions of their local-level representation were assessed by means of three questions:

- level of their satisfaction with the locality/community where they live,
- representation of their political interests at local level, and
- expressing their agreement or disagreement with a set of 3 statements about public participation and representation.

70% of the surveyed population are happy with the locality/community where they live, and almost a half of them are very satisfied (Fig. 18). For the sake of comparison, only 52% of Roma people are satisfied with the locality where they live.

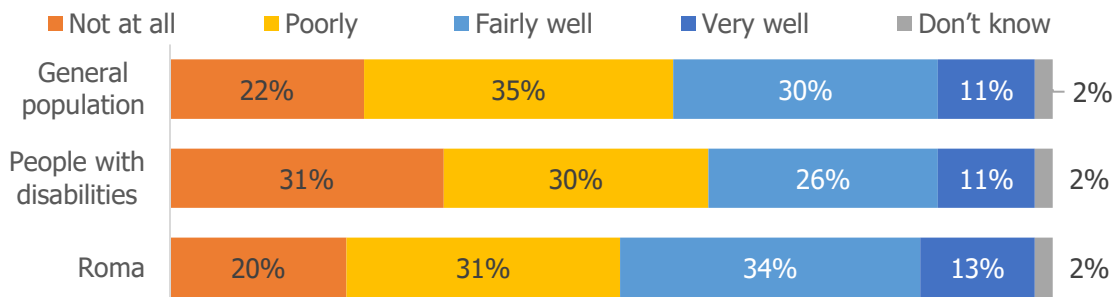
A high degree of satisfaction was more frequent among men (36%), rural residents (36%), residents of the South (51%) and the Central part (41%) of Moldova, ethnic minorities (43%).

Figure 18. Overall, how satisfied are you with the community where you live? (B1)



The prevailing opinion of most adults in the general public category (57%) is that their interests are not represented at all or under-represented in local politics (Fig. 19). However, the percentage of such responses was significantly lower (by 18%) as compared to perceptions about representation at national level; in other words, people believe that their interests are fairly well represented at local level (41%). The average score for the perceived level of representation of people’s interests in national politics is 2.3 points on a 5-point scale where 1 = *Not at all* and 5 = *Very well* (i.e. moderate level of representation).

Figure 19. How well do you believe your interests are represented in local politics? (C4.2)



Fully negative perceptions were more frequent among people with a low level of education (27%), urban residents (29), residents of the South (42%), ethnic minorities (52%), persons with disabilities (31%), people with a low level of interest in social and political life in Moldova (40%), civically passive respondents (30%), and persons with a low level of confidence in main institutions (28%).

Then perceptions of the respondents were assessed using a set of three statements on how local authorities:

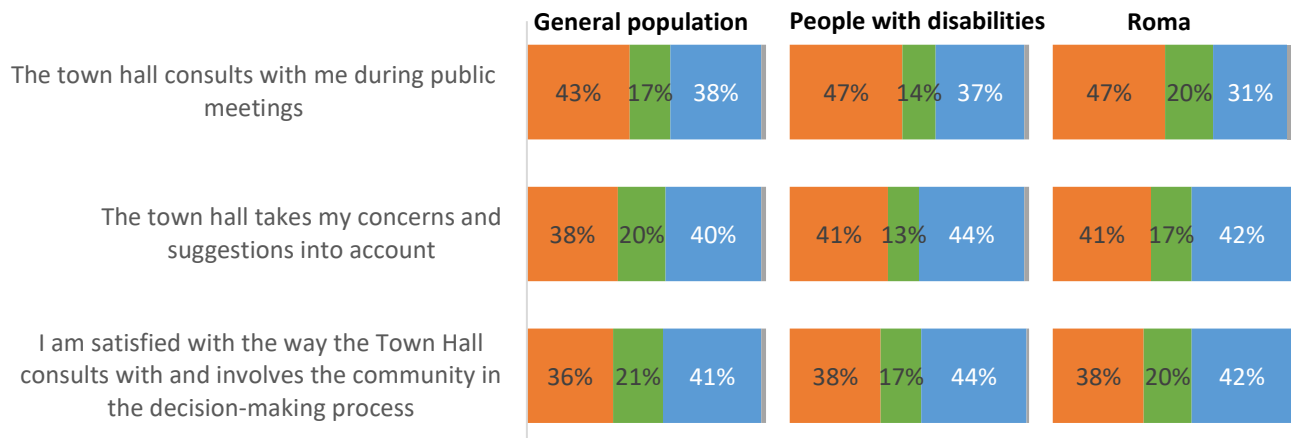
- consult with the community,
- are responsive to suggestions and needs of community members,
- consults and involve the community in decision-making.

Respondents were asked to express their degree of agreement with each statement using a 5-point scale where 1 = *Totally disagree* and 5 = *Fully agree*.

The findings show parity between opposite opinions regarding each of the three statements (Fig. 20): four out of every ten respondents have a positive perception of their LPA’s receptivity, consultation with and involvement of the community, while another four out of every ten respondents expressed a negative view. This parity between the two opposite opinions was found to also exist among persons with disabilities and Roma people.

Figure 20. Now I will read some statements about public participation and representation. Could you please tell me to what extent you agree with the following statements? (B2)

■ Strongly / Somewhat disagree
 ■ Neither... nor...
 ■ Somewhat / Strongly agree
 ■ DK/NA



Negative perceptions of public participation and representation are more frequent among young people, persons with a high level of education, urban residents (almost two-fold of such opinions among rural residents), people with medium and high incomes, ethnic minorities, civically passive respondents, and persons with low confidence in main institutions.

Opinions expressed by the FGD participants regarding the chances of ordinary people to contribute to decision-making process locally and at national level reflect significant differences in their perceptions, highlighting a mixture of optimism and skepticism. However, most respondents believe that people have more chances and opportunities to contribute to local-level decision-making. Arguments given to support this view included being able to attend local council meetings, make suggestions, highlight community-specific issues. Better knowledge of candidates at local level was also mentioned as a reason why people feel more involved locally.

However, there were also some less optimistic opinions - especially among Roma people - indicating possible corrupt influences at local level.

Law allows us to attend meetings of the local council and make suggestions, for example, about building ramps to local stores or the healthcare center. (FGD 5)

No, of course not... I think this is possible at local level by means of corrupt acts. (FGD 6)

Locally – yes - because you know the candidates better. We can suggest ideas to the council and achieve something... this is more possible... There are public consultations and people express their opinions. (FGD 1, 2, 3, 4)

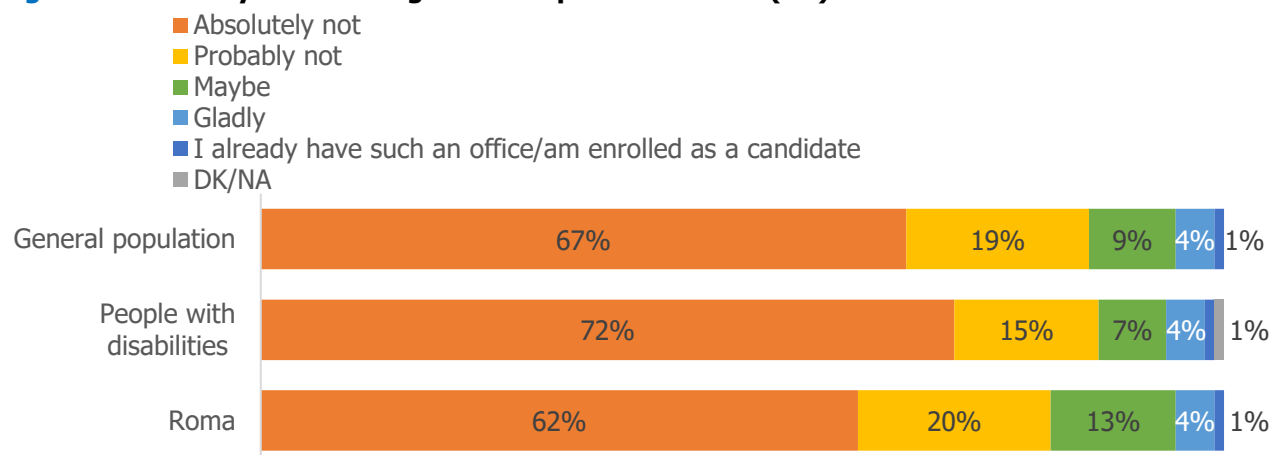
3.4 Level of political and civic engagement

The level of political and civic engagement was assessed by means of two questions about:

- interest/willingness to take a political office, and
- practicing diverse forms of political and civic involvement.

Willingness of people to take a political office can be assessed as low in terms of percentages since only 4% firmly stated they would gladly do this and another 9% would possibly like to get involved this way (Fig. 21). 1% of the surveyed population are already holding a political office. A similar picture is true without any statistically significant differences of both persons with disabilities and Roma people.

Figure 21. Would you be willing to hold a political office? (D1)



The reluctance to hold a political office is significantly higher among middle-aged and especially the elderly, people with a low level of education, ethnic minorities (80%), persons with a low level of interest in social and political life in Moldova, civically passive respondents, and persons with a low and moderate level of confidence in main institutions.

The level of civic activity was assessed based on the received responses regarding practicing of nine activities (Fig. 22). The findings made it possible to subdivide the population into four groups:

- civically passive people who did not practice any of the nine activities on the list (52% in the general population category / 58% among persons with disabilities / 48% among Roma people),
- persons with low civic activity who practiced one of the listed activities (11% / 12% / 15%),
- people with a moderate level of civic activity who practiced two or three of the listed activities (19% / 14% / 26%),
- persons with a high level of civic activity who practiced more than three activities of the list (18% / 16% / 11%).

The group of civically passive people includes the elderly, people with low education and income, ethnic minorities, persons with low interest in social and political life in Moldova, and those with low confidence in main institutions.

The group of persons with a high level of civic activity includes young people, persons with a high level of education and income, residents of the Central part of Moldova and Chisinau, the ethnic majority, respondents with a high level of interest in social and political life in Moldova, and those with a high level of confidence in main institutions.

No differences depending on the residential environment type (urban versus rural) and gender of the respondents were identified in any of the four groups.

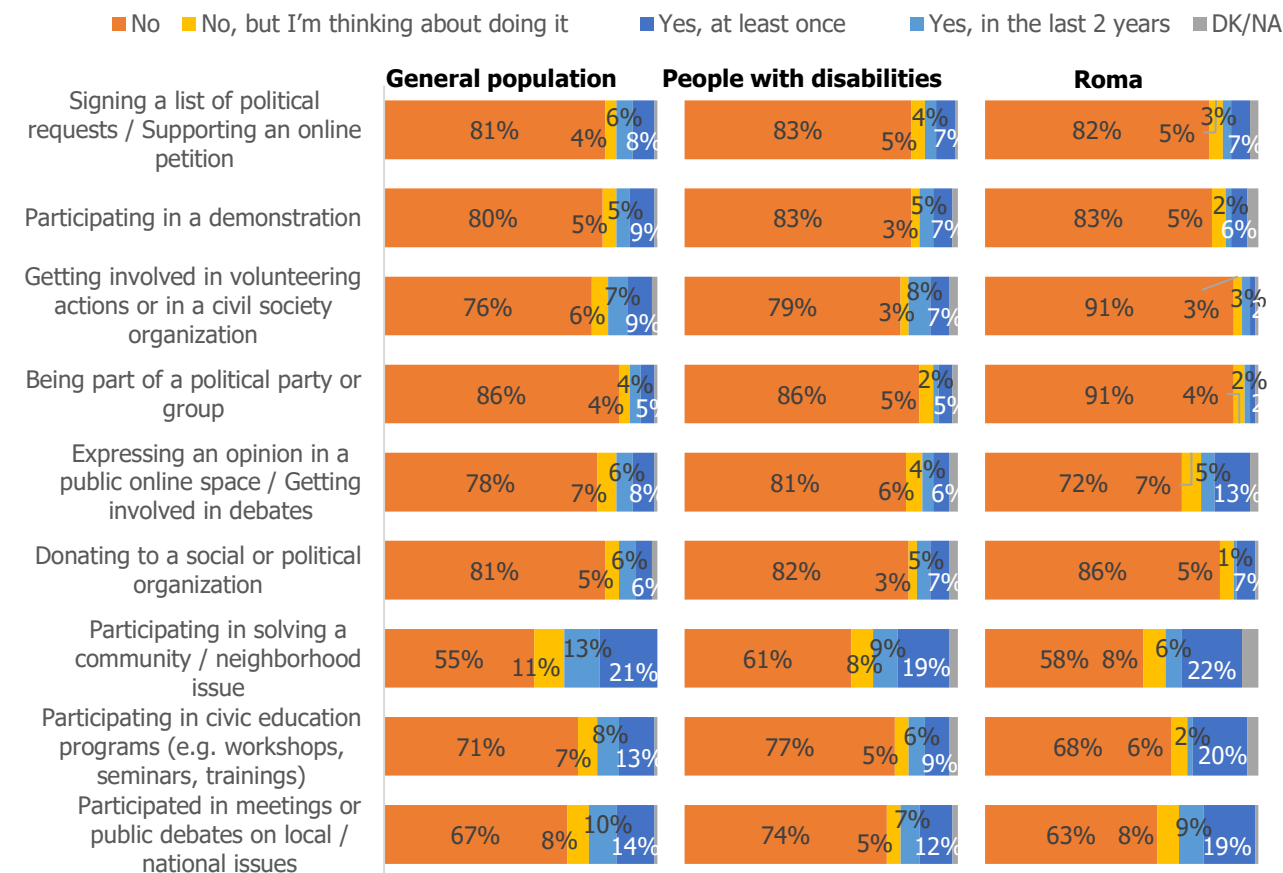
The most popular form of political and civic involvement out of the nine forms on the list is by far participation in addressing community/neighborhood issues – it was practiced at least once by 34% of the respondents (Fig. 22).

