

Participatory Monitoring for Accountability

Second Phase of Post-2015 Consultations





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Podgorica, July 2014

Imprint

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UN System in Montenegro

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Introduction

Background to the post-2015 process

Montenegro was one of the countries involved in national consultations on post-2015 development goals. This process, supported by the UN, was part of a global discussion through which people from all over the world have been invited to help Member States shape the future development agenda that will build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after 2015. In order to involve the people of Montenegro and give them the opportunity to describe “what kind of Montenegro and what kind of world they want to live in”, the UN system in Montenegro, in cooperation with a number of local partners, has created a broad platform for communication with the purpose of collecting people’s ideas, hereby helping world leaders create a new global development agenda after 2015.

The primary objective was to solicit opinions about the main challenges that citizens face, their perception about solutions to those challenges, and ideas on how these could lead to better lives for them and their families, to a post-2015 development agenda, a more effective process of EU integration for the country, and to Sustainable Development Goals.

The consultations were organised in the period between December 2012 and April 2013 and involved more than 8 000 people of Montenegro, or 1.3% of the population.

People living in Montenegro identified the eight most prominent concerns around which priorities for the future should be set:

- Economic growth, unemployment, income generation and equal regional development
- Fighting crime, corruption and nepotism
- Health
- Equality
- Environmental sustainability
- Infrastructure development
- Education
- Values

The purpose of the second phase of post-2015 consultations in Montenegro is to engage the public in a fundamental dialogue about the ways of monitoring the government’s performance and fostering responsive governance around a new set of goals in the context of the post-2015 framework. A special emphasis is on “voiceless” groups of the population (the poor, disadvantaged, young/elderly, including women who live in remote or isolated communities, displaced persons, etc.), as was the case in the first phase of post-2015 consultations in 2013, who are traditionally excluded from the processes of policy development and monitoring of their implementation.

Phase II in Montenegro, held between 10 June and 10 July 2014, engaged the following numbers of people:

Facebook page likes (sustainable future)	Filled-out online questionnaires	Participants in focus groups (17 in total)	# hits at www.predlozi.odrzivabuducnost.me	# hits on the Facebook page (sustainable future)	# comments, likes, sharing
2 618	1 176	161	6 134	221 545	2 073
3 955					

The breakdown and detailed data on the focus groups participants and respondents to online questionnaires and focus groups are given below:

		Online survey		Focus groups		Total	
Gender	Male	521	44.3%	73	45.3%	594	44.4%
	Female	655	55.7%	88	54.7%	743	55.6%
Region	Central	585	49.7%	94	58.4%	679	50.8%
	Northern	238	20.2%	38	23.6%	276	20.6%
	Southern	353	30.0%	29	18.0%	382	28.6%
Education level	Primary	25	2.1%	62	38.5%	87	6.5%
	Secondary	402	34.2%	61	37.9%	463	34.6%
	Tertiary	709	60.3%	31	19.3%	740	55.3%
	Other:	40	3.4%	7	4.3%	47	3.5%
Age	15–25	314	26.7%	48	29.8%	362	27.1%
	25–49	683	58.1%	64	39.8%	747	55.9%
	50–65	163	13.9%	47	29.2%	210	15.7%
	65+	16	1.4%	2	1.2%	18	1.3%
Employed	Yes	646	54.9%	37	23.0%	683	51.1%
	No	441	37.5%	107	66.5%	548	41.0%
	Other	89	7.6%	17	10.6%	106	7.9%
Sector	State administration	220	28.4%	12	30.0%	232	28.5%
	Private sector	353	45.5%	6	15.0%	359	44.0%
	NGO	48	6.2%	11	27.5%	59	7.2%
	Other	154	19.9%	11	27.5%	165	20.2%

Table 1: Breakdown by gender, region, education, age and employment status of participants to focus groups and respondents in the online survey

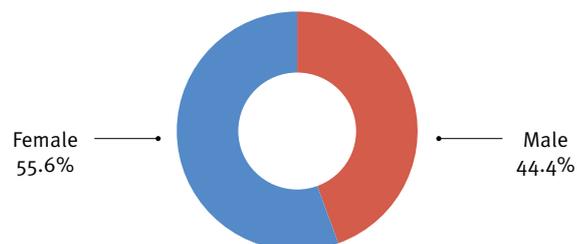


Figure 1: Breakdown of respondents by gender (%)

Methodology

In the post-2015 Phase II, the national consultations were conducted by means of three different tools. The first involved **stock-taking (mapping)**¹, conducted by an expert consultant, aimed at the rapid mapping of all forms and linkages between different formal (MDG progress monitoring, for instance) and informal participatory monitoring for accountability mechanisms, as well as how accountability systems work in the country, rather than in isolated institutions. Special emphasis was given to inclusion of citizens at the level of local communities, meaning citizens' monitoring of the work of local self-governments.

The second tool used was the **online survey**, a 17-question questionnaire posted on the website www.predlozi.odrzivabuducnost.me. To increase the visibility of the survey, we used the social networks Facebook (Page and Ads), Twitter and Google AdWords.

As the third tool of citizen participation, we **conducted 17 focus groups with different, primarily vulnerable, targeted audiences** (children and persons with disabilities, parents/guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities, displaced persons, parents of stateless persons, displaced Roma from Kosovo², Montenegrin nationals living below the poverty line, Roma, rural young people, state administration, women entrepreneurs) aiming to see in what ways and to what extent there are conditions in place for their

participation in decision making or in advocating for their rights before state authorities; these focus groups were conducted in cooperation with partner non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and state institutions³.

The gender structure of respondents was mostly balanced, with somewhat more women taking part in the survey and in the focus groups. As regards regional distribution, the largest share of respondents is from the central region of Montenegro (50.8%), while the smallest share is from the underdeveloped northern region (20.6%). As regards the education profile, the largest share are accounted for by those holding college and university degrees (55.3%) which may be explained by the type of tools used for collecting data (focus groups and the online survey). However, as can be seen in the table view (Table 1), the main characteristics of the participants in the process largely depend on the methods used, so the focus groups included people to whom the online questionnaire was not available⁴. Besides members of vulnerable groups in society, one focus group was organised with people who are employed in the state administration, because of their specific roles in participatory processes, where they are both decision-makers and citizens of Montenegro

1. www.un.org.me/uploads/Documents/2014/Montenegro%20Mapping_Participatory%20Monitoring%20for%20Accountability_Report%20-%206%20June%202014.pdf

2. In accordance with Resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council.

3. UZPD Nikšić, NGO "Adria", CBO Green Piva-Plužine, Centre for the Rights of the Child Montenegro, HELP, Red Cross of Montenegro, NGO Legal Centre, NGO Civic Alliance, NGO "Da zaživi selo" (Revival of Villages), the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, and the Chamber of Commerce

4. Or where quantitative data were missing, as it was the case with the representatives of state administration and women entrepreneurs.

Figure 2: Breakdown of respondents by region (%)

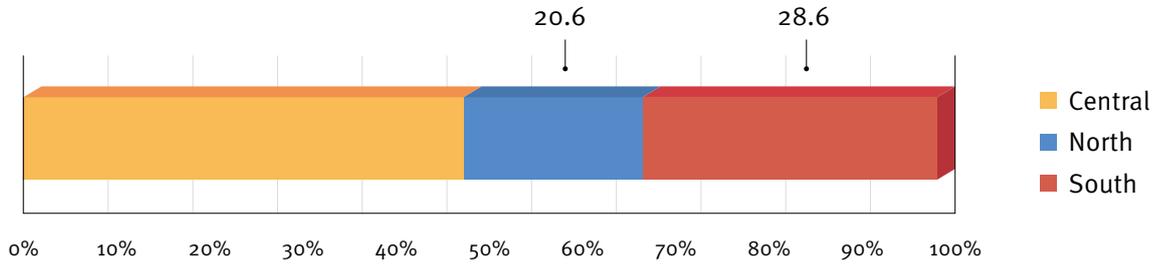


Figure 3: Breakdown of respondents by the level of education

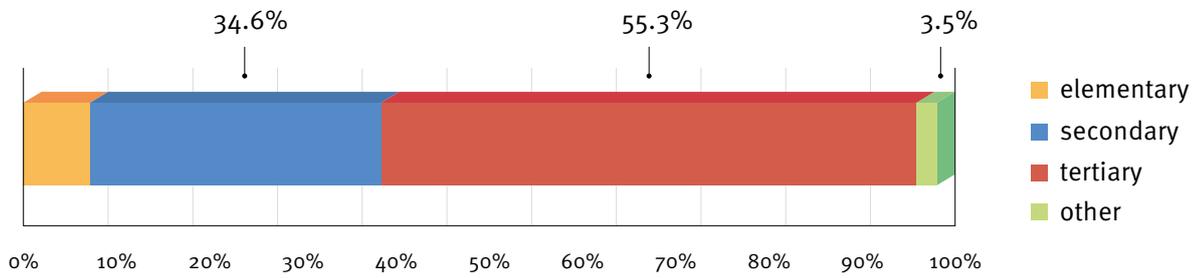
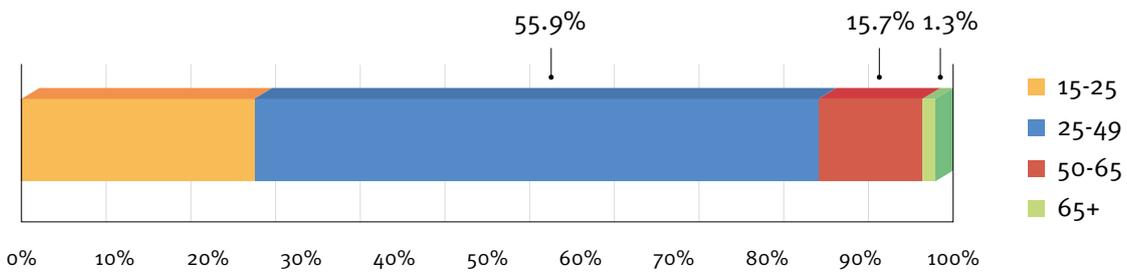


