

Call for extending help to unemployed Emiratis

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- By Samir Salama, Associate Editor
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Abu Dhabi: The Federal National Council (FNC) has demanded financial assistance be paid to unemployed Emiratis to help them lead a decent life.

Khalifa Bin Howaiden, an FNC member from Sharjah, will ask Mariam Al Roumi, Minister of Social Affairs, today about the criteria for granting assistance to the unemployed.

"Out of 12,000 unemployed, not more than 100 people receive assistance from the Ministry of Social Affairs," Bin Howaiden told Gulf News.

He said every unemployed citizen has a right to an assistance from the government until he or she finds a job. "And it is the government's responsibility to help unemployed citizens find jobs. How come a country that provides jobs to millions of foreigners fails to create jobs for its citizens?"

He said the Ministry of Labour issued 640,000 work permits to foreigners in the first quarter of 2008, but 12,000 Emiratis remained unemployed.

In 2008, the Ministry of Social Affairs extended Dh619,750 in assistance to 86 unemployed Emiratis.

A report by a committee at the council put unemployment in the UAE at 16.8 per cent, compared to the international average of 6.1 per cent in 2008. Most of the unemployed Emiratis are in the northern emirates.

The report quoted Tanmia, an employment agency for Emiratis, as putting the number of unemployed at 21,000, while a 2008 report by the Ministry of Economy put them at 43,000.

Noora Al Budoor, director of employment at Tanmia, said the agency last year helped 4,311 Emiratis find jobs, while the remaining jobs seekers are 11,541.

A 2007 study found that foreigners constituted 99 per cent of the UAE's private sector. The average in other GCC countries was 60 per cent.

It is this dearth of Emiratis employed in the private sector that the federal government's Emiratisation policy aims to fix.

Government initiative

Tanmia reported a 30 per cent rise in the number of people for whom it found private sector jobs in 2008. The government has introduced additional measures to increase those numbers further, imposing enforceable quotas for Emirati hires (a five per cent increase annually with a target of a 40 per cent Emirati workforce by 2012) and increasing the difficulty with which citizens can be fired.

But the banking and insurance industries, as well as certain trading companies, are the only sectors mandated to implement Emiratisation measures.

Another problem faced by programme is retention. Sixty per cent of Emiratis in the private sector have resigned from corporate positions due to a lack of career progression and the absence of a mentoring culture.

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