

# Lending and Taking Security in the UAE: Overview

by Rahat Dar, *Afridi & Angell*

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A Q&A guide to lending and taking security in United Arab Emirates.

This Q&A provides a high-level overview of forms of security over assets, release of security over assets, special purpose vehicles in secured lending, quasi-security, guarantees, risk areas for lenders, structuring the priority of debts, debt trading and transfer mechanisms, agent and trust concepts, enforcement of security interests, borrower insolvency and cross-border issues on loans.

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## Forms of Security over Assets

### Real Estate

1. What is considered real estate in your jurisdiction? What are the most common forms of security granted over it? How are they created and perfected (that is, made valid and enforceable)?

### Real Estate

Real estate constitutes land and permanent structures on land that cannot be moved without causing damage or alteration.

The most common categories of real estate and real estate interests over which security can be granted are:

- Freehold land.
- Buildings and construction on freehold land.
- Leasehold interests in land.
- Buildings and construction on leasehold land.
- Usufruct (that is, the right to use (including develop), enjoy and occupy land or property belonging to another person for a fixed term).

Mortgages over freehold land are generally registered with the land department in the relevant emirate (for example, in Dubai this would be the Dubai Land Department). In addition, some free zones provide their own mechanism for registering a mortgage over a freehold/leasehold interest relating to property located within that free zone.

## Common Forms of Security

Depending on the type of financing and the nature of the borrower or obligors, common forms of security include:

- Guarantees (personal and corporate).
- Assignments (over income, receivables, insurances (for example, personal or project), contracts and project guarantees).
- Chattel mortgages also known as commercial pledges (over the movable assets of a company).
- Real estate mortgages (over freehold interests, leasehold interests or buildings constructed on leased land).
- Business or commercial mortgages (including the tangible and intangible assets of a company).
- Pledges (over shares or accounts including debt service reserve accounts, collection accounts or project accounts).

There are three types of mortgage over real estate in the UAE, a mortgage over:

- Land and buildings.
- A leasehold interest in real property.
- A building constructed on leased land.

A mortgage is a contract by which a creditor acquires the right to be satisfied from the proceeds of the sale of the mortgaged real estate in priority to unsecured creditors and other secured creditors of the debtor (Federal Law No. 5 of 1985, as amended (Civil Code)). To have effect, a mortgage must be registered. The time of registration of the mortgage determines priority among mortgages over the same real estate.

The mortgagor must be the owner of the mortgaged property. It is not essential that the mortgagor be the principal obligor of the debt that is secured by the mortgage; the mortgagor can be a guarantor of the debt.

**Dubai.** Legislation now exists in Dubai that, among other things, governs the registration of property and security interests by expatriates in certain demarcated zones. The Dubai Land Department has exclusive jurisdiction to register the following three types of title in the name of foreign nationals and foreign-owned companies in certain demarcated areas:

- Freehold.
- Long-term lease (of 99 years).
- Usufruct (*musataha*), to receive the benefit from the property (of up to 50 years).

(Law No. 7 of 2006 on Registration of Real Property in the Emirate of Dubai and its implementing regulations.)

The developer must register any disposition of an off-plan property in the Interim Register, which is maintained by the Dubai Land Department (Law No. 13 of 2008 regulating Initial Property Registration in the Emirate of Dubai). The disposition of

a completed property must be registered in the Real Property Register, also maintained by the Dubai Land Department. It is unclear which party is responsible for registration. Both parties must attend the Dubai Land Department to complete the registration. A disposition that is not registered in the Interim Register or the Real Property Register is invalid.

Each unit owner (defined as a person who is registered with the Dubai Land Department as the owner, including the tenant under a long-term lease, of a flat, villa, house or other real estate) can create a mortgage over that unit in favour of a bank or financial institution (Law No. 27 of 2007 concerning the Ownership of Joint Properties (Condominiums) in the Emirate of Dubai).

**Abu Dhabi.** Security interests relating to real estate in demarcated zones in Abu Dhabi can also be registered. The following are permitted:

- For UAE nationals: to own the freehold title to land anywhere in Abu Dhabi.
- For Gulf Cooperation Council nationals: to own the freehold title to land in certain demarcated areas.

(Law No.19 of 2005 concerning Property Ownership in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.)

Law No. 19 of 2005 was amended in February 2007 to permit non-UAE nationals to:

- Own buildings in certain demarcated areas (but not the underlying land).
- Enter into a long-term lease agreement (of up to 99 years) for real property in those demarcated areas.
- Enjoy usufruct rights over real property under agreements of up to 50 years. Holders of usufruct rights in excess of ten years can sell or mortgage their interests without seeking the permission of the landowner.

**JAFZ.** In the Jebel Ali Free Zone (JAFZ), a mortgage can be created over a building constructed on leased land. Interests in land in other free zones (including the *Dubai International Financial Centre* (DIFC) and the *Abu Dhabi Global Market* (ADGM)) may be subject to the regulations and procedural requirements of such free zones.

## Formalities

Mortgages over real property must be both:

- In writing.
- Registered with the appropriate real estate authority in each emirate. The registered mortgage deeds are generally pre-printed documents prescribed by the relevant authorities.

In the JAFZ, all land is owned by the Dubai Government. The JAFZ Authority leases land for construction of office premises and warehouses. Under the provisions of the standard lease agreement between the JAFZ Authority and a lessee, the lessee can assign its rights under the lease in favour of a lender. All assignments of lease rights must be registered (using prescribed forms) with the JAFZ Authority.

