



Electronic Judicial Litigation Procedures Before the UAE Civil Courts: An Analytical Study

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**PROFESSIONAL
ARTICLE**



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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the legal regulation of Electronic Judicial Litigation (i.e. e-Litigation) before UAE Civil Courts, focusing on recent developments introduced by the UAE legislator in the field of litigation via modern electronic means of communication, under the provisions of the new Civil Procedures Act No. 42 of 2022. In this sense, this research paper will adopt an analytical approach, focusing on the adequacy of those new legal provisions concerning the regulation of litigation procedures electronically. Hence, this study will address the following topics in detail: the nature and formation of e-Litigation; the initiation of this type of litigation via electronic legal notices; as well as the stages of discovery, adjudication, and final ruling that is done electronically. On this basis, the paper concludes on a number of results and puts forward some recommendations, especially with regard to the amendment of Article 44 of the Civil Procedures Act, concerning the required data in the submitted Statement of Claim for both the plaintiff and the defendant. Finally, the analysis of the courts' practice indicates that it is desirable to have an additional provision added to the current legal provisions stipulating the commitment to all litigation guarantees, also in cases involving the traditional judiciary in the field of e-Litigation.

KEYWORDS:

UAE Civil Procedures Law;
Claim Initiation; Electronic
Legal Notice – Preparing
the Claim; The Case
Management Office;
e-Documents; Litigants
Examination; Hearing the
Witnesses; Online Pleading;
Online Deliberation;
Electronic Court Ruling

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Moustafa Elmetwaly
Kandeel, 'Electronic Judicial
Litigation Procedures
Before the UAE Civil Courts:
An Analytical Study' (2025)
16(2) *International Journal
for Court Administration*
2. DOI: [https://doi.
org/10.36745/ijca.688](https://doi.org/10.36745/ijca.688)

A judicial proceeding has to fulfill a number of procedural actions, so that a claim can be initiated and prosecuted; and that is starting from the time of filing the claim till the issuance of a court ruling or the claim's conclusion without a ruling on its subject matter. In this regard, the use of modern electronic means of communication in the field of litigation before UAE courts has evolved through four distinctive stages as follows:

- Stage (I): Before 2017, the use of electronic means in the field of litigation was very limited. This was restricted to sending legal notices by the court to the parties via fax, email or any other technological means of communication as stated by the Minister of Justice.¹
- Stage (II): This stage was initiated with the issuance of Federal Decree-Law No. 10 of 2017, stating the amendments of some legal provisions regarding the following: a) the old Civil Procedures Act;² b) the executive regulation of this law and its amendments;³ and c) the Minister of Justice's Decree No. 260 of 2019.⁴ Hence, in this stage, the legislator expanded the use of electronic means in judicial procedures and recognized the validity of those procedures regardless of whether they were conducted fully or partially via electronic means of communication.
- Stage (III): This stage was initiated by the issuance of Federal Decree-Law No. 15 of 2021,⁵ regarding the amendment of some legal provisions in the old Civil Procedures Act.
- Stage (IV): This final stage was initiated by virtue of Federal Decree-Law No. 42 of 2022, concerning the issuance of the new Civil Procedures Act;⁶ this new law introduced further expansions in the use of electronic means of communication in the field of judicial procedures.

In light of the above, this paper will focus on this legislative leap introduced by the UAE legislator in the field of e-Litigation. In other words, the main question raised in this paper is the following: Is it safe to say now that e-Litigation has been fully adopted before UAE courts? In order to answer this question, the legal regulation of e-Litigation will be analyzed in detail, including its nature, formation, initiation, proceeding, and conclusion with the issuance of a court ruling.

¹ By virtue of Article (14/1) of Personal Affairs Law No. 28 of 2005, the following is stated: "The defendant or the notified party (in his person) shall be served by a copy of his legal notice, delivered to him at his domicile, place of residence, place of work, legal correspondence address or wherever he is located; otherwise, the court may notify him via fax, email, registered mail with acknowledgement of receipt, or any other equivalent means".

² Federal Official Gazette, Judicial Year (47), Supplement of Issue No. (622), September 18th 2017, 9.

