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Country matrix 2025

United Arab Emirates

The country matrix adopts and adheres to the coding standards adopted in the "Gender Justice and the Law" initiative.

General framework of the State

Has the State ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)? Does it have any reservations on the implementation of the provisions of the Convention?

The United Arab Emirates ratified the Convention in 2004, entering reservations to article 2 (f) (the cancellation or amendment of laws and practices which constitute discrimination against women); article 9 (equal rights with regard to obtaining nationality, changing it or keeping it); article 15 (2) (equality of legal capacity in civil matters); article 16 (elimination of discrimination in all matters relating to marriage and family life); and article 29 (1) (arbitration of disputes).

Does the Constitution refer to gender equality and non-discrimination?

Article 25 of the Constitution of the United Arab Emirates stipulates that all individuals are equal under the law and there is no discrimination between the citizens of the United Arab Emirates on the basis of origin, domicile, religious belief or social position. Gender or sex is not highlighted as a specific basis for non-discrimination, but equality is one of the pillars of society according to article 14 of the Constitution.

If customary law is a valid source of law under the Constitution, is it valid if it violates constitutional provisions on gender

equality or non-discrimination?

No stipulation in the Constitution deals with customary law.

If personal law is a valid source of law under the Constitution, is it valid if it violates constitutional provisions on equality or non-discrimination?

The Constitution stipulates that "Islam is the official religion of the United Arab Emirates and Islamic Shariah is the main source of the legislation". Legislation and legal precedents have not dealt with civil status law conflicting with the constitutional stipulations related to equality and non-discrimination.

Do national laws clearly define the mandate and jurisdiction of informal justice systems, where they exist, in terms of their enforcement of formal and informal laws, both of which must conform to international standards, including non-discrimination?

There is no law defining the mandate conditional on the stipulations of the informal justice system and its legal jurisdiction and position vis-à-vis the Constitution, should it be in conflict with the provisions on human rights.

Is there a law on discrimination that prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination against women?

On 29 August 2019, a decree was issued with Federal Law No. 11, amending some of the stipulations decreed in Federal Law No. 2 of 2015 on combating discrimination and hatred, to distinctly include gender. The law on discrimination defines discrimination as every differentiation, restriction, exclusion or favourable treatment between individuals or groups on the basis of religion, belief, doctrine, denomination, sect, ethnicity, ethnic origin, gender or sex.

The law on discrimination does not deal with indirect discrimination against women.

Is there a national action plan or policy to address violence against women and girls that is overseen by a national mechanism with the mandate to monitor and review implementation?

In 2019, the State launched the National Family Protection Policy which sets forth six forms of domestic violence, namely: neglect, physical violence, verbal abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, sexual violence, and economic abuse.

Are there budgetary commitments provided for by government entities for the implementation of legislation addressing violence against women and girls by creating an obligation on the Government to provide a budget or allocation of funding for the

implementation of relevant programmes or activities?

Government organizations have made provisions in the budget for implementing the legislation concerning violence against women and girls. Fifty per cent of the social support budget has been allocated for the family and for combating violence against women and girls.

Is there a national strategy or action plan currently in place containing measures to ensure full and equal access to the entire range of sexual and reproductive health information, services and

supplies, with budgetary, human and administrative resources allocated for its implementation?

The United Arab Emirates formulated a 2017–2021 national action plan for the reproductive health of mothers and newborns.

Is legal aid mandated and guaranteed in criminal matters?

Law firms provide free legal aid in all parts of the United Arab Emirates.

Is legal aid mandated and guaranteed in civil/family matters?

Law firms provide free legal aid in all parts of the United Arab Emirates.

Are there laws that explicitly require the production and/or dissemination of gender statistics?

There has been no law or decree related to the production or distribution of gender statistics. However, there is sex-disaggregated data related to family members as per the national criteria for statistics.

Legal capacity and public life

Do women and men have equal rights to apply for passports?

Article 37 of Federal Law No. 17 of 1972 on nationality and passports has been amended to grant a woman a separate passport without the consent of her husband.

Do women and men have equal rights to obtain an identity card?

A woman can obtain a national identity card on an equal basis with a man.

In civil law matters and procedures, are women required to obtain permission from judicial or administrative authorities, spouses and other family members prior to initiating legal action?

No restrictions are imposed on a woman in initiating legal action for a civil or commercial claim.

In personal/family law matters, are women required to obtain permission from judicial or administrative authorities, spouses and other family members prior to initiating legal action?

