

Ramadan in the UAE: What should be considered from an employment perspective?

Ramadan, the holy month of fasting, begins in February this year. During such period, Muslims generally abstain completely from eating and drinking between sunrise and sunset. Below, we have summarised some special characteristics that Ramadan brings with it in terms of working life in the United Arab Emirates.

How do working hours change during Ramadan?

Usual working hours outside Ramadan are a maximum of eight hours a day or 48 hours a week in the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Human Resources & Emiratisation ("MoHRE") and in all free zones except the financial free zones Dubai International Financial Centre ("DIFC") and Abu Dhabi Global Market ("ADGM"). Regular working hours in DIFC and ADGM shall not exceed 48 hours a week either, whereas a restriction on daily working hours is not expressly prescribed.

During Ramadan, the regular working hours must be reduced by two hours per day, provided the employee falls within the applicable scope. Within the jurisdiction of MoHRE as well as in most free zones, such as the Jebel Ali Free Zone or the Dubai Multi Commodities Centre, the actual religion of the employee is irrelevant, i.e. the reduction in daily working hours applies generally to all employees. The situation is different in DIFC and ADGM, where only Muslim employees are eligible for reduced working hours.

However, with the exception of DIFC and ADGM, the reduction in working hours during Ramadan does not apply to employees in managerial positions, such as the manager shown on the employer's license.

Does the employee receive a reduced salary due to the reduced working hours?

A reduction in salary in accordance with the reduced working hours is not permitted. Thus, every employee receives his usual salary during Ramadan.

Is it permissible to work overtime during Ramadan?

It is allowed to work overtime during Ramadan. However, overtime is calculated and paid differently depending on the location of the employer.

In the jurisdiction of MoHRE and in the free zones with the exception of DIFC and ADGM, the seventh and eighth working hour of a day are already considered overtime during Ramadan. These are calculated based on the basic salary and must be compensated with a surcharge of at least 25% of the basic salary. Overtime worked between 10 pm and 4 am must be remunerated with a surcharge of at least 50% of the basic salary.

It should be noted that an employee may not work more than two hours of overtime per day. Exceeding this limit is only permitted to avoid significant damage on the employer's side.

How can regular business hours be maintained during Ramadan?

In order to maintain the usual availability and functionality of a company during Ramadan, non-Muslim employees can be asked to work overtime. Furthermore, the introduction of a temporary shift system might also be feasible. In this case, part of the workforce would commence work at the regular start time and finish two hours earlier because of Ramadan. The other part would start two hours later and work until the usual closing time.

However, it is quite common for offices in particular to actually close two hours earlier than usual during Ramadan.

What should be taken into consideration with regard to fasting employees?

In public spaces, it is generally not allowed to eat or drink during Ramadan, regardless of the individual's actual religion. Since business premises are usually not considered public spaces, these restrictions do not generally apply there. However, courtesy demands that appropriate consideration is given to fasting employees and visitors.

For example, the employer should provide a designated dining area for non-fasting employees. During appointments, care should be taken not to offer refreshments to fasting customers. In addition, it is advisable to discuss details with the workforce and jointly establish guidelines so that the needs of each individual can be adequately met.

In addition, the employer should show understanding for the fact that the productivity of fasting employees may be lower than usual during Ramadan.

Conclusion

Ramadan and the associated characteristics in everyday working life are a striking example of the cultural diversity and tolerance in the United Arab Emirates. In particular, the breaking of the fast, the so-called iftar, offers the opportunity to gain insight into customs of other religions during this special period of the year.



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

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