



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC



OCTOBER 23, 2017



SOCIAL INCLUSION AND PARLIAMENT

QUALITATIVE SURVEY

PRESENTED BY: FOTEVA-MANEVSKA, TEODORA
(GfK)

GfK SKOPJE; BLV. VMRO1, ENT. ME; 1000

CONTENTS

Survey background and objectives	2
Survey methodology	2
Sample structure	3
Survey results	4
PERCEPTION OF SOCIOECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION IN MACEDONIA	4
Main problems	4
Location of the responsibility for the actual socioeconomic situation and problems faced	7
Barriers perceived for having quality life	8
GENERAL, SPONTANEOUS PERCEPTION OF THE ASSEMBLY OF REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA	9
SPONTANEOUS ASSOCIATION WITH THE ASSEMBLY of Republic of Macedonia	9
AWARENESS ABOUT THE TOPICS, LAWS THAT THE ASSEMBLY IS WORKING ON	10
PERCEPTION AND DEFINITION OF THE ASSEMBLY	10
MAKING AND PASSING THE LAWS	13
RESPONDENTS' EXPECTATIONS FROM THE ASSEMBLY	14
PERCEPTION OF THE OPENNESS OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA	17
SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR THE WORK OF THE ASSEMBLY	17
THE ASSEMBLY WEB PAGE	17
THE ASSEMBLY TV CHANNEL	18
Communication of the citizens with the Assembly	20
Visiting the Assembly building	20
Following a plenary debate	21
Personal communication with the parliamentarians	22
CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT IN THE PROCESSES OF LAWMAKING and IN THE ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA	24
Increasing the involvement of the target group representatives in making policies for improving quality of their lives	24
Will More MPs from the target groups in the Assembly improve the quality of their life?	28
Summary	29

SURVEY BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

To support the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia's efforts for greater openness and transparency, qualitative research was conducted to ensure that the specific needs of groups at-risk-of-social-exclusion are adequately addressed. Six targeted at-risk groups were the primary focus of the research: unemployed people, youth (age 18-29 years), Roma, women, people with disabilities, and poor people¹. The qualitative research was aimed at assessing how these groups perceive the openness and transparency of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia (Parliament). The qualitative research was conducted by GfK on behalf of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). The research was made possible with the financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) technique of obtaining qualitative data represents *a fast way to better understand participants' attitudes and motives*. The FGD is a qualitative research method that investigates the *why* and *how* of certain topics, and not just *what*, *where*, and *when*. This method entails a small group of participants who rationally discuss a specific topic under the guidance of a moderator.

A group discussion is a type of personal interview with a small group of people (usually 6 to 10 people) where they are asked open-ended questions and group interaction is stimulated. The group discussion is usually taped (video and audio), which allows for post-FGD detailed analysis.

The participants in group discussions were chosen by criteria pre-defined in the screening questionnaire, in consultation with NDI/Macedonia.

The course of the discussion was led by a moderator, usually a psychologist. The average duration of a group discussion was around one and a half hours.

Each participant in the group discussion received a gift/incentive as a token for taking part in the survey. Based on the screening questionnaire that was developed in cooperation with

¹ Citizens living in households where average monthly income per family member is lower than 4000 mkd.

NDI/Macedonia, GfK Skopje recruited focus group participants from each of the specified locations.

SAMPLE STRUCTURE

Following is the structure of the twelve focus groups. The total number of participants in the focus groups was 86. The average number of participants per group was 7. A detailed number of participants per group is presented in the table below.

FGD No.	Number of respondents	City	Group	Nationality	Average age	Gender	Average income per household member
1	8	Tetovo	Youth (18-29y.o.)	Albanian	21.6	4 female; 4 male	7400 mkd
2	8	Tetovo	Women	Albanian	40.6	8 female	5063 mkd
3	8	Bitola	Unemployed	Macedonian, Turk	30.7	5 female; 3 male	6167 mkd
4	6	Bitola	Youth (18-29y.o.)	Macedonian	20.5	4 female; 2 male	6000 mkd
5	8	Prilep	People with physical disability or visual impairment	Macedonian	54.0	3 female; 5 male	No answer
6	8	Prilep	Poor	Macedonian, Roma	48.5	4 female; 4 male	1767 mkd
7	7	Kumanovo	Roma	Roma	45.9	3 female; 4 male	3660 mkd
8	8	Kumanovo	Women	Macedonian, Serbian	42.4	8 female	8063 mkd
9	6	Skopje	Unemployed	Macedonian	33.3	4 female; 2 male	6000 mkd
10	6	Skopje	People with physical disabilities	Macedonian	44.5	3 female; 3 male	No answer
11	7	Stip	Poor	Macedonian	41.7	3 female; 4 male	3833 mkd
12	6	Stip	Roma	Roma	36.5	3 female; 3 male	4188 mkd

SURVEY RESULTS

PERCEPTION OF SOCIOECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION IN MACEDONIA

Regardless of the respondents' profiles, the **general socioeconomic situation** in Macedonia was evaluated as **negative, bad, awful or catastrophic**.

MAIN PROBLEMS

The Main problems which prevent them from having better quality of life, among respondent profile, are lack of finance/money, unemployment or meagerly paid jobs, corruption in all institutions, as well as 'politicization' in each segment of life.

There is a general mood that people nowadays are very segregated because of "interference of politics" in each part of everyday life. Also, the respondents stated that they felt there was segregation by economic status.

"Some people are very, very rich, and the rest are very, very poor. The middle socioeconomic class has disappeared." – Unemployed, Bitola

Although some of the respondents are employed, their income is not enough for a family to make ends meet. *"There are factories in Macedonia, but 80% of the employees there receive a salary of 200 Euros." - Unemployed, Skopje*

"We are segregated by everything, politics, nationality, money..." - Youth, Bitola

"People have to join a political party to get a job, which is a very bad thing." – Poor, Stip

Women express concerns about their **children having to leave the country** because they cannot find a job despite having the right education. Also, women are more perceptive to the effects of poverty – *"When using public transportation, we can notice that people do not have money for basic needs, like personal care / hygiene. And, we cannot expect that they will have more for other living conditions and needs." – Woman, Kumanovo.*

The **household income** is only sufficient to cover the basic utility bills and some money is left for food. There is no money left to have a better or “normal” life.