³ Federal Official Gazette, Council of Ministers' Decree No. 57 of 2018, Judicial Year (48), Supplement of Issue No. 643, December 16th 2018, 9.

⁴ Federal Official Gazette, "Procedural Guide for the Legal Regulation of Litigation via Electronic Means & Telecommunication Technology in Civil Trials", Judicial Year (49), Issue No. 651, April 14th 2019.

⁵ Federal Official Gazette, Judicial Year (51), Issue No. 710, September 2nd 2021, 9.

⁶ Federal Official Gazette, Judicial Year (52), Supplement of Issue No. 737, October 10th 2022, 157.

2. WHAT IS ELECTRONIC JUDICIAL LITIGATION?

2.1 DEFINITION OF e-LITIGATION

By virtue of law, a judicial litigation with the UAE civil courts could be defined as a legal case arising from the initiation of a claim. Judicial litigation involves a number of procedural actions concerning the claim in question, as taken by the competent judge, assistant judges, litigants, legal representatives, and any other third parties. This concerns the entire period starting from filing the claim to the issuance of a court ruling, or the claim's conclusion without a ruling on its subject matter.

In this sense, the same definition shall apply to electronic judicial litigation (e-Litigation), considering that these procedural actions are taken electronically in the case, i.e., through the use of telecommunication technology. In this regard, Article 328 of the Civil Procedures Act has defined the use of telecommunication technology in civil procedures as follows: "It is the use of audio and visual means of communication between two or more parties, in order to fulfill the requirements of remote attendance and documents exchange, including the fulfillment of all relevant procedures of claim registration, legal notice, trial proceedings and ruling execution via this technology".

Additionally, in the Minister of Justice's Decree No. 260 of 2019, this process of e-Litigation has been referred to as "Remote Trial". According to Article (1) of this decree, this process is defined as follows: "It refers to the procedures of civil litigation taken via means of telecommunication or via electronic media; and that is in order to fulfill the requirements of remote attendance as well as the exchange of documents and memoranda, including all relevant procedures of claim registration, legal notice, trial proceedings before both the Case Management Office and the competent court, and the issuance of a court ruling".

In general jurisprudence, this process has also been identified by several other names and designations, such as "Remote Litigation"⁷, "Remote Court",⁸ "Remote Trial"⁹, "Electronic Litigation"¹⁰, "E-Justice",¹¹ "Use of Telecommunications Technology

7 Al-Shaibani, M. N. 2022. "Remote Litigation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences* 17 (2): 61–74. <https://ijcjs.com/menu-script/index.php/ijcjs/article/view/512>.

8 Olugasa, O., and A. Davies. 2022. "Remote Court Proceedings in Nigeria: Justice Online or Justice on the Line." *International Journal for Court Administration* 13 (2): 1. <https://iacajournal.org/articles/10.36745/ijca.448>.

9 Kandeel, M. E., T. A. R. Kameel, and M. A. Alkrisheh. 2022. "Information Privacy Protection during Remote Trials." In *23rd International Arab Conference on Information Technology (ACIT 2022)*, IEEE. <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/9994174>. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ACIT57182.2022.9994174>.

10 Tantawy, C. D., and H. E. Rateep. 2024. "Electronic Litigation Procedures and Its Role in Reducing Administrative Corruption in the Justice Facility." *Journal of Legal and Economic Research* 14: 391–471. https://mjle.journals.ekb.eg/article_386563.html?lang=en.

11 Sousa, M., D. Kettiger, and A. Lienhard. 2022. "E-Justice in Switzerland and Brazil: Paths and Experiences." *International Journal for Court Administration* 13 (2): 1. <https://iacajournal.org/articles/10.36745/ijca.368>. Reiling, D., and F. Contini. 2022. "E-Justice Platforms: Challenges for Judicial Governance." *International Journal for Court Administration* 13 (1): 1. <https://iacajournal.org/articles/10.36745/ijca.445>.

in Litigation”,¹² “Technology on Courts”,¹³ and “Electronic Court”.¹⁴ Of course, this transition from the practice of traditional litigation procedures to the use of electronic means of communication has provided numerous advantages;¹⁵ however, it has also caused a number of legal effects, which may vary widely depending on the various judicial procedures and relevant documents involved.¹⁶