The other two popular forms of civic and political involvement are: participation in public meetings or debates on local/national-level issues (24%), and participation in civic education programs (e.g. workshops, seminars, training) – they are practiced by every fifth respondent.

Participation in civic education programs is more common among young people (35%), persons with a high level of education (39%), people with medium (28%) and high income (39%), residents of the Central part

of Moldova (27%) and the Chisinau municipality (24%), the ethnic majority (23% versus only 8% in case of ethnic minorities).

Figure 22. There are different ways to demonstrate one’s political and civic engagement. Have you done/would you do any of the following? (D2)



Another finding made in respect of the above results is that two of the top three most popular forms of civic engagement directly concern community-level involvement.

The other six forms of civic engagement were practiced by about similar percentages of the respondents (14%).

Then those who have confirmed their participation or plan to participate in volunteering activities were asked to state the types of volunteering exercised or intended to be exercised by them. The most popular forms of volunteering were found to be: environmental volunteering such as local landscaping, planting of trees (28%); assisting vulnerable families, elderly people, persons with disabilities, refugees (29%); other community-level social activities (16%).

Other forms of volunteering mentioned by respondents concerned getting involved in educational and young people-related activities, volunteering actions of national and international organizations, donating for charitable purposes, being blood donors, etc.

Several FGD participants also stated that they had engaged in various civic activism activities over the last two years, including:

- active involvement in volunteering and community outreach activities (FGD 1, 2, 3),

- projects aimed at benefiting people with disabilities, such as conferences, training, creating accessible parking slots, building ramps in accordance with applicable standards (FGD 5),
- educational projects, such as building a gazebo on school grounds to facilitate practical outdoor lessons,
- participation in protests as a way of expressing dissatisfaction and concerns about some of Moldova's social and political issues (FGD 3, 4),
- charitable actions and donations, especially during the initial stage of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine (FGD 1, 2, 3),
- participation in public debates (FGD 3).

Some respondents did not participate in any civic engagement activities for personal reasons, such as lacking enjoyment of or interest in such activities, lack of time, a desire to avoid everything associated with politics.

I am part of a group of young persons with disabilities with whom we hold various conferences, deliver training. We have created parking spaces for persons with disabilities, we have built wheelchair ramps in accordance with all standards. We're creating conditions to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. (FGD 5)

We were awarded a Youth Media Center project and built a gazebo on grounds of the local lyceum for students to be able to have practical lessons outdoors... we mobilized people and improved the waste disposal structure in our community. (FGD 3, 5)

I've been making donations over the last two years. Within the Christmas Caravan action, we donated clothes for refugees from Ukraine. (FGD 1, 2, 3)

I have not participated in any civic engagement activities because I do not enjoy that. (FGD 5)

I try to keep a low profile; politics is not for me. (FGD 6)

Analysis of the responses regarding the level of satisfaction with the achieved impact or results indicates that the respondents were enjoying their civic engagement activities. Appreciation of the achieved results gave them personal satisfaction and motivated them to continue participating in such activities.

We are satisfied because we can see the changes and we are proud of it, we can see the deliverable of our involvement. This motivates us to continue participating. (FGD 5)

There have been positive changes, results, roads constructed, people helped - we feel good and happier. (FGD 1, 2, 3)

However, the responses regarding self-assessment as a civically active person showed that many survey participants do not consider themselves active in this respect. Most respondents considered themselves involved civically only partially or occasionally and stated that they get involved where there is a good opportunity and where they feel able to face the challenge (FGD 1,2,5). Those who assessed their own civic activity on a scale of one to ten gave themselves a score of around 4 points that corresponds to a medium or even lower level of involvement (FGD 6). The responses also differed depending on the respondent's gender and age: Women and the elderly seem to be more civically active, as compared to other demographic groups.

Partially yes, I get involved where it is possible and where I know I can cope. (FGD 5)

We are active at somewhere round 3-4 points out of 10 - somewhere below 5 points. (FGD 6)

On the other hand, respondents who do not consider themselves to be civically active at present mentioned some objective obstacles ranging from personal circumstances and professional priorities to negative perceptions in the community and lack of confidence. Some respondents said they were currently looking for a job, prioritized their career, claimed lack of time, while some others - especially young rural residents – expressed their concern about how this would be perceived in the community. They feared community disapproval because volunteering is considered a less gainful activity. Another obstacle mentioned by respondents is lack of initiative and confidence that their efforts could give rise to real changes, which prevents them from being actively involved in the community.

I'm not very civically active at present because I'm looking for a job. I have graduated from university and now I want a job in the relevant professional sphere; I will pursue some civic engagement activities afterwards. (FGD 5)

I am civically passive - maybe that is because of lack of time, but mostly because I'm not sure my involvement will change anything. (FGD 1, 2)

Many people have a poor opinion of volunteering - they keep saying it's useless, you can do something for yourself instead. (FGD 2)

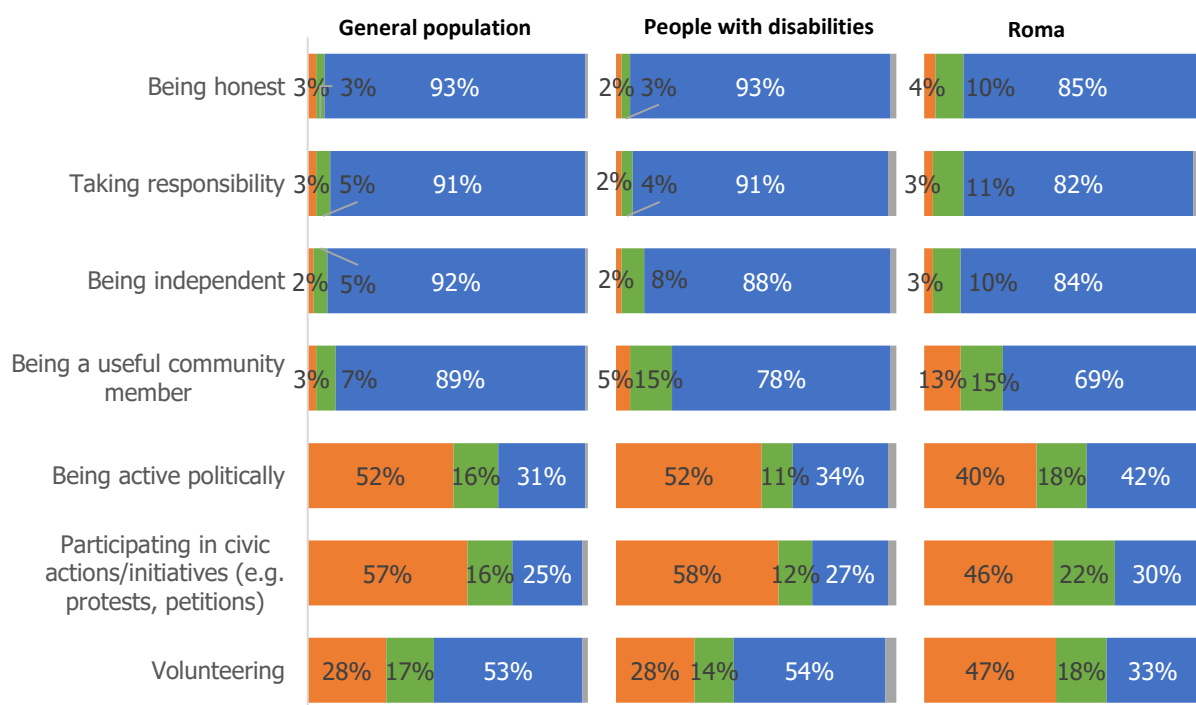
IV. LEVEL OF STABILITY AND PROMOTION OF PRO-SOCIAL VALUES IN SOCIETY

This section covers the perceptions of the population regarding the importance of pro-social values, the experience of discriminatory behaviors in society and possible reactions of respondents in certain situations of discrimination.

4.1 The importance of pro-social values in terms of civic engagement

Figure 23. We would like to know more about some of your opinions and attitudes. How important are the following items to you in general? To answer, use a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = Not Important at all and 5 = Very important. (E2)

■ Not important at all/ Somewhat not important ■ Neither, nor ■ Somewhat important/ Very important ■ DK/NA



The survey tested seven types of prosocial values, including four general human values and three civic engagement-related values. The findings show that almost all respondents consider all four general human values (honesty, taking responsibility, independence, and being useful to the community) important (Fig. 23). The first three values are equally important for the categories of general public, persons with disabilities

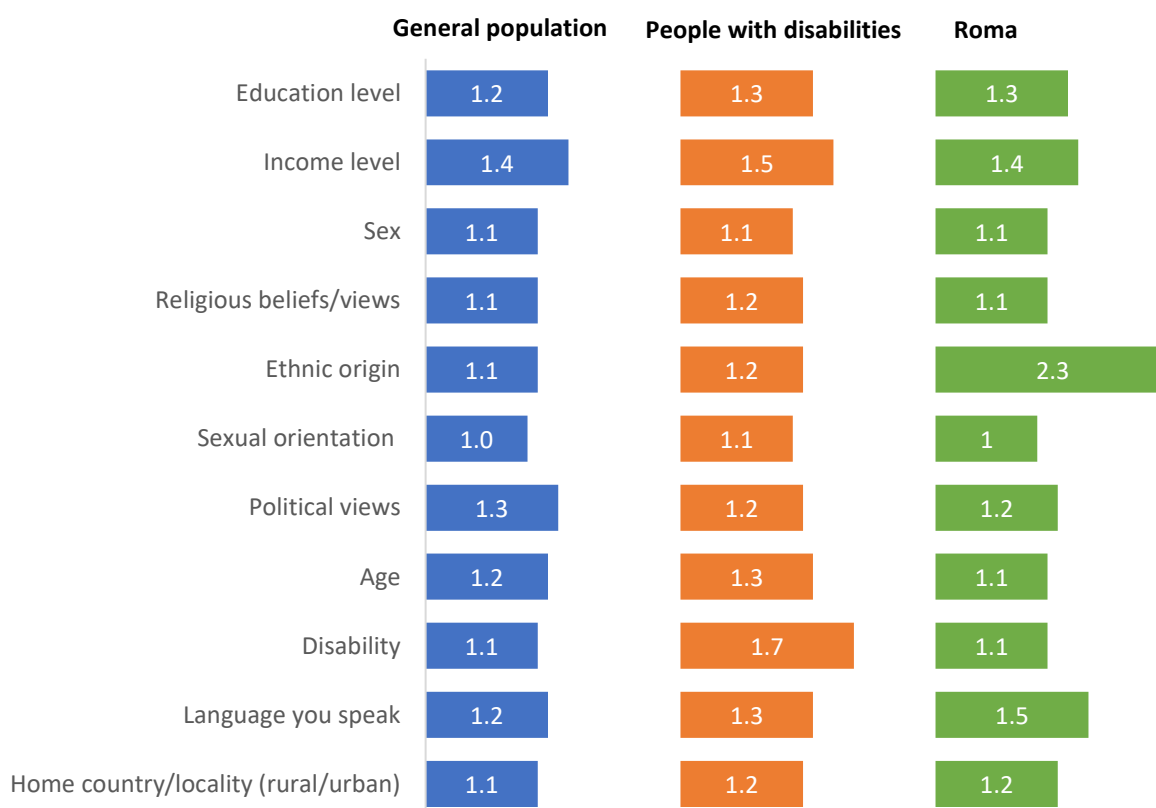
and Roma people, while being useful to the community is less valuable from the perspective of persons with disabilities (78%) and especially Roma people (69%).

If general human values are important for almost all respondents, the situation is fully opposite in the case of civic engagement-related values: only every second respondent considers it important to participate in volunteering activities, and even fewer participants believe it important to be active politically (31%) or to participate in various civic actions (25%). Unlike the general public category, the Roma people are more inclined to see the importance of being active politically (42%) but less receptive of the idea of volunteering (33%).

The reluctance to engage in civic actions is more frequent among older people, respondents with a low level of education, ethnic minorities, persons with a low level of interest in social and political life, civically passive participants, and persons with a low level of confidence in main institutions.

4.2 Experience of discrimination

Figure 24. To what extent did you feel marginalized because of your ... ? Please assess on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = *I did not feel marginalized at all* and 5 = *I felt very much marginalized*. (E4) **Average values**



The experience of discrimination was assessed in respect to eleven discrimination grounds listed in Fig. 24. Main findings made from the received responses can be summarized as follows:

- People are most frequently discriminated against because of their income level (average score of 1.4 points out of 5, or 10% of the population) and political views (1.3 points, or 9%).
- The language spoken by the person, their level of education and age are secondary grounds for discrimination.

- One's gender, religious beliefs, ethnicity, disability, and place of origin give rise to discrimination less frequently.
- Persons with disabilities are more often discriminated against because of their disability (1.7 points, or 19%), income level (1.5 points), spoken language, education and age (1.3 points in each case).
- Roma people are significantly more often discriminated against because of their ethnicity (2.3 points, or 45%) and spoken language (1.5 points).

