



# **MEDIA LITERACY IN MONTENEGRO**

## **Public opinion research**



Prepared for OSCE Mission to Montenegro

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# Table of contents

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>I. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS WITH RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>III. RESEARCH FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>3.1. ACCESS TO THE MEDIA AND INFORMATION</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>3.2. MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND PREFERENCES</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>3.3. CONFIDENCE IN THE MEDIA</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>3.4. UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA AND THEIR INFLUENCE</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>3.5. RESILIENCE TO DISINFORMATION</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<b>3.6. ATTITUDES TOWARDS MEDIA LITERACY</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>3.7. MEDIA LITERACY INDEX OF CITIZENS</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>APPENDIX A. DEMOGRAPHICS AND VARIABLES USED IN THE ANALYSIS</b> .....	<b>72</b>

# **I. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS WITH RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>1</sup>**

**The research data indicates the ubiquity of technology in the lives of citizens of Montenegro. Smartphones are the predominant means of communication**, considering that nine out of ten Montenegrin citizens between the ages of 16 and 75 own and use them. Six out of ten citizens possess a computer or laptop, while tablets are less common and are used to a lesser extent.

**Furthermore, the internet is a significant part of citizens' daily lives.** Almost everyone has access to the internet (95%), with the majority also using it. Time spent online varies, with **the majority of users spending more than 2 hours online daily (58%)**. Younger and more educated individuals stand out as groups that spend more time on the internet.

**The data clearly indicate the widespread use of social networks among population of Montenegro aged 16 to 75, and their significant role as a channel for communication and content consumption in the digital environment.** Three quarters of citizens reported that they have a personal account on a social network, with around a third of users spending more than two hours a day on them (35%). It is important to point out that the **majority of social network users, even four out of five, regularly (at least several times a week) use these platforms to find information that is important to them.** On the other hand, **the findings of the focus groups indicate that social networks are often the first source of information, but that citizens rarely perceive them as a channel for finding out "extensive" and "completely reliable" information.**

**Despite the evident impact of the internet and social networks on news and information consumption habits, television retains a dominant position as a medium among the population aged 16 to 75 in Montenegro.** Almost all citizens own a television set (98%), and the

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<sup>1</sup>When interpreting the findings of this research, it is essential to keep in mind that citizens' perception of media may not always align with how media are defined in a legal context. Under the Media Law of Montenegro, media are defined as actors involved in the production and dissemination of media content, with editorial control or supervision over content intended for an indefinite number of people. Furthermore, media content is defined as information, analysis, commentary, opinions, as well as authorial works in textual, audio, audiovisual, or other forms aimed at informing and satisfying the cultural, educational, and other needs of the public. According to the law, media can take the form of printed, audiovisual, and internet publications. An internet publication is a medium whose content is disseminated via the internet and cannot be considered an audiovisual media service under the law regulating the field of audiovisual media services. Commentary is content published in an internet publication created by its registered user in response to published media content (source: <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/a7360bf9-e540-4e1e-806b-cd0131c25466>). Unlike the legal definition of media, it is not always clear what citizens encompass under the term "media," and the difference is perhaps most apparent when it comes to internet publications. It appears that citizens often have a broader understanding of internet publications than what is defined in the law. This broader understanding may sometimes include social networks and various informational content available on the internet within the category of media.

vast majority use it to access content. Additionally, **about a third of citizens practice watching TV programs and video content that are not broadcast on television through digital platforms** such as applications for viewing TV programs on smartphones/tablets and platforms for browsing video content.

**Television is also the most commonly used "traditional" medium and the primary source of information about events in the country and the world.** Three-quarters of population aged 16 to 75 inform themselves through television at least several times a week, with 60% of them doing so on a daily basis. Other traditional media such as radio and print media are much less popular. **Online media**, such as news websites, online editions of newspapers, media house applications, and news blogs, **follow television as the second most common source of news**, with around two-thirds of citizens seeking information through them at least several times a week or more. Social networks and personal contacts are also frequent sources of information, with over 60% of citizens getting information through them at least several times a week. **The results suggest notable variations in source preferences based on age, and the use of television as an information source, as opposed to the internet, is progressively distinguishing the youngest and oldest members of the population.** Specifically, the age group from 16 to 29 years less frequently uses television and other traditional media, preferring to obtain information from online media and social networks. On the other hand, the oldest age group (60+) less frequently uses the mentioned internet sources, which are more popular among the youngest. Additionally, people over 45 years of age are more likely to follow news on television. Focus group results support the quantitative research findings, pointing to **a perception television as an outdated and impractical way of obtaining information among the younger generation**, which leans towards modern sources such as online media and social networks.

**The majority of citizens believe that the media (newspapers, television, radio, and online news sources) report news fully, accurately, and fairly.** Around 54% of them express general trust in the media, while 44% have doubts about the accuracy of the information conveyed by the media. **Focus groups with citizens confirmed the impression that the Montenegrin media can be trusted to some extent and that the level of trust in the media is higher compared to neighboring countries.** This can be explained by the presence of a smaller number of media outlets, a low number of tabloid media, and easier verification of information through acquaintances or witnesses.

**Citizens trust information that comes from people in their immediate surroundings the most. When considering trust in different types of media, television again tops the list, with 60% of those considering it a mostly or completely reliable source of information.** Among the elderly, television enjoys even greater trust. **Online media and radio share second place in terms of citizens' trust when it comes to the media.** However, in contrast to radio, there is a division among citizens regarding trust in online media, with an equal proportion both exhibiting trust and skepticism towards the information they acquire from this medium, standing at 47%. Citizens are similarly polarized when it comes to the reliability of printed daily media as an information source, with 41%

expressing trust and 43% harboring distrust. **News disseminated through social networks, despite its widespread use, records the lowest level of trust at 32%, while as much as 59% of citizens perceive it as unreliable.**

**The insights from focus groups suggest that trust in traditional media is higher due to the perception of stricter content oversight/control.** However, **three out of five citizens advocate for a hands-off approach towards the internet**, claiming it should remain an open platform where individuals can freely express their viewpoints and opinions, **thus opposing censorship on the Internet** (62%).

As indicated by the findings from focus groups, **in the active pursuit of information, apart from perceived reliability that varies by media type, timeliness plays a pivotal role.** Despite traditional media's reputation for reliability, **the need for rapid verification and access to up-to-the-minute information often steers citizens toward online sources.** Additionally, focus groups with citizens reveal that **personal political views directly influence the perception of reliability and the choice of media outlets that citizens rely on for information verification.**

**Understanding the internet and social networks is at an insufficient level**, as reflected in the following findings:

- The majority of citizens believe that Google search results depend solely on the keywords used in the search (61%).
- Two out of five citizens hold the misconception that social networks do not rely on advertising revenue, as is the case with traditional media - television, radio, or print media (40%).

**Citizens of Montenegro show significant interest in national and international events, actively seeking information on these topics.** More than three-quarters of the population searches for such news at least several times a week, with around two-thirds doing so on a daily basis. Additionally, **the vast majority recognizes the importance of having access to diverse news sources.**

**Despite more than half placing trust in the media in Montenegro, the prevailing perception among citizens regarding the media environment remains unfavorable.**

- **Namely, the majority observe a deep division among Montenegro's media outlets, primarily concerning which political structures control them**, as over 80% assess the media landscape as highly polarized in that regard. This finding is particularly significant, given that **political bias and media polarization were spontaneously recognized in focus groups as key challenges in finding reliable information.**
- **Concerning the perception of the media's current contribution to democracy and the public interest, citizens display a divided stance.** Approximately half express skepticism about this role of the media, while slightly fewer acknowledge the positive impact of the media in enhancing democracy.

**The majority of Montenegro's citizens firmly believe that the media have a significant influence in shaping public opinion, with television notably perceived as the most influential**

**medium in this regard.** Following television, **the internet - social networks and online media** - is recognized as a potent influencer, particularly among the youngest age group (16 to 29 years). **The findings from focus groups support the recognition of media's impact on the public, stemming from the information they disseminate, the choice of topics they cover, and the way they present the news.**

- **Citizens are aware that the media shape their behavior, decisions, and attitudes, which is particularly evident through the information presented and selective reporting on certain topics.**
- It has also been observed that the **media can influence political preferences and decisions**, both through biased reporting and through an imbalance in the "amount of media space" dedicated to different perspectives.
- **The formulation and presentation of news also play a significant role in shaping public reactions**, as observed in crisis situations such as the pandemic.

**A significant majority of Montenegro's citizens, three-quarters or more, very often or sometimes encounter various forms of unprofessional reporting.** The most prevalent of these are **news designed to divert attention from more important topics** ("spins"), followed by **sensationalist and biased/one-sided news. Deliberately misleading or false news (fake news) is very often noticed by slightly less than half of the citizens, with an additional third sometimes coming across such news. The internet, including social networks and online media, is most commonly perceived as a source of fake news.** On the other hand, the presence of fake news is less frequently detected in traditional media, including television, which is the most commonly used medium for obtaining information. These findings align with the focus groups observations **that responsibility for spreading disinformation is predominantly attributed to online media.** Specifically, it was recognized how **the dissemination of unverified content, also known as "copy-paste" journalism**, by various sources, especially online media, can create the illusion for readers that the news is accurate due to its extensive presence in the media.

**Over two-thirds of population recognize "fake news" as a serious problem that poses a threat to democracy within the country. However, only half perceive fake news as intentionally designed to deceive and inflict harm**, while the remaining half holds alternative interpretations of the term or cannot provide a precise definition of the term.

**Citizens have a high level of self-confidence when it comes to their competences for critical evaluation of media content. Approximately three-quarters of them believe in their ability to confidently discern propaganda, identify fake news, and recognize the motives behind the publication of specific information in the media** (which actors benefit from that). Citizens are slightly less confident in their ability to distinguish between sponsored and unpaid content - slightly over two-thirds believe this that this task would not present a significant challenge for them.

**On the other hand, the majority of citizens, as per their own admissions, very often or sometimes believed in some information from the media that subsequently proved to be false (61%).**

**However, just over half claim that they always or often fact-check information obtained from the media, with an additional quarter doing so on occasion. Furthermore, most citizens state that they check the news before sharing it with others.**

- Approximately a quarter have shared news with others before reading or viewing it in its entirety (27%).
- A third have shared news with others without verifying its accuracy (33%).
- Nearly two out of five citizens acknowledge having shared news that later turned out to be false or misleading (39%).

**Young people, aged 16 to 29, show a significantly higher tendency to spread false, inaccurate, and unverified news, or at the very least, they more frequently report doing so.** For instance, one out of two citizens within this age group admitted to sharing news that subsequently turned out to be false or misleading, while a slightly smaller proportion acknowledged sharing news without prior verification or without reading/watching to it in full.

**Although majority claim to use them, the information verification strategies that citizens resort to should be taken with a grain of salt.** When faced with conflicting information discovered on the internet, just slightly more than a quarter of citizens would analyze various characteristics of the website where they found the information (including who is behind the published content and the website, the website's purpose, and the motivations for posting the information, among other aspects). A similar proportion would seek the opinion of experts in the field. Surprisingly, one in five individuals would place greater trust in the information they find more frequently on the internet.

Additionally, insights from focus groups suggest that while **there is a general recognition of the importance of verifying information sources**, this attitude does not consistently translate into practical application. The analysis reveals that a **more thorough examination of information and the search for alternative sources usually arises from a specific interest in a particular topic or news**, which can also be prompted by skepticism towards a piece of news. Moreover, preferred alternative sources often represent several "affirmed" media outlets that are trusted more. **Political views also exert a substantial influence in this selection, with individuals often gravitating toward sources sources that promote political views which align with their own.**

In addition to the previously mentioned strategies, focus groups identified several other approaches that citizens employ to verify the accuracy of information they encounter in the media. These strategies encompass:

- **Giving time** for sensational or shocking news to be debunked or confirmed by subsequent reports.
- **Examining comments made by other citizens** on news articles.



- **Searching for information about the Author or Source of the news.**
- **Analyzing the style in which the news is written**, including the use of language and expressions that may suggest a degree of reserve.

Although citizens believe in the necessity of institutions or organizations regulating the media space, systematic regulation through these bodies is not clearly recognized. There is a belief that "some institutions must exist," but responsible authorities are not clearly identified.

**Citizens predominantly view media literacy as the ability to evaluate different media content (44%), and in smaller extent as other abilities such as using, creating, finding, and sharing media content.** However, it is noteworthy that only 9% of citizens recognize that media literacy encompasses all five mentioned competencies, while as many as two-thirds associate media literacy with just one of these competencies. This aligns with the findings from focus groups that the **central theme related to media literacy often revolves around the quest for and discovery of the truth, which implies a critical evaluation of the information acquired through diverse channels.**

**There is nearly unanimous consensus among citizens that media literacy is important for the people of Montenegro (92%).** However, **close to two-thirds believe that the media literacy of the population is currently unsatisfactory.** Education is widely recognized as a key measure to improve media literacy, with priorities such as organizing training sessions and increasing the accessibility of educational materials. The vast majority of citizens share the opinion that strengthening media literacy is an effective strategy for combatting misinformation and support the integration of media literacy skills into formal education.

The insights derived from focus groups also suggest **recognition of the need to cultivate media literacy among citizens, particularly among both older and younger age groups, each facing distinct challenges in assessing media information.** Older adults and elders (aged 30-75) acknowledge that **the youngest are most susceptible to accepting false information, primarily due to their limited life experience and unfamiliarity with the political landscape.** On the other hand, younger individuals (aged 16-25) see **elders (aged 65+) as a vulnerable group due to their deficiency in digital skills and lack of critical reflection on news/greater trust in the media.** Despite this awareness of the necessity for media literacy development, **there is a tendency among citizens to overestimate their own media literacy**, pointing to the danger that high self-confidence may discourage the adoption of new knowledge, skills, and behavioral changes, especially among identified "critical" groups.

## **Media Literacy Index**

Based on the data from the research on a representative sample of citizens aged 16-75, a media literacy index was calculated. This index incorporated **the understanding of fake news, media literacy, the internet, and social networks** as indicators of objective knowledge. Furthermore, it

included **self-assessment of one's ability to critically evaluate media content**, as well as **self-reported habits related to verifying and sharing media content**.

**The media literacy index, obtained as the average of individual citizens' scores, is 12.2**, while its value can range from 0 to 25. Additionally, **the results show that 45% of citizens achieve a total score of 11 to 15 points, indicating a moderate level of media literacy. One-third of citizens exhibit a low level of media literacy**, considering scores of 10 points or less. On the other hand, one-fifth of citizens achieve results between 16 and 20 points, while 2% of them attain the highest scores when it comes to media literacy, scoring between 21 and 25 points.

### **Recommendations for improving media literacy**

The research conducted with citizens of Montenegro aged 16 to 75 provides a deeper insight into the current state of media literacy in the country, as well as the media habits and preferences of its citizens. Based on these findings, the following recommendations have been formulated to enhance media literacy:

- 1) Citizen Education:** organization of educational programs (workshops and lectures) for citizens, with a special focus on younger and older individuals who have been identified as the most vulnerable to misinformation. These programs should cover various areas, such as strategies for identifying fake news, understanding the internet and social networks, and topics based on the specific needs of the target audience (e.g., technology and internet browser usage skills). Additionally, emphasis should be placed on less known aspects of media literacy, including the skills to create, use, and find media content.
- 2) Encourage the adoption of advanced information verification methods:** Citizens need to be familiarized with more sophisticated methods for fact-checking information and identifying fake news, such as conducting deeper source analysis, consulting multiple sources, etc. It is also important to raise awareness about the limitations of less reliable methods, especially when it comes to online content. The frequent presence of certain information on the internet can create the illusion of its truthfulness, so it is crucial for citizens to be very cautious when assessing such information. Education can be conducted through media campaigns tailored for different audiences and publications that provide more information about effective information verification strategies.
- 3) Promote critical self-assessment of media literacy:** Considering citizens' tendency to overestimate their media literacy skills, it is essential to emphasize the importance of continuous improvement and self-evaluation of one's own knowledge/skills. This becomes particularly critical given the constant advancement of technology and the emergence of new methods and opportunities for generating and disseminating unverified information and fake content.
- 4) Introducing media literacy into formal education:** A significant contribution to improving media literacy among the population could be achieved through the development and

implementation of media literacy curricula in the school system. As mentioned, most citizens believe that it is necessary to empower and motivate young people to think critically about the information they receive via the internet and social networks, as well as to inform them about the risks of irresponsible media and internet use.

- 5) Ongoing monitoring of media literacy:** Conducting continuous research plays a crucial role in monitoring progress in media literacy, citizens' media habits, identifying barriers, and developing effective strategies to overcome them.

In addition to the general recommendations, specific aspects that need special attention have been identified:

- **Understanding algorithms and content filtering:** It is necessary to familiarize citizens with how algorithms work on social networks and search engines. This will help them better understand how content is displayed and filtered according to their interests.
- **Critical monitoring of political reporting:** This is particularly crucial because individuals often choose media sources to trust based on their political preferences.
- **Ethics of information sharing:** Understanding responsible information sharing on social networks should be an integral part of media literacy education. This equips citizens with the understanding of their role in the dissemination of information and the need to conduct thorough vetting of news before sharing it with others.

## **II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Quantitative public opinion research**

Quantitative public opinion research was conducted on a representative sample of 1003 citizens of Montenegro, aged between 16 and 75 years. Data collection took place during June and July 2023, using a structured questionnaire that lasted approximately 20 minutes.

The data collection method employed was a combination of telephone interviews (CATI - Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) and online surveys (CAWI - Computer Assisted Web Interviewing). Online interviewing were specifically targeted at the younger urban population (aged 16 to 44), those who are hard to reach by phone, and were conducted with 15% of the total sample.

*Sample universe:* General population of citizens aged 16 to 75

*Size sample universe:* 467266

*Data collection period:* June 30 - July 11, 2023

*Sample size:* 1003 respondents

*Method of data collection:* Mixed-mode, a combination of telephone and online interviews.

*Sample type:* One-stage random representative sample with quota selection of respondents

*Post-stratification:* By gender, age, region, and type of settlement

### **Qualitative public opinion research**

Focus groups represent a research method in the opinions of the participants are obtained through group interaction and facilitation by a moderator. Group discussion allows participants to share their views and experiences with the help of a discussion guide that defines the most important questions to be addressed.

Six online focus groups were conducted with citizens of Montenegro between July 24 and 26, 2023. Each group had a minimum of 5 participants, and the discussion in each group lasted approximately two hours. The table below shows the structure of the groups in terms of gender, age, and participants' places of residence.

<b>Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age range</b>	<b>Region</b>
1	Women	30 - 60	Mixed groups (north, central, south)
2	Women	19 - 25	
3	Men and women	16 - 18	
4	Men	19 - 25	
5	Men	30 - 60	
6	Men and women	65 - 75	

Findings obtained through qualitative research (FGDs) are showcased within text boxes and marked with the following symbol:



### **III. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

## 3.1. Access to the media and information

Almost all citizens of Montenegro aged between 16 and 75 years own a TV set (98%), and large majority use it (93%) (Figure 3.1.1).

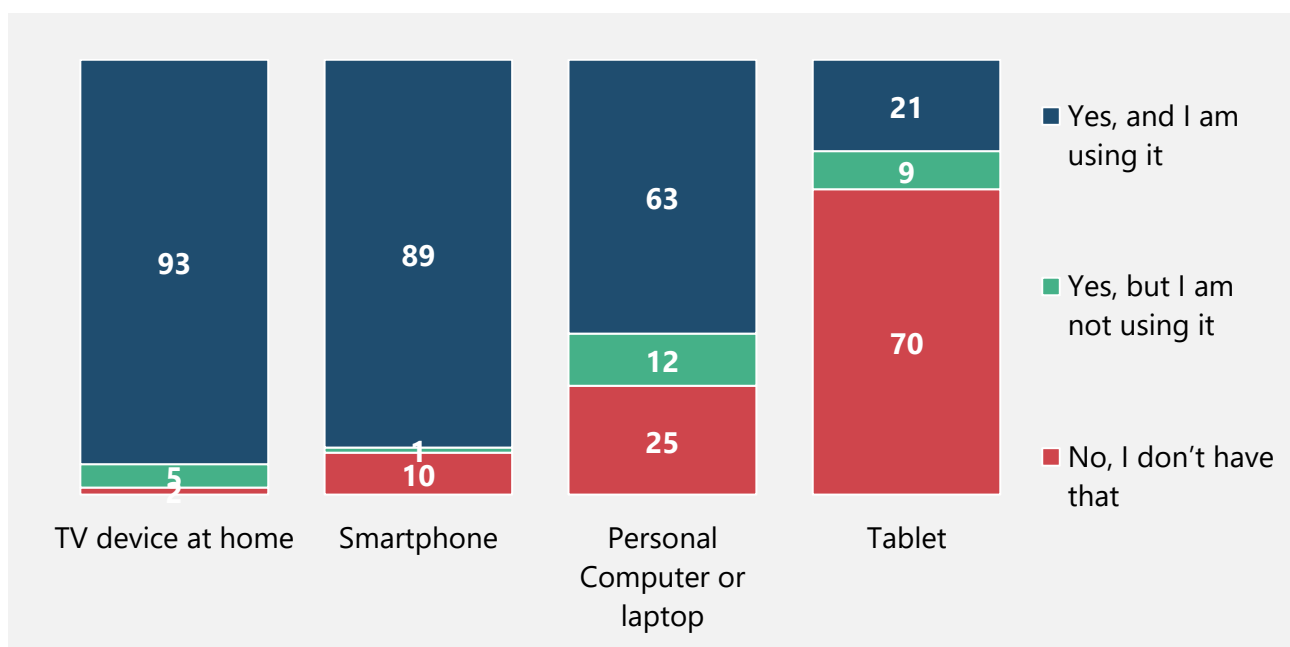
It's similar with smartphones – nine out of ten citizens own it (90%), and almost all of them use it (89%).

Three quarters of citizens reported having a computer and a laptop, but somewhat less than two thirds actually use it (63%). Tablet is owned by three out of ten citizens, and about one fifth use it (21%).

**Figure 3.1.1.** Possession and usage of devices

Question: Do you own the following...?

Base: Total target population



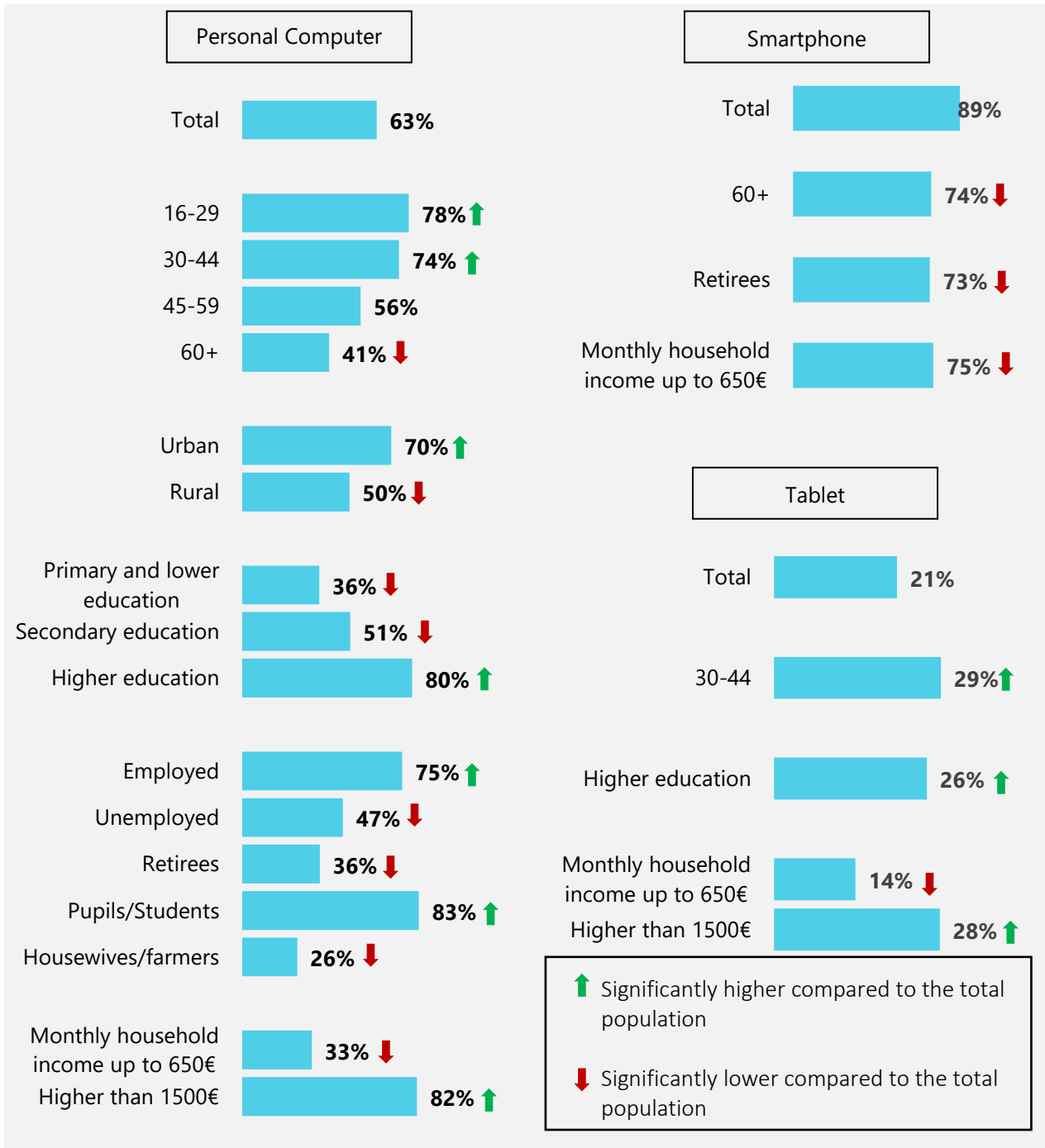
- Youngest citizens, those aged between 16 and 29 years (78%), as well as those aged between 30 and 44 years (74%) are more likely to use a computer/laptop (Figure 3.1.2). Quite expectedly and in line with this data, a computer/laptop is more likely to be used by the employed (75%) and pupil/student population (83%). Moreover, a lot more likely than average, a computer/laptop is used by residents of urban areas (70%), those with college and higher education (80%), as well as members of households with the biggest income (82%). On the other hand, a laptop/computer is less likely to be used by the eldest citizens (41%), residents of rural areas (50%), citizens with elementary and lower education (36%), secondary school education (51%) and members of households with unfavourable financial status (33%).

- Citizens older than 60 years of age (25%), residents of rural areas (13%), with elementary and lower (23%), as well as secondary school education (13%), and those with lower income (23%), are more likely than average to say that they have no smartphone.
- The share of citizens using a tablet is growing among those aged between 30 and 44 years (29%), with college and higher education (26%) and members of households with big income (28%).
- No significant differences between specific sociodemographic groups are registered in terms of owning a TV set, however these differences are present in terms of their using. Namely, about 5% of citizens in the population aged between 16 and 75 years say that they are not using a TV set although they own one, and they are more likely to be between 16 and 29 years old (16%), as well as those who don't trust the media in general (8%).

