Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference
PARLIAMENTARY LIAISON OFFICE

Family Digest 74

October 2026

The Impact of the Local Government Elections on Women & Children

Local government is where South Africans experience government most directly. So, these elections are the most consequent for the everyday lives of women and children. Municipalities have jurisdiction over local by-laws and community spaces, making elected officials directly responsible for creating safer neighbourhoods, law enforcement, community infrastructure, and immediate social and health support services. An unprecedented 136 790 candidates have satisfied the statutory requirements to contest seats in the eight metropolitan municipalities, 44 district municipalities and 205 local municipalities across the country. The IEC has confirmed that 546 out of 732 registered parties will contest the elections, competing for 10 526 council seats nationwide. https://tinyurl.com/y26w3jur and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHAtfbHgjbg

These elections are about service delivery. Local leaders decide budget allocations for municipal shelters, counselling services, and strengthening referrals to emergency care. The non-governmental organisation My Vote Counts (MVC) has launched a scathing critique of municipal service delivery, warning that decades of documented failures have allowed 'rot' to fester, despite a robust legislative framework. https://tinyurl.com/36xzvunj. The organization has developed a Municipal People's Analysis of Manifestos (M-PAM), designed to empower voters to evaluate political promises against actual community needs and constitutional mandates. https://tinyurl.com/3jt4mxnb

The priorities of the four largest political parties, the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA), the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and the uMkhonto weSizwe party (MK), regarding women and children are briefly set out below:

The **ANC's** focus is on strengthening the local response to gender-based violence, femicide and violence against children; supporting implementation of the National Strategic Plan on GBVF; and strengthening referral pathways to Thuthuzela Care Centres, shelters and victim-support services. Improving safety around schools; enforcing by-laws against illegal liquor outlets; and supporting prevention and youth programmes are also on the ANC agenda. The party posits that the incoming councils can curb key systemic drivers of violence by shutting down unlicensed liquor outlets and managing public spaces. Upgraded public transport infrastructure and improved lighting around schools and community spaces are seen as crucial for the protection of children and women. The party has pledged to enhance multi-sectoral co-ordination and to use the District Development Model to audit local plans from a gender, youth, and disability perspective. https://www.cogta.gov.za/ddm/ and https://tinyurl.com/34m8n4uu

The **DA** traditionally prioritises gender-neutral, merit-based governance but has historically focused on targeted safety budgets, such as Cape Town's task teams for violent hotspots. https://tinyurl.com/2rxwujyk. In its Women Need Action Not Advice campaign, the DA explicitly hits back at national government warnings that tell women to simply 'be vigilant' or to avoid going out at night. The party states that South African women do not need more warnings: they need a localized, capable police force able to apprehend offenders. Rather than separating gender issues into standalone programmes, the

party focuses heavily on community safety, localized policing, and infrastructural upkeep as the primary mechanisms to protect women and children. https://www.da.org.za/policy/2026-local-government-manifesto

The **EFF** promises a 50 per cent female representation quota in municipal structures to ensure that women shape local laws, and focuses its approach on shifting local municipal power directly into the hands of women, expanding social safety nets and ensuring that municipalities aggressively fund anti-GBV initiatives. https://www.ewn.co.za/2026/07/25/malema-says-addressing-the-gender-balance-in-places-of-employment-is-one-of-the-party-s-pledges The party's manifesto dictates that local councils must roll out robust education and awareness campaigns explicitly focusing on rape prevention and reporting systems within local schools and community sectors. Furthermore, the EFF's local government election guidelines bar anyone with a past record of domestic or gender-based violence from being nominated as an EFF councillor candidate. To protect mothers and children, the party proposes transitioning local clinics to 24/7 service centres that guarantee expanded access to maternal healthcare, mental health services, as well as sexual and reproductive health options. The EFF strongly advocates for more accessible, efficient, and responsive child maintenance courts at the local level to ensure that fathers who evade their legal financial obligations face immediate consequences. EFF 2026 Local Government Manifesto

MK notes deep concern over high rates of teenage pregnancy and crimes affecting vulnerable children, women, and the elderly. It attributes these challenges partly to cultural dislocation and a departure from traditional African values. The party promises to deny bail to perpetrators of violence against women and children. It also pledges to set up well-resourced, specialized units at each police station to investigate gender-based crimes. https://mkparty.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/MK-Manifesto-The-Peoples-Mandate-Paths-Final-2.pdf and https://mkparty.org.za/our-manifesto/

The common thread in these manifestos is the undertaking to address gender-based violence. However, as the Mandela Foundation has commented, "South African women cannot be expected to measure progress in the fight against GBVF only by the establishment of councils and the issuing of declarations. They have to be able to feel that something is changing in their homes, communities, police stations, courts, workplaces and places of learning". https://www.polity.org.za/article/mandela-foundation-wants-voters-to-demand-action-on-gbvf-ahead-of-elections-2026-09-22

The true impact of the election will depend entirely on the political will of the winning local councillors to effectively fund and implement child, women and victim support services, rather than treating them as secondary national issues. Furthermore, given the high number of parties contesting this election, coalitions will be the way forward. It is to be hoped that municipal government will prioritize service delivery through co-operative governance which makes a meaningful difference to the lives of women and children.

Lois Law
Project Co-ordinator
lois@cplo.org.za

This Digest, or parts thereof, may be reproduced with acknowledgement.