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United Arab Emirates

*Access to the United Arab
Emirates (UAE) for Syrians
and Palestinian Refugees*



United Arab Emirates - Access to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for Syrians and Palestinian Refugees

This brief report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The report/brief report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service.

Furthermore, this report/brief report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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Executive summary

Palestinians and Syrians seeking to enter the United Arab Emirates (UAE) must obtain a work visa and secure a sponsor, with the application for residency submitted by the sponsor. Residency permits can be revoked automatically if the holder is absent from the UAE for more than six consecutive months, and re-entry requires restarting the visa process, often entailing stricter security checks, particularly for Palestinians.

Overstaying can lead to fines, detention, and deportation, with deportation sometimes occurring to countries where the individual has no ties. Deportation can be judicial (following a criminal conviction) or administrative. Re-entry is typically banned unless special permission is granted by the authorities in the UAE. Since the outbreak of the war in Gaza in October 2023, Palestinians have faced increased scrutiny with regards to deportations, with reports of several Palestinians being deported for protesting against the war in Gaza.

There is contrasting information concerning the UAE's upholding of the principle of non-refoulement. Although non-refoulement is generally respected by the UAE for individuals who are registered by UNHCR, some sources reported of foreign nationals being deported in spite of various sources assessing the risk of such individuals of being subjected to violations upon return. There have been examples of Palestinians and Syrians being deported in the last ten years.

The UAE does not have a legal framework for granting asylum or refugee status, and asylum applicants without valid residency are treated as unauthorized immigrants, although the UAE-authorities sometimes cooperate with the UNHCR to provide temporary protection or facilitate resettlement.

Most non-Emirati citizens, including those born in the UAE, remain on renewable, employer-sponsored visas under the *kafala* (sponsorship) system. A loss of sponsorship can result in the loss of legal residency.

Although no official entry ban has been issued against Palestinian asylum seekers in the UAE, reports suggest that since the war in Gaza began in October 2023, UAE authorities have been rejecting applications from holders of Palestinian travel documents issued by the Palestinian Authority as well as Syrian travel documents issued to Palestinians.

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Introduction

This thematic report gives an overview of information pertaining to Syrians and Palestinian refugees' access to the UAE. The report presents information on rules relating to entry and exit to the UAE, including prevalence of detention, deportation, entry bans, return and re-admissions to the UAE and the subject of refoulement.

The report also covers access to asylum, acquisition of citizenship and the sponsorship system (*Kafala* in Arabic) in the UAE as it relates to procedures for obtaining a residency permit in the UAE which is also detailed in the report.

The report is written in accordance with the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) COI Report methodology and has undergone internal peer review within the Danish Immigration Service (DIS).¹ The report is a synthesis of the information obtained from written sources. It is drafted exclusively on the basis of information collected through desk-study research

The terms of reference (ToR) for this report were drawn up by the Country of Origin Unit at DIS in consultation with the Asylum Division of DIS. The ToR is included at the end of the report (Annex I).

The research and editing of this report were finalised on the 27 of august 2025. The report can be accessed from the website of the Danish Immigrations Service, <http://www.us.dk/>. The report is available to all stakeholders working within the field of refugee status determination as well as to the general public.

¹ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), *Country of Origin (COI) Report Methodology*, February 2022, [url](#)

Abbreviations

COI Country of Origin Information

DIS Danish Immigration Service

EUAA European Union Agency for Asylum

GDFRA General Directorate for Residency and Foreigners Affairs

HRW Human Rights Watch

ICP Federal Authority for Identity, Citizenship, Customs and Port Security

MoHRE Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation

NL-MFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

PA The Palestinian Authority

RRIS UNRWA's online Refugee Registration Information System RRIS

PRS Palestinian refugees from Syria

SMA Swedish Migration Agency

UAE United Arab Emirates

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNRWA United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees

1. Syrians and Palestinian refugees in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) consists of seven emirates: Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Sharjah, Ras al-Khayma, Fujairah, and Umm al-Quwain.²

It is estimated that between 100,000 and 300,000 Palestinians live in the UAE. Palestinians in the UAE are typically well-educated and constitute a community that has been residing in the country for many years, with some having lived there for 40 to 50 years.³

According to a Swedish Migration Agency report from 2019, there were approximately 60,000 Palestinians with Palestinian travel documents in the UAE. The number of Palestinians with other travel documents, such as Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian, or Jordanian, were estimated to be around 250,000. With regard to Palestinians from Syria (PRS) the UAE authorities accepted Syrian travel documents. In cases of Palestinians with a so-called '00 passport', issued by the Palestinian Authority, such travel documents were also accepted for entry, according to the Swedish Migration Agency's report.⁴