Figure 4: Breakdown of respondents by age



Mapping participatory policy monitoring tools in Montenegro – summary

Introduction:

In the process of drafting the progress reports towards the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) so far, governments around the globe used official data available to responsible authorities. This criterion is important from the point of view of provision of official comparable data and continuity in monitoring certain indicators. Nevertheless, civil society representatives worldwide insist that such an approach excludes the voices of citizens, particularly underprivileged ones, and the data collected by nongovernmental organisations through direct contacts with communities. Thus, the goal attainment monitoring process so far focused more on (quantitatively expressed) short-term goals than on long-term impacts. Following this line of thinking, it is necessary to use participatory policy monitoring mechanisms to ensure that future global sustainable development goals are also embraced locally.

Although the principles of participatory monitoring, as well as of accountability and transparency of governments, are largely known, the concept of *participatory monitoring for accountability* falls within participatory democracy innovations in Montenegro.

Given the array of tools available to citizens in UN member states, the intention was to assess what participatory monitoring for accountability means in the Montenegrin social and political context. The survey focused on mapping the tools that might foster

progress monitoring in attaining future sustainable development goals, and the findings may serve to monitor the actions taken by competent authorities and to step up citizen participation in all other areas.

Specific features of Montenegro’s civic participation and monitoring model:

To date Montenegro has practised hardly any of the “traditional” participatory monitoring mechanisms to boost government accountability recognised by the existing reference literature⁵. Therefore, the report takes stock of all the existing modes which on their own, or in conjunction with other complementary mechanisms and tools, may increase citizen participation in monitoring the fulfilment of future sustainable development goals.



Focus group with representatives of a national group for monitoring of MDGs. Photo: Miloš Vujović

5. Stakeholder survey; citizen report cards; community score cards; social audit; citizen audit, participatory budgeting, etc.

The practice so far has shown that greater emphasis was placed on opening a participatory process at the policy-planning stage, while less was placed on involving people in the implementation and evaluation processes. Certainly, in monitoring the goals set in the future development agenda, the difference between the two processes is blurred, given that goal implementation will also imply decision making at different levels.

It is noteworthy that the accountability of the central and local governments would greatly improve with consistent observance of the rules of citizen participation, particularly at the local level, and the use of informal mechanisms should be there only to give added value. Since this is not the case, it is proposed for capacities to be built for both approaches in parallel.

General mechanisms that may serve as participatory policy monitoring tools:

Montenegrin citizens have the right to file requests **for accessing information**, as a precondition for their involvement in monitoring the work of the competent authorities.

Public discussion is one of the key mechanisms for public involvement in the adoption of legislation and other strategy papers and plans. The public may be involved at an early stage by using the tool known as “prior consultations”, which implies the duty of conducting consultations to elicit the views, interests and needs of citizens around specific issues.

The Law on Local Self-Government sets forth the mechanisms for direct citizen participation in expressing their views and in decision making including: **initiatives, civic initiatives, citizens’ assemblies, referendums (at the community and municipality levels)**, and other forms of expression of views and decision making provided for in municipal charters (**petitions, proposals and complaints**). Municipalities adopt Decisions on the participation of the local population in the exercising of public tasks. It is also

envisaged to develop annual media plans containing the information on the forms, tools and timeframe for citizen participation.

Consultative hearings are one of the control mechanisms of the Montenegrin Parliament offering the possibility for citizens to be involved in the work of parliamentary committees by invitation or to even launch the initiative to hold a hearing. This offers a major opportunity to include non-partisan individuals and organisations with expertise in the given field.

By using the “**free seat**” tool, a representative of interested citizens attending the local parliament session has the right to give proposals or opinions on matters on the agenda, without voting powers.

With a view to improving local governance, **Councils for Local Self-Government Development and Protection** have been established within municipalities. Council members are appointed by the local parliaments from among distinguished and prominent local citizens and experts in the fields relevant to local governance.

The Government of Montenegro has established **Citizen Bureaus** aimed at helping citizens communicate with state institutions, and such Citizen Bureaus are now operational in most of Montenegro’s municipalities.

Unlike Citizen Bureaus, offering mostly administrative public services to citizens, the **Civic Office** enables citizens to be involved in the processes of policy making and monitoring. Ideally, the Civic Office is set up in partnership with local self-governments and NGOs, at municipal or geographical/administrative region levels.

The Government of Montenegro has set up an **e-government portal** to ensure that citizens can communicate electronically with public administration authorities. The portal has also put in place the technical requirements for active citizen participation in drafting documents and making policies through

e-participation. Citizens have available also the **e-petition** tool, enabling Montenegrin nationals, foreigners with permanent residence in Montenegro and holders of ID cards for foreign nationals, to launch petitions on any matter within the scope of the responsibilities of the Government of Montenegro.

Montenegro's Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms (the **Ombudsperson**) is an autonomous and independent body which takes actions to protect human rights and freedoms by mediating between citizens and decision-makers, but also by acting proactively in giving recommendations and launching petitions based on information provided by citizens.

In order for the wider public to monitor policy implementation, an open **radio or TV programme** may be organised through which citizens send their objections and proposals to improve the implementation and, together with the responsible players, come up with solutions in specific cases.

The use of **web-based platforms and mobile applications** for citizen participation in addressing the issues of a local or a wider importance is on the increase. Some of the existing solutions include all topics of societal importance, while others are specialised in certain areas (reporting illegal dumping, the grey economy, etc.).

Participatory budgeting is a process in which citizens directly participate in various stages of budget definition, approval and monitoring. This tool is still in its early stages.

In order to adapt to monitoring goals, the above general tools are used in conjunction with other tools and different communication channels, thus creating *specific mechanisms* managed by state institutions or NGOs, functioning most often on the principles of multi-agency cooperation.

Conclusions and recommendations:

The citizens and the government of Montenegro

have available a wide array of formal and informal mechanisms for policy monitoring, particularly so at the local level. However, most of the existing mechanisms, particularly the local-level ones, are non-functional. The review has shown that each of the mechanisms identified has substantial advantages, but also shortcomings, and that it would be best, depending on the goal and specific features of each policy being monitored, to define a model to include several compatible mechanisms.

Several factors affect *the effectiveness* of such tools: citizens being aware of the existence of a certain tool, their level of empowerment and interest in taking an active role in societal processes, the tool's accessibility in the sense of the required knowledge and skill, but also physical barriers, and finally the social and political context in their micro communities. Vulnerable groups lack empowerment for direct participation in policy monitoring, and most often do so through NGOs, various councils or foundations.

Poor use of existing tools also reflects a low level of proactive actions taken by the central and local governments. From the citizens' viewpoint, it is particularly important to get *feedback* to their proposals and demands. Those tools where the questions and answers of all interested parties were made public had the greatest number of users, and successfully (or equitably) addressed cases are the best motivators. Timely involvement is also important – if people are involved at the planning stage already, they will show a higher level of responsibility for attaining the planned outcomes during the subsequent implementation and monitoring.

The review also showed that the communication channels used by the relevant authorities are also important for constructive interaction. The best designed models have the poorest performance because of not being properly communicated. The governments, apart from formally setting the mechanisms in place, should also find a way to invite and mobilise citizens to use them (which is their statutory requirement); in addition, forging partnerships with civic associations

and the media may be very helpful in that respect.

There is no single mechanism for citizen monitoring in all policy areas, primarily because of the different goals and target audiences (youth policy, educational policy, healthcare, pensions, etc.), and yet again each individual citizen chooses his or her own model that suits him or her best. In addition, citizens prefer different communication channels when dealing with different issues (e.g. illegal dumping or illegally parked cars are reported online, while corruption is most often reported in person, by mail or telephone).

Nevertheless, as the findings indicate, some general tools may be singled out as cornerstones for participatory monitoring in Montenegro, to contribute, through synergies, to greater accountability of both citizens and decision-makers:

- Use of new technologies (web-based platforms and mobile applications);
- Public discussion and other mechanisms set in the Law on Local Self-Government;
- Participatory budgeting and local budgets monitoring, and
- The media.

Evidence shows that the first and the last of the four proposed models (web/mobile platforms and the media) can *over a short period of time mobilise a large number of citizens*. On the other hand, although time is needed for successful implementation of other tools to reinforce the civic capacity of citizens and democratic capacity of institutions, the future development of local communities should be built upon them.

