



Bible Access List

Where Bible access is most difficult, and Bible shortage is greatest

United Arab Emirates

Bible Restrictions Rank: **44**
CONSIDERABLE ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

Bible Shortage Rank: **53**
Bible needs estimate between twenty five and fifty thousand



An Overview of Bible access in United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is home to nearly 1.25 million Christians, about 13% of the country's 9.6 million people. Yet despite this large number and the country's connectivity, Bible access is not universal. It's estimated that approximately 80% of Christians have access to a Bible despite considerable restrictions, revealing a critical spiritual gap in a nation that projects tolerance but enforces strict limitations beneath the surface.

While the UAE allows churches and Christian expatriates to possess Bibles under specific conditions, the reality is more complex. Importing Bibles is only permitted for churches and migrant congregations; and even then, only for internal use. Printing Bibles locally is not allowed. Storing Bibles is restricted to recognized churches and official Bible societies. Distribution is confined strictly to Christian communities and church compounds, with no allowance for outreach to Muslims.

For the vast majority of Christians, who are migrant workers, personal Bible ownership is permitted, but precariously so. These believers often live under employer surveillance and in tightly controlled communities, where open expressions of faith can trigger social, professional, or even legal repercussions.

In places like Ajman and Umm Al Quwain, where no designated church buildings exist, access to Bibles becomes even more limited. With strict monitoring of religious gatherings and online activity, even digital access comes with risk. Although platforms like YouVersion report thousands of users each month in the UAE, the reality is that government surveillance makes many cautious about how they engage with online Scripture.

Before we continue, would you take a pause to pray for the United Arab Emirates?

How can I pray for United Arab Emirates?

- **Safety and Strength for Hidden Believers.** Pray for strength, wisdom, and support for Muslim background believers (MBBs) who must follow Jesus in secret, often facing intense family and societal pressure.
- **Church Leaders and Bible Access.** Ask God to guide church leaders and Christian workers in finding safe and legal ways to distribute Bibles and disciple believers.
- **Justice and Dignity for Migrant Christians.** Pray for protection, fair treatment, and spiritual support for Christian migrant workers, especially women vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Bible Access Restrictions

Considerable Access Restrictions

- Import restrictions for part of population
- No Printing
- Storage restrictions for part of population
- Ownership restrictions for part of population
- Distribution restrictions for part of population

Other Limiting Factors

No Other Factors Identified

Bible Shortages Among Believers

Bible ownership is over 50%, **estimated** Bible need is between 25 and 50 thousand

Main religion: Islam

Country population: 9,592,000

Christian population:

1,241,000, 12.94% of total population

World Watch List: #60

After praying for United Arab Emirates, continue reading on the next page to learn more.

WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES?

A Climate of Control Masked In Comfort

Although Christians in the UAE, especially expatriates, are permitted to worship within designated church compounds, strict legal and societal boundaries make accessing and sharing the Bible extremely difficult.

Public evangelism is strictly prohibited, and proselytizing Muslims is punishable under the law. Churches must be careful not to engage with or even visibly integrate Muslim Background believers or MBBs, out of fear of legal or social repercussions.

High Surveillance and Government Oversight

Church activities are closely monitored, often through surveillance cameras installed in worship spaces. Some churches report they cannot access the camera feeds, indicating these are likely monitored by security agencies. Christians, especially MBBs, are aware they are being watched and often self-censor to avoid drawing attention.

Online activities, such as sharing Scripture or testimony, are also carefully restricted due to high surveillance and restrictive cybercrime laws that criminalize speech perceived to harm the state or criticize Islam.

Church Access: Legal Recognition and Spatial Limitations

While the UAE hosts approximately 40 recognized church buildings, demand far exceeds capacity. In the Emirate of Dubai alone, over 150 church groups are thought to operate outside recognized buildings, often forced to meet in homes or rented spaces like hotels, which has become increasingly difficult under recent crackdowns. *(More on this below)*

Barriers for Muslim Background Believers

Bible access for MMBs, particularly Emirati nationals, remains almost entirely underground. These believers face intense pressure from family, employers, and community, including threats of job loss, forced marriage, or loss of inheritance.