Palestinians and Syrians living in the UAE on a sponsorship basis are required to rely on private providers of education and healthcare, as public services are only available to UAE citizens.⁵ According to Swedish Migration Agency, the situation for Palestinians in the UAE has become increasingly difficult and they face greater difficulty obtaining legal residency in the country and risk deportation if their employment, and thus their right to remain is terminated. The UAE has not ratified the UN Refugee Convention, and Palestinian refugees are only granted residency for employment purposes and have a sponsor; on equal terms with other foreign nationals wishing to reside in the UAE.⁶

Syrian nationals have historically constituted one of the largest Arab migrant communities in the UAE. Their presence dates back to the 1950s and 1960s, when they were commonly employed in professions such as education, law, medicine, engineering, banking, and entrepreneurship. Following the oil boom of the 1970s, the profile of Syrian migrants

² Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument* (version 1.1), October 2019, [url](#), p. 100

³ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument* (version 1.1), October 2019, [url](#), p. 100

⁴ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument* (version 1.1), October 2019, [url](#), p. 103; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, [url](#), p. 11

⁵ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument* (version 1.1), October 2019, [url](#), p. 100; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 40

⁶ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument* (version 1.1), October 2019, [url](#), p. 99-100

diversified to include individuals working in lower-skilled jobs and lower paying sectors, including administrative and technical roles within the military, municipal services, ports, and local banks.⁷ While many of the migrants coming to the UAE remained and established families in the country, subsequent generations—often born in the UAE—have generally continued to reside there on temporary, renewable visas. This situation is largely due to the UAE's restrictive immigration policies, which limit access to permanent residency and naturalisation for most foreign nationals.⁸

An estimated 242.00 Syrians resided in the UAE as of 2015 according to UAE authorities, who also stated that the UAE had granted 100.000 residency permits to Syrians since the outbreak of conflict in Syria in 2011.⁹

According to UNHCR data, as of 2024, there were 1,415 refugees in the UAE under the UNHCR mandate, of whom 24 were Palestinian refugees, whilst the number of Syrian refugees does not appear in the UNHCR data. Additionally, the UAE hosted 6,932 asylum seekers, including 9 Palestinians. The majority of refugees and asylum seekers in the UAE originated from Iraq and Syria.¹⁰

2. Entry and exit

Like other foreign nationals, Palestinians and Syrians are required to obtain a work visa and secure a sponsor prior to entering the UAE, with the application being processed through a local agent. The entry permit is granted once the sponsor submits the application on behalf of the individual, i.e. the person wishing to enter the UAE cannot apply him- or herself. As part of the entry visa process, applicants are required to undergo a security check and submit a police record (Good Conduct and Behavior Certificate) from their home country when applying for a residency permit.¹¹

When exiting the UAE, the individual receives an exit stamp. Palestinians, like other foreigners, lose their residency permit if they have been abroad for more than six consecutive months. The permit is automatically removed from the system, regardless of the length of time the individual has lived in the UAE. While an individual can apply for re-entry, they must go through

⁷ Idil Akinci-Perez, E-International Relations, *Different Type of Refugee: Onward Journeys of Gulf-Born Migrants from Politically Volatile Countries*, 12 September 2021, [url](#)

⁸ Idil Akinci-Perez, E-International Relations, *Different Type of Refugee: Onward Journeys of Gulf-Born Migrants from Politically Volatile Countries*, 12 September 2021, [url](#)

⁹ AP-News, *Emirates defends its response to Syria's refugee crisis*, 9. September 2015, [url](#); Landinfo, *Respons Golffmonarkiene: Opphold for syrere og jemenitter, og forekomst av tvangsreturer*, 28 juni 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁰ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 40-41

¹¹ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1)*, October 2019, [url](#), p.p.102- 104

the entire process again, securing a job and finding a sponsor. The individual may be allowed to return if the previous sponsor reinstates their support or if a new sponsor is found, provided they pass the required security clearance. However, there is no guarantee that the authorities will approve reentry of such concerned individuals in these cases. Additionally, The Swedish Migration Agency reported in 2019 that information suggested that Palestinians may face difficulty passing the security check. If their request is denied, they are typically not provided with an explanation from the UAE authorities.¹²

Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, UAE-born Syrians and Syrian nationals have faced increasingly strict border controls, more frequent residency visa renewals, and tightened security checks within the Gulf region. In the UAE, where residency is primarily tied to work permits, the inability to renew these permits can have significant consequences. This may include restrictions on access to essential services, such as education, and limitations on employment, which in turn affect the individual's ability to provide for themselves and their families.¹³