“We do not live, we are struggling to survive.” – Woman, Tetovo

“We have job agreements for a 7-hour-work day but, instead, we work 9 hours. We are paid 12,000 Denars to our bank account and additional 5,000 in cash. We get K-15² but we have to give it back to the company and managers.” – Woman, Kumanovo

Youth express dissatisfaction with the **education** system, especially in terms of producing quantity and not quality. According to the youth focus group members, the jobs offered on the labor market are either taken by people that are members of a political party or the **jobs are underpaid**. Additionally, the **students’ standard** and conditions under which students who are not from Skopje study are perceived as big problems. The **low level of household income** and low social care benefits are also problems that young people face – *“Everything becomes clear when we look at the amount of **social care benefits**, the number of young people living in families that receive social care, our living conditions/where we live everything. The money that our relatives working abroad send us is somewhat helpful but without it the situation would be disastrous.” – Youth, Tetovo*

Many people are forced to **return to live with their parents** because of the finances. The parents have pensions and a stable income.

“I am 25 years old and I depend on my mother’s pension. Wherever I try to look for a job, it becomes clear that politics is involved and ‘connections’ (nepotism) prevail.” – Female, unemployed, Skopje

Roma people believe that they are most affected by the long-term **economic crisis** in the country. *“It is hardest to be a Roma. The Roma have always been affected worst by the economic situation. We live off a small amount coming from the social care benefits, and on top of that, every two years the amount of benefits is decreased by 50%.” – Male, Roma, Kumanovo.* The **discrimination** that Roma people experience in everyday life, especially when looking for a job, is also noted by the respondents.

² K-15 is an annual bonus of at least 40% of the monthly net salary for a vacation.

“I have two Macedonian friends and we all applied for a job in one factory. They got the job, but I did not, and the explanation from the factory was that they did not hire people from minority groups.” – Male, Roma, Stip.

Unemployed respondents also assess the actual socioeconomic situation as bad and catastrophic. There are **no possibilities to get a job** and even when you find one, **the salaries are very low**. The labor force is not paid enough.

“When at a job interview, the first question I am asked is if I would work for 150 Euros. It is degrading for me and I instantly leave the interview. While I have to work for 150 Euros there are people who do not work anything and receive a 500 Euros salary.” - Male, unemployed, Skopje.

“I am 54 years old and wherever I try to find a job they ask me ‘why did you apply at all?’. It seems like I am incapable of working because I am 54. Employers do not prefer older workers, they believe that we are unworthy. Everything is politics. Capable people are leaving the country and one can find a job only if they have political connections.” – Female, unemployed Skopje.

Persons with a disability state that one of their major problem is the **low amount of the social care assistance**.

“I have multiple sclerosis, and the amount of the money I get as social care is not enough. No one is aware that in treating multiple sclerosis, it is important not only to eat, but also to eat a quality and special type of food. And for this type of food, the social care assistance that are given to us are not enough. So we are dependent on our families, who give us these additional resources. But the question is what will we do when some of our families will no longer able to do so.” – Person with a disability, Skopje

They also state the **discrimination** as one of their main problems. Many of them stated that when announcing to their employee that they have a disability are losing their jobs. They say that some steps in improving the situation for them are taken but it is still not enough.

“For example, yes we have in Skopje public transport busses with ramps but the drivers don’t know how to park the buss properly on the bus stop so that we can use that ramp to enter the buss.” – Person with a disability, Skopje

Poor respondents face the same major problems as other group at risk: unemployment, low salaries and low amount of social assistance leading to lack of money in the household facing

higher life expenses. Very rarely but yet appears that some poor respondents face **inability to access the right to health care**. *“I receive 2000 denars social care assistance. I have 3 children. And additionally I have epilepsy that I cannot treat since I dint have health insurance. Due to the epilepsy I very often fall down and as you can see I’m all cover with scars from these.” - Poor, Prilep*

LOCATION OF THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ACTUAL SOCIOECONOMIC SITUATION AND PROBLEMS FACED

There was a consensus among most respondents when naming the ones responsible for the actual socioeconomic situation. According to them, the responsibility lies externally, in institutions and in the government. Very few of the respondents among youth, the unemployed and women stated that people themselves are also responsible for the problems they face.

There is an attitude that although the country has a system of governance and necessary laws, there is a problem with their implementation.

“We have many laws on paper and on paper everything looks perfect, but unfortunately, in real life and in practice everything is a disaster.” – Woman, Kumanovo

Generally, citizens from these groups pinpoint the institutions as the ones responsible for the bad socio-economic situation (the government, different ministries, especially the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Ministry of Health, as well as Centers of Social Work).

“The Centers of Social Work are not in the field, they do more administrative work than offer real help to the ones in need” – Woman, Kumanovo

Some youth stated that the government pays more attention to and takes care of the pensioners, rather than young people. They believe that the benefits that the government provides to the pensioners are bigger than what is provided to the students and young people. Consequently, youth do not feel motivated to stay in the country.

The government does not work in youth’s favor – *“the quality of education is very low and the conditions for studying in Skopje are miserable. The Ministry of Education is responsible for that.” – Youth, Bitola*

BARRIERS PERCEIVED FOR HAVING QUALITY LIFE

The following barriers that prevent respondents from having a more quality life were detected:

- Lack of money, low income and salaries, and higher life expenses.
 - o *“There is no perspective in this country. The salary is 400 Euros and the monthly expenses are 600 Euros.” – Youth, Tetovo*
 - o *“Young people may find a job maybe, but working for 100 euros will not be enough to have a quality life. The money is not even enough for basic life expenses.” – Unemployed, Bitola*
- Unfair competition, grey economy.
 - o *“I have a registered business, but because there are many unregistered businesses as mine, they are cheaper and I cannot succeed on the market.” – Unemployed, Bitola*
- Corruption
 - o *“I learned and studied but cannot find a job because someone else, using corruption, had already taken my job.” – Young, Bitola*
 - o *“My children graduated from college and we spent a lot of money for their education but someone else employed their own children using nepotism.” – Woman, Tetovo*
- Politicization in every part of life.
 - o *“I am a Law graduate, but whenever I apply for a job I am asked if I am a member of a political party.” - Young, Tetovo*
- Bad economic policies in the past two decades.
 - o *“Bad economic policies implemented since the independence till today have resulted in the creation of huge social differences, imbalance and accumulation of wealth among 2% of the richest.” – Youth, Bitola*
 - o *“Unprofessional and unfitted people are placed on important positions. And, since they do not know how to do their job, they poison us with politics, instead of working for the good of the citizens.” – Poor, Stip*
- Discrimination
 - o *“When I announced to my employer that I have Multiple Sclerosis he fired me a few months later. He did not want me to be a burden to the company.” – Person with disability, Prilep*