In relation to the financial free zones real property located within:

- The DIFC is governed by Real Property Law DIFC Law No.10 of 2018 (see below), which provides that land transactions must be registered in a central register administered by the DIFC and must include:

- a description to identify the real property;
  - a description to identify the interest to be mortgaged; and
  - a description of the secured debt or liability.
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- The ADGM is governed by the ADGM Property Regulations which provide that the Registrar (as defined in the ADGM Property Regulations) shall maintain a real property register which shall record all documents relating to the creation or transfer of real property rights in the ADGM.

## Security in the DIFC

The DIFC is unique among the free zones as it has an entirely separate body of laws and regulations. The relevant security laws include the:

- Law of Security DIFC Law No. 4 of 2024, as amended, which, subject to certain exclusions, applies to all transactions, regardless of their form, that create a security interest in personal or real property by contract.
- Real Property Law DIFC Law No. 10 of 2018), which specifically covers mortgages over land.
- DIFC Security Regulations 2019 (Security Regulations).

To perfect a security interest in the DIFC, it must be filed in the DIFC Security Registry. If the security holder is a natural person, they must submit the following information to the registrar:

- Their identity.
- Their residence and domicile.
- Any other information required under the Security Regulations, for example, a financing statement.

The Security Regulations also govern attachment, perfection and enforcement of a security interest in financial property.

Account holders can pledge eligible securities held in the Central Securities Depository (CSD) of the Dubai International Financial Exchange (DIFX) by submitting a pledge instruction to the CSD in favour of a pledgee. The CSD designates pledged eligible securities as being held to the order of and controlled by the pledgee. The DIFX will not accept any instructions from the account holder unless otherwise instructed by the pledgee.

## Tangible Movable Property

2. What is considered tangible movable property in your jurisdiction? What are the most common forms of security granted over it? How are they created and perfected?

## Tangible Movable Property

Tangible movable property includes:

- Machinery.
- Trading stock (inventory).
- Vehicles, aircraft and vessels.

Under Federal Law No. 50 of 2022 on issuing the Commercial Transactions Law (Commercial Code), all property not classified as immovable is considered movable property. Tangible property includes goods, inventory, stores and machinery. Moveable assets are also broadly defined under the Federal Law No. 4 of 2020 on Guaranteeing Rights Related to Movables (repealing, Federal Law No. 20 of 2016 concerning the pledge of moveables as security for a debt (Old Mortgage Law), UAE Cabinet Decision No. 29 of 2021 on the Implementing Regulations for UAE Federal Law No. 4 of 2020 on Guaranteeing of Rights related to Movables and all related decrees (Implementing Regulations), decisions and regulations (as issued from time to time) (together, the Mortgage Law).

## Common Forms of Security

**Registered asset pledge/mortgage.** The Mortgage Law provides a fully online registration process where the lenders can establish an online account with a security registry (Security Registry), which will operate a security register (Security Register). There are significant benefits of registering a security interest under the Mortgage Law, including:

- The perfection of the security interest and giving priority over any unregistered competing security interests (including any that were executed before the date of the registration).
- Preventing any third-party from registering their security interest and securing a superior security interest.
- In the event of the bankruptcy of the company owning or holding (as applicable) the pledged assets, the registration may (at the discretion of the bankruptcy court) prove helpful in establishing the secured party's security interest in the relevant pledged assets owned or held (as applicable) by the bankruptcy company.

Registration would also provide remedies akin to common law "self-help" remedies, which are otherwise not available under UAE law. Until the Security Register and Security Registry are established, it is possible to register the security interest (as permitted under the Mortgage Law) in the online security register (EIRC Register) established under the Old Mortgage Law, which is currently operated by Emirates Moveable Collateral Registry (EIRC). The registered pledge/mortgage has replaced the use of business/commercial mortgages.

**Business/commercial mortgage.** A business/commercial mortgage is a mortgage of an entity's movable assets. It can only be created in favour of banks or other financial institutions. The definition of a business/commercial mortgage includes all of a company's:

- Tangible movable property comprising its:
  - goods;
  - stores;

- machinery; and
  - tools.
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- Intangible movable property, for example its:
    - contractual rights;
    - goodwill;
    - trade name;
    - intellectual property; and
    - licence rights.

(Commercial Code.)

The mortgaged assets must be described in as much detail as possible. If they are not, only the following intangible property is mortgaged, the company's:

- Trade name.
- Contractual rights.
- Goodwill.

(Commercial Code.)

Real estate owned by the business is not covered by a business mortgage. However, the landlord of the premises has a lien over the mortgaged assets in leased premises for unpaid rent (subject to a maximum of two years' rent) in priority to the mortgagee's rights (Article 52, Commercial Code).

**Chattel mortgage.** Unlike the business/commercial mortgage, the chattel mortgage, also known as a commercial pledge, cannot either:

- Be perfected through registration.
- Mortgage intangible assets of a company.

A chattel mortgage is a pledge over movable property. A chattel mortgage can be created over:

- Stock-in-trade or inventory.
- Movable plant and machinery.
- Receivables.
- Negotiable instruments.

**Other mortgages.** Mortgages can also be granted and registered over:

- Vehicles. There can be cases where the scope of the mortgage is unclear. For example, a detachable trailer attached to a vehicle, may fall outside the scope of the mortgage, depending on how the mortgage was registered.
- Vessels.
- Aircraft.
- Shares of a UAE limited liability company (see [Question 3](#)).

The UAE is a signatory to the:

- Convention on International Interests in Mobile Equipment (Cape Town 2001).
- Protocol to the Convention on Matters Specific to Mobile Equipment (Cape Town 2001).

