

Second Update - COVID-19 and its Implications for Commercial Contracts in the MENA-Region

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To assist our clients amid the outbreak of COVID/19, we published our [Alert on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Commercial Contracts in the MENA Region](#).

In the [first update](#), we summarized governmental measures in a number of MENA-region key countries to combat the outbreak of the pandemic.

This second update details the most recent developments of the said governmental measures.

Current Situation in Numbers¹

Country	Reported Infected by COVID-19	Reported Deaths due to COVID-19
Saudi Arabia	10,484 (+9,717) ²	103 (+102)
UAE	7,265 (+7,017)	43 (+41)
Qatar	6,015 (+5,489)	9 (+9)
Egypt	3,333 (+2,931)	250 (+230)
Morocco	3,046 (+2,876)	143 (+138)
Algeria	2,718 (+2,454)	384 (+365)
Kuwait	2,080 (+1,889)	11 (+11)
Bahrain	1,907 (+1,515)	7 (+4)
Iraq	1,574 (+1,258)	82 (+55)
Oman	1,508 (+1,409)	8 (+1)
Tunisia	884 (+770)	38 (+34)
Lebanon	677 (+359)	21 (+17)
Palestine	461 (+401)	4 (+4)
Jordan	425 (+271)	7 (+7)
Sudan	107 (+104)	12 (+11)
Libya	51 (+50)	1 (+1)
Syria	39 (+38)	3 (+3)
Yemen	1 (+1)	0

¹ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/> (21 April 2020 – 12:00 PM CET).

² Compared to the last Client Alert (Update) dated 25 March 2020.

Bahrain

Following the recommendation of the National Taskforce for Combating the Coronavirus (COVID-19), the Government Executive Committee, headed by the Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister, issued its second bundle of measures on April 7 in which the initial March 17 measures were extended and partly intensified. The new measures in force as of April 9 to April 23, subject to renewal, include the following key decisions³:

- All **fitness studios, swimming pools, movie theaters, shisha stores and salons** remain **closed**.⁴ Restaurants, tourist facilities and **places for serving food and beverages** are to **remain limited to delivery services**.⁵ The first hour of grocery store openings is to remain dedicated for the elderly and pregnant women.
- **Prohibition on public gatherings** of more than **5 individuals** remains in effect. **Violations** are **punishable**.⁶ All individuals are **obligated** to wear a **mask in public**.⁷
- All **non-essential medical services** provided by private health clinics **remain suspended**.
- **Commercial and industrial businesses** providing goods or services directly to customers **are now allowed** to resume work (banks, construction sector, factories and offices with no direct contact to customers were already exempted⁸) **provided** the following **conditions** are met:
 - Employees and visitors are required to **wear a face mask**.
 - The **number of employees** in any facility must be **reduced** and overcrowding in stores must be actively prevented to ensure that sufficient social distancing measures are always maintained.
 - Stores must ensure **continuous sterilization**, including external premises.
 - **Queuing line-ups** outside stores must be arranged in accordance with the **social distancing measures** issued by the Ministry of Health.⁹
 - further compulsory work-place measures (contained in the Decision of the Minister of Health 24/2020) such as carrying out daily health checks (temperature checks) of employees and customers before entering stores.

³ <https://www.moh.gov.bh/COVID19/Details/4101>

⁴ Decision of Minister for Industry, Commerce and Tourism 40/2020 dated 8 April 2020.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Article 2 of the Decision of Minister of Interior no. 53/2020 dated 26 March 2020 in conjunction with Article 25 of no. 5/1999 on Civil Defense.

⁷ Decision of Minister of Interior no. 59/2020 dated 9 April 2020

⁸ Decision of Minister for Industry, Commerce and Tourism 29/2020 dated 24 March 2020.

⁹ Decision of Minister of Health no. 26/2020 dated 8 April 2020.

- **Private Sector** enterprises are encouraged to follow the **guidelines**¹⁰ below:
 - **Remote working** to be maintained, **if possible**.
 - The **number of employees** to be **limited** at any specific location, office and employees are instructed to adhere to **social distancing measures**.
 - Employees using corporate transportation methods, such as buses, to be reduced.

