



COVID-19: Situation Report United Arab Emirates

Like most countries, the United Arab Emirates ("UAE") has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as well. Pursuant to our assessment, local authorities respond to the crisis level-headedly, implement measures very quickly, correct them where necessary and monitor their compliance with the required consistency. Due to the ever-changing circumstances, particularly in the past two days and this very moment, below information can only serve as a snapshot of Monday, 23 March 2020, 10 a.m. UAE time. Regardless, these details should help you evaluate the current situation in the UAE more accurately and, thus, enable you to make adequate decisions with regard to your company, your employees or your family members.

STATISTICS

With a population of about 10 million, official reports for the UAE currently confirm that 153 persons have contracted COVID-19 and that two persons have died from the virus. Meanwhile, 38 persons have recovered after having contracted COVID-19.

PUBLIC LIFE

As of now, no supply shortfalls or "panic buying" have occurred. Nevertheless, the possibilities to take part in public life have been reduced continuously in order to ensure the imperative social distancing. This morning, all UAE residents were asked to leave their residences only in order to obtain indispensable supplies or to perform essential jobs. Furthermore, instructions concerning the use of public transportation, taxis and other means of transportation shall be announced later. At present, there are no indications that a curfew will be enforced.

As early as 15.03.2020, the closure of all parks, cinemas, entertainment parks, spas as well as fitness clubs, both located in publicly accessible areas and residential towers, was decreed in Dubai. The day before, many tourist attractions had already been ordered to close in Abu Dhabi. On 22.03.2020, access to all public and private beaches and swimming pools as well as sports halls was suspended for an initial duration of two weeks.

From 25.03.2020 onwards, all commercial centre and malls along with fish, meat and vegetable markets will be closed for a renewable period of two weeks. According to latest announcements, such closure seems to apply to all shops not selling essential items covering daily consumer needs as well. The decision excludes pharmacies and food retail outlets, including cooperative societies, grocery stores and supermarkets, along with fish, meat and vegetables markets dealing with wholesalers. Previously, some malls had reduced their opening hours on a voluntary basis.

Restaurants and cafés will also face further restrictions from 25.03.2020 onwards by having to limit their services to home delivery for the next two weeks. Shortly before, it had been announced that only 20% of the seating area may be occupied at an outlet at any given time and that a minimum distance of two metres between guests would have to be ensured. At that time, food could still be prepared for take-away.

Back on 30.01.2020, the Dubai Health Authority had instructed all healthcare facilities in Dubai to treat every suspected and confirmed case of COVID-19 as an emergency. This order has resulted either in an automatic cost takeover by the health insurance provider of a validly insured patient or, in case that the patient is not properly insured, services being rendered free of charge for the patient.

Until the end of March, all main roads in the Emirate of Dubai will be subject to a deep cleaning.

EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

Currently, all educational facilities in the UAE remain closed. The first nurseries discontinued operations on 01.03.2020 already. On 08.03.2020, schools and subsequently universities followed.

Concerning the running of schools, the two-week spring holidays were brought forward. Schools and teachers made use of this time to prepare online programs for learning at home. The current school term resumed on 22.03.2020 and lessons are planned to be conducted through so-called distance learning until 05.04.2020. The aim is to convey the entire curriculum of the school year, either through lessons provided in schools or by distance learning. Some universities had already started distance learning the week prior.

TRAVEL

As of 25.03.2020, all passenger flights to and from the UAE, including transit flights, will be suspended for an initial period of two weeks. Cargo and emergency evacuation flights are exempted.

Emirates Airlines had already reduced its operations to Europe. From 23.03.2020 onwards, flights to Germany and Austria have been suspended. Starting from 25.03.2020, Emirates Airlines had anyways intended to temporarily discontinue nearly all passenger flights, but intended to service specific countries, including, amongst others, destinations located in Great Britain, Switzerland, the United States of America and Australia.

Since 19.03.2020 and for an initial duration of two weeks, only diplomats and Emirati nationals are permitted to enter the UAE. The provisional relaxation of this entry ban allowing nationals of



other GCC member states to enter the UAE has subsequently been abolished. Hence, also holders of valid UAE residence visas ("Residents") are prohibited from travelling to the UAE at the moment. Exceptions are made on a case-by-case basis in favour of pupils and students studying abroad.

Through its online portal Twajudi, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation offers assistance to Residents who are currently abroad and therefore cannot return to the UAE due the travel restrictions imposed.

Persons having entered the UAE in the past few days must self-quarantine at home for 14 days. Violators will be prosecuted.

Emiratis are forbidden from leaving the UAE as of 18.03.2020. Tourists have been advised to arrange for return to their respective home countries at the earliest.

