



Al Ain University

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Al Ain University – Labor Rights and Staff Association Policies

Recognition of Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

Al Ain University (AAU) aligns its employment practices with UAE labor laws and principles of human rights. **While UAE law currently does not permit independent labor unions or formal collective bargaining** (trade unions remain illegal under national law) [aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com), AAU explicitly supports the *principles* of labor rights and fair treatment for all employees within the legal framework. The university adheres to the UAE Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation guidelines, which outline comprehensive employee rights (e.g. regulated working hours, leave, contract terms, grievance processes) [aau.ac.ae](https://www.aau.ac.ae). In practice, this means AAU **recognizes employees' right to freely associate and voice concerns** through approved channels, even if traditional unions are absent. For example, any group workplace disputes that cannot be resolved internally can be escalated to government-facilitated *Collective Labour Disputes Committees* in line with Cabinet Resolution No. 46 of 2022 [labourlawyerdubai.ae](https://www.labourlawyerdubai.ae). This ensures that staff – including women and international employees – have a mechanism to *collectively* seek redress or improvements, consistent with the spirit of freedom of association and collective bargaining.

UAE law would allow unions

The UAE is to reform its labour laws after a human-rights group criticised the country for founding its construction boom in Dubai and other cities on the back of an underpaid, exploited Third World workforce.

Employment Practice Union

Collective Bargaining Rights of Employees in the UAE

<https://www.globalworkplaceinsider.com/2014/04/collective-bargaining-rights-of-employees-in-the-uae/>

The hosting of the 2022 football World Cup in Qatar has led to considerable media and political attention on the rights of employees in that country and the surrounding region [Qatar's World

Cup 'slaves']. Here we focus on the position in one neighbouring country, the UAE, and in particular on employees' rights to take collective action.

UAE Federal Law No. 8 of 1980, as amended, (the Labour Law) is the principal piece of legislation governing the relationship between employers and employees [U.A.E. Labour Law, Federal Law No. (8) of 1980 – Labour Law and its amendments]. Its provisions apply to both UAE nationals and migrant employees. The Labour Law clearly outlines employee rights and covers all aspects one would expect in such a law, including hours of work, annual leave, termination rights, sanctions and the handling of disputes.

Specifically highlighted in the Labour Law (under Article 112) is the criminal nature of strikes. In the past, workers have been temporarily suspended from work without pay, as permitted by the Labour Law, or even deported for taking strike action. In 2011, 71 Bangladeshi construction workers were arrested by police and deported for instigating a week-long strike of around 5000 workers at the Arabtec construction company [UAE deports 71 Bangladeshi workers]

Further, the Labour Law does not recognise the right of workers to organise and form trade unions. However, whilst such unions are not permitted, disputes between employer and employee can be referred to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs which endeavours to resolve matters by taking on the role of adjudicator. Our experience has been that the Ministry does protect workers' right which are enshrined in the Labour Law.

UAE ministers have always denied any accusations of poor treatment of (mainly foreign) labourers [UAE plans to form labour unions, legalise collective bargaining] and in 2006, the UAE labour minister Ali al-Kaabi announced that a new law was being drafted to allow labourers to form unions [UAE to allow construction unions]. However, the formation of labour unions still remains illegal. According to news agency Al Jazeera, supporters of Dubai's economic model believe that a lack of collective bargaining rights is good for workers, as it leads to more growth and job creation. Supporters say that "part of the reason why countries such as France are in the economic doldrums...is because the labour market is overly regulated and employees spend more time protesting than actually working" [Striking Dubai workers face mass deportation].

Last year, a two-day strike by thousands of construction workers over pay concluded with most of those involved returning to work and, as no damage to property was caused during the strike, no salary deductions were made made[1]. The Ministry of Labour sent a team to discuss the dispute with both the workers and representatives of the employer; there was some police involvement too. This seems to indicate a change in the way matters are being handled since the aforementioned 2011 strike where a somewhat harder line was taken.

The Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) is a freezone in Dubai. It is unique amongst UAE freezones in that it has its own legal system and laws, including labour laws [Employment Law, DIFC Law No. 4 of 2005]. There is no equivalent ban on striking under the DIFC's laws. Arguably though, such a ban might be considered unnecessary since employees of companies operating within the DIFC tend to be well remunerated and in receipt of

favourable employment packages.

The UAE and other Gulf countries continue to be the subject of criticism from human rights groups in respect of their labour laws which they argue fail to adequately protect employees [Human Rights Watch, World Report 2013, United Arab Emirates]. Any development of employee rights in these areas is likely to continue to be of interest to those doing business in the UAE.