Individuals travelling from “countries infected with Covid-19” will still be subject to **two-weeks quarantine** after entering Bahrain. The Ministry may order individuals under quarantine to wear a tracking bracelet.¹¹ **Health center consultation fees** for non-Bahraini patients are **suspended for three months** starting from April 9.¹²

In order to mitigate the effects of Covid-19 on the job market employers (also non-Bahraini employers) are **exempted** from **fees** for issuing or renewing one-year **work permits** as well as **monthly fees** for work permits. The exemption lasts for **three months starting from April**.¹³

The Civil Service Bureau (CSB) ordered that **70 %** of **government employees** (an increase of 20%) in the respective government entities can **work remotely** as of April 5.¹⁴ Working mothers and employees belonging to risk groups are prioritized.¹⁵ The remaining employees are obligated to wear face masks.¹⁶ The information and e-Government Authority (iGA) continues to assist government entities in their transition to remote working. In April, the Ministry of Interior launched eight new e-services.

As of April, **civil and commercial (and employment-related)**¹⁷ lawsuits can be filed and managed **in all instances electronically**.¹⁸

Egypt

On April 18, the Egyptian parliament approved **amendments to the Emergency Law**¹⁹, which already granted the President extensive powers. The amendments will now also **empower the Egyptian President** to suspend schools, universities and government agencies, extend tax deadlines, ban private and public gatherings and protests, or restrict sales, allocation of necessary resources and exports.²⁰

¹⁰ <https://www.moh.gov.bh/Content/Upload/File/637197306455000000-Recommended-Response-for-Workplaces-guidelines-en.pdf.pdf>;
[https://www.moh.gov.bh/Content/Upload/File/637205591358694000-\[EN\]-COVID19---Floor-plan-and-sticker-v1.0.pdf](https://www.moh.gov.bh/Content/Upload/File/637205591358694000-[EN]-COVID19---Floor-plan-and-sticker-v1.0.pdf)

¹¹ Article 2 of the Decision of Minister of Health no. 25/2020 dated 30 March 2020.

¹² Decision of Minister of Health no. 27/2020 dated 9 April 2020.

¹³ Decision of the First Deputy Prime Minister no. 5/2020 dated 2 April 2020.

¹⁴ CSB Governance no. 6/2020 dated 2 April 2020.

¹⁵ CSB Governance no. 4/2020 and 5/2020 dated 19 and 22 March 2020.

¹⁶ CSB Governance no. 7/2020 dated 9 April 2020.

¹⁷ Decision of the Minister of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Waqf no. 41/2020 dated 26 March 2020.

¹⁸ Decision of the Minister of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Waqf no. 45/2020 dated 2 April 2020.

¹⁹ Law no. 162/1958 on State of Emergency.

²⁰ http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/367529.aspx?fbclid=IwAR1mYOqfAg_Vpuc3LfOSTsKPRWhgcM7LHn-GQg4_mHTh6SzEfEGof623kf0

On March 25, the Egyptian PM issued a **night curfew** from 7 pm (now extended to 8 pm) until 6 am and ordered commercial shops and services to close from 5:00 pm till 6:00 am and throughout weekends. While groceries, pharmacies or supermarkets were exempted from the curfew, cafes, restaurants and other amusement facilities have to be closed in general.²¹ Moreover, the **decree suspended all services provided by ministries and governorates to citizens** such as notarization²², civil status administration, traffic licenses, work permits or passports with an exception for health services. The nationwide curfew was then extended and is **currently in force until April 23**, though **likely to be extended through Ramadan**.²³

Air traffic all over the Egyptian airports remains **suspended** with an exception for inbound charter and regular flights arriving empty to transport outbound passengers, to cargo and domestic flights.²⁴

The Financial Regulatory Authority has granted SMEs a **six-month grace period for the payment of insurance premiums**.²⁵ It has also formed an emergency committee to follow up on the impact of the outbreak and take necessary action to protect microfinance instruments. A decree by the Finance Ministry now obliges VAT registrants to file their taxes despite of the partial economic shutdown.