2.1. Visa policy change for Palestinians following October 7. 2023 and the war in Gaza

According to one source interviewed in 2025 by the Netherlands MFA, no specific legislation or regulation prohibits the issuance of entry visas to Palestinian asylum seekers in the UAE.¹⁴ However, according to the NGO, Action Group for Palestinians in Syria, there has been a shift in UAE visa policies for Palestinians following October 7, 2023 and the subsequent military conflict in Gaza. UAE authorities have reportedly been rejecting applications from holders of Palestinian travel documents issued by the Palestinian Authority as well as Syrian travel documents issued to Palestinians. Travel agencies in Syria and Egypt have confirmed that Palestinians with Syrian documents and Palestinian Authority passports are no longer being allowed entry, although the UAE has not issued an official decision in this regard. Palestinians who entered the UAE before this change have experienced a state of legal limbo due to the refusal of issuance of residency permits by the UAE. The UAE extended the deadline for Palestinians in the UAE to correct and legalize their status until December 31. 2024, allowing individuals to regularize their status by leaving the country, securing a job, or altering their residency status. Palestinian refugees from

¹² Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument* (version 1.1), October 2019, [url](#), p. 102-103

¹³ Idil Akinci-Perez, E-International Relations, *Different Type of Refugee: Onward Journeys of Gulf-Born Migrants from Politically Volatile Countries*, 12 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p.11

Syria (PRS) who faced an irregular legal status were unable to benefit from the extension of this deadline.¹⁵

In spite of the aforementioned visa restrictions since the war in Gaza began in 2023, the UAE have begun providing medical care to evacuees from Gaza through its Emirates Humanitarian City in Abu Dhabi. Palestinian evacuees from Gaza reside at the center. By December 2024, 2,254 patients and family members had been transferred from Gaza to the UAE. According to the report by the Netherlands MFA, the total number of refugees and evacuees residing in the EHC was unknown as of March 2025. Individuals are required to return after receiving medical treatment, but it is unclear if evacuees receive documents confirming lawful residence in the UAE while receiving treatment.¹⁶

2.2 Overstay, detention, deportation and entry bans

The Swedish Migration Agency reported in 2019 that foreigners who overstayed their residency permit may face fines and possible deportation, which appeared to have an element of arbitrariness. In some cases, deportation had occurred to countries with which the deportee had no ties. The Swedish Migration Agency's sources had highlighted cases where Palestinians were deported to Iraq, Sudan, Malaysia, and Somalia. Deportation typically occurred when the authorities considered the individual a security risk, or if they had committed a crime. If deported, the individual would be banned from re-entering the country.¹⁷

2.3. Detention

Individuals residing in the UAE without a valid residence visa may be subject to administrative detention for a period of up to three months. Detention may be applied in cases where a person lacks a residency permit, fails to pay the fines after the visa has expired, does not depart the country after the expiration of the visa, or when their visa has been revoked by the authorities. An expired visa will incur fines of 50 AED (approx. 90 DKK.).¹⁸

The UAE regularly arrest and deport foreign citizens for violating immigration regulations, including violations related to public safety or morality. Legal provisions for administrative detention are set out in Article 21 of Federal Law No. (6) of 1973 on Immigration and Residence. This article allows for the use of administrative detention under specific conditions,

¹⁵ Action Group For Palestinians of Syria, *Changes in the UAE's entry policies for Palestinians*, تغيرات في سياسات دخول الفلسطينيين إلى الإمارات, 11 August 2024, [url](#)

¹⁶ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 41-42

¹⁷ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1)*, October 2019, [url](#), p.p. 101-102

¹⁸ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 28, 31-32

which include effectuating deportations as a consequence of breaches of immigration law or in connection with criminal offences committed by an individual residing in the UAE.¹⁹

Individuals who are denied entry to the UAE may be subject to detention upon arrival in the UAE. In some instances, passengers may be refused entry during the boarding process in their departure country, if they do not meet the necessary conditions set by the UAE. In May 2024, hundreds of Indian nationals were detained at the airport for failing to present the necessary travel documents upon arrival in the UAE. A group of forty Indian nationals were reportedly returned to their departure country after arriving in the UAE due to failure to meet entry requirements, including possession of the correct visa, adequate funds for their stay, and a return ticket with the same airline.²⁰

In a COI-report by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a confidential source stated that although detention can occur, it does not occur for extended time periods. However, according to the Netherlands MFA the frequency and duration of detention in the UAE are unknown.²¹