An in-depth statistical analysis found that 65% of the respondents never felt discriminated against on the grounds listed in Fig. 24; 15% had an experience of being discriminated against on one of the eleven listed grounds; 11% - on two or three of those grounds, and 9% on more than three grounds.

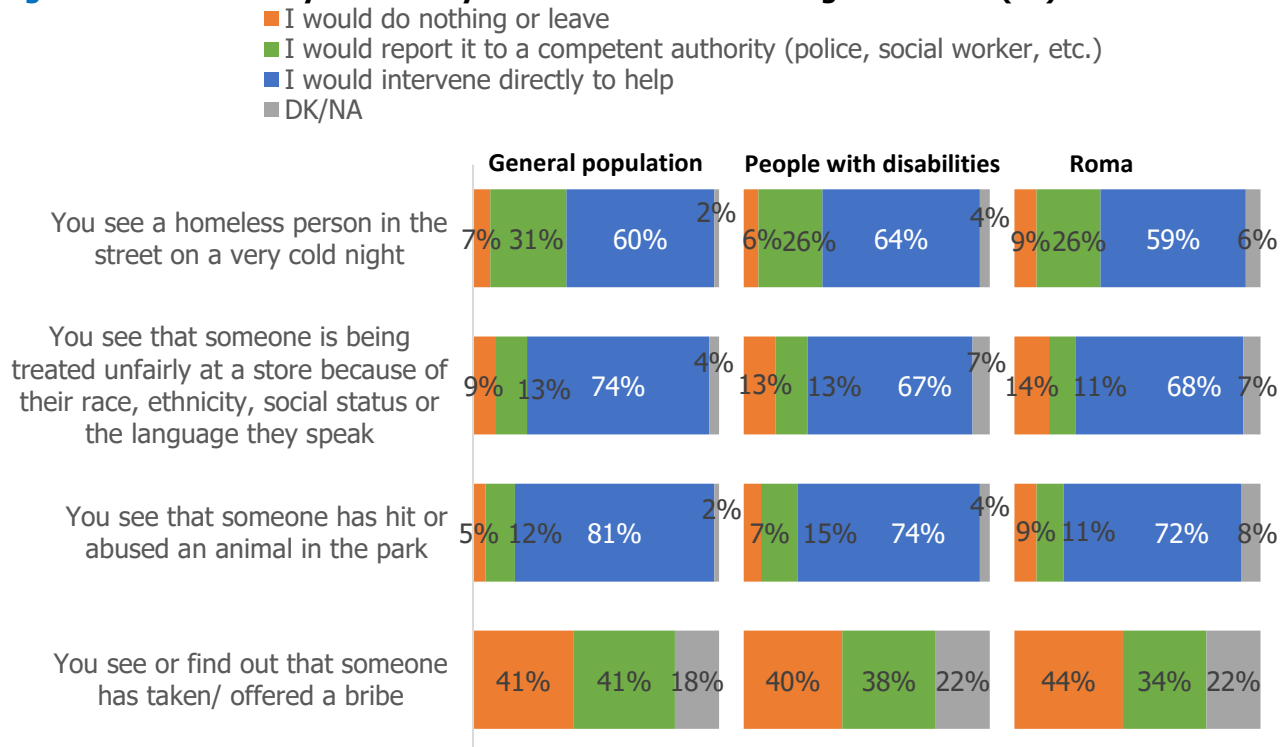
Exposure to some kind of discrimination more or less frequently was mentioned more often by women (39%), young people (40%), people with a high level of education (42%), ethnic Ukrainians (54%) and Russians (48%), persons with a high level of civic activity (44%), and residents of the North of Moldova (42%) and the Chisinau municipality (41%).

4.3 Potential reactions in situations involving pro-social behavior

Then the respondents were asked what their reaction would be in four specific situations:

- vulnerability of another person,
- discrimination against another person in a public place,
- animal abuse,
- witnessing a bribe being given or accepted.

Figure 25. How would you react if you witnessed the following situations? (E5)



Consistent with a high degree of acceptance of the general human values listed in Fig. 23, nine out of every ten respondents (regardless of their category) would react altruistically (at least at a declarative level) in the first three situations of vulnerability, discrimination or abuse (Fig. 25).

Most respondents would personally intervene to give physical or moral help - especially in the situations of discrimination and animal abuse. In the case of a homeless person in cold weather, every third respondent would notify a competent authority.

The attitude was very different in case of the situation of witnessing a bribe being given or accepted where the respondents could be subdivided into two distinct groups approximately similar in size – those who would do nothing, and those who would report the case to a competent authority. This demonstrates a high level of tolerance to corruption. At the same time, every fifth respondent is not certain about how they would react to a situation of corruption. Those who would ignore the witnessed bribe case are mostly women (45%), the elderly (45%), residents of the North of Moldova (52%), persons with a low level of interest in social and political life (49%), civically passive respondents (48%), and persons with a low or moderate level of confidence in main institutions.

V. KNOWLEDGE OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

This section covers the level of knowledge by the population of the electoral process, the institutions responsible for its administration, accessibility of information about the electoral process, knowledge of the voting procedure by the population, the role played by the media in the shaping of public opinions about the elections, insufficiently covered topics, perceptions of the electoral system by the population, digital education, and feedback arrangements.

5.1 Level of knowledge and accessibility of information about the electoral process

The level of knowledge by the adult population of the electoral process was assessed in respect of five aspects: the voting procedure, the electoral candidates and their electoral programs, the conditions for participation in voting, and the possibility of getting involved in the organization of elections as polling station staff.

The assessment was based on a 5-point scale, where 1 = *Very well* and 5 = *Not at all*. The findings show that half of the respondents consider themselves to be sufficiently well informed about the first four aspects, and one third of the participants believe themselves to be informed to a fair extent (Fig. 26). Roma people do not think they are sufficiently well informed about these 4 aspects (27% on an average, as compared to 16% on an average in the general public sample). The average score for the level of knowledge is 2.4 points on the 5-point scale for the first four aspects at the level of the entire population (i.e. medium level of knowledge).

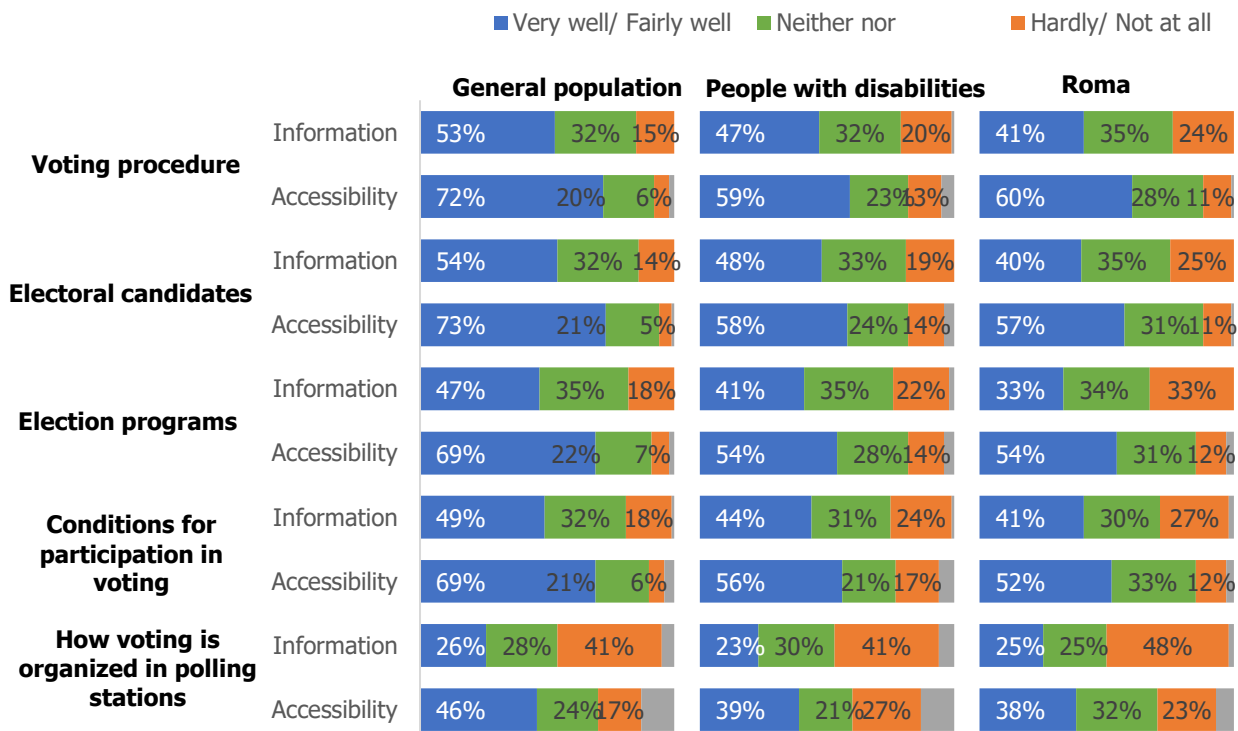
A significant information gap was found regarding knowledge of the possibilities of getting involved in the organization of elections in polling stations: 41% of the respondents consider themselves poorly or not at all informed in this respect. This group includes mostly young people (52%), persons with a low level of education (47%), residents of the North (46%) and South (47%) of Moldova, ethnic minorities (47%), civically passive people (47%), and those with a low level of interest in social and political life of Moldova (53%).

Overall, 26% of the respondents admitted they had insufficient knowledge about at least one of the first four aspects. Moreover, 10% stated they had insufficient knowledge about all four aspects. If we consider all five assessed aspects of the electoral process, the percentage of poorly informed respondents reaches 46%. The demographic profile of such respondents is similar to that described in the previous paragraph.

The situation is significantly better regarding accessibility of information about the electoral process: seven out of every ten respondents rated its accessibility level as good or very good for the first four assessed aspects (Fig. 26), but the information accessibility level is significantly lower for the possibility to get involved in the organization of elections at polling station level (46%). This finding is consistent with a lower level of knowledge about this aspect by the population.

The level of accessibility of information about the electoral process was rated significantly lower by persons with disabilities and Roma people: 57% on an average rated the level of accessibility as good or very good for the first four assessed aspects.

Figure 26. How well are you informed about the following? / How accessible is the information about the following? (F1-F2)



Overall, 19% of the respondents believe that the level of access to information is low or totally lacking for at least one of the assessed aspects.

Further to the level of knowledge about the electoral process, we present the findings of the qualitative survey component (FGDs) where the participants were asked a number of questions to cover this topic in more detail.

Knowledge of the types of elections held in Moldova at national level

Overall, most responses demonstrated insufficiently clear understanding of the types of elections held in Moldova at national level, mentioning local, parliamentary and presidential elections. Few respondents clearly stated that the national-level elections were those to Moldova’s Parliament and the presidential elections.

However, most respondents gave correct answers to the question who is elected in the three types of elections (local, parliamentary and presidential). Thus, in local elections people vote to elect their mayor and counselors (at local, regional or municipal level), while members of the parliament are elected in parliamentary elections. In the presidential elections, people vote for the candidate who they want to see as the president of the country.

Only one response was an exception that used the term ‘mayors’. This could be a case of confusion or perhaps the respondent concerned (FGD 5) used this term in a more general sense when speaking of local elections.

Local, parliamentary, presidential elections. In local elections people elect their mayor and local and regional counsellors. People elect members of the parliament in the parliamentary elections and respectively the president in the presidential elections. (All FGDs)

Regional, municipal. (FGD 1)

Knowledge of the main institutions responsible for organizing and holding elections

Opinions expressed by the respondents regarding the main institution(s) responsible for organizing and holding elections demonstrated correct understanding of what they are: the Central Electoral Committee (CEC) at national level, and the polling stations at local level.

The institutions responsible for organizing and holding elections are the Central Electoral Committee and the polling stations in each locality. (All FGDs)

In contrast, the responses given by Roma participants (FGD 6) indicate erroneous perceptions or gaps in knowledge about electoral institutions. The town hall, deputies, the government, and certain political parties are not among the institutions directly responsible for organizing and holding elections. Moreover, some respondents claimed they had never heard of the CEC (FGD 1).

Knowledge of differences in the processes of organizing local, parliamentary and presidential elections

The participants' responses regarding differences in the processes of organizing local, parliamentary and presidential elections showed differing perceptions. Some participants believed the differences existed mainly between organizing local-level and national level elections and were associated with the number of voters. Thus, their number is limited to the members of the respective community in case of local-level elections, while the entire country, including the diaspora, participates in the parliamentary and presidential elections. Another difference mentioned by a young rural resident is the number of ballot papers: he pointed out that they were much more numerous in the national-level elections.

The difference is that only the residents of the village participate in local elections and elect their mayor; while the entire country, including the diaspora, participates in presidential or parliamentary elections. (All FGDs)

Some respondents also mentioned differences in the procedure for registering candidates and in the duration of the electoral campaign, pointing out that at national level, candidates are required to collect a certain number of signatures in their supportive in order to be registered and that the electoral campaign is longer (FGD 1, 2).

At the same time, some respondents did not believe there were any significant differences in the processes of organizing local, parliamentary and presidential elections (FGD 2, 6).

Perceptions of the most pressing election-related issues the CEC has to address in Moldova

Two of the most urgent election-related issues to be addressed by the CEC in Moldova, as highlighted by respondents, are (by frequency of their mention):

- *Streamlining the voting process by means of introducing electronic voting.* Some participants think that an urgent concern to be addressed by the CEC is the implementation of electronic voting to make voting easier - especially for the elderly and those who are travelling on the election day (FGD 3, 5).
- *Developing an effective mechanism to combat vote tampering and vote buying.* Respondents stressed the importance of taking effective measures to prevent electoral fraud, including vote buying and tampering with election results (FGD 1, 2, 3, 6).