Possessing a Bible or even expressing Christian beliefs openly can lead to ostracization or worse. As a result, MBBs often hide their faith and may not have access to Scripture at all.

Limited Distribution Channels

Bibles and Christian materials are only legally distributed within designated church compounds, which are located primarily in urban centers. Access outside these compounds, especially in more conservative and rural emirates like Umm Al Quwain or Ajman, is virtually non-existent.

Distribution through bookstores or public spaces is considered illegal proselytism and thus prohibited. Even Emirati or Muslim-background individuals may avoid entering church compounds due to fear of societal backlash or surveillance.

Labor Conditions and Discrimination

Many low-paid Christian migrant workers, particularly from Africa and Asia, face not only economic exploitation but also discrimination that limits their religious expression. Some are confined to labor camps where religious gatherings are surveilled or discouraged.

Abuse of Christian domestic workers, though not always faith-related, further contributes to a context where spiritual growth and access to the Bible are hindered by fear, isolation, and mistreatment.

Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in United Arab Emirates

United Arab Emirates	Islamic Oppression	Religious Nationalism	Ethno-religious hostility	Clan oppression	Christian denominational oppression	Communist and post-Communist oppression	Secular intolerance	Dictatorial paranoia	Organized corruption and crime
Persecution Engines →									
Persecution Drivers ↓	Medium	Not at all	Not at all	Medium	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all	Medium	Not at all
Government officials	+++							+++	
Ethnic group leaders	++								
Non-Christian religious leaders	++								
Christian religious leaders									
Violent religious groups									
Normal citizens	+++			+++					
Extended family	++++			+++					
Political parties									
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups									
Organized crime									
Multilateral org. & Embassies									

Reference

The more fully shaded the circle in orange, the stronger the level of persecution. The number of "+" signs indicates the frequency or intensity of the driving factors behind it.

Very Strong

Strong

Medium

None

Although not as intense and more subtle than other nations, persecution does exist in the UAE. Three of these persecution forces involve **Islamic Oppression**, **Clan Oppression**, and **Dictatorial Paranoia**. These are driven by societal pressure from family, conservative community structures, and the government's tight restrictions on religious freedom.

The World Watch List by Open Doors sheds light on the broader context of persecution of Christians. But now we have to ask the question: How does this affect Bible access? Furthermore, where can we pinpoint the problem so we can address the need and demand for Bibles in the United Arab Emirates?

A CLOSER LOOK AT PERSECUTION ENGINES

A persecution engine is simply this: the source of persecution in the country. A persecution driver (or actor) is the one “driving” the persecution. Taking a closer look at these engines and drivers, in proper context, will give us insight on how we can solve the problems of Bible access in the country.



: Faith Suppressed by Law and Society

Islamic oppression in the UAE operates primarily through deeply conservative societal norms, supported by laws that prohibit proselytizing and do not recognize conversion from Islam. Islam is the official state religion, and Sharia is a principal source of legislation. As such, Muslims are not legally permitted to convert to another religion.

For Emiratis, conversion to Christianity is treated as a betrayal of family and faith. MBBs face immense pressure from their extended families, including threats of disinheritance, forced marriage, and job loss. Public expression of their faith, including owning or reading a Bible, is often hidden to avoid retaliation. Even among expatriate communities, MBBs often remain secretive due to pressure from within their own national or ethnic groups. This fear leads to profound isolation and prevents MBBs from openly accessing or owning a Bible.

According to the U.S. State Department report, several Christians were deported from the UAE after being accused of proselytizing back in 2023, similar incidents took place again in 2024 and 2025 as per the Open Doors persecution reports. Though long prison sentences are codified in law for such offenses, the government tends to deport rather than imprison to avoid international backlash, especially in cases involving Westerners.



Family Honor Over Faith

Tribal and family structures are tightly interwoven with religious identity in the UAE. Leaving Islam is not merely seen as religious disobedience; it is regarded as dishonoring the family and tribe. As a result, clan oppression manifests through ostracization, coercion, and, in some cases, threats of violence or forced marriage.