2.4. Deportation

There are two types of deportation in the UAE; judicial and administrative deportation. Judicial deportation is implemented against a foreign national who has been convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for a criminal offence. Deportation in such cases occurs after the individual has completed their sentence, although the court may also choose to opt for deportation as an alternative to imprisonment. Administrative deportation is issued by the Immigration and Citizenship Department (ICP) and is typically based on considerations of public interest, public safety, or public morals. This category also includes deportation of individuals with expired visas. Foreigners who have been deported are generally banned from re-entering the UAE unless they receive special permission from the Director-General of the ICP, in accordance with Article 28 of Law No. 6 of 1973 regarding the entry and stay of foreigners. Individuals arriving in the UAE without a valid visa are subject to deportation. In cases where a person arrives by air, the airline is responsible for arranging their return. If deportation to the country of departure or to a third country is not possible, UAE authorities may contact the UNHCR for assistance. However, as resettlement in a third country is not guaranteed, there is a risk of refoulement for such individuals in these circumstances, according to the assessment of UNHCR from 2020.²²

¹⁹ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 30

²⁰ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 31-32; OnManorama, *UAE issues new visiting visa guidelines: Passengers detained at airports*, 23 May 2024, [url](#); Aviation24.be, *UAE Visit visa holders urged to book return ticket with same airline*, 31 May 2024, [url](#)

²¹ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 32

²² UNHCR, *United Arab Emirates: Country of Origin Information Relating to the Return and (Re)admission of Individuals who Previously Resided in the UAE and Who Require a Visa Prior to Arrival*, 12 May 2020,

Based on reporting in Arab media, a COI-report from the Netherlands MFA stated that since October 7, 2023, Palestinians in the UAE who have expressed solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza have faced increased scrutiny and measures by the authorities in the UAE. The reporting claimed that individuals ranging from tens of persons to potentially hundreds of individuals were arrested, interrogated, issued fines, and deported for posting online statements related to the Gaza conflict. The specific destinations to which these individuals were deported were not clear from the reporting. In one incident, a student who shouted "Free Palestine" at a university in Abu Dhabi was allegedly deported from the UAE. Additional media reporting has indicated that freedom of expression in the UAE has become more restricted following the normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE in 2020. Criticism of this normalization reportedly draws increased attention from the authorities, with Palestinians in the UAE particularly affected.²³

2.5. Entry ban

If an individual has been deported from the UAE, an entry ban may be imposed upon a person by UAE-authorities. As described above two separate schemes exist in deportation cases, namely judicial or administrative deportation. The *blacklist* includes individuals who have committed a criminal offense and have been deported, and thus fall under the judicial deportation schemes. The *administrative* list includes people who are not allowed to return to the UAE due to the expiration of their residence visa, or individuals who have "escaped their sponsor" and thus fall under administrative deportation. According to a report by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is unclear what UAE-authorities specifically mean with "escaped their sponsor", but Article 28 of Law 6 from 1973 regarding the Entry and Stay, states that a deported foreigner can only return with special permission from the Director-General of the Federal Authority for Identity, Citizenship, Customs and Port Security (ICP). There are reportedly no special arrangements for Palestinians wishing to re-enter the UAE, nor have the Netherlands MFA or DIS been able to find information on the duration of entry bans being imposed on foreigners or Palestinians. Furthermore, no specific information has been found relating to entry bans being imposed specifically on Palestinians.²⁴

UNHCR, *United Arab Emirates: Country of Origin Information Relating to the Return and (Re)admission of Individuals who Previously Resided in the UAE and Who Require a Visa Prior to Arrival*, 12 May 2020, [url](#), p.4; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 30

²³ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 31

²⁴ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 37

2.6. Return and re-admissions to the UAE

A foreign national who has exited the UAE can obtain re-entry the UAE under one of the various residency visa categories, provided that the foreign national meets the required criteria of the various residency visa categories, as described in section 2 and section 6-6.3 of this report. A permit of residency is automatically cancelled if the permit holder has been absent from the UAE for more than six consecutive months (180 consecutive days). A non-Emirati national returning to the UAE, including those who are forcibly returned and who do not hold a residency permit or an entry visa, will not be allowed to enter the UAE. In general, such individuals would not be allowed to board a flight to the UAE and would be denied boarding by the airline in the country of departure. If an error occurs and the individual lands in the UAE, they will be denied entry into the UAE, and the airline must arrange their return to the country of departure. However, if the airline is aware that the individual will not be readmitted to the country that the individual departed from, the UAE-authorities may attempt to put said individual on a flight to their country of origin: In the event it is not possible to return the individual to neither the country of departure or the country of origin, UAE authorities will seek to send the individual to a third country in which no entry visa is required. This can result in the individual being stranded at the airport for an extended period. In past cases where individuals could neither be sent back to their country of departure nor transferred to a third country, the UAE authorities have contacted UNHCR to explore resettlement options in a third country. However, since resettlement is not assured, these situations place the individual at risk of refoulement, according to UNHCR's assessment.²⁵