Another significant concern has also been identified in respect to:

- *Managing the number of candidates.* Some respondents believed that a high number of candidates (21 in the discussed case) could be confusing for voters. It was suggested in this regard to introduce more rigid criteria for the registration of candidates (FGD 3, 5).

In addition to these issues, the participants mentioned some other concerns, such as fining those who violate election rules, and restricting diaspora votes (FGD 3, 4). Other mentioned issues were: regulating electoral campaign expenditures (including the expenses on advertising and campaign materials), motivating young people to vote, and putting a cap at 80 years old on the admissible voting age (FGD 1, 3), making voting mandatory, and promoting the right to vote in any locality inside Moldova (FGD 2).

I believe it is implementation of electronic voting to make voting easier - for example, for the elderly who cannot move about... also the money wasted on advertising aids, their distribution, etc. (FGD 3, 5)

To put a cap on the number of candidates because you get confused as to where to put your stamp... Becoming a candidate is far too simple. Stricter criteria should be applied. (FGD 3, 5)

To motivate young people to vote, to create incentives for voting, choosing the future for our country... to cap the maximum admissible voting age e.g. at 80 years of age. (FGD 1, 3)

Gaps in knowledge about the electoral process

There are multiple concerns and ambiguities about the electoral process aspects the respondents find difficult to understand. Some participants are confused about the need to present their ID at each election, while others have difficulties in understanding the voting process and the phenomenon of buying votes to get a public position. Another issue that causes confusion is verification of information about the election progress (FGD 2).

Several respondents - especially young people from rural areas and women – found it hard or refused to answer this question.

I don't really understand why you have to show your ID each time you vote. (FGD 5)

People choose one out of several candidates, for example, Filat, Plahotniuc, Dodon. Each of them gets a certain number of votes that is not enough to be elected. Then one of them buys another's votes and goes to the next level. (FGD 6)

The level of knowledge about electoral processes in other countries

The survey found that respondents had limited knowledge about the electoral process in other countries. However, some of them could describe certain specific features of international electoral practices.

Three noteworthy features of international electoral practices different from those of Moldova include:

- the US electoral system characterized by voting by mail and the lengthy process that takes many days (FGD 1),
- use of electronic voting in some countries such as the US, France (only for French nationals) and Estonia,
- no right to vote in North Korea, which is a significant difference from the electoral process in Moldova.

One respondent commented that the electoral process in Moldova is more democratic than that in the US, which consists of several steps and where their leader is elected by a small part of the population.

Several participants admitted they did not follow or did not know electoral processes in other countries (FGD 3, 4, 5, 6).

I know there has been a major postal voting scandal in the US. The voting process is several days long... in North Korea, people have no right to vote. (FGD 1)

France has electronic voting... in Estonia they also vote electronically - it is very simple, practical, quick, convenient and safe. (FGD 2, 3)

In the US, voting is electronic... In our country, elections are more democratic than in the USA, their elections consist of many steps and only a part of the population gets to choose the leader. (FGD 4)

Perceptions about what would be beneficial for the electoral system in Moldova

Survey participants believe it would be beneficial for Moldova's electoral system to introduce electronic voting, which is considered to be an essential component of an ideal electoral system.

Perceptions of an ideal electoral system

A crucial aspect mentioned by several respondents is the integrity of the electoral system, with an emphasis on eliminating corrupt practices (to prevent buying and selling of votes, frequent migration of elected representatives between political parties). Another important aspect is to prevent marginalization in the electoral process, especially in case of persons with disabilities.

Some other important aspects mentioned by the participants is making voting obligatory for all Moldovan nationals, introduction of fines for non-voting or evasion from voting, and introduction of incentives for participating voters.

Thus, the responses reflect the desire of the participants to have a technology-savvy, fair and transparent electoral system, which would be accessible and immune to corrupt practices.

An ideal electoral system should also target people with disabilities who are usually marginalized... not to be corrupt, to prevent buying and selling of votes, migration of deputies between political parties, to envisage sanctions for such infringements. (FGD 5)

To be an electoral system immune to corruption, ensuring free and fair elections. (FGD 6)

A system with electronic voting - the process will be faster and more people will vote... Voting must be made mandatory. (FGD 2)

Perceptions of what is necessary for an ideal electoral system

According to the FGD participants, certain changes are necessary to have an ideal electoral system, such as: voting accessibility should be improved and in particular it should be possible to vote from any location that is convenient for the voter (FGD 4); the supervision of the entire process by the CEC should be stricter; the procedure for registering candidates should be reviewed in terms of the introduction of more rigorous filters (FGD 1, 3). It was suggested furthermore to implement a mixed voting system where voters could vote electronically as well as in polling stations. Other suggestions were to introduce electronic vote counting and to implement a territorial reform for the avoidance of certain problems in the electoral process.

To introduce mixed voting - electronically as well as physically... to implement electronic counting of votes. (FGD 1, 6)

A territorial reform is required to prevent such cases from occurring in future... To introduce a filter at the candidate registration stage. (FGD 3)

Perceived media influence on shaping of the public opinion about elections

The responses received regarding the role played by media in shaping the public opinion about the elections reflect differing perceptions. Most participants see media as a tool to influence general public; some

respondents pointed out that poor quality information can lead to manipulations and thus affect the public opinions.

On the other hand, some participants stated that although they follow information in the media, they remain impartial and able to form their own opinions for decision-making purposes (FGD 4, 5).

Mass media is basically a tool to manage general public, people. If people are given low-quality information, they will be easier to manipulate in elections. (FGD 5)

I listen to it, but I make independent decisions. (FGD 5)

Perceptions of how to improve media coverage of elections to better inform general public

The participants expressed their significant concerns about the fairness and impartiality of the media when covering the elections. Thus, respondents emphasized the need for impartiality and independence in covering the elections and expressing their desire to see truthful information in the media and ensured equal access to media platforms. In their view, improved coverage of the elections in the media involves integrity and impartiality as well as ensured access to correct and balanced information for general public. It was suggested to introduce sanctions for misinformation and to create specialized agencies - or to make it the responsibility of the CEC - to monitor and regulate the electoral process and the way it is covered in the media. This idea was supported more frequently by young people, women and the elderly. The respondents appreciated investigative news and suggesting that journalists should be more deeply involved in the analysis and presentation of details (FGD 3).

However, some participants found it hard to answer this question in a concrete and relevant way.

Not to disseminate lies... To be independent, not to support any candidate. (FGD 5)

A special agency is required to regulate all those matters. There is the CEC of course, but it would be good to have some other one to prevent misinformation and to verify information that appears in public domain... and to apply sanctions for misinformation. (FGD 1, 2)

Journalists must present investigative news... it would be good to involve the CEC in the monitoring of this process. (FGD 3)

To give information about each candidate to a similar extent, regardless of who they are, so that all candidates could have a chance to speak... all parties should be given similar time on air. (FGD 4)

Perceptions of the sufficiency and effectiveness of channels for feedback on the electoral process

The analysis of the responses regarding adequate channels for people to provide feedback on the electoral process identified differing opinions. Some participants acknowledge that such channels are actually in place (e.g. the CEC or the hotline), while some others claim that there are no such channels or they are not aware of them (FGD 3, 4). Opinions about the effectiveness of such channels are conflicting; there is a certain degree of skepticism about the impact of the received feedback (FGD 6).

Some respondents mentioned that the CEC has chats in social media where people can complain, but expressed their doubts about feedback effectiveness and said they did not see the point in providing any. It was pointed out furthermore that giving feedback can be difficult for certain categories of people, such as persons with disabilities. Some respondents mentioned the PromoLex phone line and police as appropriate channels for providing feedback (FGD 4).

I don't know of any special [feedback] channel other than the CEC or the hotline... It is a chat where you can complain or report irregularities, but I do not think anyone will do this because I do not believe anyone will read this message in the CEC. (FGD 1, 2)

We can communicate with the CEC, but it is difficult for me, a person using a wheelchair, to provide feedback. (FGD 5)

Even if they are in existence in a sufficient number, I don't think they are effective and I don't think it is worthwhile. (FGD 6)

Suggestions for the institutions involved in the electoral process regarding active communication with people and responsiveness to feedback

Respondents made various suggestions intended to improve communication and interaction between the institutions involved in the electoral process (the CEC and its subdivisions) and the general public. They included in particular:

- creating a special website or a special page on the CEC website for complaints; it should ensure anonymity and recording of messages for a transparent process without fear of retaliation,
- holding conferences and training sessions to facilitate more effective communication and to inform people correctly,
- creating a mobile line to take calls/complaints from people (FGD 3) or organizing Q&A TV shows for direct interaction with general public,
- organizing meetings or activities at local level to inform people about the CEC's role and objectives,
- conducting surveys to assess the level of satisfaction and to collect feedback from people.

Some participants - especially among Roma people - found it hard to answer this question.

To be more accessible... to create a website where people could express their opinions... there should be a section for complaints on the CEC website and there should be some reaction to them, some measures taken... The message should be recorded in case of a call; complaints should be anonymous. (FGD 1, 3)

To organize a direct conference with people from the CEC... To organize training for people - so that they are well informed. (FGD 2)

It would be desirable to have an indirect mechanism of communicating with people by mobile phone. That is, there should be someone there, a moderator who responds to all calls. (FGD 3)
TV shows where you can call and ask questions live. (FGD 4)

To organize meetings with the community... Awareness-raising activities specifically about what the CEC does, what its objectives are... Diverse surveys. (FGD 5)

5.2 Level of knowledge about the voting procedure

Associations with and understanding of the term "voting procedure"

The way the respondents were explaining how they understood the term "voting procedure" demonstrated a variety of perceptions of the electoral process. Most often the term was associated with how the entire voting process takes place as well as with the steps you have to go through in order to get to the ballot box, including the act of voting as such.

Most participants understand that this procedure is not only about exercising your right to make political choices; it has more complex dimensions. The voting procedure includes multiple stages and involves participation of various institutions that monitor and ensure transparency of the electoral process.

It was emphasized that the voting procedure involves election of your representatives - either an individual or a political party that will express and protect the interests of voters in public institutions, addressing their problems and respecting their rights. The voting procedure is perceived as a legitimate right of every individual enabling them to elect their representatives in state institutions.

Some participants also pointed out that the process of selecting representatives is based on the electoral promises of the candidates and the confidence placed in them.

It was pointed out therefore that people must be informed in advance of the identity and the ideological platform of each electoral candidate before exercising their right to vote.

The voting procedure means election of the person or party we want to represent us in parliament, the mayor, those who must address our problems and respect our rights... thus, we should vote for someone we have confidence in... it is a complex process involving several state institutions responsible for voting as well as the procedure of validating or not validating voting results. (FGD 5)

The act itself when you go to the polling station and cast your vote for some candidate. (FGD 1, 2)

The way voting takes place: protocol rules, regulations... the procedure makes me think of online voting and physical voting... the election process... exercise of the right to vote. (FGD 2, 3, 4)

The steps people have to go through to get to the ballot box. (FGD 3, 4)

Every person has the right to vote and to elect a trustworthy person who should be accountable to the people. (FGD 6)

Self-assessment of the level of knowledge about the voting procedure

Self-assessment by the FGD participants of their level of knowledge of the voting procedure on a scale of 1 to 5 generally yielded scores between 3 and 5 points. It should be noted that young rural residents more often consider themselves better informed about the voting procedure. However, most participants assessed their level of knowledge about this process as fair. They argued that there is confusion about certain details, lack of information and experience, violations in the electoral process, irregular practices during elections.

A small number of participants, especially young people from rural areas, believed they had very good knowledge of the voting procedure and gave it the highest possible score, relying on their personal experience or that of their relatives with the process. They acknowledge however they may be not fully aware of some aspects despite their level of knowledge.