**Figure 3.1.2.** Possessing and using devices, by demographic categories - % of the responses Yes and I am using it

Question: Do you own the following...?

Base: Total target population

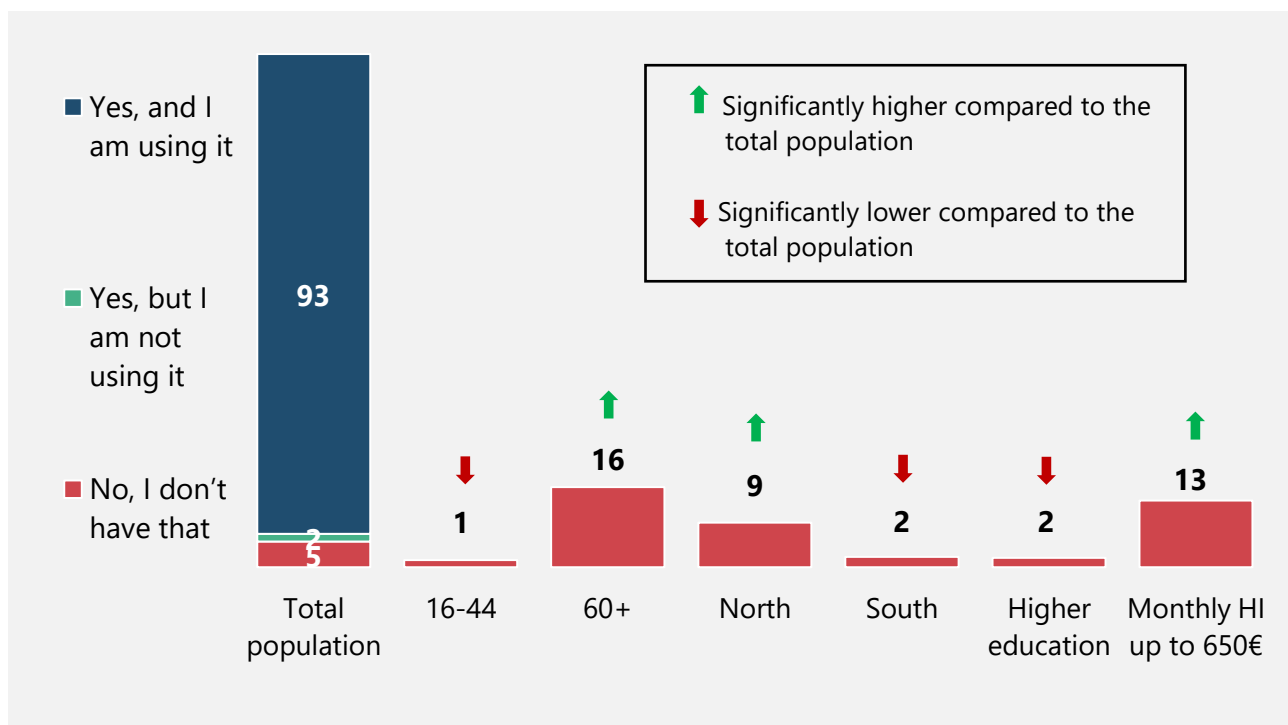




Even 95% of the population from 16 to 75 years old have internet access (at home, at work, on mobile phone), and just slightly smaller share of them actually use the internet (92%) (Figure 3.1.3). In the total population of citizens of Montenegro aged between 16 and 75 years, 2% reported not having internet access, and these are more likely to be citizens older than 60 years of age (16%), residents of northern part of Montenegro (9%), the unemployed (9%) and pensioners (14%), as well as members of households with income below 650EUR a month (13%).

**Figure 3.1.3.** Internet access

Question: Do you own the access to the internet (on a mobile phone/tablet, at home, at work or elsewhere)?  
Base: Total target population



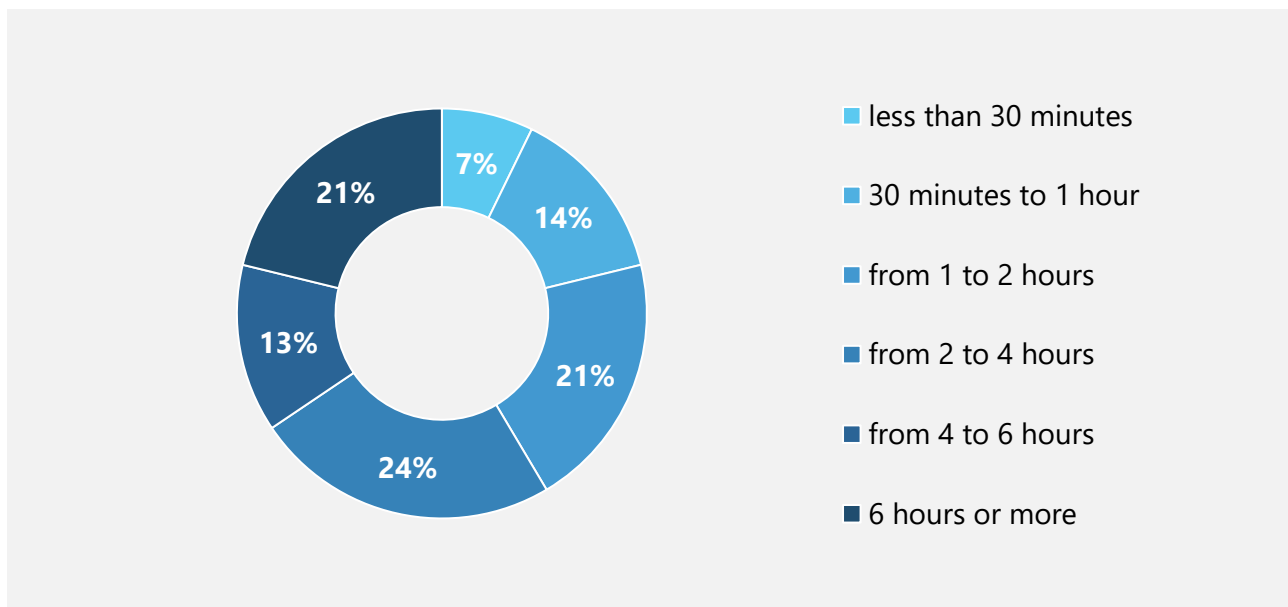
More than half of internet users spend, on average, more than two hours a day on the internet (58%), while even one third surf the internet for four hours or more a day (34%) (Figure 3.1.4). One fifth of users use the internet for less than an hour a day (21%), while almost equal share of citizens use it for one to two hours a day on average (20%).

Quite expectedly, young people, with higher education, the employed and members of households with big income spend most time on the internet. More precisely, internet users aged between 16 and 29 years (35%), citizens with higher education (27%), the employed (28%) and members of households with income above 1500 EUR (29%) are significantly more likely than average to say that they spend more than six hours a day on the internet. Interestingly though, those who have no confidence in the media are also more likely to use the internet for more than six hours a day (26%) than those who have confidence (17%).

**Figure 3.1.4.** Daily internet usage

Question: How often during the day do you use the internet?

Base: Those who have access to and use the Internet (93% of the target population)



More than a third of citizens have the application for watching TV program on a phone or tablet (36%), but somewhat smaller share of them really watch TV program on devices such as smartphone and tablet (Figure 3.1.5).

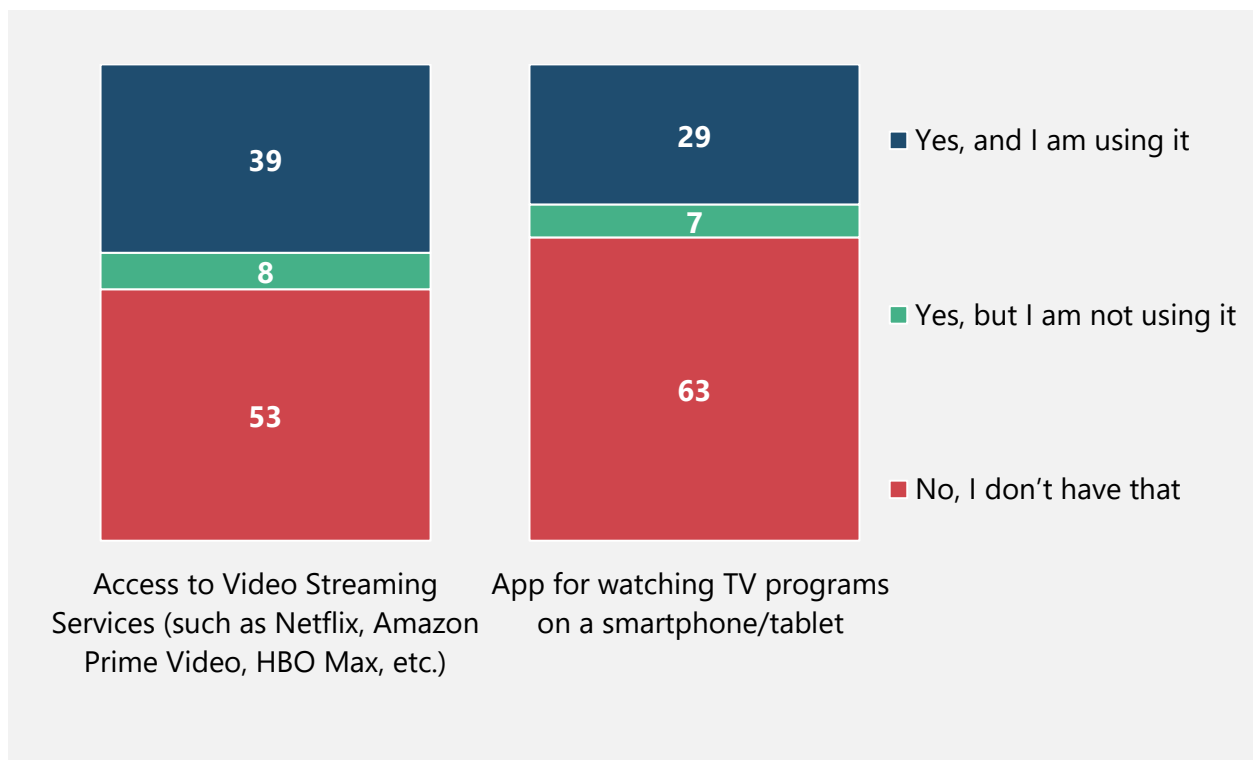
Close to half of citizens in the population aged between 16 and 75 years have access to platforms for watching video contents<sup>2</sup> (47%), while two out of five say that they actually use these platforms (39%). These platforms are more likely to be used by citizens aged between 16 and 44 years (52%), residents of central parts of Montenegro (45%), those with college and higher education (46%), as well as members of households with the biggest income (56%). **On the other hand, one in two citizens have no access to such platforms (52%),** and these are a lot more likely to be citizens older than 60 years of age (73%), residents of northern part of Montenegro (65%), those with elementary or lower education (69%), as well as those with lower monthly household income (76%).

<sup>2</sup>The so-called „video-streaming“ platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, HBO Max, Disney+, Peacock, Start etc.

**Figure 3.1.5.** Using media platforms for watching TV program and other video contents<sup>3</sup>

Question: Do you own the following...?

Base: Total target population



**Most participants can't imagine a day without using the internet.**



Using the internet (education, getting informed, culture, entertainment, communication...) **is a widespread part of everyday of all generations, although a bit less present among the eldest** (the 65 to 75 years age group). Narrower interest and poorer variety of internet contents characterise this group. In addition, some members of this group don't consider using the internet a significant part of their daily activities and usual habits. Lack of interest, but also technical skills, may keep the elderly at a distance from the internet (may be a barrier).

*„I don't use the internet for anything, I'm simply not into it.“ – Woman, 65 – 75 years old*

*„I use it most for communication with people who live in other countries. I use WhatsApp and Viber for that, and I also have Facebook and Instagram.“ – Woman, 65 – 75 years old*

<sup>3</sup>Please bear in mind that the percentages in the figure do not have to add up to 100% due to rounding the values for the shown response categories. In addition, some figures don't show the responses Don't know and Refusal.

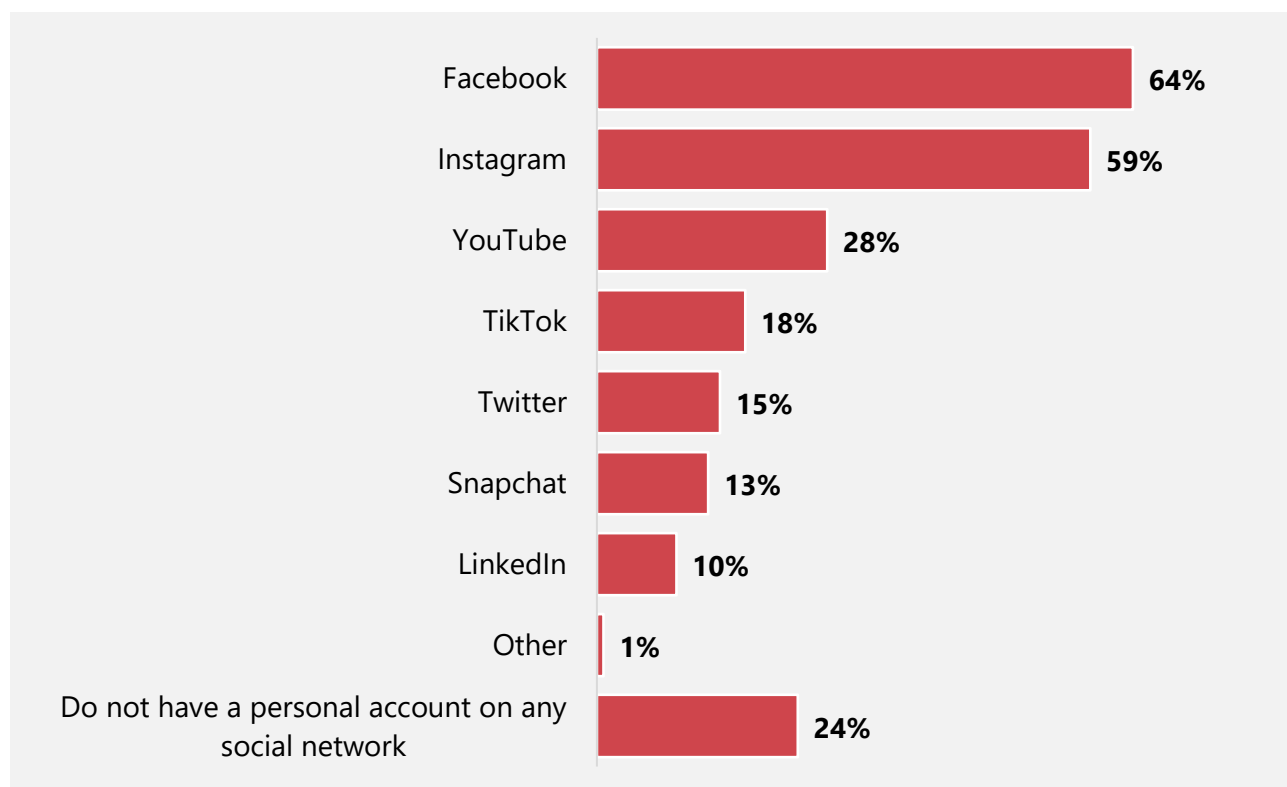
Three quarters of citizens aged between 16 and 75 years have a personal account on some social network (76%) (Figure 3.1.6). Facebook leads, since two out of three of them have an account there (64%). It's followed by Instagram, where three out of five citizens have an account (59%). Other social networks have significantly fewer users: somewhat more than one quarter of citizens have a personal account on YouTube (28%), 18% have an account on TikTok, while 15% of citizens have a Twitter account.

Young people aged between 16 and 29 years are more likely than average to say that they have personal accounts for all these social networks (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn). On the other hand, those older than 60 years of age (59%), with elementary or lower education (38%), as well as those with the smallest income in the household (41%), are more likely than average to say that they have no accounts on any of these social networks.

**Figure 3.1.6.** Use of social networks (having personal accounts on social networks)

Question: Do you personally have an account on these social networks? Multiple answers

Base: Total target population



About one third of social networks users spend more than two hours a day using them, on average (35%) (Figure 3.1.7). Somewhat more than one quarter use social networks for one or two hours (28%), while two out of five use social networks for less than an hour on a usual day (38%).

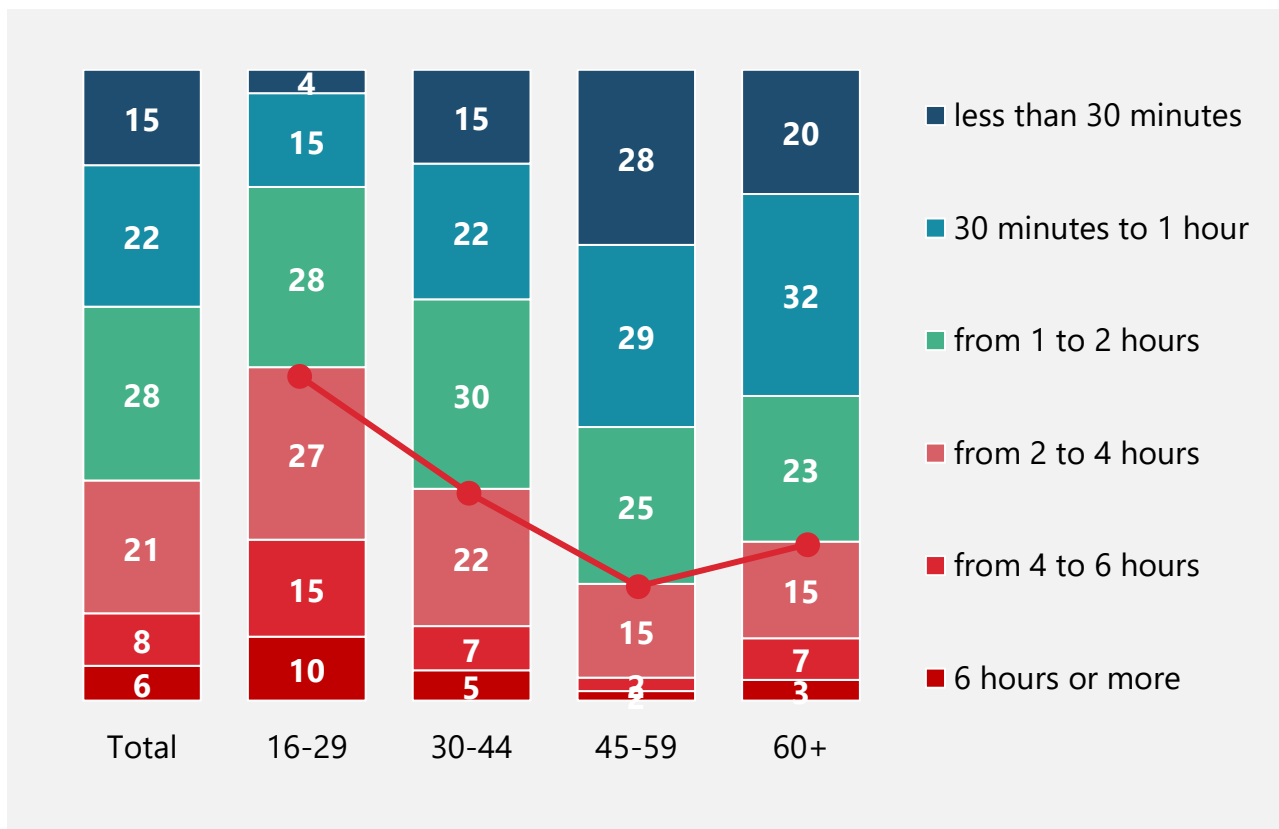
The only differences that are evident among social media users regarding the duration of time they spent on these platforms are related to their age. So, the youngest, from 16 to 29 years old, are a lot

more likely to say that they spend more than two hours using social networks – even a half of them (53%). On the other hand, the share of those who spend more than two hours on social networks reduces significantly in the age group from 45 to 59 years (18%).

**Figure 3.1.7.** Time spent using social networks

Question: On average, how often during the day do you use social networks (such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Snapchat etc.)?

Base: Those who have a personal account on social networks (76% of the target population)



**Older generations believe that time spent on social networks should be limited, while younger disagree.**



Except for the difference in time spent using social networks, **members of younger and older generations also differ mildly regarding their attitude towards using (acceptability) of social networks.** Namely, although those older than 30 years notice how using social networks has become a part of their „daily routine,“ they still believe that **time spent using social networks should be limited.** Such an attitude is not visible among younger people, especially those from 16 to 18 years old.

*„Social networks serve also to keep us informed and I think that they have progressed hugely in the past three years. Unfortunately, I have to admit that I spend all my free time using my phone.“ Man, 30 – 60 years old*

## 3.2. Media consumption and preferences

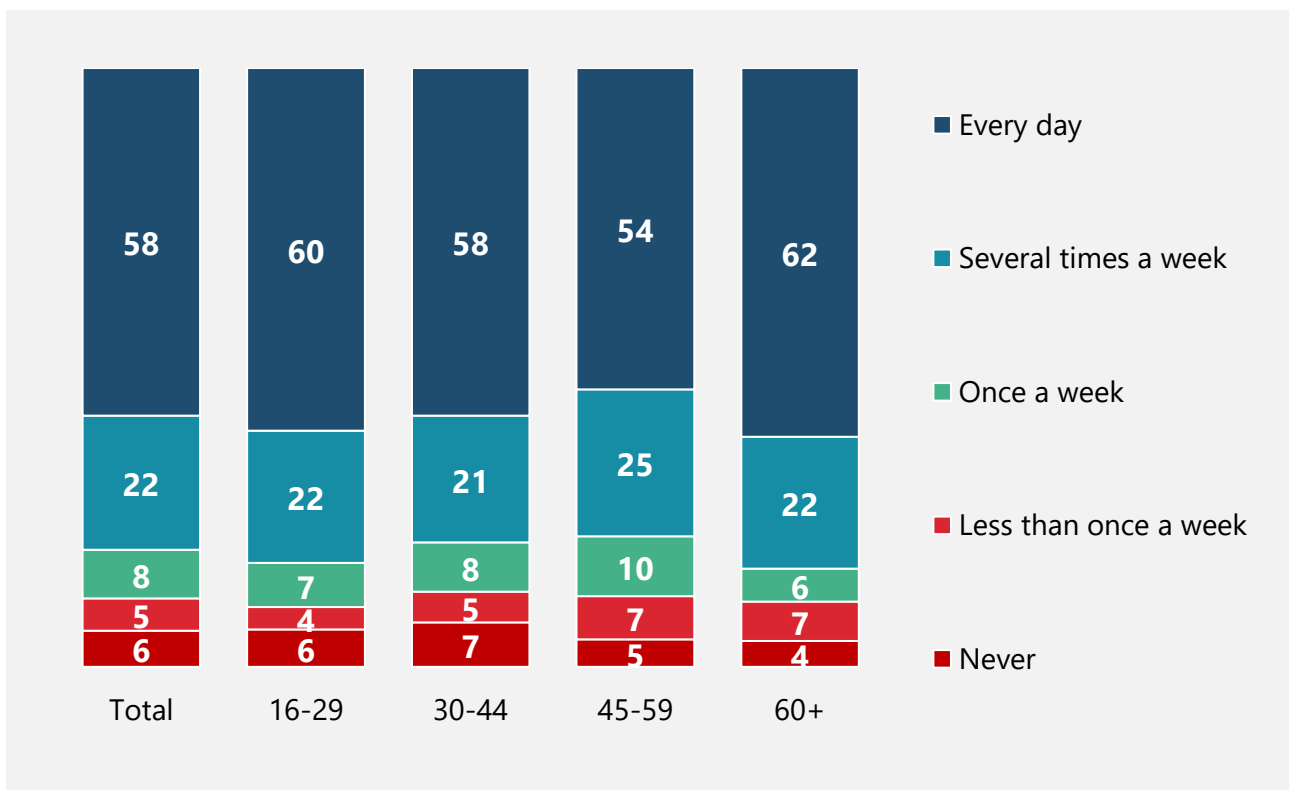
Four out of five users of social networks use them at least several times a week to find important information (80%), while three out of five of them do this every day (58%) (Figure 3.2.1).

Interestingly though, there are no significant age differences between users regarding frequency of relying on social networks for important information. Namely, 60% of those aged from 16 to 29 years said that they were using social networks for these purposes every day, while 62% of those older than 60 years did the same. This share is relatively stable in other age categories as well.

Although social networks users who generally have no confidence in the media in Montenegro are more likely than average to say that they never use social networks to find important information (9%), most of them still look for information on social networks every day (53%) or several times a week (24%).

**Figure 3.2.1.** Using social networks to find important information

Question: How often you use social networks sites or apps to find information that is important to you?  
 Base: Those who have a personal account on social networks (76% of the target population)



## Social networks are common sources for finding out the news.



Knowing the difference between active „looking for“ information and „passive/spontaneous“ finding information (that one accidentally comes across while browsing social networks), **social networks are recognised as important sources of the news**. Focus group participants perceive them as the first place where they find out the news. However, social networks are not likely to be recognised as a channel for finding out „comprehensive“ and „fully reliable“ information.

This **first contact with the news is quite likely to be in the form of sponsored contents or materials displayed on media accounts on social networks** (either the followed ones or shared by friends). **The importance of sponsored contents is detected in the impressions of those less actively searching for information on social networks**. Namely, they notice that specific information/news appears in their feed<sup>4</sup>, although they are not looking for it or following the media sources.

**Twitter (also Telegram sometimes) is perceived as the most updated source** (even among social networks that are generally perceived as a quick way to find out the news). Users of Twitter perceive using this platform as an efficient way to keep updated. However, they are quite likely to believe that the available information is subjective, showing the attitude of those who posted it, rather than confirmed or verified data.