2.7. Refoulement

There is contrasting information concerning the UAE's adherence to upholding the principle of non-refoulement. The principle of non-refoulement is generally respected by the UAE for individuals who are registered by UNHCR, but human rights organisations have criticized the UAE's legal safeguards against non-refoulement as being inadequate, in spite of the UAE being a party to the UN Convention Against Torture, which prohibits refoulement for persons who risk being tortured upon return, as well as UAE's constitution which prohibits the deportation of citizens of the UAE and political refugees. The criticism has centered on the fact that UAE's legislation does not provide for an assessment of the risk of torture that a deported person may face upon return. Such an assessment is generally expected to take place prior to the deportation procedure. There have been examples of foreign nationals being deported in spite of facing possible torture upon return, such as the case of the Russian citizen, Ravil Mingazov, in

²⁵Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 37 ;UNHCR, *United Arab Emirates: Country of Origin Information Relating to the Return and (Re)admission of Individuals who Previously Resided in the UAE and Who Require a Visa Prior to Arrival*, 12 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4

2023. There have also been examples of Cameroonian migrant workers being deported despite concern due to ongoing violence in Cameroon in 2021.²⁶

According to an Amnesty International report from October 2021, close to 400 African migrant workers were arbitrarily detained and collectively deported without due process.²⁷ In its Submission to the Committee against Torture in July 2022, the independent Swiss research centre, Global Detention Project, reported that the UAE regularly detains and deports non-nationals for immigration violations or breaches of "public security or morals." Detained non-citizens often experience arbitrary arrests, poor detention conditions, lack of access to case information, and deportation without legal recourse. According to the organisation, the UAE does not disclose data on the amount or nationality of detainees or deportees.²⁸

According to US Department of State's annual human rights report from 2020, there were no public reports of refoulement during the reporting year, in contrast to the previous year.²⁹ The organisation Integral Human Development stated, in its migration country profile on the UAE referring to developments up until 2021, that whilst the country does not have an asylum system, it generally respects the principle of non-refoulement. According to the organisation, the UAE endorsed the United Nations Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration as well as the UN Global Compact on Refugees in December 2018.³⁰

According to a Swedish Migration Agency's source in the UAE, who was interviewed for a report published in 2019, there were reported cases of Palestinians from Gaza with Egyptian travel documents, who had been deported. Palestinians from Syria (with Syrian travel documents) were generally not deported to Syria, although such cases may have gone unreported. However, there had been attempts in the past to deport Palestinians from Syria to other countries, such as Malaysia, Sudan or Somalia.³¹

²⁶ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 42

²⁷ Amnesty International, *UAE: Ensure the right to remedy to hundreds of African workers following racially motivated detentions and deportations*, 26. October 2021, [url](#)

²⁸ Global Detention Project, *UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: Submission to the Committee against Torture - Global Detention Project | Mapping immigration detention around the world*, 26. October, 2021, [url](#)

²⁹ US Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: United Arab Emirates*, March 2021, [url](#), p.26

³⁰ Integral Human Development, *United Arab Emirates – Migrant and Refugees Section*, n.d., [url](#)

³¹ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1)*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 103

3. Access to asylum

The law in the UAE does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status. The UAE does not have a formalized system for providing protection to refugees and asylum seekers. While the UAE does grant informal protection to refugees and asylum seekers from being returned in some cases, any individual lacking legal residency status falls under the law of unauthorized immigrants. UAE authorities have the authority to detain such individuals.³² In certain instances, authorities restricted individuals seeking protection at the airport to a designated area while they awaited resettlement in another country. The government supported initiatives to resettle or relocate individuals who had been moved from Afghanistan to other countries.³³

According to sources interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the ministry's 2025 COI-report on the UAE, no individual can legally obtain asylum in the UAE. The legal status of non-Emirati nationals is governed by residency regulations, which solely depend on holding a valid work permit. Neither does any special arrangements or exceptions exist for Palestinian asylum seekers or migrants.³⁴

UAE authorities cooperate with the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations to provide protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees or asylum seekers, and other vulnerable persons or groups on a case-by-case basis, due to the lack of an instituted national asylum procedure in the UAE.³⁵

UNHCR operates under the auspices of the World Food Programme in the UAE and UNHCR is responsible for conducting the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process in the UAE. The UAE allows individuals seeking protection to stay in the country on a temporary, case-by-case basis.³⁶

UNHCR does not issue proof of registration in the UAE, as the refugee status granted by UNHCR is not recognised by the UAE. Neither does being awarded refugee status by UNHCR make the process of the renewal of residence easier, or give access to basic services. Thus, a significant

³² US Department of State, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: United Arab Emirates*, April 2024, [url](#); Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 39

³³ US Department of State, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: United Arab Emirates*, April 2024, [url](#).