[I award myself] 5 points - my mother was a member of the electoral committee and I am well informed; I also have this information by watching TV. (FGD 5)

I think [my score is] between 3 and 4; there is chaos in voting... violations have been committed... diverse tricks are practiced... I cannot say I know all details to perfection. (FGD 2, 5, 6)

I am partially informed; I think there is information of which I know little... there are certain fine points... I do not have enough experience. (FGD 2, 5)

The level of knowledge of the voting procedure was also assessed in the quantitative component of the survey by means of nine statements of which two are true and seven are false:

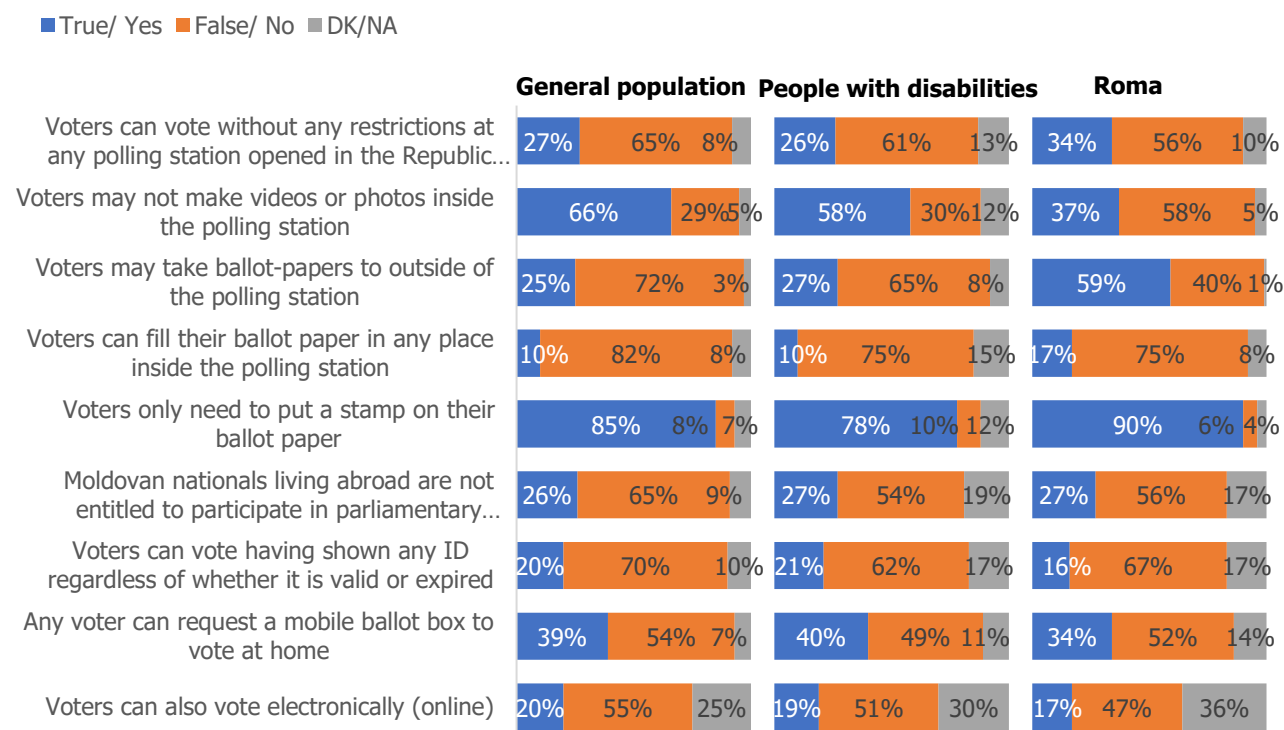
• Voters can vote without any restrictions at any polling station opened in Moldova	False
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• Voters may not make videos or photos inside the polling station	True
• Voters may take ballot-papers to outside of the polling station	False
• Voters can fill out their ballot paper in any place inside the polling station	False
• Voters only need to put a stamp on their ballot paper	True
• Moldovans may not vote in parliamentary elections while abroad	False
• Voters can vote having shown any ID regardless of whether it is valid or expired	False
• Any voter can request a mobile ballot box to vote at home	False
• Voters can also vote electronically (online)	False

The findings shown in Fig. 27 allow arriving at the following conclusions:

- not a single statement was attributed correctly by everyone,
- the level of knowledge varied between statements (from 54% to a maximum of 85%),
- the level of knowledge demonstrated by persons with disabilities does not vary significantly from that in the general public sample,
- the level of knowledge by Roma people varies significantly in case of certain statements such as the ban on making videos and removal of ballot papers from the polling station,
- the lowest level of knowledge was registered regarding the right to request a mobile ballot box and the possibility to vote online.

Figure 27. Please tell me if each of the following statements about the election procedure is true or false (F3)



The calculated overall value for the level of knowledge of the voting procedure indicated that only 11% of the respondents attributed all 9 statements correctly, another 18% attributed 8 statements correctly, and 5% attributed less than three statements correctly.

Level of knowledge of the voter registration process

The responses regarding the level of knowledge of the voter registration process identified differing degrees of knowledge among the survey participants. However, a significant portion of the respondents demonstrated good level of knowledge, describing the stages of the registration procedure in detail, from presenting your ID at the polling station to be registered by a responsible official to mention of the

anonymity of your vote and importance of observing the rules, such as the ban on making photos and ensuring the voter's privacy in the voting booth.

A certain Roma respondent added that registration and voting take place by sector and street.

On the opposite pole, there were some respondents who demonstrated limited knowledge of the procedure and were not able to provide specific details; they were more frequent among young urban residents and the elderly.

By your IDNS code of 13 digits, you can see which polling station you are registered at... your ID is requested there and the data is entered in the computer... they tell you which sector you should approach and a responsible person gives you your ballot paper there. You go to a booth and vote anonymously. (FGD 1, 5)

It is not allowed to make a photo of your ballot paper... when voting, you are alone in the voting booth; no one is allowed to manipulate you. (FGD 1, 6)

Obstacles to participation in the electoral process

Obstacles encountered by people in the electoral process concern accessibility, manipulatory practices and errors in electoral lists, misinformation and other practices able to influence your free choice. A certain respondent commented that voters can be motivated to vote for a certain party or candidate in exchange for some benefits. Several respondents reported their experiences of seeing errors in the voting lists, such as inclusion of deceased persons or absence of eligible voters on the list.

Other highlighted obstacles concerned the lack or insufficient quantities of aids, such as a magnifying glass for people who have trouble seeing, as well as the issue of the respondent's name missing from the voting lists, or the possibility of someone else having voted on your behalf. A special mention was made of the lack of infrastructure for persons with disabilities, especially mobility-challenged ones (FGD 5).

Some respondents mentioned obstacles caused by the lack of information and knowledge of electoral procedures, stating that people are mostly not familiar with the procedure required to vote at home by using a mobile ballot box (FGD 3). There was also mention of obstacles because of having a different registered place of residence (FGD 1, 3), as well as concerns about violations and wrongdoing, such as organizing forced delivery of voters to polling stations (FGD 2).

For example, some parties invite people to vote for them in exchange for a package of rice... there may be not enough magnifying glasses for those who have trouble seeing. (FGD 5)

The issue of voter lists, their accuracy and verification... There were some occasions where people could not find their name on the voting list or saw the name of a deceased person there... it is a problem where they are on the list. (FGD 1, 5, 4)

People are misinformed, they don't know that in case you want to vote from home for some reason you have to submit a request to have a mobile ballot box brought to your place. (FGD 3)

Issues on which more information is needed

Overall, the participants' responses regarding what additional information would be desirable for them reflect a number of concerns ranging between the level of transparency and integrity of the electoral process and understanding of the principle behind counting of votes. Thus, some participants expressed their interest to get more practical information about how the voting procedure takes place, how voter lists are made and what illegal practices are possible within the electoral process. On the other hand, some other respondents were curious about technical aspects of ensuring correctness of the vote counting process.

I would be interested to know more about how points/votes are counted. (FGD 5)

Of particular interest was the selection process and the legitimacy of representatives at community level.

At community level, there is a sole representative from the city who manages the entire voting process... how many election observers there should be. I am interested to know who chooses these people and how they are chosen. (FGD 3, 6)

Concern was also expressed about the accessibility of information provided during election campaigns to persons with disabilities, including those who have trouble seeing or hearing. Thus, it was suggested to develop special ballot papers for such persons.

The information given to support advertising during the election campaign should also be accessible to persons with disabilities, those who have trouble seeing or hearing... the information on the ballot papers should also be made more accessible for them. That is, special ballot papers would be needed for them. (FGD 5)

Whether my vote goes to the right place... whether no errors are made during the vote counting process. (FGD 2)

How the procedure takes place actually because we know it only in theory... How lists are made of the people who will vote. (FGD 2)

Participation in civic education programs on elections

An analysis of the responses regarding participation in civic education programs on elections found that such type of involvement is limited - especially during the period immediately before the elections. Most participants had no experience of participating in civic education programs on elections. The responses showed that civic education programs are often offered in the context of elections and focus on familiarizing people – and especially those who are directly involved in the process, such as advisors, observers, or members of the election committees - with the election procedures. They receive special training related to the elections, which includes rules for administrating the voting process, rules of conduct on the election day and certain practical aspects, such as use of equipment. Some respondents mentioned their experience of taking part in discussions and presentations of candidates' electoral programs (FGD 6).

Lack of interest or, in some cases, lacking information or lacking opportunity were given as reasons for non-participation in civic education programs.

I received training on the elections because I was an observer. (FGD 2, 3, 5)

Perceived most beneficial topics or information in a civic education program on electoral processes

The responses regarding information considered beneficial in a civic education program on electoral processes identified the following topics:

- voting consequences - because some people misunderstand its actual impact,
- the importance of voting and how it can influence decisions and the political direction of the entire country,
- details of the process for counting and verifying votes,
- how exactly elections are organized and held - as an important element of the electoral process transparency (FGD 1). It would be desirable to have an informative guide – as either a video or a printed booklet - to explain voting stages and to list the required documents.
- how voting security is ensured, including in the case of electronic voting (FGD 2, 3).

An interesting suggestion in this respect concerned a possibility to introduce fines for unsubstantiated abstaining from voting, similar to other countries (FGD 3).

Some people do not understand the consequences of voting and how important it is... the stages of the voting process, the documents required for voting... [Information] about the vote counting/verification process... (FGD 1, 3)

Perceptions about the convenience of digital platforms for accessing electoral information

The responses regarding convenience of using digital platforms to access electoral information demonstrated that very few people had an experience of using the cec.md platform. Some of them said it was very comfortable to access electoral information through this digital platform, appreciating usefulness of the information provided there.

On the other hand, most respondents - especially the elderly and Roma - said they had no experience of using such platforms. Many participants were not even aware of the existence of a digital platform with electoral information, while some others preferred other information sources, such as social media or TV.

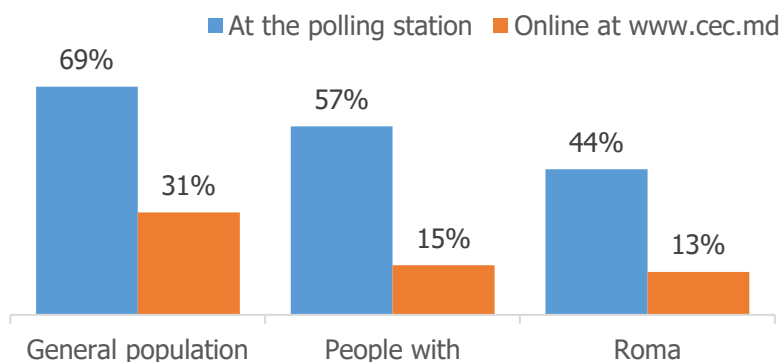
One young man commented that using such platforms is difficult, especially for the elderly, and pointed out in particular the challenge of finding the required locality on the map.

Cec.md is a convenient platform for me... The information was useful. (FGD 1, 5)

It is difficult - especially for older people - to use this website because it is difficult to find the required locality on the map. (FGD 2)

I have never used something like this... I use social media, watch TV to obtain information. (FGD 3, 5, 6)

Figure 28. Do you know that you can check your personal data in the voter lists, including at the polling station where you are registered? (F4)



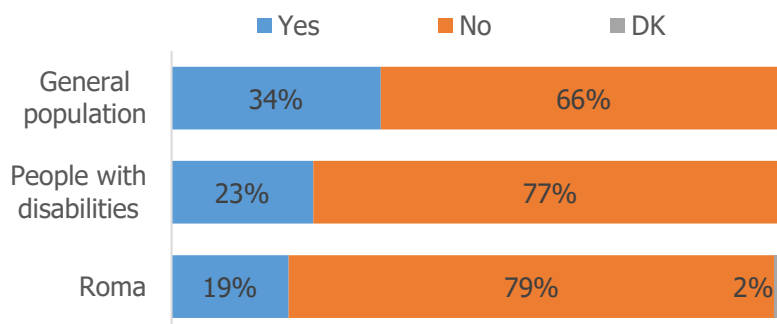
Another assessed aspect was the respondents' awareness that they can check their personal data in the voter lists, including at the polling station where they are registered. Thus, 69% of the respondents claimed they were aware of the possibility to verify their data at the polling station, but only 31% knew they could also do this online at www.cec.md (Fig. 28).

As compared to the general public, the level of awareness among persons with disabilities and Roma people was significantly lower concerning both the possibility of verifying the data at the polling station and the possibility of verifying them online on the CEC website.

Those who are not aware of the possibility to verify their personal data at the polling station are more often persons with low education (43%), residents of the North of Moldova (38%) and Chisinau (34%), civically passive people (35%), and those with low interest in social and political life (45%).

Among those who are not aware of the possibility to verify their personal data on <http://www.cec.md/> www.cec.md there are more older people (80%), persons with low (85%) and medium (70%) level of education, residents of the North (76%) and Central part (73%) of Moldova, rural residents (73%), ethnic minorities (82%), civically passive people (80%), and those with low interest in social and political life (81%).

Figure 29. Have you ever checked your personal data? (F5)



Sample: 811/141/98 respondents who are aware of the possibility to verify their personal data in the voter lists

(45%), persons with a high level of education (42%), urban residents (39%), residents of the Central part of Moldova and Chisinau (44% in each case), the ethnic majority (37%), civically active people (46%).

Suggestions for improving the level of digital knowledge relating to the elections

Participants made some specific suggestions intended to improve the level of digital knowledge relating to the elections, including use of the CEC platforms, the state register and online tools. They include:

- distributing brochures or leaflets with information about the websites relevant for the electoral process (FGD 5),
- intensifying advertisement and information campaigns on www.cec.md (FGD 2),
- simplifying the website use by adding a list of Moldova' localities (FGD 1),
- providing training and assistance to people, especially the elderly, to teach them how to use digital platforms (FGD 4).