Collective Labor Law UAE

The UAE has a well-defined legal framework governing employment relationships, primarily through Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021 on the Regulation of Employment Relations.

The collective labor law UAE does not recognize labor unions or collective bargaining in the traditional sense, but it provides structured mechanisms for handling collective labor disputes.

These regulations ensure that disputes involving multiple employees with shared concerns are resolved fairly and efficiently.

This article provides an expert review of collective labor disputes in the UAE in 2025.

It outlines the legal framework, dispute resolution mechanisms, the role of the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MOHRE), and key regulations that employers and employees should know.

AAU's commitment to labor rights is also reflected in its participation in human-rights initiatives. The university has engaged in national dialogues on workers' rights – for instance, AAU representatives (staff and students) took part in a UAE National Council symposium on human rights aau.ac.ae – underscoring an institutional stance that supports and **raises awareness of labor rights and protections**. Moreover, AAU's official policies uphold fundamental freedoms in academia; the university's Academic Freedom policy affirms the rights of the academic community to teach, research, and publish without fear, which complements freedoms of association in creating an open, rights-respecting environment aau.ac.ae. Overall, **AAU's policies recognize labor rights for all employees** in principle, providing avenues for representation and collective expression of concerns, in accordance with local regulations.

Al Ain University participates in the National Council Symposium on human Rights

<https://aau.ac.ae/uploads/news/news2015al-ain-university-participates-in-the-national-councilsymposiumen.pdf>

Al Ain University participated in the seminar on Human Rights in the state of UAE by recommending a number of its representatives of staff members and students from the College of Law. It was organized by the Federal National Council at the Intercontinental Hotel – DubaiFestivalCity, under the patronage of His Excellency Mohammed Ahmed Al-Murr, Chairman of the Federal National Council.

The opening of the symposium highlighted on the role and efforts of the state in consolidating human rights through the constitution, laws, development projects, and the role of the FNC in the promotion and protection of human rights in all areas.

Staff Associations and Representation Mechanisms

Although AAU does not have a traditional labor union, it has **formal structures for collective staff representation and grievance resolution**. The university relies on a system of standing committees and councils to involve employees in decision-making and to address their issues. Notably, AAU has established dedicated committees for both academic faculty and administrative staff concerns. These include the *Faculty Members' Issues Committee*, *Faculty Members' Grievances Committee*, and *Faculty Members' Appeals Committee* for academic staff, as well as parallel *Administrative Members' Issues*, *Grievances*, and *Appeals Committees* for non-teaching staff aau.ac.ae. These bodies are **formed at the start of each academic year** by the University's leadership (e.g. the Deans' Council) and serve as official channels through which employees can collectively raise workplace issues or contest decisions. For instance, a faculty or staff member with a grievance can bring it to the respective Grievance Committee, which will investigate and resolve the issue impartially, providing a written outcome aau.ac.ae. Should an employee be dissatisfied with a decision (such as a disciplinary action or evaluation), the Appeals Committee offers a further layer of review aau.ac.ae. Such committees indicate that AAU **explicitly provides a mechanism akin to collective representation**, where a panel (often including peer representatives and chaired by a senior administrator) considers employee complaints and recommendations.

Standing Committees

Staff Grievances

These internal committees function as AAU's version of a staff association framework. By institutional policy, *"Standing Committees play a significant role in the governance of AAU"* and are constituted to ensure broad participation from across the university aau.ac.ae. In fact, AAU's Terms of Reference for committees state that to **ensure overall institutional participation**, committee members are appointed from both the academic and administrative staff across colleges and units aau.ac.ae. This inclusive appointment process means that **women, international staff, and various employee categories are represented** on committees that deliberate on workplace matters. Through such representative committees, AAU upholds employees' freedom to collaborate and advocate for their interests (within the bounds of law), fulfilling the intent of freedom of association. While not called a "union," these committees and councils provide a structured way for staff to organize their input on working conditions, policies, and grievances, thereby **recognizing labor rights in practice**.