³⁴ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 39, 41

³⁵ US Department of State, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: United Arab Emirates*, April 2024, [url](#); Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 40

³⁶ US Department of State, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: United Arab Emirates*, April 2024; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 40

number of refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR do not have a valid residence permit, as presence in the UAE is subject to applicable residency regulations. A person's legal status may change abruptly in certain cases. For example, Syrians born in the UAE can become refugees if they lose their temporary residency status.³⁷

Some refugee families, particularly those from Iraq and Syria, have faced challenges in accessing healthcare and education. The authorities in the UAE provide access to certain services on a case-by-case basis, typically following intervention by UNHCR.³⁸

4. Acquisition of citizenship in the UAE

In January 2021, the UAE government amended regulation related to the Citizenship and Passports Law in order to allow certain categories of foreign nationals and their spouses and children to acquire Emirati citizenship. Eligible candidates include investors, medical professionals, specialists, inventors, scientists, intellectuals, and individuals with artistic or creative abilities. Such individuals must also fulfill specific criteria. For example investors are required to own property in the UAE, doctors or specialists must be trained in scientific fields that are in high demand in the country, and inventors must hold one or more patents that have been approved by the UAE's Ministry of Economic Affairs.³⁹

Another source stated in 2021 that non-citizens in the UAE, including individuals born and raised in the country, do not generally have access to Emirati citizenship or permanent residency. Despite constituting approximately 90% of the total population in the UAE, non-Emirati nationals are predominantly governed by a system of renewable, employer-sponsored temporary visas, commonly referred to as the *kafala* system. Although recent reforms have introduced longer-term visa options and limited pathways to naturalisation, these measures are largely restricted to selected categories such as highly skilled professionals, investors, and entrepreneurs.⁴⁰

According to a 2019 report from the Swedish Migration Agency, acquiring citizenship in the UAE through naturalization is possible, but the process is vague, and reportedly very few people are granted citizenship through this process. However, some Palestinians born in the UAE have

³⁷ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 40-41

³⁸ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 40

³⁹ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 12

⁴⁰ Idil Akinci-Perez, E-International Relations, *Different Type of Refugee: Onward Journeys of Gulf-Born Migrants from Politically Volatile Countries*, 12 September 2021, [url](#)

been granted citizenship via decree or royal favor on the basis of notable contributions to the country.⁴¹

There are no specific requirements for Palestinians to become citizens of the UAE. They must fulfill the same general requirements as other foreign nationals in order to obtain emirati-citizenship.⁴² According to a 2025 COI-report by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the UAE granted citizenship through naturalization to Palestinians and other individuals who contributed to the establishment of the UAE government after its founding in 1971 and this included a large number of Palestinians who were naturalized in connection to their contribution to the establishment of the state. In practice, Palestinians are rarely naturalized in the UAE today, as it is rare for foreign nationals to be granted Emirati nationality. According to a 2025 COI-report by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs there was no information on whether the UAE still upheld the Casablanca Protocol for the treatment of Palestinians in Arab states. The protocol permits Palestinians to work, gives them the freedom of residence and travel documents in turn for their 'Palestinian identity' being preserved and they are thus not given citizenship in the hosting state.⁴³

5. The sponsorship system in UAE

The sponsorship system also called *Kafala* in Arabic, is a set of work and residency procedures that are applied throughout the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC), which the UAE is a member state of, aimed at regulating labor immigration. As a member of the GCC, the UAE has also adopted the *Kafala* sponsorship system into its laws.⁴⁴

The right to live and work in the UAE is primarily granted through sponsorship by a citizen, also called a *kafeel*. UAE citizens have the authority to hire and bring foreign workers into the country, as well as control their entry and residency rights. Citizens are typically allowed to sponsor as many migrants as they can financially support, with no set time restrictions on their role as a sponsor. The sponsor, whether a citizen, company, or government institution, provides the migrant temporary access to the labor market and has the authority to terminate employment if needed. If the migrant fails to comply with the rules, they may face deportation

⁴¹ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument* (version 1.1), October 2019, [url](#), p. 100; Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Palestine and United Arab Emirates: residence status of stateless Palestinians, including access to employment, education, health care and other services, and the ability to travel in and out of the country; the requirements and procedures to renew residence status; treatment of stateless Palestinians whose residence status has expired (2015-November 2017)*, 24 November 2017, [url](#),

⁴² Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 11

⁴³ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 11-12

⁴⁴ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument* (version 1.1), October 2019, [url](#), p. 99

or other legal consequences.⁴⁵ Since workers' employment and residency visas are tied together and can only be renewed or terminated by sponsors, the system grants private individuals, rather than the state, control over workers' legal status. This creates an irregular residency status for workers, as they depend on sponsors to remain in the country legally, and since sponsors can invalidate their status for whatever reason they see fit.⁴⁶