There are some restrictions on women in initiating legal proceedings in personal/family matters, as the male guardian must sign the marriage contract of his daughter, whereas a man can marry without needing permission from his male guardian.

Does a woman's testimony carry the same evidentiary weight in court as a man's?

In certain cases, in accordance with the Shariah, a woman's

testimony carries half the weight of a man's testimony despite the fact of being of equal value according to the law of evidence.

Can a woman enter into a contract the same way as a man?

An Emirati woman enjoys full capacity in signing commercial contracts and has financial independence.

Do women and men have equal rights to own, access, and control or use property?

Men and women have equal access to own, access, and control or use property. With regard to marital property, the property of each spouse is separated in accordance with Shariah law.

Does the law allow for women to register

businesses the same way as men?

No restrictions are imposed on women in creating and founding companies or registering commercial businesses in the United Arab Emirates. Women enjoy full capacity in signing commercial contracts.

Do women and men enjoy equal rights and access to hold public and political

office (legislature, executive, judiciary)?

Women and men enjoy equal rights in holding public offices, but there are no positive measures in this regard.

Are there quotas for women (reserved seats) in the national parliament?

The ratio of the representation of women should be no less than 50 per cent of the United Arab

Emirates national council (parliament) representatives, on the condition that 20 seats are allocated to men and 20 seats to women.

Is there a law that explicitly prohibits violence against women in politics and elections?

There is no statute prohibiting violence against women in public politics and elections.

Protection from violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres

Is there legislation on domestic violence that includes all forms of physical violence?

The United Arab Emirates recently issued a new Federal Decree Law No. 13 of 2024 on the Protection Against Domestic Violence that repealed the Federal Decree Law No. 10 of 2019 in the same regard.

The new law includes a broader and more comprehensive definition of all types of violence, including physical violence, as follows: "any act, omission, statement, or threat thereof, neglect, sexual or economic exploitation committed or shared by one or more family members against another, exceeding the guardianship, authority or responsibility held by the perpetrator. This behaviour results in or aims to cause physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm". Additionally, the law determines

the process for obtaining restraining orders.

Is there legislation on domestic violence that includes all forms of sexual violence?

The new Federal Decree Law No. 13 of 2024 on the Protection Against Domestic Violence, which repealed Federal Decree Law No. 10 of 2019 in the same regard, covered all types of violence, including sexual violence. Domestic violence is defined as: "any act, omission, statement, or threat thereof, neglect, sexual or economic exploitation committed or shared by one or more family members against another, exceeding the guardianship, authority or responsibility held by the perpetrator. This behaviour results in or aims to cause physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm". Additionally, the law determines the process for obtaining restraining orders.

Is there legislation on domestic violence that includes all forms of psychological/emotional violence?

The new Federal Decree Law No. 13 of 2024 on the Protection Against Domestic Violence, which repealed Federal Decree Law No. 10 of 2019 in the same regard, covered all types of violence, including psychological violence. Domestic violence is defined as: "any act, omission, statement, or threat thereof, neglect, sexual or economic exploitation committed or shared by one or more family members against another, exceeding the guardianship, authority or responsibility held by the perpetrator. This behaviour results in or aims to cause physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm". Additionally, the law determines the process for obtaining restraining orders.

Is there legislation on domestic violence that includes financial/economic violence?

The new Federal Decree Law No. 13 of 2024 on the Protection Against Domestic Violence, which repealed Federal Decree Law No. 10 of 2019 in the same regard, covered all types of violence, including economic violence. Domestic violence is defined as: “any act, omission, statement, or threat thereof, neglect, sexual or economic exploitation committed or shared by one or more family members against another, exceeding the guardianship, authority or responsibility held by the perpetrator. This behaviour results in or aims to cause physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm”. Additionally, the law determines the process for obtaining restraining orders.

Are there criminal and civil protection orders available for victims of violence for which a breach (constitutes a criminal offence) has legal consequences?

Under the new law issued in 2024, the public prosecution may, on its own initiative or at the request of the Social Support Centre that received the report of domestic violence or the Ministry or the competent authority, issue a restraining order. Also, the competent court may, on its own initiative or at the request of the victim, issue a restraining order while hearing a criminal case if it discovers that there is an incident of domestic violence.

Additionally, the law stipulates new criminal and civil restraining orders, such as

“obligating the offender to attend social or psychological counselling sessions in coordination with the Ministry or the competent authority, and referring the victim, upon his/her consent, to a shelter”. Anyone who violates the restraining order shall be punished with imprisonment and a fine. The new law has increased the minimum fine from Dirhams 1,000 to Dirhams 5,000.