Iraq

In its session of March 26, the **Council of Ministers established** the Supreme National Committee for Health and Safety (**Supreme Committee**) headed by the PM. The Supreme Committee is now the competent body to take all key decisions related to combatting Covid-19.²⁶ The government's Crisis Cell (alias Committee of the Office Order 55/2020) established by Prime Minister Office's Order 55/2020 continues to operate. Its role will be limited to providing recommendations, health care and precautionary health measures.

The Crisis Cell previously declared that the period as of February 20 is deemed a *force majeure period* **"for all projects and contracts"**. For more information on the legal impact of this declaration please review our alert: [Iraqi Government: The Coronavirus crisis \(Covid-19\) is declared "Force Majeure" - What is the legal impact?](#).

The (previous) **round-the-clock curfew was extended** firstly until April 11²⁷, then April 18²⁸ and now until **May 22** limited, however, to the hours **between 7 pm and 6 am** while the **total**

²¹ Prime Minister's Decree No. 768 of the year 2020: https://www.cbbl-lawyers.de/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/Prime_Minister_s_Decree_No._768_of_the_year_2020.pdf

²² Public Notarization' Circular no. 140 dated 8 April 2020.

²³ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-egypt-extends-lockdown-flights-suspended>
<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/367453/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-to-extend-nighttime-curfew-through-Ramadan-G.aspx>

²⁴ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/367550/Egypt/0/Egypt-set-to-repatriate-Wednesday-citizens-strande.aspx>

²⁵ <https://aegypten.ahk.de/en/corona-virus-in-egypt>

²⁶ Decision on Amending the Council of Ministers' Decision no. 64/2020 in the 12th ordinary session dated 26 March 2020.

²⁷ Decision of the Council of Ministers in its ordinary session dated 26 March 2020.

²⁸ Supreme Committee's Decisions dated 7 April 2020; <https://gds.gov.iq/covid-19-iraqs-higher-committee-for-health-and-national-safety-extends-curfew/>.

curfew remains in place on Fridays and Saturdays. The relaxation of the curfew was ordered by the Supreme Committee in its session of April 19 along with key measures including:²⁹

- Current **exemptions** from the curfew for certain business categories, including **bakeries** and **pharmacies** and workers in **health sector** and **security forces**, will be maintained. **Restaurants and cafes** are permitted to provide **delivery services** only.
- Schools, universities, educational institutions, sport venues, malls, wedding halls, mosques and places of worship will **remain closed**.
- **Retailers** and **factories** can **resume work** but only outside curfew hours.
- **Restrictions on public gatherings** and **social distancing** rules **remain** in place. Wearing of **face masks** outside the home is **compulsory** and those who do not comply face legal action.
- **International travel** in and out of Iraq **remains suspended** as is travel **between Iraqi provinces**. Taxis can operate but large public transport vehicles are only permitted to carry four passengers at any one time.
- **Government departments** are permitted to **resume working**, but with minimum staffing which must **not exceed 25% of the workforce**.

Vehicles and trucks transporting construction materials for “**investment projects**” are **exempted** from the night-time curfew.³⁰

Medicines, medical supplies, devices, diagnostic and laboratory equipment for combating Covid-19 which are ordered by the Ministry of Health or its departments are **exempted** from **import license regulations**. The **Ministry of Health** is entitled to **grant import approvals** for the said items as well as for raw materials and pharmaceutical production lines.³¹ The parliament (Council of Representatives) also **exempted** all purchase contracts related to combating Covid-19 concluded by the governmental **Crisis Cell** from the **application of the Regulations for the Execution of Governmental Contracts** (the Iraqi law governing contracts with public sector).³²

Following relaxation of the curfew, the **Supreme Judicial Council** ordered the **heads of the courts** to designate individuals required to **resume their work in courts** as of April 21, however **not exceeding 25%** of the total number of the employees in the relevant court.³³

Jordan

After four days of a **countrywide round-the-clock curfew** starting on March 21, the Jordanian government **relaxed** the round-the-clock curfew by allowing small groceries and retailers to open and individuals to move freely **between 10 am and 6 pm** provided **no vehicles** are used

²⁹ <https://gds.gov.iq/covid-19-iraq-announces-changes-to-curfew-other-restrictions/>

³⁰ According to the General Secretariat for the Council of Ministers the exemption was granted by the Supreme Committee in its 4th session dated 15 April 2020; <http://cabinet.iq/ArticleShow.aspx?id=9554&lang=A>

³¹ Supreme Committee’s Decision no.9/2020 in its session dated 1 April 2020.

