

MEDIA RELEASE

GOVERNMENT ADDS A SURPRISE PUBLIC HOLIDAY: 4 NOVEMBER 2026 DECLARED A NATIONAL DAY OFF FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Employers have less than eight weeks to update leave calendars, payroll systems and operational plans before the country downs tools for a fourth-quarter election holiday

JOHANNESBURG — The President of the Republic of South Africa has declared Wednesday, 4 November 2026, a public holiday throughout the Republic, in connection with the holding of local government elections. The declaration, gazetted as Proclamation Notice 346 of 2026 in Government Gazette No. 55352 on 8 September 2026, is made under section 2A of the Public Holidays Act, 1994 (Act No. 36 of 1994).

For businesses across South Africa, this means the 2026 public holiday calendar has just grown by one — and the new date lands squarely in the middle of the fourth quarter, a period most employers had already locked into their operational and leave planning.

An addition, not a swap

This is a freestanding addition to the calendar under section 2A of the Act, which empowers the President to declare any specific day a public holiday. It does not replace or absorb an existing holiday — it simply adds a new one. Employers should treat 4 November 2026 exactly as they would any other gazetted public holiday for purposes of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997, including pay, work on the day, and substitution arrangements.

Why this matters for employers now

"Every time an election holiday is gazetted, we see the same scramble: shift rosters built months in advance, payroll cut-offs that don't account for the extra day, and leave policies that go quiet on how a late-added holiday interacts with annual leave already booked over that period," said a GBS spokesperson. "The lead time here is short — barely eight weeks — so employers in retail, manufacturing, logistics, healthcare and other operations that run seven days a week need to act now, not in October."

The practical issues employers should work through include:

- **Payroll and rostering:** Confirm that payroll systems, shift schedules and overtime calculations for the week of 2–6 November 2026 correctly flag 4 November as a public holiday, particularly for employees required to work that day under section 18 of the BCEA.
- **Leave interactions:** Where employees have pre-approved annual leave spanning that week, clarify — in line with policy and the BCEA — that the public holiday does not count as a day of annual leave.
- **Essential and continuous operations:** Businesses that cannot close (security, healthcare, manufacturing on continuous shift cycles, retail) should confirm allowance or time-off-in-lieu arrangements are documented and consistent with collective agreements or contracts of employment.
- **Collective agreements and BCs:** Bargaining council and sectoral determination employers should check whether the new date triggers any notice or consultation obligations under applicable agreements.
- **Communication:** Notify staff, particularly shift workers, well ahead of the day to avoid confusion or unplanned absenteeism.

The bigger picture

Election-linked public holidays are not new — South Africa has gazetted similar one-off holidays for national, provincial and local government elections in the past. What is notable this time is the timing: a fourth-quarter declaration compresses an already tight run-in to the December shutdown period for many businesses, adding pressure on production targets, year-end deadlines and festive-season resourcing.

Employers are encouraged to treat this as a trigger to review their broader 2026 public holiday and leave governance now, rather than responding date by date as further gazettes are published.

About Global Business Solutions

Global Business Solutions (GBS) is a South African employment law, labour relations, HR advisory and organisational development consultancy, helping employers navigate complex workplace legislation, dispute resolution and people strategy.