In order for the proposed mechanisms to be *functioning effectively, partnerships should be established among different sectors* for better use of the resources available:

- The **non-governmental sector**, to provide inputs, particularly from the local level and from vulnerable groups they are in direct contact with;

- The Government, to provide the outputs/ timely response to questions, comments and demands of citizens, and for their proactive involvement in goal implementation and monitoring;
- **Media**, particularly TV production companies, have the potential to involve the wider public in the promotion and monitoring of the set development priorities. The media can play a dual role, either just to convey information or to be the driving force as well.

In the context of the post-2015 agenda, it is important for the competent authorities (particularly the MDG monitoring group) to devise a model that would enable the setting of realistic goals and performance indicators, taking into account grassroot-level data, not necessarily the official data of competent authorities, but can also rely on the reports of civil society organisations and multi-agency outreach teams. Unlike the current practices, the goals should be better promoted locally and at the community level, particularly in places with prominent inequalities.

Finally, it should be noted that making use of participatory tools affects their future sustainability through self-regulation and balancing of social power, thus substantially increasing the accountability of not only governments, but also citizens.

Online survey results

The online survey with a standardised questionnaire was conducted between 10 June and 10 July 2014. Given some of the restrictions posed by such surveys, these results, in conjunction with the other survey methods used (desk review and focus groups) are provided for data validity. The survey included **1176** respondents from Montenegro. The detailed breakdown of the respondents is given in Table 1 above.

I Are you aware of any means by which citizens may present to competent authorities their views and opinions about topical issues?

Only 40% of respondents are aware of some means of participation in decision making while almost two-thirds are not sure (24.5%) or are unaware (32.2%). A small share of respondents who chose the option “other” give mostly similar answers: that citizens have several options available for presenting their own views and opinions, but that, in their opinion, the responsible authorities do not take them into account in policy making and implementation.

II Which of the listed tools are known to you, and which have you used so far?

Apart from the low level of information of the respondents about the existing tools, **each tool offered was unknown to at least half of the respondents; also, the share of those who actually use certain tools among those who are familiar with the same tool is unfavourable.** The largest share of respondents is familiar with writing letters to the competent authorities

and with the use of media. Women are, although not substantially, less informed about most of the tools. It is evident that women have less experience in the actual use of the tools available, and the only tools they used more frequently than men were e-petitions and complaint boxes. Women are underrepresented at public discussion, in the media, and approach the responsible institutions and decision-makers less.

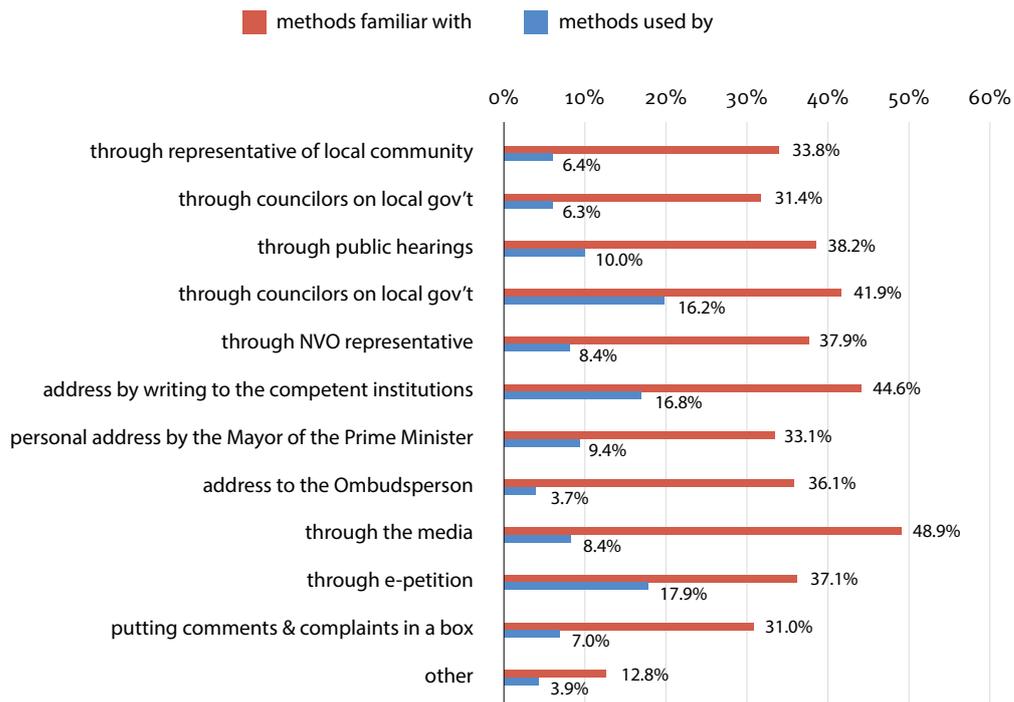


Figure 1: The tools known to and used by citizens as a share (%) of the total number of respondents

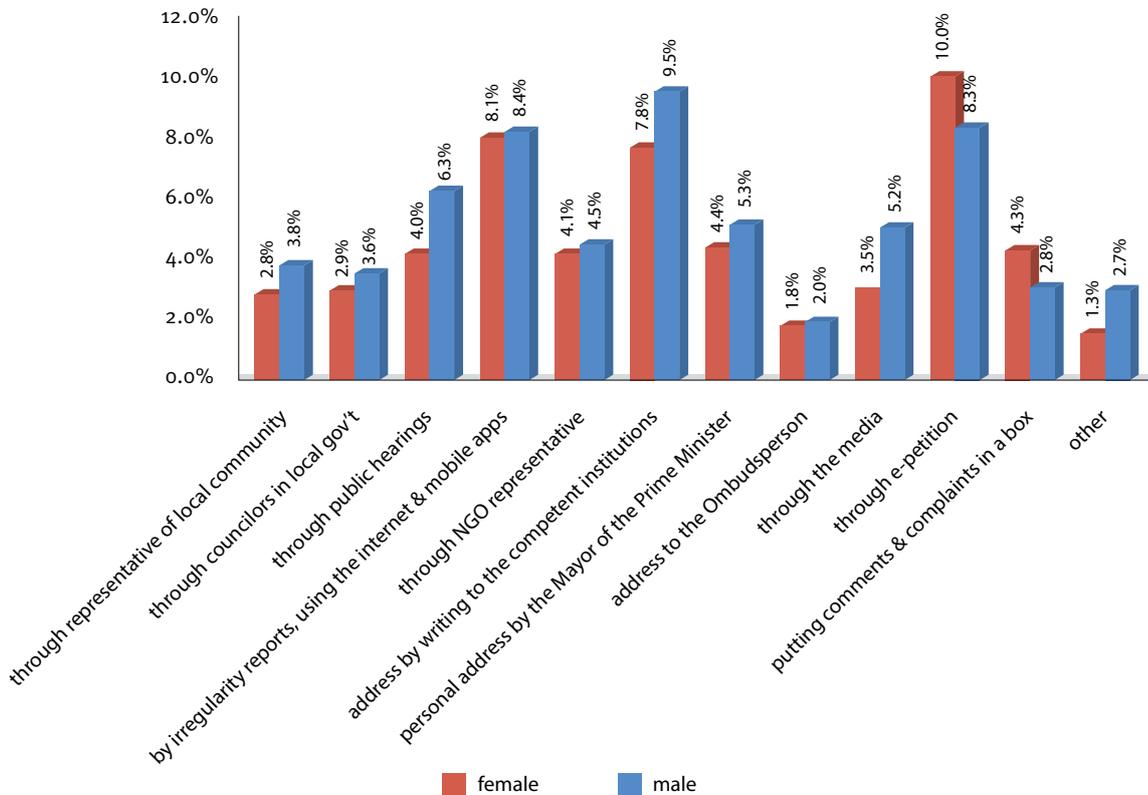


Figure 2: Share of respondents who used any of the means of expressing their opinions and views on topical issues before the competent authorities, breakdown by gender

III Have you so far taken part in decision making in any manner, locally or nationally?

Only one-third of respondents have taken part in decision making so far, while two-thirds state that they do not have the experience. It should be noted that this was an open question leading to possible uncertainties about what is meant by participation, possibly prompting more negative responses. Therefore it was followed by a control question, which shows that the share of those who had taken part in decision making, at least at the local level, is much greater.

A (if Yes) which of the below tools have you used in your municipality?

The total of 59.6% respondents used some of the participatory tools at the local level. Most of them had signed petitions (31.1%), followed by taking part in public discussions (14.2) and civic initiatives. Women, more often than men, had used petitions only, and were much less present at citizen assemblies and public discussions.

B (if No) Why haven't you taken part in decision making at the local level?

Almost half of the respondents who do not use local participatory tools stated a *lack of trust that anything might change if they approach the responsible authority* as the reason. A substantial share of the respondents (28.8%) say they are not informed of the participation procedures, while 15.4% are not interested. Other reasons stated include: consultations being held during working hours when they were unable to leave their jobs, not enough visible calls by responsible authorities or fellow citizens, and some say there was no need, or they didn't have any problems to address.

IV Do you think that the responsible authorities are able to respond to all demands by citizens?

Only 26.7%, or slightly less than one-quarter of re-

spondents believe that the responsible institutions may respond to the demands, while as many as 64.5% do not think so.