When brochures are handed out before the elections, they could produce small leaflets listing websites where you can find information about the progress of the elections... advertisement. (FGD 5)

Promote www.cec.md more and hold broader information campaigns about this website as well as explain the steps required to find information. (FGD 1, 2)

To simplify the procedure for its use by making it possible to just enter the name of the locality you are interested in, because using the map is more complicated. I mean, they should include a list of Moldova's localities. (FGD 1)

Considering our age, maybe there should be someone to show us how to use it. FGD 4

Only one third of the respondents aware of the possibilities to verify their personal data in the voter lists have ever actually done this (Fig. 29). This percentage is significantly lower among Roma people and persons with disabilities: 19% and 23% respectively.

The socio-demographic profile of the respondents who have ever verified their personal data in the voter lists says they are more often young people

VI. KNOWLEDGE OF THE MAIN CIVIC INVOLVEMENT TYPES AND LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

This section covers the level of knowledge by the population about the main local processes, civic involvement types, local involvement types practiced by local authorities, the level of interest to participate in such involvement activities, motivation for and obstacles to local civic involvement, people's perceptions of the receptivity of local authorities, and satisfaction with LPA activities to involve the community.

6.1 Level of knowledge about the main local processes

The survey assessed the level of knowledge by the population about the nine main local processes shown in Fig. 30. The findings make it possible to arrive at the following conclusions:

- People (mostly) know to a relatively better extent where and how to apply for social assistance services (75% of the respondents), support services (knowing where to apply) in case of discrimination or violation of human rights (63%), and support in case of having received non-compliant or inferior services (57%).
- The level of knowledge is moderate regarding more practical aspects, such as how work and services of public interest are performed (46%), how you can get involved in decision-making (45%), and how fee rates are calculated for public services (43%).
- The lowest level of knowledge was registered regarding practical aspects of LPA functioning – how their development strategies are adopted (32%), how decisions are made (32%), and how public finances are managed (24%).

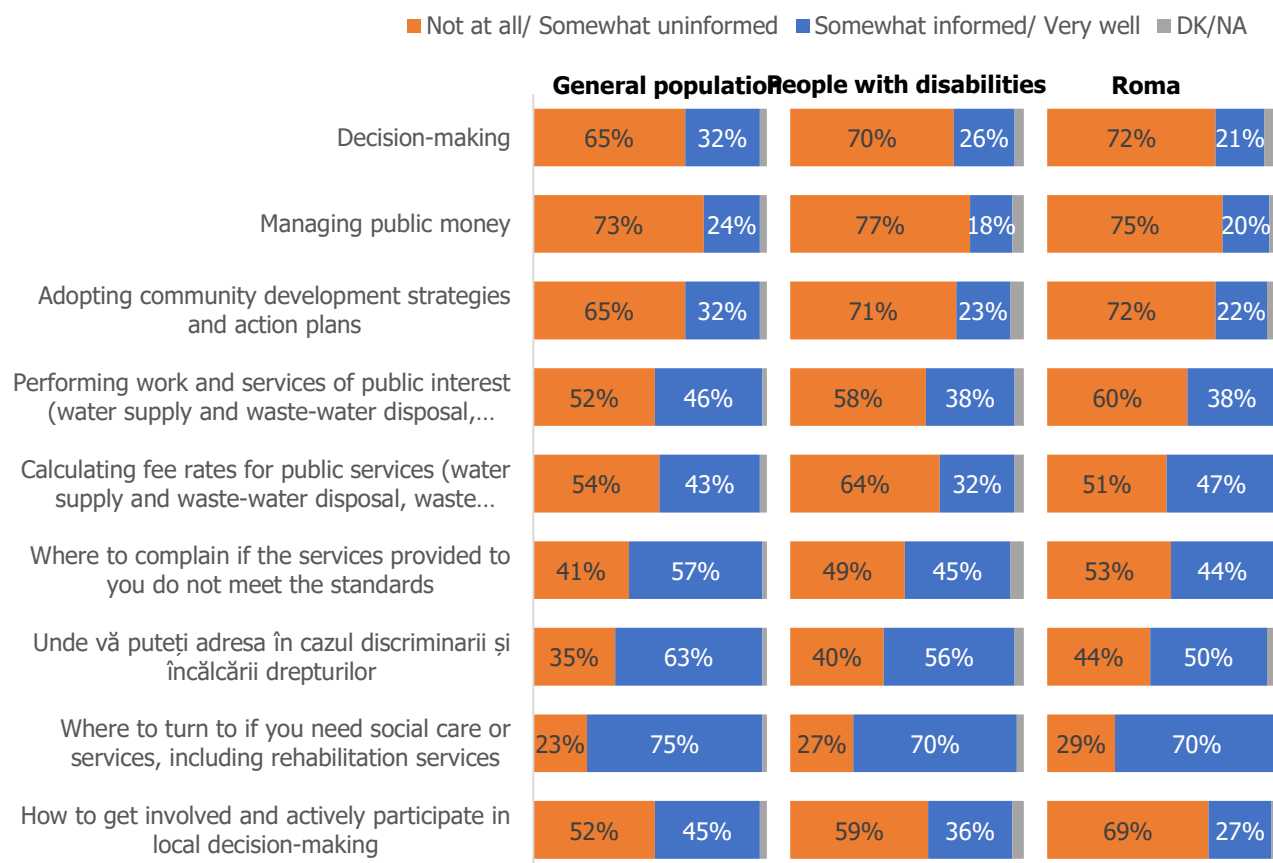
Persons with disabilities and Roma people are more vulnerable in this regard, especially in terms of knowledge of local involvement types.

The computed overall percentages show that 17% of the respondents are not informed about any of the nine assessed processes, while 14% are sufficiently well informed about all those processes. Based on the received responses, the entire population can be subdivided into 3 groups according to their level of knowledge about local processes:

- people with a low level of knowledge, i.e. those who know up to three of the nine assessed processes (46% of the respondents); this group mostly includes people with a low level of education (60%), urban residents (51%), ethnic minorities (76%), unemployed (51%), persons with special needs (53%), those with low interest in social and political life (57%), civically passive persons (59%), and those with a low level of confidence in main institutions (56%),
- people with a moderate level of knowledge, i.e. those who know four to six processes out of the nine assessed ones (34% of the respondents),
- people with a high level of knowledge, i.e. those who know seven to nine processes out of the nine assessed ones (20% of the respondents); this group mostly includes adults (24%), persons with a high and medium level of education (25%), residents of rural areas (25%), Central part (27%) and South (24%) of Moldova, the ethnic majority (23%), persons with a high level of interest in social

and political life (29%), civically active people (39%), and those with a high level of confidence in main institutions (33%).

Figure 30. How well are you informed about the following processes in your community? (G2)



6.2 Knowledge of civic involvement types

FGD participants' associations with the phrase 'civic involvement'

The responses regarding understanding by the FGD participants of the phrase 'civic involvement' included the following definitions:

- participation and involvement in social and political life, including contributing to policy making by expressing your opinions and views and making suggestions as well as getting involved in activities that benefit the society (FGD 1, 2, 4, 5),
- participation in the electoral process by engaging in debates, asking questions to candidates, voting, exercising your right to vote (FGD 4, 6),
- involvement in volunteering activities at the level of your community and the society: planting trees or making parks not to pursue any gainful or political interests (FGD 3).

Some respondents associate civic involvement with interest in any political or social process, emphasizing the importance of the fact that you are not indifferent to them (FGD 3).

Some participants knew the phrase but did not have a clear idea of what it means.

Participation and involvement in social and political life of the country, including in the development of policies by expressing your opinions and views, by making suggestions. (FGD 1, 2, 5)

To exercise our voting right... to be involved in the life of the society. (FGD 4, 6)

Civic involvement is where candidates are holding a debate and I ask them questions about issues of interest for me personally [as a national of this country] or for the entire community. (FGD 4)

Importance of civic activity

The importance of civic involvement was assessed on a scale of 1 to 5. The findings indicate its mostly positive perception by respondents, who awarded it high scores. The substantiating arguments were that civic activity is vital and has considerable beneficial impact. It was pointed out that civic involvement gives you a feeling of being important and thus motivates you to continue to be active in the future. Tangible and visible deliverables of civic activity are perceived as an impetus motivating you to even more active participation. Civic involvement is considered a powerful tool for addressing problems.

It was also mentioned that civic involvement gives meaning to your existence and contributes to changes towards a better life.

One participant defined civic activity as responsibility of every citizen for their country (FGD 6).

I award 5 points - I think it is very important to be active. Thus, we feel more important when we see changes caused by our involvement. This motivates us to be even more active... Problems can be addressed and solutions can be found easier when people are acting together, and this gives meaning to your life... to have a better life. (All FGDs)

It is very important to be civically active, we are nationals of this country. (FGD 6)

Level of knowledge of the main civic involvement types

A general analysis of the responses regarding main types of civic involvement identified a range of perceptions and views as to how people get involved in civic life, including personal attitudes and joint actions. According to some respondents, this means participating in community initiatives, contributing to community development through volunteering for local projects (FGD 1, 2, 5), active involvement in public manifestations intended to show dissatisfaction, such as participation in protests or expressing your opinions in letters, petitions, applications (FGD 4, 6).

Some respondents believed that the main civic involvement type is voting in elections, while others spoke about the importance of donating for public causes. Other mentioned types of involvement included participation in electoral debates, cultural events and civic education campaigns for the population to cultivate a feeling of citizenship and civic engagement.

It is important to emphasize that respondents are aware of the need to have a leader with concrete ideas and an action plan to gather people around a cause.

For example, this means participation in certain projects intended for the entire community. For example, making a park. Or this can be projects for the society. (FGD 5)

Volunteering - for example, we can initiate a campaign to clean some area in our community or to plant trees, or to landscape some space, to make a park. (FGD 1, 2)

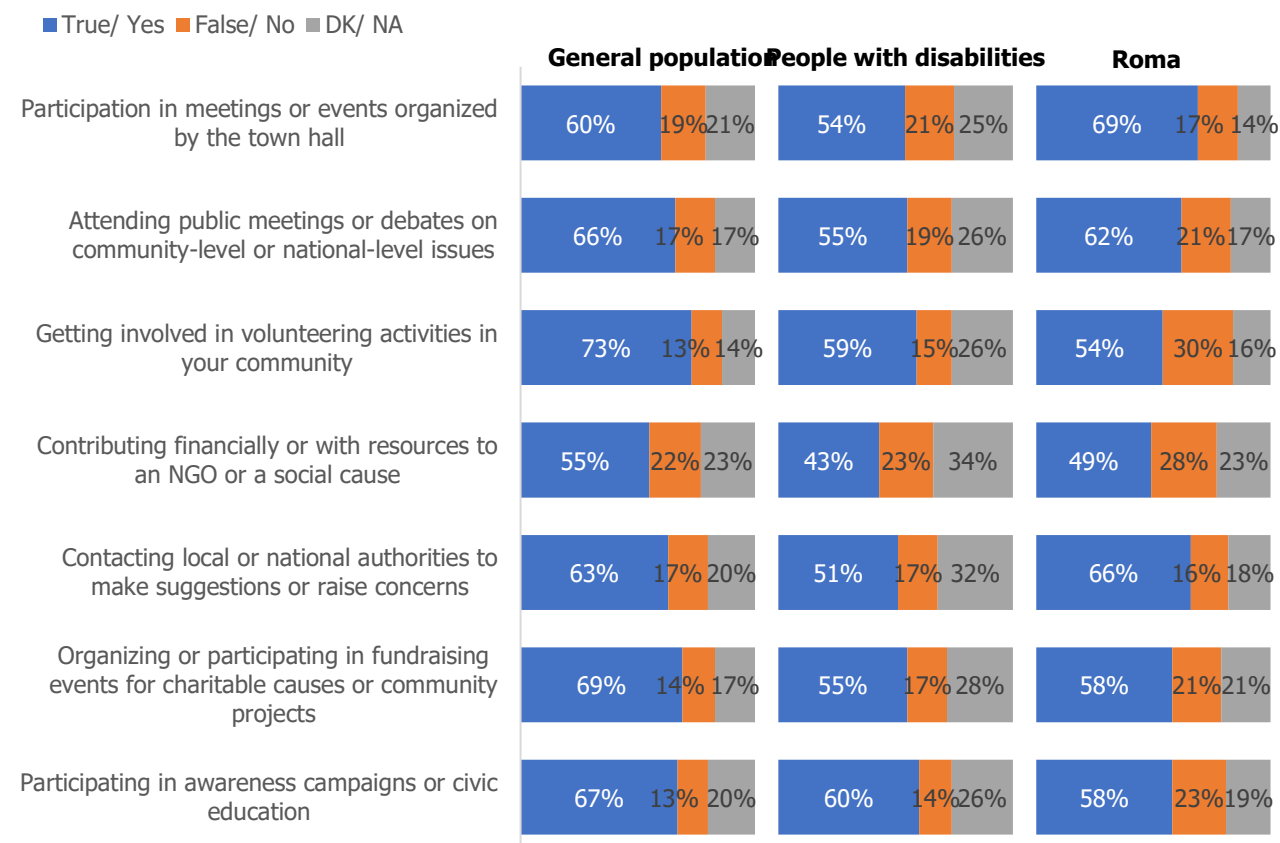
Donating money for a public cause. (FGD 3)

There must be a leader with concrete ideas and an action plan so that we could gather people around that idea. (FGD 3)

As part of the FGD, respondents were given a list of seven most common types of civic involvement to assess their level of knowledge of those types (Fig. 31). The first finding made in this regard is that most people know all seven types of civic involvement. Overall, the level of knowledge was slightly lower among persons with disabilities and Roma people.