³² First Deputy Speaker Mr. Hassan Al-Kaabi’s letter dated 24 March 2020, Ref. no. M KH 1/3/71.

³³ Announcement issued by the President of the Supreme Judicial Council dated 19 April 2020; <https://www.hjc.iq/view.67202/>

and **social distancing measures** are complied with. **Violations** are punishable with **fine** between **100 and 3,000 JOD** and **imprisonment for up to one year**. Vehicles moved in violation of the curfew will be seized for at least 30 days and businesses violating the curfew will be closed for 14 days.³⁴

As of April 21, **certain businesses will be allowed to resume their activities** provided no more than 30 % of the manpower (and / or a minimum of three workers of businesses with 10 workers) is utilized. The exempted businesses include electronic retailers, energy sector including renewable energy, and delivery by bookstores, furniture stores, cloths, textiles, and jewelry stores. Manufacturing companies of all kinds can resume their activities as of April 21 provided 30% of the manpower per shift are utilized whilst the shifts not exceeding two shifts per day.

Since the activation of Defense Law on March 17, the Prime Minister has issued a total of nine Defense Orders to tackle the implication of the Covid-19 outbreak. Noteworthy are the following Defense Orders:

- Defense Order no. 5/2020 dated 30 March 2020:
 - **All periods** (limitation periods, preclusive periods, period of limitations, procedural periods) stipulated in **all valid laws and regulations, deadlines** related to take any measures before ministries and public entities **are suspended** (Article 1 [1] to [3]) until a respective Prime Minister Order is issued for public entities and courts to resume their work (Article 1 [5]).
 - The suspension does **not apply** to **deadlines** related to settling **monetary obligations** towards public entities.
 - **Provisions of the Companies Law**, Law no. 22/1997, and its regulations **related to corporate meetings** (GAMs and BoDs), constitution of quorums, notifications' procedures and record-keeping are **suspended** (Article 2 [1]). Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply is further entitled to regulate mandatory corporate meetings. In this respect, the Companies Control Department (CCD), competent body to monitor companies established under Jordanian law, announced that corporate meetings may be held through modern audio or visual communication systems with CCD's approval.

The Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) announced in a press release a set of precautionary measures to mitigate the economic impact of the Covid-19 outbreak. The key measures include:³⁵

- Allow banks to **postpone** the **credit facilities instalments** granted to the economic sectors clients (**companies and individuals**) affected by the spread of the Corona virus without **commissions or default interest** effective **until the end of 2020**.
- Inject **additional liquidity** to the **banks** with an amount of JOD 550 million by **reducing the compulsory reserve ratio on deposits** with banks from 7 to 5%.

³⁴ Defense Order 3/2020 dated 25 March 2020.

³⁵ <http://www.cbj.gov.jo/DetailsPage/CBJEn/NewsDetails.aspx?ID=279>

- **Reducing the financing costs of the Central Bank's refinancing program** that targets SMS projects (reducing interest rates to 1% instead of 1.75% for projects inside Amman Governorate and 0.5% instead of 1% for projects in the other governorates).
- **Support the procedures of the Jordan Loan Guarantee Corporation by reducing loan guarantee commissions and increasing the coverage of the local sales guarantee program.**

Kuwait

Kuwait went into a **two-week nation-wide lockdown** (declared as public holiday) on March 13 and extended it **until April 26**.³⁶ It also extended its **partial curfew** by two hours in the morning to run from 5 pm until 6 am, effective until further notice. Furthermore, the government announced a full lockdown on two densely populated districts.³⁷ The Kuwaiti Health Minister presented on April 20 a study on an **overall curfew** in Kuwait that he considers imposing after bringing back all Kuwaiti citizens stranded abroad.³⁸

Returnees are obligated to use **electronic bracelets** that ensure compliance with quarantine measures by the returning nationals.³⁹ **Visitors and temporary residents** in Kuwait received a **three-month grace period** for visas expiring between March 1 and May 31.⁴⁰