5.1. The Role of the sponsor

Having a sponsor is required in order to obtain legal residency in the country; thus individuals who lose their sponsor due to the termination of their employment risk losing their residency permit. The sponsor serves as a guarantor for the foreigner and is responsible for applying for residency permits, opening a bank account, and ensuring the foreigner's legal residency status. If a foreigner loses their sponsor (e.g., through job termination), they have 30 days to find new employment before being required to leave the country.⁴⁷

5.2. Sponsoring family members

Foreigners working in the UAE can sponsor their family members if they meet the financial requirements. This includes their spouse, children under 18, and elderly parents. The minimum salary required to be a sponsor is 3,000 or 4,000 AED for men. Permits for family members are valid as long as the sponsor holds a valid permit.⁴⁸ Sponsored individuals can also include adult sons or male relatives who are studying, as well as unmarried daughters and divorced women, who are usually sponsored by a male relative, typically their father. Once a child turns 18, they cannot remain in the UAE without a special university scholarship or sponsorship, and must either secure their own employment or a separate sponsor in order to remain, regardless of whether or not they were born in the UAE.⁴⁹

5.3. Different requirements for sponsorship for women and men

Women can sponsor their children but only in special cases approved by the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship (ICP). UAE authorities do not specify or elaborate on what such

⁴⁵ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1)*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 99

⁴⁶ Council of Foreign Relations, *What is the Kafala System?*, 18. November 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1)*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 101-102

⁴⁸ The official Portal of the UAE Government, *Sponsorship requirements*, 15. July, 2024, [url](#); Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, [url](#), pp. 24-25

⁴⁹ The official Portal of the UAE Government, *Sponsorship requirements*, 15. July, 2024, [url](#); Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1)*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 101

special cases might be, or what the requirements are.⁵⁰ Unlike men, women are not able to serve as sponsors for their parents.⁵¹

If granted permission by the ICP, a women can serve as sponsors for family members seeking a residency visa, and can sponsor a spouse, sons up to the age of 25 as well as unmarried daughters of any age. A female student can only be sponsored by a parent as long as she is unmarried.⁵²

Women seeking to sponsor a family member must earn at least 8000 AED (approximately 2000 EUR), 10,000 AED in the emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi and must be able to provide accommodation. Furthermore, women must be employed in one of the following professions: teacher, doctor, nurse or another medical profession or engineer. Unlike women, there are no specific professional employment requirements for men seeking to sponsor a family member. In emirate of Dubai, women are not subjected to employment requirements but require permission from the Dubai Naturalization and Residency Department.⁵³

6. Laws and regulations on residency

The law regulating entry and residence in the UAE is the Federal Law by Decree No. (29) of 2021 Concerning Entry and Residence of Foreigners. This law, which has been amended three times prior to 2021, as No. (7) of 1985, Law No. (13) of 1996, and Federal Decree-Law No. 17 of 2017, outlines the procedures, regulations, and penalties related to immigration in the UAE. The law regulates both work visas and residence visas.⁵⁴ UAE authorities use the words residency visas and residency permits interchangeably on their official government websites, but they refer to the same document, i.e. the permit to reside in the UAE.⁵⁵

6.1. Residency permits which do not require a sponsor

In the UAE, residency permits are granted based on employment, owning a business, or property.⁵⁶ There are a few types of visas, which do not require a sponsor. These are residency

⁵⁰ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, [url](#), pp. 24-25; The Official Portal of the Government, *Residence visa for family members*, 15 July 2024, [url](#),

⁵¹ Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, [url](#), pp. 20-21, 24-25

⁵² Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, [url](#), pp. 24-25

⁵³ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, [url](#), pp. 24-25

⁵⁴ UAE, *Federal Law by Decree No. (29) of 2021 Concerning Entry and Residence of Foreigners*, 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁵ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 13.

⁵⁶ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestiner i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1)*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 101-102

visas such as the Green Visa, the Virtual Work Visa, the Golden Visa, the Blue visa and the student Visa.⁵⁷

The Green Visa permits individuals classified as skilled personnel to obtain a residency visa, provided their occupation falls within the first, second, or third skill level, which includes business executives, legislators, managers, professionals and technicians in the scientific, technical and/or humanitarian field, as defined by the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE) classification system. The green visa also allows freelance/self-employment work, but authorities require applicants stay financially solvent throughout their residence in the UAE. The Virtual Work Residence Visa allows for foreign nationals to live in the UAE but work for a company in a different country. The Golden Visa is issued based on *exceptional merit* or capital and targets investors, doctors, scientists, entrepreneurs, and exceptional students. The Blue Visa targets individuals that have made exceptional contributions to the environment and sustainability and Student Visas target foreign nationals, who can be sponsored by a UAE-based university or a parent living in the UAE.⁵⁸