- *“I applied for a job, but since I am a Roma I did not get one while my friends, Macedonians, who applied for the same job got it.” – Roma, Stip*
- Inefficient institutions like Centers of Social Work and some Health institutions
 - *“I cannot get my one-time social care money, because I am not entitled to benefits now and nobody explained why.” – Poor, Prilep*
 - *“I cannot get my health insurance benefits for medicines, because the health institution requires a document from me that no other institution issues. It is if they ask from me to provide something that does not exist.” – Person with a disability, Prilep*
 - *“A small amount of the social care benefits is not enough for basic life. We cannot talk about quality of life, only about the basic needs.” – Person with a disability, Skopje*
- Lack of jobs
 - *“Many factories have been closed down and there are not enough jobs.” – Woman, Kumanovo*
 - *“I am 54 years old and nobody wants to hire me. Everybody says that I am old. Why? There are no jobs for people over 50.” - Unemployed, Skopje*

GENERAL, SPONTANEOUS PERCEPTION OF THE ASSEMBLY OF REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

SPONTANEOUS ASSOCIATION WITH THE ASLYLY OF REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Respondents' Spontaneous Association with the Assembly of Republic of Macedonia are presented in Picture 1 below. The larger letter font refers to a stronger association i.e. association expressed by larger number of the respondents. Of the stated associations, almost all have a negative connotation. Only few of them are neutral or positive. The strongest associations are: circus, lies, theater/acting and legislative house.

Picture 1 – ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE ASSEMBLY OF MACEDONIA
by citizens at risk of social exclusion (youth, women, people with disabilities, poor,
unemployed, Roma)



AWARENESS ABOUT THE TOPICS, LAWS THAT THE ASSEMBLY IS WORKING ON

The target group is most familiar with the law on the use of languages. But also, they are familiar with the laws and changes in the laws that relate to the improvement of the social and economic situation, such as the law on increasing the minimum wage, law on bankruptcy workers, etc.

PERCEPTION AND DEFINITION OF THE ASSEMBLY

When asked to describe and explain 'what is the Assembly of Republic of Macedonia', the largest number of the respondents stated that the Assembly is the most important legislative body, but they also added that it should work to promote the interests of the citizens and

improve the economy. Still, there is perception that the Assembly is a place for blindly supporting political party interests:

- *“A place where political parties fight “ - Roma, Stip*
- *“A place where we don’t have independent parliamentarians” - Unemployed, Bitola*
- *“All parliamentarians are under the influence of a political party or someone above them” - Stated by all different profiles of respondents at risk*
- *“All the time there are some conflicts and nobody pays attention to the important issues for the citizens.” - Stated by all different profiles of respondents at risk*

Also, there is a strong perception that the Assembly functions like a company with inefficient workers (parliamentarians).

- *“Dysfunctional assembly, since parliamentarians do not do their job” – Stated by all different profiles of respondents at risk*
- *“In our Assembly all parliamentarians are the same, they take care of their own benefit and interest first” – Poor, Stip*
- *“A structure of people that make the life of citizens sad and depressing” – Unemployed, Skopje*
- *“Place where the highest level of corruption takes place” – Poor, Stip*
- *“Parliamentarians turned the legislative house into a theater” – Unemployed, Skopje*
- *“They only make laws that protect them, they do not work for the good of the workers” – Roma, Stip*
- *“Lack of responsibility” - Stated by all different profiles of respondents at risk*
- *“They do not discuss, they only fight with each other” - Stated by all different profiles of respondents at risk*
- *“Simple people that believe they are something more and more valuable than other people” - Poor, Stip*

Only several respondents from all groups, know that there are approximately 120 parliamentarians in the Assembly and that there is President of the Assembly.

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

Picture 2 - PERCEPTION AND DEFINITION OF THE ASSEMBLY
by citizens at risk of social exclusion (youth, women, people with disabilities, poor, unemployed, Roma)

1. THE HIGEST AND MOST IMPORTANT LEGISLATIVE HOUSE

- "Laws making" – Youth, Tetovo
- "Institution that passes all laws in the Country" – Youth, Bitola
- "It should be the highest legislation house" – Person with a disability, Skopje
- "Brings decisions" – Poor, Prilep
- "Passes laws" – Person with a disability, Prilep
- "Institution that should pass all laws" - Person with a disability, Prilep
- "A place where sessions are held and where important decisions are made at the state level" – Roma, Kumanovo
- "The house of legislation" – Roma, Stip
- "The highest house for legislation" – Unemployed, Skopje
- "Place where they discuss social situation, politics and laws" – Woman, Kumanovo

2. ORGANIZATION OF INEFFICIENT PARLIAMENTARIANS

- "Not functional assembly, since parliamentarians do not do their job" – Stated by all different profiles of respondents at risk
- "In our Assembly all parliamentarians are the same, they take care first of their own benefit and interest" – Poor, Stip
- "A structure of people that make the life of citizens sad and depressing" – Unemployed, Skopje
- "Place where the highest level of corruption takes place" – Poor, Stip
- "Parliamentarians turned the legislative house into a theater" – Unemployed, Skopje
- "They only make laws that protect them, they do not work for the good of the workers" – Roma, Stip
- "Lack of responsibility" - Stated by all different profiles of respondents at risk
- "They do not discuss, they only fight with each other" - Stated by all different profiles of respondents at risk
- "Simple people that believe they are something more and more valuable than other people"- Poor, Stip

3. HOUSE FOR SUPPORTING POLITICAL PARTY INTERESTS

- "Place where political parties fight" – Roma, Stip
- "A place where we do not have independent parliamentarians" -- Unemployed, Bitola
- "All parliamentarians are under the influence of a political party or someone above them" - Stated by all different profiles of respondents at risk
- "All the time there are some conflicts and nobody pays attention to the important issues for the citizens." - Stated by all different profiles of respondents at risk

4. BODY THAT SHOULD WORK FOR PROMOTING THE INTERESTS OF THE CITIZENS AND IMPROVING THE ECONOMY

MAKING AND PASSING THE LAWS

Making and passing the laws is the first and most important role of the Assembly the respondents singled out. When asked whether the Assembly creates laws beneficial for the citizens' groups they belong to (Roma, unemployed, women, youth, people with disabilities, poor), many respondents believe that the Assembly does not pass laws in their best interests. They think that the politicians care only about themselves, and not for citizens in general. It is their duty to pass laws in the citizens' best interests but on many occasions, this is not the case. The respondents think that there are bad laws adopted by the Parliament, only for the personal interests of the parliamentarians. This group of respondents believe that the Assembly needs to be free of parliamentarians who work only for protecting their political party interests and that citizens need to be more involved.