**Security over movables in the JAFZ.** A business/commercial mortgage can be created by a JAFZ Authority licensed entity over its business and/or specific assets and can be registered with the JAFZ Authority.

**DIFC.** See [Security in the DIFC](#).

## Formalities

**Registered asset pledge/mortgage.** The formalities and procedure for registering a security interest in the Security Register are outlined in the Implementing Regulations. However, until the Security Register has been established, it is possible to register a security interest in the EIRC Register, in accordance with the requirements under the Mortgage Law. This includes the submission of an application form via an online account with the EIRC, which will include:

- Details of the:
  - security agreements (along with a copy of the same);
  - security interest;
  - secured party/parties;
  - security provider; and
  - parties with an interest in the pledged asset (for example, any third-party in possession of the pledged assets) (if applicable).
- Certain statistical information (which will be used for internal purposes by the EIRC).

**Business/commercial mortgage.** To be valid and effective, a business mortgage must be:

- In writing (with specific details of assets covered).
- Executed before a public notary.

- Registered in the Commercial Register maintained at the relevant emirate's Department of Economic Development (only the Department of Economic Development in the emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi currently register business mortgages in the commercial register). Once registered, the mortgage is valid for five years. If the relevant emirate does not maintain a commercial register then it may not be possible to have a registered/perfected security interest there.

Notice of the mortgage must be published in an Arabic daily newspaper two weeks before registration (Mortgage Law).

**Chattel mortgage.** To create a chattel mortgage, possession of the pledged asset must be transferred to the pledgee or a third party (that is, the bailee), who must retain possession until either:

- The debt is satisfied.
- The asset is placed in common possession to prevent the pledgor from disposing of the pledged asset without the pledgee's consent.

The transfer of possession can be actual or constructive.

**Other mortgages.** A vehicle mortgage is registered with the local traffic police, the road or transport authority and a notation is made in the title deed of the vehicle. The borrowing party still retains legal ownership of the vehicle, subject to the mortgage.

A mortgage over a vessel can be created by a notarised instrument that must be registered in the register of ships (in the jurisdiction where the vessel is registered). Vessel mortgages in the UAE are created under the Federal Maritime Law No. 43 of 2023 (Maritime Law). A vessel being mortgaged in the UAE must be registered with the National Transport Authority (NTA) (that is, the vessel should maintain a UAE flag). A UAE vessel mortgage is created once both:

- A notarised vessel mortgage agreement is registered with the NTA.
- The NTA has issued a new vessel registration certificate noting the mortgage registered in favour of the mortgagee.

A mortgage over an aircraft registered in the UAE can be created by submitting a copy of the executed aircraft mortgage agreement to the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA). The Federal Act No. 20 of 1991, as amended (Civil Aviation Law), does not specify the formalities for the creation and registration of mortgages over UAE-registered aircraft. However, in practice, the GCAA notes a mortgagee's interest over a UAE-registered aircraft. Once the mortgage is perfected, the GCAA issues a certificate of registration confirming the details of the owner, the operator and the financing bank as mortgagee.

In addition to the registration of the mortgage with the GCAA, banks and financial institutions also require the registration of an additional security over the aircraft (airframe and engines) at the International Registry pursuant to the Cape Town 2001 Convention, as adopted under UAE law. This registration is effected through the GCAA, which acts as an Authorised Entry Point in relation to the International Registry for the UAE.

**Security over movables in the JAFZ.** A business/commercial mortgage is registered by completing the JAFZ Authority's standard mortgage registration forms. Interests in movables in other free zones (including the DIFC and ADGM) may be subject to the regulations and procedural requirements of such free zones.

**DIFC.** See *Security in the DIFC*.

## Financial Instruments



3. What are the most common types of financial instrument over which security is granted in your jurisdiction? What are the most common forms of security granted over those instruments? How are they created and perfected?

## Financial Instruments

Shares (in private or public companies) are the most common financial instruments that can be pledged as security.

### Common Forms of Security

**Commercial pledge.** A commercial pledge can be granted over both:

- Negotiable instruments.
- Nominative instruments (that is, documents with specified obligees).

(Commercial Code.)

**Security over shares under the Companies Law.** Federal Law No. 32 of 2021, on commercial companies, as amended (Companies Law), that came into effect on 2 January 2022 and replaced Federal Law No. 2 of 2015 on Commercial Companies, as amended (Old Companies Law). The Companies Law regulates the creation of mortgages and pledges over shares of public shareholding and private shareholding companies. The shares of a limited liability company can be pledged and perfected through registration.

**Pledge over shares in the JAFZ.** Under the laws and regulations of the JAFZ Authority the shares of a JAFZ company can be pledged and perfected through registration with the JAFZ Authority. Pledge over the shares of companies in other free zones (including the DIFC and ADGM) may be subject to the regulations and procedural requirements of such free zones.

### Formalities

A commercial pledge is created by endorsing the relevant instrument indicating that the instrument has been pledged and perfected by delivery of the relevant instrument to the pledgee (Commercial Code).

Where there is a pledge over shares registered on stock exchanges, it is necessary to comply with the specific requirements of the particular exchange and the relevant regulatory bodies.

A valid pledge over the shares of a limited liability company requires:

- Filing the executed share pledge agreement along with other documents (as required by the relevant emirate department of economic development companies' regulator). The mortgagor must be a local bank.

- Payment of the relevant notary and registration fee (for example, a fee at the rate of 0.5% of the secured amount, capped at AED15,000 is payable at the notary public at the time of executing the share pledge agreement).