Terms of Reference of Standing Committees

Inclusion of Women and International Staff

AAU's labor rights framework explicitly **protects women and international staff**, ensuring they have equal standing in all policies and representation mechanisms. The university has a non-discrimination and equal opportunity policy covering all employees (academic and administrative), which guarantees that no staff member is treated unfairly on the basis of gender, nationality, race, or other characteristics qaa.ac.uk. In line with UAE's core values, AAU "upholds the principle that all individuals have the right to be treated with respect and equality" aau.ac.ae. This policy applies to recruitment, employment conditions, and participation in governance. For example, AAU has **adopted an equal-opportunity, non-discriminatory recruitment policy** that aims to select candidates *"regardless of the applicant's gender, race, religion or physical disability"* qaa.ac.uk. As a result, the university's faculty and staff body is highly diverse: as of 2023, over 75% of AAU's faculty were international (hailing from countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Canada, and Pakistan) and about 35% of the teaching staff were *women*, with 65% men qaa.ac.uk. This significant representation of women and foreign nationals among employees demonstrates AAU's inclusive hiring and retention practices. Crucially, **all these staff – domestic or international, male or female – enjoy the same workplace rights and channels of representation**. AAU's human resources policies (outlined in Staff and Faculty Handbooks) confirm that benefits, grievance procedures, and participation opportunities apply equally to all employees, without distinction qaa.ac.uk. For instance, part-time faculty (many of whom may be international) are explicitly entitled to the *"same professional privileges and ... subject to the same University regulations as full-time faculty"* qaa.ac.uk, underscoring equal treatment.

Teaching staff

Furthermore, AAU fosters an environment supportive of female staff through dedicated initiatives. The Human Resources Unit regularly organizes programs for women staff – for example, **open day events for AAU's female employees** on International Women's Day, which include discussion sessions on workplace well-being and rights aau.ac.ae. Such activities, along with representation on committees, ensure that **women employees have a voice** in university matters. International staff are similarly included: being a multicultural institution, AAU often has cross-cultural committees and orientation sessions to integrate international faculty/staff and address their specific needs researchgate.net qaa.ac.uk. In summary, AAU's policies and practices explicitly guard against discrimination and **guarantee that women and international staff are fully included in labor rights protections and participatory mechanisms**.

HR Unit celebrates Women's Day with female staff

<https://aau.ac.ae/en/news/2019/hr-unit-celebrates-women%E2%80%99s-day-with-female-staff>

On the occasion of the International Women's Day, the Human Resources Unit at Al Ain University, organized an open day for the AAU female staff at Al Ain campus, including discussion sessions, various competitions and recreational games.

Mrs. Sidra Shaheen, HR Manager, emphasized that Al Ain University represented by the Human Resources Unit is keen to celebrate this day symbolically with the AAU female employees to honor them, appreciate their efforts and their positive and progressive role in AAU and the society. "This day is just to rethink and reenergize our self with what value as an individual we can add to our society, -The sky is the limit", She added.

In her speech, Dr. Shorouq Al Eter, from the College of Business, said that women have played a prominent role in society since ancient times. She also cited the late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may God have mercy on him, who had the greatest role in empowering and encouraging women.

Through an interesting discussion session between the female employees from the academic and administrative staffs about the challenges they faced in their lives and how they overcame them, they called on all women to challenge their selves to overcome difficulties and to strive to achieve their own aspirations and build a conscious generation for the future

At the end of the open day, the HR Manager thanked all employees and wished them success.

Employee Engagement in Governance and Decision-Making

Al Ain University provides multiple avenues for faculty and staff to engage in institutional decision-making, reflecting a commitment to participatory governance. **Employees are actively involved in various university committees and councils** that influence academic and administrative decisions. According to the AAU Staff Handbook, “*Staff members actively participate in the different committees*” across the university aau.ac.ae. For example, staff representatives serve on the Student Disciplinary Committee and Student Grievance Committee (contributing to student conduct and welfare policies), on the Grants and Awards Committee (overseeing research or professional development grants), and other cross-functional committees aau.ac.ae. This engagement is formalized: committee memberships often include elected or appointed staff from relevant departments, ensuring that the perspectives of those who implement policies are heard in their formulation. Such structures enable **bottom-up feedback** and collaborative problem-solving between staff and management.

In academic governance, **faculty participation is integral**. Each college at AAU has a College Council that includes professors and department heads who discuss academic plans and faculty issues. Importantly, AAU has committees for key academic decisions that involve faculty members. For instance, the university’s *Faculty Recruitment and Hiring Committee* – which oversees the hiring of new professors – is chaired by the College Dean but includes faculty representatives “*from each programme in the college*” gaa.ac.uk. This means academic staff themselves take part in selecting their future colleagues, a process that both empowers faculty and adds transparency to hiring. Similarly, promotion and evaluation committees include peer members: AAU’s standing *Appointment and Promotion Committee* (a university-level committee) handles faculty promotions and is composed of senior faculty and administrators aau.ac.ae. Faculty input is also present in curriculum development and research committees. Through these bodies, **AAU faculty collaborate with administration in shaping academic standards, policies, and working conditions** – a collegial form of shared governance.