The respondents also commented that the laws in the country change too much and too often, which indirectly implies that the laws are not good. *"In some stable countries, like Germany for example, laws are not changed for many years."* – Unemployed, Bitola

Those respondents who consider that the Assembly passes laws for the citizens' best interest pointed out the Law on Subsidies for Farmers. Also, they stated that some laws and changes in laws were made for the benefit of students (like changes in the law that eliminates external testing for students) or for pensioners (increase in pensions). Similarly, there were comments that the existing laws are good and in favor of citizens, but the problem was with their implementation, since laws must be equally and fairly applied to all citizens, without selectivity for certain groups.

Some of the respondents among persons with disabilities and poor people stated that they had experienced poor implementation of laws.

"By law, they have the right to visit me and check whether I have a disability or not. This is ok, but it does not make sense to check me every month. Instead of working on some bigger problems, they lose time by visiting me." - Person with a disability, Skopje

"I have Multiple Sclerosis, and had to undergo medical examination and therapy in Skopje. I am entitled to reimbursement of the money I paid for the examinations and medicine. But I had to spend one month travelling between Skopje – Prilep and vice versa to obtain the necessary documents, as some could not be obtained in Prilep. So, I quit at the end. I have spent twice as much money." – Person with a disability, Prilep.

RESPONDENTS' EXPECTATIONS FROM THE ASSEMBLY

The respondents' Expectations from the Assembly is mainly focused on solving the citizens' problems. Half of the citizens' expectations are connected to solving problems. But one group of the respondents expect the Assembly to focus on lawmaking, improving the efficiency of the parliamentarians and also on promoting citizens' interests including their economy opportunities.

With respect to solving the citizens' problems, the respondents suggest that they expect the Assembly to work on:

- *“Creating new jobs” – Poor, Stip*
- *“Increasing the salaries” – Youth, Tetovo*
- *“Greater social care for persons with disabilities” – Person with a disability, Prilep*
- *“Working for the good of the persons with disabilities” – Person with a disability, Prilep*
- *“Solving citizens problems” – Stated by all different profiles of respondents at risk*
- *“Working for good of the citizens and not for the MPs' own good” – Stated by all different profiles of respondents at risk*
- *“Opening new factories” – Roma, Stip*
- *“Working for good of the 'working class' “ – Unemployed, Skopje*
- *“Improving the working conditions for employees” – Woman, Kumanovo*
- *“Working to solve the real problems that the citizens face daily” – Woman, Kumanovo*
- *“Helping poor people” – Poor, Prilep*
- *“Increasing the amount of the social benefits” – Poor, Prilep*
- *“Employ more citizens” – Woman, Tetovo*
- *“Preventing any kind of discrimination among citizens” – Roma, Kumanovo*
- *“Improving the education system in the country” – Youth, Bitola*
- *“Applying the laws to everybody, preventing selective application of laws” – Unemployed, Bitola*

The second group of citizens' expectations is related to law making and one can conclude, the citizens expect the following:

- Making quality and logical laws that can be respected by all citizens
- Making stable laws

- Making laws in the interest of all citizens, providing equal conditions for all citizens, protecting the rights of all citizens

There is a group of citizens whose expectations from the Assembly directly address the professionalism of the parliamentarians. The citizens from this group suggest that the parliamentarians should:

- *“Lie less” – Youth, Albanian*
- *“Not be parliamentarians for 20 and more years” – Roma, Kumanovo*
- *“Efficiently do their job” – Unemployed, Skopje*
- *“Work more closely with the citizens”, Poor, Prilep*

The other group of respondents expect the Assembly to work on promoting the interests and economy of the country. This group expect that the Assembly bring about economic changes that would provide the country with a viable and stable economic foundation, which would lead to improvement of the living standards for all citizens.

Picture 3 - EXPECTATIONS FROM THE ASSEMBLY

by citizens at risk of social exclusion (youth, women, people with disabilities, poor, unemployed, Roma)

1. SOLVING CITIZENS' PROBLEMS

- "Creating new jobs" – Poor, Stip
- "Increasing the salaries" – Youth, Tetovo
- "Greater social care for persons with disabilities" – Person with a disability, Prilep
- "Working for the good of the persons with disabilities" – Person with a disability, Prilep
- "Solving citizens problems" – Stated by all different profiles of respondents at risk
- "Working for good of the citizens and not for the MPs' own good" – Stated by many different respondents at risk
- "Opening new factories" – Roma, Stip
- "Working for good of the 'working class' " – Unemployed, Skopje
- "Improving the working conditions for employees" – Woman, Kumanovo
- "Working to solve the real problems that the citizens face daily" – Woman, Kumanovo
- "Helping poor people" – Poor, Prilep
- "Increasing the amount of the social benefits" – Poor, Prilep
- "Employ more citizens" – Woman, Tetovo
- "Preventing any kind of discrimination among citizens" – Roma, Kumanovo
- "Improving the education system in the country" – Youth, Bitola
- "Applying the laws to everybody, preventing selective application of laws" – Unemployed, Bitola

2. LAW MAKING

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

3. IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF THE PARLIAMENTARIANS

- "Lie less" – Youth, Albanian
- "Not be parliamentarians for 20 and more years" – Roma, Kumanovo
- "Efficiently do their job" – Unemployed, Skopje
- "Work more closely with the citizens" – Poor, Prilep

4. PROMOTING CITIZENS' INTERESTS INCL. THEIR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

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

PERCEPTION OF THE OPENNESS OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR THE WORK OF THE ASSEMBLY

The respondents mainly inform themselves about the work of the Assembly through news from **TV stations** and **internet portals**, as well as through social media, especially **Facebook**. Very few of the respondents mentioned the **Assembly TV channel** as a source of information regarding the work of the Assembly. Also, there are some respondents who get information about the topics and issues regarding the Assembly from their **friends and family**.

Generally, most of the respondents are familiar with the existence of the Assembly's web page and the Assembly TV channel.

THE ASSEMBLY WEB PAGE

The Assembly web page is known to the Macedonian women, youth, unemployed, persons with disabilities, some respondents from groups of poor people and Roma.

