



Emiratisation and the Nafis Programme

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Contents

Introduction	1
1. What is Emiratisation?	1
2. Legal framework and authorities	1
3. Why it matters now	2
4. Who must comply	2
5. Emiratisation targets and penalties	3
6. Strategic value of Emiratisation	4
7. Best practices for employers	4
8. The road to 2026	4
Want help implementing this?	4

Introduction

Emiratisation is more than a legal requirement, it's a strategic opportunity.

As part of the UAE Vision 2031, the government aims to build a competitive, knowledge-based economy where Emirati citizens play a central role in private-sector growth. This guide outlines what you need to know about Emiratisation, what's changing, and how your business can act now to stay compliant and ahead of the curve.

1. What is Emiratisation?

Emiratisation is the UAE government's national initiative to increase the number of Emiratis working in the private sector. It reflects a long-term vision to create a sustainable workforce and ensure UAE nationals play a key role in the country's economic development.

Key programme: Nafis

Launched in 2021, Nafis is a federal programme under the Emirates Talent Competitiveness Council (ETCC) designed to incentivise and accelerate Emirati participation in private-sector employment. It includes financial support for both jobseekers and employers.

2. Legal framework and authorities

Key authorities:

- Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE)
- Emirates Talent Competitiveness Council (ETCC)

Governing laws and policies:

- Federal Law No. 33 of 2021 (regulates labour relations)
- Cabinet Decisions on Emiratisation quotas and penalties

Applicable sectors:

- All mainland private-sector companies registered with MoHRE (free zones currently excluded)



3. Why it matters now

Compliance is time-sensitive.

The Nafis programme concludes in 2026. Companies with 50 or more employees are required to increase their Emirati workforce by 2% annually in skilled roles, reaching 10% by the end of 2026.

Incentives are attractive, but penalties are steep.

Benefits include pension contributions, training grants, monthly wage support (up to one year), and significant reductions in MoHRE service fees. However, companies that fail to meet the quotas may face:

- Up to AED 96,000 per unmet Emirati role in 2024
- AED 108,000 per unmet role in 2025 (estimated)
- Additional penalties for non-compliance, including ghost hiring and work permit suspensions

MoHRE is actively monitoring.

Audits are carried out regularly. Failing to report employment data transparently or misclassifying roles can lead to penalties and downgraded tier status.

4. Who must comply

- All mainland UAE private-sector companies with 50+ employees
- Selected sectors with 20–49 employees (as defined by Cabinet Resolutions)

Roles in scope — Emiratization quotas apply to skilled job categories:

- Managerial roles (Level 1)
- Professional roles (Level 2)
- Technical roles (Level 3)



5. Emiratisation targets and penalties

- All mainland UAE private-sector companies with 50+ employees
- Selected sectors with 20–49 employees (as defined by Cabinet Resolutions)

Year	Emiratisation Quota	Penalty per Unmet Role (Annual)
2023	4%	AED 84,000
2024	6%	AED 96,000
2025	8%	AED 108,000 (est.)
2026	10%	AED 120,000 (est.)

Employer obligations:

1. Register with the Nafis platform: <https://nafis.gov.ae>
2. Hire through MoHRE-approved contracts and channels
3. Avoid ghost Emiratisation or fake placements
4. Register Emiratis for pensions within 30 days of hiring
5. Update workforce data accurately and on time



6. Strategic value of Emiratisation

- Reinforces UAE Vision 2031 and long-term sustainability
- Unlocks government incentives (salary, training, pension support)
- Improves Tier status and reduces MoHRE service fees
- Builds a loyal, long-term national workforce
- Strengthens reputation and eligibility for public/private contracts

7. Best practices for employers

- Proactively forecast Emiratisation quotas for 2025 and 2026
- Build internal Emirati talent development pathways
- Create an inclusive, purpose-driven work culture
- Ensure transparent pay structures and equal opportunities
- Align HR policies to support Emirati integration and retention

Useful contacts:

- MoHRE Call Centre: 600 590 000
- Nafis Helpdesk: <https://nafis.gov.ae/faq>

8. The road to 2026

Your 2025 actions will determine your 2026 outcomes.

Treat Emiratisation as a board-level priority. Integrate it into your workforce strategy, set quarterly targets, and invest in meaningful development for your Emirati team members.

Want help implementing this?

Read the companion guide: "How Salt supports your Emiratisation success" for actionable steps on workforce planning, recruitment, onboarding, and compliance.





Emiratisation made easy with Salt

Salt can help you stay compliant, competitive, and future-ready.

Reach out to our specialist digital recruitment team to find out how we can help you.



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