

Can your employer keep your passport?

Your rights in the UAE and exactly what to do if it happens — in plain English.

Employment & labour

It's one of the most common worries for expats: your employer is holding your passport. So what does the law actually say?

The short answer: Your passport is your personal property. As a general rule in the UAE, an employer cannot force you to hand over your passport or refuse to return it against your will. Holding it without your genuine consent is generally not permitted.

What this means for you

- You are normally entitled to keep and access your own passport.
- Any "company policy" to hold passports does not override your right to your own document.
- Giving it temporarily for a specific government process (with your consent) is different from your employer keeping it indefinitely.

If your employer won't return it — step by step

- 1 Ask in writing.** Politely request the return of your passport by email or message, so there is a record. Keep it factual.
- 2 Keep copies.** Save a copy of your passport, your contract, and any messages about the request.
- 3 Escalate internally.** Raise it with HR or management, referring to your request in writing.
- 4 Use official channels.** If it isn't resolved, you can raise the matter with the relevant labour authority (for many private-sector workers, this is MOHRE) or seek help from the police.

5 Get advice. If you feel pressured, or it's tied to other issues (unpaid wages, resignation, a ban), speak to a lawyer before acting.

Key questions to ask

- Did I genuinely consent, or was I told I had no choice?
- Is the passport being held alongside other pressure (wages, end-of-service, visa)?
- Do I have my request in writing and copies of my documents?

When to get a lawyer

If your employer refuses after a written request, or the situation is tangled up with money owed, termination or a potential ban, a short conversation with a licensed lawyer can save you a lot of stress — and they'll tell you the fastest route for your specific case.

Got a question this didn't answer?

Ask a lawyer free → lawpocket.pages.dev

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