None of the Albanian women in the group are familiar with the website of the Assembly. Most of the Albanian women agree with the statement that if there was information on employment and opportunities for young people they would get interested in the web page. In general, the rest of them are not motivated to visit the website.

Almost none of the Roma respondents are familiar with the website of the Assembly. The exception is one Roma respondent who is registered on the website and receives notifications from each session.

Regarding other profiles of respondents, most are familiar with the website, but almost none of them have ever visited it.

"I have no interest to visit this web page. Why? What will I find out there? I even don't trust the information posted there" – Unemployed, Skopje

“Why should I visit it, there is nothing useful for me. Only some general information.” – Youth, Bitola

Few female respondents from groups of unemployed people in Skopje and persons with disabilities from Prilep have visited the website after the change of government to find out about the new parliamentarians’ background and better inform themselves about the parliamentary composition.

The respondents suggest that the Assembly website should include information about scholarships, internships and study abroad to make it more relevant and more attractive for these groups of citizens.

Also, several respondents mentioned the idea of creating an Assembly Facebook page that would post announcements of Assembly sessions and work. More citizens would have the opportunity to read about the Assembly if it was on Facebook.

Additionally, there was an idea that the Assembly website be used to conduct surveys among citizens when a law or topic is being discussed, regardless if it concerns a particular group of citizens or all of them – this way, the citizens could be involved and give their opinion anonymously.

THE ASSEMBLY TV CHANNEL

The Assembly TV channel is known to most of the respondents. Macedonian respondents are more familiar with it, compared to the Albanian participants.

Only two of the young Albanian respondents and two Albanian women respondents know about the Assembly TV channel. None of them have ever watched it or followed it.

The other respondents are all familiar with the Assembly TV channel, but very few follow it. The most common category of citizens following the parliamentary TV channel are unemployed people and pensioners. Others follow this channel only in situations when they are interested in a particular topic.

When asked what needs to be done so that the Assembly TV channel achieves greater media reach, the respondents’ initial, spontaneous comments were about the Assembly sessions.

All respondents think that the parliamentary sessions are “total *chaos*”; “*only lies and conflicts*”. Many respondents from all profiles commented that they “*cannot stand watching the parliamentary TV channel, because they cannot look at MPs who argue while sitting in armchairs for huge sums of money and lying to the citizens*”. Also, many respondents from all profiles compared the sessions’ broadcast on the Assembly TV channel to “*a circus*” and believe that this channel should be closed.

Some respondents stated that the parliamentarians in the Assembly protect their political party interests and that they do not express their personal views, but rather the views imposed by the party.

On the other hand, there are still respondents, from all profiles, who think that those sessions should be followed, so that the citizens are informed and know what is happening in the country. Only if citizens are informed first, can they somehow influence changes and improve the situation in the country, as well as contribute to the society. According to this group of respondents, the biggest problem when watching the sessions is that the parliamentarians’ discussions frequently turn into a political party debate or into a personal party members’ conflict.

Following are the suggestions for making the Assembly TV channel more attractive according to these groups of citizens:

- If they covered more topics of interest to groups at risk of social exclusion, they would follow it.
- To be fully transparent, the parliamentary channel should announce the agenda in advance and present/communicate it to the citizens in a clear way. If the citizens are informed about the agenda and topics to be discussed in the Assembly in a timely fashion, they would choose whether to watch the discussions or not, depending on the topic’s relevance for them.
- Broadcasting debates including professionals or critics in economy or politics during the breaks between the parliamentary sessions.
- When laws are passed, the MPs should use the Assembly TV channel to present, in a concise and clear way, concrete contents of these laws and their impact on the citizens, thus avoiding long debates and conflicts.

COMMUNICATION OF THE CITIZENS WITH THE ASSEMBLY

When asked ‘how citizens can communicate with the Assembly’, the first reaction of the respondents was that of “shock” and “confusion”. Their question was: ‘why should I communicate with the Assembly if it cannot help me solve a problem or improve my quality of life’. They acted confused when discussing reasons for addressing the Assembly. Generally, all respondents stated that communication with the Assembly would be pointless, that no one there would hear their problems or solve them.

In the event the respondents decided to communicate with the Assembly, their first choice of communication would be by writing an email using the Assembly webpage (as some of them have had the experience of communicating through email with some Ministries). However, they would not expect to receive a reply to their e-mail.

Half of the respondents mentioned the possibility of communicating with the Assembly through a personal visit to their MP's office. Several of them have even visited the Assembly and tried to get in touch with the MPs on the given day citizen outreach, but without success. The offices were always closed and the MPs were never there. However, they think that even if they met the MP and explained their problem, there would be no outcome of such a meeting, i.e. no change or solution to their problem. They stated that they had lost trust and hope in the MPs and the Assembly, more precisely, in the state and the branches of government.

VISITING THE ASSEMBLY BUILDING

Most of the respondents are not sure and have not been informed to know exactly when and how they can visit the Assembly building. Most of them do not like the idea of visiting the Assembly building and consider that they, as citizens, would not benefit from it. They think there is no one they would be able to discuss their problems with and who would follow through on their request. They have no purpose to go and see the building itself.

In one of the women groups, all of the participants think that citizens have no chance to visit the Parliament. They believe that only journalists and MPs can enter the building. In one of the youth groups none of the respondents knew that they can visit the building of the Assembly and think that they would not have any benefit if they did.

Some respondents pointed out that there are open days for visiting the Assembly and every citizen who is interested can go, but are not sure what those days are. Those who knew or heard about the open days were informed via newspapers or heard it via the Assembly channel. One respondent visited the Assembly as a student through the faculty,

Of all the respondents - one unemployed, one young and one Roma - have visited the Assembly so far.

Regarding the accessibility of the building, most respondents know where it is located because of its location in the Skopje city center, but they find it difficult to get inside. There are respondents, mainly from other cities in Macedonia, who do not know where the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia is.

Most respondents think that entrance is forbidden for citizens. They believe that there are many procedures, including security checks that prevent free entrance. Citizens should be announced ahead of time, schedule an exact date for the visit and announce themselves to the person with whom they wish to meet. Apart from the procedural part, most participants point out that those citizens who are from other cities in the country cannot afford to come and visit the Assembly and that this is easier for those who live in Skopje.

Persons with disabilities emphasize that accessing the entrance of the building is very difficult as there are stairs, pavement, and no ramps for people with disabilities. They assume that movement and accessibility inside the building is even harder.