ECONOMY

In order to curb the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, the Emirate of Dubai approved an economic-growth package of AED 1.5 billion for the upcoming three months back on 13.03.2020. Two days later, the UAE Central Bank pledged AED 100 billion to support the UAE economy. A further AED 16 billion budget was approved by the cabinet in a meeting on 22.03.2020 which was held virtually for the first time.

Various local banks have already announced different measures, such as the deferral of due payments for certain clients for a four-month period starting from April.

BUSINESS LIFE

Authorities and banks remain open. However, over-the-counter transactions have been reduced in many cases or abandoned altogether. The Jebel Ali Free Zone Authority does not entertain visitors since 17.03.2020. The Dubai Airport Freezone Authority followed suit a day later. All transactions can, however, be conducted electronically by eMail or through the respectively available online portals.

The Dubai Courts have cancelled most public hearings from 22.03.2020 until currently 16.04.2020 and shifted to distance working. The DIFC Courts have implemented similar changes to their operations until 26.04.2020.

Event permits, such as for exhibitions, conferences and business functions, are not being issued at all until the end of March.

WORK LIFE

The UAE employment laws remain valid in their entirety. Up until now, no specific regulations or exceptional provisions have been issued. Consequently, employers, for example, are not allowed to unilaterally reduce salaries due to declines in sales. However, it is indeed possible to impose paid leave as defined by

law. Unpaid leave can be, as is always possible, agreed upon with the respective employee.

Naturally, companies can, in consultation with their employees, find flexible solutions in order to safeguard the employees' health on the one hand and to ensure continued business operations and security of jobs to the best possible extent on the other hand. Employers have been requested, for instance, to offer home office solutions to their employees, if possible.

The Emirates Group, which includes Emirates Airlines, has announced to cut basic salaries of most employees by 25% to 50% in order to avoid making staff redundant. Allowances shall continue to be paid in full.

The concept of short-time work is unknown in the UAE.

In case that an employee has been quarantined based on regulatory directive or precautionary measures imposed by his employer and cannot work from home although he is healthy and able, it remains currently unclear whether such days of absence will be considered as part of the employee's sick leave.

Entry permits and as a result work permits for applicants who are currently outside the UAE are no longer being issued. Exceptions apparently apply to work permits applied for in connection to Expo 2020. Renewals of work permits of employees who are currently inside the UAE will be performed as usual. The same rules apply to the renewal of residence visas. Visa transfers are currently still possible as well, provided the applicant is in the UAE. Cancellations of residence visas can also be processed.

CONCLUSION

The UAE has adopted a variety of measures across the board in order to slow down the spread of COVID-19. At the same time, particular attention is directed towards the support of the local economy. At present, the UAE benefit from the success of their digitisation projects which have been systematically enforced for the past several years. Consequently, school life can be maintained through distance learning and business life through home office and digital communication with authorities. Also, short decision-making processes and, thus, the possibility to react to changed circumstances immediately, a very good medical infrastructure and, last but not least, the willingness of the population to follow recommendations and instructions should enable the UAE to overcome current and future challenges.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Ministry of Health and Prevention

www.mohap.gov.ae/en

Twitter: @mohapuae

Telephone: 800 11111 or +971 4 230 1000



Dubai Health Authority

www.dha.gov.ae/en

Twitter: @DHA_Dubai

Telephone: 800 342 or +971 4 219 8888

Department of Health Abu Dhabi

www.doh.gov.ae

Twitter: @DoHSocial

Telephone: 800 555 or +971 2 449 3333

**General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs -
Dubai**

www.gdrfad.gov.ae/en

Twitter: @GDRFADUBAI

Telephone: 800 5111 or +971 4 313 9999

Emirates News Agency

<http://www.wam.ae/en>

Twitter: @WAMNEWS_ENG

Dubai Media Office

Twitter: @DXBMediaOffice

Do you have questions? - We would be glad to answer them!

From our office located in the heart of Dubai, our team of German attorneys has been advising small and medium-sized companies, corporations and individuals on the laws of the United Arab Emirates for more than a decade. Our areas of expertise include corporate and commercial law (in particular business set ups), commercial agency law, employment law as well as tenancy and real estate law. We would be happy to attend to your questions as well. Contact us!

ANDERS LEGAL CONSULTANCY
Sama Tower, Office 806
Sheikh Zayed Road
PO Box 333 558, Dubai, UAE

Telephone: +971 4 327 5888
Telefax: +971 4 327 5999
eMail: info@anders.ae
Web: www.anders.ae

Published: 23.03.2020, 10 a.m. UAE time

The information provided in this article has been carefully perused. However, no legal responsibility or liability whatsoever, in particular for completeness, accuracy and topicality, can be assumed. Specialist advice should be sought for any individual case.