The Real Estate Association of Kuwait has called on real estate companies to support their tenants, which lead to some companies **exempting tenants from rent**.⁴¹ The State-owned Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (**KPC**), decided to **freeze tenders for projects** announced in early 2020 at the request of the Central Agency for Public Tenders.⁴²

On April 20, the Central Bank issued **USD 792 million worth of bonds and Tawarruq** with a maturity period of three months and coupon rate of 1.25%.⁴³

Libya

The Libyan Government of National Accord (Tripoli) had previously imposed a night-time curfew from 6 pm to 6 am which was then tightened as of March 30 to become a partial-curfew in the hours between 12 pm to 7 am of the next day.⁴⁴ As of April 17, a **round-the-clock curfew** took effect and continues **until April 27**. **Health services, public services and goods transport** remain **exempted**. Small grocery stores and bakeries can operate only between 6 am

³⁶ <https://www.businessinsider.com/countries-on-lockdown-coronavirus-italy-2020-3?r=DE&IR=T#in-italy-a-nationwide-lockdown-went-into-effect-on-march-10-that-restricts-virtually-all-aspects-of-life-for-its-60-million-citizens-including-retail-leisure-worship-imprisonment-and-travel-33>

³⁷ <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-04-06/kuwait-locks-down-two-areas-over-coronavirus-extends-curfew>

³⁸ <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/84908/Kuwait-considers-imposing-total-curfew>

³⁹ <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1661411/middle-east>

⁴⁰ <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2886150&Language=en>

⁴¹ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/20/c_138993031.htm

⁴² https://www.zawya.com/uae/en/story/Kuwait_suspends_oil_tenders_due_to_Coronavirus_report-ZAWYA20200416063543/

⁴³ <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2886885&Language=en>

⁴⁴ Presidential Decree no. 238/2020 dated 29 March 2020.

and 12 pm. Individuals are allowed go out of their houses by foot and only between 6 am and 12 pm.⁴⁵

The nationwide **state of emergency** remains in effect. The **Supreme Judicial Council of Libya** ordered **all courts to suspend their work**, except for urgent proceedings, as from **March 30** and until the **end of April**.⁴⁶

Oman

Most of the measures taken in March by Oman's Supreme Committee for Dealing with COVID-19 (“OSC”) – an inter-ministerial committee headed by the Minister of Interior – remain in effect. In addition, the OSC decided to **lockdown the governorate of Muscat** as of **April 10**.⁴⁷ As extended, the lockdown will continue **until May 8**.⁴⁸

In order to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak and following government restrictions on the **employment market**, the OSC declared that **private sector companies shall not dismiss their Omani national employees** under (and due) to current circumstances. In exchange, the OSC **offered incentives to support** the private sector. The Minister of Manpower is reported to have stressed that the private sector **must adhere to decisions of the OSC as these are legally enforceable**.⁴⁹ Companies in the private sector are obligated to:

- Revamp their operating systems, **use modern technology** and **implement remote work** to limit the assembling of workers.
- Provide enough space between employees at the workplace and employees’ residences.
- Give **paid leave with full salary to workers during the period of health isolation and Stay-at-Home period**, provided a “certificate on the end of quarantine period” is issued by the departments concerned.
- **Not to dismiss any Omani national employee**. Affected private sector establishments and firms **may offer advanced paid annual leaves** for their workers in sectors that have been shut down. Otherwise, to **negotiate to lower the salaries of workers for a period of three months** in return for a **reduction of duty hours after the expiry of outstanding days of an employee’s paid leave**. If necessary, this system will be applied with effect from May 2020.
- **Repayment of Bank loans of Omani national employees**, whose salaries are lowered, **will be postponed** and so shall their financing loans during the salary reduction period. Their loans will be rescheduled **without interest or additional fees**. Their **electricity and water bills** will be **postponed** till the **end of June**.

⁴⁵ Presidential Decree no. 227/2020 dated 17 April 2020.

⁴⁶ Supreme Judicial Council’s Decision no. 35/2020 dated 29 March 2020.