The Roma also feel discriminated against, and some group respondents pointed out that it is very difficult for them to schedule a visit in the Assembly building because of too many procedures and waiting. Some sent a request through a non-governmental organization (implementing the "Roma women in politics" project) to visit the building and speak with political party representatives, but until the time of this survey, they had not received any answer from the parties. They believe that they simply do not want to meet them in the Assembly building.

FOLLOWING A PLENARY DEBATE

Most of the respondents are not aware whatsoever of their right to follow some of the plenary debates in the Parliament. They do not know how to get involved, what their role would be

there and whether following the plenary debate would be of benefit to them. They assume that they would certainly have to submit a request, but do not have enough information. Also, the idea of following a plenary debate without the possibility of posing questions or getting involved in the discussion is demotivating for the respondents to attend a plenary debate in the Assembly.

Most of the respondents do not wish to attend a plenary debate and do not feel that they could change something if they attended. They stated that they avoid watching and listening to the TV debates because of constant party fights and non-constructive sessions, while issues of vital importance to the citizens are not being solved.

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION WITH THE PARLIAMENTARIANS

Many respondents pointed out that MPs are open for and contact the citizens only during election campaigns (before the elections). It is only then that they listen to the citizens' problems and demands, but later fail at resolving the issues and keeping promises. This generates distrust in the MPs and results in the respondents' lack of motivation to initiate direct communication with the parliamentarians. The respondents think that the MPs would only listen to their demands, but would never follow through their agenda.

There are respondents who have never heard about the possibility to talk directly with the parliamentarians and they do not know how they could realize this type of communication.

To improve communication between the citizens and parliamentarians, some of the respondents suggest the use of e-mail or regular mail, i.e. the citizens can send their requests and they will be considered later.

Also, scheduling monthly gatherings of MPs with their constituents would provide a possibility for citizens to have direct contact with their MPs.

The citizens would like to have direct contact with MPs, because they believe that MPs would pay more attention to the needs and problems that the citizens face and not only work for their personal interests.

Picture 4 - PERCEPTION OF TOUCH POINTS OF CITIZENS AND ASSEMBLY by citizens at

Touch points of citizens and Assembly	Web page	TV Channel	Visiting the Assembly building	Attending plenary sessions	Talk to Parliamentarians
Familiarity	Less Familiar	Very Familiar	Almost not familiar	Not familiar	Less Familiar
Visited / followed / achieved contact	Very few	Some	Very few	None	Very few
Room for Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about scholarships, internships and studies abroad Facebook page of the Assembly Conduct surveys among citizens when a relevant law or topic is discussed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topics relevant to the youth, Roma, unemployment, etc. Early announcement broadcast / communicated TV program/schedule of the topics discussed Broadcasting debates with professionals or critics in the areas of economy or politics, during the pauses between the parliamentary sessions Assembly TV channel should come out and present the concrete conclusions of these laws and their effect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobility and hearing accessibility for people with disabilities Organized visits for groups of citizens at risk, especially for those outside of Skopje Clear and widely spread information about when and how (clearly communicated procedures how) the Assembly can be visited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the opportunity to include citizens in the plenary debates allowing certain number of questions that the citizens can ask their MPs during these plenary debates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication via email or post mail with the MP MPs to organize monthly meetings, gatherings with their constituents

risk of social exclusion (youth, women, people with disabilities, poor, unemployed, Roma)

CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT IN THE PROCESSES OF LAWMAKING AND IN THE ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

After presenting the animated video that demonstrates the work of the Assembly, the respondents' first impressions were very positive. The video was perceived as very informative, clear, and explanatory so that everybody could easily understand the work of the Assembly.

Some respondents stated that they were familiar with the information presented in the video. There was a significant group, especially among women, the Roma, and poor people that found the video to be very useful for them to get more information about their rights as citizens.

Everyone agreed that the video was useful and informed them fully about the work of the Parliament and adoption of laws, but half of the respondents stated that that was not the case in reality, i.e. everything shown in the video does not respond to what happens in reality.

Almost all respondents think that the video should be broadcast on TV stations so that all citizens are informed. Younger respondents in all groups believe that this TV spot should also be shown on social networks because they use social networks (especially Facebook) a lot more than television.

INCREASING THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE TARGET GROUP REPRESENTATIVES IN MAKING POLICIES FOR IMPROVING QUALITY OF THEIR LIVES

Most of the respondents think that citizens should be **more informed** about the work of the Assembly. Many respondents heard and learned for the first time about some of the rights they have as citizens and about the possibilities to get involved from the video presented.

*“So, we can gather as a **group of citizens and submit a law proposal**. I did not know that.” – was one of the most often stated comments in all groups after watching the video.*

There is a fundamental lack of information about the ways in which citizens can be involved in the Assembly's work. For the citizens to be more involved and be able to give suggestions, they primarily should be informed about the ways they can do it.

Also, "citizens are a powerful weapon" was a frequently mentioned statement and the respondents believe that there should be ways in which their voice should be heard more loudly, apart from their members of parliament.

All respondents believe that parliamentarians should keep their promises given before the elections, since they are their representatives, their voice. The respondents expect that parliamentarians help them and work for their benefit, since they themselves are not well informed about their citizens' rights. An ordinary citizen from these target groups believes that she/he does not know their rights at all, is not aware of the procedures, their complaints and requests are not properly addressed and forwarded, and as a result, their problems are not solved and laws are selectively applied, frequently to their detriment.

Young people believe that there should be more **youth activism**, since the youth have been marginalized. The voice of the students who are drivers of the society is heard less, they believe that they do not have future in the country and, consequently, more and more young people are leaving the country.

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

Young respondents believe that there should be **parliamentary representatives from all groups in society**, to have **diversity** so that they can cover more problems and commit themselves to solving them.

Some of the unemployed respondents suggested that "**lobbying**" is the most effective way to increase the involvement of these groups of citizens in the creation of policies.

People with disabilities, as well as **Roma** respondents, suggested that they would contribute to creating better policies in their favor if more of them were **included** not only in the Assembly, but **in all institutions**. They also suggested that there is a **strong need for raising awareness and education of the general population** (MPs included) about people with disabilities and the Roma. *"Let's play 'a role change' for one day so that others can see how it is to live one day as person with disability/Roma."* Persons with disabilities feel limited, while

the Roma feel discriminated. Roma respondents also believe that there would be less discrimination against them, if more awareness was raised among the citizens and the involvement of Roma in policymaking would increase. Additionally, Roma respondents stated that their voice as a minority is not heard and believe that the Assembly works in favor of and passes laws that concern only two large ethnic groups - Macedonians and Albanians.