*„As soon as something happens, it appears on Twitter, in no more than 10 seconds.“ – Man, 19 – 25 years old*

*„Twitter, it's full of information, I read it and then consult some other source if I need or want to know more.“ – Man, 30 – 60 years old*

**Citizens of Montenegro claim to be very interested in what's happening in Montenegro and the world and they get informed actively. So, more than three quarters look for the news at least several times a week (78%), while two thirds do this every day (63%) (Figure 1.2.2).**

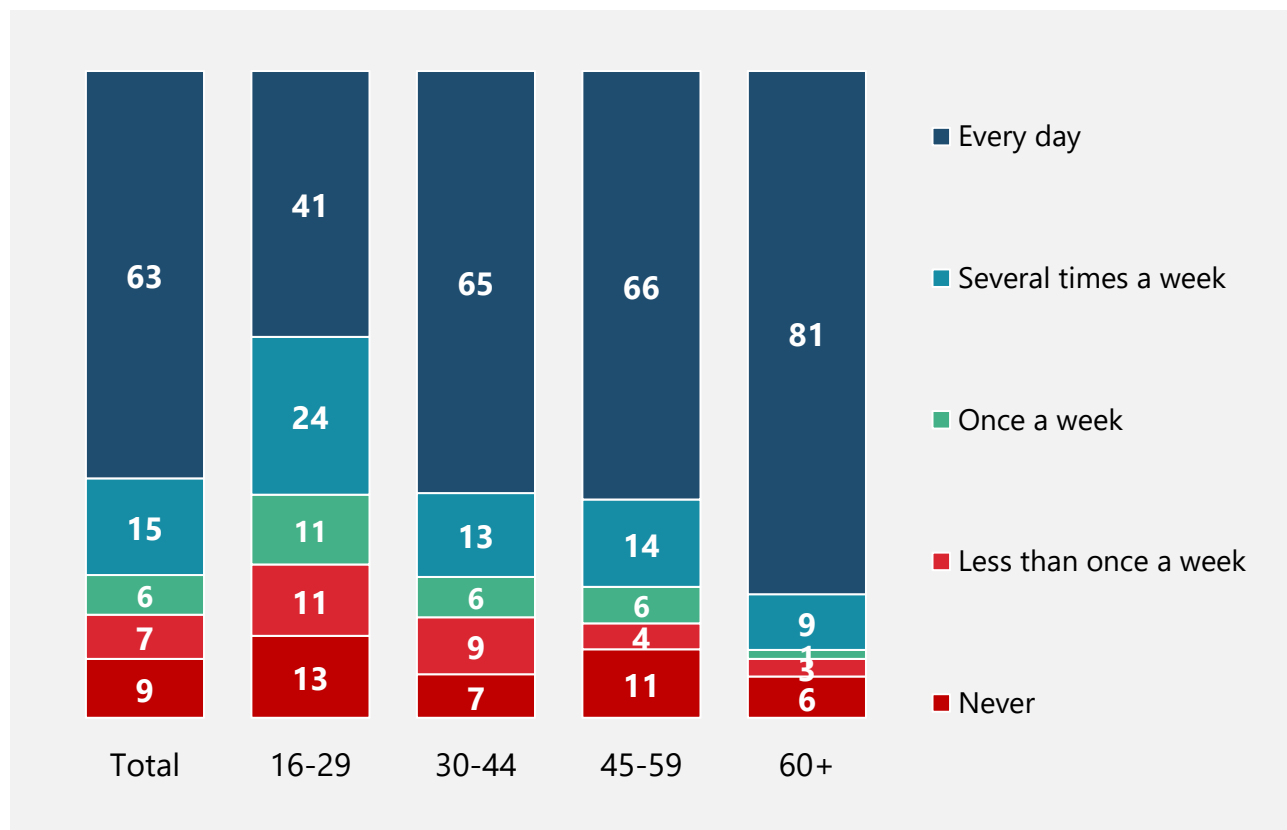
Citizens older than 60 years of age are more likely to say that they follow the information about topical events every day (81%), while the youngest, aged between 16 and 29 years, are a lot less likely to do this (41%). In addition, citizens with lower education (22%) and those who have no confidence in the media (13%) are more likely to say that they never follow the news.

<sup>4</sup>„Feed“ is a continuous flow of news and activities of friends or followed pages on the homepage of many social networks.

**Figure 3.2.2.** Getting informed about national and international events

Question: How often do you seek out news - information about current events in Montenegro or the world?

Base: Total target population



**Television is both the most used „traditional“ medium and generally the source of information about national and international events** – three quarters of citizens aged between 16 and 75 years say that they use TV as a source of information at least several times a week (74%), while three out of five of them do this every day (60%) (Figure 3.2.4). For comparison, the news on the second most used traditional medium, the radio, is followed daily by about one fifth of citizens (22%), while another tenth listens to the radio for the same reason several times a week (10%). Other traditional media are used far less – about 15% read the news in printed dailies at least several times a week, and 10% of citizens in printed periodicals.

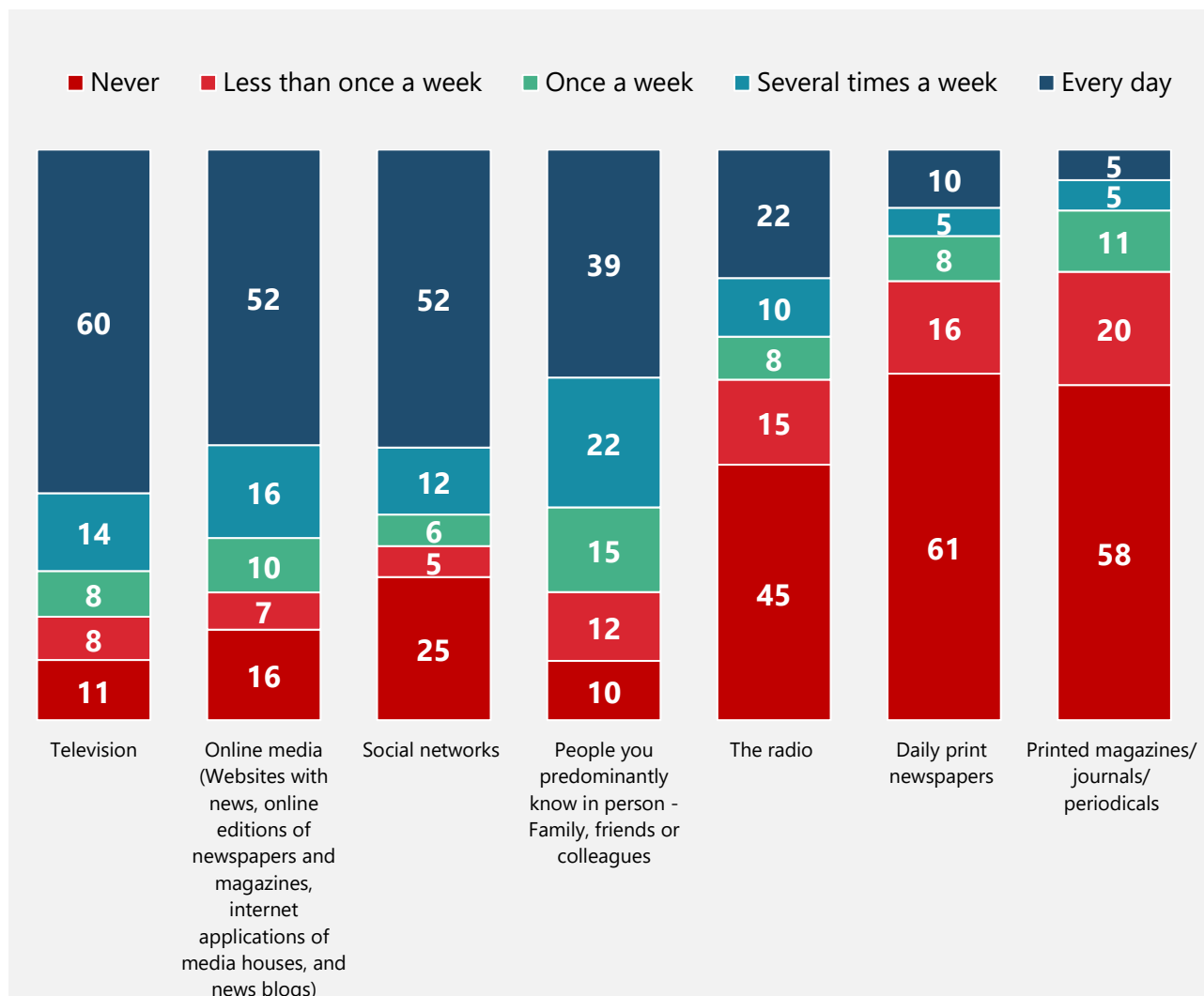
**Online media, such as news web portals, internet dailies, media agencies’ apps and news blogs, are the second most common source of news, right after television. More than two thirds of citizens aged between 16 and 75 years use them to get informed several times a week or more frequently (68%). Social networks and personal contacts are at a similar level, so they are the sources of information for more than 60% of citizens at least several times a week. However, unlike online media and social networks used by more than half of the population daily (52%), members of one’s social circle are less likely to be the daily source of information about national and international events (39%).**



**Figure 3.2.4.** Using different sources of information about topical national and international events

Question: How often do you use the following sources to get news, i.e. information about current events in country and the world?

Base: Total target population



The results suggest that there are significant differences between citizens regarding usage of different sources of information by socio-demographic characteristics, especially age (Figure 3.2.5), and confidence in the media in general.

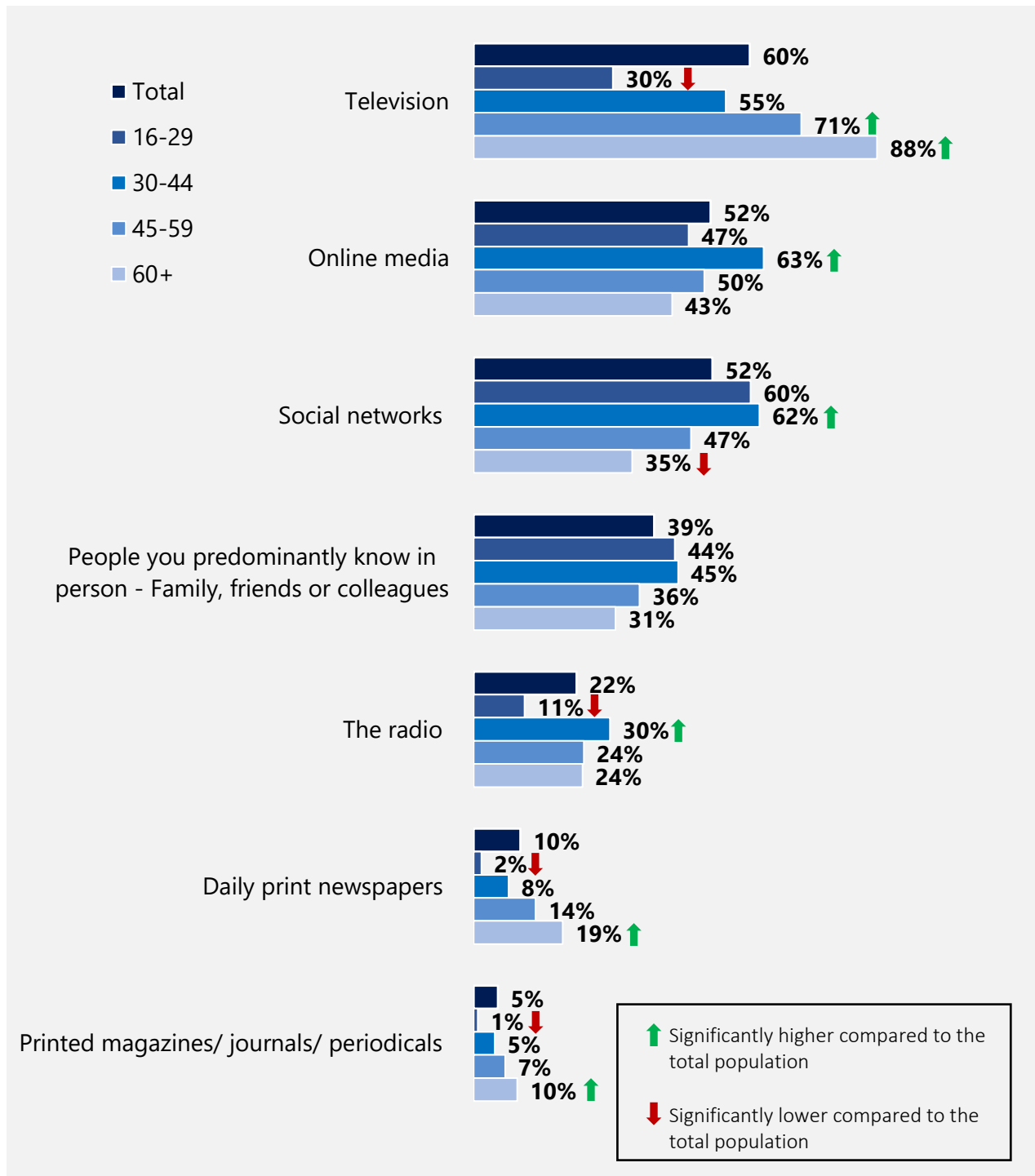
- Citizens older than 60 (88%), those aged between 45 and 59 years (71%) and those with small household income (75%) are more likely to say that they watch TV every day. On the other hand, citizens aged between 16 and 29 years are less likely to watch the news on TV (30% every day).
- Other types of traditional media are also less popular among the youngest (from 16 to 29 years of age). For instance, in the age group from 16 to 29 years, one in ten citizens uses the radio to get informed every day (11%), and just 1 to 2% read printed dailies.

- Radio is most popular in the group aged between 30 and 44 years (30% every day), and printed dailies, weeklies and periodicals in the eldest population, 60+ (19% and 10% read them every day, respectively).
- Citizens aged between 30 and 44 years are more likely to prefer online media that about two thirds of them use as a source of information on daily basis (63%). In addition, social networks are more likely to be used as sources of information in this and the age group 16 to 29 years (62% and 60% every day, respectively). On the other hand, these internet sources are less likely to be used by the eldest citizens 60+, citizens with lower education and those with the smallest household income, who are more likely than average to say that they never use them.
- It may be noteworthy that citizens who have no confidence in the media are more likely to say that they never get informed in the traditional media (television, radio, print) than those who generally have confidence in the media. However, there are no such differences in terms of getting informed from online media and social networks.

**Figure 3.2.5.** Daily usage of different sources of information, by age (% of answers - Daily)

Question: How often do you use the following sources to get news, i.e. information about current events in country and the world?

Base: Total target population



Younger participants favour the internet, and older prefer television for getting informed. Radio and printed media are less relevant sources of news.



**Television** – Habits of relying on this source of information most clearly separate the youngest (16-18) from the eldest (65-75) participants. While **younger participants consider this method of getting informed outdated and impractical**, especially when compared with online media, many of the elderly single out television as their primary source of information.

**Online media** and **social networks** – These sources of information are recognised as inevitable (except among the eldest - 65 to 75 years of age). Their key advantage is extreme accessibility and practicality owing to broad usage of mobile phones („we all have a mobile phone“), as well as speed/promptness in launching information that can hardly be paired by other sources. This is the reason why it is widely agreed that these sources have become primary sources of information in the modern age.

**Radio**, judging by participants’ habits, has a decreasing effect on their keeping informed. It is instead quite likely to be perceived as a source of entertainment and pastime. Those who do use the radio as a source of information, usually while in a car, notice that it usually offers concise news without many details.

**Printed media** are more associated with specific interests (such as culture) than with the news. There is a firm association with the „once widespread“ habits and older readers.

*„TV is not used as much as it used to be, mobile phone is much simpler and offers more information. I turn on the TV once a week.“ – Woman, 16-18 years old*

*„I prefer TV, I don't use other sources and I don't have confidence in them. TV is there for validation of information.“ – Woman, 65-75 years old*

*„Only TV at our age.“ – Woman, 65-75, years old*

*„With mobile phones and social networks available, only those with the elderly in their family buy printed dailies. Younger people never watch TV and the news there.“ – Woman, 19-25 years old*

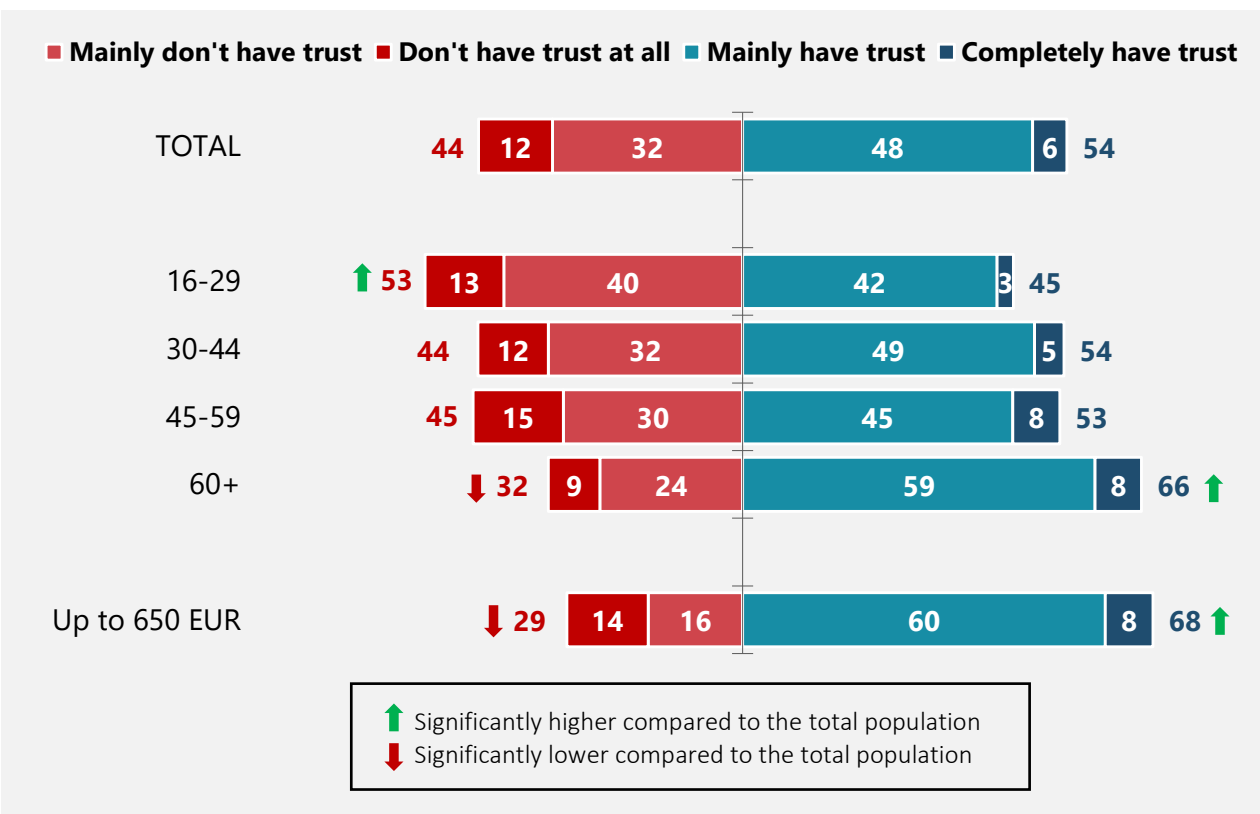
### 3.3. Confidence in the media

Citizens aged between 16 and 75 years are most likely to believe that the media in Montenegro (newspapers, television, radio or online sources) report fully, accurately and fairly. While somewhat more than a half have confidence in the media (54%), about two fifths don't trust the information they report (44%) (Figure 3.3.1). More precisely, close to half of citizens mainly believe what the media say (48%), while 6% believe fully. On the other hand, about a third mainly have no confidence (32%), while another 12% have no confidence at all.

In general, women are more likely to have confidence in the media (58% of those who mainly or fully trust the media), citizens older than 60 (66%), residents of northern parts of the country (61%) and those with the smallest household income (68%), than men (50%), the youngest, those aged between 16 and 29 years (45%), residents of central and southern parts of the country (51% and 52%, respectively), and those with monthly household income above 1500 EUR (48%).

**Figure 3.3.1.** General confidence in the media

Question: In general, how much trust do you have in the media - such as newspapers, TV, radio or online news sources - when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately, and fairly in Montenegro?  
 Base: Total target population



## The media in Montenegro are trusted more than the media in the region.



Focus group participants are under the impression that they can trust media in Montenegro to certain extent and they think that this confidence is much higher than in some other countries. This is particularly evident when they compare Montenegro with the region (primarily Serbia)<sup>5</sup>, but also with other countries in the world. According to participants, the higher trust in the media can be attributed to several reasons:

- There are fewer media outlets, which results in fewer opportunities for spreading false information and manipulation;
- Fewer „gossip“ and tabloid media;
- It's easier to validate information using WOM („It's a small country and everything is known/someone will tell the truth/prove that something is a lie.“).

*„Our people here are more likely to read Vijesti, watch RTCG on portals and on TV, while in other countries it has become sensationalistic, tabloids, it's all about clicking.“ – Man, 19-25 years old*

*„I think that our portals offer quite true information, and that there are portals in the neighbouring countries, such as Blic, that have only sensationalism.“ – Woman, 30-60 years old*

*„People here trust all media equally more or less, while in Serbia there is no confidence in majority of the media. Serbian media exaggerate so that articles would seem bizarre and make more people click on them, while our media don't do that.“ – Man, 16-18 years old*

**As for the confidence in different sources of information, citizens find information coming from close people most reliable** (76% trust these sources mainly or fully) (Figure 3.3.2).

**Considering different types of media, citizens have most confidence in information broadcasted on television**, which is also the most common type of media used daily. Namely, **three out of five citizens perceive television as a mainly or completely reliable source of information (60%), while somewhat more than a third believes the opposite (37%)**. More confidence in television as a source of information is registered among the older than 60 years of age, residents of northern parts of Montenegro, citizens with secondary or lower education and those with the smallest household income (below 650 EUR).

**Next are online media and the radio, which are trusted by just below half of the population** (47% and 45%, respectively). However, **when it comes to online media, it is noticeable that**

<sup>5</sup>However, this attitude aligns to some extent with the findings from certain regional studies on public trust in the media (source: [https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Media-trust-in-Western-Balkan-countries\\_narrative-report\\_15.4-1.pdf](https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Media-trust-in-Western-Balkan-countries_narrative-report_15.4-1.pdf))

citizens are divided, since equal share does not trust the information they receive through them (47%). In contrast, for radio, one-third of citizens express distrust (32%).

Citizens are divided also regarding reliability of printed dailies as a source of information – while two fifths trust the news in them (41%), approximately the same share doesn't believe them (43%).

Printed periodicals, as well as social networks, are trusted by about a third of citizens (34% and 32%, respectively). Interestingly, although they are followed quite a lot, the news on social networks is not trusted much by the citizens – even three out of five consider them unreliable (59%).

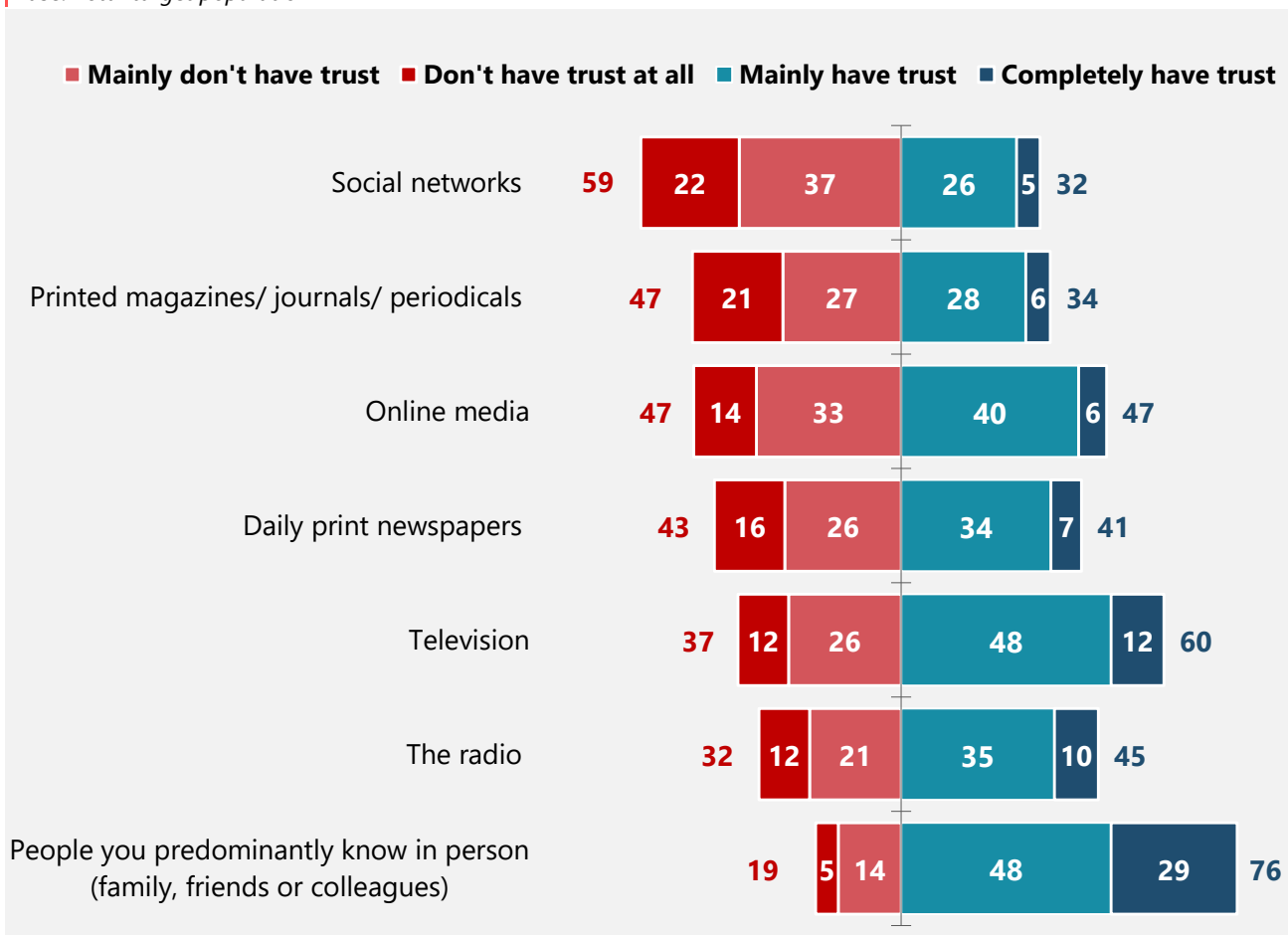
Quite expectedly, citizens who have confidence in the media in general are more likely to have confidence in all different sources of information, while those who generally have no confidence in the media are also mistrustful about the news from different sources, including their own social circle.

In addition, men are more likely than women not to have confidence in different media, both traditional and online media and social networks.

**Figure 3.3.2.** Confidence in the sources of news and information

Question: Regardless of how often you get information from these channels, to what extent do you trust each of them is a reliable source of news and information? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 means Do not trust at all and 4 means Completely trust.