Does the law allow mitigating circumstances for femicide?

With Federal Law No. 15 of 2020, the United Arab Emirates annulled the stipulations of the Penal Code which provided a reduced sentence for perpetrators of “honour crimes”.

Does the law criminalize female genital mutilation (FGM) or cutting if practised?

There is no direct prohibition of this practice.

Does the law criminalize adultery?

The Penal Code does not address the issue of adultery in a specific article. However, article 1 can be used as a basis, as it stipulates: “With regard to Hudud and Qisas [Shariah terms] crimes and blood money, the stipulations of Islamic Shariah shall apply”.

Do laws that criminalize rape act based on absence of consent without requiring proof of the use of physical force or penetration?

In article 406, the Penal Code stipulates a life prison sentence for anyone committing the crime of having sexual intercourse

with a female without her consent. The sentence will be execution if the victim is under 18 or someone who cannot give consent.

Does the law criminalize marital rape?

Marital rape is not explicitly a crime, although the law on domestic violence stipulates that domestic violence includes physical, psychological, economic and sexual violence. In principle, the Penal Code could be used as a basis which criminalizes physical aggression. According to the Personal Status Law, the wife’s alimony is forfeited if she withholds herself from her husband without a legal excuse.

Does the law include exoneration if the offender marries his victim?

There is no statutory stipulation waiving punishment of the perpetrator of violence if he marries his victim.

Is sexual harassment defined in any legislation?

The Penal Code criminalizes sexual harassment in articles 358 and 359.

Is there a provision in the law that criminalizes cyberviolence against women and girls?

Legislative efforts to combat cybercrime have been initiated with Federal Decree-Law No. 34 of 2021, which took effect on 2 January 2022. The law does not contain any provisions dealing with the definition of cyberviolence against women and girls, but article 359 of Federal Decree-Law No. 4 of

2019 has been amended to include punishments of a prison sentence and a fine for anyone who exposes any female to inappropriate acts using technology or any other method.

Are sex work and prostitution criminalized?

The Penal Code criminalizes prostitution.

Are there comprehensive provisions (punitive, protective and preventive) on human trafficking in any law?

In 2006, the United Arab Emirates introduced legislation to combat human trafficking, prohibiting all forms of it and stipulating punishments ranging from a prison sentence of one year to life imprisonment, not to mention fines and deportation from the country.

Employment and economic benefits

Does the law mandate non-discrimination on the basis of gender in employment?

The amended Labour Relations Law of 2021 affirmed equality and prohibited discrimination between persons on the grounds of sex, "which would weaken equal opportunities or would prejudice equality in obtaining or continuing a job and enjoying its rights". The amended law also stipulated that "all provisions regulating the employment of workers without discrimination shall apply to working women".

Does the law mandate equal pay for the same work as men?

The amended Labour Relations Law of 2021 explicitly affirmed the right of women to equal pay as men if they perform the same work. Additionally, since 2019, a decision was adopted by the Council of Ministers and provided for equality in salaries and wages between the two sexes in Government entities.

Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value?

Article 4 (4) of the Labour Relations Law of 2021 stipulated

that: "A woman shall be paid a wage similar to a man's wage if she performs the same work, or another work of equal value. A Cabinet resolution shall be issued, upon a proposal by the Minister, to determine the procedures, controls, and criteria necessary for evaluating work of equal value".

Does the law allow women to do the same jobs as men?

The amended Labour Relations Law removed all restrictions imposed on women working in any sector or profession that were previously restricted. It also emphasized the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex, "which would weaken equal opportunities or would prejudice equality in obtaining or continuing a job and enjoying its rights".

Does the law allow women to work the same night hours as men?

The amended Labour Relations Law of 2021 maintained the annulment of restrictions imposed on women working at night.

Do national labour and civil service-related laws (labour codes, civil retirement acts, etc.) discriminate between men and women in terms of retirement age?

According to the new retirement law of 2022, women can retire at an earlier age than that stipulated for men, as they can benefit from a greater retirement pension through the opportunity given to them to increase its value.

Do national labour and civil service-related laws grant men and women equal rights to pass on their pensions to their spouses?

In some stipulations for entitlement to retirement, the law discriminates in terms of pensions between men and women.

Does the law prohibit dismissal during pregnancy and maternity leave?

The law prohibits dismissal of the woman due to pregnancy; it considers termination of employment on this basis arbitrary.

