

CLIENT ALERT

UAE: Changes to the Weekend and Work Week for Public Sector Employees and Schools

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) government recently announced a new work week for all public sector employees as follows:

- *The new work week for the public sector will span 4.5 days from Monday to Friday.*
- *The weekend will now be Saturday and Sunday instead of Friday and Saturday.*

For the last fifteen years, the weekend in the UAE has been Friday and Saturday, which is currently the weekend in most (but not all) countries in the Middle East and North Africa. The UAE is adopting the “international weekend” along with many other Muslim majority countries such as Turkey, Malaysia, Pakistan, Morocco, and Indonesia.

The Public Sector

As of 1 January 2022, the new work week for the public sector will be as follows:

- Monday to Thursday (8-hour workday from 7.30am to 3.30pm)
- Friday will be a 4.5-hour workday starting from 7:30 AM and ending at 12:00 PM to accommodate Muslim prayer timings.
- Friday prayers will be held at 1.15pm throughout the year.
- The changes encourage flexible hours and remote work.

The Emirate of Sharjah will implement a three-day weekend for the public sector. Some other governmental entities are understood to be considering the implementation of a three-day weekend.

The Education Sector

The federal and Emirate level government regulators of the education sector have directed schools to implement the 4.5-day week and new weekend, with schools ordered to end classes on Friday at 12pm and implement a Saturday to Sunday weekend.

In the Emirate of Sharjah, schools will observe the school week from Monday to Thursday and align with the public sector’s 3-day weekend.

The Banking Sector

The UAE Central Bank has issued a circular to banks in the UAE requiring them to maintain a six-day banking week.

The current bank holiday of Friday will be moved to Sunday.

The Private Sector

There is no reduction in working hours for the private sector.

The new Labor Law that will come into effect on 2 February 2022 maintains the six-day work week, but removes Friday as the statutory weekend.

Private companies have the discretion to maintain a six- or five-day work week, and to adjust the weekend to Saturday and Sunday.

Many private companies will shift their weekend to Saturday and Sunday, but we understand that some companies that primarily do business with other Middle East countries plan to maintain the Friday to Saturday weekend so as to be aligned with their business partners and customers.

Private sector companies should review their current policies and schedules, particularly considering the change to schooling hours which will have an effect on many employees.

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

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