Base: Total target population



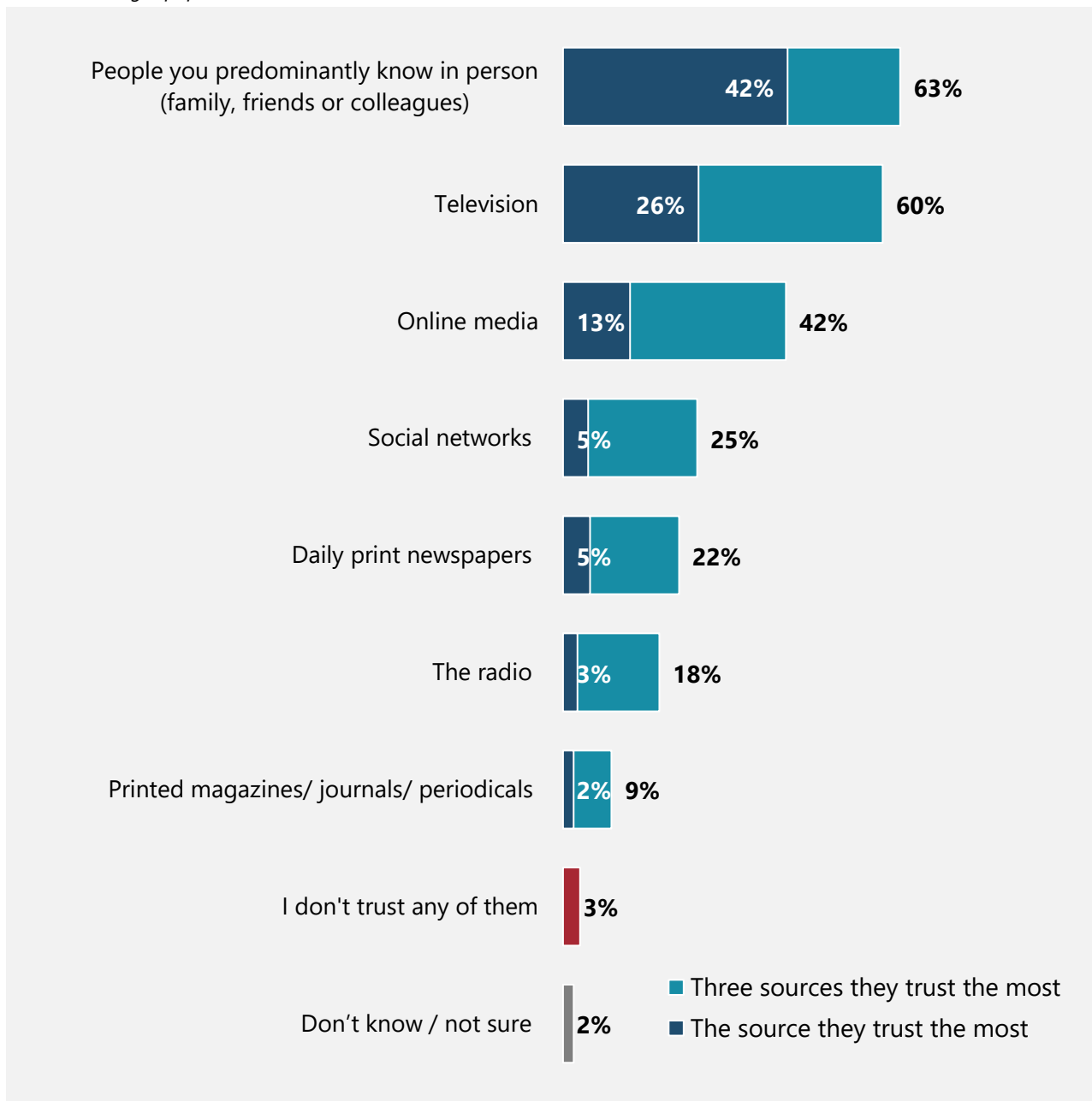
Findings were similar when citizens were asked to choose three sources of information and news they had most confidence in (Figure 3.3.3.). Biggest share still trusts people they know in person and television, 60% or somewhat more citizens. Television is followed by online media that are considered to be among top three most reliable sources by more than two fifths of citizens (42%), while for one quarter social networks are among the top three most reliable sources (25%).

Online media are more likely to be among the most trusted sources for the citizens aged between 16 and 44 years, those with higher education, as well as members of better-off households (with monthly income above 1500 EUR).

**Figure 3.3.3.** Perception of the reliability of different sources of information

Question: Now please choose the three sources you trust the most and rank them starting with the one you trust the most when it comes to news and information.

Base: Total target population





Owing to the impression of more serious content control, participants have more confidence in traditional media. Television is the key channel for validating the truth, and internet for prompt updating.



The impression of „serious journalism“ and „verified information“ is reflected on participants' opinion about reliability of different sources of information. **As for traditional media, participants believe that the broadcasted information is thoroughly controlled and coming from authors who are „real journalists“** and who are responsible for accuracy of their reporting. This type of control is associated with television most.

**As for online media and social networks, focus group participants think that there is no such strict control** and accountability for the launched information as in traditional media. Even within this type of media, some users differentiate between those that follow the format of traditional media they originated from (such as web portals and social media profiles of television channels) compared to those that are "exclusively online."

As opposed to the traditional media with the perception of control, the prevailing impression about „online exclusive“ media, especially social networks, is that „everyone can be a journalist.“ In other words, there is more room for disseminating unverified information in these sources.

In the active search for information (about an event/topic), except for reliability that depends on the type of source, **promptness also plays a very significant role.** In spite of traditional media being perceived as more reliable, **the need for quick checking and access to the latest news is quite likely to direct people towards online sources.**

- **Television is very likely to be the key source for checking truthfulness of information, due to greater confidence participants have in it.** In this context, there are some TV formats such as news ("Dnevnik")/daily news that are considered to be very important. They are important because they are very likely to be considered as having the „supreme authority“ for deciding if some news is true or not („I wait to see what they will say in the news ("Dnevnik")/daily news.“)

When considering the importance of social networks for the "function of informing", it's also important to bear in mind how natural language shapes perception. Namely, social networks are recognised as a type of media and source of information, so **"social networks" has become their very common name**, spontaneously used by younger people frequently (16-25 years old).

*„I think that printed media and television, as traditional media, are checked and controlled more than digital media.“ – Man, 19-25 years old*

*„TV is most honest because there are different portals on social networks and the internet and they may all offer different information, while the information that I see on TV is fully reliable“ – Woman, 30-60 years old*

*„It's easier to check digital media that originated from the traditional than instant portals that even I can make.“ – Man, 19-25 years old*

*„Quality control is weaker because anyone can "become a media outlet".“ – Man, 30-60 years old*

*„Some 2-3 years ago there was a rumour that salaries wouldn't be paid because of the coronavirus pandemic or something like that. I thought that it was impossible and that I should check it in the news (dnevnik). If they don't say anything about it there, I know it's a lie.“ – Woman, 30-60 years old*

**Personal political attitude influences the impression of media reliability, so the selection of media that participants rely on for truthfulness of information depends on it.**



The attitude that it's useful to check several sources is considered „common knowledge“<sup>6</sup>. **However, accepting this attitude doesn't necessarily mean that this practice will be present in behaviour and media habits.** As we'll see later on, alternative sources are consulted usually when there is some specific interest in a topic or news.

**A look at the preferred „alternative“ media reveals that these are usually a few „routine“ sources that participants have most confidence in.** Political attitudes may also play an important role in this choice, as **some people will prefer the sources promoting political attitudes similar to theirs.**

<sup>6</sup>„Common knowledge“.

## 3.4. Understanding the media and their influence

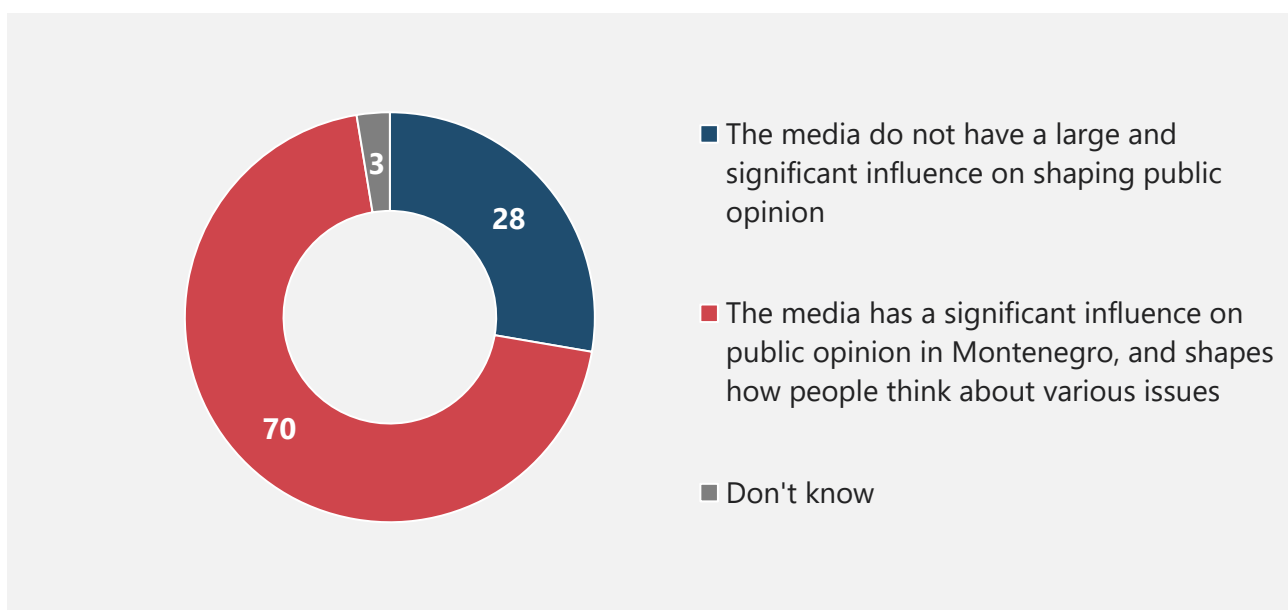
Seven out of ten citizens notice that media have significant impact on the public opinion in Montenegro and that they are shaping citizens' opinion about various issues (70%) (Figure 3.4.1). However, more than a quarter of them don't think that media play an important role, believing that their influence on public opinion is scarce (28%).

Citizens with higher education, as well as members of households with the biggest income, are a lot more likely than average to share the attitude that the impact of the media is substantial (74% and 82%, respectively).

**Figure 3.4.1.** Perception of media influence on public opinion in Montenegro

Question: Some people believe that the media has a great influence on the opinion of people in Montenegro, while others claim that this influence is not significant. Which position is closest to yours when it comes to the media influence on public opinion in Montenegro?

Base: Total target population

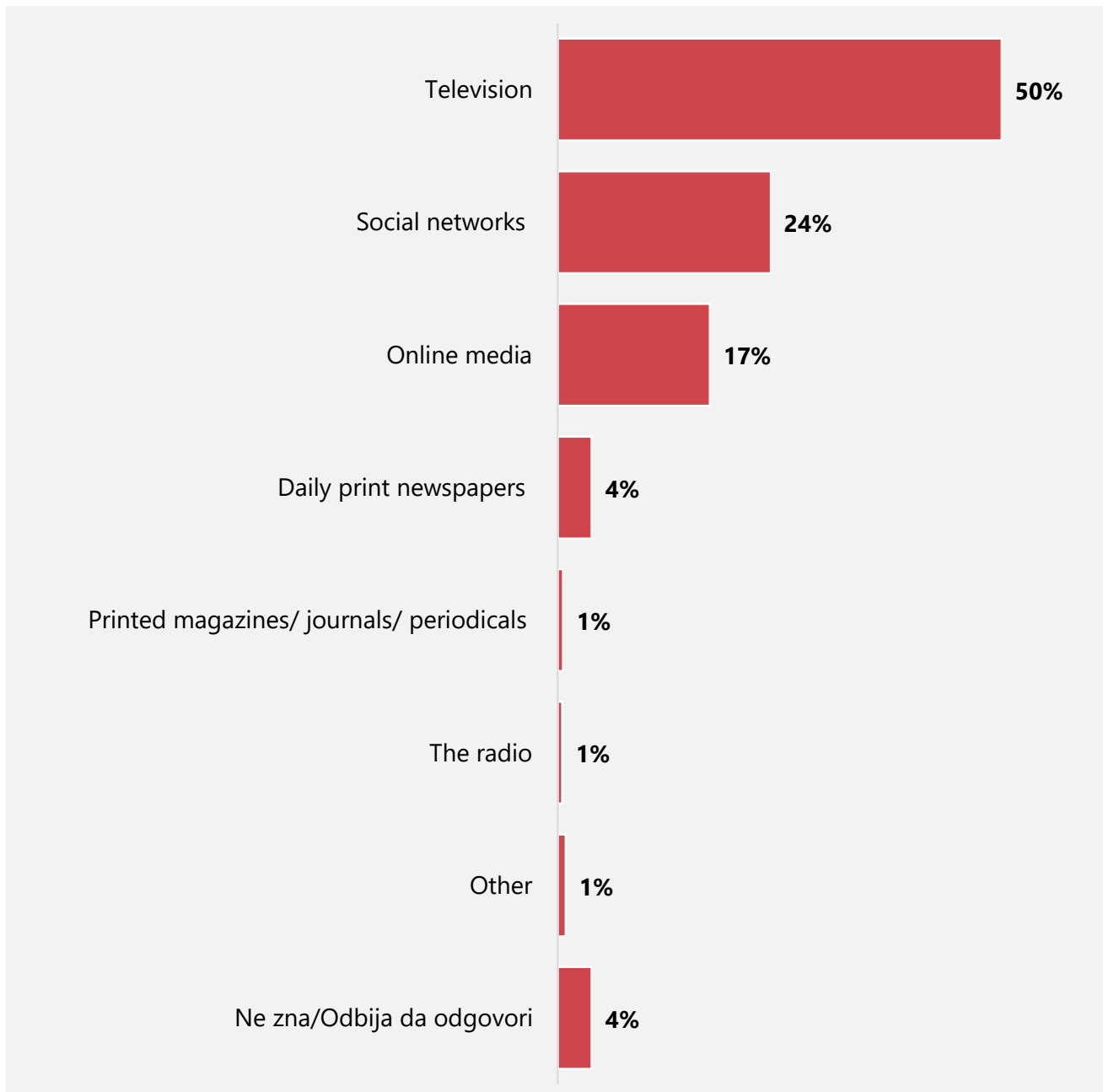


One in two citizens of Montenegro aged between 16 and 75 years believes that television has the strongest impact on shaping the public opinion (50%) (Figure 3.4.2). It is followed by the internet, or social networks (24%) and online media (17%), whose dominant influence is more likely to be recognised by the youngest, from 16 to 29 years old (30% and 23%, respectively). On the other hand, the eldest citizens are more likely than average to believe that television has the strongest influence on the opinion of citizens of Montenegro (62%).

**Figure 1.4.2.** The type of media that is considered to have the greatest influence on citizens' opinion

Question: When you think about the media, which one do you think has the most influence on citizens in Montenegro?

Base: Total target population



Media may influence the public with the information they broadcast, selection of topics and the way news is presented.



In addition to participants' awareness of the influence of media on public opinion, they also recognise different ways how this influence can be achieved. Some of the examples where participants recognise the influence of media on public opinion are the following:

- **Presenting untruthful information (fake news).** Given that our knowledge of the topical national and international events depends on the media, it is recognised also that media shape our behaviour, decisions and attitudes.
- **Selection of topics and media space dedicated to them.** In the periods before important political events, such as elections, „political favouritism“ becomes obvious in the media, which focus group participants believe can influence also political outcomes and decisions. This is manifested in:
  - One-sided or biased presentation of a topic, showing a „side“ at its best.
  - Unbalanced „amount of media space“ dedicated to some topics, attitudes, public figures or political parties, which enables or supports favouring of specific views.
- **The way announcements are phrased and information presented.** It had become clear during the pandemic that the way news is presented can provoke strong reaction of the public – such as panicking, „hysterical“ shopping etc.

*„Media have a decisive impact on the public. It all depends on which guests they bring to the studio.“ – Man, 30–60 years old*

*„Media have a very strong influence. 100 times repeated lie become the truth, so we all see this information and think about what they wanted to say.“ – Man, 19–25 years old*

*„Media can scare people, if they say that the world will end on some specific day, people will get scared, no one will just neglect such news “ – Man, 16–18 years old*

**Social networks are associated with both positive and negative influences on the public.**



Caution about the information coming from social networks is very present. **A quite widespread belief is that the picture we get from social networks may be extremely distorted.** That's why, as respondents say, **the impact of social networks on the public actually lies in interaction between users more** (in comments, sharing posts and attitudes, online communication, calls to action<sup>7</sup>) than in the very information available on social networks (which are, as participants think, doubted more, so they influence public opinion less).

**A positive example are charity activities** that are spread quickly owing to social networks, reaching broad audience. On the other hand, negative aspects are visible in the role social networks may play in **spreading peer (cyber) violence or dangerous trends.**

*„Social networks did have influence, especially on raising funds for medical treatment of sick children and people. How would I find out about this without social networks? So this is the best effect of social networks as far as I'm concerned.“ – Woman, 30-60 years old*

*„There can be a negative impact on children because a lot of peer violence was initiated on social networks. There are some social networks such as TikTok, that drag children into peer violence and into hurting themselves.“ – Woman, 30-60 years old*

**Large majority of citizens of Montenegro believe that it's important that citizens have access to various sources of information – while more than half consider this very important (57%), another third believe that availability of diversified sources of information is mainly important (31%) (Figure 3.4.3). On the other hand, one in ten citizens doesn't think that it's relevant that citizens have access to different sources of news (10%), and they are more likely to be of lower education (19%) and generally without confidence in the media (15%).**

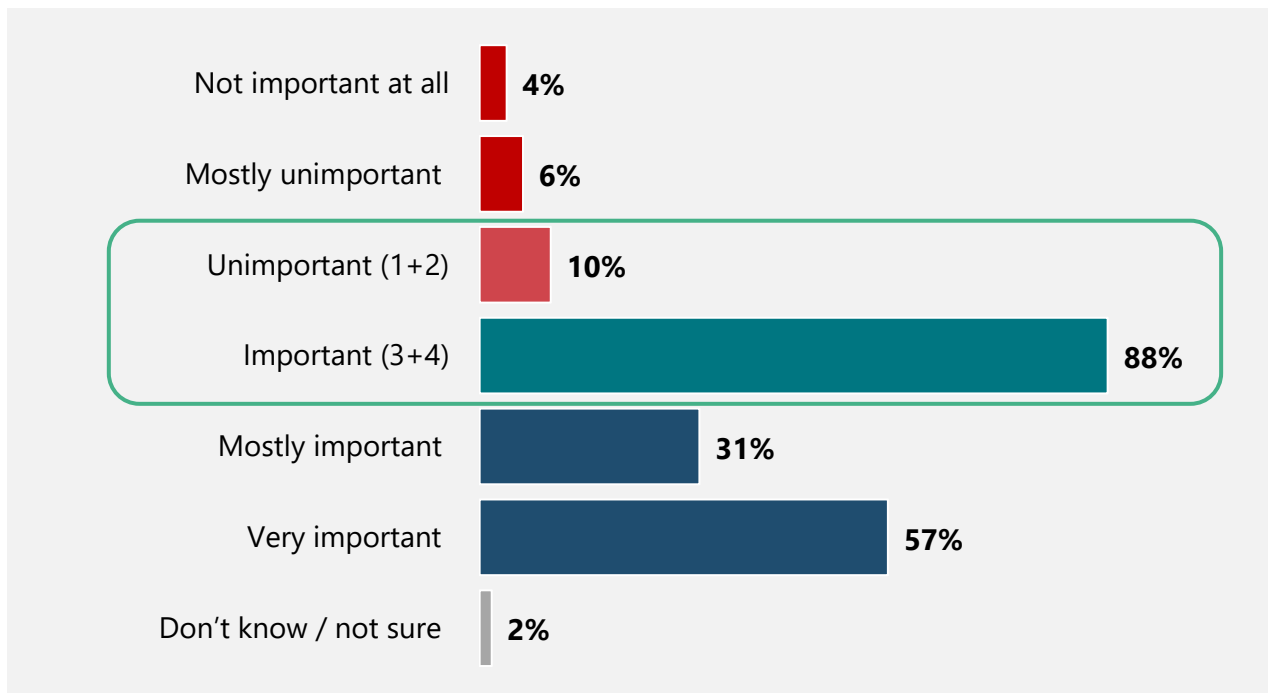
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<sup>7</sup>“Call to action”.

**Figure 3.4.3.** Importance of having access to various news sources

Question: How important do you think it is for citizens to have access to a variety of sources of news?

Base: Total target population



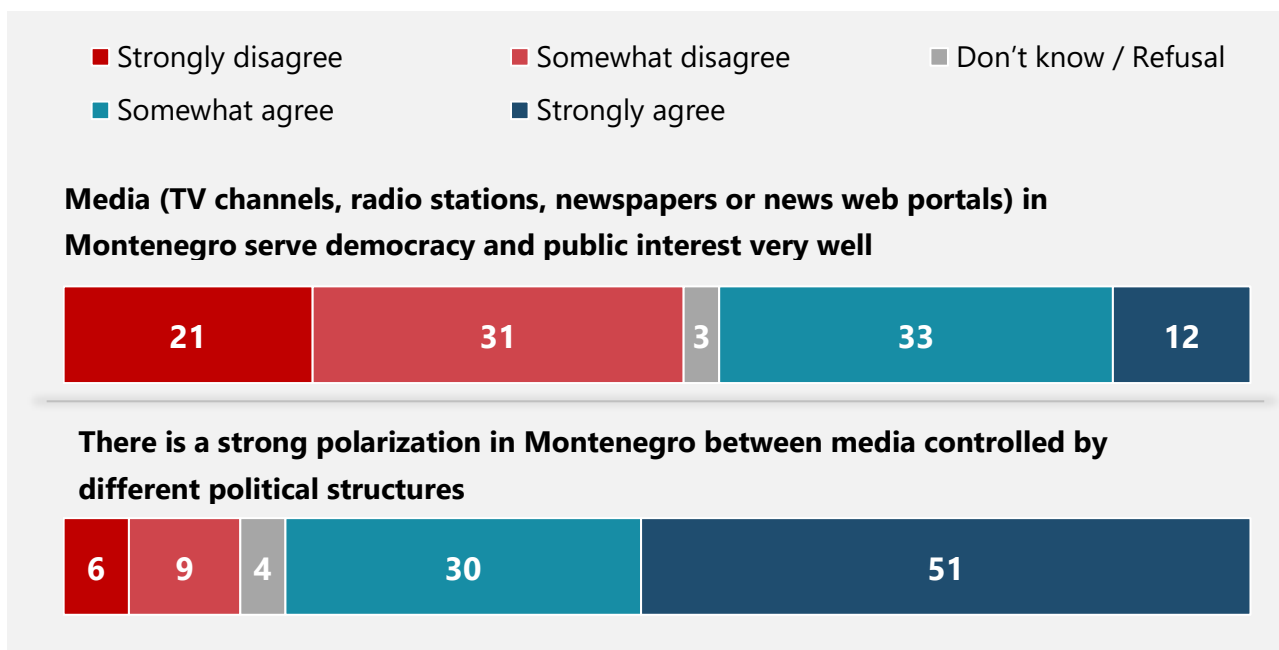
**Majority of citizens of Montenegro detect sharp division between media according to their editorial policy.** Namely, even more than 80% of the population from 16 to 75 years old believe that the media space is polarized to a great extent (Figure 3.4.4).

**On the other hand, public opinion is somewhat divided regarding how well the media such as television, radio, printed media and online media serve democracy and public interest.** Although somewhat more than half believe that it's not the case (52%), somewhat smaller share perceives the role of the media in upgrading democracy in the country positively (45%). Moreover, citizens who generally have confidence in the media in Montenegro are more likely to believe that they serve democracy and public interest very well (59%).

**Figure 3.4.4.** Perception of the media landscape in Montenegro

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: Total target population



**Political bias of the media disrupts reliability of information, but doesn't „block“ the truth entirely.**



**The most important „noise“ and barrier when looking for trustworthy information (recognised also spontaneously) originates from political bias and polarization of the media.**

However, general impression is that this doesn't prevent finding out the truth, but only underlines the importance of „bearing in mind“ the political bias of the media we follow. As we are going to see later, the awareness of presence of political polarization plays an important role in strategies used for examining the news and validating their truthfulness.

*„Political bias is growing, it has increased a lot in the past few years, there are “Montenegrin” and “Serbian” portals, however the tone is similar. It has been present always, but it's very strong now.“ – Woman, 30-60 years old*

*„Politics is very important to everyone in Montenegro, and it's only politics where bias is recognised, weak or strong.“ – Man, 19-25 years old*

**Three out of five citizens think that internet contents shouldn't be censored, but that this space should be free for everyone to express their attitudes and opinions (62%), while somewhat more than a third disagree (35%), and these are mainly citizens with higher education (41%) (Figure 3.4.5).**



Similarly, three fifths of citizens think that they will get same Google search results as anyone else anywhere in the world if they use the same key words (61%). Only one in three believes that it's not so (32%), and these are more likely to be citizens with higher education (37%), those who have no confidence in the media (41%) and members of households with the biggest income (43%).

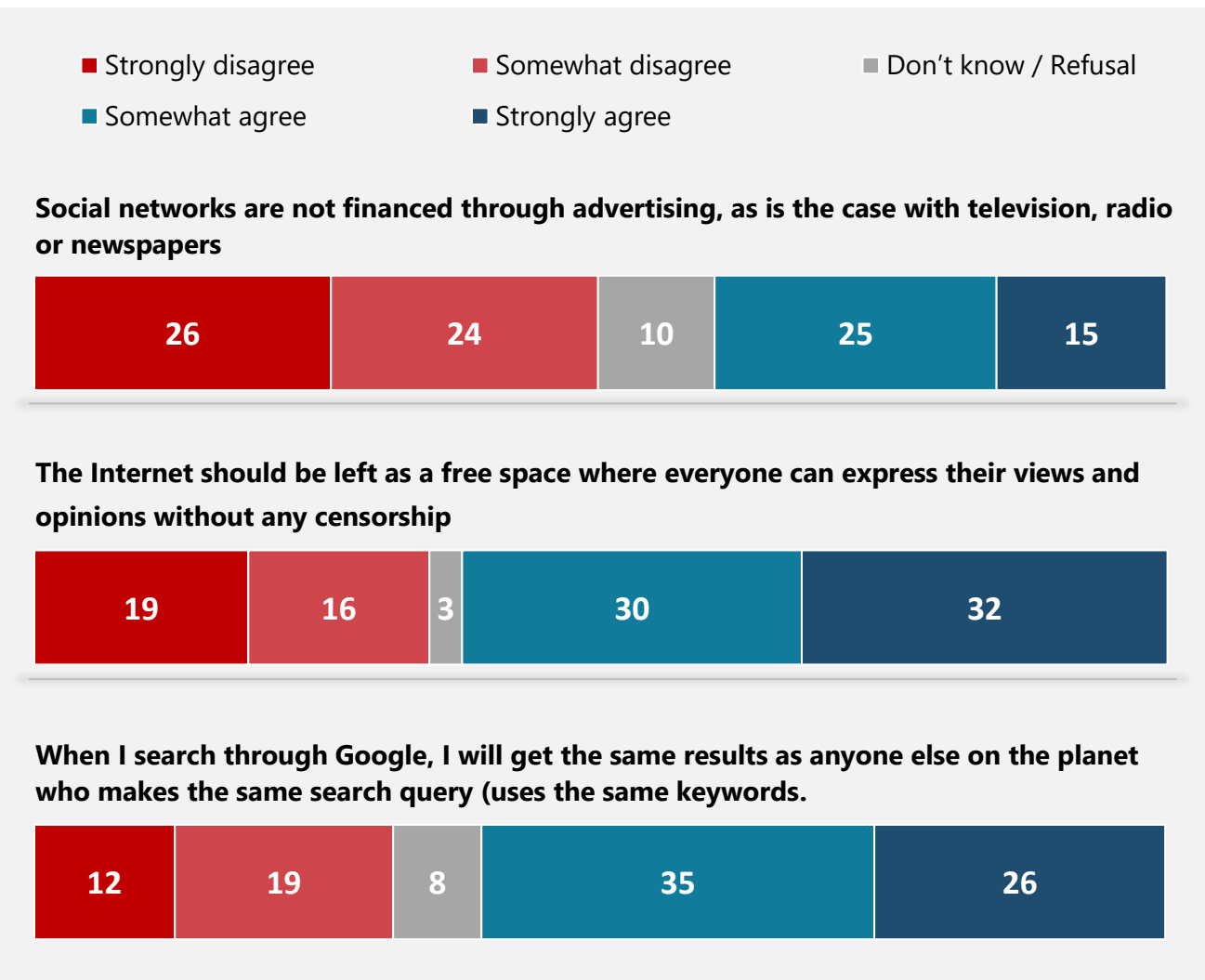
One in two citizens disagrees with the statement that social networks are not financed from advertising, unlike traditional media – television, radio and printed media (50%). On the other hand, two out of five disagree, claiming that advertising is not a source of financing of social networks, as is the case with traditional media (40%).

