



Trade Facts

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United States - Oman Free Trade Agreement FTA Supports Oman's Labor Reforms

- As in other recent U.S. free trade agreements, the United States - Oman FTA contains provisions reaffirming the Parties' commitments as members of the International Labor Organization (ILO), and pledging the effective enforcement of domestic labor laws that provide for internationally recognized worker rights. An Annex to the Labor Chapter creates a cooperative mechanism to upgrade labor standards.
- Oman passed a new labor law in 2003 (Royal Decree No. 35), allowing for the creation of worker representative committees for the first time.
- The 2003 decree details procedures for dispute resolution and removes a 1973 prohibition on strikes.
- The provisions of the new labor law apply equally to women and prohibit the dismissal of women during pregnancy or maternity leave.
- Significantly, the protections of the labor law apply equally to foreign workers. Foreign workers must be at least 21 years of age to obtain a work permit in Oman. Both nationals and non-nationals may belong to the worker representative committees and participate in the leadership.
- Regarding collective bargaining, the new law allows the committees to represent workers in "*all matters that relate to their affairs*" and for workers and employers to "*enter into agreements...the terms of which are more beneficial than the terms provided for in [the] law.*" The law also provides for the settlement of labor disputes through bargaining and consultation between workers and employers. The government of Oman is currently working with the ILO on additional regulations to ensure that the implementation of collective bargaining provisions is consistent with international labor standards.
- The new law provides that representatives of the workers' committees shall form a "main" representative committee, which is a national organization, and may represent workers in local, regional, and international conferences.
- Oman ratified ILO Conventions 29 on forced labor in 1998 and 182 on the worst forms of child labor in 2001, and, in July 2005, ratified Conventions 105 on the abolition of forced labor and 138 on the minimum age of employment. Oman also ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children in July 2005.
- In April 2003, the Government raised the minimum age of employment from 13 to 15 years to conform with international standards. Primary school education for children, including foreign children, is free and universally accessible.

Oman's 2003 law permits workers in any establishment to form a representational committee through a secret ballot election, with the goal of taking care of their employment interests and defending their workplace rights. To date, 24 worker representative committees have been established in Oman.

- The Government of Oman recognizes the need to continue making progress on labor rights, and is seeking assistance from the ILO to raise awareness and educate workers about their rights, and to establish new worker representative committees.