This is particularly severe for women. Female MBBs may face house arrest, forced marriage, or physical abuse. They are legally barred from marrying non-Muslim men, and custody laws favor Muslim fathers in cases of divorce. Such legal and societal barriers create overwhelming pressure to conform, making it almost impossible for MBBs to publicly access Scripture or participate in Christian fellowship where Bibles are available.



State Control and Censorship

Although the UAE promotes a public image of tolerance, it is governed by an authoritarian regime that does not tolerate dissent or religious expression that challenges Islamic norms. The government's control is enforced through widespread surveillance, vague anti-blasphemy laws, and the criminalization of any perceived criticism of Islam or the state. Christians, particularly those from a non-Western background, are acutely aware of this scrutiny.

As recently as 2024, the UAE enacted the Houses of Worship Law, centralizing control of non-Muslim religious gatherings and imposing heavy fines for unapproved religious events or failure to report donations. While the law was framed as administrative reform, it places significant limitations on Christian organizations, especially in terms of outreach and Scripture distribution.

Furthermore, churches are strongly discouraged from engaging with MBBs, and many apply strict self-censorship to avoid state intervention. These limitations hinder not only Bible distribution but also the spiritual mentorship and discipleship necessary to help new believers access and engage with God's Word.

THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Despite the relatively high availability of Scripture, there remains a significant need to support and sustain the Church. A number of **up to 50,000 additional Bibles** is critical in closing the gap of access, further strengthening the church in the UAE.

A Growing Church, A Growing Demand

Over the past five years, the Christian community in the UAE has expanded. A huge victory for the kingdom of God, but this also intensifies the challenge of Bible supply. As congregations expand and new believers come to faith, the need for Bibles outpaces current distribution efforts.

In a context where evangelism is restricted and spiritual growth must often happen quietly, access to the Bible becomes even more essential for personal discipleship, underground fellowships, and sustaining faith under pressure.

Bible Formats for Diverse Needs

In the UAE, **print remains the primary format** needed. While nearly universal internet and mobile access exist, digital Bibles are not a complete solution due to surveillance risks and restrictions on faith-based content. Many believers, especially domestic workers and laborers, prefer the privacy and portability of a printed Bible.

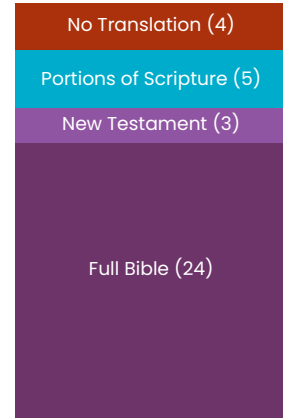
Audio formats also meet a vital need, particularly for workers who have limited literacy or reading time due to long hours. Ensuring that believers have access to the format that best suits their daily lives is key to discipleship and spiritual guidance.

The Translation Gap

Christians in the UAE speak at least 36 different languages. Of these languages:

- only **24** languages currently have a full Bible translation
- **3** languages have only the New Testament
- **5** have limited Scripture portions translated
- **4 languages have no Bible translation at all**

This linguistic gap means that thousands of believers and seekers remain spiritually isolated, unable to read or hear God’s Word in a language they fully understand. Translation efforts must continue with urgency to reach every corner of this multilingual Christian population.



Spoken Languages with Believers in United Arab Emirates

THE CLARION CALL

The need for Bibles in the United Arab Emirates is more than a logistical concern. It is a mandate for the international Christian community. Behind every statistic is a believer longing for connection with God through His Word, often in silence and secrecy.

The global Church is uniquely positioned to respond. By investing in Bible distribution, translation, and multi-format access, we can equip the growing church in the UAE with the tools it needs to thrive under pressure.

This is a call to act boldly and compassionately, so that no believer in the UAE is left without the light of God’s Word.



3.0%

Annual Church Growth



Bibles needed for both
Believers & Seekers



25-50k

Bible needs estimate



Printed Bible

Preferred Format



Audio Bible

Format 2nd Priority