The best-known civic involvement type is involvement in volunteering actions in the community (73%), and the least-known one is donating funds or resources to non-governmental organizations or social causes (55%).

Figure 31. In your opinion, can the following actions be categorized as civic involvement types? (G4)



The calculated overall percentages show that 12% of the respondents do not consider any of the listed activities to be civic involvement types, while 32% correctly attributed all seven activities. Based on these values, the population can be subdivided into 3 groups by their level of knowledge of civic involvement types:

- People with a low level of knowledge, i.e. those who know up to three types out of the seven on the list (31% of the respondents). This category more frequently includes persons with a low level of education (43%), urban residents (34%), unemployed (35%), persons with disabilities (44%), those with low interest in social and political life (49%), and civically passive respondents (41%).
- People with a fair level of knowledge, i.e. those who know four to six types (37% of the respondents).
- People with a high level of knowledge, i.e. those who know all listed types (32% of the respondents). This category more frequently included men (37%), persons with a high or medium level of education (37%), residents of rural areas (36%) and the South of Moldova (52%), ethnic

minorities (51%), people with a high interest in social and political life (42%), civically active persons (42%), those with a high level of confidence in main institutions (38%).

6.3 Local-level civic involvement types, their organization and level of interest. Involvement drivers and obstacles

Perceptions of how to involve people in decision-making and planning at local level

Finally, the respondents were given a list of seven main types of local-level involvement and asked if their LPAs practice such types and if the respondents would be interested to participate in such local administration activities (Fig. 32).

The findings make it possible to arrive at the following conclusions:

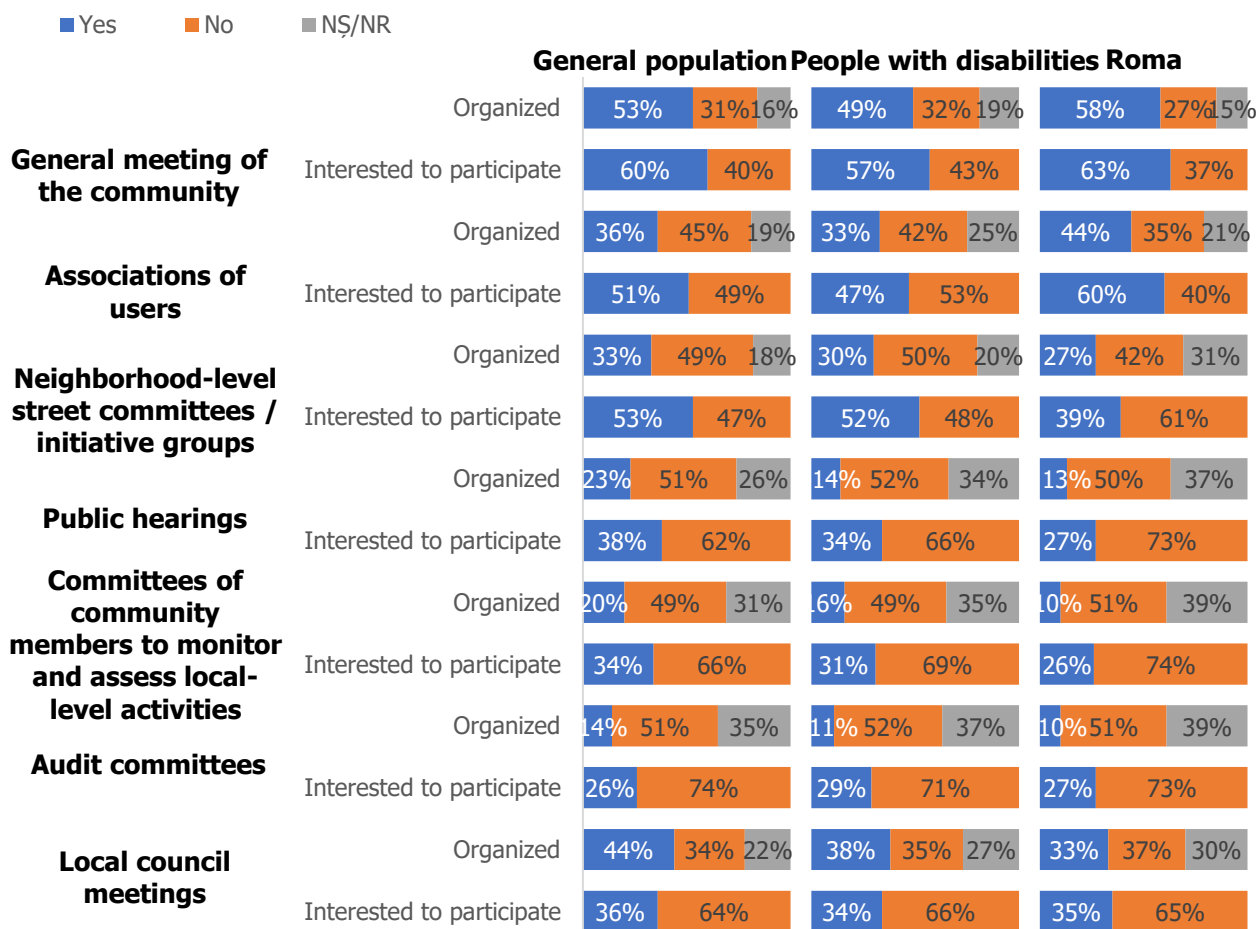
- LPAs most often organize general community meetings (53%) and meetings of the local council (44%).
- Also popular are civil involvement types such as user associations (36%) and street committees/neighborhood-level initiative groups (33%).
- The least popular types are public hearings (23%), oversight committees composed of community members to monitor and assess work at local level (20%), and review/audit committees (14%). These types also yielded the highest percentage of non-responses, i.e. respondents do not know if such activities are organized in their community.
- General meeting of the community, associations of users (such as water, gas users) and street committees/neighborhood-level initiative groups are the local involvement types enjoying the highest level of interest from the participants (every second respondent).
- Review/audit committees are the local involvement type in which respondents are least interested.
- Overall, the percentage of respondents interested in local-level involvement is significantly higher than the percentage of those who mentioned/know that their LPA involves people in these activities (excepting local council meetings).
- Overall, the survey did not identify any statistically significant differences in the responses given by general population, persons with disabilities and Roma people.

An in-depth analysis revealed that 31% of the respondents are not aware of any type of civil involvement activities organized by their local authorities. Such responses were more frequent among urban residents (39%) as well as residents of the South of Moldova (40%) and Chisinau (43%).

31% of the respondents are not interested in getting involved in community administration activities in any way. The lack of interest in local involvement is more frequent among people with a low level of education (42%), urban residents (38%), residents of the South (38%) and Chisinau (40%), unemployed (35%), ethnic minorities (46%), persons with a low level of interest in social and political life (51%), civically passive respondents (47%), and those with a low level of confidence in main institutions (33%).

FGD participants made various suggestions regarding involvement of the community in decision-making and planning. Several respondents spoke of the importance of participating in the meetings of regional and local councils; they believed this is an opportunity to discuss community issues and to make suggestions and propose solutions. This view is shared mostly by women, the elderly and persons with disabilities. Other suggestions included involvement through informing the community by posting information about town hall plans and performance on the social media pages, and recognition and appreciation of the community involvement in diverse projects and activities. Direct communication, such as live video conferences with the mayor, were also suggested as a means enabling community members to ask questions and receive answers. These suggestions were made mainly by young urban residents.

Figure 32. Were any of the following civic involvement activities organized in your community during the last two years? / Which of these activities would you be interested to participate in? (G6-G7)



One respondent said it was important that "the agenda of council meetings be designed in a way arousing the interest of all residents" (FGD 4).

However, some respondents - especially Roma and young rural residents - found it hard to give a clear response to this question.

To attend meetings of the regional or local council. It should be pointed out this is an issue, which must be addressed. Attention should be drawn to this issue... They do not participate in decision-making, but they can get involved at project level with their suggestions, proposed solutions, ideas... Attending meetings, raising issues. (FGD 3, 4, 5)

It is important for town halls to appreciate involvement of people and to recognize the merits of community members... [Information about their] plans and performance should be posted in social media... To have a possibility to ask the mayor questions, to organize live video conferences. (FGD 2)

Perceptions of the LPA practices to involve people in decision-making and planning

The town hall practices to involve residents in decision-making in the communities of the survey participants are mostly traditional, such as an invitation to attend local council meetings. Such meetings are announced in advance, including the issues to be discussed, and give an opportunity for those interested to actively

participate in the debates (FGD 1, 4, 5). Respondents also mentioned video conferences (FGD 2) and placement of relevant information on the town hall's website (FGD 4).

However, some Roma respondents claimed that the town hall in their community did not have any such practices to involve the community in decision-making.

The town hall announces in advance [the date and venue of] the council meeting and the issues to be discussed or the agenda, and all interested community members can attend the meeting. (FGD 1, 4, 5)

The mayor of the neighboring village is a young man; he also posts information on the town hall website about what he has done and what else he intends to do. (FGD 4)

Level of satisfaction with communication between the national government and general public

The analysis of the responses regarding the level of satisfaction with communication of the national-level authorities with the population identified differing opinions. Most respondents are generally dissatisfied with the (lacking) communication between national-level officials and ordinary people. Criticisms were common because of the lack of adequate and effective communication between those two groups; it was pointed out that such communication is only in place in the run-up to elections. Some respondents stated that either this dialogue is lacking or the language used is not understandable to rural residents (FGD 5).

In contrast, some respondents expressed medium level of satisfaction with their communication with national authorities. This view was more common among young people and the elderly.

Only some respondents are satisfied with the level of communication of the national authorities with the population (FGD 1).

Maybe there is some communication, but [the language] is not understandable to an average person, that is, the terms used should be understandable to a rural person. (FGD 5)

This dialogue has not been functioning well... We do not see them in our localities, there is no dialogue, we only see them before elections... there is hardly any communication. (FGD 1, 3, 4)

Level of satisfaction with the way the town hall consults and involves community members in decision-making

The perceptions of how well the town hall consults and involves people in decision-making also varied considerably. The level of satisfaction expressed by respondents depended to a major extent on the degree of community involvement in local decision-making. Some respondents stated they were quite satisfied and gave examples of mayors who took opinions of community members into account and were responsive to community needs. At the same time, there were criticisms and negative opinions highlighting low or non-existing community involvement and excessive arbitrariness practiced by some town halls.

Another noteworthy aspect is some erroneous perceptions of involvement. For example, some FGD participants believe that organizing meetings and providing transparent information about the awarded projects or the achieved goals are also ways of consulting and involving the community in decision-making (FGD 4, 6).

Some respondents spoke of partial involvement of people, referring to some events in which the community took an active part (FGD 5).

I think we are involved in part, but the counsellors we have voted for and representing us are more involved. The town hall organizes certain events in which we take part - and so we can say that we are also involved. (FGD 5)

Our town hall fulfills its mission very well, it takes opinions of the village residents into account... they make a meeting when they want to build a road or a house... our mayor is very responsive. (FGD 1, 3)

The situation with involvement is very bad in our community. The mayor does what he wants. (FGD 1)

Perceptions of the degree to which the town hall consults with vulnerable groups in the community (poor people, persons with disabilities, etc.) and motivates them to get involved in decision-making and planning

Respondents mainly have negative opinion of the town hall practices to consult with vulnerable groups in the community, such as the poor or persons with disabilities, and to motivate them to get involved in decision-making and planning. Most participants expressed their disappointment in this respect and stated that their town hall generally does not initiate consultations with these vulnerable groups. The responses were consistent in expressing disbelief that these categories of people are consulted at all or motivated to participate in decision-making, and highlighting the lack of such practices in their community.

One young rural resident said that the level of consultation with these groups depends largely on the mayor's personal views and indicated a possibility that they can get involved differently depending on their social status.

At the same time, many respondents - especially among young people from urban areas, the elderly and Roma – found it hard to give a clear response to this question.

This depends on the mayor, whether they differentiate among social groups - because it is them who monitors and initiates the process. (FGD 1)

No... Not witnessed [any such occasion]... [They are] not consulted. (FGD 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

Preferential ways to express opinions on local-level planning, management and decision-making

Respondents indicated a number of preferential ways and made suggestions on how to express their opinion regarding planning, management and decision-making in their community. Some participants prefer public meetings where everyone interested to attend can raise individual issues to be addressed. Some others suggested surveys by phone and boxes where the elderly could leave their feedback messages with opinions or suggestions. These ideas were expressed mostly by young respondents.

Other mentioned ways of expressing your opinion included chats on online platforms such as Facebook, sending letters and initiating petitions; these suggestions were made mainly by women. Older people indicated the town hall website as a suitable channel for expressing your opinion.

At the same time, some persons with disabilities suggested attendance of the meetings where issues are addressed that affect them directly and stated they were willing to express their opinion directly.

Some participants found it hard to give a relevant response or did not respond at all; this situation was more frequent among the elderly and Roma people.