Although the share of those who recognise that also social networks are financed from advertising is somewhat bigger among citizens who have social networks accounts (53%), this increase is not much if compared with total population aged between 16 and 75 years. This is a lot more likely to be the attitude of citizens with higher education (57%), those who have no confidence in the media (57%), as well as members of households with the biggest income (65%).

**Figure 3.4.5.** Understanding internet and social networks

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

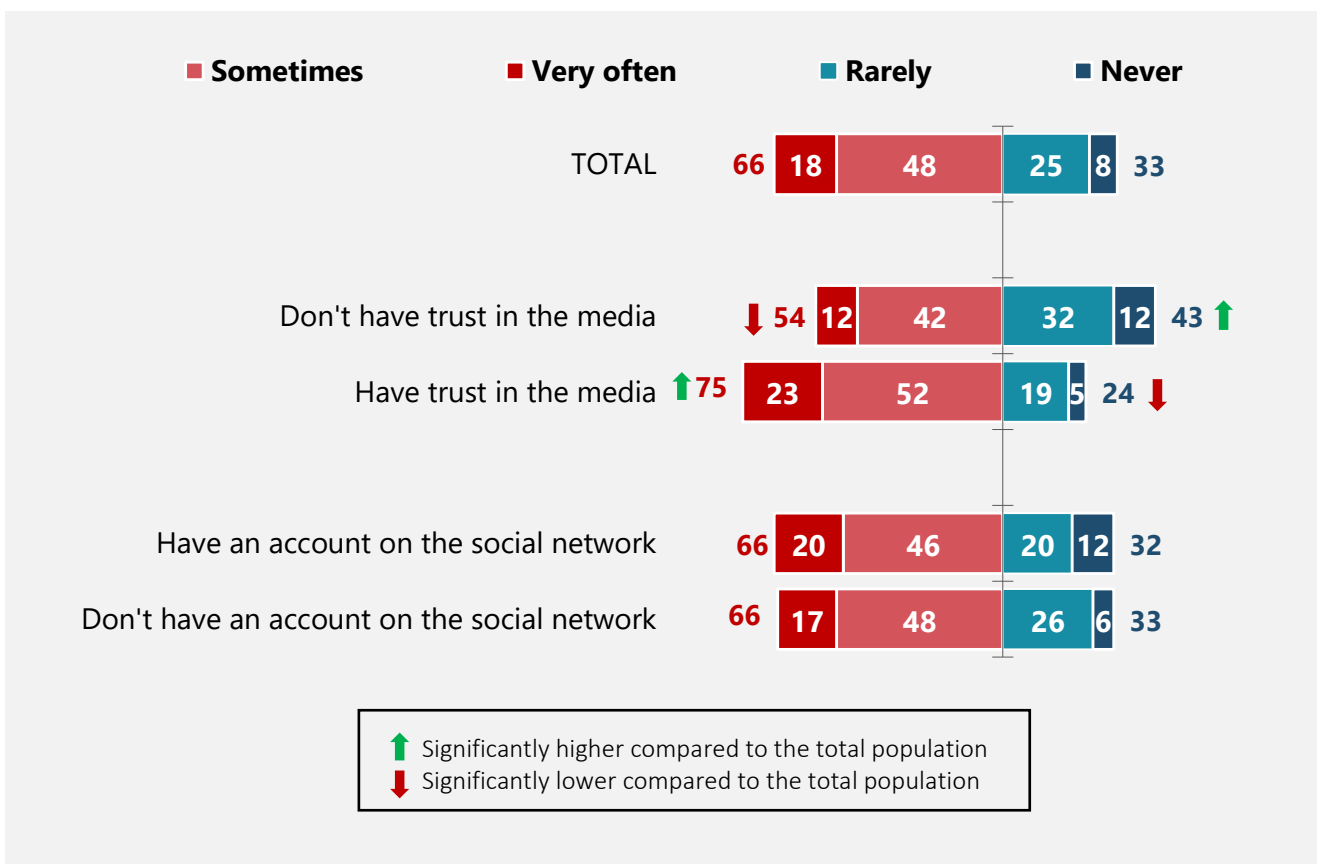
Base: Total target population



One third of citizens say that they rarely or never come across any news aligned with their belief or opinion (33%), while two out of three find such news very often or at least occasionally (66%) (Figure 3.4.6). No strong differences have been registered between those who have an account on at least one social network and those who are not present on social networks. Quite expectedly, citizens who generally have confidence in the media are more likely to say that they find such news very often or occasionally (75%) than those who have no confidence in the media (54%).

**Figure 3.4.6.** Exposure to news that is consistent with one's own beliefs and opinions

Question: How often do you encounter the news stories or articles that align with your beliefs or opinions?  
 Base: Total target population

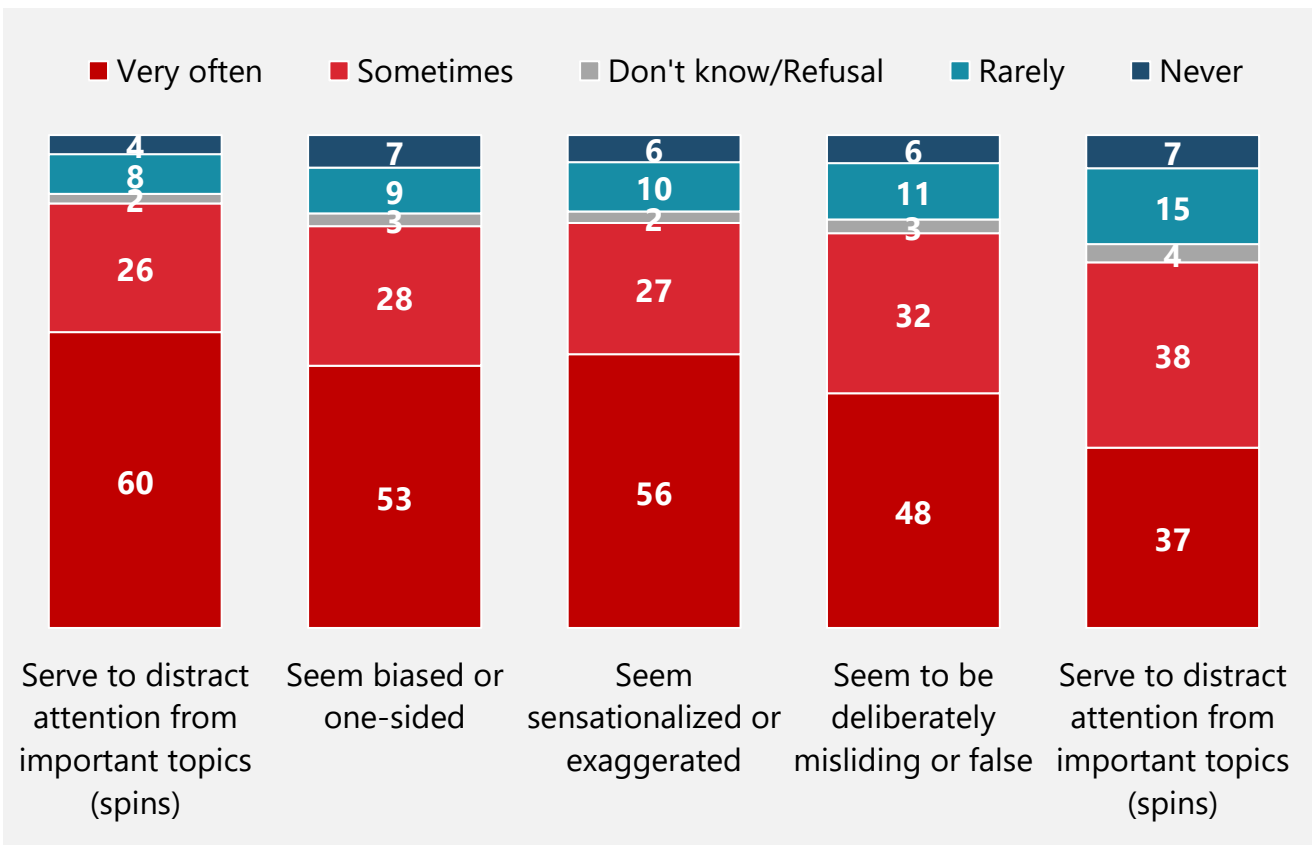


### 3.5. Resilience to disinformation

Large majority of citizens of Montenegro, three quarters or more of them, say that they experience different kinds of unprofessional reporting very often or occasionally (Figure 3.5.1). Most widespread are news and articles aimed at diverting attention from important issues (“spin”), which three out of five citizens are exposed to very often (60%). Then follow sensationalistic and biased news that more than half of citizens see or hear very often (56% and 53%, respectively). Deliberately misleading or false news are noticed very often by somewhat less than half of citizens (48%), while more than a third very often find news with extremely emotional language (37%).

**Figure 3.5.1.** Detecting various forms of unprofessional reporting in the media

Question: How often do you encounter the news stories or articles that...?  
 Base: Total target population



Residents of northern part of Montenegro, as well as those with lower education, are more likely than average to say that they never or rarely find news packed with emotional language (30% and 34%, respectively), biased or one-sided (21% and 39%, respectively), sensationalistic or exaggerated (21% and 30%, respectively), or aimed at distracting attention from important issues (16% and 33%, respectively).

In addition, citizens who generally have confidence in the media are more likely than those who don't to say that they never or rarely find fake news, or deliberately false or misleading news (23% compared with 11%), as well as news that seem sensationalistic and exaggerated (18% compared with 13%), while there were no registered differences for other forms of unprofessional reporting.

### Some of the examples in which participants recognise unprofessional reporting in Montenegro:



#### Spin

„Important and existential issues are put aside, while irrelevant topics are pushed in the focus to deceive us. For instance they don't talk about employment, finances, creating jobs, economic development, and they focus on some people acting crazy.“ – Man, 30-60 years old

„It's called **cancellation** for some things. It's visible in case of the war in Ukraine – it's spreading more quickly than coronavirus could. However, no one talked about the war in Iraq, Siria. Everyone wanted to spread this news. **They want to keep our attention.**“ – Man, 16-18 years old

„I recognise the spins, for instance a member of some political party insults someone and that someone is **not given an equal chance to explain/respond.**“ – Man, 16-18 years old

#### Sensationalism

„A few days ago I visited one portal and the headline was Ex **Demokratski front takes over the position of Bošnjaka party...** as if it was agreed and people thought that they were going to rule, but when you read the text, you see that it's only analysis, that it just might be so.“ – Man, 19-25 years old

#### Misleading or false news

„Intellectuals launch lies, they announced that someone published a book at some historical moment under someone else's name, but then the author's cousin gave arguments and denied it – and this was a lie of two intellectuals with a PhD and **no one apologised or said anything.**“ – Man, 30-60 years old

#### Biased news

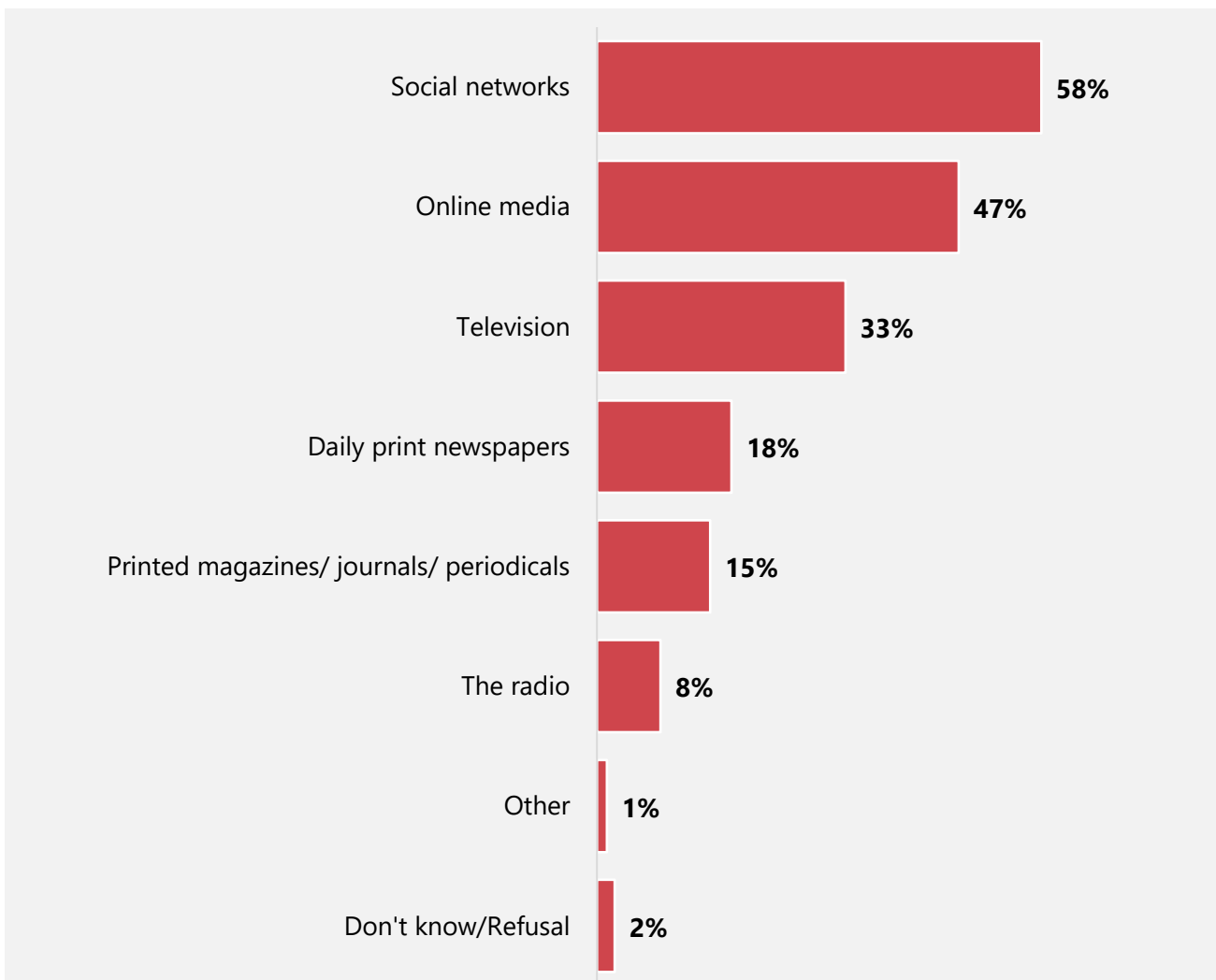
„For instance the sport journalist, **he shouldn't belittle** Novak Đokovic so much, it was really...saying that many stupid people should stop watching tennis because Novak is not number one anymore.“ – Man, 19-25 years old

**Citizens who said that they find fake, misleading or false news at least sometimes usually find them on the internet, on social networks (58%) and in online media (47%)** (Figure 3.5.2). On the other hand, fake news is less commonly detected in traditional media. So, one third has noticed fake news on television (33%), about 15% in printed media (18% in dailies, and 15% in periodicals), and only 8% on the radio.

**Figure 3.5.2.** The type of media in which the presence of fake news is noticed

Question: Where do you usually come across news that you think are deliberately misleading or false?; Multiple answers

Base: Those who at least rarely encounter news or articles that seem to be deliberately misleading or false (91% of the target



population)

**Online media are predominantly held responsible for disseminating disinformation.**



Readers are becoming more and more aware that **taking unverified contents, known also as "copy-paste" journalism, from different sources, especially online media, plays the key role in spreading fake news.** When uncorroborated news is broadcasted by different sources, **an illusion may be created among readers that this news is true, given its wide media presence.** Such dynamics boosts spreading of disinformation.

*"It happens that several media outlets launch the same untrue story just for the sake of launching." – Woman, 16-18 years old*

*„Some Serbian tabloid announced that Lane Gutović passed away. He really did die, but 10-15 days later. It was fake news because he was just in the hospital then. I thought that it was true because I saw it in several different sources, which didn't*

even check their own source of information. They all wrote that „the famous actor died“ and **Google showed only this news on different portals**. So it was about taking over news **without checking their truthfulness first**“ – Man, 19–25 years old

„They said that Nikola Mirotić was going to play for Partizan, and then they said that it wasn't true. You type Mirotić on Google and 5-10 of the first portals wrote about that. This **information was posted on the basketball page on Facebook, and then all portals spread it without checking it first.**“ – Man, 19–25 years old

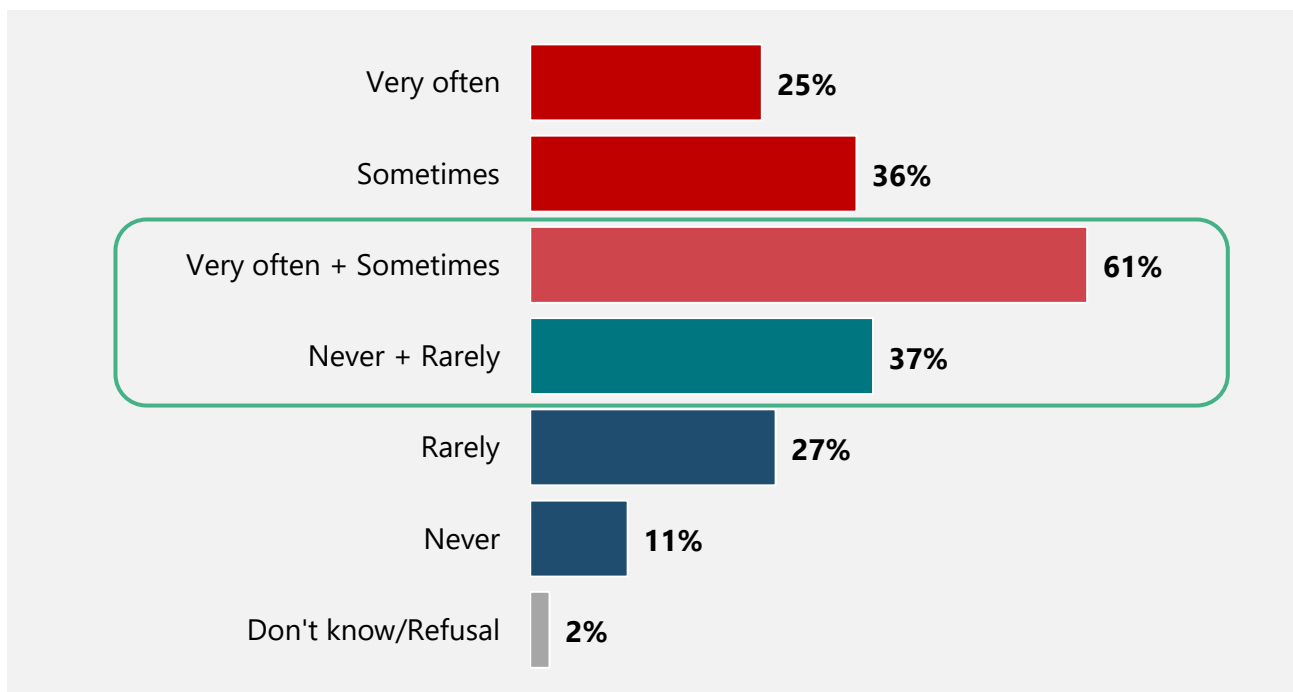
**In their own words, it was quite common for a quarter of the population aged between 16 and 75 years to believe in some information they find in the media that later turned out to be false (25%), while another third said that this has happened occasionally (36%) (Figure 3.5.3).** On the other hand, somewhat more than a quarter said how it rarely happened to them to believe in false news (27%), and one in ten said that it has never happened to them (11%).

Interestingly though, those who have no confidence in the media are more likely than average to say that it happens to them often to believe in false news (30%), while citizens with lower education are more likely to say that it never happens to them. (27%).

**Figure 3.5.3.** Experience with false information in the media

Question: *It happens that people believe in some information that they found out in the media, but later it turns out that this information was false. How often has this happened to you?*

Base: Total target population



**More than half of citizens say that they always or often look for alternative sources of information to compare and confirm what they found out in the media (52%), another quarter**

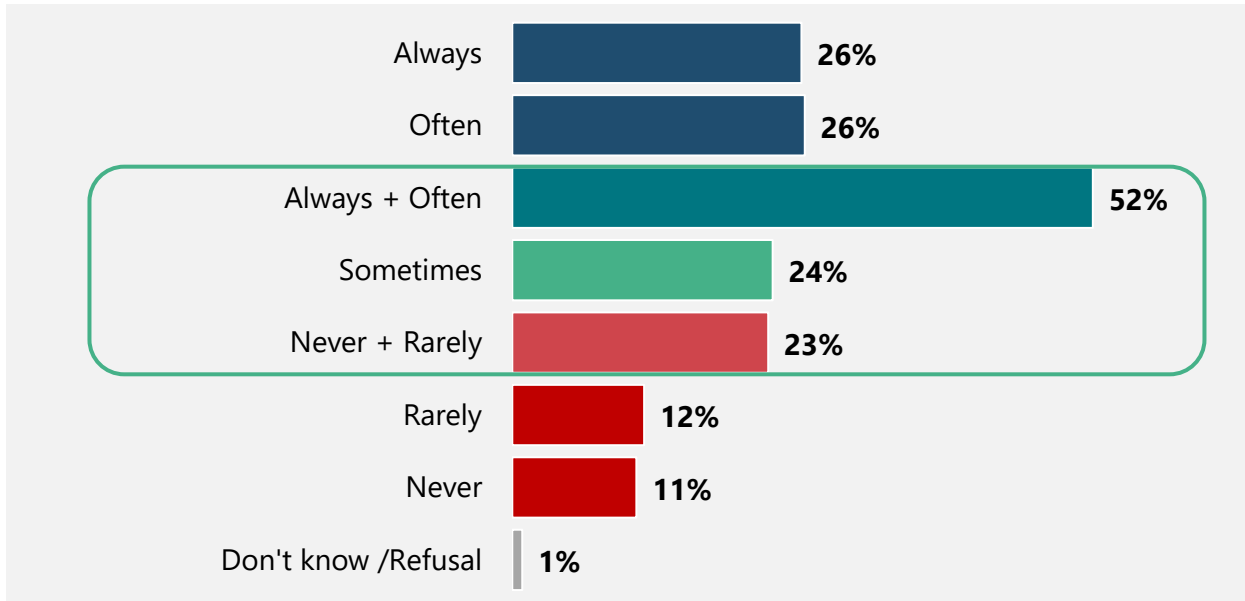
does this occasionally (24%), while just a bit smaller share say that they rarely or never look for additional sources of information (23%) (Figure 3.5.4).

Women (28%), citizens with lower education (44%), as well as members of households with the lowest income (32%) are more likely than average to say that they never or rarely check the information they find in the media.

**Figure 3.5.4.** Frequency of searching for alternative sources of information to verify media content

Question: How often do you seek out alternative sources of information to compare and verify what you have read/heard/seen in the media?

Base: Total target population

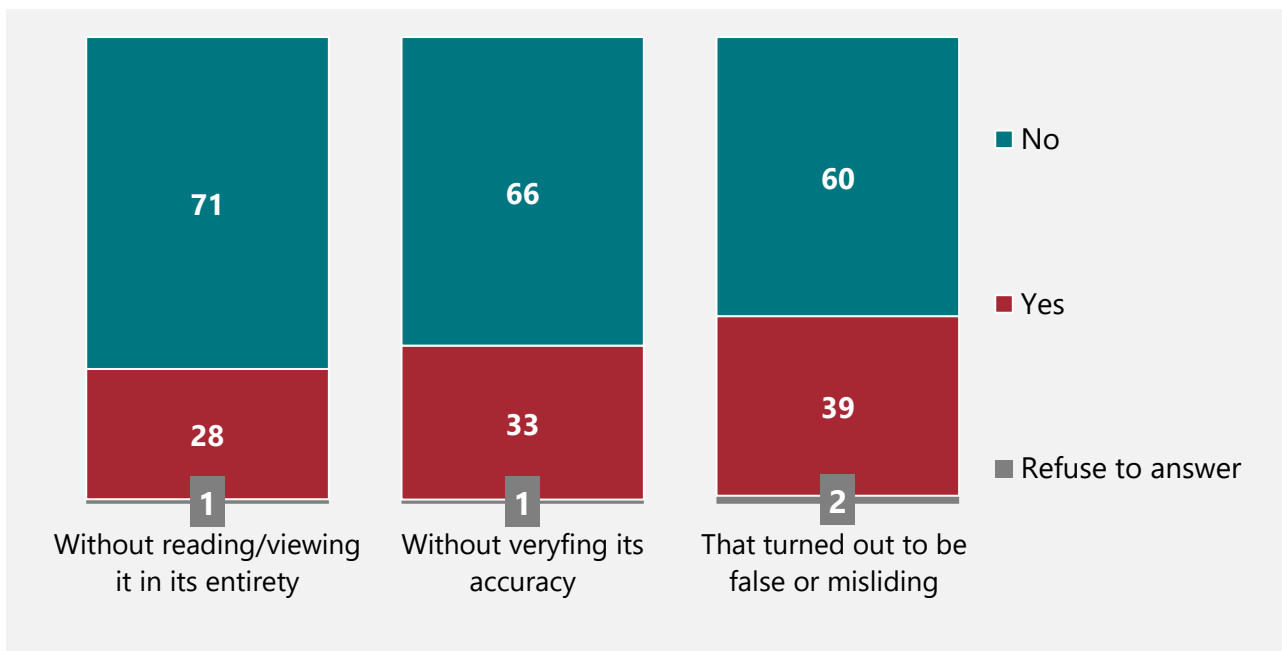


Majority of citizens say that they are used to checking the news before sharing them with others. Namely, two thirds say that it has never happened to them to share some news without checking its truthfulness first (66%), while close to three quarters say that they always read/watch the news before sharing it (71%) (Figure 1.5.5). However, two out of five citizens said how they shared some news that turned out to be false or misleading (39%), which is far less than the share of those who have ever believed in some false news (88%).