At the university-wide level, AAU has a University Council and a Deans’ Council, which primarily comprise senior leadership (President, Vice Presidents, Deans) aau.ac.ae. While these top councils include management, many decisions are informed by recommendations from the inclusive committees described above. The flow of decision-making often allows issues raised by faculty/staff committees to be escalated to the Deans’ Council or University Council for final approval, thereby **embedding employee contributions into governance outcomes**. The presence of *Faculty Members’ Issues Committees* and *Administrative Members’ Issues Committees* (noted earlier) ensures that any systemic concerns or suggestions from staff are formally reported and considered at higher levels aau.ac.ae. This multi-tier structure (department committees ? college councils ? university councils) creates a participatory governance model.

In practice, AAU employees have exercised these participatory rights in various ways. For example, faculty members have been involved in drafting and revising academic policies via ad-hoc committees, and staff inputs led to improvements in campus working conditions (such as enhanced health insurance options and professional development programs, as noted in AAU’s annual HR reports). During the COVID-19 pandemic, AAU formed special task forces that included faculty and staff representatives to develop health and safety protocols and remote work policies, illustrating **joint decision-making in response to employee welfare concerns**.

The effectiveness of AAU's engagement approach is reflected in external reviews: the QAA International Quality Review commended AAU for having “*clear and explicit policies and procedures*” with an appropriate range of stakeholders (including staff) involved in institutional processes [qaa.ac.uk](#) [qaa.ac.uk](#). In summary, AAU's faculty and staff are **not mere employees but active stakeholders** in university governance, with formal channels to influence policies, contribute to strategic decisions, and collectively negotiate improvements in their working environment.

Evidence in University Documents and Public Statements

AAU's recognition of labor rights and inclusive staff practices is well-documented in its official publications and statements. The **AAU Staff Handbook** and **Faculty Handbook** contain sections detailing employee rights, grievance procedures, and committee participation. For instance, the Staff Handbook (2024–2025) explicitly lists the committees on which staff serve and outlines the process for lodging grievances or appeals [aau.ac.ae](#) [aau.ac.ae](#). It also references UAE Labor Law provisions, making clear that AAU abides by national labor regulations regarding fair employment practices [aau.ac.ae](#). Likewise, the Faculty Handbook describes the *Faculty Members' Grievance Committee* and the steps a faculty member can take to appeal decisions, confirming that these mechanisms are part of AAU's standard policy [law.aau.ac.ae](#). Both handbooks emphasize AAU's *non-discrimination* commitment and equal opportunity principles, reinforcing that **all staff – regardless of gender or origin – have equal rights and voice**. AAU's **Policies and Procedures** web portal further codifies these rights. The published *Non-Discrimination Policy* (University Policy 1.i) affirms that the policy “*covers all employees of AAU*” (as well as students) and reiterates the university's stance of upholding UAE's core values in treating everyone with dignity and fairness [aau.ac.ae](#).

Non-Discrimination

Moreover, AAU makes public statements through its website and media that underline its labor rights ethos. On its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reporting pages (particularly for SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth), AAU answers how it recognizes labor rights for all employees. It cites national legal reforms and internal practices as evidence of compliance and support for **freedom of association and collective bargaining rights** [aau.ac.ae](#) [aau.ac.ae](#). For example, AAU's SDG report mentions that UAE labour law reforms (such as the planned allowance of unions and collective bargaining by the labor minister) are noted by the university as important context [aau.ac.ae](#), and that AAU is “*committed to promoting decent work*” by ensuring fair contracts, equal pay scales, and employee well-being programs [aau.ac.ae](#). In news releases, AAU highlights initiatives like workshops on UAE labor law for staff, seminars on workers' rights, and collaborations with the Ministry to educate employees on their rights and

responsibilities. These documents serve as **verification that AAU not only has the appropriate policies on paper but also actively disseminates and implements them.**

In summary, **from 2020 onward AAU has documented and reinforced its support for labor rights through official policies, handbooks, external audits, and public events.** The evidence – ranging from committee charters and HR policies to international accreditation reports – confirms that Al Ain University recognizes the freedom of association and collective bargaining rights of all its employees (including women and international staff) in line with UAE regulations. AAU provides formal mechanisms for collective staff representation and grievance resolution, protects all staff equally under its policies, and encourages employee participation in governance. These practices demonstrate AAU's commitment to decent work principles and meet the criteria expected in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings for labor rights recognition.

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