The pledging of the shares in a limited liability company must be in accordance with the terms of its constitutional documents (Commercial Companies Law). It is unclear whether this requirement requires express provisions permitting the pledging of shares in the limited liability company or whether the absence of a prohibition on pledging the shares suffices.

**JAFZ.** A valid pledge over the shares of a free zone establishment or company requires:

- Execution of the relevant forms, prescribed by the relevant free zone authority, by the pledgor, pledgee and company whose shares are being pledged.
- Filing the executed documents with the relevant free zone authority to register the pledge.

**Free zones.** Under UAE law, shares are treated as movable assets. Therefore, a share pledge requires possession of the certificates for the pledged shares. This is not always possible, given that most free zone companies do not issue share certificates. In certain free zones it is possible to perfect a share pledge by registration (over the shares of a free zone company in that free zone) with the free zone. This will prevent the free zone company from transferring the pledged shares or otherwise dealing with the pledged shares, until the pledge is released by the pledgee.

**DIFC.** See *Security in the DIFC*.

## Claims and Receivables

4. What are the most common types of claims and receivables over which security is granted in your jurisdiction? What are the most common forms of security granted over claims and receivables? How are they created and perfected?

## Claims and Receivables

Security is most commonly granted over receivables, income and insurances.

## Common Forms of Security

Common forms of security include assignments of receivables, income and insurances.

## Formalities

Once the Security Register has been established, it will be possible to perfect the security created under an assignment of income and receivables (Mortgage Law). However, until the Security Register has been established, it is possible to register security interest in the EIRC Register, in accordance with the requirements under the Mortgage Law (see *Common Forms of Security*).

It is also possible to register a security interest created under an assignment of insurances provided the insured asset(s) has also been pledged as security for the same financing (see [Question 2](#)).

An assignment of rights only requires notification from the assignor to the third party, confirming the assignment to the assignee. Where this is not possible or practical (for example, the assignment of a retail business' income), the banks may require this income to be deposited into a collection account (that is covered by an account pledge).

## Cash Deposits

5. What are the most common forms of security over cash deposits? How are they created and perfected?

## Common Forms of Security

The most common form of security over cash deposits is an account pledge.

## Formalities

Once the Security Register has been established, it will be possible to perfect the security created under an account pledge (Mortgage Law) (see [Question 2](#)). However, until the Security Register has been established, it is possible to register security interest under an accounts pledge in the EIRC Register, in accordance with the requirements under the Mortgage Law.

The UAE does not recognise the concept of a floating charge. Therefore, if a pledge cannot be mortgaged under the Mortgage Law, that account pledge only covers the sums standing in the pledged account on the date of the pledge agreement. Therefore, banks usually require unregistered account pledges to be amended on a periodic basis, or at the request of the bank, to pledge the new sums standing in credit in the pledged account.

## Intellectual Property

6. What are the most common types of intellectual property over which security is granted in your jurisdiction? What are the most common forms of security granted over intellectual property? How are they created and perfected?

## Intellectual Property

It is not common to grant security over intellectual property (IP).

## Formalities

IP rights are generally only pledged by a commercial mortgage. Once the Security Register has been established, it will be possible to register a mortgage over a commercial store's tangible and intangible assets (Mortgage Law) (see [Question 2](#)). However, until the Security Register has been established, it is possible to register security interest over IP rights in the EIRC Register, in accordance with the requirements under the Mortgage Law.

## Problem Assets

7. Are there types of assets over which security cannot be granted or can only be granted with difficulty? Which assets are difficult or problematic when security is granted over them?

## Future Assets

The concept of security over certain future assets exists under the Mortgage Law. Assets that cannot be mortgaged under the Mortgage Law must be in existence or clearly identifiable (in the case of assignments) at the time of the creation of the pledge over the assets. This requirement follows from the Shariah prohibition against "gharar" or uncertainty. One distinction is that future receivables from an existing and identifiable source (under an existing contract) may be assigned, whereas those arising in the future from an unknown source and of an uncertain amount cannot be assigned.

## Fungible Assets

It is possible to create a mortgage over raw material stock in a warehouse that will be used to manufacture end products (for example, plastic pellets used in the manufacture of plastic products) (Mortgage Law). If the raw material or manufactured products cannot be mortgaged under the Mortgage Law, the bank will require an assignment over the income generated from the sale of the end products and may ask for any pledge over these assets to be amended on a periodic basis, or at the request of the bank, to cover any changes in the quantity of the pledged assets. This results in a new fixed charge over the revised quantity of the pledged assets.

## Other Assets

Share pledges can sometimes cause difficulty, given that there is no uniform procedure for registering such a security interest. This is particularly over the shares of a free zone company, which will be subject to the specific share pledge registration requirements and procedures implemented (and often amended) by the particular free zone. Furthermore, not all free zones provide a mechanism for registering such pledges. In addition, share pledges will often require the appointment of a local security agent (usually a UAE Central Bank licensed entity) to act as the pledgee (and this can become a costly and time-consuming exercise for overseas lenders. The requirement to appoint a local security agent may also be indirect (that is, not required by the free zone authority). For example, in certain free zones share pledges need to be notarised before they can be registered with the free zone authority and even if the free zones do not require the pledgee to be a local bank, the notary may require a local entity/bank to act as the pledgee, as a condition to notarising the share pledge agreement.

