

Public holidays in the UAE – what can you expect?

Residents of the UAE will be familiar with the concept that many of our public holidays are not on fixed dates or for a fixed duration.

Due to certain changes in approach, Eversheds Sutherland’s employment team consider it timely to prepare a guide which:-

- summarises entitlement to public holidays; and
- provides a brief explanation of the meaning of each public holiday.

UAE Labour Law

UAE Labour Law provides that employees are entitled to paid leave on the following public holidays:

Hijri New Year	One day
New Year’s day (Gregorian)	One day
Eid Al Fitr	Typically two days
Eid Al Adha and Arafat day	Typically three days
Prophet Mohammed’s birthday	One day
Isra and Mi’raj	One day
National day	Two days

In addition, since 2015, Commemoration Day (one day) has been recognised as a public holiday although it is not actually listed as a public holiday in the UAE Labour Law.

In practice, private sector employees are entitled to those public holidays as “announced for the private sector” (as described above, the public sector has historically been granted more favourable leave).

Lunar vs Gregorian calendar

Whereas the Gregorian calendar has 365 days a year (366 in a leap year), the Islamic lunar calendar is tied to the moon phases and has 354 or 355 days in each year.

Many of the public holidays will fall on the same date every year and are for a specified number of days. However, many of the Islamic holidays are based on the lunar calendar, meaning they are not announced until the moon has been sighted, signalling the commencement of that holiday period.

Furthermore, where a public holiday falls on a non-working day, there is no entitlement to an additional day off in respect of that public holiday.

Public sector vs private sector

In practice, private sector employees are entitled to those public holidays as “announced for the private sector” (as described above, the public sector has historically been granted more favourable leave).

Historically, public sector employees have been granted more favourable public holidays than private sector employees.

However, in March 2019 the UAE Cabinet announced that the private sector would be granted the same public holidays as the public sector. The rationale behind this decision is to make private sector employment as attractive as public sector employment particularly for Emiratis who have traditionally favoured public sector employment. By making private sector employment more attractive, the Government hopes to encourage more Emiratis to take up private sector employment thereby increasing the number of Emiratis employed in the private sector achieving the Governments underlying objective of “Emiratisation.”



What are the key public holidays in the UAE and what do they signify?

Gregorian New Year's day

This public holiday falls on the 1 January every year and signifies the start of the new year by reference to the Gregorian calendar.

Arafat day

This Islamic holiday falls on 9th day of Dhu al-Hijjah and signals the second day of the Hajj pilgrimage and the start of Eid Al-Adha. In 2019 it started on Saturday 10 August 2019 which meant that many employees did not enjoy a day off from work.

Hijri New Year

This marks the first day of the start of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is also known as Al Hijar and it marks the movement of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) and his followers from Mecca to Medina. The holiday lasts for one day and is linked to the lunar calendar meaning it changes from year to year.

UAE National Day

This annual celebration signifies the unification of the United Arab Emirates on the 2 December 1971. Typically both private sector and public sector employees are granted the 2 and 3 December as leave.

Eid Al Fitr

Eid Al Fitr means "festival of breaking the fast". This holiday is celebratory and marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan when Muslims break their fast. The dates are determined by lunar sighting and it will usually result in three to four days' holiday. In 2019, private sector employees enjoyed 2- 5 June off work (three days) whereas public sector employees were granted the full week off (five days).

Eid Al Adha

Eid Al Adha translates to the "festival/feast of sacrifice". The days of Eid are observed by Muslims as "days of remembrance" of the willingness to submit to Allah's commands. Eid Al Adha comes every year on the 10th of the Islamic month Dhu Al Hijja and lasts for four days. In the Gregorian calendar the dates vary from year to year and this year, it was announced as falling on Sunday 11 August to Tuesday 13 August 2019 for both private sector and public sector employees.

Commemoration day

Introduced in 2015, Commemoration Day recognises and honours the sacrifices of Emirati martyrs, who have given their lives in the UAE as well as abroad in the field of military, civil and humanitarian service. Previously this day fell on the 30 November but it has now been confirmed as falling on 1 December which means it can be combined with National Day.

The Prophet's birthday

This day celebrates the birthday of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) and it falls on the 12th day of Rabi Al Awwal. When the UAE Cabinet confirmed the public holidays for 2019 and 2020, The Prophet's birthday was not listed as a holiday and so there remains a degree of uncertainty as to whether or not this will be declared as a public holiday. In 2018, it fell on 18 November 2018.

Eversheds Sutherland Employment Team – Key Contacts

Our UAE employment team are recognized by Chambers Global 2019 with one client saying the practice is their "go-to for employment advice in the UAE". Geraldine Ahern heads up the employment practice and alongside her is Principal Associate Sarah Anderson who is described by industry sources as having, "a good understanding of DIFC law, but also of English employment law, so she is able to explain and compare the two legal systems."

Geraldine and Sarah are supported by a dedicated team of experienced lawyers across our network of regional offices in the UAE, Jordan, Qatar, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, many of whom are fluent in Arabic and English. They are also supported by relationship firms in Bahrain, Egypt and Oman.



Geraldine Ahern

Partner, Head of Employment and Commercial (Middle East)

T: +971 2 494 3632
T: +971 50 220 5983
geraldineahern@
eversheds-sutherland.com



Sarah Anderson

Principal Associate

T: +971 4 389 7017
T: +971 50 649 4075
sarahanderson@
eversheds-sutherland.com

eversheds-sutherland.com

© Eversheds Sutherland 2019. All rights reserved.
Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP and Eversheds Sutherland (US) LLP are part of a global legal practice, operating through various separate and distinct legal entities, under Eversheds Sutherland. For a full description of the structure and a list of offices, please visit www.eversheds-sutherland.com.

ABU_LIB1\202114\1

