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LEXOLOGY

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COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Regulatory and institutional structure

Summarise the regulatory framework for the communications sector. Do any foreign ownership restrictions apply to communications services?

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) consists of seven emirates, each of which operates as its own legal jurisdiction, and laws are made at both a federal and an individual emirate level. Some emirates also have defined areas within them that have been designated as free zones, which typically have separate civil and commercial laws for businesses and individuals in the relevant free zone, although they all remain subject to the UAE federal criminal law. Examples of free zones in the UAE include Dubai International Financial Centre, Dubai Creative Clusters Authority and Abu Dhabi Global Markets. For the purposes of this chapter, unless otherwise specified, we focus on the laws and regulations applying at a federal level.

The principal law in the UAE that relates to the communications sector is [Federal Law No. 3 of 2003 Regarding the Organisation of the Telecommunications Sector](#) (the Telecoms Law).

The Telecoms Law establishes the Telecoms and Digital Government Regulatory Authority (TDRA) as the regulator of the telecommunications and information technology sector in the UAE. The Telecoms Law establishes a licensing-based regulatory framework for the supply of telecommunications services to customers in the UAE. Article 37 of the Telecoms Law, for instance, provides that individuals and corporate entities may not provide "telecommunications services" through "public telecommunications networks" to customers and "subscribers" without obtaining a licence. Article 37 of the Telecoms Law is complemented by TDRA Resolution No. 6 of 2008 regarding the Licensing Framework (the Licensing Framework). The Licensing Framework provides that "regulated activities" in the state are licensable by the TDRA. Here, "regulated activities" means the operation of a "public telecommunications network" or the provision of "telecommunication services".

Telecommunications services are defined in the Telecoms Law as delivering, broadcasting, converting or receiving, through a telecommunications network:

- wire and wireless communications;
- voice, music and other audio material;
- viewable images;
- signals used or transmission (other than public broadcasts);
- signals used to operate and control machinery or equipment;
- activities relating to the interconnection of equipment with a public telecommunications network;
- operating data transmission services, including the internet; and
- any other services approved by the High Committee appointed under the Telecoms Law.

Foreign ownership restrictions that previously applied to onshore companies in the UAE have been eased following amendments under Federal Decree-Law No. 26/2020 to the UAE's Commercial Companies Law (Federal Law No. 2/2015) (which has now been replaced

by Federal Decree-Law No. 32/2021 on Commercial Companies, as amended by Federal Decree-Law No.20/2025, which introduced further reforms including the recognition of free zone companies as UAE juridical persons, corporate re-domiciliation between emirates and free zones, and multi-class share structures for limited liability companies). The Departments of Economic Development of Abu Dhabi and Dubai have both released their respective lists of activities that would allow foreigners to establish companies with 100% full ownership.

The [Cabinet Decision No. 55/2021](#) on the Determination of the List of Strategic Impact Activities outlines seven categories of activities (eg, education, defence and telecommunications) that are considered to have a strategic impact on the UAE's economy whereby prior approval of the relevant regulatory authority needs to be obtained. Save for fisheries-related services (which requires 100% UAE ownership), the specific details of minimum UAE ownership and UAE board representation requirements of these activities are to be decided by the relevant regulatory authority (Strategic Impact List).

Companies established in free zones are exempted from these foreign shareholder restrictions and can be wholly foreign-owned, and several international communications operators have established wholly owned entities in such free zones; however, they cannot offer public telecommunications services in the UAE, which, since 2006, has been a closed duopoly market.

The two providers of public telecommunications services (du and Etisalat) are licensees of the TDRA. The eligibility element of each licence refers to the licensee being a "UAE juridical entity established and in good standing under the laws of the UAE".

Other than public terrestrial telecommunications services, there is scope for non-UAE businesses to actively participate in the broader communications sector, although even international businesses that have procured a specific licence from the TDRA have largely done so through a UAE-incorporated entity as the licensee. Beyond the provision of public telecommunications services in the UAE, there are many businesses offering products and services as part of the wider communications ecosystem, and many of these are not subject to foreign ownership restrictions.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Authorisation/licensing regime

Describe the authorisation or licensing regime.

Under the Telecoms Law, the provision, operation or sale of any telecommunications services through a public telecommunications network in the UAE requires a licence from the TDRA.

Currently, only du and Etisalat are licensed operators for fixed and mobile terrestrial public telecommunications services in the UAE. This follows government policy on the operation of a duopoly in the telecommunications field. We understand the TDRA is not currently considering further licences to break the duopoly.

The licences granted to du and Etisalat have various features; for example, each is required to filter the content that flows through its networks in line with the priorities of the state. Notable content filtering takes place concerning matters concerning the state, foreign policy

and morality issues. The decision as to which content should be filtered is essentially made through private discussions between the TDRA and the mobile operators (regarding TDRA policies on internet access), but there is no practice of publishing details on specific content-level filtering rationale.

In addition to the duopoly policy on fixed and mobile public telecommunications services, the TDRA has issued licences to other UAE entities for specific purposes, such as broadcast satellite transmission, public access mobile radio, mobile satellite and satellite services. Notably, in June 2024, the TDRA granted Starlink an individual licence to install, operate and manage a public telecommunications network and provide satellite internet services for a 10-year term. Starlink's residential and business services went live in March 2026. While Starlink holds a public telecommunications licence, it provides satellite-based internet connectivity and does not displace the du and Etisalat duopoly over fixed and mobile terrestrial public telecommunications services.

All such licences are issued individually to entities meeting various requirements under the Telecoms Law and under a decision made by the TDRA board. A licence can be categorised as either a class licence or an individual licence. Individual licences refer to whether scarce resources are requested such as spectrum or frequencies; class licences are issued where non-scarce resources are required and where the activities are insignificant enough that less regulatory supervision is required.