**Figure 3.5.5.** Frequency of sharing false and unverified news

Question: Have you ever shared (either in conversation with others, through messaging or sharing on social networks) a news story...?

Base: Total target population



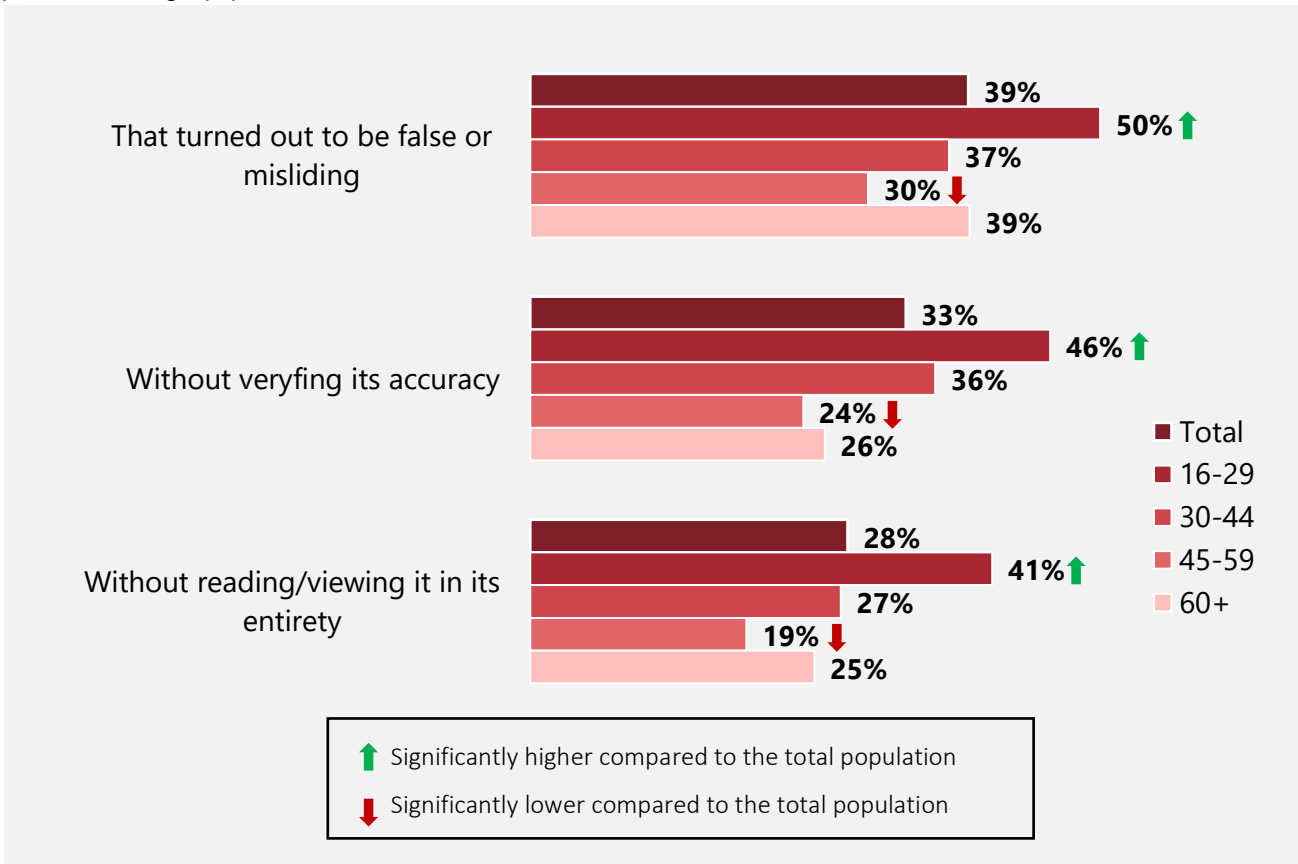
Impression is that the youngest, those from 16 to 29 years old, are a lot more likely to participate in sharing false, fake and unverified news, or at least report about it (Figure 3.5.6). So, one in two members of this age group say that they have ever shared some news that proved to be false (50%), while somewhat smaller share say how they have shared news without previous checking of their accuracy (46%). Finally, two out of five shared news that they didn't fully read, see or hear (41%). On the other hand, middle-aged citizens (45 to 59 years old) were a lot less likely to have such experience.



**Figure 3.5.6.** Frequency of sharing false and unverified news, by age groups (% of answer - YES)

Question: Have you ever shared (either in conversation with others, through messaging or sharing on social networks) a news story...?

Base: Total target population



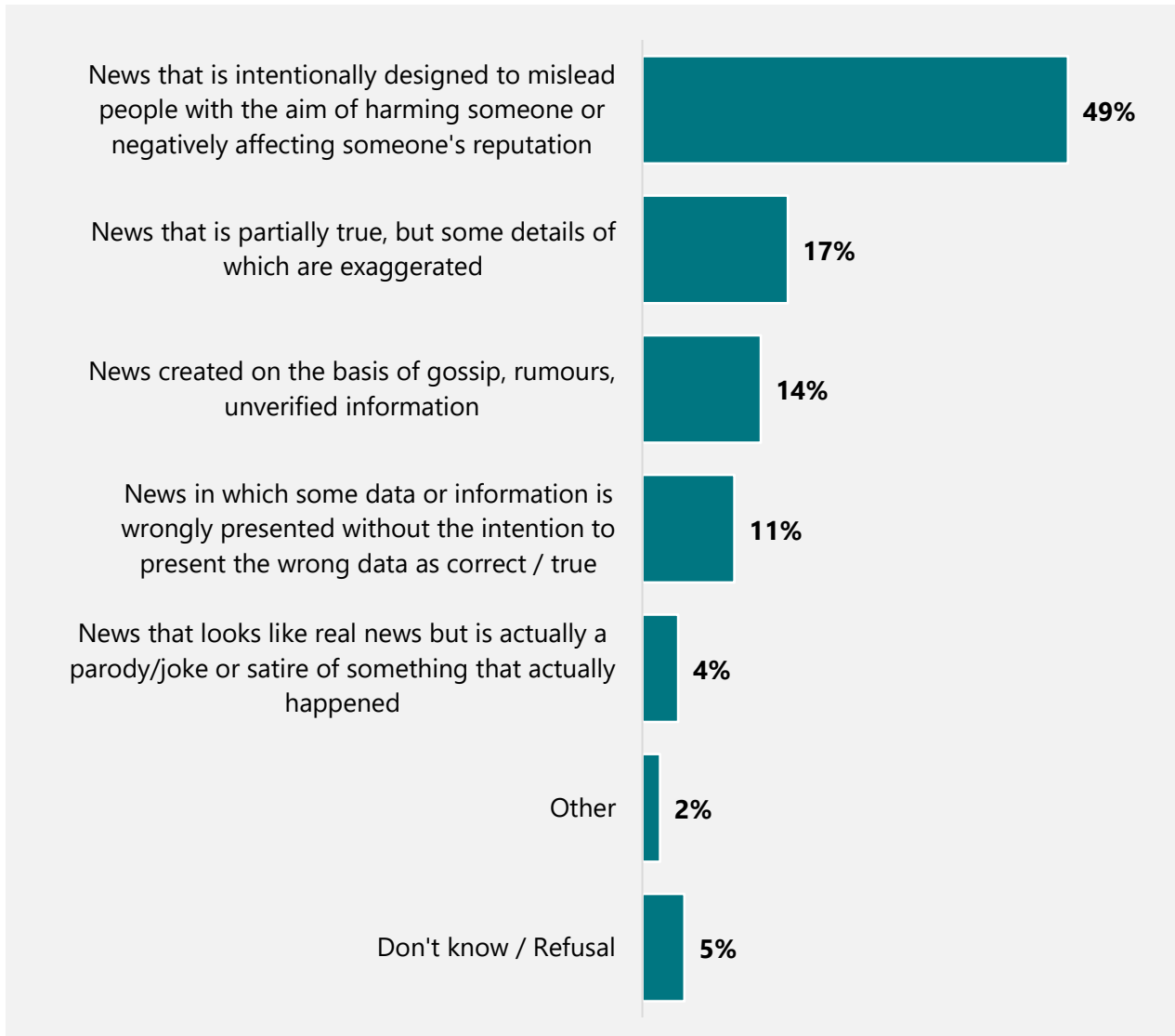
**Almost one in two citizens recognises that “fake news” is designed deliberately to mislead the public and inflict damage to someone (49%) (Figure 3.5.7).** However, approximately equal share of them explains fake news differently or can’t define what it is (51%). Other explanations – that fake news is partly true, or that some of their details are just exaggerated (17%), that this news is created based on rumours and unverified information (14%), or that some false information was accidentally included in this news (11%) – are mentioned almost equally.

Correct definition of “fake news”, as deliberately created and launched news, is much more likely to be given by citizens aged between 30 and 44 years (58%). On the other hand, the youngest, from 16 to 29 years old, are a lot more likely to think that fake news is just accidental and unintentional (15%), than total population of citizens of Montenegro aged between 16 and 75 years (11%).

**Figure 3.5.7.** Citizens' understanding of fake news

Question: What do you think is "fake news"?

Base: Total target population



Perceptions of fake news generally involve one of three components: intentional misinformation, deliberate blending with the truth, and targeted influence on the public.



Excluding the oldest group (65 to 75 years), whose understanding of fake news is less complete, similar elements in the perception of "fake news" are noticed among other age groups:

- Fake news is seen as **intentionally disseminated**.
  - Authors and sources that publish such news are considered aware of their role in spreading lies or deceiving the public.
- The lies in these news articles are "**cleverly**" intertwined with factual elements to make them appear credible.
  - News is structured in a manner that, even when its falseness is apparent, it still seems like it could contain some truth. This effect is frequently achieved by interweaving false information with actual facts.
- Fake news is disseminated **to achieve a specific goal or influence that is in the interest of the author/source**.

However, it's important to note that a "**comprehensive**" understanding of the concept of fake news is not widely spread. The elements that make up the perception of fake news can vary, with some elements dominating in the understanding of some participants and others in the understanding of others.

*„It looks like half-truths. People attach importance to it; it is the direct intention of some group that wants to either attract attention or divert it from something - security, geopolitics, specific events.“ – Man, 30-60 years old*

*„Sometimes it's news that claims facts that are untrue, and it usually does this with the aim of convincing people. **This sets it apart from clickbait**, because people simply believe in the falsehood, which affects their behavior.“ – Woman, 19-25 years old*

*„Avoiding the truth or twisting the truth. When it's true but not entirely.“ – Woman, 16-18 years old*

## Clickbait content is recognized by sensational headlines and texts that do not deliver what the headline promises.



A similar pattern is observed in the understanding of the term "clickbait." Among the oldest participants, besides those who lack a clear understanding of this terminology, there are individuals who haven't encountered this concept previously. Reasons for this may include less reliance on online media as a source of information or their lower proficiency in computer and internet skills. Regardless of the causes, **older citizens may be less skilled in recognizing this form manipulation in the media, and as a result, they may be more prone to believe in inaccurate information.**

For other participants, **the concept of "clickbait" is recognizable through "bombastic" and "sensationalistic" headlines.** Typically, these headlines provoke surprise, contain information that is hard to believe, or have a dramatic tone. **However, the content of the news usually does not match what the headline "announces"** (builds expectations that are not met).

Indeed, participants recognize the "expectations" created by the headline as a mechanism for attracting clicks. Unlike fake news, **clickbait content appears more obvious to participants, making it easier for them to identify it as unreliable information.**

The meaning of this type of news is contained in its name – **clickbait**, attracting clicks for popularity (whether through the number of visits, likes, shares). Although **there is an idea that sources using clickbait gain some form of benefit/profit, there is a lack of understanding of the specific mechanism by which this is achieved.**

Risks/consequences of clickbait articles can be recognized in public behavior, especially if the audience does not recognize that it is clickbait but instead accepts the information as true. **Due to the dramatic elements present in the headlines, this news can cause concern and panic among those who take them seriously.** Besides the impact on the public, the reputation of individuals mentioned in clickbait news may be compromised.

*„It's something you get used to, especially from certain portals. The headline is like 'sadness', 'terrible family tragedy' – 'everyone is sobbing', you click on the link and it's about a dog dying.“ – Man, 19-25 years old*

*„They earn from those clicks, when someone clicks, they get money.“ – Man, 16-18 years old*

*„This is due to popularity - it gives them an advantage, they have more traffic - more people, for example, opened the news on one portal than on another, and someone who is not informed will rely on what has more views, so he thinks it is reliable.“ – Woman, 30-60 years old*

*„Somebody puts out what they want, interprets it how they like.“ – Man, 65-75 years old*

*„It refers to advertising stuff, the more clicks they have, they probably have some material benefit.“ – Woman, 65-75 years old*

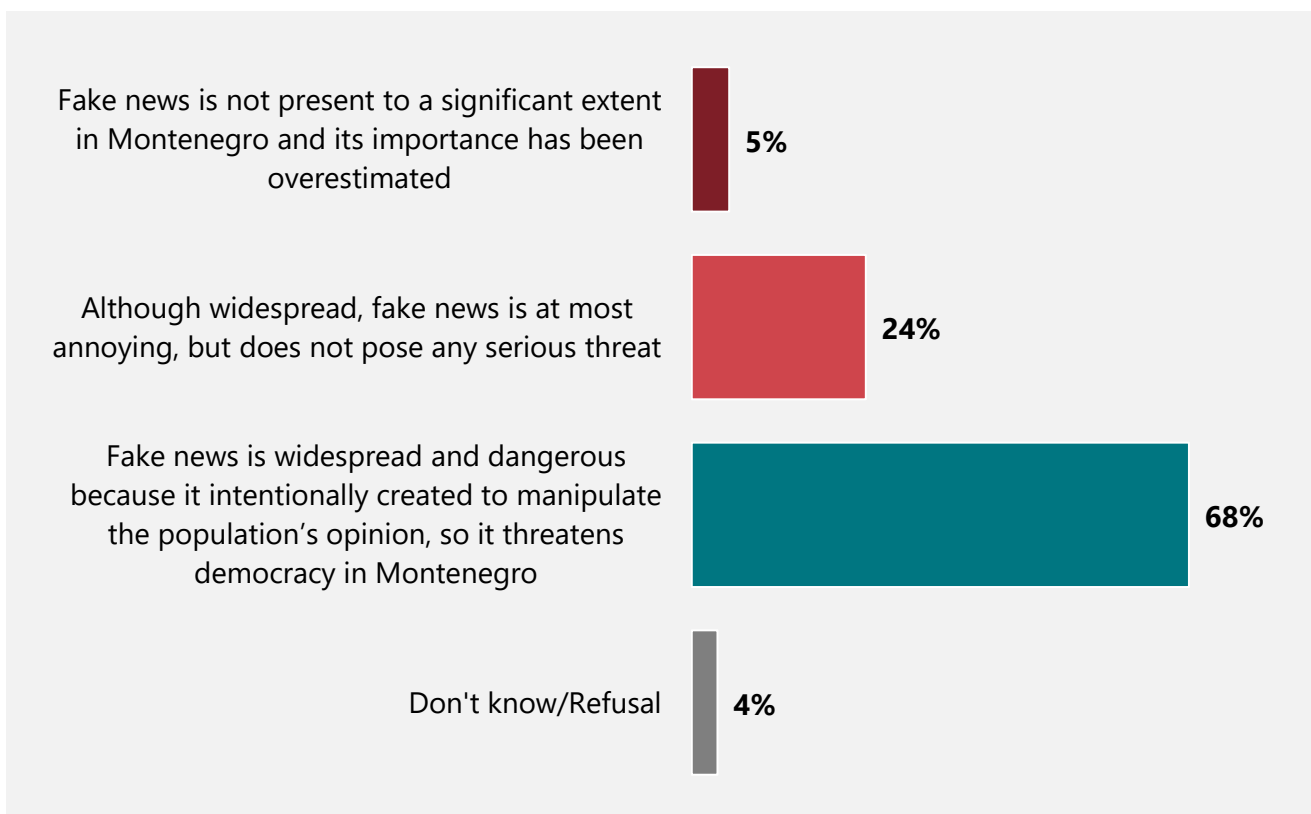
Just over two-thirds of the population aged 16 to 75 in Montenegro believe that fake news is currently a serious problem that can threaten democracy in the country (68%) (Figure 3.5.8). One-quarter of them believe that although widespread, fake news is not as dangerous as it is annoying (24%), while 5% of citizens completely minimize the problem of fake news.

The view that fake news is an overestimated problem is more common among residents of the southern part of the country (8%). Additionally, citizens who trust the media are more likely to see fake news as a nuisance rather than a serious threat (28%).

**Figure 3.5.8.** Perception of the prevalence and impact of fake news in Montenegro

*Question: In your opinion, how serious a problem is fake news in Montenegro currently? Please choose statement which best matches your opinion.*

*Base: Total target population*



Identifying fake news in the media is a serious challenge, particularly given the severity of the consequences it can have.



Although there is some **understanding of the key "components" of fake news, strategies for recognizing fake news are not widely spread**. Apart from the idea that "shocking" news should be given time (an opportunity to be debunked), a few other approaches are mentioned:

- **User comments on the post or news.** These comments may include denials from eyewitnesses, as well as logical arguments that cast doubt on the news's credibility (such as providing convincing rational reasons that challenge the reliability of the news).
- **Source analysis.** An especially important indicator ("red flag") that may suggest fake news is the **absence of data about the author or source of the news**.
  - **The style in which the news is written or presented can also raise suspicion**, although this is not generally adopted as an "active" verification strategy. For example, the use of expressions that suggest "reserve" (cautiously, as opposed to decisive and unequivocal reporting, such as "As if", "It seems", "Could be") leaves room for the source to "disclaim responsibility" if the news later proves to be false.

**The prevailing impression is that fake news can have more severe consequences compared to clickbait content.** This "harmful potential" partly stems from the lack a foolproof method for verifying fake news (or a lack of awareness about such methods) and the challenge of distinguishing them from "genuine news". Observed consequences of fake news, as previously mentioned in the context of negative media impacts on the public, often include inducing fear and panic among citizens.

*„Many times, there are comments below the news, where someone is on the spot or better informed, and from those comments, you can draw conclusions. Sometimes someone who was there on the scene shares something...“ – Man, 30-60 years old*

*„If some false news comes out, how can I verify whether it's true or not? Personally, I can't know; only when I hear it a few days later..“ – Woman, 65-75 years old*

*„Once a person gains trust in a particular editorial office, they may not feel the need to check their news regularly.“ – Man, 65-75 years old*

**According to their self-assessment, the majority of residents in Montenegro aged 16 to 75 believe they possess competencies for critical evaluation of media content. Approximately three-quarters of them are confident that they can recognize propaganda content (79%), fake news (76%), and assess which actors benefit from the publication of certain information in the media (74%) (Figure 3.5.9).** Citizens are slightly less confident in their ability to distinguish between

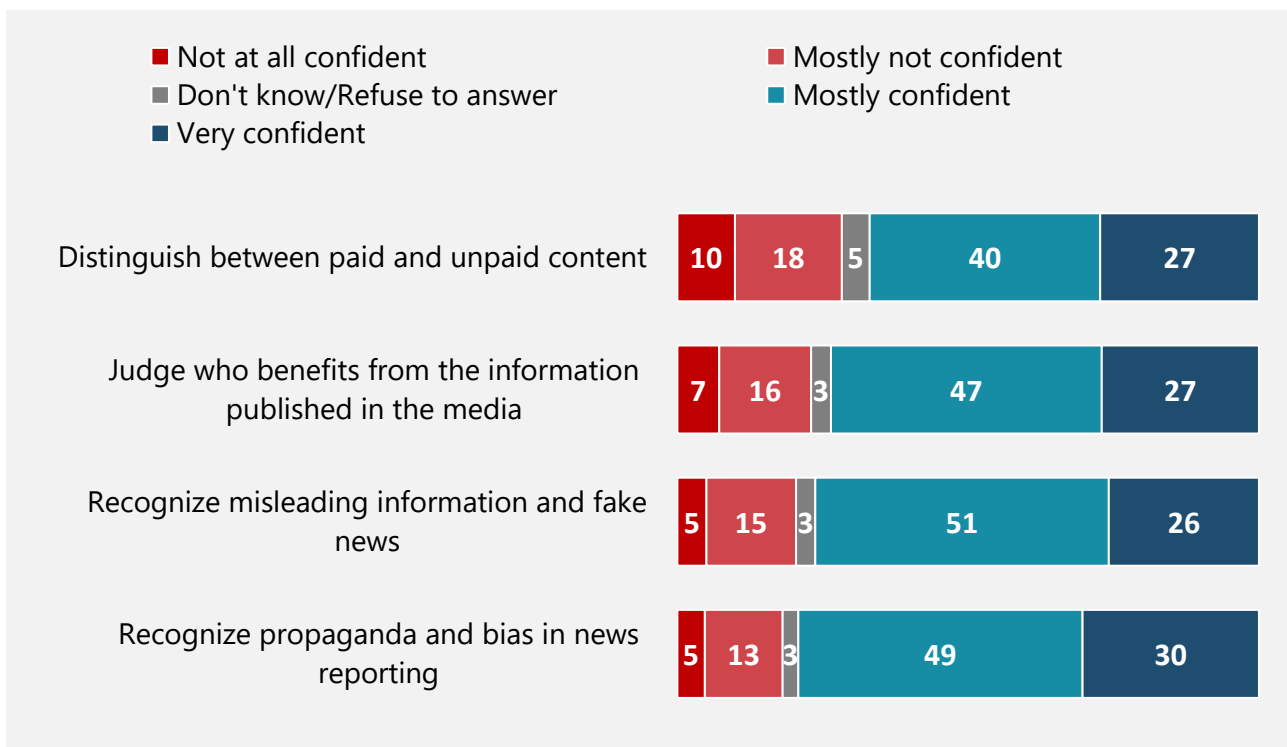
paid/sponsored and unpaid content, but still, **more than two-thirds believe they wouldn't have a problem with this** (67%).

Citizens with lower levels of education, as well as women and those with the lowest household incomes, are less confident in their ability to recognize propaganda (37%, 22% and 30% respectively) and the actors interested in certain information being published in the media (40%, 29% and 33%, respectively). Additionally, citizens aged 45 to 59 are more likely than average to express uncertainty about their ability to recognizing fake news (26%), while those over 65 have less confidence that they could identify paid content (39%).

**Figure 3.5.9.** Self-assessment of competences for evaluating media content

Question: How confident are you in your ability to...?

Base: Total target population



However, **when specifically asked how they would verify the accuracy in case they found contradictory information on the internet, just slightly more than a quarter (27%) mentioned that they would analyze the characteristics of the websites where they found the information** – who is behind the published information and the website, what is the website's purpose, why the information is published on it, etc. (Figure 3.5.10). **Approximately the same percentage would seek the opinion of experts in the relevant field (26%), while one in five would give preference to information they more frequently encounter when searching the Internet (20%).**

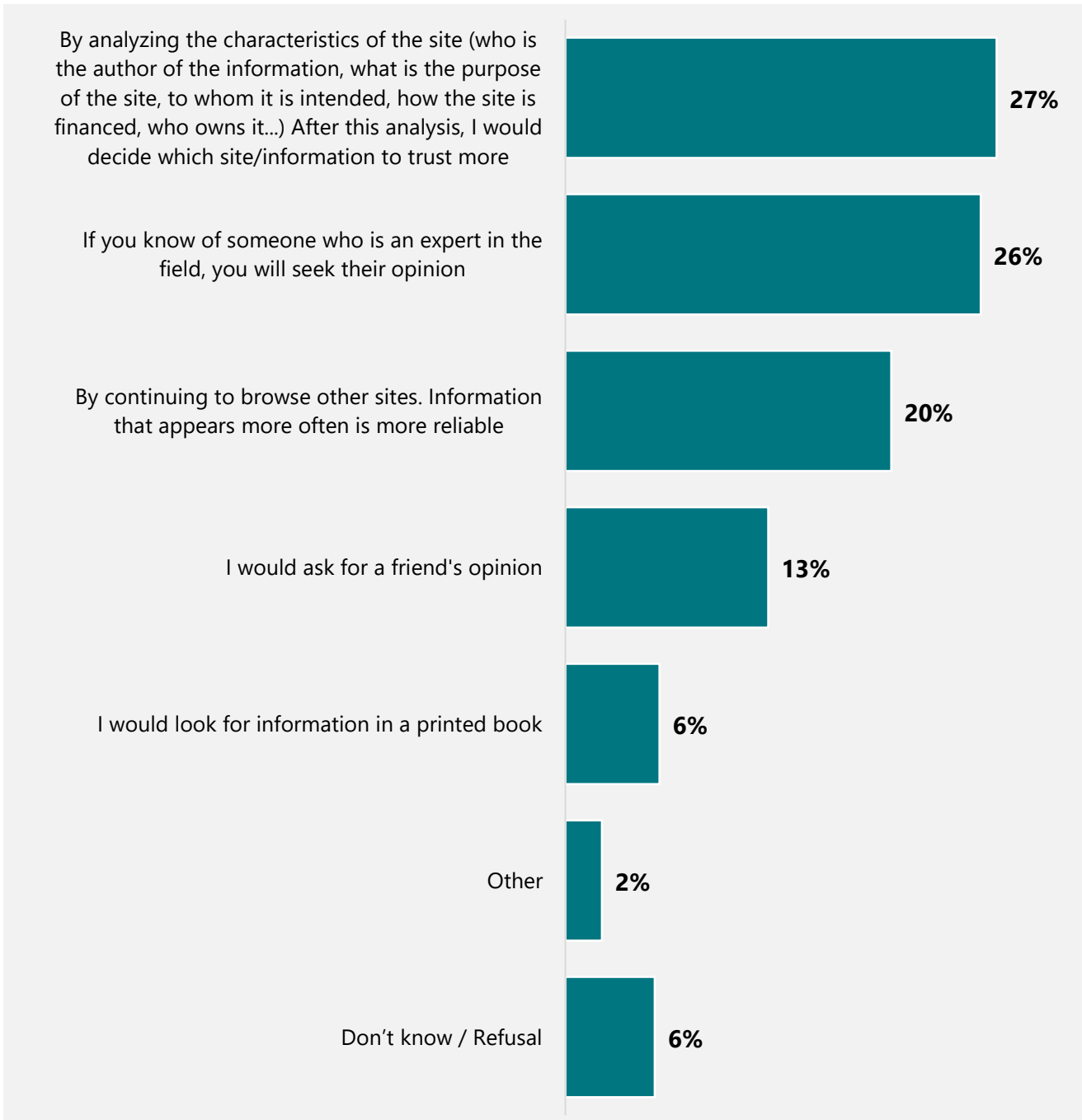
The youngest age group, from 16 to 29 years old, more often than average, indicated that they would consider information they frequently find in various online sources to be accurate (27%), while those over 60 more often mentioned that they would seek advice from friends on this matter (20%).