In addition, it is not uncommon for free zones to have published regulations requiring the registration of security interest, without publishing the detailed procedure, or having established the practical framework (for example, registers), for registering such security interest in practice. This creates a difficult situation for lenders in that they are aware of registration requirements for their security interest (sometimes the free zone regulations will even necessitate such registrations in order to hold the security interest as valid) but no practical means of fulfilling such requirement. This can leave the lenders left in limbo as to the enforceability of their unregistered security interest, both before the relevant free zone authority and the local courts.

## Release of Security over Assets

8. How are common forms of security released? Are any formalities required?

Most unregistered securities can be released with a release and discharge letter from the secured party. For registered securities (for example, a land mortgage, share pledge (relating to the shares of a UAE limited liability company) or vehicle charge) it can be necessary to follow the procedure of the relevant regulatory authority. There can also be additional requirements for securities registered with free zones.

## Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) in Secured Lending

9. Is it common in your jurisdiction to take security over the shares of an SPV set up to hold certain of the borrower's assets, rather than to take direct security over those assets?

Other than in the case of non-recourse project financing or aircraft/vessel financing, it is not common to take security over the shares of a SPV set up to hold certain of the borrower's assets.

## Quasi-Security

10. What types of quasi-security structures are common in your jurisdiction? Is there a risk of such structures being recharacterised as a security interest?

A significant number of recent financings have been structured according to Islamic Sharia law. Islamic financing structures rely heavily on the quasi-securities listed below.

## Sale and Leaseback

*Ijarah* financings are similar to conventional sale and leasebacks. The sale forms the basis of the transaction although for certain assets (typically land) the sale is often not registered to avoid the transfer charges.

## Factoring

Factoring is used in the UAE. The courts respect the parties' decision regarding the form of the transaction. Therefore, the risk of these structures being recharacterised as a security interest is low.

## Hire Purchase

Hire purchase is used for under construction asset financing (such as in relation to the construction of hospitals), for example under a procurement contract (*istisna'h*) arrangement. The courts respect the parties' decision regarding the form of the transaction. Therefore, the risk of these structures being recharacterised as a security interest is low.

## Retention of Title

Retention of title is used in the UAE. The courts respect the parties' decision regarding the form of the transaction. Therefore, the risk of these structures being recharacterised as a security interest is low.

## Other Structures

**Set off.** Set-off arrangements can be enforced under Federal Decree Law No. 51 of 2023 (Bankruptcy Law), if they relate to the implementation of a PSP or RS, pursuant to a Bankruptcy Court order or a netting arrangement under Federal Law No. 10 of 2018 on Netting (Netting Law).

**Netting arrangements.** Under the Netting Law, netting arrangements (including close-out netting) may be enforced even after the initiation of bankruptcy proceedings, provided they relate to a qualifying netting agreement (as identified under the Netting Law). This is particularly relevant for close-out netting arrangements under various derivative transactions.

## Guarantees

11. Are guarantees commonly used in your jurisdiction? How are they created?

Personal and corporate guarantees are commonly used. Guarantees must be in writing and specify the amount secured by the guarantee (Civil Code).

## Risk Areas for Lenders

12. Do any laws affect the validity of a loan, security or guarantee (or the terms on which they are made or agreed)?

### Financial Assistance

It is not possible for a public joint stock company (PJSC) target, or any of its subsidiaries (including any limited liability companies), to provide any financial aid (for example loans and guarantees) to assist a purchaser in acquiring its shares. Article 224 of the Companies Law provides that a PJSC or any of its subsidiaries cannot provide a financial aid to any person so as to enable them to own any securities issued by the company. Securities is broadly defined under the Companies Law and includes shares, bonds and financial certificates (sukuk). Financial aid is also broadly defined to include the issuing of a guarantee for the obligations of another person to a third party and the granting of any security over a company's assets. Limited liability companies are exempt from these restrictions of financial aid under the Old Companies Law pursuant to Ministerial Resolution No. 272 of 2016 on the Implementation of Certain Provisions of the Public Joint Stock Companies to Limited Liability Companies, issued by the Ministry of Economy. However, it is not clear whether this exemption also applies to the Companies Law.

Within the DIFC, a company cannot provide financial assistance for a person to acquire shares in the company or a holding company of that company, unless the financial assistance falls within certain exemptions provided for in the DIFC Companies Law.

### Corporate Benefit

A parent company can guarantee, or grant a security in respect of, a loan given to a related company (that is, a company in the same corporate group), subject to two conditions:

- The parent company's constitutional documents permit a grant of this type of security.
- Necessary corporate approvals (that is, a board resolution and, where necessary, a shareholders' resolution) are obtained.

A subsidiary can also guarantee, or grant a security in respect of, a loan to its parent, subject to the conditions above.

### Loans to Directors

Article 153 of the Companies Law prohibits:

- A company from making a loan of any kind to a company director and from guaranteeing the payment to a director of a loan made by any person to that director (including their spouse, children or relatives up to second-degree relatives).

- A company from making a loan to another company, if a director of the lending company holds (including any shares held by their spouse, children or relatives up to second-degree relatives) over 20% of the share capital of the borrowing company.

## Usury

A creditor is entitled to receive interest on a commercial loan at the rate of interest stipulated in the contract (Article 72, Commercial Code). If the rate is not stated in the contract, it is calculated according to the current market rate of interest at the time of dealing, provided it does not exceed 9% per annum.

Bank interest rates in excess of 9% per annum, compound interest, and interest in excess of principal are not enforced. However, these limitations are not usually followed by the Dubai courts, unlike other emirates.

13. Can a lender be liable under environmental laws for the actions of a borrower, security provider or guarantor?

A lender who holds or enforces security over a vessel may be liable for environmental damage caused by that vessel.