The TDRA requires an application form to be completed by a potential licensee, which includes relevant information such as management and shareholding structures, their business operations, including the type of networks and services they intend to provide and funding sources for these business operations.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Flexibility in spectrum use

Do spectrum licences generally specify the permitted use or is permitted use (fully or partly) unrestricted? Is licensed spectrum tradable or assignable?

The Telecoms Law gives the TDRA responsibility for managing and regulating radio spectrum in the UAE. There is no established spectrum trading or leasing practice. The TDRA grants temporary authorisations on application for up to 90 days and such authorisations are specific to the applicant.

In common with many other jurisdictions, the UAE has its National Frequency Plan. This is issued by the TDRA and provides that certain services can only be provided within certain spectrum bands. In practice, the TDRA is known to have shown some flexibility in certain cases where this would not cause interference. All of the 800MHz, 900MHz and 1,800MHz spectrum has been divided between the two mobile operators, which means higher bandwidths can be supported in all frequency bands. Not all the 2,100MHz band is currently licensed and the 3,500MHz band is licensed for fixed wireless access. The fourth updated version of the National Frequency Plan was published in November 2024. It includes the allocation of 600MHz and 6GHz frequency bands for international mobile telecommunications systems, to support the infrastructure of "smart cities" and 4IR technologies.

In November 2025, during the inaugural meeting of the UAE's 6th Generation Committee, the TDRA launched a 6G initiative in the UAE to develop a comprehensive national 6G ecosystem by supporting the development of international 6G standards and seeking to establish a relevant and robust regulatory framework.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Ex-ante regulatory obligations

Which communications markets and segments are subject to ex-ante regulation? What remedies may be imposed?

Under the Telecoms Law, the TDRA does have the power to issue ex ante regulations and decisions concerning practices, as well as to conduct ex post investigations. Until 2012, it was not uncommon for the TDRA to publish determinations and decisions concerning telecommunications services publicly, including on their website. Since 2012, it appears the regulator has taken the decision not to publish such determinations and decisions publicly but to communicate them only to the relevant entities instead.

The TDRA has a short regulatory policy on ex-ante competition safeguards, which details the various factors it may take into account in assessing competition and dominance in the UAE. The policy provides wide discretion to the TDRA on the factors to be considered and the remedies to be imposed depending on the outcome of an assessment of the level of competition in the relevant market.

[Cabinet Resolution No. 56 of 2024](#), issued in June 2024, sets out several important changes to the regulation of telemarketing, with the aim of regulating the marketing of products of services through telemarketing and reducing unwanted calls to consumers.

Furthermore, [Cabinet Resolution No. 57 of 2024](#) provides administrative penalties to those violating the provisions of Cabinet Resolution No. 56 of 2024 Concerning the Telemarketing Regulations.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Structural or functional separation

Is there a legal basis for requiring structural or functional separation between an operator's network and service activities? Has structural or functional separation been introduced or is it being contemplated?

There is currently no directive that imposes structural or functional separation between an operator's network and its services in the UAE.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Universal service obligations and financing

Outline any universal service obligations. How is provision of these services financed?

It is the responsibility of the TDRA to oversee the provision of telecommunications services throughout each emirate of the UAE and ensure that they are sufficient to meet public demand across the UAE; however, this has not taken the form of a hard universal service obligation. The TDRA fulfils this obligation via its relationships with the state-backed public telecoms companies who each have references in their licences to financial obligations around universal service obligations; however, these provisions are typically only references back to the general regulatory framework rather than a specific, hard obligation. Etisalat's TDRA licence differs from that of du on the issue of universal service and has a harder obligation that extends to certain services such as dial-up internet services.

The two public telecoms operators, du and Etisalat, have a significant government-ownership interest and have invested heavily in infrastructure and broadband. Given the nature of the duopoly, there are no direct government subsidies.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Number allocation and portability

Describe the number allocation scheme and number portability regime in your jurisdiction.

Under the Telecoms Law, the TDRA has the authority to control the allocation of telephone numbers and numbering plans. To this end, the TDRA has released a national numbering plan that sets out this approach to number allocation. This includes the numbering regimes used to indicate which emirate the call arose from, as well as reserving certain numbers for the emergency service and premium paid-for calls.

The licensed operators can apply to the TDRA for allocation of a batch of numbers, which is granted based on capacity, future demand, utilisation by the licensee and administrative effort. The TDRA allocates rights to use numbers in continuous blocks of up to 100,000 numbers. The licensed operators are then responsible for allocating the numbers to their subscribers.

At the end of 2013, the UAE implemented a mobile number portability programme. Notwithstanding the mobile virtual network operator or independent branded services, there are only two mobile network operators in the UAE and so the only number portability is between the two. Both networks offer a number porting application form that can be submitted to request a number transfer.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Customer terms and conditions

Are customer terms and conditions in the communications sector subject to specific rules?

The TDRA is empowered by the Telecoms Law to represent customer interests in the UAE. This encompasses issuing rules or regulations relating to the terms of supply to the

customer and includes consumer protection regulations, such as key terms that must be included in contracts with customers (eg, restrictions on usage and rights to terminate) and detailed information that must be provided to the customer before the purchase of a service. The TDRA has also issued a consumer protection guide that sets out a customer's rights concerning their service contract, the privacy of information, access to services and several others.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Net neutrality

Are there limits on an internet service provider's freedom to control or prioritise the type or source of data that it delivers? Are there any other specific regulations or guidelines on net neutrality?

No specific regulations require net neutrality in the UAE. Both of the public telecoms operators have offered plans with zero rating on certain social media applications.