As the main reasons for such a situation the respondents cite poor internal arrangements and division of competences. The prevailing causes for their inactivity seen by those choosing the option "other" (15.9%) are corruption, then a lack of interest, ignorance and incompetence among civil servants. The respondents from the civil service cite as reasons that this issue is not a priority, and a lack of funds, especially for field work.

V Have you ever used web-based platform (E-government portal or the web sites of the responsible authorities) to communicate with the responsible authorities?

As many as 63.4% of respondents **have never used the online platforms** available for interacting with the relevant authorities although this survey itself was conducted through one such platform.

In cases where they did use these platforms, 30.2% received a response to their queries, which is rather low. Almost half of the respondents (47.5%) state that they never received any feedback, while the rest received only a "procedural" response not addressing their issue. Some of the respondents say it depends on the institution.

VI Do you think that vulnerable groups in your municipality stand equal chances of exercising their rights?

As regards the **exercise of rights of vulnerable groups at the local level**, the respondents believe (44%) that of all groups listed, women are in the best position, although they note the group is too widely set. They are followed by ethnic minorities chosen by 37.8% respondents. Roma and poor people (22.1% and 23.8%, respectively) are the vulnerable groups that have the least chances of exercising their rights at the local level. *Most respondents believe that no vulnerable*

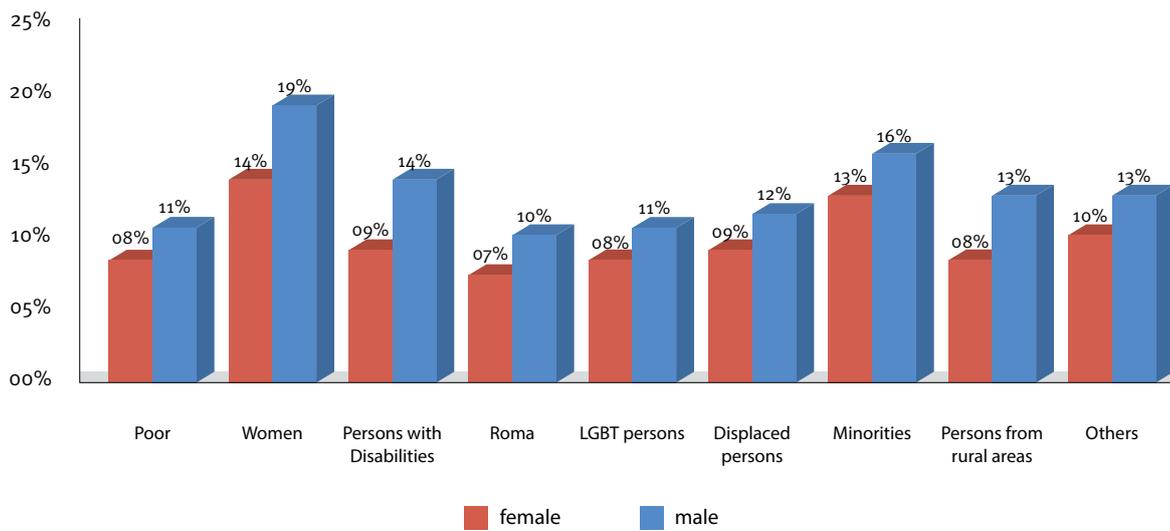


Figure 3: Share of respondents who think listed vulnerable categories stand equal chances of exercising their rights at municipal level

group can exercise their rights at the local level properly.

As many as 30.2% respondents chose the option “other” and indicated the existence of privileged groups in the society, such as members of the political parties in power, their relatives and associated people (through families or through business). On the other hand, other groups of underprivileged were also added (the unemployed, single mothers and addicts).

VII What form of interaction between citizens and the authorities would suit you the most?

Asked what form of participation would suit them the most, the respondents gave varied answers mentioning almost all existing tools and communication channels. The largest share of responses indicates that citizens have no particular preferences regarding the choice of tools, they rather focus on better functioning of the things that already exist.

Findings from focus groups

Citizens' awareness of the ways to present opinions and view on topical issues to competent authorities

The respondents from the segment of **the population below the poverty line** approach the institutions mostly in writing, usually through NGOs. A very small share of respondents approach mayors regarding their problems, none approach the prime minister or the Ombudsman; at the same time, they are fully unaware of the possibility of reporting irregularities, of using web-based and mobile applications, and hence have no experience in using these tools to express their views and opinions.

Citizens of northern municipalities and rural areas are most familiar with the possibility of approaching institutions through local councillors, then through the media, at public discussions, and through letters sent to the competent authorities. *Rural young people* say they were able to present their views and opinions concerning certain issues also through community representatives and NGOs. *Urban young people* recognise all forms of communication with the competent authorities, but used only e-petitions through which they tried addressing student issues, then writing letters to competent institutions and line ministries regarding specific matters, participation through the media, and the Student Parliament.



Citizens from remote region in the North of Montenegro discuss aspects of their greater participation in decision making processes. Photo: Miloš Vujović

Children in foster care were mostly aware of the possibility of addressing institutions by means of a letter, e-mail, personal contact or petitions, but note that these tools do not provide for their full participation without adult assistance and support. Hence, they noted addressing through NGOs, letters and personal contact the mayors, secretariats, local communities, school management, Centres for Social Work, etc. as the most frequent forms used.

People with disabilities, apart from personal contact and writing letters, also used the “free seat” tool, public events and media releases. The free seat tool was used through their associations, and they note the outcome to be semi-solutions (proposals usually adopted, but never implemented). The experience with writing urgencies to address any of the issues they face proved to be ineffective since these most often remain unanswered. The involvement of the media increases visibility, but usually to no avail.

“I approached the media, but they wrote a sad story and that was the end of it” - man, displaced person

Children with disabilities mostly note their involvement through Student Parliaments.

Parents/guardians of people with developmental disabilities say they are fully unaware of any means of presenting their opinions to the competent authorities, and that when they face a serious problem, *they do not know who to turn to.*

Roma see interaction with competent authorities primarily through reporting various forms of discrimination they face with the competent authorities. Even the more educated Roma lack information on the ways to engage in order to address other issues. Roma usually approach the Roma Council and NGOs dealing with Roma issues. Other most often used means include going through community representatives, writing letters to the competent institutions, to the mayor or through the media. Interactions through local councillors have never been used as a method,

and no one has ever written to the Ombudsman, or ever used e-petitions.

Unlike men, **Roma women** are unaware of any means of interactions with competent authorities to present their views and opinions on topical issues. They have never heard of the most of the tools available. Apart from oral and occasional written complaints to competent authorities, the respondents never used any other participatory tool. The media is not recognised as a possible means of communication although there were examples of some Roma women publicly stating their problems. Roma women mostly approach the Red Cross of Montenegro as intermediaries when addressing state authorities.

The **displaced persons** that took part in the focus groups note that, regardless of whether they have the status of foreigners with permanent residence or still have the status of displaced, they have no suffrage and thus are prevented from taking part in the political life of Montenegro. The respondents took stock of all the rights they are deprived of presenting a general view that *if they do not enjoy their basic rights, the whole participation story in monitoring for accountability seems pointless and superfluous.*

“I don’t have bread on my plate, nowhere to work, I’m only interested in that.” - man, displaced person

Nevertheless, the respondents (displaced persons) mentioned approaching consular or diplomatic offices of their countries of origin in Montenegro, mayors, going through NGOs and local commissioners for displaced persons as possible routes of conveying their opinions on topical issues. They approach commissioners in person or in writing, following which the commissioner presents to the competent local authorities the problems they are facing, advocates for their interests and thus constitutes an important channel of communication between this marginalised group and the competent institutions. The respondents attach great importance also to the existence of the NGO “Legal Centre”, offering legal aid, which



Facilitator at one of many focus groups organised within the process to obtain feedback from various groups of people of Montenegro.

Photo: Miloš Vujović

they can address at any time and receive timely and accurate information pertaining to their rights, and all other types of legal aid.

Women entrepreneurs are largely aware of all forms of citizen participation, and use many of the tools available (petitions, the Ombudsman, public discussions, addressing mayors and their offices, etc). All tools are believed to be effective, provided that one is patient and persistent.

Participants in focus groups coming from **state authorities** state they are aware of all the tools that may be used in interactions with state authorities, but used them very rarely. The respondents state that they mostly “used the tools in their capacity as decision-makers or sponsors of proposals”. The most frequent tools used by this group of respondents are standard petitions and e-petitions which they, regardless of being part of the “authorities”, see as a support for citizens. The respondents also agreed to the following statement: “Most people do not believe in such tools, although they never attempted using them”.

When you took part in decision making, describe the process and the outcome of your

activities (was the response or the decision was the one you had hoped for?)

“The Ombudsman reviewed my full documentation and provided his opinion to the competent authority; this type of support was very important for me, particularly mentally, but also because the ombudsman’s opinion is respected” - woman entrepreneur

Socially disadvantaged respondents claim to have taken part in decision making only during the elections. As regards some specific problems for which they approached competent authorities, they claim to have been rejected or the promises received were never acted upon. They see the greatest problem in the lack of a sense of urgency when handling their problems. They all say that interaction by means of letters is problematic since they often remain unanswered, and that that is usually the end of any activity, especially if unaware of any other means to obtain the response sought.