In this regard, we note that electronic litigation in the aforementioned sense differs from some commonly used terms such as “electronic judiciary”, “judiciary using artificial intelligence”, or “smart judiciary”. These terms describe a situation in which the judge is not a human being, but rather a mere device or robot¹⁷ fed facts to issue a decision on the subject of the dispute, particularly in minor disputes, or his role is limited to being an assistant to the judge.¹⁸ There is no doubt that the use of artificial intelligence in the judiciary raises—according to UNESCO—many concerns, foremost among which is the potential violation of human rights such as the right to freedom of expression, the right to privacy, data protection, and non-discrimination.¹⁹ This requires establishing rules and foundations for governing the use of artificial intelligence.²⁰

2.2 THE VALIDITY OF ELECTRONIC LITIGATION PROCEDURES

The legislator has permitted the use of electronic media in the trial proceedings; in addition to any prior procedures concerning the claim registration, fees payment, and judicial notice, as well as any subsequent procedures concerning the ruling execution or the filing of appeals; that is to say, when completed electronically, all of those procedures have been deemed as legally binding and valid. In this regard, Article 330 of the Civil Procedures Act states the following: “In case of being completed fully or partially via telecommunication technology, all of the following procedures shall be considered as valid and legally binding: claim registration, fees payment, legal notice, documents

12 Kandeel, M. E. 2021. “Toward the Use of Telecommunications Technology in Litigation with Technical Guarantees.” In *22nd International Arab Conference on Information Technology (ACIT 2021)*, IEEE. <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/9677333>.

13 Wallace, A. 2021. “The Impact of Technology on Courts.” *International Journal for Court Administration* 8 (2): 1. <https://iacajournal.org/articles/10.18352/ijca.236>.

14 Helmia, R. 2019. “The Existence of Electronic Courts (E-court) in Realizing Simple, Fast and Low-Cost Justice.” *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change* 8 (9): 270–78. https://www.ijicc.net/images/vol8iss9/8921_Helmi_2019_E_R.pdf.

15 Kandeel, M. E. 2022. “Guarantees in the Use of Telecommunications Technology in Litigation before UAE Civil Courts and Its Compliance with International Standards.” *International Journal for Court Administration* 13 (3): 1. <https://iacajournal.org/articles/10.36745/ijca.355>.

16 Wali, F. 2009. *Civil Justice Law*. Cairo: Cairo University Press and University Book. 385. Ragheb, W. 1986. *Principles of Civil Justice*. Cairo: Arab Thought House. n. 219.

17 Shalaby, A. G., G. M. Abdelaziz, and M. E. Kandeel. 2022. “Using Artificial Intelligence to Resolve Disputes through Online Arbitration.” In *Ninth International Conference on Social Networks Analysis, Management and Security (SNAMS 2022)*, 1–8. IEEE. <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/10062524>.

18 Kandeel, M. E., and G. Elrefae. 2023. “The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Achieving the Efficiency of Justice: ‘AI & Speedy Justice’.” In *24th International Arab Conference on Information Technology (ACIT 2023)*, 1–5. IEEE. <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/10453918>.

19 UNESCO. “AI and the Rule of Law: Capacity Building for Judicial Systems.” <https://www.unesco.org/en/artificial-intelligence/rule-law/mooc-judges>

20 Kandeel, M. E., E. A. Hamza, and G. Elrefae. 2024. “AI Governance: A General Perspective.” In *Global Congress on Emerging Technologies (GCET 2024)*, 195–201. IEEE. <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/10934585>.

submission, appearance before the court, court openness, proceedings of verbal pleading, hearing the witnesses, interrogation and examination of all concerned parties, court deliberation, issuance of rulings, submission of appeals, and rulings execution through all procedures of execution as set forth by virtue of this law and its amendments”.