Bandwidth throttling by internet service providers is common. Network traffic that relates to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services is often blocked or has its capacity reduced to give partial effect to the TDRA's policy on VoIP services, whereby such services (where there is network breakout) are not permitted unless provided by one of either du or Etisalat.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Platform regulation

Is there specific legislation or regulation in place, and have there been any enforcement initiatives relating to digital platforms?

The regulatory landscape for digital platforms has developed significantly since 2025 with the introduction of the [Federal Decree-Law No. 26/2025 on Child Digital Safety](#) (CDSL). In force since 1 January 2026, it has introduced a comprehensive framework for protecting children online that applies to digital platforms and internet service providers (ISPs) operating in, or targeting users within the UAE, including on an extraterritorial basis. In scope entities have been granted a one-year adjustment period, with enforcement expected to commence from 1 January 2027 (unless extended by the executive branch of the UAE federal government, known as the Council of Ministers or the UAE Cabinet (Cabinet)).

The CDSL applies to ISPs licensed under the Telecoms Law (currently du and Etisalat) and to digital platforms operating within the UAE or targeting users in the UAE, regardless of whether they are public or private sector entities and irrespective of any physical presence in the country. "Digital platform" is broadly defined as any electronic means enabling interaction and communication among users in the digital space that provides digital services or content. A non-exhaustive list of examples includes websites, search engines, smart applications, messaging apps, forums, electronic games platforms, social media platforms, live streaming and podcast platforms, streaming and on-demand video services, and e-commerce platforms. The term "targeting" users in the UAE is not expressly defined, and no further regulatory guidance has yet been issued on its interpretation. The CDSL also

applies to children's caregivers (ie, parents, guardians or other persons legally responsible for a child). A "child" for these purposes is any person under the age of 18.

The CDSL introduces several obligations for in-scope digital platforms. In relation to children's personal data, digital platforms are prohibited from collecting, processing, publishing or sharing the personal data of children under 13 years old unless the platform:

- obtains explicit, documented and verifiable parental consent;
- provides an accessible mechanism for consent withdrawal;
- clearly discloses its data privacy policy and the purpose of collection to the child and caregiver;
- restricts internal access to authorised personnel to the minimum extent necessary; and
- refrains from using the data for commercial purposes, targeted advertising or tracking beyond the originally declared purpose.

"Personal data" is not defined in the CDSL itself, but is expected to be interpreted by reference to the definition in the UAE Personal Data Protection Law (Federal Decree-Law No. 45/2021), the executive regulations of which remain pending.

Digital platforms must also implement effective and reasonable age verification mechanisms commensurate with the platform's risk level. Platforms are prohibited from permitting children to participate in, create accounts for or access "online commercial games" (broadly defined to include gambling and activities involving wagering for monetary or valuable consideration), and must take technical and administrative measures to prevent such access. All in-scope platforms must develop and implement enhanced child protection measures including:

- privacy-by-default settings for children's accounts;
- content blocking, filtering and age-rating tools;
- controls over targeted advertising and features related to excessive engagement;
- parental control tools with daily usage limits and mandatory break features;
- user-friendly reporting tools for harmful content, supported by AI-based proactive detection;
- immediate reporting of child pornography or harmful content to the concerned authorities;
- execution of removal orders; and
- periodic compliance reporting.

The specific requirements for each platform will vary based on a classification system to be issued by the Cabinet, which will categorise platforms according to type, content, scale of use and impact on children.

The CDSL looks to establish a Child Digital Safety Council, to be chaired by the Minister of Family, to coordinate policy across federal, local and private sector entities. The concerned authorities (expected to include the TDRA, the National Media Authority and the Cybersecurity Council) are required to conduct regular monitoring of digital platform content

and notify security agencies of potential violations. Several further Cabinet decisions are pending, including on:

- the classification system and corresponding platform obligations;
- age verification controls for different age groups;
- permissible data categories and consent verification mechanisms for under-13s; and
- the penalty regime, enforcement mechanisms and appeal procedures.

Separately, [Cabinet Decision No. 42/2025](#), in force since 29 May 2025, establishes a detailed administrative enforcement regime for breaches of [Federal Decree-Law No. 55/2023](#) (the Media Law) and its executive regulations. The decision applies to individuals, media institutions and entities exercising media activities in the UAE, including in free zones. Violations of Media Content Standards are classified by severity across four degrees, with fines ranging from 5,000 UAE dirhams to 1 million UAE dirhams, which may be doubled for repeat offences within one year. A permanent committee has been established to review and decide on content violations, and a grievance mechanism allows affected parties to appeal within 15 days of notification (see further under "Media" to this chapter).

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Next-Generation-Access (NGA) networks

Are there specific regulatory obligations applicable to NGA networks? Is there a government financial scheme to promote basic broadband or NGA broadband penetration?

There are no specific regulations concerning NGA networks. Du and Etisalat are both committed to providing high-speed networks across the UAE, and the UAE has a very high penetration of fibre-to-home connectivity. Given the nature of the public telecommunications duopoly in the UAE, there are no direct government subsidies or financial schemes available.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Data protection

Is there a specific data protection regime applicable to the communications sector?

The UAE issued its first federal data protection law in September 2021 ([Federal Decree-Law No. 45 of 2021 Regarding the Protection of Data Protection](#)) (the Personal Data Protection Law) that is applicable to all sectors in the UAE, save for free zones like the Dubai International Finance Centre and Abu Dhabi Global Market that have their own data protection regimes. The newly established UAE Data Office will be responsible for regulating the implementation and enforcement of the core data protection concepts such as personal data, controllers, processors and processing, requirements to appoint a data protection officer and subject rights. The new Personal Data Protection Law is conceptually similar to the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and will have extra-territorial effect in that it is applicable to organisations established in and outside of

the UAE that process personal data of data subjects within the UAE. Despite its similarities to the GDPR, it is noteworthy that the Personal Data Protection Law does not provide for a "legitimate interests" basis for processing personal data, and so consent will be required unless an exception (eg, public interest, defending a legal claim) applies. Furthermore, there are slightly more onerous obligations to record personal data and the requirement to notify the UAE Data Office of breaches of personal data "immediately upon becoming aware of them" (as opposed to the lower threshold of "without undue delay" under the GDPR).