⁴⁷ <https://omannews.gov.om/NewsDescription/ArtMID/392/ArticleID/11309/Supreme-Committee-Decides-Muscat-Lockdown-Undated-Suspension-of-Study>

⁴⁸ <https://omannews.gov.om/NewsDescription/ArtMID/392/ArticleID/11898/Supreme-Covid-19-Control-Committee-Takes-More-Decisions>

⁴⁹ <https://alroya.om/post/260607/-القانون-وعلى-القطاع-الخاص-الالتزام-بها>

- As for **non-Omani employees**: their **annual leave may be advanced and paid in full** if they operate in the sectors permanently shut down. **Expatriate workers** in affected private sector establishments and firms **can be repatriated** to their respective countries, according to the understanding reached between the OSC the private sector companies.

The incentives offered by the OSC include:

- **Reduction of renewal fees of expatriate workers' labor cards, exemption from fees, waiving of delay fines and extension of expat workers' licenses** for the period of April 15 until end of June 2020.
- **Approval of preliminary work permits** for expat workers for partial or temporary use and the possibility of **secondment of workers** of any private entity for emergency work for another **entity**.
- Affected private sector entities **may terminate the employment contracts of their non-Omani workers**, provided these establishments adhere to the payment of all the dues of the laid-off workers before their final departure from the Sultanate.
- **Exemption from payment of fees for Commercial Register renewal** with effect from 15 April until end of June.
- **Exemption from renewal fees of licenses** and from fines for a period of three months for government departments.
- Government sectors and government companies shall abide **by contracts signed** with private sector entities in the fields of services.
- Possibility of **extension of time for completion of government projects** will be handled flexibly and **no delay fines** will be imposed.
- **Postponement of social insures monthly subscription fees and postponement of electricity and water dues** for of March, April and May. Affected SMEs are further permitted to pay their dues in instalments.
- **National Fuel Subsidy Cards** to be given to entitled groups of **workers** in the private sector **whose salaries are temporarily reduced** until the relevant businesses can resume their activities.

On April 20, the **Capital Market Authority (CMA)** announced the **resumption of general meetings of joint public stock companies** and investment funds **via electronic portal of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company**.⁵⁰ GMs of joint stock companies via electronic means is subject to the rules newly issued by CMA's Chairman in Administrative Decision no. E/25/2020 dated April 20.

Qatar

The **full ban of social gatherings** continues and covers primarily **businesses considered as non-essential** such as cafes, restaurants, schools, or shopping centers. Other stores may remain open and operate but only on weekdays between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. Some specific and **essential**

⁵⁰ <https://www.cma.gov.om/Home/PrintNews/8398>.

services are exempt from this limitation, for instance food delivery, factories, food and supply outlets, companies within ports and airports or pharmacies.

On March 26, Qatar issued Law No. 9 of 2020 amending several provisions of Law No. 17 of 1990 on Protection from Infectious Diseases that cover **obligatory notifications of infections**.⁵¹

Restrictions on entering the country are still in place, so that **only Qatari citizens, their family members and permanent residents can enter Qatar**, provided they self-quarantine for two weeks. Individuals are **still permitted to transit** in Qatar if they are traveling to a country other than Qatar. Cargo also remains unaffected.⁵²

The Supreme Judiciary Council (SJC) and the Ministry of Interior have announced the **use of a remote trial service** which was initiated by the Court of First Instance on April 2.⁵³

The **Qatar Central Bank** issued a press statement on March 25, declaring that banks shall:

- **postpone payment of loan instalments** and interest for affected industry sectors for a period of six months starting on March 16.
- stipulate the allocation of a **repurchase window with a zero percent rate** to be used by banks to postpone loan instalments or grant new loans.
- **cancel all POS and ATM fees** and **facilitate electronic banking** by requiring banks to offer electronic money transfers abroad.