Citizens from the North believe that one of the most widely known tools, interaction through local councillors, is ineffective if your advocate comes from the ranks of the opposition.

Young people point to e-petitions regarding student rights that proved to be effective as positive examples. The respondents stated that their initiatives aimed at decision-makers were most effective when using several interaction tools at the same time. They highlighted the example of students who, through boycotting teaching and writing to the Ministry of Education, and involving the media, managed to influence the choice of the teaching staff.

Children in foster care, supported by the NGO Centre for the Rights of the Child, arranged a meeting with the mayor to present their problems, opinions and ideas, and received direct answers and specific solutions for foster families and children from the territory of Podgorica.



Focus group with young people with disabilities about their greater participation in decision making processes. Photo: Miloš Vujović

People with disabilities point out that they have never individually participated in decision making. They attended meetings as NGO representatives, and their proposals, even when acknowledged, most often remain unimplemented. Among the participation tools, they often used round tables attended by the heads of the competent authorities, wrote to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, and were invited for discussions. Children with disabilities had the opportunity of taking part in choosing the field trip destinations and the election of Class Presidents, but express their dissatisfaction with “not being asked” as regards other problems pertaining to children (since they are underage).

Going through community representatives is recognised as a possible route and is frequently pursued by the members of the **Roma community**. The issues are most often of a local nature, like improving infrastructure in the neighbourhood (public lighting, street surfacing), addressing long-standing utility issues. Territorial community representatives are, however, most often contacted through the representatives of the Roma community so that their voice may be better heard. There were letters written to the mayor,

but most often with petitions regarding social assistance, most often one-off allowances. Even in such cases, the letters would go through the Roma Council since they believe that the letter would be sooner read and responded to that way than if written by an individual. The media was mostly contacted through the Foundation for Scholarships for the Roma and the Roma Council.

The experiences of the **Roma women** mostly refer to direct personal communication with the heads of various institutions (mostly Centres for Social Work, the Administration for Care of Refugees and healthcare institutions) where they were received well, but are dissatisfied at none of their problems being solved. They are very often met with the responses like “we’ll see, it’ll come”, and afterwards no one approaches them ever again.

Displaced persons approached the competent institutions solely with a view to addressing their own poor circumstances caused by extreme poverty. They mostly addressed the mayor or the Prime Minister, the Minister of Human and Minority Rights, the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, the UNHCR,

or the Administration for Care of Refugees.

The experiences vary, and as claimed by women entrepreneurs, they do not depend on the institutions but the individuals working there.

“I have had very nice experiences with the Tax Administration in all respects: getting information, the necessary instructions, their indicating the way to deal with a problem, explaining why something may not be addressed immediately and what new procedure is to be launched; a very good and professional service”. - woman entrepreneur

Civil servants most often cite the examples of taking part in public discussions (public discussion regarding the development of cyclist lanes, spatial and urban plans for the given borough), then the petition to protect the River Tara, the change of the working hours in the public administration, increasing the capacity of pre-schools and the protection of green areas. But they often find themselves wearing two hats.

“Now I am also a local councillor and I see that as a major role to play, since people approach me often to sponsor some of their proposals and suggestions or complaints” - local government councillor

For the respondents who responded negatively: Why not?

“We live in such a setting where it is a shame to admit to being poor and needing assistance. It is considered a shame to admit you are in need, that you don’t know, that you can’t. It is difficult for me even now to talk about it, but that’s my experience...when you are poor, it is a totally different state of mind. I never wanted to leave the house because I was depressed,

where could I take part, who’s going to look at me, how will I be judged; in order to be able as a woman to talk to you now, I first needed a job. Because, how else could have I come here? It is sad, but before I didn’t even have the strength to talk to people, let alone express my opinion and believe anyone would care.” – woman business starter from the northern part of the country

Poverty has been recognised as a special state that prevents people from playing an active role in society. This is relevant for most of the vulnerable groups (Roma, the rural population, single mothers, etc.), who are usually of very limited means.

Most of the respondents from the focus groups did not use any of the participation tools since they have primarily not been made aware of the options available. Even when they are informed about something, it is usually only partially, the procedures remain unclear, and they remain unaware of who to approach and in what manner. The belief that as individual citizens they can do nothing is very prominent among all target groups because “the decision-makers do what they have planned and do not respect the opinion of citizens”. They believe their opinion would be undervalued, and that competent authorities would still decide “as they please”.

Most of the tools are inaccessible anyway **to people with disabilities**, even when motivated to participate, due to physical barriers and an absence of sign language interpreters.

Apart from a lack of information, **young people** also stress the lack of internet access in rural areas and absence of modern technology, preventing them from using online applications. However, the number of young people who said that they were unwilling to present their views and opinions to the competent authorities because they believe the decisions are made by people who are paid to do so and that those

decisions are best for them, i.e. that they place their full trust in the decision-makers, is not negligible.

The hurdle to participation most often cited by **women** is preoccupation with family duties and existential concerns. They also say that they are often discouraged by their husbands who say they would not be able to push through what they have in mind.

“I haven’t launched an initiative myself, since there was no need for that. Actually, we all have a need but simply the pace of my life is such that in the last six years I haven’t done anything except build a house and raise children – this includes my career, which I have regarded as something for which I don’t have time” –woman employed in public administration

As regards citizen’s initiatives, it is a general impression that citizens are unaware of the importance and power of association.

“Everyone has the fear of getting together and asking something from the competent institutions”- woman entrepreneur

Women entrepreneurs see the fact that “entrepreneurs perceive each other as competitors, not the support needed as a prerequisite to addressing problems encountered systemically not sporadically” as a hurdle.

The civil servants who did not use any tools to approach the competent authorities claim not to have done so because “they didn’t have any major problems” since they feel privileged at having permanent jobs” and “did not encounter such initiatives”.

Familiarity with the formal forms of direct participation in decision making and expression of views at the local level: public discussions, initiatives, civic initiatives, citizens’ assemblies, referendums (at the community and municipality levels), and other forms of expression of views and



Women entrepreneurs share their views on how to hold Government accountable. Photo: Miloš Vujović

decision making provided for in municipal charters (petitions, proposals and complaints). What do you think, why are these tools underused? What is your experience? What impediments/difficulties (for participation using these tools) do you see on the part of the citizens and what on the part of the local authorities?

“All mechanisms produce results, but we need to be patient and persistent. It can be a tiring time, especially for women.” - Women entrepreneur

Regardless of the fact that the Law on Local Self-Government defines a set of tools for direct participation in expressing views and making decisions, a large number of respondents state they are not familiar with this law, or the participatory tools it envisages. However, those target groups who are in close communication with NGOs are familiar with almost all existing tools, but believe that many petitions and initiatives were not effective enough regardless of their active participation and involvement. Citizens' experiences in launching some major initiatives, especially local referendums, are not positive either. Nevertheless, many positive experiences are recognised in participation in public discussions where a large

number of suggestions and proposals have actually been inserted into town development strategies.

The reasons for the underuse of the existing citizen participation tools at the local level are varied, but largely already mentioned in the previous chapter. However, in this section the respondents clearly stated the impediments and the difficulties both on the part of the citizens and on the part of the local administration.

Apart from a lack of information, a lack of trust in the competent authorities, doubts as to what weight their words and actions might have in the given participatory tools, the respondents state passivity and lack of motivation and support among the citizens, and often they do not feel that they may be their allies.

Some are guided by the thinking “I’m fine, it doesn’t concern me, I don’t care for the rest”.

“Often citizens themselves are passive and wait for others to do things” - girl from a foster family

People with disabilities cite the inaccessibility of institutions for people with reduced mobility and the lack of interest on the part of local authorities to



*Young people with disabilities express concerns regarding their participation in decision making processes.
Photo: Miloš Vujović*

address their specific problems under the pretext of a lack of funds, which makes the people with disabilities feel that they continue to be on the margins of society and discourages them from any further actions.

Doubt in the successful outcome of any action and regarding positive solutions remains to be the key factor for inadequate participation in providing opinions and decision making at the local level, since the competent authorities will anyway do “what they please”.

Displaced persons believe that the above tools are available only to Montenegrin nationals and that they as displaced persons have no chance of affecting any decisions since they do not have their representative in the local parliament.

As regards **Roma**, they often express the fear that they might bear the consequences if they say anything that others and the majority disagree with. Some among the respondents even believe that they need money to launch petitions at the local level. They cite the difficult financial status as one of the reasons forcing them to focus on how provide food for their family on daily basis. The lack of understanding of citizen participation tools only further aggravates the situation.

“How can an illiterate Roma understand the direct participation tools? Who cares about it!” - displaced Roma man

Speaking of impediments on the part of local authorities, the respondents highlight inertia and a lack of coordination among institutions/authorities which, coupled with overly bureaucratic procedures only heighten the impression of “just wandering aimlessly, wasting time and incurring unnecessary costs”.

They also cite the great workload and lack of time of decision-makers, the absence of the contact person delegated for the questions of citizens who would give clear information and guidelines, absence of

Citizen Bureaus, no trust based on the principles of the local administration as a service to citizens, a lack of information and websites of local governments not being updated.