2.3 THE SCOPE OF ELECTRONIC LITIGATION PROCEDURES

According to Article (2/1 of the Minister of Justice’s Decree, the scope of using electronic means of communication in the field of litigation before civil courts is limited only to claims of civil, commercial, and personal affairs. On this basis, it is not permissible to use this telecommunication technology in the fields of labor claims or administrative claims. This exclusion could be attributed to the legislator’s consideration for the litigants of those claims. On one hand, with the labor claims, one of the litigants could be a simple laborer who might lack the required technical or educational potentials in order to be capable of using electronic media in the field of litigation, or who might lack the required material capabilities enabling him to hire an attorney at law in order to take all legal actions and procedures on his behalf. On the other hand, with administrative claims, their exclusion could be attributed to the fact that federal or local government authorities are always involved as one of the litigants in this type of claims; in addition to the special circumstances of the other litigant who seeks the prosecution of those government authorities.

3. INITIATION OF THE e-LITIGATION

3.1 FILING THE CLAIM OR APPEAL ELECTRONICALLY

3.1.1 The Electronic Filing of a Statement of Claim or Appeal

Pursuant to Article 44/1 of the new Civil Procedures Act, a claim shall be referred to the competent court upon a request by the plaintiff; and that is by filing a Statement of Claim at the Case Management Office, or through the electronic or paper-based registration of this Statement of Claim as per the applicable regulations of the competent court. In addition, by virtue of Article 330 of the same law, it is permissible to use telecommunication technology to submit appeals; i.e. it is permissible to file statements of appeal, cassation and petition for reconsideration electronically.²¹

Nonetheless, the legislator has apparently failed to provide an explicit mechanism for the electronic filing of statements of claim or appeal, i.e. the mechanism of initiating claims or appeals electronically. In this sense, we believe that the legislator has preferred to leave the regulation of those actions to the decisions issued in this regard by the competent federal judicial authority or the competent local judicial authorities; a fact that could be deduced from the phrase “as per the applicable regulations of the competent court”, as stated in Article 44/1. Indeed, Articles 5 and 6 of the Minister of Justice’s Decree state this applicable regulation for the electronic filing and registration of claims.

3.1.2 The Approved Dates for the Electronic Filing of a Claim or Appeal

In order to ensure a proper regulation for the electronic filing of claims and appeals, a major question would naturally be raised about the approved date for initiating a

²¹ In the same sense: Article 24 of the Minister of Justice’s Decree.

claim or an appeal electronically. That is to say, would this approved date refer to the date of submitting the electronic request to the competent court via the electronic registration system? Or would this date rather refer to the date of final registration of this request, after its review and payment of the stated fees? In fact, the answer to this question is not just a matter of theoretical regulation, but rather an action of major procedural effect that could impact the defenses submitted before the court, regarding the validity of the claim or appeal's registration on time.

In this regard, in 2016 (i.e. prior to the issuance of the current regulatory provisions), Dubai Court of Cassation stated a new legal principle concerning e-Litigation. The Court ruled the following: "A claim, request or contestation filed through an appeal, cassation or petition shall be considered as legally initiated starting from the date of submitting the relevant statement at the Case Management Office, or as of the date of submitting the relevant application to the court electronically – as the case may be; as this date of submission solely shall be considered as the approved date, when determining other procedural dates including the stated dates of appeal".²²

Furthermore, with regard to the following legal provision: "An appeal shall be initiated by virtue of a statement of appeal submitted at the Case Management Office in the competent Court of Appeal; as this statement shall be registered immediately at the relevant record or registered electronically", on its judgement of December 06, 2015, the Dubai Court of Cassation ruled that this provision shall be considered as a clear evidence of the legislator's new adoption of the electronic registration of statements of appeal at the Court of Appeal. For this purpose, the Court of Appeal has indeed created its own software for the electronic registration of appeals. Hence, this new electronic method shall be considered as equivalent to the ordinary method of submission and registration at the relevant record in the Case Management Office at the Court of Appeal. In this sense, the date of registering the appeal electronically shall be considered as the approved date of submission, subject to legal review and assessment, rather than the later date of review and approval by the Case Management Office or the date of paying the stated court fee.²³ Moreover, in their subsequent ruling issued on March 29, 2017, the court confirmed the same principle in an equivalent phrasing.²⁴

