



Global Platform for the Right to the City
Plataforma Global por el Derecho a la Ciudad
Plateforme Globale pour le Droit à la Ville

Right to the City in the United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is considered one of the most attractive destinations for foreign workers and is the third highest source of foreign remittances by foreign contract workers from over 200 different nationalities. However, the monitoring body of the binding Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has expressed its concern that gaps in the protection of foreign workers under the sponsorship of contractual relationship systems still exist. While UAE's policies and regulations toward foreign workers have improved over the years, abusive working practices, such as the withholding of passports, false imprisonment, substandard working conditions, long working hours, non-payment of wages, non-payment of overtime, unlawful deduction of wages, insufficient rest or break periods and overcrowded living conditions affecting foreign workers persist.

In particular, domestic workers, who are mostly foreign women, are not protected under national labor laws. The Committee is further concerned at reports that foreign domestic workers have experienced unpaid wages, lengthy work days with insufficient time off or rest periods, restrictions on freedom of movement and, in some cases, sexual exploitation by employers. The UAE has yet to ratify the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011.¹

Concerning women, the UAE still has not removed its reservations to the CEDaW Convention. Nor does the State's Constitution enshrine the principle of equality of women and men, as is its international legal obligation. These equality and protection gaps coexist with cultural stereotypes of women as less than full rights holders. Such cultural features contribute to the persistence of unregistered children, forced marriage, judges' derogations of the legal minimum age of marriage, polygamy, domestic violence, unequal inheritance and a lack of access to justice, all which of which are contrary to the dignity of women and girls.²

The cities of UAE also host a considerable number of persons who remain stateless, despite their long residence or birth within the state. Human rights bodies have recommended that the State accede to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.³

Added to these concerns about the lack of protections for women, children and foreign workers inside the UAE are the consequences of the country's extraterritorial reach. Largely enabled by its wealth derived from the fossil-fuel industry, the UAE is an active investor in cities around the world, especially through its acquisition of port facilities and real estate (e.g., Dubai Port World and Emaar).⁴ The exportation of its growth-oriented development model and cultural myopia challenge not only the principles and commitments of the New Urban Agenda, but also the UAE's military adventurism elsewhere is noted with grave consequences for Yemen, Libya and Palestine, among other States and their constituent peoples.

¹ No. 189. CERD/C/ARE/CO/18-21, 13/09/2017; CEDAW/C/ARE/CO/2-3, 24/11/2015.

² CEDAW/C/ARE/CO/2-3, 24/11/2015.

³ CERD/C/ARE/CO/18-21, 13/09/2017.

⁴ <https://www.propertyweek.com/data/who-owns-london/5088280.article>;
<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/uae-purchase-american-port-facilities>