Although the Personal Data Protection Law came into force on 2 January 2022, there was a six-month window of non-enforcement due to pending implementing regulations. The executive regulations remain unpublished at the time of writing, and there has been very limited enforcement activity under the Personal Data Protection Law to date. This continues to create a significant degree of uncertainty on certain compliance matters. Notwithstanding the pending status of the Personal Data Protection Law executive regulations, the CDSL (see further under "Platform regulation" to this chapter) introduces specific data protection obligations in respect of children under 13, including requirements for explicit, documented and verifiable parental consent before personal data may be collected, processed or shared. These obligations must be interpreted consistently with the Personal Data Protection Law's definition of personal data and will apply from January 2027 regardless of the status of the Personal Data Protection Law executive regulations.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Cybersecurity

Is there specific legislation or regulation in place concerning cybersecurity or network security in your jurisdiction?

Key primary legislation relating to cybercrime includes [Federal Decree-Law No. 34/2021 On Countering Rumours and Cybercrime](#) (effective 2 January 2022) (the Cybercrime Law) and the Penal Code.

The new Cybercrime Law specifically deals with activities like hacking (this was previously described as unauthorised access), identity theft and fraud, crimes that involve computers, networks and electronic information, impersonation, electronic robots, cryptocurrency and the spreading of false information. The Penal Code consists of general provisions prohibiting various criminal acts, some of which will apply to cybercrime.

The Cybercrime Law applies across all sectors, with no exceptions. In practice, it will be of particular relevance to the telecommunications and financial services sectors, as these are typically entrusted with critical data and therefore more likely to be targets of cybercrime. Furthermore, there are specific implications for the banking, medical, media or scientific sectors as aggravated penalties will apply if the harm affects the said sectors. The Cybercrime Law also penalises those who spread rumours and fake news as well as those who perpetuate (ie, republish and recirculate) such information that, among others, provokes public opinion and intimidates and harms the public interest.

From a general cybersecurity compliance perspective, many of the licensing instruments published by the TDRA relating to emerging technology such as the internet of things (IoT) emphasise the importance of cyber controls, particularly as regards the active elements of the related radio frequency-dependent infrastructure.

The Signals Intelligence Agency (SIA) is the UAE federal authority responsible for the cybersecurity of the UAE. The SIA operates under the direction of the UAE Supreme Council for National Security. Government organisations, semi-government organisations and business organisations that are identified as critical infrastructure in the UAE are required to follow SIA compliance guidelines. The primary standard to follow for SIA compliance is the UAE Information Assurance Regulations.

The TDRA has also established the UAE's Computer Emergency Response Team, which was established by statute and has published a wide-ranging information security policy.

The UAE National Cybersecurity Council is currently developing several new policies including for cloud computing and data security, IoT security, and cybersecurity operations centres.

Furthermore, sector-specific regulators in the UAE that issue certain licences (such as the financial services regulators) impose obligations on businesses that fall within their respective jurisdictions that are focused on cybersecurity and operational resilience.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Big data

Is there specific legislation or regulation in place, and have there been any enforcement initiatives in your jurisdiction, addressing the legal challenges raised by big data?

There is no specific federal legislation or regulation in place; however, the emirate of Dubai has introduced the Dubai Law No. 26/2015 (the Dubai Data Law), which provides for local government and private entities to contribute certain non-confidential information relating to the emirate, known as Dubai Data, to a knowledge and database from which such entities can benefit. The intention is to improve integration, harmonisation and efficiency between services and encourage the development of a smart economy through digital transformation.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Data localisation

Are there any laws or regulations that require data to be stored locally in the jurisdiction?

The Personal Data Protection Law implements restrictions on transfers of personal data whereby it may only be transferred outside the UAE to limited jurisdictions as determined by the UAE Data Office. If the intended jurisdiction is not deemed to have an adequate level of protection, personal data is only allowed to be transferred outside of the UAE if, among others, the transfers are necessary for the performance of a contract with, or in the interest of, the data subject, the transfers are necessary for establishing a legal claim or the express consent of the data subject is obtained and the transfer does not conflict with the security and public interest of the UAE. These concepts are similar to the ones introduced by the GDPR but have additional considerations of national security issues. The Personal Data

Protection Law executive regulations are expected to set out the controls and requirements for these exceptions for transferring personal data to jurisdictions that are deemed to not have an adequate level of protection.

Until the Personal Data Protection Law's executive regulations are published and come into effect, guidance given by regulators on data domiciliation within the UAE in certain key sectors, including telecommunications, will apply (but this does not come in the form of hard law or publicly available guidance). State-owned entities are also expected to abide by certain data domiciliation rules, which are not set out in hard primary legislation. As the Personal Data Protection Law does not apply to certain free zones, entities registered in the Dubai International Financial Centre or Abu Dhabi Global Market have to adhere to their specific regimes around transfers of personal data that impacts those businesses' freedom to outsource or offshore certain functions.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Key trends and expected changes

Summarise the key emerging trends and hot topics in communications regulation in your jurisdiction.

