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Adverse Weather Conditions:
Effects on Employment in the United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates ("UAE") enjoys predominantly sunny weather throughout the year. Rain, strong winds and thunderstorms are rare. However, when they do occur, the consequences can be significant. Especially following the severe rainfall in April 2024, which led to days-long flooding in many areas, weather warnings are taken very seriously. In this article, we explain which effects extreme weather conditions can have on employment in the UAE.

General Principles

The UAE Labour Law contains only a limited number of provisions specifically governing the handling of weather-related impacts. Employers' obligations arise primarily from general legal principles, in particular the duty to provide a safe and suitable working environment.

Commuting

If the employer provides transportation for employees to and from the workplace, he is responsible to ensure the safety of his employees during the commute and for responding to weather warnings issued by the National Center of Meteorology.

If employees commute to work independently, they have to be informed about the adequate conduct in exceptional weather conditions and be advised to exercise caution.

There must always be an appropriate balance between the employer's work-related interests and the employee's safety.

Travel Time

According to the UAE Labour Law, travel time to and from the workplace is generally not considered working time.

However, if an employee requires longer travel time, for example, due to adverse weather conditions with a weather warning issued by the National Center of Meteorology, such time is, as an exception to the rule, considered working time.

Salary

The employer is not entitled to reduce an employee's salary due to late arrival to or absence from work caused by extraordinary weather conditions.

Salary deductions are only possible in a limited number of cases, which are explicitly stipulated by law. These include, for example, repayment of a loan granted by the employer or compensation for damage caused by the employee. No salary deductions are provided for circumstances beyond the employee's control, such as adverse weather conditions.

If an employee is unable to perform work for several consecutive days due to severe weather, the parties should reach an agreement on whether paid or unpaid leave will be used, taking into account a fair balance of interests.

Remote Work

The law does not require employers to mandate working from home during exceptional weather conditions. Likewise, employees do not have a legal right to work remotely. Whether an employee is permitted to work from home depends on the individual agreement with the employer.

However, the competent authorities, such as the Ministry of Human Resources & Emiratisation, issue recommendations to private sector companies via the media when necessary and encourage them, where possible, to allow employees to work from home and to respond flexibly to upcoming extreme weather conditions. In contrast, for the public sector, the respective authority may order remote work at short notice for all employees.

Most companies have been well-prepared for working from home since the COVID-19 pandemic and use this option even without a specific reason. Provided that weather warnings are issued in a timely manner and the nature of work allows it, switching to remote work should be possible without difficulty.

Risk Management

Employers are well advised to proactively establish policies for extreme weather situations. Among other things, these should include provisions for remote work, flexible working hours and handling weather-related absences.

Such policies do not only enable a quick response to unexpected weather events but also serve as part of the employer's duty of care towards his employees, primarily to ensure their safety.

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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 20 years. Our areas of expertise include corporate law (in particular business set-up), 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!

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