Respondents are of the opinion that, although public calls for participation are regularly published, the executive branch of power usually does not follow the proposals, petitions, complaints, and similar launched by citizens, which only reinforces the feeling that they are being invited for the sake of appearances, not because any substantial contribution is expected from them. The lack of feedback, in the form of a notification or a written material regarding the initiative, is regarded not only as a serious omission, but their further marginalisation as members of the community.

Some of the respondents claim that at times the requests citizens have are vague, confusing and that it is therefore important “to specifically say what you need to be able to know what you are looking for and to pose an understandable question, in order to avoid confusion between citizens and the administration”.

The lack of sound and good communication between citizens and decision-makers is also noted. The general conclusion may be easily drawn from the statement by one participant in the focus group including women entrepreneurs:

“There are shortcomings on both sides – both on the part of those who should be informed and have some knowledge, but also on the part of those who should give information or refer where to seek such information. Someone is employed to make such information available. It means – there is no shortage of people, interests and needs, information is not in short supply either, but what lacks is some nice interaction and solidarity. Examples of good practices are in short supply, though“ - a female entrepreneur

To what extent are the competent authorities, in your opinion, available for the vulnerable groups in society, to what extent are they included in providing opinions and making decisions on matters relevant for community development?

Almost all respondents agree that the competent authorities are not available to vulnerable groups in society enough and that their commitment to solving the problems of marginalised groups is minimal. They believe that the citizens below the poverty line are particularly excluded and, according to their claims, almost never participate in expressing views and making decisions. The participants in the focus groups believe that under-participation of vulnerable groups is largely a consequence of non-transparency and closedness of the authorities to “receiving any initiatives coming from these groups”.

“Institutions have to care more for the vulnerable groups, to ask them more about their needs, and then based on that, provide services in order for all to feel better and have a better life” - boy from a foster family

The *general impression* is that the competent authorities mostly marginalise vulnerable groups when it comes to their participation in policy making. They are mostly focused on meeting their social needs and do not expect that this is a group in the society which can give a constructive contribution to solving the issues relevant for societal development, particularly when it comes to the Roma community. Displaced persons believe that due to their status which makes them a very vulnerable group in Montenegrin society, the competent institutions are particularly inaccessible to them.

On the other hand, the experiences of organisations of people with disabilities indicate the lack of participation by decision-makers from responsible institutions in the public discussions organised by these NGOs, thus leaving the impression that decision-makers skilfully avoid personal contact with the represen-

tatives of any marginalised group.

Women believe that they do not enjoy adequate support from the competent authorities as regards facilities in the process of their economic empowerment. They say that launching a business for women is not done as a step in their entrepreneurship career, but rather an opportunity to address or assuage the problems they are facing, to survive in business, but also in their families as the ones obliged to make a living for their families, and ensure their survival. They add that “a woman who wishes to go into business must first fight with her own family and find justification for her ideas, and support, and only then struggle with the decision-makers...”

Young people pointed out that the competent authorities are available to them in terms with the legislation, and that vulnerable groups, given the issues they additionally face with, have more opportunities to fight for their rights unlike other citizens. That they get together, and have their representatives, and in this way attain their goals more easily.

Civil servants believe that vulnerable groups in the society themselves will give responses regarding which problems they are facing, but are not sure which way of communicating with the state authorities would be best for them, particularly for those who are poor and have no access to the internet. Maybe by letter only.

“These are their problems; maybe it would be better if they could explain them in person” - woman employed in public administration

Which mode of communication with the competent authorities suits you best in approaching them in the easiest way possible (in person, by phone, by letters, e-mails)? How do you learn about the activities undertaken by the competent authorities? (TV, internet, press). Does local media exist (radio and/or TV stations, newspapers) and how important are they?

“I prefer personal communication, I think that is the fastest way to get a solution because you have the opportunity to explain it all”, “the importance of a letter is judged by some clerks and it might happen that it never reaches the addressee”, “a good way is also by e-mail, but one should also think about rural people, poor people with no internet access, and in those cases a normal letter would be preferable”. - girl from a foster family

Our respondents see personal contact as the best way of communicating with the competent authorities. They claim that this tool suits them most, that this is the only manner which gives them assurances that progress is being made in handling the issue. This is particularly important for most of the respondents who do not have internet access (are ill-educated, have no computer literacy, and in addition, are unable to buy a computer, internet subscription or to use this form of communication). Apart from the personal contact, some of the respondents find meetings and public discussions suitable, but say that having an office that would gather information, through direct communication with citizens, on ideas and problems propounded by the members of the public, would have the most forceful impact.

Young people highlighted the use of e-mails and postal services, but also the telephone as the means they mostly use in establishing communication with the competent authorities. Given the specific circumstances they live in, Roma believe the best way would be for the competent authorities to come to the camp and see first-hand the problems they are facing. Apart from personal contact, displaced persons believe it is good to communicate through NGOs dealing with the problems of the displaced persons and people at risk of becoming stateless.

Women entrepreneurs note that the means of interaction in their case depends on the institution they are addressing. They believe that each ministry should

have a desk handling the questions from within their scope of competences, depending on the type of problems, and all ways of interaction should be available to citizens, personal contact or by telephone, letter, emails, etc.

Civil servants believe that the means of interaction depends on the setting in which people live and work.

“Since we work in the public administration, we have more information available; all the existing tools are at our disposal. But rural people have more difficulties in obtaining the information, and thus would have more problems doing what they need. We all know that they are not comfortable communicating through the internet. Although they are mostly literate, they are often absent during certain seasons of the year, at altitudes where traditional means of communication do not function.” - man employed in Public Administration

Respondents most often get informed about the activities of state authorities via radio and TV. They have no possibilities to be informed through other media (press, internet, etc.), due to being of very limited means. The situation is the opposite with young people; they use mobile phones, electronic devices and obtain information much more easily. Roma obtain information mostly through the Red Cross and the UNHCR, and partly also from other NGOs.

They do not see local media as relevant, and most are even unaware of their existence in the municipalities where they live.

What would motivate you (additionally) to be engaged; what is in your view the most suitable tool for interactions between citizens and the authorities?

The respondents state that they would be motivated

towards more active participation by more detailed information on the developments within the community, as well as the readiness of local authorities to respond within a reasonable time to the questions and demands of citizens.

“It is basic politeness when you send an e-mail to someone, for them to acknowledge the receipt or respond to the specific demand. Feedback is essential. Even when something cannot be dealt with for whatever reason, the responsible individuals should have it as their duty to inform us of that.” - woman employed in Chamber of Commerce

The respondents note the need for greater visibility of outcomes, particularly in citizens’ initiatives, the transparency of all actions, better communication between citizens and the authorities through mutual understanding, and greater visibility of the existing tools.

“Visibility of existing tools is very important – just to know that it is mentioned somewhere that there exists, for instance a tenant council, to know where the offices of the local territorial community are, to have the right to approach them and propose something.” - woman employed in Public Administration

The respondents also state that they would be most motivated for more active engagement if their opinions were be respected and if they believed that their participation would contribute to a better status for people with disabilities in the community.

“It is only those who value the opinion of others and understand the problem of others that can handle them; if that is missing, then you get fatigued soon and it all seems useless.” - woman employed in Public Administration

The respondents would be motivated by the readiness of the competent authorities to talk to them in person about the problems. They are confident that citizens would be more active were they better informed, if any of their initiatives were successful, any proposal approved, and suggestions taken. They pointed out that their best motivator is the wish for changes towards better living.

“We cannot know it all, it is unrealistic, but the institutions should inform us of all of the laws they pass, of our rights, of who we are to talk to, in what manner and when, to develop models to involve children and young people in contributing as much as possible to the development of our town and of our country.” - boy from a foster family

Respondents believe that improving the quality of their lives and putting an end to the daily struggle for existence and mere survival would contribute to better involvement of this population in any type of developments within the community.

“When there is something going on I usually say “I don’t have time”, and a friend of mine says “I have time, but no money and no desire.” Those who have a job and those who don’t are not in the same position. Who would care about any petition if they do not have the basics in life: no job, no place to live. Those who do not have a job are not informed or involved, they have different interests.” - woman business starter

Examples of solidarity and good practices in providing support for citizens’ initiatives at all levels would be strong motivators.

“It would be good to have a standard manner of approaching a ministry, a municipality, anyone, to have some

front desk where you can come and say what your problem is. To hand in documents in writing, or, since they are probably not literate, for the front desk officer to prepare and register the document and refer it to the responsible authority. I don't think this would be much of a problem for archive officers since the number of illiterate people is relatively low". - woman employed in Public Administration

existing ones should be strengthened and the principles of transparency, equality in decision making, deciding in terms with public needs, not current politics should be reinforced, and relations of mutual respect and trust fostered.

Respondents emphasise better communication through personal contacts between citizens and the authorities (meetings between citizens and the local authorities, panels, discussions, field visits, open days, etc.). They propose the introduction of clear procedures for handling citizens' requests, with clearly defined responsibilities, institutions and deadlines.

The respondents mostly do not see the need for introduction of new interaction tools, but believe the



*Discussion with young people with disabilities about their greater participation in decision making processes.
Foto: Miloš Vujović*

Conclusions

Most of the people living in Montenegro are unaware of the means to participate in decision making and monitoring of the authorities, and only a few of those who are familiar with such tools actually use them. It is particularly disconcerting that most of the people who belong to vulnerable groups have never used any of the tools available to present their views and opinions on certain issues with the responsible authorities. However, it is indicative that most of the participants did use some of the existing tools, but fail to recognise them as such, primarily because their approach to the competent authorities is aimed at addressing some of their personal existential issues, without any major societal impact.

