



Commission for Gender Equality
A society free from gender oppression and inequality

**SUBMISSION: NOTICE OF INTENTION TO INTRODUCE A PRIVATE
MEMBER'S BILL AND INVITATION FOR COMMENT ON
THE DRAFT ELECTORAL MATTERS AMENDMENT BILL,
2026**

Commission for Gender Equality Comments
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1. Introduction

The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE), established in terms of Chapter 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Electoral Matters Amendment Bill, 2026 ("the Bill"), published as Government Notice 3981 of 2026 in *Government Gazette* 54874 of 19 June 2026.

The CGE supports initiatives that seek to strengthen democratic participation, remove barriers to voter registration, and improve the inclusiveness of electoral processes. The CGE therefore welcomes the introduction of an Automated Voter Registration (AVR) system aimed at reducing administrative burdens on citizens and improving the completeness and accuracy of the voters' roll.

2. Background

The CGE's comments are informed by its 2025 report entitled *A lack of commitment? Assessing Women's Participation and Representation in the 2024 National and Provincial Elections*, which provides extensive evidence regarding voter participation, electoral administration, women's political representation, and barriers to substantive democratic inclusion.

3. The CGE's Submissions

3.1 General support for automated voter registration

The CGE supports the principle of Automated Voter Registration. The CGE's findings in the aforementioned report reveal that voter turnout declined to



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58.64% during the 2024 National and Provincial Elections, representing a decline of 7.41 percentage points compared to the 2019 elections. The report further notes ongoing challenges relating to voter mobility, access to registration processes, and administrative barriers affecting electoral participation.

Automated Voter Registration has the potential to:

- reduce the number of eligible but unregistered voters;
- improve the completeness and integrity of the voters' roll;
- reduce administrative and financial burdens associated with repeated voter registration campaigns;
- improve inclusion of young voters entering the electorate; and
- facilitate more accurate electoral planning and resource allocation.

The CGE therefore supports the policy objective of shifting responsibility for voter registration from individual initiative to a state-administered process.

3.2 Gender implications of automated voter registration

While supporting AVR, the CGE emphasises that increased registration does not automatically translate into substantive political representation. The CGE's report found that women constituted approximately 55% of registered voters during the 2024 elections, yet women occupied only 43% of seats in the National Assembly after the election, representing a decline from 46% in 2019.



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The report further found:

- there is a 3% decline in women's representation in the National Assembly;
- none of South Africa's provincial legislatures achieved gender parity in 2024;
- women constituted only 22% of provincial premiers, a figure unchanged since 2014;
- women's representation among cabinet ministers declined from 50% in 2019 to 44% in 2024;
- women's representation among deputy ministers declined from 44% to 40%;
- women remained underrepresented in many influential parliamentary and provincial leadership positions; and
- only two of eleven independent candidates contesting the 2024 national elections were women.

These findings demonstrate that voter inclusion and candidate inclusion remain distinct challenges requiring separate policy responses. Accordingly, the CGE submits that AVR should be viewed as one component of a broader programme of electoral reform aimed at advancing substantive equality as envisaged in section 9(2) of the Constitution.

3.3 *Mandatory gender-disaggregated reporting*

The CGE strongly recommends that the Bill be amended to require the Electoral Commission to publish gender-disaggregated AVR data. The CGE's election observation findings identified a significant deficiency in the



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availability of gender-disaggregated voter information. Observers reported difficulties obtaining data relating to the gender composition of registered voters and electoral staff at voting stations.

The CGE therefore recommends that the Bill require annual reporting to Parliament on:

- the number of persons automatically registered through AVR;
- registrations disaggregated by sex, age, disability status and province;
- voter turnout disaggregated by sex, age and province;
- corrections to residential information;
- registrations of first-time voters;
- participation of young women voters; and
- accessibility outcomes for persons with disabilities.

Such reporting would enhance transparency, strengthen oversight and allow Parliament to assess whether AVR is achieving equitable outcomes.

3.4 *Protection of vulnerable groups*

The CGE's election observations identified significant accessibility challenges affecting persons with disabilities. The report recorded that many voting stations lacked wheelchair ramps and accessible infrastructure, while inclusion of non-binary persons remained limited.

The CGE therefore recommends that AVR implementation regulations include measures to ensure:



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- accessibility for persons with disabilities;
- inclusion of rural and marginalised communities;
- protection against exclusion arising from inaccurate population register information;
- accessible notification mechanisms; and
- accessible correction and appeals procedures.

3.5 Residency confirmation safeguards

The Bill proposes mechanisms whereby voters may be allocated voting districts based on information contained in the population register where residency details are not confirmed. The CGE recognises the administrative necessity of this provision but recommends that additional safeguards be introduced to prevent inadvertent disenfranchisement. Particular attention should be paid to:

- young people who relocate for employment or study;
- women in informal housing arrangements;
- survivors of domestic violence who relocate frequently;
- farm workers and seasonal workers; and
- persons residing in informal settlements.

3.6 Electoral reform and women's representation

Although outside the immediate scope of AVR, the CGE notes that the Electoral Matters Amendment Bill provides Parliament with an opportunity to advance broader electoral reform. The CGE reiterates the recommendations contained in its 2025 report, namely that Parliament should initiate consultation



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processes aimed at amending electoral legislation to require greater gender parity in political representation. The report concluded that the absence of binding legislative measures contributes to persistent underrepresentation of women despite women constituting the majority of registered voters.

The CGE therefore recommends that Parliament consider future amendments to:

- require candidate lists to comprise no less than 50% women;
- incorporate gender parity requirements into electoral regulations;
- strengthen accountability mechanisms relating to women's representation;
- improve support and financing mechanisms for women candidates; and
- promote gender equality in political leadership structures.

4. Conclusion

The CGE supports the objectives of the Draft Electoral Matters Amendment Bill, 2026 and recognises Automated Voter Registration as an important democratic reform capable of improving electoral inclusion. However, evidence from the Commission's own report demonstrates that increased voter registration alone will not resolve persistent gender inequalities in political representation.

The CGE therefore urges Parliament to adopt a gender-responsive approach to AVR implementation by incorporating mandatory disaggregated reporting, accessibility safeguards, oversight mechanisms and future reforms aimed at achieving substantive equality in political participation and representation.

END