



وزارة الخارجية  
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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## **MOFA Brief on Labour Rights in the UAE**

**May 2014**

Expatriate labour comprises a significant and valued part of the UAE's workforce. They are also an important source of income for their home countries: according to World Bank figures, in 2012 they remitted more than US\$ 20 billion back to their home countries – the largest amounts going to India, Pakistan, Egypt, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh - making the UAE the sixth biggest source of remittances in the world. For the UAE, respect for labour rights is a moral, cultural and economic imperative.

The UAE has made enormous progress in the protections it provides to workers. Over recent years, the UAE government has substantively reformed its laws to address concerns that expatriate workers may be exposed to poor practices and/or mistreatment, including the withholding of travel documents, human trafficking, or nonpayment of wages.

Many of the challenges relating to the implementation of labour rights in the UAE are concentrated around blue-collar workers in the construction field. The UAE considers it a priority to work on an ongoing basis to improve their conditions.

Recent measures have ranged from outlawing employer confiscation of workers' passports to allowing workers to transfer sponsorship between employers and introducing wage protection measures. These include:

- **International conventions:** The UAE has ratified nine major ILO conventions related to the rights of workers.
- **Enforcement:** The UAE has taken strong action to enforce the law on conditions of work. The UAE Cabinet issued resolution No. 10 in 2012 and prior to that, resolution No. 1178 in 2010, imposing high fines on firms that do not ensure the basic rights of workers. In 2013, the Ministry of Labour conducted 138,801 inspections, 11,807 visits to inspect the standards of accommodation and 80,571 visits to ensure workers were not working during the peak hours of summer heat. In total, 1,015 cases were transferred to the prosecutors. Substantial penalties have been imposed for violations relating to working conditions and workers' rights.
- **Accommodation:** The UAE has strict rules regarding the provision of proper accommodation to workers. The UAE Cabinet issued Resolution No.

13 in 2009 obligating authorities to issue licenses for workers' residences that meet the required standards of accommodation. For workers' accommodation that existed at the time, the owners were given until 2014 to upgrade the facilities. The Ministry of Labour does not process group labour permits unless there is a clear commitment (e.g. plans and resources) to provide adequate housing.

- **Payment of wages:** The UAE has taken steps to enforce the fair and timely payment of salaries: In 2009, the Ministry of Labour introduced a Wage Protection System that ensures the timely payment of salaries to foreign workers. By the end of 2013, around 258,000 establishments paid nearly 3.3 million workers their wages through this system.
- **Health:** The UAE is committed to protecting workers' health. The UAE requires that all workers are provided with, at the cost of the employer, a comprehensive health insurance that does not impose any financial burden on the worker. In addition, since 2005 it has been prohibited for workers to work outside between 12.30 and 3pm during the hot summer months.
- **Recruitment:** The UAE has taken steps to protect workers from unscrupulous recruiters. In 2010 the Minister of Labour issued Resolution No. 1283 setting out strict conditions that agencies must fulfill in order to obtain a license to recruit foreign workers, including heavy fines for non-compliance with the law and stipulating that practices that may amount to trafficking in persons shall be referred to the Prosecutor's office.
- **Human trafficking:** The UAE is committed to the fight against human trafficking. The UAE was the first country in the region to enact a comprehensive anti-trafficking law (Federal Law (51) in 2006). In 2007 the UAE established a National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking. The UAE has taken robust action against human traffickers: 47 human trafficking-related cases were registered under Federal Law 51 in 2006. These cases involved 75 victims and led to the arrest of 149 traffickers.

There were convictions in 32 cases, involving 91 traffickers. These involved penalties ranging from one year to life imprisonment and fines.

- **Visa sponsorship:** The UAE gives workers the right to transfer between employers. Ministry of Labour Resolution No. 1186 in 2010 permits the movement of workers from one employer to another upon the expiration of the original employment contract or if the original employer fails to meet his obligations to the worker. In the latter case, the worker is granted permission to seek and accept an alternative employment without the original employer's consent. It is illegal in the UAE for employers to withhold workers' passports and workers do not require their employer's permission to leave the country.
- **Complaints mechanisms:** The UAE has implemented measures to make it easier for workers to bring complaints. The UAE has established offices in courts to provide legal support to workers in labour disputes and labour care units have been established across the UAE to provide protection for workers and raise awareness of their rights. In addition, there is a 24-hour toll-free hotline which allows workers to file complaints, check the status of their case and ask questions.
- **International cooperation:** The UAE promotes international cooperation in the protection of workers' rights: a conference was held in 2008 in Abu Dhabi to discuss cooperation between the UAE and workers' home countries in order to protect workers' rights, which concluded with the formal launch of the "Abu Dhabi Dialogue" regional consultative process. The UAE has also signed numerous Memoranda of Understanding with workers' home countries designed to promote cooperation in protecting the rights of workers in the UAE.

The UAE has a strong record in implementing robust measures to monitor and enforce the implementation of labour protections and is committed to continuously enhancing the enforcement of labour protections. This is why, for example, the UAE is currently developing a new law for protecting the rights of domestic workers. However, given the speed with which the workforce is growing and

changing, the UAE recognizes that workers' rights will require ongoing monitoring and evaluation and further action to address any shortfalls.