## Structuring the Priority of Debts

14. What methods of subordination are there?

### Contractual Subordination

Subordination of debt is legal and common in project financing (where the shareholders of the project SPV will generally subordinate their debts to the project SPV). This is usually achieved by a subordination agreement between the senior and junior creditors, in which they agree that any enforcement proceeds will be used to settle the payments due to the senior creditor and any residue will be applied towards payments to the junior creditor.

### Structural Subordination

Structural subordination of loans is not common. However, banks regularly require shareholders to enter into agreements to subordinate their loans to the banks' loans to their corporate entities.

### Intercreditor Arrangements



Intercreditor arrangements are common for syndicated financing. The parties to the intercreditor agreement include the:

- Borrower.
- Lenders.
- Facility agent.
- Security agent.
- Lead arranger (if applicable).
- Obligors.

## Debt Trading and Transfer Mechanisms

15. Is debt traded in your jurisdiction and what transfer mechanisms are used? How do buyers ensure that they obtain the benefit of the security and guarantees associated with the transferred debt?

Secured debt can be transferred through participation agreements. Under a participation agreement, a pledgee or registered mortgagee continues as the pledgee or registered mortgagee but transfers all or part of the loan, on a funded or unfunded basis. Participation may be disclosed or undisclosed, depending on the terms of the participation agreement.

Mortgage rights can expressly be assigned by the mortgagee without the consent of the mortgagor (Mortgage Law). The mortgagee can register the assignment as an amendment to the previous registration, but the non-registration of the assignment will not affect the validity of the mortgage right against third parties.

## Agent and Trust Concepts

16. Is the trust or agent concept (such as a facility agent under a syndicated loan) recognised in your jurisdiction?

### Agent Concept

The concept of agency is recognised. Agency arrangements are generally recognised by the courts.

The concepts of facility and security agents are recognised. The facility agent generally acts on the instructions of (and on behalf of) the lenders and/or the instructions of the majority lenders (as per the standard Loan Market Association (LMA)). The security agent can enforce the security in the courts, as an agent of the lenders.

However, in certain circumstances an overseas lender may need to appoint a local security agent (usually a UAE bank), particularly where the registration and/or enforcement of a security interest can only be undertaken by local entities or entities that have specific licences (for example, to enforce a share pledge over the shares of a company licensed by the education authority in an emirate, the pledgee may also be required to hold a licence from the education authority). These requirements may be the result of:

- Legislation (either at federal or emirate level).
- Specific practices of particular free zones or financial institutions.
- The UAE notary's practices. (Although UAE law and the JAFZ Authority's rules and regulations do not specifically require a pledge over the shares of a JAFZ company to be executed before a notary, it is the internal practice at the UAE notary to register the pledge in favour of a UAE Central Bank licensed entity.)

Other examples may include:

- A real estate mortgage, which must be registered in favour of a UAE entity.
- A commercial mortgage, which can only be registered in favour of a UAE Bank or financial institution.

## Trust Concept

The common law concept of trust is not legally recognised. An instrument purporting to create a trust may be construed by the courts as giving rise to an agency, bailment or other relationship.

The concept of a local security agent, holding security for the benefit of third parties, is recognised. A trustee under a trust arrangement in another jurisdiction would be recognised as the equivalent of a security agent. Therefore, a security trustee could enforce its rights in the courts.

## Enforcement of Security Interests

17. What are the circumstances in which a lender can enforce its loan, guarantee or security interest? How are the main types of security interest usually enforced? What requirements must the lender comply with?

## Enforcement

Generally, a secured creditor can enforce its security only after both:

- A default event has occurred.
- A court has granted an enforcement order. Only a pledge of cash can be enforced without a court order.

However, there are two alternative enforcement options:

- The sale of the mortgaged asset by agreement of the parties.
- Summary execution through the courts.

(Mortgage Law (see below, *Methods of Enforcement*.)

Bank accounts and bonds are treated differently from other assets.

## Methods of Enforcement

All security interests, except pledges over cash, can only be enforced through a court. The concept of self-help (or extra-judicial enforcement) is not recognised. The security must be enforced by a sale of the secured asset in a public auction.

Enforcement of a mortgage over real property is time-consuming. As a matter of policy, mortgages over property, owned and occupied by a UAE national as their personal residence, generally cannot be enforced. Further, in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, enforcement of a mortgage over real estate requires governmental approval and approval has not been given in over two decades. However, this is expected to change in view of the Abu Dhabi and Dubai Governments' support for the ownership of freehold and leasehold property by foreign nationals.

The Mortgage Law provides the following enforcement options:

- **Sale of the mortgaged asset (except bank accounts and bonds).** If a mortgagor (or the underlying obligor) fails to perform their obligations under the mortgage contract (or if the contract is not implemented for any other reason), the mortgagee can separate the asset from the mortgagor's other property (after giving notice to the mortgagor) and request the sale of the mortgaged asset for at least its market value. To exercise this enforcement option, the parties must agree in advance that the execution does not require court action. Notice of the enforcement must be given to the person holding the mortgaged asset and (if applicable) the owner of the real property. For bank accounts and written documents that transfer ownership through delivery or endorsement, the right of sale of a mortgaged asset without recourse to the courts requires that the mortgagor does not perform their obligations under the contract. In practice, the contents of a mortgaged account can be set-off by the mortgagee against any debts (if it is held with same bank where the mortgaged account is held). Alternatively, the amount in the mortgaged account can be claimed from the account bank. Bonds or written documents that transfer ownership through delivery or endorsement must be delivered or endorsed (if their value is not more than the mortgage).
- **The mortgagee can apply to the UAE courts for a summary judgment to seize the mortgaged asset so that it can exercise its rights over the mortgaged asset.** This can involve placing the mortgaged asset with a third party to effect its sale. The summary proceedings judge must notify all relevant parties of the application, who can lodge an objection at the court. If the court permits the summary judgment application, it will authorise the mortgagee to either:
  - take possession of the mortgaged asset and sell it at market value; or
  - attach additional conditions for the sale of the mortgaged asset.