Does the law provide for maternity leave that meets

the International Labour Organization (ILO) standard of 14 weeks?

Since the amendment of the Human Resources Law in the Federal Government in 2022, a female employee appointed to a permanent government position is granted a longer paid maternity leave for a period of 3 months (90 days) only, despite the international standard of 98 days specified by the International Labour Organization. The same applies to the private sector, as working women are granted only 60 days of maternity leave.

Does the law provide for paid paternity leave available to fathers?

Under the amended Human Resources Law in the Federal Government of 2022, a male employee in a government job is now granted a paid paternity leave for 5 days to look after his child, similar to the parental leave stipulated in the Labour Relations Law of the private sector.

Does the State provide or subsidize childcare facilities?

In line with the Council of Ministers' decision No. 19 of 2006, the ministries and other government institutions with more than 50 female employees must set up nurseries at their headquarters for the infants of female employees.

Does legislation tackle sexual harassment in the workplace?

Federal Decree-Law No. 4 of 2019 added a new article to the Penal Code prohibiting sexual harassment. Article 14 of Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021 on regulating employee relations stipulates that sexual harassment, bullying, or exerting any verbal, physical or psychological violence against an employee is prohibited, whether it is by his/her employer, managers in the workplace, colleagues or co-workers.

Are there provisions allowing for civil claims/remedies for sexual

harassment in the workplace?

Sexual harassment has been criminalized, but there is no provision dealing with civil remedies.

Does the Labour Law provide protection for domestic workers?

The State passed Federal Law No. 10 of 2017 concerning ancillary workers, which guarantees extra protection of domestic workers. The law goes in detail about the role of recruiting agencies and contains non-discrimination stipulations.

Is there a public entity that can receive complaints on gender discrimination in employment?

The Department of Employment in the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation receives complaints concerning discrimination against women and investigates them with the requisite promptness in order to reach an amicable solution or to send both parties to the competent court.

Family matters (personal status)

Is 18 the minimum age at marriage, with no legal exceptions, for both women and men?

Pursuant to Article 19 of Law No. 41 of 2024, legal capacity for marriage is completed upon sound mind and the attainment of eighteen (18) full Gregorian years. The registration of a marriage contract is prohibited

for any male or female who has not reached eighteen (18) years of age, except with the permission of the court and after verifying that the marriage is in the best interest of the minor. The marriage must also meet the conditions and procedures applicable to the marriage of persons under eighteen (18) years of age, as specified by a decision issued by the Council of

Ministers upon a proposal from the Minister of Justice.

Is marriage under the legal age void or voidable?

Law No. 41 of 2024 does not contain provisions invalidating a marriage contract on the basis of age. Pursuant to Article 18, the essential elements required for the conclusion of a marriage

contract are: offer and acceptance by both spouses, and the presence of a guardian (wali) if the bride is Muslim. An exception applies to a Muslim bride who is not a citizen, if the law of her nationality does not require a guardian for marriage. Under Article 19, any person who enters into a valid marriage acquires the legal capacity to litigate and to appoint legal representation in all matters related to marriage and its consequences, provided that the person is of sound mind, even if not yet of full legal age.

Do women and men have equal rights to enter marriage (i.e. consent) and initiate divorce?

Men may unilaterally divorce their wives, while a woman must petition the court to obtain a divorce.

Article 53 of law 41 of 2024 defines divorce (*ṭalāq*) as the dissolution of the marriage bond by the will of the husband.

Khul', pursuant to Article 65, is a separation between the spouses initiated at the request of the wife and with the husband's consent to the compensation offered by the wife or by another party. A khul' results in an irrevocable minor divorce.

Does the law prohibit polygamy?

The Personal Status Law for Muslims does not prohibit polygamy.

As for civil marriage for non-Muslims residing in the United Arab Emirates, the executive regulations of the Civil Personal Status Law of 2022 stipulate that

"the wife shall not have an existing marital relationship, and also the husband if the legislation, to which he is subject, permit polygamy".

Do women and men have equal rights to be legal guardian of their children during and after marriage?

Chapter IX of Law No. 41 of 2024 regulates guardianship, legal authority (wilayah) and custodianship (qiwamah). Under Article 128, guardianship of a minor is divided into: guardianship over the person, which refers to the general supervision of the minor's affairs, provided it does not conflict with the authority of the custodian responsible for the child's daily care; and guardianship over property, which refers to managing all matters related to the minor's financial interests. Both forms of guardianship may be vested in one person.