The respondents suggest that **non-governmental organizations** should be more active and work in the interests of the citizens. The same goes for the organizations such as unions, which represent workers' rights. According to the respondents, NGOs and unions should be involved in debates and discussions about relevant laws in the Assembly.

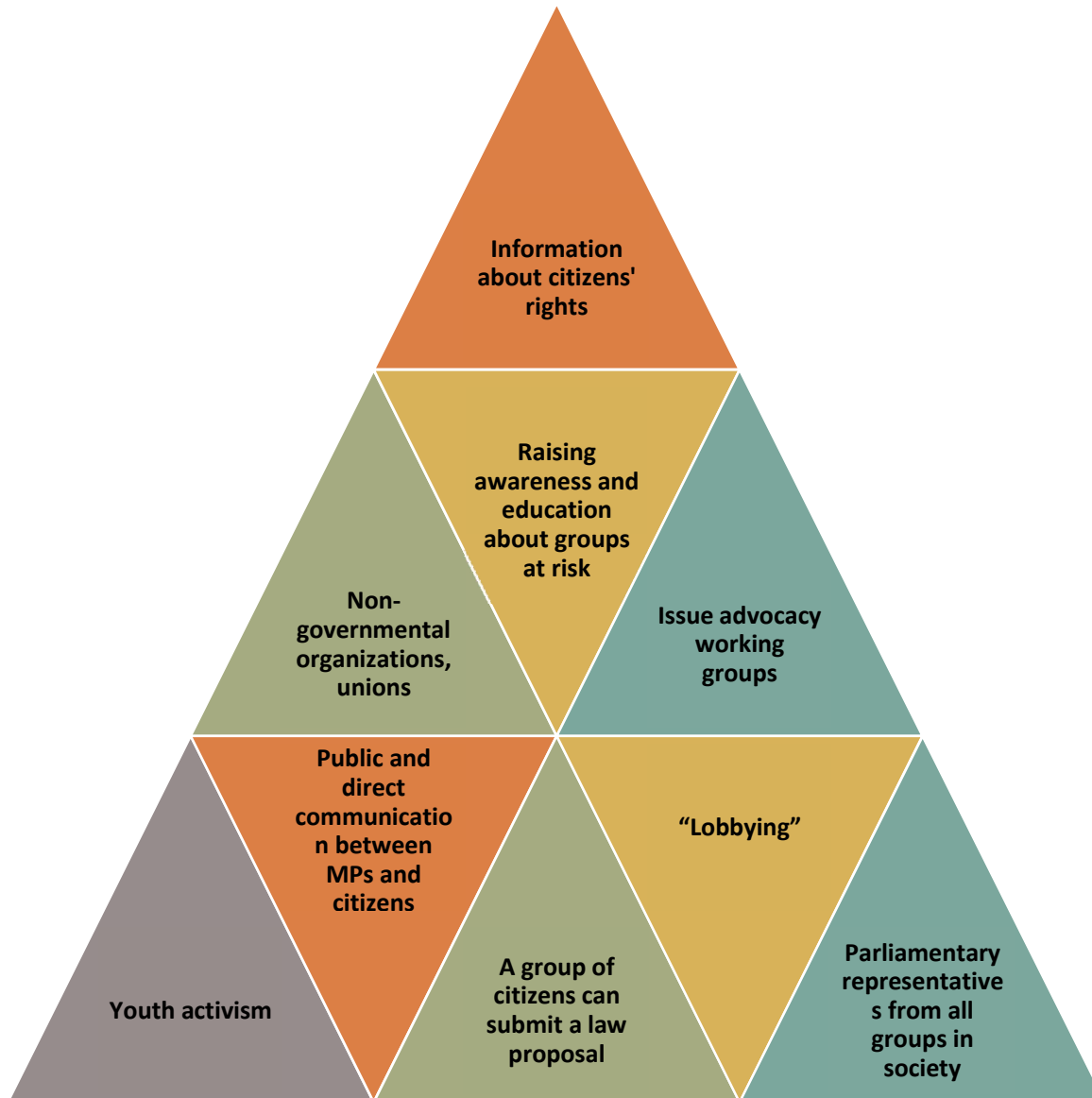
As stated by some respondents, frequent **public** gatherings should be organized on a municipal level so that **MPs have direct communication with their constituents**. During these gatherings more citizens' initiatives should be **discussed** and they would have a chance to express their critical opinion about relevant laws.

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

Although these groups of citizens outlined several options for their greater involvement in the work of the Assembly regarding policies and law making, they still expressed their doubt about the viability and efficiency of their suggestions. Some respondents mentioned that there are some **working groups in the Parliament** which include people with disabilities or Roma, but they have not been efficient and their work has not had impact on improving the quality of life of these groups at risk.

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

Picture 5 - INCREASING THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE TARGET GROUP REPRESENTATIVES IN POLICIES FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF THEIR LIVES by citizens at risk of social exclusion (youth, women, people with disability, poor, unemployed, Roma)



WILL MORE MPS FROM THE TARGET GROUPS IN THE ASSEMBLY IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THEIR LIFE?

Generally, all target groups believe that if more representatives from their profile were represented the Assembly could work in favor for them.

“We have exceptional students who are really knowledgeable and capable of representing young people and developing beneficial youth-related laws.” – Young, Bitola

“It is expected that if one social subgroup is represented in the Assembly, it will have benefits and advantages. It is young people who really understand the problems and needs of the young.” – Young, Tetovo

“I believe it will help, because they are aware about our situation. They will understand how it is not to have enough money to pay for the bills and food.” – Poor, Stip

One part of the youth believes that if they wanted to have better legislation concerning youth it is not necessary for them to have their representatives in the Assembly. The young do not have enough experience, which they believe is necessary for someone to be a parliamentarian. On the other hand, they strongly believe that young people should take initiative, develop and submit legislation that concerns them, which should further be discussed by older parliamentarians.