The respondents who are familiar with participatory tools most often mention addressing institutions by means of letters and the use of media as such, then public discussion, reporting irregularities by using web-based and mobile applications, approach through NGOs, approaching the prime minister, the Ombudsman, while the approach through local councillors is least mentioned. The most often used tools are e-petitions, letters to institutions, public discussions, web-based and mobile applications. By way of comparison, apart from letters, all of the above most frequently used tools are fully inaccessible to the poor.

Although not substantially, women are less informed about most of the tools than men, but use them much less than men. Women used only the e-petition and complaint boxes more often than men, and were much less present at public discussions, in the media and

directly addressing the responsible authorities and decision-makers. The situation is even worse at the local level where a somewhat larger percentage of women used only petitions.

One gets the impression that the initiatives which involve public gathering (public discussions, citizen assemblies) are still seen as a traditional male domain. This is a clear indication of persisting patriarchal patterns in Montenegro, not conducive to greater participation of women in the public domain.

Special attention should be given to *Roma women* who, unlike their male counterparts, have not even heard of most of the tools that could help them present their views and raise issues, and who, apart from oral and occasional written comments, have never used any other participatory tool.

A positive example of the level of information and the use of tools available is seen among *women entrepreneurs* many of whom have used petitions, approaching the Ombudsman, public discussions, approaching mayors and their offices.

The respondents from particularly vulnerable groups pointed out the lack of knowledge about the procedures to use the existing tools, which prevents them from presenting their opinions and views on topical issues. They interacted with the competent authorities most often by means of letters, then through NGOs, local communities, and only exceptionally, through local councillors.

Given the inaccessibility of internet in the rural areas and the absence of modern technologies, the *rural young people* were not able to use online platforms and mobile applications. On the other hand, *urban young people* have adopted all forms of interaction with the relevant institutions, and most often use web-based platforms and mobile applications e-petitions, letters and the media.

Children are mostly involved through Student Parliaments, but they point out that current tools do not ensure their safe participation without adult support and assistance.

Roma are very little involved in decision making and policy making at any level. Apart from several NGOs, Roma approach the Roma Council, while *displaced persons* present their views and concerns through local commissioners for displaced persons.

The belief of displaced persons that because of the fact that they do not enjoy suffrage they may not express their views nor influence any policies is disconcerting. The absence of a sense of belonging to society, due to their unresolved status, affects their reduced interest to participate in decision making. Also, *parents of children with disabilities* do not feel that the society is adequately interested in the issues faced by their families, and thus are not motivated enough to be involved more in decision making.

It should be noted that a large number of marginalised groups, like people with disabilities, Roma and displaced persons, have organised themselves and *influence the responsible authorities through their associations*. This form of organised action has opened new opportunities and greater chances for using the mechanisms like public discussions, the “free seat” and citizen initiatives.

Civil servants are mostly well informed about all the tools available, but use them rarely, since they do not recognise the need for this type of action, and see them more as a venue for those affected by a specific problem. Since they mostly find themselves

in the roles of decision-makers or sponsors, they most often used public discussions and occasional petitions, mostly dealing with internal issues within the administration. The topics civil servants are interested in as normal citizens are usually “soft” ones, like protection of green areas and culture. Civil servants have difficulties putting themselves in the shoes of normal citizens, and their positive personal experiences with internal initiatives within the administration make them think that most people do not believe in the participatory tools simply because they have never tried using them. Contrary to that, citizens cite a large number of failed initiatives and absence of visible examples of good practices as one of the reasons for their lack of involvement.

The respondents’ experiences in addressing the authorities vary. The e-petition is stressed as the most accessible to a large number of users, but not to those affected by poverty. Letters are used most frequently, but produce few positive outcomes and range mostly from a failure to respond, and outright rejections, to persistent silence from the administration. Addressing through local councillors is not effective if the demand is not in line with the position of the governing party, and is easily labelled as “opposition views”. For local issues, addressing them through local territorial communities most often produced results. The involvement of the media gives visibility and sends a direct, but essential message to decision-makers. Public discussions are cited as good examples for presenting views and giving proposals to address various issues. Petitions are seen as one of the best tools to gather many people, thus producing most visible results. The advantages of associations of citizens are well recognised by a number of respondents, and thus the experiences of launching initiatives through NGOs, concurrently using several tools to exercise influence, have been the most successful tools so far in exercising influence with the responsible authorities.

The respondents from particularly vulnerable groups, who have never used any of the tools, cite a lack of information, lack of experience, inaccessibility

and doubts about the relevance and significance that would be attached to their voice as the reason for that. They are further discouraged by the poor experiences of others, and doubt the success of any action and positive results. Another reason is their extreme poverty which makes them focus on how to feed their families, which leaves little room or motivation for any societal activism.

Most respondents cite direct contact and public discussion, while urban young people and a share of the general population cite the internet and social networks, and the rural population cite personal contact and telephone conversations as the **tools for interacting** with the authorities that would suit them the most. Due to their specific circumstances and living conditions, people with disabilities and Roma believe that it would be best if the responsible authorities came and learned about their problems first-hand.

The key factors that would motivate participation for all audiences are greater communication between citizens and authorities through mutual understanding, readiness on the part of the local authorities to respond to queries and demands within a reasonable time, visibility of outcomes, particularly in citizen initiatives, valuing their opinion and personal belief that their participation would bring about their better status in the community.

The respondents mostly do not think that the introduction of new tools would be required for establishing an **ideal model for interaction between citizens and authorities**, but rather strengthening the existing tools and reinforcing the principles of transparency, equality in decision making, deciding along the lines of the needs of citizens, not current politics, and fostering mutual respect and trust.

Faster than with any other tool, **citizen participation and monitoring for accountability are increasing via new technologies**, like web-based platforms, presentations and mobile applications. Although it still does not exceed other tools, an increasing number

of young people and adults (25–49) see this form of participation as the most suitable. Given the rate of expansion of such channels, and the good experiences at the central level (“Be Responsible” application), these should be counted on and developed in future.

Testing Stage

Following the mapping out of the existing mechanisms for the participatory monitoring of public policies and after direct consultations with citizens on the possibilities of their greater involvement in overseeing the enforcement of the decisions, Montenegro has undertaken the testing of one of these mechanisms.

It concerns a participatory monitoring mechanism based on communication between citizens and decision makers via a web portal on the topic of *Employment in tourism*. The topic was selected in accordance with Montenegrin efforts aimed at the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of “**Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger**” with special focus on an indicator relating to the reduction of unemployment. Tourism was chosen as the main development potential of Montenegro.

Testing results

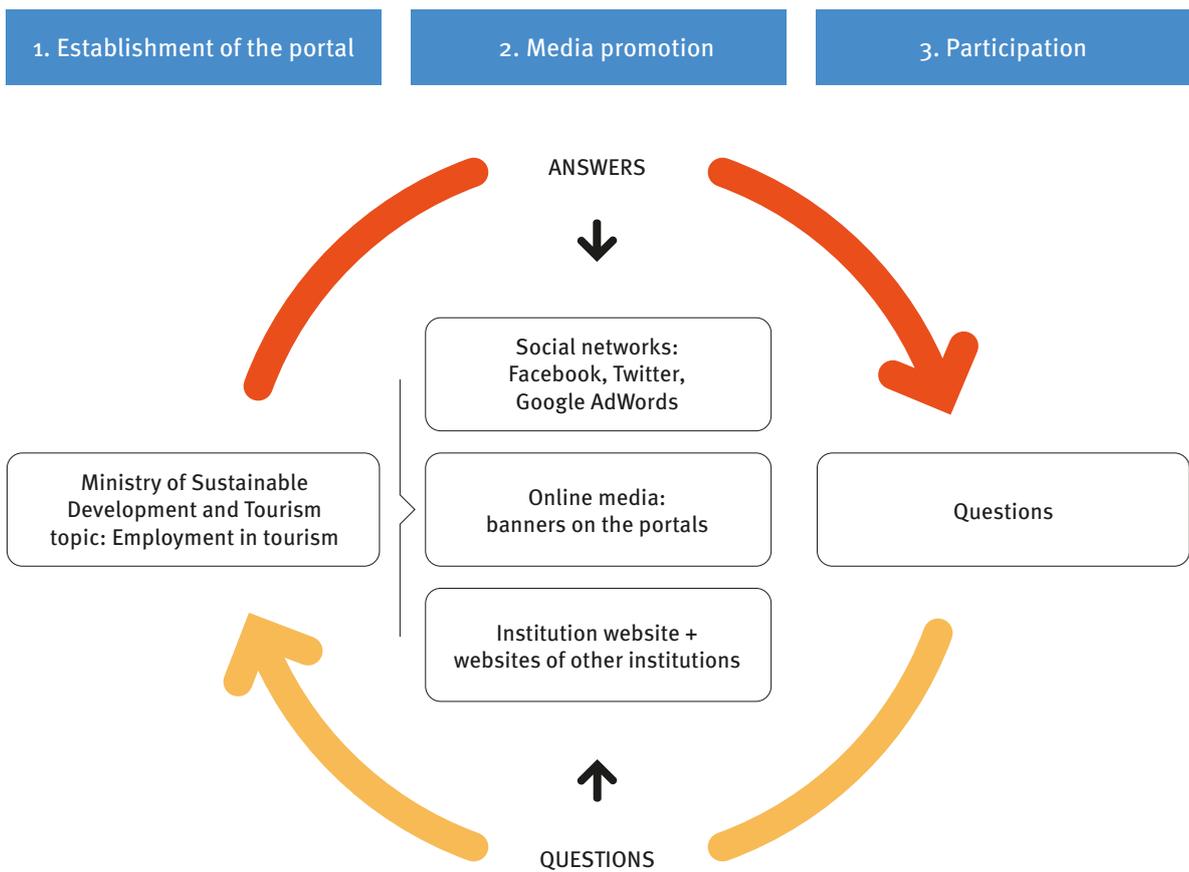
Participatory monitoring testing was aimed at checking the potentials but also the shortcomings of such mechanisms of citizen participation via a web portal. The mapping out of the existing mechanisms has showed that Internet/mobile platforms and the media can mobilize a large number of citizens in a very short period of time. The portal was established in cooperation with the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, more specifically the Tourism Development and Standard Directorate, which was also in charge of communication with citizens. The **testing stage** lasted from 23rd to 30th September 2014.