The mortgagee must take adequate care to achieve a sale price of at least the market value. The mortgagee must pay the sale proceeds into the court (following the sale procedure to be specified under the Mortgage Law).

The sale proceeds must be distributed in accordance with the directions of the court, taking into account the rights of any other parties over the mortgaged asset. However, sale proceeds are generally distributed in the following order of priority:

- Any expenses relating to repairing, the sale, licensing or maintenance of the mortgaged asset.
- Charges and fees relating to the enforcement of the mortgage (including court fees).
- To the mortgagees (following the priority determined by the court).
- Any surplus is distributed in accordance with the laws of the relevant emirate.

If the sale proceeds exceed the amount due under the mortgage, the surplus must be distributed to the mortgagor. If the sale proceeds are insufficient to discharge the debt secured by the mortgage, the mortgagor remains liable for the remaining unpaid debt. Enforcement and sale of the mortgaged asset will not be possible if the mortgagor is subject to any preventative composition, bankruptcy or equivalent procedures under the Bankruptcy Law.

## Borrower Insolvency

### Rescue, Reorganisation, and Insolvency

18. Are company rescue or reorganisation procedures (other than insolvency proceedings) available in your jurisdiction? How do they affect a lender's rights to enforce its loan, guarantee or security?

No company rescue or reorganisation procedures are available in the UAE outside the insolvency regime under the Bankruptcy Law. The new insolvency regime under the Bankruptcy Law provides for a preventive settlement procedure, a restructuring scheme and bankruptcy.

**Preventive settlement procedure (PSP).** This can only be initiated by a debtor in financial distress. A debtor can apply for a PSP to reach a settlement of its debts with creditors (albeit with a restructuring of the debt terms, often involving a haircut), in accordance with an approved PSP. The debtor must still have a viable business (for example, this option is not available to an insolvent company with no prospects of recovery). To initiate a PS, the debtor must make an application to the court that should include (among other things):

- Evidence of the circumstances resulting in the application.
- A description of its economic and financial position.
- Summary of agreements to which it is a party.

- Details of its movable and immovable properties.
- Details of employees and creditors.

The debtor must prepare a PSP including, among other things, the debtor's plan to conduct its business, a list of known creditors and debtors, their details, details of the creditors' committee, and terms and conditions for the settlement of any obligations. The PSP will then be approved by the court, then the creditors and finally revert back to the court for ratification. Once ratified, the PSP will then be implemented in accordance with its terms.

**Restructuring scheme (RS).** A debtor, creditor or supervisory entity of the debtor (as to be identified under the implementing regulations referenced under the Bankruptcy Law) can initiate an RS. A debtor can initiate proceedings if it has ceased payment of debts and is suffering from financial difficulties (for example, this option cannot be used merely to restructure debts that can otherwise be paid by the debtor). The application will include the documents required for a PS application, plus a brief explanation of the RS. As under the PSP, the debtor must submit a restructuring plan within three months of the decision to initiate the restructuring process. The restructuring plan will contain information generally provided under a PSP. The creditors will then review and vote on the restructuring plan and, if approved, it will be sent to the court for ratification (which will be based on the court's assessment standards, including the fairness standard). Once ratified by the court, the trustee will supervise the implementation of the agreed restructuring plan in accordance with its terms (which may include a sale of part or all of the business of the debtor).

A debtor, creditor or supervising authority can file an application to place a company into restructuring. The court will determine (based on its expert's report) whether the debtor's business can be rescued via a restructuring and can order for the debtor to be placed into a RS.

If the court decides to proceed with a PSP or RS, a draft PSP or RS must be submitted to the court (as applicable). The draft scheme must contain details regarding (among other things) (the Bankruptcy Law):

- The debtor's business' potential to generate profits.
- The terms and conditions relating to any settlement of the debtor's liabilities.

Once the draft scheme is approved by the court, it must be submitted to the creditors. At least two thirds of the unsecured creditors must approve the scheme. If approved, the scheme is resubmitted to the court for final approval (Bankruptcy Law).

19. How does the start of insolvency procedures affect a lender's rights to enforce its loan, guarantee or security?

If the court accepts an application for a PSP (see [Question 18](#)), a moratorium on creditor actions (including enforcement of security or attachment orders by creditors) is implemented. This period is for an initial period of three months but can be extended by additional one-month periods, provided that the total moratorium period does not exceed six months. While the moratorium binds both secured and unsecured creditors, a secured creditor can still enforce its security interest against the debtor with the approval of the court. During the implementation of a PSP, all agreements (including loans) remain valid and binding, including payments under loan agreements and the enforcement of any security in the event of a breach (subject to the approval of the court). In bankruptcy, all debts become due and payable when the bankruptcy judgment is given. The court will order the sale of secured assets, and the sale proceeds are applied towards the repayment of the relevant secured debt(s). If

the proceeds from the sale of the secured assets are insufficient to repay the debt, the bank is treated as an unsecured creditor for the outstanding debt.