Key changes in the market dynamics and regulation are likely to result from increased competition between the two terrestrial operators. While du and Etisalat remain the sole providers of fixed and mobile terrestrial public telecommunications services, the TDRA granted Starlink an individual licence to provide satellite internet services, with residential and business services going live in March 2026. Although Starlink operates on a distinct infrastructure model and does not displace the terrestrial duopoly, its entry introduces a new competitive dynamic in consumer and commercial internet provision. It remains to be seen whether the TDRA will consider issuing further licences. The TDRA has stated previously that the intention behind introducing a second licensed operator was that "Competition is the drive for development, where it leads to higher quality services, lower prices and the adoption of latest technologies. It is a race that pumps innovation and progress into the veins of the sector." There is an expectation going forward that the TDRA will be keen to ensure that as much real competition as possible emerges between the operators.

Being considerably newer in its establishment, du has been playing catch-up around the infrastructure and expertise to compete on a truly level playing field with Etisalat. The two providers have often divided regions up geographically rather than competing directly for the same customers, so customers are effectively faced with a service provider with a de facto monopoly. In 2015, the two providers started bitstream access, a method by which the one network could be shared by the two operators, permitting customers more flexibility to choose a provider where the infrastructure previously restricted their choice. Greater ability for customers to switch between the providers has also been encouraged. It is likely that the TDRA will continue to encourage this competition.

The marked perception of increased competition in the mobile market was increased in 2017 when each of du and Etisalat launched mobile services under new brands: du acquired rights to launch a Virgin mobile branded service and shortly after, Etisalat launched a prepaid service branded as "SWYP". Neither the Virgin Mobile nor the SWYP services are regulated independently of their respective MNOs.

Enterprise-focused information and computer technology (ICT) services growth through operator divisions or subsidiaries is a key area to watch, particularly as these divisions will compete with a large pool of non-operator affiliated entities. As regards the ICT services growth being experienced by the operators, enterprise adoption of emerging technology will continue to require regulatory guidance from the TDRA, as well as other concerned regulatory bodies in the UAE, to ensure the balance between advancement in technology and risk management is addressed.

The TDRA has been active in terms of regulatory and policy output covering a range of communications areas including Earth Station Regulations, Space Service Regulations and the new Information Assurance Regulation. One of the most significant developments in light of the various Smart City ambitions in the UAE is the IoT Regulatory Policy, which remains largely untested and has a seemingly broad ambit covering IOT services.

One of the areas where change is expected is around the move of operations into mobile financial services, fintech verticals focusing on consumer products and services, and the impact of open banking and liberalisation of the financial services sector in the UAE.

The enforcement of the Personal Data Protection Law and its implementing regulations will be a much-anticipated development. Companies will have to be vigilant for the issuance of the implementing regulations by the UAE Data Office as they will then have six months to align and harmonise their internal processes. It will be interesting to see the extent of penalties decided upon via the implementing regulations and their influence on the manner of implementation of the new personal data protection laws of neighbouring Saudi Arabia that came into force in 2023 and into effect in 2024. A significant regulatory development in the online space is the enactment of the CDSL, in force since 1 January 2026, which introduces the UAE's first comprehensive platform regulation framework (see further under "Platform regulation" to this chapter). The law's extraterritorial reach, broad definition of "digital platform", and specific data protection obligations for children under 13 represent a notable expansion of the UAE's regulatory footprint over international technology companies. Full compliance is expected by January 2027, with further Cabinet decisions pending on the platform classification system, penalty regime and enforcement mechanisms (see further under "Platform regulation" to this chapter).

In the media sector, there have been significant institutional and enforcement developments, including the establishment of the NMA and a new administrative penalty framework for media content violations (see further under "Media" to this chapter).

Law stated - 4 May 2026

MEDIA

Regulatory and institutional structure

Summarise the regulatory framework for the media sector in your jurisdiction.

The principal source of law in relation to the media sector in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is Federal Decree-Law No. 55 of 2023 (the Media Law). The law was issued on 18 December 2023 and came into force on 18 December 2024. The law covers a large number of regulations on the media including ownership, prohibitions on certain types of reporting

and defamation. The related implementing regulations, the [Cabinet Resolution Concerning the Executive Regulation for Federal Decree-Law Regulating the Media](#) (the Implementing Regulations) went into effect on 31 October 2024. The regulations provide detailed guidelines on media activities, licensing procedures, and standards for media content.

Under the previous media law, which dates back to 1980, the Ministry of Culture and Information was the national media regulator. In 2006, Cabinet Resolution No. 14/2006 abolished the Ministry and established a new regulator for the media industry, the National Media Council (NMC), which was subsequently replaced by the Media Regulatory Office (MRO) in 2021 following the merger of the NMC and the Federal Youth Authority. The UAE Media Council was then established under Federal Law No. 57 of 2022 to coordinate media efforts, with the National Media Office (NMO) also under its remit. Most recently, Federal Decree-Law No. 11/2025 on the Establishment and Regulation of the National Media Authority (NMA), signed on 30 September 2025 and in force from January 2026, has brought about a further institutional restructuring. The NMA is a new federal public entity that replaces the UAE Media Council, the NMO and the Emirates News Agency, assuming all of their respective functions, rights and obligations, including those arising under contracts, agreements and memoranda of understanding. The NMA oversees all media activities in the UAE, including digital media and media activities in free zones. All references to the UAE Media Council in the Media Law and other legislation should now be read as references to the NMA.

The Media Law and its Implementing Regulations provided a much-needed update and clarification, especially for ensuring that media activities cover not just traditional media such as books, newspapers and television but also electronic and digital media and video-on-demand services. Wide discretion for the licensing of these new electronic and digital media activities has been provided, in the same way as newspapers and radio and television in the previous law.