The first phase encompassed the selection of the topic and the *establishment of the online participation platform* and the other *encompassed promotion and communication with visitors by answering questions*. The objective was to establish a constructive dialogue between citizens and the representatives of the ministry via a technically and visually simple online platform which would make it possible for citizens to have easy access to the portal and to ask questions.

Promotion of this phase was based on two main channels: advertising on social networks and through banners on popular online portals.

The testing stage was implemented in two phases.

Screenshot of the portal for the testing stage



The scheme of online participatory monitoring process

During the **seven-day testing** of the mechanism, the citizens asked a total of 25 questions, which is about three questions a day. Bearing in mind that at the moment of testing this topic was less attractive due to being the end of the main tourist season, as well as due to the short period for the testing of the mechanism, it can be said that the number of questions

was considerable and that it is obvious that there is a need for such portals. The number of answered questions showed that such a mechanism can function in practice and that on the side of the institution there is sufficient interest for the establishment of such forms of communication with citizens.

Percentage of answered questions	16	64.0%
Percentage of unanswered questions	6	24.0%
Percentage of questions that were not considered	3	12.0%
Total percentage of questions during a week	25	100.0%



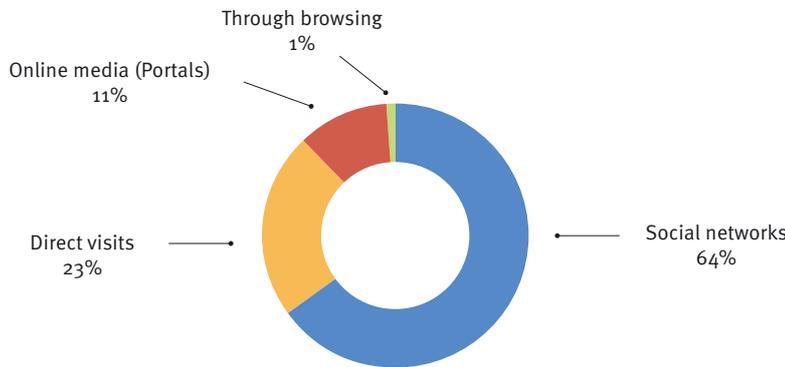
Questions asked

The testing stage highlighted another key challenge of the mechanism and overall of the greater involvement of citizens in decision making and monitoring, i.e. animating citizens to take an active part in the process.

The testing results therefore impose the need for analysis as to how to come to the broadest possible circle of users who would take an active part and contribute to participatory monitoring. The testing

stage has also clearly shown the great power of social networks, indicating that this might be the best channel for communication with citizens. As can be seen in Table 2 below, a considerable number of visits to the portal came in fact from social networks – as many as 65.4% of the total number. In relation to the money invested in advertising (€0.11 per visitor brought to the portal) this is by far the most profitable channel for informing and animating citizens.

Visits to the web-portal (mechanism) through following channels			Amount of money invested in promotion per visitor	
Social networks	1477	65.4%	158.79 €	0.11 €
Direct visits	512	22.7%	- €	- €
Online media (Portals)	251	11.1%	880.00 €	3.51 €
Through browsing	20	0.9 %	- €	- €
Overall	2260	100.0 %	1,038.79 €	0.46 €



Number of visitors and where they visited the portal from

The representatives of the ministry who administered the discussion with citizens, consider the mechanism itself as being very useful and as meeting its purpose. They also highlighted certain technical shortcomings at the very beginning of the process that were eliminated within a short time. Also, the main objection is not so much the process itself or the technical solution as much as perhaps the insufficient level of knowledge citizens have about the competences of the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism in this case, so that there were questions which the ministry is not competent for. In such cases,

the visitors were referred to the competent institution. It is very important that the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism representatives recognize the advantages and the importance of such a portal since it enables a fast and simple method of communication with citizens in real time. But, in order to achieve this, it is necessary for some other steps to be improved, primarily the improvement of administrative capacities, which might mean the establishment of a special sector/office that would be entrusted with this form of communication with citizens.

Recommendations

In order to ensure better participation by both citizens and non-residents in pursuing and monitoring sustainable development goals, the **level of information** about the existing tools for presenting views and opinions on topical issues should be increased.

The **information needs to be made accessible** to all members of local communities, and the **method of interaction should be adapted** to their specific needs. Where inexistent, procedures for handling citizen requests should be developed to contain clear instructions, simple forms, deadlines for response and clear division of responsibilities.

Then, **the participation of multiply vulnerable groups needs to be increased** in the policy planning and decision-making processes, including their representatives in local councils, working groups and bodies at the local and the national levels.

The indicators of the new post-2015 goals should be readjusted to measure success by their influence over the most vulnerable members of the society. At the same time, **modern technologies need to be used** thus increasing opportunities for large participation of the general public and interaction at all levels.

One of the main challenges before Montenegrin society in building capacities for civic monitoring will be to **restore the trust of citizens** in local governments and the competent authorities through further improvement of tools and communication channels.

It will also be a challenge for the lessons learned to

be set as standard procedures. At the same time, this is a precondition for **new development goals to be embraced** locally, which is the only route to their attainment.

“Insufficient level of knowledge citizens have about the competences of the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism in this case, constitutes one of the barriers for successful establishment of the mechanism. On several occasions citizens asked questions that the ministry is not competent for. In such cases, the citizens were referred to the competent institution.”

Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism

Following the completion of the testing stage it can be concluded that **there are grounds for the development of this way of participatory monitoring in the future**, that citizens are interested in visiting such portals (the total of 2 260 visits, ~330 visits a day) which could, with regular promotion, good preparation, relevant topics as well as greater visibility in the media (TV as the most powerful medium was not used at this stage) actuate the involvement of a considerable number of people. Since the ministry assessed this process as a useful and necessary one, the opportunity has been created for a similar platform to be established on other management instances, perhaps even at the level of the government. It is very important to understand this opportunity especial-

ly when sustainable development goals start being monitored in the future.

It is also important to follow a **simple and clear design, easy access to questions and answers**. Although almost all state institutions have the possibility of receiving questions on their websites, such a separate portal for communication with citizens, then also review of all questions and a speedy answer **constitute a considerable advantage**.

“We clearly recognize the advantage of such a portal since it enables a fast and simple method of communication with citizens in real time. However, in order to achieve this, it is necessary for some other steps to be improved, primarily the improvement of administrative capacities, which might mean the establishment of a special sector/office that would be entrusted with this form of communication with citizens.”

Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism

As for the channels to reach the citizens and encourage them to get involved, social networks definitely show the best results. They have great potential if used in a strategic way. Most state institutions do not use this channel of communication sufficiently and there is room for improvement. With additional training delivered on the potential advantages, but also the potential risks of using **social networks**, it is important to bear in mind the cost of advertising not only on those but also on other media channels. This, however, need not be an additional cost, since the savings on printed material, for instance, can be used for online advertising. Also, **when one such portal becomes well established**, the funds invested in the promotion can be reduced considerably and **it becomes a permanent place for citizens to come and communicate directly** with the state institutions and monitor their work and performance.

Although such a portal reaches out to a large number of people, one must bear in mind that this is just one more communication channel and that there are still citizens who do not have the possibility of using it. For that reason, **for truly successful participatory monitoring it is necessary to use all available communication channels** so that, if possible, all citizens have equal opportunities to access this, no matter whether they are going to do this or not.

All this highlights the fact that the establishment of a participatory monitoring mechanism can hardly be successful unless accompanied by a **strategic communication plan**. Also, as mapping results have shown, several factors influence the **efficiency of the mechanisms**: citizens’ awareness of the existence of the particular mechanism, the level of their empowerment and interest in taking an active part in social processes, the degree of accessibility of the mechanisms in the sense of knowledge and skills but also of physical barriers, and finally the socio-political context in the micro-communities in which they live.



Montenegro

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