In other cases, applicants for residency in the UAE will need a sponsor, typically an employer or a citizen (for household services), or a foreign UAE-resident sponsoring family members. Residency permits are generally valid for a duration of two-three years, depending on the job or contract, with extensions available at the General Directorate for Residency and Foreigners Affairs (GDFRA) within 30 days of expiration. Late applications may incur fines.⁵⁹ There are reportedly no special arrangements for Palestinians with regards to obtaining a residency permit, although one source, in a Netherlands MFA COI-report, stated that it is not clear whether special arrangements apply to Palestinians in terms of residence visas.⁶⁰

6.2. Application process

To obtain a work residency permit, the employer first applies for a visa quota approval from the Ministry of Labour, followed by the submission of a signed employment contract for approval. Afterward, the employer applies for the foreign employee's work permit and entry visa.⁶¹ The entry permit allows short-term entry (typically for 60 days) for various reasons, including employment, tourism, or medical treatment. Employment permits typically allow 60 days of

⁵⁷ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 21-24.

⁵⁸ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 21-24.

⁵⁹ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1)*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 101-102

⁶⁰ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE* March 2025, [url](#), p.17

⁶¹ Qureos, *A Comprehensive UAE Visa Guide For Employees (2025) - Career Guide*, January 22 2025, [url](#); Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 14-15

stay, after which a residence visa or extension is required.⁶² A residence visa is granted to individuals who are already in the UAE after entering on an entry visa.⁶³

Upon arrival in the UAE, the employee must undergo a medical test. Once passed, the employer applies for the residency visa, and the signed labour contract is submitted to the Ministry of Human Resources & Emiratisation.⁶⁴ Residence visas can last up to three years, depending on the sponsor. Long-term residence visas are available for five or ten years, subject to conditions.⁶⁵

In some cases, the requirements for obtaining a residence visa/permit differ between men and women. With regards to a standard work visa, women can apply and have an employer act as a sponsor. According to a COI-report by the Netherlands MFA, the official UAE website does not directly specify whether women can or cannot obtain such work visas or whether there are differences for the requirement for women and men.⁶⁶

6.3 Required documents

To apply for a residency permit, the following documents are required:⁶⁷

- Original passport and copy
- Original entry permit
- ID card
- Establishment card (for business owners)
- Copy of trade license
- Medical examination results
- Signed and stamped residency permit application from the sponsor
- Police record (Good Conduct and Behavior Certificate) from the applicant's home country⁶⁸

Foreigners must also obtain an approved security clearance, which, according to Swedish Migration Agency source's, is often difficult for Palestinians to obtain. Upon approval of the residence visa application, a visa sticker is stuck to the passport, and an Emirati identity card (ID) is issued, reflecting the same validity period as the visa. Additionally, the Ministry of

⁶² Abu Dhabi Residents Office, [Types of Visa](#), n.d., [url](#)

⁶³ Abu Dhabi Residents Office, [Types of Visa](#), n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁴ Abu Dhabi Residents Office, [Types of Visa](#), n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁵ Abu Dhabi Residents Office, [Types of Visa](#), n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁶ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p.24

⁶⁷ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1)*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 102

⁶⁸ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1)*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 102

Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE) issues a Labour Card, confirming the holder's legal authorization to work in the UAE.⁶⁹

To renew a residency permit, applicants must submit the same documents as the initial application, excluding the entry permit.⁷⁰

6.4. Identity documents

ID cards are mandatory for anyone with a residency permit in the UAE; however, an ID card cannot be issued to someone who does not have a residency permit. The validity of the ID card varies for citizens, GCC citizens, and non-citizens. For a person with a residency permit, the ID card is valid as long as the residency permit is valid. When a person with a residency permit applies for an ID card, they are required to submit an original passport and entry or residency visa.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1)*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 102; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Palestinians (and other foreign nationals) in the UAE*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 15

⁷⁰ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1)*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 102

⁷¹ Swedish Migration Agency, *Lifosrapport: Palestinier i Mellanöstern - uppehållsrätt och dokument (version 1.1)*, October 2019, [url](#), p. 103

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Annex I: Terms of reference: Access to the UAE for Syrians and Palestinians refugees

1. Regulations and procedures for reentry and exit

1.1. Laws pertaining to reentry into the UAE for Syrians and PRS

2. Residence permits and citizenship

2.1. Laws regarding residence permits and citizenship in the UAE

2.2. Possibility of Syrians and Palestinians to obtain residence permits and citizenship in practice in the UAE

3. Refoulement of Syrians and Palestinians from the UAE

3.1. Forced returns of Syrians to Syria from the UAE

3.2. Forced returns of Palestinians (UNRWA-mandate country of individual or ancestors)