“Everybody can help so that we have more women in the Assembly and there is no need to have quotas for women in the Assembly. People who deserve to be there, are capable and want to work for the good of the citizens should be members of Parliament.” – Woman, Kumanovo

Unemployed respondents believe that only if a larger number of representatives from their profile were represented in the Assembly, the effects would be positive. Additionally, they mentioned “lobbying” as one method for influencing the Assembly to work more in favor of unemployed people. Unemployed respondents from Skopje believe there is no need for the unemployed to have larger representation in the Assembly, since “once they’ve received their salary, they will forget where they came from.” This group of respondents also believes that more experienced and older parliamentarians are needed as, according to them, “political parties have started nominating representatives in the parliament directly from college and they are very young.”

People with disabilities also believe that their representation/participation in the Assembly and other institutions would be beneficial for improving their quality of life. It was also noted that their presence *per se* would provoke compassion by other people who would be inspired to think of ways to help these groups at risk and work on improving their quality of life.

“I want to state that we probably have to enter the Assembly, so that the parliamentarians can look at us, understand our daily struggles, wake up and say: ‘let’s help this group, there are not only one or two persons with disability, there are around 30.000 people with similar problems.’”

– Person with a disability, Skopje

“If people with disabilities were included everywhere we would not be invisible as we are now, the others would be able to see us, acknowledge our problem and help us.” – Person with a disability, Skopje

Then again, it was pointed out that once they became MPs, people from groups at risk would forget where they came from and not work for the good of these groups but for their own interest, *“the money they are paid as parliamentarians would change them”*.

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

SUMMARY

The main problems these groups at risk of citizens face are of the economic and social origin and, consequently, they assess the actual socioeconomic situation in the country as bad and catastrophic. Their main problems are:

- Low level of household income
- No possibilities to find a job
- Very low salaries

Women emphasized, young people leaving the country is an important problem, while bad education system, low level of student standard are more important problem for young respondents. Low amounts of social care benefits and discrimination are important problems for Roma and persons with a disability and poor citizens.

According to these groups at risk, the main responsibility for the problems of citizens lies with the government and its institutions, especially with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education, as well as the parliamentarians and political parties. Based on their experience, while trying to exercise their rights, they were discriminated against, did not get any support and did not succeed. Therefore, they feel that the government does not work for their benefit. It must be emphasized that their comments were mainly directed towards the previous government structure (the period when the survey was conducted was approximately three months after the change of government).

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

Associations that these groups of citizens have with “the Assembly of Macedonia” are predominantly negative and words like “circus, theater/actors, and lies” stand out. Neutral associations with the Assembly mainly refer to it as “a legislative house”. Regarding the respondents’ awareness about the topics discussed by the Assembly, apart from the law on the language usage, these groups of citizens mainly recognize laws and changes of laws that lead to the improvement of their economic status like: law on increasing the minimum wage, law on bankruptcy workers.

The respondents predominately perceive the Assembly as the highest legislative body, but there is also a strong perception that it as an organization of inefficient parliamentarians that support political party interests. The weakest perception of the Assembly is that of an institution that should work on promoting the interests of citizens and improving the economy. Conversely, the greatest expectation these groups of citizens have from the Assembly is that it should work on solving citizens’ problems and passing “stable, efficient, and quality laws”.

Of all outreach mechanisms between the Assembly and the citizens, these groups of citizens are mainly familiar with the Assembly TV channel. They are less familiar with other outreach mechanisms like the web page and direct communication with the parliamentarians. There is almost no awareness about the possibilities to visit the Assembly building and follow a plenary debate. Some differences among different respondents profile were noted. Macedonian woman, youth, unemployed and persons with a disability are more familiar with the outreach mechanisms of the Assembly. Less familiar are Roma and poor respondents. The least familiar with the Assembly outreach mechanism are Albanian women and Albanian youth.

Generally, the Assembly is perceived to be transparent, by all profiles of respondents since anyone who wants to can directly follow the sessions via the Assembly TV channel. With respect to the openness, the citizens do not consider the Assembly to be open to them. They believe that their interests should be represented in the Assembly by the parliamentarians they had elected.

Regarding the improvement of the openness of the Assembly for citizens, these groups suggest conveying widespread and clear information about how citizens can participate and get involved.

To make the Assembly web page more appealing they suggest posting information relevant for students and platforms where citizens can discuss law proposals. The idea of creating a Facebook page of the Assembly also came up.

Concerning the Assembly TV Channel improvements, the respondents suggested providing an early TV program/schedule with the topics to be discussed so that citizens can decide whether to watch or not. Respondents proposed that panel discussions among experts in the areas of economy and politics be broadcast on the parliamentary channel to inform viewers on the contents of laws and their impact. The respondents frequently stated that the parliamentarians should act more professionally and work for the interests of all citizens and not only for their political parties.

The respondents' suggestions regarding visits to the Parliament building ranged from improving the accessibility for people with disabilities; organizing group visits for groups at risk of citizens, especially for those coming out of Skopje; and providing clear information about the Assembly's visiting days/hours for the citizens.

Regarding participation in the plenary debates, the respondents stated that citizens should have the opportunity to take part and pose certain number of questions to the MPs.

To improve direct communication with the parliamentarians, citizens suggest introducing e-mail or regular mail communication with MPs, organizing meeting with the parliamentarians at least once a month, and gatherings with citizens in their constituencies.

In regard to the suggestions how to increase the involvement of the citizens at risk in policies making there is no difference among different profiles. All citizens at risk, at first expressed a need of the information about their rights and possible ways to be included.

For greater self-involvement in the Assembly work and policies making these groups of citizens suggest:

- Campaigns for informing citizens on how they can participate and get involved
- Organizing groups of citizens for submission of proposals or changes to laws
- Youth activism
- “Lobbying”
- Greater presence and inclusion of the Roma and people with disabilities in the Assembly and institutions
- Raising awareness and education of the general population about the groups of citizens at risk in society and their needs
- More active civic engagement through non-governmental organizations and unions
- Direct communication between MPs and citizens
- Establishing working groups that include groups of citizens at risk in the Parliament.

Regarding the issue of having more representatives in the Assembly from all groups in the society, the respondents had opposing reactions. At first all believe it would be good and beneficial, but after discussing the issue some start to believe that once they became MPs, people from groups at risk would forget where they came from, work for their own interest and not work for the good of these groups of citizens at risk. Some differences were detected. Youth believe that since they don't have enough experience it will be better if they are only initiators for some policies or changes in laws. Unemployed believe that only a larger number of MPs coming from groups at risk can make difference. The persons with a disability believe that their presence in the Assembly even in smaller number may provoke compassion among others and initiate the other MPs to start think and work more in favor of persons with disability.