The Media Law provides Media Content Standards that must be adhered to by anyone performing a media activity or profession, including duties and prohibitions, for example:

- respect for the Islamic beliefs and other beliefs;
- respect and not to offend the state, the emirates or their legal, economic, judiciary and security systems;
- not to perform any act that affects foreign relations;
- respect the culture and national identity of the UAE;
- not to publish any offensive content;
- respect the privacy rules and whatever is related to the private life of individuals;
- not to publish any matter that incites to commit crimes or use illegal substances;
- not to publish, broadcast, or share expressions, photos, drawings or opinions that breach the public morals or that corrupt the morals of the youth; and
- not to publish or broadcast rumours, fake news or falsified papers.

[Cabinet Decision No. 42/2025](#), in force since 29 May 2025, introduces the first detailed administrative enforcement regime for breaches of the Media Content Standards. The decision applies to individuals, media institutions and entities exercising media activities in

the UAE, including in free zones. Violations of Media Content Standards are classified by severity across four degrees, with fines ranging from 5,000 UAE dirhams to 1 million UAE dirhams, which may be doubled for repeat offences within one year. A permanent committee has been established to review and decide on content violations, and a grievance mechanism allows affected parties to appeal a finding of a violation of the Media Content Standards within 15 days of notification of the violation. Cabinet Decision No. 41/2025, also in force from 29 May 2025, introduces updated media service fees and licensing costs for activities including podcasting, electronic publishing and audiovisual content production.

In addition to the Media Law, the UAE has a history of trying to regulate social media influencers. In March 2018, the Electronic Media Activity Regulation Resolution 2018 (the EMR) was published, which regulates a wide range of digital media activities including websites that sell content and individuals who seek to monetise their social media popularity by way of an annual licence arrangement. The National Media Council (now superseded by the NMA) Circular No. 13/2020 was then issued to further clarify rules on advertisements on social media including the need for the advertisement to use non-confusing language and restrictions on advertising health-related products, drugs and other pharmaceuticals.

There are also relevant provisions relating to media found in the Penal Code, particularly in regard to defamation, and the Cybercrime Law, when considering digital communications.

Across the UAE there are various media-related free zones that have their own civil regimes, while still being subject to the same criminal restrictions as the main jurisdictions. Many national and international media companies are established in these zones.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Ownership restrictions

Do any foreign ownership restrictions apply to media services? Is the ownership or control of broadcasters otherwise restricted? Are there any regulations in relation to the cross-ownership of media companies, including radio, television and newspapers?

Under article 4 of the Media Law, the owner of a licensed media publisher or of any means of mass media and publication, must:

- have legal capacity;
- have a good reputation and conduct and not have been convicted of an offence related to morality or dishonesty;
- obtain any necessary approvals from government entities; and
- any other requirements once the implementing regulations have been enacted.

However, if ownership is by a company rather than an individual, the company must also be limited to the practice of media activities. The Implementing Regulations further specify that foreign media offices must appoint a director who is at least 25 years old and holds an appropriate academic qualification, with approval from the competent authority.

Many media outlets are owned, in whole or in part, by the government or prominent local families closely aligned with the government.

There are also certain academic and experience qualification requirements on editors-in-chief and standard writers and journalists, though these are typically not enforced in practice.

The EMR set out requirements of applicants for the licensing regime as well as the mandatory appointment of a "responsible manager" to act as a representative, although breaches of the EMR by an applicant or licensee do not extend to liability on the part of this responsible manager. There is no requirement in the EMR for the responsible manager to be a UAE national.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Licensing requirements

What are the licensing requirements for broadcasting, including the fees payable and the timescale for the necessary authorisations?

Under the Media Law, all practitioners of media activities are required to hold a licence before they can lawfully publish. The Implementing Regulations specify that the National Media Authority (formerly the UAE Media Council) or the competent authority shall review the application for issuing a licence to practise media activities within three working days from the date of its submission, provided that it meets the terms and conditions. Failure to submit a licence renewal application within 90 days from the date of expiry shall result in the automatic cancellation of the licence and the imposition of fines.

Separately from the ownership requirements under the Media Law, article 4 of Cabinet Decision No. 22/2017 on Licensing Media Activities, requires licensees to:

- be a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) national;
- not to have been suspended from practising media activities;
- not owe the MRO (now NMA) any dues;
- be at least 25 years of age;
- have a good reputation and conduct and not have been convicted of an offence in relation to morality or dishonesty; and
- have appropriate academic qualifications.

The Implementing Regulations further detail that the application must be submitted through approved electronic means using the designated form, with all required documents and data. The licence applicant must have full legal capacity and be of good reputation and conduct, not having been previously sentenced to imprisonment for a felony or a misdemeanour involving moral turpitude or breach of trust unless rehabilitated.

The proposed new media outlet must apply to the NMA, requesting the granting of such a licence. This can be done online via the NMA's website and must include details of the owner and the proposed media outlet brand. Applications must be in Arabic. The NMA will review the application and, if it is in favour of the licence being granted, will support the application in front of the federal government. The federal government must then approve the application and grant the licence.

The Media Law and its Implementing Regulations provide for an applicant to deposit a guarantee of 50,000 UAE dirhams for an application for a newspaper and 20,000 UAE dirhams for other media outlets to be paid along with the application. Fines imposed will be removed from this deposit, which must then be topped up to maintain its original level. The NMA can also charge a range of service fees ranging from 500 UAE dirhams to 100,000 UAE dirhams, dependent on the type of licence sought and the activities covered.

The EMR also sets out an annual licensing regime for electronic media activities that have variable fees depending on the category of the regulated activity: the most expensive of the categories identified in the EMR is electronic or online accounts and websites, including specialised ones (commercials, advertising, news, etc), which attract a new application processing fee of 15,000 UAE dirhams and the same amount for a renewal.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Foreign programmes and local content requirements

Are there any regulations concerning the broadcasting of foreign-produced programmes? Do the rules require a minimum amount of local content? What types of media fall outside this regime?