On April 20, the **First Finance Company**, a subsidiary of the Barwa Bank Group, **announced a postponement of instalments** and documentary credits for small and medium sized enterprises without additional fees or charges.⁵⁴

Saudi Arabia

On April 12, Saudi Arabia extended its **24-hour curfew for major cities**, in force since April 2, **until further notice** and announced a new **nationwide movement permit system** for its inhabitants starting April 21.⁵⁵ Also, the **halt of international flights**⁵⁶, **suspension** of the year-round **Umrah pilgrimage** and **closure of most public places** remain in force.⁵⁷

⁵¹ <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/26/03/2020/QR-200,000-fine,-imprisonment-for-violating-infectious-diseases-law>

⁵² <https://www.qatarairways.com/en/travel-alerts/COVID-19-update.html>

⁵³ <https://www.marhaba.qa/remote-trials-launched-in-qatar/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.marhaba.qa/first-finance-company-postpones-payments-for-registered-sme/>

⁵⁵ <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2020/04/19/Coronavirus-Saudi-Arabia-to-launch-unified-travel-permit-on-Tuesday.html>

⁵⁶ <https://www.saudia.com/covid-19?intcid=20200319-saudia-coronavirus-campaign#TemporaryprecautionarymeasuresfortheCoronavirusCOVID-19fortravelfromtoSaudiArabia>

⁵⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/curfew-mecca-medina-extended-24-hours-coronavirus-200402140517634.html>

Unused tourist visas are extended by excluding the lockdown period.⁵⁸ **Residents can renew** their driver's and vehicle **licenses online** and national IDs have been automatically extended by two months.⁵⁹

The Ministry of Justice now accepts **appeals and memos online** and has been scheduling **remote hearings** via videoconference.⁶⁰ A new **online platform** that offers e-services to **create, save and manage enforcement orders**, was inaugurated on April 19.⁶¹

Due to the ongoing lockdown and to promote the private sector, the judiciary allowed the **use of private practitioners in legal services**, such as reconciliation, mediation, handing over judgments and document exchange.⁶² The court may also **accept evidence heard in a foreign country as legitimate**, if it does not violate the legal provisions and rules of the Kingdom. Also, **foreign arbitral awards need no longer be certified** by the Appeal Court but may now be submitted directly to the Enforcement Court and a new Commercial Courts Law has been implemented.⁶³

The government launched several initiatives to support the private sector, such as:

- **Temporary lifting of suspensions** relating to the **wage protection** system until further notice.
- **Temporary lifting of suspensions relating to the correction of the company's activities and to the non-payment of penalties**
- **Suspension** of recruitment penalties.
- **Fee waiver for renewing residence permits** expiring between March 31 and June 30.

Saudi Arabia has also put together a **new aid package** to support the private sector. It includes **USD 266 million** to accelerate payment of private sector dues, provide liquidity and cover wages in the public transport sector and USD 250 million for the health sector.⁶⁴

Fines for delays on government projects (Tenders Regulations Art. 74) will be **waived and deadlines extended**, according to the Ministry of Finance, if the delay is caused by the government entity or unforeseen circumstances beyond the contractor's control and the owner suspends some or all of the works or reasons not attributable to the contractor.

58

https://twitter.com/Saudi_MT/status/1250074705278709762?ref_src=twsrc^tfw/twcamp^tweetembed/twterm^1250074705278709762&ref_url=https://xpressriyadh.com/tourist-visa-update-the-flight-suspension-period-not-counted/

⁵⁹ <https://twitter.com/eMoroor/status/1249788799858683904?s=20>

<https://twitter.com/eMoroor/status/1249788799858683904?s=20>

<https://www.spa.gov.sa/2075409>

⁶⁰ <https://www.moj.gov.sa/ar/MediaCenter/News/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?itemId=1060>

⁶¹ <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1661706/saudi-arabia>

⁶² <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1658946>

⁶³ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Apg3DkUUyYL4mHzcdg86rf17RYDBMfn/view>

⁶⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-saudi/update-2-saudi-king-approves-more-private-sector-coronavirus-crisis-aid-idUSL5N2C345L>

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has launched a **new system to protect secured interests over liquid assets through an electronic database** of registered security interests.⁶⁵ in attendance.⁶⁶

United Arab Emirates

An **overnight curfew** that remains in effect across all UAE's emirates has been **extended indefinitely**.⁶⁷ As such, all movement between 08:00 pm and 06:00 am is restricted, and public transportation is suspended during curfew hours.