Citizens with a high level of education, as well as those with the highest household incomes, significantly more often stated that they would resort to analyzing the websites where they found information (33% and 34%, respectively).

**Figure 3.5.10.** Approaches employed by citizens to verify the reliability of online Information

*Question: Imagine that you are browsing the Internet and come across different information about something that interests you. Which of the following would you use to check which one is reliable/correct?*

*Base: Total target population*





Personal interest in the topic or doubt about the truth of the news is usually the driver for "more detailed" information verification, so there are significant individual differences in this regard.



**Verification strategies, although known to participants, are not part of their "usual" or "everyday" information-seeking habits.** These strategies are often "activated" only when there is a **personal interest in a topic or when the news itself raises suspicion** ("It seems untrue"). Besides **analyzing the characteristics of media outlets**, focus group participants, contrary to the findings of quantitative research, report that they **often rely on searching and comparing multiple online sources, opting for information that appears most frequently in them.**

**Other strategies used in the search for credible information include:**

- **Comparing multiple sources:**
  - Typically involves checking several online media and comparing how information is presented in them..
  - Involves familiarity with specific media outlets, including recognizing the political views and preferences that may be present in their reporting. This is crucial for understanding bias and how these media outlets can "skew the picture" to favor certain political actors.
- **Searching for the primary source of news:**
  - It is checked where the information "originally came from." If it comes from a trusted source, there is a higher chance that it is true.
  - It can serve as a way to deal with "copy-paste" journalism, instead of accepting news as true just because multiple sources have published it.
- **Checking the author:** A verification method associated more with local media/news sources. In smaller communities, there is often a clearer perception of journalists active in that community, based on an already established reputation. In such cases, the author of becomes important for assessing the news truthfulness. This approach is not as pronounced when it comes to national news.

More "advanced" verification strategies involve checking news through the websites of state institutions (.me/.gov) or even verifying the authenticity of photographs using specialized online tools. However, there is no clear picture of how widely they are used among participants.

*„Checking from multiple sources, not just one, and thinking about what is stated here as pure fact, what is interpretation, and what are verifiable facts.“ – Woman, 19-25 years old*

*„I approach every breaking news with a dose of caution. When someone publishes it first, others will publish it quickly, and then there will be multiple versions.“ – Man, 30-60 years old*

*„As time goes by, I don't buy into it right away, and now I don't believe so easily.“ – Man, 30-60 years old*

*„In some of our newspapers, I look at the authors. Sometimes their quality control is so poor that they make spelling mistakes like children, and then their credibility diminishes. This is only for local media outlets; in our small community, everything is known, and news spreads quickly among the people.“ – Man, 19-25 years old*

*„For local things, I would look at who is the author of the news. Likewise, I would definitely ask my acquaintances, mother, aunt if they've heard anything about it.“ – Woman, 19-25 years old*

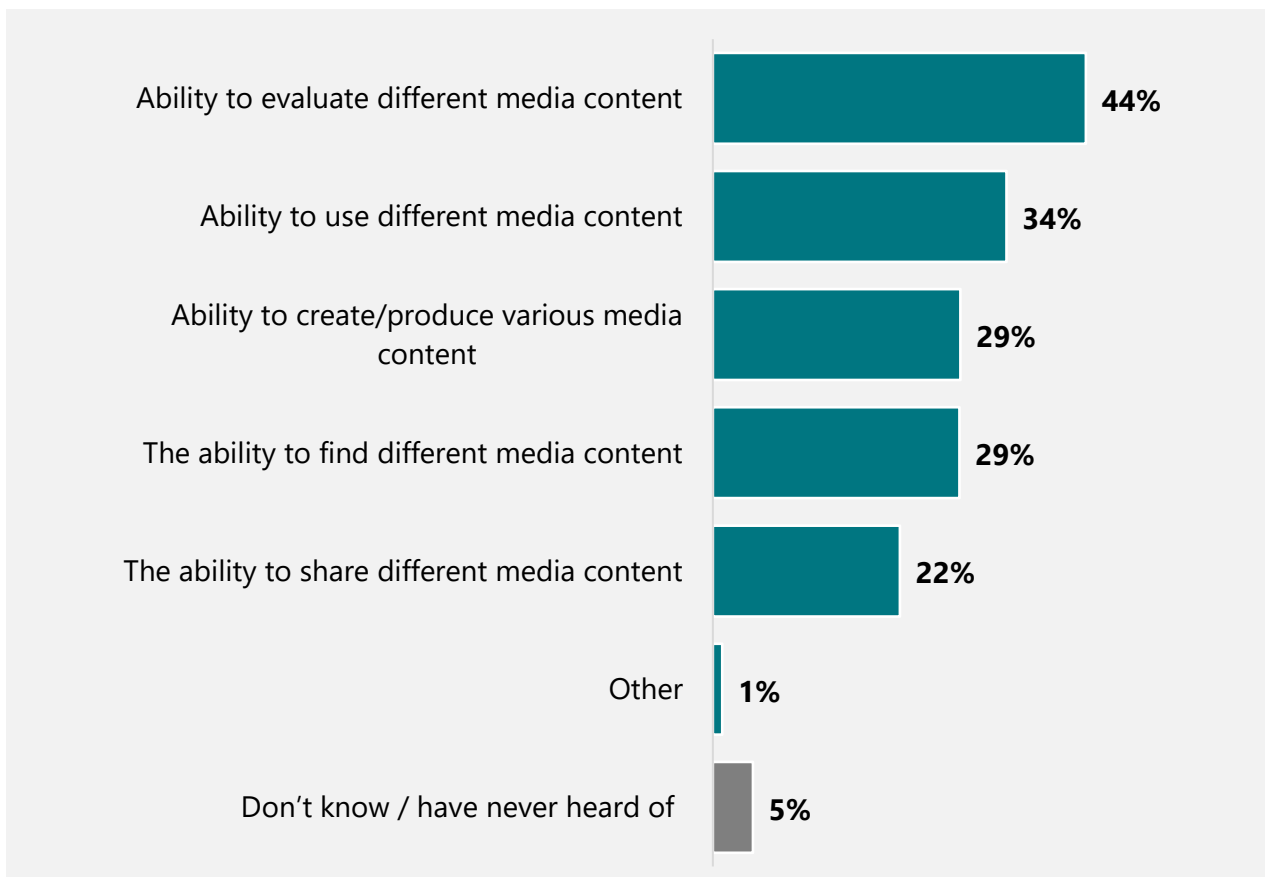
## 3.6. Attitudes towards media literacy

Citizens primarily associate media literacy with the ability to evaluate various media content, which is a central competency of media literacy for more than two-fifths of them (44%) (Figure 3.6.1). For one-third, media literacy involves the ability to use different media content (34%). An equal proportion, more than a quarter of them, believe that media literacy is the ability to create media content (29%) or to find this content (29%). Finally, 22% mention that media literacy includes the ability to share media content.

However, it's important to note that only 9% of citizens recognize that media literacy encompasses all five of these abilities, while as many as two-thirds associate only one of these abilities with media literacy (64%).

**Figure 3.6.1.** Understanding media literacy competencies

Question: What is media literacy in your opinion?; Multiple answers  
Base: Total target population



Citizens aged 16 to 29 more frequently than the average explain media literacy as the ability to find various media content (36%), and the ability to share this content (28%). On the other hand, those aged 45 and older more often compared to the average state that they don't know what media literacy is or that they haven't heard of the term (8%).

### The comprehension of media literacy appears to be somewhat more precise among younger participants when compared to elders.



The central theme that often arises in the context of media literacy is related to the **discovery of truth, which involves the critical evaluation of information obtained from diverse channels**. Although to a lesser extent, **knowledge of the technical aspects and ways of using technology** (such as mobile phones and computers) **and content** (onlinemedia, internet search, social networks) is also recognized as part of media literacy.

At a spontaneous level, it is noticed that understanding of media literacy is somewhat widespread among participants. However, even among those who are familiar with this concept, a complete understanding often lacks (usually only certain aspects of media literacy are mentioned, with the belief that this explains media literacy exhaustively).

Analyzing the explanations provided by different age groups, **it is observed that the key determinants of media literacy gradually diminish as we move from younger to older age groups**. This trend of "distancing" becomes particularly pronounced in the oldest age group (65-75 years). This group is characterized not only by the less frequent recognition of relevant components, but also by often mention of some elements that do not reflect the essence of media literacy. Instead, their understanding seems to be very broad (encompassing aspects such as education, spelling proficiency, or general knowledge in fields like politics and economics).

*„It's probably knowing how to use a **mobile phone, computers, the tools we use when searching for information**. Also, knowing how **to distinguish information we can trust from disinformation**.“ – Woman, 16-18 years old*

*„The ability to **critically judge** the media content we receive, not just to 'take' the information but **to analyze it, to check from multiple sources**, not to blindly believe.“ – Man, 19-25 years old*

*„We know how to use the internet – to understand that the internet has both advantages and disadvantages, **that you can compare and search for different sources of news**, and based on that to form a picture of events.“ – Woman, 19-25 years old*

*„To be able to interpret events correctly, professionally, and objectively, **to gain the trust of the people**, that, to me, is media literacy.“ – Man, 30-60 years old*

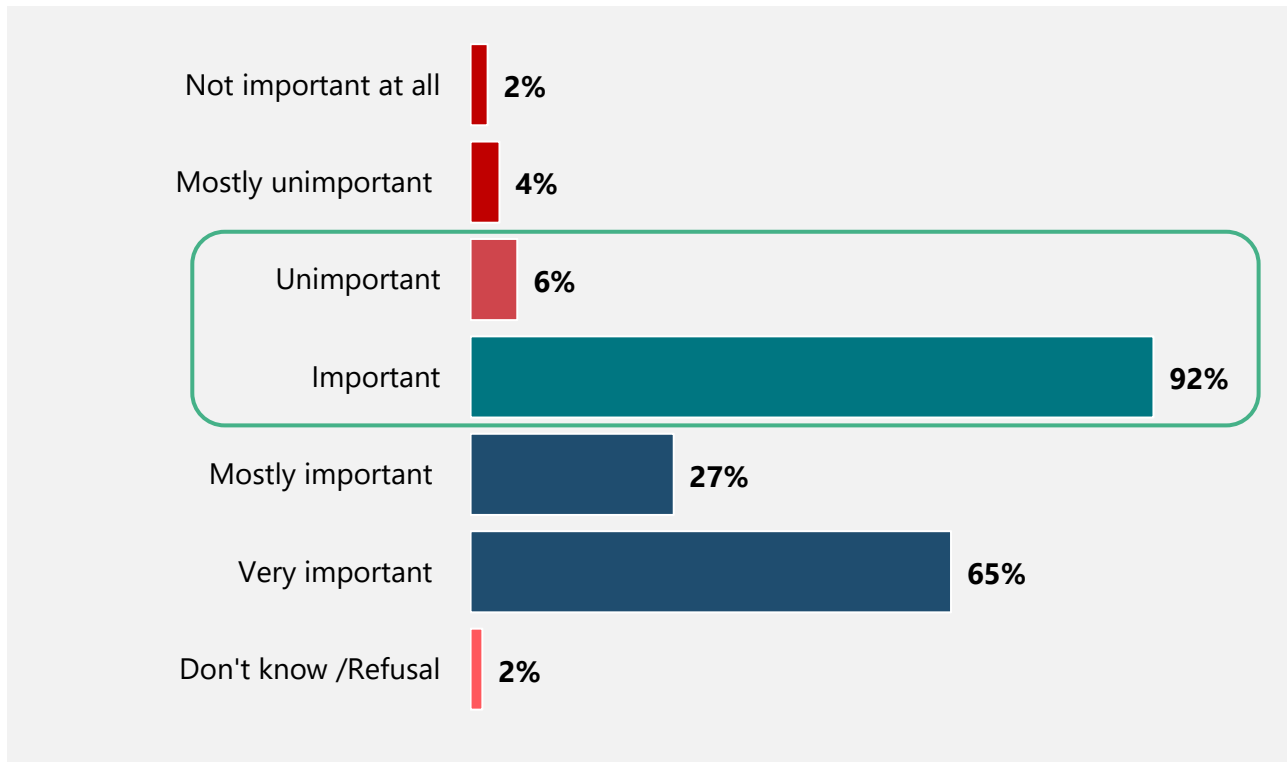
*„**To know everything, to be educated in all fields, politics, economics, journalism** – to be able to follow and know the same as those who disseminate information and to participate in it.“ – Man, 65-75 years old*

Among citizens, there is almost unanimous agreement that media literacy is important for the people of Montenegro (92%) (Figure 3.6.2). However, within certain subpopulations, there is a slightly higher prevalence of the view that media literacy is not important – among citizens with lower levels of education (12%) and those who do not trust the media (9%).

**Figure 3.6.2.** Assessment of the importance of media literacy

Question: How important do you think media literacy is for the general public in Montenegro?

Base: Total target population

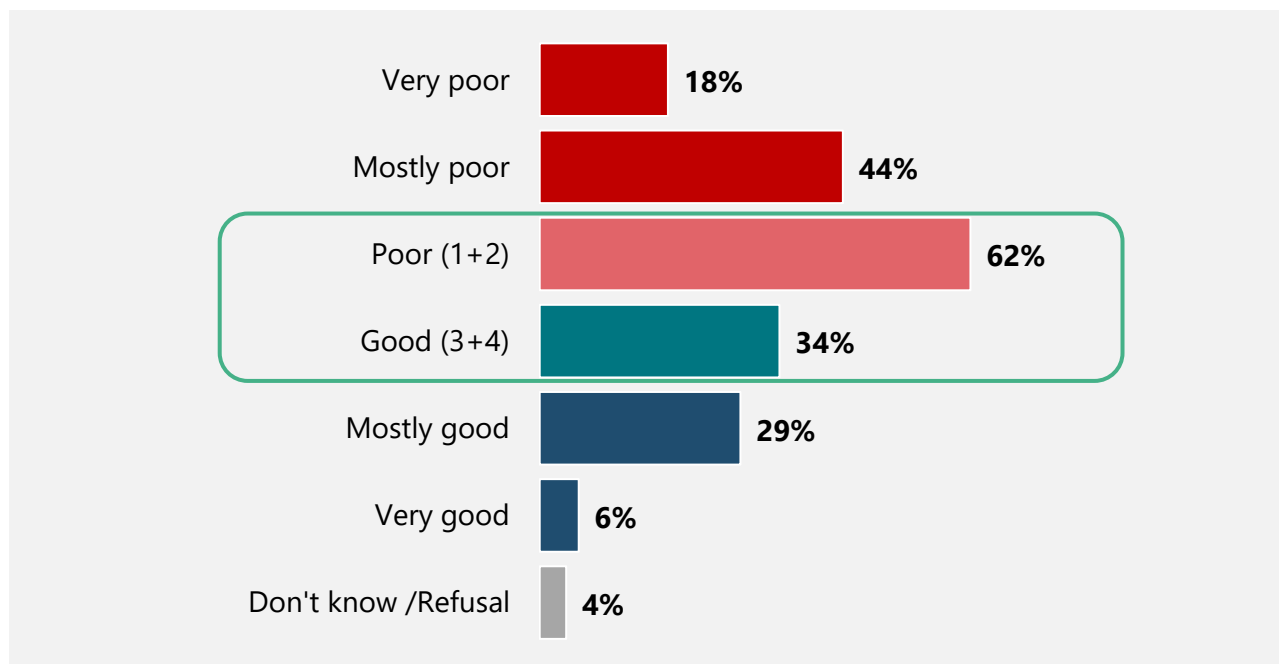


Close to two-thirds of citizens rate the media literacy of Montenegrin citizens as poor (62%), while around one-third believe it is mostly or very good (34%) (Figure 3.6.3). Citizens with secondary or lower levels of education, as well as those who trust the media, are more likely to evaluate the media literacy of the population as satisfactory.

**Figure 3.6.3.** Assessment of the level of media literacy of citizens of Montenegro

Question: How would you rate the overall media literacy of citizens of Montenegro?

Base: Total target population



There is a need for improving the media literacy of citizens, with a particular focus on different age groups and their specific challenges in recognizing and evaluating information coming through the media.



When considering media literacy in the country in general, it is observed that there is significant room for improvement. Additionally, **specific groups have been identified that would particularly benefit from an improvement in media literacy:**

- **Older adults and elders (30 - 75) recognize that the youngest (starting from elementary school) are at the greatest risk of accepting false information.** They attribute this to the **lack of knowledge**, especially in areas such as political or economic history, and **a lack of understanding of the media landscape in Montenegro** (political polarization and the image of different media outlets).
- On the other hand, **younger individuals (16-25 years old) identify older people (65+) as a vulnerable group.** Young people point out the **lack of technical skills** in these older age groups, such as using the internet, smartphones, online media, and social networks. They also highlight that older people often **lack a critical perspective** on the news, and sometimes place too much trust in the media in general.

*„Especially young people and children who have more and more access to the phone and social networks, but also older people who often have a lower levels of online literacy. They don't have the impression that that portal with big pictures and titles is not trustworthy.” – Woman, 19-25 years old*

*„It takes experience and years (to recognize lies). Mi ovdje koji razgovaramo smo zreli ljudi... they (young people) can be victims of fake news.” – Man, 30-60 years old*

„They (older people) believe in everything. Maybe because in their time, false news and the like were not so widespread.“ – Man, 16-18 years old

„Whatever they hear, they believe blindly. They don't realize that anyone can publish information nowadays. Because they may not know how to navigate the Internet, they tend to accept what's presented to them, as it's more convenient than conducting searching for information.“ – Woman, 16-18 years old

### Self-assessment of media literacy, even among groups identified as critical, is often overestimated, which can be an obstacle to its improvement.



Despite the awareness of the need for the development of media literacy in the country, **introspection regarding one's own abilities and media literacy reveals that even groups identified as "critical" - the youngest and the oldest - express high confidence in their media literacy**, believing that they can already recognize the truth in the media quite well.

This indicates the possibility that **high self-confidence in one's own media literacy (lack of self-awareness or clear criteria for evaluation) could be a barrier to its further improvement** because citizens may not recognize the need for additional education or changing their habits. The barrier to the development of media literacy may be rooted in this perception - *"If I can find the truth, there is no need to improve media literacy."*

This obstacle is perhaps best illustrated by the example of the oldest age group (65-75 years), who often believe that they understand the media well and are also prone to overestimating their abilities to recognize the truth in the news. This trend persists despite the noted deficiency in understanding the distinction between fake news and clickbait news, as well as the employment of less diverse strategies and less prevalent habits of verifying information from different sources in this older age group.

„For the things I'm interested in, I can tell if the news is true; I don't know what interests me anymore. I pass everything superficially. Only economics still interests me.“ – Man, 65-75 years old

„Whoever is regularly informed recognizes these everyday lies, based on their content and previous events." Only if we are constantly informed.“ – Woman, 30-60 years old

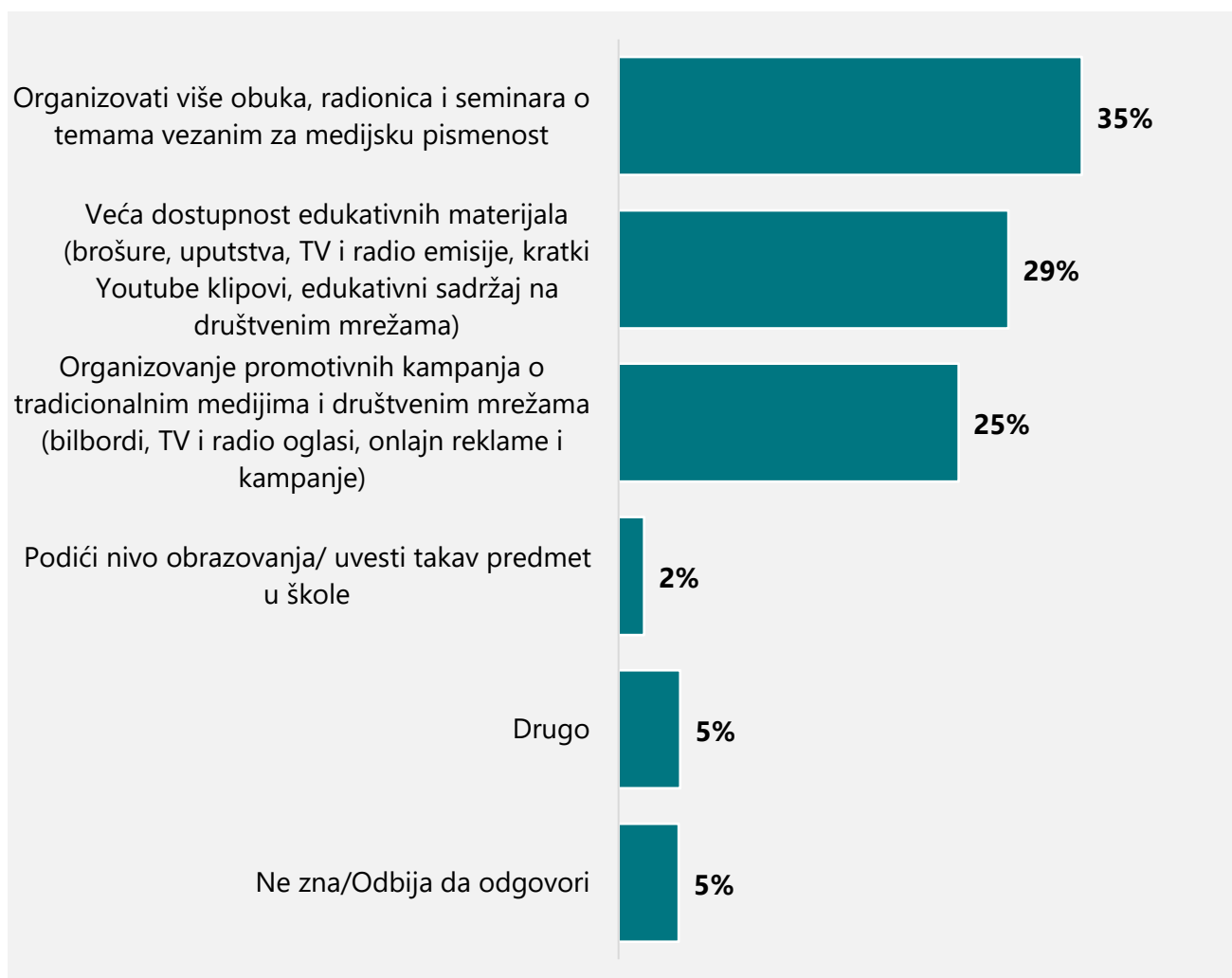
„It depends on age (media literacy). Younger people are really well-informed, up to 30-35 years, while older people are not very informed.“ – Man, 16-18 years old

**As the most important measure for improving media literacy in the country, education of the population stands out** - over a third is advocating for organized trainings (35%), more than a quarter emphasize need for greater availability of educational materials (29%), while an additional 2% spontaneously mention that media literacy should be part of formal education (Figure 3.6.4). Finally, a quarter believe that it would be most important to organize promotional campaigns about traditional media and social networks (25%).

**Figure 3.6.4.** Measures to improve the media literacy of citizens of Montenegro

Question: What do you think is the most important thing to do to improve media literacy of citizens in Montenegro?

Base: Those who rated the media literacy of citizens of Montenegro as very poor, mostly good to mostly good (91% of the target population)



**The majority of citizens, over 80%, recognize that strengthening media literacy among the population is the best way to combat fake news** (Figure 3.6.5). Citizens with lower levels of education (28%), those who do not trust the media (18%), and those with the lowest household incomes (19%) slightly more often do not share this view.

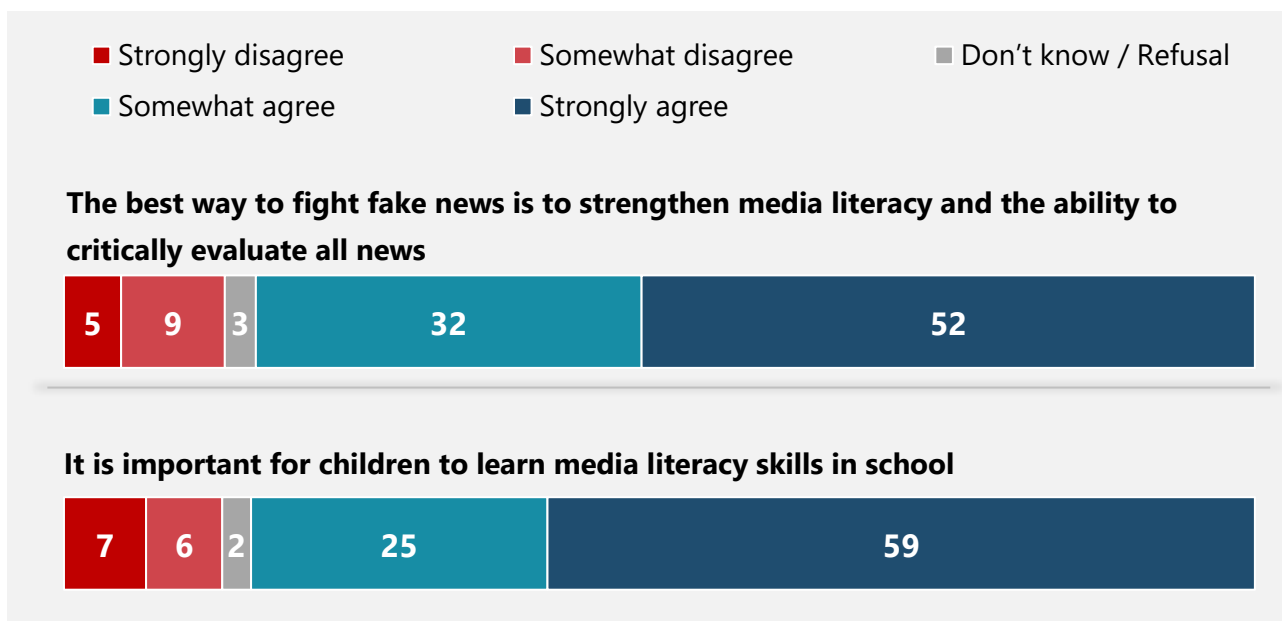
**Furthermore, over 80% of citizens support the idea that formal education for children should include media literacy skills.** However, men disagree with this somewhat more often (17%).



**Figure 3.6.5.** Perception of the importance of media literacy

Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 means Strongly disagree and 4 means Strongly agree.

Base: Total target population



Public education on recognizing fake news and the role of individuals in this process, with an emphasis on incorporating media literacy into school subjects, appears to be crucial in addressing the problem of fake news.



When it comes to combating fake news, participants recognize the importance of educating the broader public and the significant role individuals play in this process. An especially effective approach would involve "exercises" and practical examples of "deconstructing" specific fake news.

However, it is noted that individual efforts have limited power in combating fake news. Additionally, there is a lack of personal initiative to report suspicious content. Therefore, it is considered important to raise citizens' awareness on the importance of applying various "techniques" for recognizing fake news (in addition to informing and acquainting them with fact-checking methods/tools).