To attend meetings that address issues concerning us, to express our opinion regarding such issues. (FGD 5)

People should choose issues to be addressed. Decisions regarding solutions to problems should also be made by the community rather than the mayor... Conduct surveys, including by phone. (FGD 1, 2)

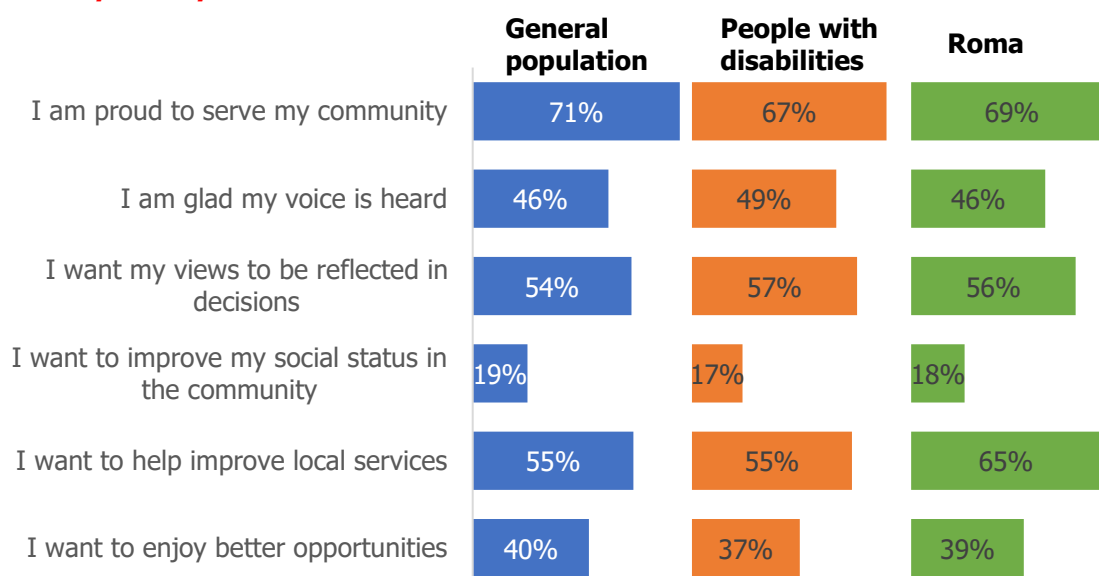
There should be boxes for the elderly where they can leave their opinions or suggestions. (FGD 2)

Local involvement drivers and obstacles

Taking pride in being useful to the community is the main driver for local involvement (71%); it is followed by drivers such as the desire to contribute to improvement of local services (55%), the desire to express their opinion/make their needs known (46%), to ensure that decisions are made with account of the needs and interests of the community (54%). These drivers are also valid for persons with special needs and Roma people (Fig. 33).

Figure 33. What drives you to get involved in decision-making and planning in your community? (G8)

Three responses possible



Sample: 804/168/172 respondents interested in participating in at least one type of local involvement activities

The main reason invoked by respondents not interested to get involved locally is the lack/insufficiency of time (61%), followed by less common reasons, such as lack of confidence in the responsiveness of the authorities (36%), lack of willingness to be informed about such events (29%), and the fact that such events are organized during their working hours (20%).

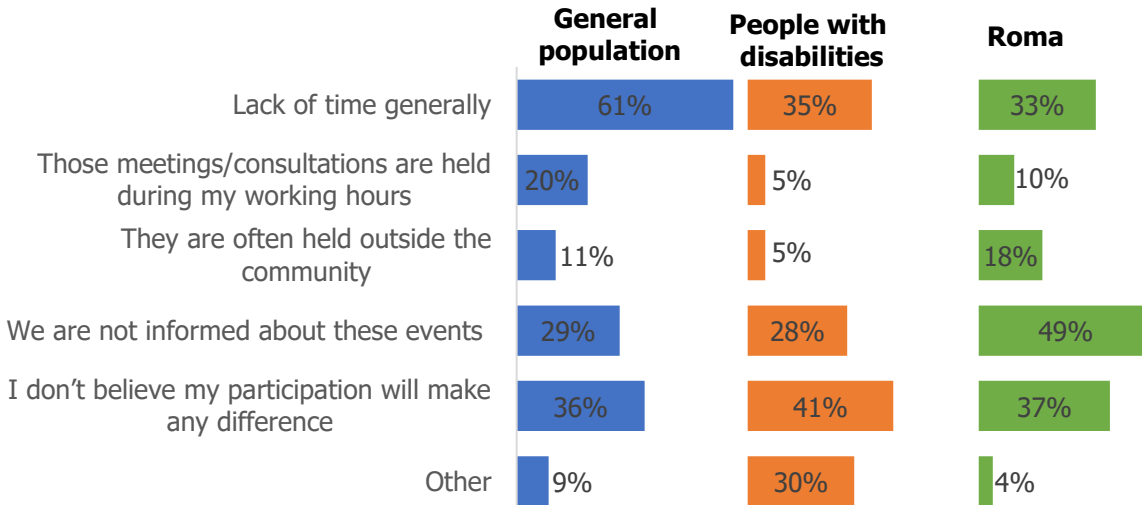
In case of persons with disabilities, the most common reason is lacking belief that they will be heard; in case of Roma people, the reason invoked most often was the lack of interest in getting informed about the organization of civic involvement events.

Overall, drivers for the involvement in addressing community issues varied and included certain factors of personal nature as well as community-related or socio-economic factors. Personal drivers included the desire to change prevailing perceptions of disability, being inspired by the example of others, the need for collective initiatives, and an opportunity to get involved for vulnerable groups.

Some participants stated they would be driven to get involved in order to refute the stereotypes prevailing in respect of persons with disabilities, the desire to give a positive view and to demonstrate that they are also able to contribute to addressing of issues in their community. Some others are driven to get involved where they see that other community members are actively involved in solving local problems. The drivers also include the existence of leaders or groups organizing and coordinating community efforts as well as

the existence of initiatives that take the needs and capacities of persons with disabilities into account. These ideas are more common among young people.

Figure 34. You said you are not interested to participate in any meetings, consultations and planning processes organized by the town hall. Why is that? (G9) *Multiple answer*



Sample: 355/79/49 respondents not interested in participating in any type of local involvement activities

A strong driver for civic involvement is improvement of living standards, such as higher pensions, better healthcare and transport services; this opinion was frequent especially among the elderly. Appropriate appreciation of your volunteering efforts can also facilitate the willingness to get involved in civic activities.

My incentive is to refute the stereotype that I am a disabled person, I want to prove that I am capable of something... I would be motivated by seeing that other people around me get involved, that is, that the involvement is a joint effort. (FGD 5)

Better health, higher pensions will be an incentive for us... If we see adequate appreciation on the part of people in power, some changes.... transports should be organized. (FGD 4)

There should be someone who takes the initiative in their hands and organizes us. (FGD 6)

CONCLUSIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

AND

General Finding 1

The respondents' level of confidence in main institutions is in sync with the level of their interest in social and political life in Moldova and the level of their civic activity - the higher the interest in social and political life and the level of civic activity, the higher is the level of confidence in main institutions.

These three variables are in fact interdependent: an increase in the level of any one variable influences the increase in the level of the other two variables.

General Finding 2

The level of interest in social and political life, civic activity and confidence in main institutions directly influences:

- proactive and advanced consumption of information (from various sources),
- knowledge of the electoral programs of candidates running in the local elections,
- access to information about how public authorities function and make decisions,
- belief that you can participate in and influence decision-making,
- perceptions regarding representation of your interests in national-level and local-level politics,
- holding a political function,
- knowledge of the electoral process and the voting procedure,
- knowledge of local processes,
- interest in getting involved in local planning and decision-making.

Recommendation regarding General Findings 1 and 2

To identify realistic and feasible actions that would continuously contribute to gradual improvement of the level of people's interest in social and political life, civic activity and confidence in main institutions in the short, medium and long term.

First of all, it is proposed to organize various forms of civic involvement (among those addressed in this study) at the community level and to stimulate the involvement of residents in these civic activities, with an emphasis on vulnerable groups (people with low levels of education and income, young, ethnic minorities). In the sense that when certain information / training / theoretical and practical involvement activities are organized, they should involve primarily (only) vulnerable groups.

Secondly, it is recommended to take into account that the actions / measures organized have tangible results for the participants, since among the main reasons for apathy in civic activism are the lack of confidence in one's own power and the lack of confidence that citizen participation would have any impact.

Thirdly, it is recommended to organize activities outside working hours, this being another reason for non-participation in civic actions.

General Finding 3

The most vulnerable categories in terms of the aspects covered in the survey (level of knowledge, information gaps, civic activity, etc.) are: people with a low level of education and income, young people, ethnic minorities (especially the Gagauz).

Recommendation regarding General Finding 3

To identify realistic and feasible actions (among those addressed within this study) to directly address the above-mentioned vulnerable categories of the population in the short, medium and long term.

Matters regarding which significant differences were registered between general public on the one hand and persons with disabilities and Roma people on the other hand:

- The latter two categories had a lower level of interest in the social and political situation in Moldova.
- The portion of people with positive perceptions of democracy, which is higher among Roma people and significantly lower among persons with disabilities.
- In the Roma focus group, a negative attitude prevailed towards the way democracy is actually practiced in Moldova at present.
- The percentage of those who believes it important to know the electoral programs of candidates running in local elections is lower among Roma people.
- One out of every three persons with disabilities and Roma never uses social media and news portals.
- A higher percentage of those who watch TV news bulletins and shows was registered among persons with disabilities, but they use news portals and social media less often. Roma people more frequently use their friends, relatives and family as a source of information, but they use all other information channels less often.
- Significantly fewer Roma believe that women should be equally involved and represented in political positions in Moldova.
- A smaller percentage of Roma are satisfied with the community where they live.
- There are more believers in the importance of political activity among Roma people, but they are less receptive of volunteering.
- Persons with disabilities are more often discriminated against because of their disability status, income level, language, education and age.
- Roma are discriminated against in a significantly higher proportion because of their ethnicity and language.
- Roma consider themselves most often insufficiently informed about the electoral process.
- Persons with disabilities and Roma assess significantly lower the level of accessibility of information about the electoral process.
- The level of knowledge among persons with disabilities and Roma people is significantly lower regarding verification of their personal data at the polling station as well as online on the CEC website.
- Persons with disabilities and Roma are more vulnerable in terms of their level of knowledge about the main local processes.
- Persons with disabilities and Roma are more vulnerable in terms of their level of knowledge of civic involvement types.

Recommendation

To focus on the program activities targeting people with special needs and Roma - first of all, in respect of the vulnerable aspects identified by the survey (as reflected above).

Level of information and specific knowledge gaps regarding politics and current events

- Moderate interest in social and political life in Moldova in combination with passivity in obtaining information (in terms of the diversification and frequency of use of various information sources) causes limited knowledge about politics and current events - and, respectively, higher vulnerability to misinformation and manipulations.
- General public as well as persons with disabilities and Roma people mostly do not know the differences between left-wing and right-wing ideologies.
- The percentage of respondents who do not confide the main institutions listed in the survey is at least 2.5-fold of the percentage of those who confide at least eight out of the ten listed institutions; seven out of every ten respondents have low confidence in those institutions, which directly affects the confidence in Moldova's medium-term and long-term political strategies and geopolitical direction.
- The idea of democracy as the most appropriate state system for Moldova is insufficiently understood and consolidated.
- Most people do not know at all or know only little of the electoral programs of the candidates running in local elections.

Recommendation

It is recommended to organize information activities at the local level with theoretical and practical elements regarding the importance of being an informed citizen (in general, and in particular with reference to the electoral programs of the candidates) in order to reduce the vulnerability to misinformation and manipulation.

Level of civic involvement

- Almost all respondents are passive or moderate-level consumers of information in terms of frequency of use and diversification of their information sources.
- Most people do not believe at all or believe only little that their interests are represented in national politics.
- Four out of every ten respondents think that access to information about the way public authorities operate and make decisions is limited and, respectively, they do not have an opportunity to participate in and influence decision-making.
- Political offices are not attractive for most people.
- Two thirds of the population are absolutely passive in civic terms or demonstrate a low level of civic activity.

Recommendation

It is recommended:

- organization of information activities with theoretical and practical elements regarding the way in which public authorities function and take decisions, the way in which citizens can influence the decision-making process;
- facilitating and stimulating collaboration between local authorities and citizens;
- organization of internships within the institutions of local public authorities of level one and two.

Stability and promotion of pro-social values in society

- General human values are considered important by almost all respondents, while civic and political activity values registered a weak to moderate level of receptivity.
- Every third respondent has been discriminated against at least once.

- The most common discrimination is that based on one's income level, political views, language, level of education, and age.
- The level of tolerance to corruption is still quite high in Moldovan society, which fact can possibly be explained in part by a low level of confidence in main state institutions.

Knowledge of the voting procedure

- Most people have insufficient knowledge about the electoral process and the voting procedure.

Recommendation

It is recommended to organize information activities with theoretical and practical elements regarding the electoral process and the voting procedure.

Knowledge of and level of satisfaction with main civic involvement types

- Most people have insufficient knowledge about practical aspects of how local authorities are functioning, such as how they adopt development strategies, make decisions and manage public finance.
- Every third respondent has very limited knowledge of civic involvement types.
- Every third respondent is not interested in getting involved in community administration in any way.

Recommendation

It is recommended:

- organization of information activities and involvement of citizens in the practical processes of operation of local authorities;
- information about civic involvement mechanisms, their importance and positive practical examples;
- motivating citizens to get involved in the community administration process.

Suggestions and recommendations made by the respondents to improve interaction between institutions involved in the electoral process and the population

- To diversify communication channels.
- To ensure efficiency, transparency and responsiveness of the communication channels.
- To create a specialized website/mobile app for complaints.
- To hold conferences covering relevant topics.
- To implement mobile tools.
- To make relevant TV shows.
- To hold local meetings.
- To conduct surveys.