According to Article 129, guardianship over the minor's property belongs exclusively to the father, then to his appointed guardian (if any), then to the paternal grandfather, and thereafter to the court.

Does the law grant women and men equal custody rights of their children?

Under Article 114 of Law No. 41 of 2024, custody is a right of the child and is borne by both parents as long as the marriage remains in effect. If they separate, custody is granted to the mother, followed by those entitled in the following order: the father, then the maternal grandmother, then the paternal grandmother. The court shall

determine what best serves the interests of the child, and may deviate from this order if deemed necessary for the welfare of the child.

Do women and men have equal rights to choose where to live?

The law obligates the husband to provide maintenance to his wife during the marriage. Pursuant to Article 103 of Law No. 41 of 2024, a wife forfeits her right to maintenance if she refuses marital relations, or refuses to move to or reside in the marital home, or to travel with her husband, without a legitimate excuse.

Do women and men have equal rights to choose a profession?

Women have equal rights in choosing their profession.

Do women and men have equal rights to own, access, and control or use marital property including upon divorce?

Women and men have equal rights to own, access, and control or use marital property, and each party keeps their assets and property in line with the stipulations of Islamic Shariah.

Where rights to inheritance are enshrined by law, do women and men have equal rights?

The Personal Status Law of Muslims deals with the question of inheritance and follows the principles of Islamic Shariah, which provides for women's right to inheritance. But in many cases, the daughter receives half the amount the son receives.

As for the Civil Personal Status Law of non-Muslims, it established equality in inheritance between women and men.

Are there specialized civil courts or civil court processes for family law matters that provide for the equal rights of men and women?

The Family Courts preside over family law matters; the Personal Status Court does not, in the

case of Muslim religious marriages.

As for family matters resulting from civil marriages, the authentication judge – who is considered as a specialized civil court, provides for the equal rights of men and women.

Do women have equal rights as men to pass their nationality to children?

As per the Nationality Law, children automatically gain the nationality of their male

guardian. An Emirati mother can submit a request to obtain United Arab Emirates nationality for her child on the condition that he/she has resided in the United Arab Emirates for a minimum period of six years.

Do women have equal rights as men to pass their nationality to a foreign spouse?

A woman cannot pass her Emirati nationality to her foreign husband.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

Do law(s) or regulation(s) exist that guarantee access to maternal health care for all women and girls, irrespective of marital status and without third-party authorization?

The State passed Federal Law No. 13 of 2020 on public health. Article 10 of the law addresses family health without stipulating any restrictions on mothers obtaining health care.

Do law(s) or regulation(s) exist that guarantee access to contraceptive services for all women and adolescent girls, irrespective of marital status and without third-party authorization?

Contraceptive pills are widely available without a prescription.

Do law(s) or regulation(s) exist that guarantee access to emergency contraception for all women and adolescent girls, irrespective

of marital status and without third-party authorization?

Emergency contraceptive pills are not prohibited legally. Furthermore, in article 15 of Federal Decree-Law No. 4 of 2016 on medical responsibility, it permits actions and interventions for birth control. Also, in article 10 of Federal Law No. 13 of 2020, it guarantees that family members can receive family health-care services, including reproductive health services and information about them.

Is induced abortion legal at least when the life or health of the pregnant woman is at risk and in cases of rape, incest or severe fetal impairment, and is abortion decriminalized in any case for both the pregnant woman as well as health-care providers performing it (when consent is fully given)?

The Council of Ministers adopted Decision No. 44 of 2024 concerning the determination of permissible cases of abortion. Abortion is permitted in the following instances: when the pregnancy is the result of intercourse with a female by coercion, without her consent, or with a will that is not legally recognized; when the person responsible for the pregnancy is an ascendant or another prohibited degree of kin (*mahram*) of the woman; or upon the request of the spouses and with the approval of the competent committee. The first and second cases must be proven by an official report issued by the competent Public Prosecution in the State.

Irrespective of the legal status of abortion, do law(s) or regulation(s) exist that ensure access to post-abortion care for all women and girls, independent of their marital status and without third-party authorization?

The State has not drawn up any laws on access to post-abortion care.

Do law(s), regulation(s) or national policies exist that make comprehensive sexual health education a mandatory component of the national school curriculum?

Sexual health education is not compulsory under State law.

Do law(s) or regulation(s) exist that guarantee access to voluntary HIV testing and counselling services for all women and girls, irrespective of marital status

and without third-party authorization?

All citizens and impoverished non-citizens enjoy the right to free HIV testing. Also, there is free treatment and health care for all citizens.

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