There are no specific regulations preventing the broadcasting of foreign-produced programmes, providing that they do not contain any content that is not permitted under the Media Law. The Implementing Regulations require foreign media offices to obtain a licence from the competent authority, specifying the type of media outlet to be represented within the UAE. There are also no official requirements in relation to the minimum amount of local content.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Advertising

How is broadcast media advertising regulated? Is online advertising subject to the same regulation?

The Media Law contains restrictions on advertising similar to those found in many other nations, though unlike in jurisdictions that rely largely on self-regulation, advertising standards are enforced by the NMA. The Implementing Regulations prohibit advertisements that contravene the Media Content Standards or harm the public interest. Advertisements must be factual, not misleading, and clearly identified as advertising.

In particular, advertisements are prohibited where they are inconsistent with the Media Content standards or are against the public interest. This includes those that are "inconsistent with public conduct", a phrase capable of covering a broad range of cultural sensitivities including inappropriate dress or behaviour. It also prohibits adverts that mislead the public, could cause harm to the state or the value of society or contain subversive ideas.

The Implementing Regulations further specify that advertisements must not include incorrect or misleading claims, exaggerations or any content that may be construed as

fraudulent or deceptive. Advertisements must be clearly identified and distinct from other editorial and media content.

The Media Law also requires advertisers to make clear that their material is clearly and explicitly noted as advertising.

The MRO (now NMA) issued an official advertising guide in 2018, which consolidates various principles on advertisements in the UAE and protects local religious, cultural and social values and improves the freedom of expression of the media.

The EMR addresses electronic advertisements, including the use of digital social media and imposes a broad licensing requirement on those involved in such online advertising.

The Telecoms and Digital Government Regulatory Authority (TDRA) Consumer Protection Regulations also contain restrictions on the advertising of products or services regulated under Federal Law No. 3 of 2003 Regarding the Organisation of the Telecommunications Sector. These include the requirement to be able to evidence to the TDRA's satisfaction of any statements or claims made in the advertisement, whether direct or implied and restrictions on the form of comparative advertising.

Federal Law No. 15/2020 on Consumer Protection also prohibits misleading advertisement whether it relates to the price or the description of the goods. Furthermore, advertisements related to consumers shall be made in Arabic (with other languages being able to be made in addition to Arabic).

Article 20 of 2024's [Federal Decree by Law Concerning Media Regulation](#) further regulates promotion and advertising, strengthening consumer protection.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Must-carry obligations

Are there regulations specifying a basic package of programmes that must be carried by operators' broadcasting distribution networks? Is there a mechanism for financing the costs of such obligations?

No, there are no official must-carry obligations in the UAE. In line with the requirements on the media not to insult or harm the state and for official news reporting to be undertaken through a centralised, state-controlled function, certain state media content will sometimes unofficially be required to be included as part of the schedule. Also, local broadcast media channels will observe mourning content (eg, soft music or recitation of the Holy Koran) in circumstances where there has been a death of a royal or some other nationally observed tragic event.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Regulation of new media content

Is new media content and its delivery regulated differently from traditional broadcast media? How?

There is no distinction in the Media Law between different types of media content according to their delivery. The Implementing Regulations extend Media Content Standards to digital content and require adherence to the Age Rating System approved by the UAE Media Council. In July 2017, the UAE Cabinet issued Resolution No. 23 of 2017 concerning media content consolidated content rules and extended these specifically to digital content and then, more recently, the EMR established a licensing and compliance framework for digital media (including licensure relating to social media influencers).

On 9 September 2020, the MRO (now NMA) issued National Media Council Circular No. 13/2020, a circular regarding social media advertisements emphasising the need to obtain prior approval from the Media Licensing Department. This will impact companies, brands, influencers, and anyone who carries out social media advertising activities on a commercial basis. Furthermore, the circular sheds more light on the regulation of advertising on social media including the need for the product to be authentic and not exaggerated and not cause confusion with other similar names. The identity of the advertisement must be clear and distinctive from other materials presented – for example, phrases like "paid advertisement" as opposed to "in collaboration with" should be used to make it clear whether the advertisement is commercial or not.

Ultimately, the fundamental principles behind the UAE's regulation of traditional media and the UAE's regulation of new media are not different.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Digital switchover

When is the switchover from analogue to digital broadcasting required or when did it occur? How will radio frequencies freed up by the switchover be reallocated?

The switchover from analogue to digital broadcasting was completed in 2012, coordinated with other GCC states such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Additional radio capacity was allocated to improve mobile telephone services.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Digital formats

Does regulation restrict how broadcasters can use their spectrum?

No, there is no regulation that restricts how broadcasters are permitted to use their spectrum allocation.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Media plurality

Is there any process for assessing or regulating media plurality (or a similar concept) in your jurisdiction? May the authorities require companies to take any steps as a result of such an assessment?

There is no official assessment or regulation of media plurality in the UAE. Many media service providers are owned or part-owned by the UAE government or members of prominent local families closely linked to the government.

The NMA (formerly the MRO) oversees the content prepared by the media and any material that is considered to be undesirable is likely to be blocked. Particularly in a commentary in relation to the state, foreign affairs or Islam, journalists are likely to self-censor and a similar position will typically be taken across all media outlets. On controversial or sensitive issues, journalists will often take their lead from the single official government news agency, the Emirates News Agency operated by the NMA, and adopt identical reporting positions.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Key trends and expected changes

Provide a summary of key emerging trends and hot topics in media regulation in your country.