Given the recognition that media literacy will become even more important for future generations, participants agree that formal education is an appropriate environment for raising awareness on this issue. Media literacy as an elective subject in schools is seen as a suitable solution, and such a subject is viewed as equally important as "civic education" or "informatics."

„Media literacy for children should be introduced in schools. My daughters just finished the 5th grade, and I see what's available to them in life, and they've only just started learning about computer science in the 5th grade..." – Woman, 30-60 years old

„Well, I think it's necessary. If we have a subject called civic education, why shouldn't we have a subject for media literacy?" – Woman, 30-60 years old

**While participants acknowledge the necessity of competent authorities in this field, they have not clearly recognized the existence of systemic regulation through institutions.**



**Although participants believe in the necessity of institutions or organizations that regulate the media space, systematic regulation through these bodies is not clearly perceived.** There is a belief that "some institutions must exist," but the responsible authorities are not clearly identified. Given the presence of a certain order in the media, participants believe that government authorities, such as the Prosecutor's office, get involved in cases when the situation escalates, such as causing panic or intentionally damaging someone's reputation (slander).

The only source known to participants as actively verifying the accuracy of news is "raskrinkavanje.me." This online media outlet is perceived as the closest equivalent to fact-checking agencies/media.

Participants also mention entities such as **the Agency for Electronic Media, Radio-difuzni centar, and the Media Union of Montenegro**. However, the effects or work of these bodies/organizations are not clearly recognized by focus group participants. Therefore, it is concluded that a higher level of transparency regarding the activities of these bodies, which are expected to be involved in the "fight against fake news" and the verification of the accuracy of media content, is necessary.

„The reporting options mostly serve as dust collectors. They never read those reporting options... they will just dismiss it and look at you as if you're crazy..." – Man, 16-18 godina

„Well, there should be some kind of Radio-difuzni centar, who is responsible for it... As we can see, they are not doing well." – Man, 30-60 godina

„Any regulatory bodies that we have, and I'm sure we have them, for media control. They exist, I mean, I'm not really familiar, I know it as a concept." – Woman, 19-25 godina

„They have REM (in Serbia), and here we have the equivalent agency - **the Agency for Electronic Media**, I think that's the agency that should deal with fake news. It's not mentioned in the public, people are poorly informed about who works there, who is the director of the Agency, and what their responsibilities are. From the name, we don't know what they do. Unfortunately, here it all comes down to these informal sources like **Raskrinkavanje**. It's not clear who should be dealing with this." – Man, 19-25 godina

**For various programs of cultural institutions/organizations, over half or more of citizens aged 16 to 75 report that they haven't visited them in the past 12 months** (Figure 3.6.6). Furthermore,

approximately one-fifth of citizens have not attended any of the listed cultural events or institutions within the past year (specifically, 22% have not visited museums, cinemas, theaters, libraries, or exhibitions). The least frequently visited cultural institutions are libraries and theaters, which have been visited by approximately two out of five citizens in the past year (38% and 41%, respectively). Exhibitions of artistic works, museums, and cinemas have been visited by slightly more citizens, around 45%. However, when interpreting data on cultural event attendance, it's important to consider how physically and financially accessible these events are to the citizens of Montenegro.

- The proportion of those who have not visited theaters in the past year is significantly higher among the oldest citizens (60+), residents of the northern part of Montenegro, citizens with secondary or lower levels of education, and those with the lowest household incomes..
- Similarly, citizens older than 45, with lower educational levels and the lowest household incomes, more often report that they have not visited a cinema at all in the past 12 months. On the other hand, cinemas are more frequently visited by citizens aged 16 to 44, highly educated individuals, employed, students, and citizens from households with the highest incomes (more than 1500 EUR).
- Likewise, art exhibitions and museums are less frequently visited by citizens with secondary and lower levels of education and those from financially disadvantaged households. Additionally, citizens from the northern part of Montenegro more often report that they have not visited museums.

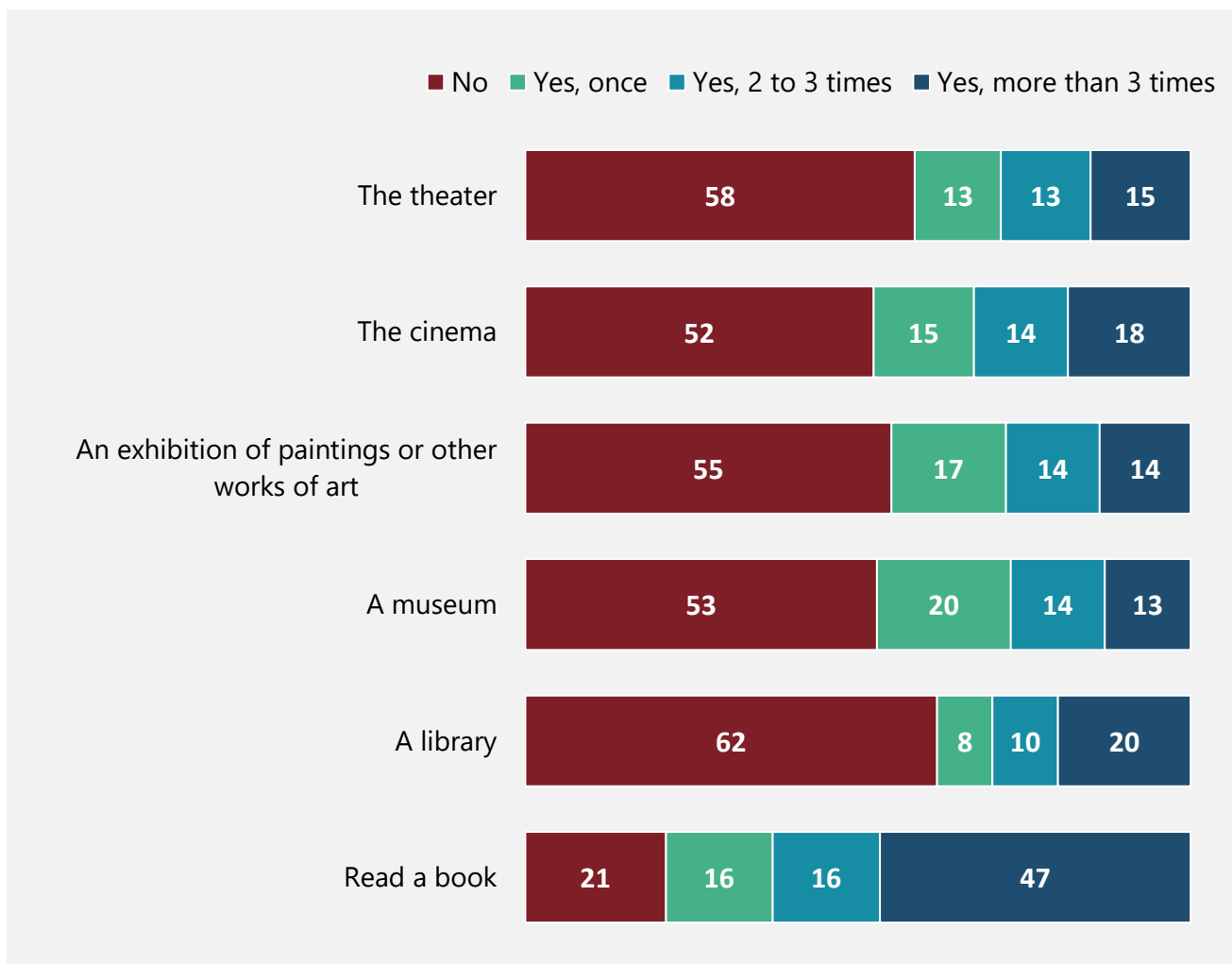
**The situation is somewhat better when it comes to cultural consumption in the private sphere, specifically reading books. More than three-quarters of citizens aged 16 to 75 state that they have read at least one book in the past 12 months, with nearly half of them practicing this more than 3 times** (Figure 3.6.6).

In the population aged 16 to 75, about one-fifth have not read any books in the past year (21%), with this proportion increasing among the elderly 60+ (29%), residents of the northern part of Montenegro (28%), rural areas (28%), those with secondary and lower levels of education (29%), and citizens with less favorable financial status (34%).

**Figure 3.6.6.** Citizens' participation in diverse cultural activities

*In the past 12 months have you been to...?*

*Base: Total target population*



## 3.7. Media Literacy Index of citizens

Based on the data from the research on a representative sample of citizens aged 16-75, a media literacy index was calculated. This index **incorporated the understanding of fake news, media literacy, the internet, and social networks as indicators of objective knowledge**. Furthermore, it included **self-assessment of one's ability to critically evaluate media content**, as well as **self-reported habits related to verifying and sharing media content**.

A more detailed overview of the components and items included in the Media Literacy Index is provided in the Table 3.7.1.

**Tabela 3.7.1.** Media Literacy Index

Component	Items/questions for constructing the index	Min	Maks	Average
Seeking additional information/sources and fact-checking	How often do you seek out alternative sources of information to compare and verify what you have read/heard/seen in the media?	0	4	2.45
	Imagine that you are browsing the Internet and come across different information about something that interests you. Which of the following would you use to check which one is reliable/correct?	0	2	0.87
Sharing unverified and false news	Have you ever shared (either in conversation with others, through messaging or sharing on social networks) a news story that turned out to be false or misleading?	0	1	0.61
	Have you ever shared (either in conversation with others, through messaging or sharing on social networks) a news story without reading/viewing it in its entirety?	0	1	0.72
	Have you ever shared (either in conversation with others, through messaging or sharing on social networks) a news story without verifying its accuracy?	0	1	0.67
Self-assessment of critical media content evaluation skills	How confident are you in your ability to: recognize misleading information and fake news?	0	2	1.02
	How confident are you in your ability to: recognize propaganda and bias in news reporting?	0	2	1.09
	How confident are you in your ability to: distinguish between paid and unpaid content?	0	2	0.94
	How confident are you in your ability to: Judge who benefits from the information published in the media?	0	2	1.01
Understanding the internet	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: When I search through Google, I will get the same results as anyone else on the planet who makes the same search query (uses the same keywords)?	0	1	0.5
	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: Social networks are not financed through advertising, as is the case with television, radio or newspapers	0	1	0.32
Understanding fake news	What do you think is "fake news"?	0	1	0.49
Understanding media literacy	What is media literacy in your opinion?	0	5	1.58
<b>Total</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>12.21</b>

The questions related to knowledge were scored in such a way that a correct answer awarded a certain number of points. The maximum number of points a citizen could receive for answering correctly was 1, except for the question related to understanding media literacy, where the answer could be partially correct, so the number of points one could receive ranged from 0 to 5.

On the other hand, for items related to self-assessment of one's own skills in critical evaluation of media content, the frequency of sharing unverified news, and habits regarding information verification, citizens could receive a different number of points (from 0 to 4) depending on the frequency of desirable or undesirable behavior and the level at which they assessed their skills in critical understanding of media content.

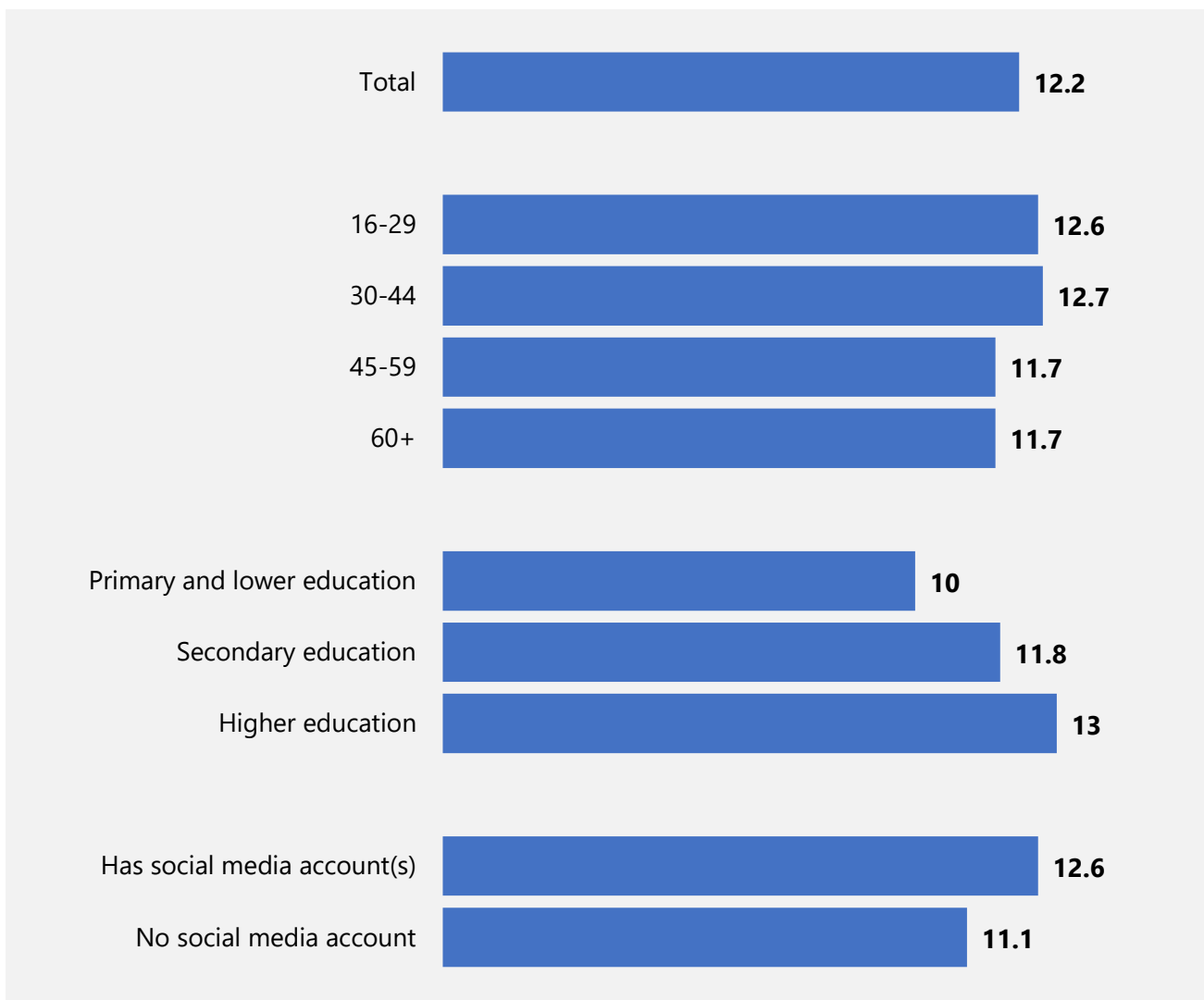
The total score for each citizen was calculated as the sum of points obtained for each item/question included in the Media Literacy Index, ranging from 0 to 25.

**The value of the Media Literacy Index is obtained as the arithmetic mean of individual scores of citizens and amounts to 12.21** (Figure 3.7.1). As expected, this index is somewhat lower among citizens with elementary or lower education (10) compared to citizens with higher education (13). Additionally, citizens who have an account on a social network achieve a slightly higher score on average in terms of media literacy compared to those who do not use social networks.

However, when interpreting the Media Literacy Index, it should be taken into account that most of the questions included in the index are related to self-assessment rather than objective criteria of assessment. Additionally, the data pertains to the population aged 16 to 75 years.

**Figure 3.7.1.** Average media literacy scores among various groups of Montenegrin citizens

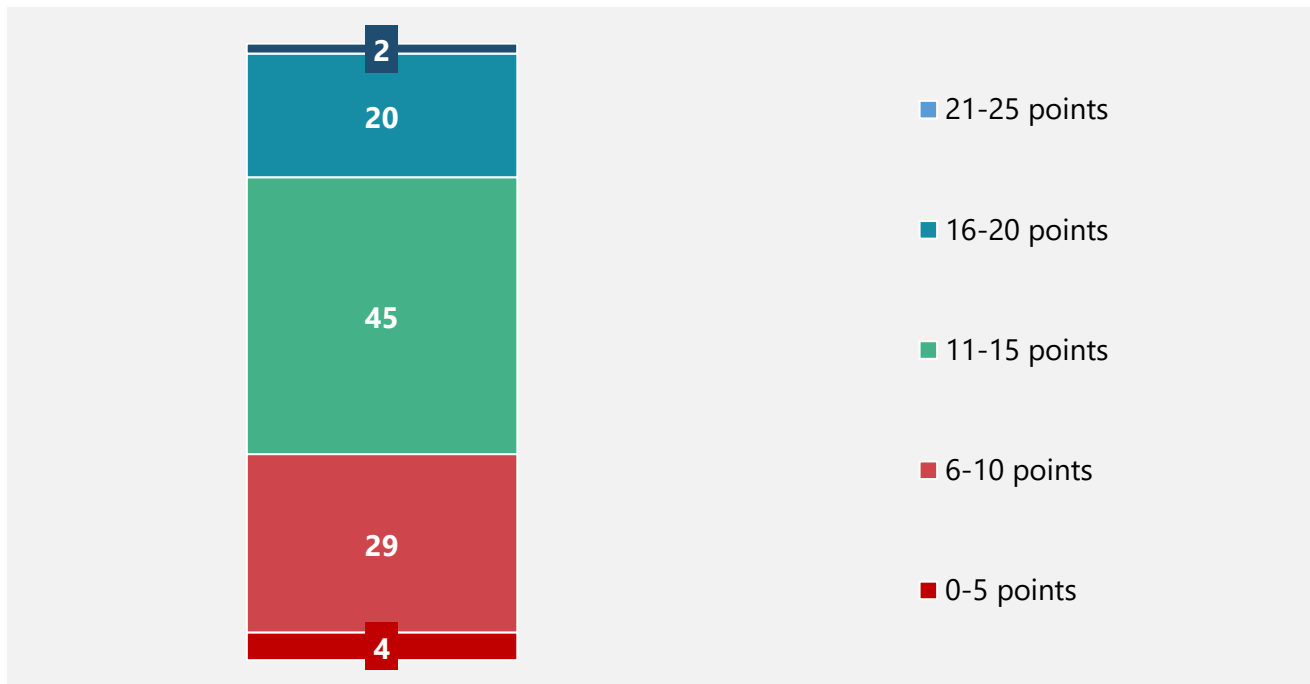
Base: Total target population



It can be observed that **45% of all citizens achieved a total score ranging from 11 to 15 points, indicating a moderate level of media literacy**, while **one-third of citizens have a low level of media literacy** (scoring 10 or less) (Figure 3.7.2). On the other hand, one-fifth of citizens achieved a score ranging from 16 to 20 points, and only 2% of them obtained the highest scores in terms of media literacy (over 21 points).

**Figure 3.7.2.** Distribution of total media literacy scores among citizens of Montenegro

Base: Total target population

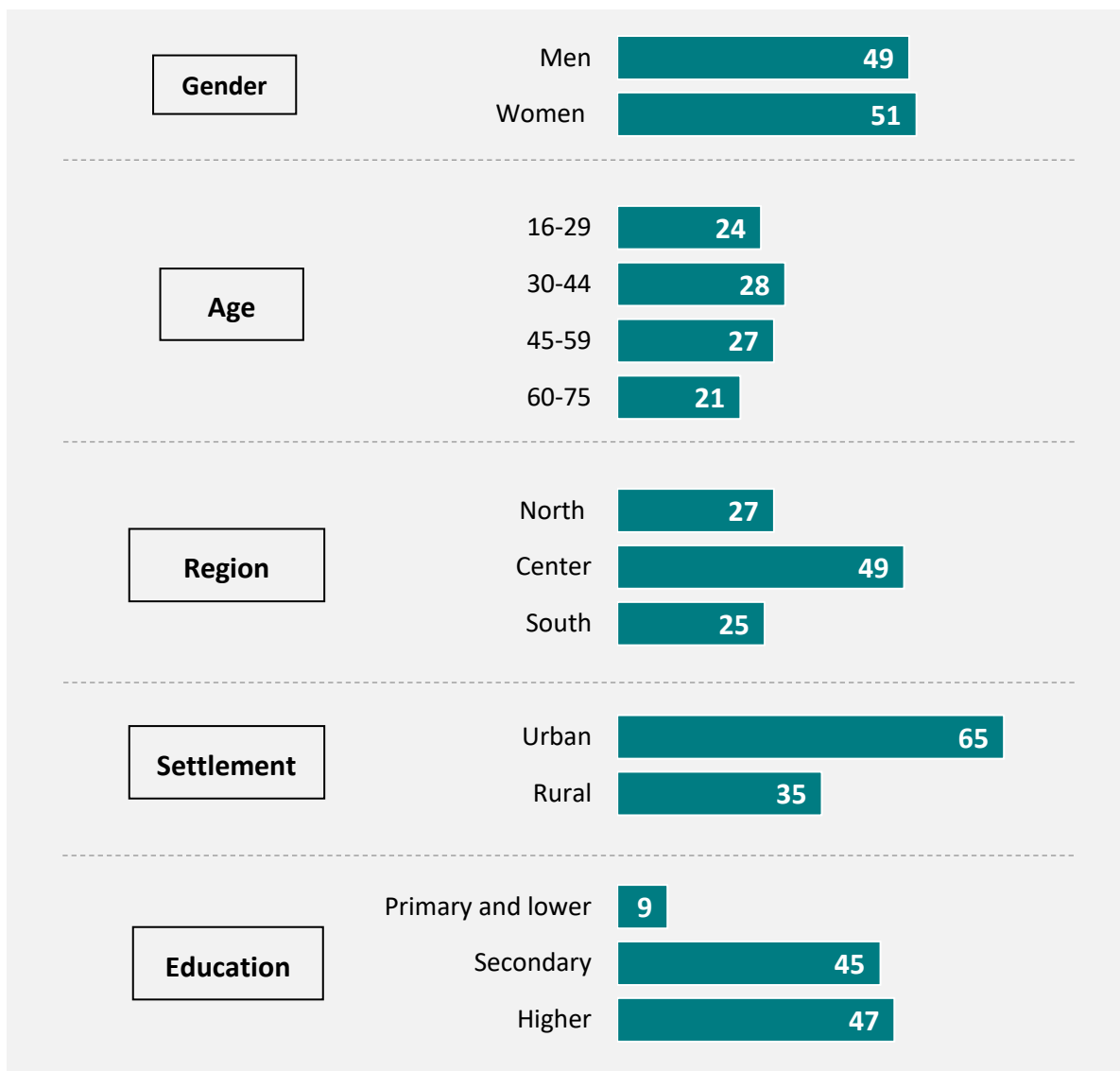




## Appendix A. Demographics and variables used in the analysis

The correction of the sample structure, in order to correspond to the structure of the population of Montenegro aged 16 to 75 years, was subsequently carried out using the method of post-stratification or weighting, based on geographic region, settlement type, age, and gender (Figure A.1).

**Figure A.1.** Structure of the realized sample according to gender, age, region, type of settlement and education (weighted data)

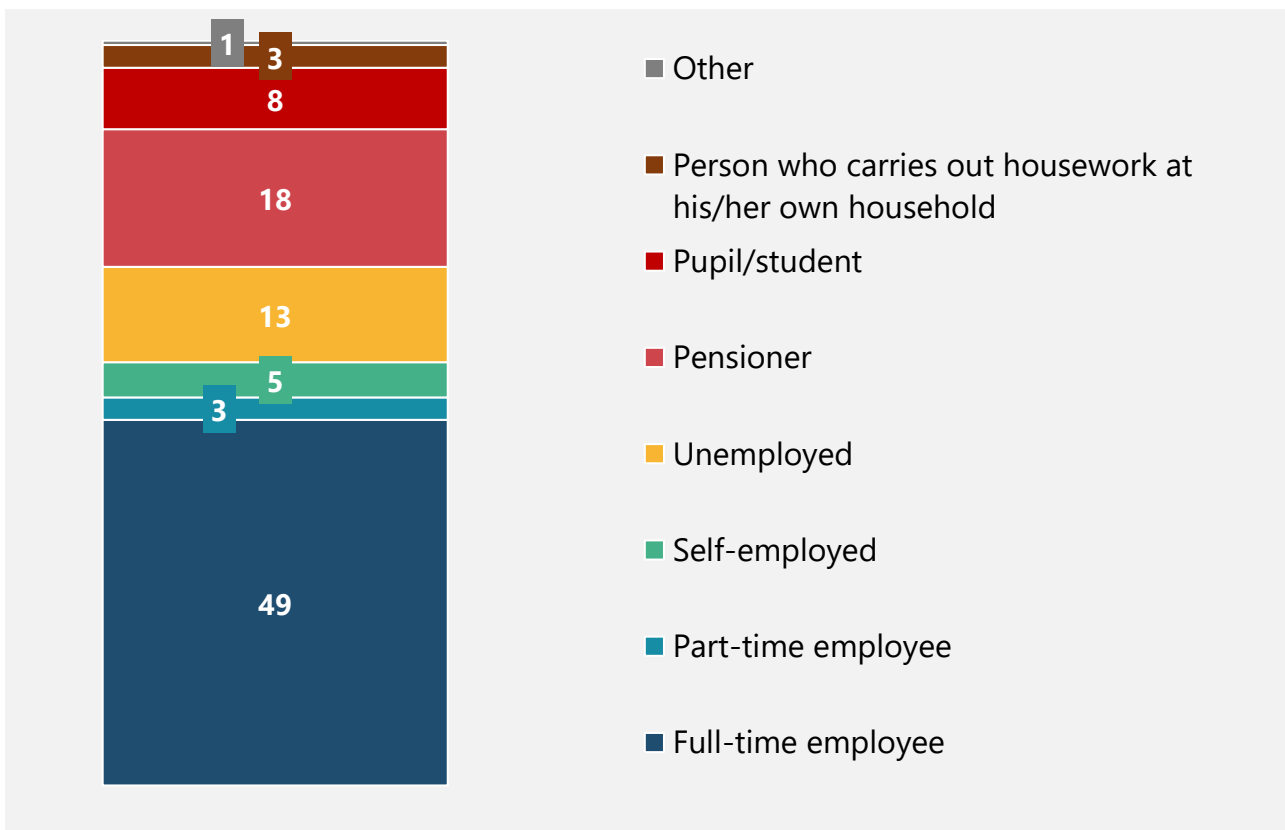


**Employment status:** In the age group of 16 to 75, nearly three out of five citizens are employed (57%), including those employed on a full-time basis (49%), part-time (3%), or as self-employed (5%). On the other hand, 13% in this age range are currently unemployed, while just under one-third are economically inactive - whether they are retired (18%), students attending school or university (8%), or engaged in household work/farming (4%) (Figure A.2).

**Figure A.2.** Employment status

*What is your current main employment status?*

*Base: Those who answered the question (99.3% of the target population)*



**Household income:** The majority report monthly net household incomes ranging from 651 to 1500 EUR (18% reported income from 651-1000 EUR, and 16% reported income from 1001-1500 EUR) (Figure A.3). Approximately a quarter reported both considerably low and high incomes - 23% reported income below 650 EUR per month (households with the lowest income), while 25% reported income above 1500 EUR (households with the highest income).

**Figure A.3.** Household monthly income

*What was the total household income in the previous month?*  
Base: Total target population