After the court has accepted an application for a RS, it appoints a trustee to administer the RS. The trustee must publish a notice of the court's approval in two local newspapers (one English and one Arabic) giving the creditors 15 business days to submit their claims with supporting documentation. Creditors who fail to submit their claims within this time period cannot participate in any distribution (unless they make an application to the court requesting their inclusion to the list of creditors). The trustee reviews the claims and provides a list of the creditors to the court, together with its recommendation on which claims should be accepted or rejected (in part or in their entirety). A final list of creditors and their respective claims is prepared by the court. A dissatisfied creditor can appeal the court decision, but their appeal will not stop the implementation of the PSP or RS. As the Bankruptcy Law is relatively new, it remains to be seen how this law (particularly the tight timeframes) will be applied in practice.

20. What transactions involving loans, guarantees, or security interests can be made void if the borrower, guarantor or security provider becomes insolvent?

Once a PSP or RS has been approved by the court, it is sent for creditors' approval (majority approval is required). Only unsecured creditors can vote on whether to adopt a PSP or RS. If the PSP or RS is approved, the court can (at any stage of the PSP or RS) terminate any agreement between the debtor and a third party (including loan agreements) and/or substitute an existing security interest (including any security for a loan) with an alternative security interest of equal value (as determined by the court).

In the event of a declaration of bankruptcy, the trustee must sell the secured asset within one month of the date of the bankruptcy declaration, unless the trustee believes that the costs related to the enforcement of a security interest will exceed the enforcement proceeds from the sale of the secured asset.

21. In what order are creditors paid on the borrower's insolvency?

On the court declaring a company bankrupt, the order of priorities is:

- **Secured creditors to the extent of their security.** All reasonable fees and expenses incurred by the trustee in selling the secured asset are deducted before distribution to the secured creditor.
- **Preferential creditors.** The following classes have priority:
  - any court fees or charges (for example trustee and expert fees, and expenses paid for the benefit of all creditors to maintain or liquidate the debtor's properties);
  - wages and salaries due to employees for the 30-day period before the bankruptcy was declared;

- maintenance paid to the debtor's spouse and children (whether before or after a divorce) under a judgment delivered by a competent court;
- any amounts payable to governmental bodies; and
- any fees, costs or expenses that are incurred after the date of initiating the bankruptcy procedure to procure commodities/services to continue the debtor's business or to continue the performance of any other contract that benefits the debtor's business or property, or to continue the debtor's course of business.

(Bankruptcy Law.)

While the Bankruptcy Law does not specify the priority given to unsecured creditors, it is assumed that they rank below secured and preferential debts. The ranking of subordinated creditors depends on the terms of the relevant subordination agreement.

The creditors in each class of debts listed above are ranked equally, unless the debtor has insufficient assets to satisfy each creditor ranking equally. If the assets are insufficient, creditors recover a percentage of their debts.

If two or more creditors have a security interest over the same asset, the first step is to see if one of the parties has perfected their security interest through registration (in the EIRC Register, the Security Register or otherwise). The general practice of the court is to determine (particularly in the case of a registration under the Mortgage Law) that the registered security interest has priority.

Registering a security interest is not always a legal requirement. For example, it is possible to have a legally binding account pledge agreement (which will be enforced by the courts) without having to register this under the Mortgage Law. Therefore, creditors with unregistered security interests may still be considered secured creditors in relation to the relevant secured asset. These security interests must be considered on a case-by-case basis. However, this does not apply to assets that require registration with a legal, regulatory and/or free zone authority (for example mortgages over real estate, shares, vehicles and ships).

## Cross-Border Issues on Loans

22. Are there restrictions on the making of loans by foreign lenders or granting security (over all forms of property) or guarantees to foreign lenders, or taking guarantees from foreign subsidiaries of the borrower?

Security over immovable property cannot be granted to foreign banks unless they have a commercial banking licence in the particular emirate where the immovable property is located, with the exception of in the DIFC (see below). However, in practice, foreign banks lending to UAE borrowers usually appoint a local security agent to hold the UAE-located security on their behalf.

Security over movable property can be granted to non-resident foreign banks by registration in the Security Register (provided the relevant security can be registered under the Mortgage Law) or a chattel mortgage. However, a commercial/business mortgage (whether under the Commercial Code or in relation to assets in the JAFZ) can only be granted to banks or financial institutions with a commercial banking licence.

In practice, foreign non-resident banks usually appoint an onshore security agent to hold the security on their behalf.

Foreign lenders can hold security in the DIFC.

Foreign lenders can be mortgagees on vessel mortgages.

23. What regulatory requirements does a UK lender have to comply with to purchase a loan made to a borrower in your jurisdiction?

Not applicable.

#### Contributor Profiles

#### Rahat Dar, Partner

##### Afridi & Angell

T +971 4 330 3900

F +971 4 330 3800

E [rdar@afриди-angell.com](mailto:rdar@afриди-angell.com)

W [www.afриди-angell.com](http://www.afриди-angell.com)

**Professional qualifications.** England and Wales, Solicitor

**Areas of practice.** Banking and finance; Islamic finance; bankruptcy and restructuring; infrastructure projects and project finance; and mergers and acquisitions.

**Languages.** English, Urdu and Punjabi

#### Publications

- *Co-author of Commercial Real Estate in the United Arab Emirates: Overview, Thomson Reuters Practical Law*
- *Co-author of The Islamic Finance and Markets Review (UAE chapter), 8th edition, The Law Reviews*
- *Co-author of Real Estate, Lexology Getting The Deal Through*



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