The rise of social media has spurred a slew of regulations looking to regulate this area and stop the spread of misinformation. Even the Cybercrime Law that came into force in January 2022 provides more protection against online crimes committed via social media networks and IT platforms. For example, the Cybercrime Law now penalises taking pictures of others without permission and also photographing victims of accidents or disasters and spreading the same. As social media becomes more integrated into everyday life, the increased regulatory scrutiny and enforcement of such laws will be one to watch in the coming years.

The Implementing Regulations for the new Media Law, which came into effect in October 2024, provide detailed guidelines on media activities, licensing procedures, and standards for media content. These regulations have amended or replaced several previous regulations, ensuring that media activities cover not just traditional media but also electronic and digital media and video-on-demand services

Law stated - 4 May 2026

REGULATORY AGENCIES AND COMPETITION LAW

Regulatory agencies

Which body or bodies regulate the communications and media sectors? Is the communications regulator separate from the broadcasting or antitrust regulator? Are there mechanisms to avoid conflicting jurisdiction? Is there a specific mechanism to ensure the consistent application of competition and sectoral regulation?

The communications and media sectors are regulated by the Telecoms and Digital Government Regulatory Authority (TDRA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) National

Media Authority (NMA), respectively. The NMA, established under Federal Decree-Law No. 11/2025 and in force from January 2026, replaced the UAE Media Council, the National Media Office and the Emirates News Agency, assuming all of their regulatory functions. Given the convergence in the sector, there is some overlap between these and indeed other UAE regulators and their respective jurisdictions. As the communication and media sectors include embedded payment propositions for consumer services, the regulatory jurisdiction of financial services regulators (including the Central Bank of the UAE) can also be triggered.

With regard to competition, the UAE adopted a new competition law in the form of [Federal Law No. 36 of 2023](#) on the Regulation of Competition (the Competition Law) replacing the 2012 law. The Competition Law has been in force since December 2023; however, the implementing regulations have not yet been published. Therefore, the previous law's executive regulations (Council of Ministers' Resolution No. 37 of 2014) and two relevant resolutions (the Resolutions), which provided key thresholds and definitions, remain in effect.

The previous competition law provided for a Competition Regulation Committee (the Committee) to be established to oversee general competition law policy in the UAE and this remains in effect. Day-to-day enforcement of the Competition Law is the responsibility of the Ministry of Economy, acting through its Competition Department. To date, there have been no officially publicised cases of Competition Law enforcement, although we are aware that the Competition Department has been established and issued views on specific cases that have been brought to it (in particular, with regard to merger control notifications).

The Competition Law provides that its provisions shall be enforced on all businesses in relation to their economic activities or the effect of their economic activities in the UAE (even where the conduct takes place outside of the UAE). It is as yet unclear how the courts will react to any jurisdictional disputes.

Unlike under the previous law, the telecommunications sector is no longer specifically excluded from the remit of the Competition Law. However, exemptions remain in cases where other law already governs the competition of that sector or the Minister decides that other criteria relating to economic development or growth are fulfilled. Federal Law No. 3 of 2003 Regarding the Organisation of the Telecommunications Sector stipulates that the TDRA shall have the competence to issue regulations, instructions, decisions and rules regulating and ensuring competition in the telecommunications sector. The TDRA includes terms in the licences issued to operators requiring them not to participate in anticompetitive practices.

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Appeal procedure

How can decisions of the regulators be challenged and on what bases?

Decisions of the Competition Department can be appealed directly to the Minister of Economy within 15 days of the applicant becoming aware of the decision. Such appeals will be considered by the Committee, which will submit recommendations to the Minister within 10 days. The Minister must then respond to the applicant within 30 days of the appeal being filed; if nothing is heard in this time, the decision is deemed to be rejected. After this, the only remaining appeal is to a court of law (which must take place within 60 days of the decision or the deemed decision).

Licensing decisions issued by the National Media Authority may be appealed directly to the Chair of the NMA within 15 days of the date of notification. The Chair must then respond to the applicant within 30 days of the appeal being filed. Following that, the only remaining appeal is to a court of law. In relation to administrative penalties for breaches of Media Content Standards, [Cabinet Decision No. 42/2025](#) provides a separate grievance mechanism: the competent authority must notify the violator within 15 days of issuing the penalty, the violator may file a reasoned appeal within 15 days of notification, and a decision must be issued within a further 15 days (failure to decide within that period is deemed a rejection).

Law stated - 4 May 2026

Competition law developments

Describe the main competition law trends and key merger and antitrust decisions in the communications and media sectors in your jurisdiction over the past year.

The key concepts in the Competition Law include a prohibition on anticompetitive agreements, a prohibition on any abuse of a dominant position and merger control. Anticompetitive behaviour is broadly similar to the regimes in jurisdictions with more developed competition law systems, such as Europe and the United States. The new law has tightened controls on economic concentration and market dominance, with the threshold for dominance being altered to be determined by the Ministers (which has not been published yet). Additionally, mergers or joint ventures of a certain size must now be pre-notified to the relevant government ministry at least 90 days before completion (instead of 30 days).

The Competition Law also provides for the issue of individual exemptions for businesses in relation to particular agreements or practices where this is considered appropriate, which can be obtained by application to the Ministry's Competition Department.

It remains to be seen how the Competition Law will be implemented in practice and whether there will be consistency in approach. Once the Competition Department and Competition Regulation Committee begin to make decisions and recommendations, it is unlikely that these will be available to the public. The Competition Law specifically requires the Competition Department to take steps to maintain the confidentiality of information provided by the parties, which is considered confidential. Accordingly, trends in this context will not be easy to be identified through conventional research; however, as market consolidation and convergence in the sector take effect, the approach taken by authorities will be easier to comment on.

Law stated - 4 May 2026