Dubai announced on April 17 the **extension of its own 24-hour-a-day curfew**, originally intended to end on April 18, by a week **until April 25**.⁶⁸ In order to leave the house, a person has to apply for a movement permit unless he works in a vital sector.⁶⁹ On April 14, Dubai also decided to extend its **closure of hotels, restaurants, and events**, originally intended until April 18, **until further notice**.⁷⁰

Positive news came from air carriers: Dubai-based Emirates announced that it was the **first airline to launch rapid COVID-19-tests** for its passenger.⁷¹ Abu-Dhabi-based Etihad Airways announced a **partial resumption of passenger-flights in May and June** with the intention to return to full operation in July.⁷²

Residence and visitor **visas** as well as national ID-cards, **expiring after March 1, are extended until the end of 2020**. Furthermore, **government services** – such as documents, permits, licenses and commercial registers – expiring on March 1 onwards are extended for a renewable period of three months starting from April 1. However, the **general entry ban for foreigners and temporary suspension of visas** (except for diplomats) remains in force.⁷³

The **public administration** launched several **online services** (e.g. renewal of Emirates ID cards and existing UAE residence visas or a marriage service, in order to adhere to the restrictions in movement and interaction.⁷⁴ The **Dubai Courts** – closed to the public by

⁶⁵ <https://www.uqn.gov.sa/articles/1586466268957986100/>

⁶⁶ <https://www.spa.gov.sa/viewfullstory.php?lang=en&newsid=2050559#2050559>.

⁶⁷ <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/333601/uae-authorities-extend-24-hour-curfew-in-dubai-through-april-25-update-26>

⁶⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-emirates/dubai-extends-24-hour-coronavirus-curfew-by-one-week-idUSKBN21Z2K4>

<https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/333601/uae-authorities-extend-24-hour-curfew-in-dubai-through-april-25-update-26>

⁶⁹ <https://dxbpermit.gov.ae/home>

⁷⁰ <https://gulfbusiness.com/dubai-extends-closure-of-hotels-restaurants-events-until-further-notice/>

⁷¹ <https://www.emirates.com/media-centre/emirates-becomes-first-airline-to-conduct-on-site-rapid-covid-19-tests-for-passengers/>

⁷² <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2020/04/16/Coronavirus-Etihad-to-resume-partial-flights-in-May-says-CEO.html>

<https://gulfbusiness.com/etihad-to-commence-limited-passenger-services-from-may-1/>

⁷³ <http://wam.ae/en/details/1395302832041>

<http://wam.ae/en/details/1395302830665>

⁷⁴ <https://u.ae/-/media/Guidelines-2020/UAE-Government-Services-Around-the-Clock.ashx>
<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-uae-launches-online-weddings-amid-pandemic-restrictions>

Resolution 30 of 2020 issued by the Dubai Courts on 17 March 2020 – announced **the resumption of court hearings remotely** through video-conferencing from April 19 on all court levels (except criminal courts).⁷⁵ The **DIFC Court and Registry Offices** have also closed their doors to the public from March 17 until April 26 (or pending further notice), and will operate on a remote basis.

On April 19, the Central Bank announced that UAE banks have tapped 30% of the AED 50 bn aid package to support businesses and individuals by zero cost loans.⁷⁶ The DIFC announced on April 16 an **additional support package** offering a three-months' **rent waiver** for business owners in the financial free zone.⁷⁷ Moreover, the UAE had issued in March an **FDI "positive list"** of business activities – including medical, pharmaceutical and health sector – where 100% foreign ownership is now permitted.⁷⁸

If you would like more information about this topic, please contact us.

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⁷⁵ <https://gulfnews.com/uae/coronavirus-now-you-can-attend-dubai-court-from-the-comfort-of-home-1.71058720>

⁷⁶ <https://www.thenational.ae/world/asia/coronavirus-latest-uae-central-bank-says-banks-have-used-30-of-covid-19-support-fund-1.988993>

⁷⁷ <https://gulfbusiness.com/dubais-difc-offers-three-month-rent-waiver-to-retailers/>

⁷⁸ Federal Decree-Law No. 19 of 2018 (FDI Law) and Cabinet Resolution No. 16 of 2020 (Positive List).