Indeed, it is true that those court rulings were issued prior to the adoption of the current new legal provisions; however, those rulings remain completely consistent with the present legal provisions. That is to say, Article 44/1 states the following: "A claim shall be referred to the competent court upon a request by the plaintiff; and that is by filing a Statement of Case at the Case Management Office, or through the electronic or paper-based registration of this Statement of Claim as per the applicable regulations of the competent court". This has to be done by taking into account the provision of Clause 2/d of the same article, regarding the following stipulation: "The submitted Statement of Claim shall include the date of filing this statement at the Case Management Office". In addition, Article 47/1 states that: "After paying the stated fees, the Case Management Office shall register the claim at the relevant

²² See what is published in Al-Bayan Newspaper and Al-Ittihad Newspaper with regard to this Court Ruling, in their issues of February 25th 2016, August 26, 2025, <https://www.albayan.ae/across-the-uae/accidents/2016-02-25-1.2581081> and <https://www.alittihad.ae/article/7790/2016>.

²³ Dubai Court of Cassation, Commercial Cassation No. 709 of 2015, 06/12/2015.

²⁴ Dubai Court of Cassation, Civil Cassation (Real Estate) No. 19 of 2017, 29/03/2017.

record, whether the process is completed through an electronic or paper-based registration; and in this case, the claim shall be considered as duly registered with full legal effects in this regard as of the date of submitting the statement, provided that the stated fees are duly paid within a period of no more than three working days as of date of the day following the payment notice; otherwise, this registration shall be considered as null and void”.

Therefore, it is obvious that Article 47/1 has confirmed the same principle stated in the previously mentioned court rulings issued by Dubai Court of Cassation, before the issuance of the current new legal provisions. In other words, by virtue of this article, a claim shall be considered as duly registered with full legal effects in this regard as of the date of submitting the relevant Statement of Claim electronically or in a paper form; and that is after paying the legally stated fees for the claim's electronic or paper-based registration in the relevant record. On this basis, the mere action of electronic registration of the Statement of Claim is not sufficient to consider this claim as duly registered with full legal effects. This action has be followed by payment of the stated fees on time by either the plaintiff or his legal representative, so that the Case Management Office can duly register the claim in the relevant record. The date of electronic registration of the Statement of Claim will be considered to be the approved date, regarding any potential defenses concerning the validity of filing the claim or appeal on time.

3.2 DATA CONTAINED IN THE ELECTRONIC STATEMENT OF CLAIM OR APPEAL

Article 44/2 of the new Civil Procedures Act established the required data that has to be contained in the Statement of Claim, including all further data of both the plaintiff and the defendant as required in light of the nature of e-Litigation.

3.2.1 Plaintiff's Data

According to Article 44/2/a, the statement of claims shall include the Plaintiff's name, surname, ID number or a photocopy thereof, or any documents issued by government entities that prove the person's identity, profession, occupation, domicile, place of work, phone number, fax number, or e-mail. If the Plaintiff has no domicile in the State, the Plaintiff has to elected a domicile and appoint a legal representative. The party will have to provide the legal representative's name, surname, ID number, profession, occupation, domicile, place of work, fax number, or e-mail.

3.2.2 Defendant's Data

Article 44/2/b has stipulated the inclusion of the following information for the defendant: his name and surname, ID number, ID photocopy or any equivalent document of identification issued by a government authority that verifies the defendant's identity, profession or position, domicile, place of work, and phone number, fax number, or email address. In addition, if the defendant or his legal representative have no place of residence in the UAE, then, a legal correspondence address shall be stated for him, taking into account the following required data for his legal representative: name and surname, ID number, profession or position, domicile, and place of work, fax number, or email address.

In this regard, two remarks become necessary/are useful to make:

- 1- The legislator has stipulated the inclusion of the following data for both the defendant and his legal representative: phone number, fax number, or email address. However, we believe that the presently used wording is not the best option in practice. It would have been desirable that the legislator would have added the phrase “if any” at the end of this legal provision, as it is possible that neither the defendant nor his legal representative have a fax number and/or an email address.
- 2- The legislator has established that: “If the defendant or his legal representative has no place of residence in the State, then, a legal correspondence address shall be stated for him”. In this regard, we believe that this phrase has been mentioned in this legal provision as a material error. It might have been quoted literally by mistake from Article 44/2/a, concerning the plaintiff data. In other words, a legal correspondence address shall be specified by the concerned person himself; hence, it is not possible for the defendant to specify his chosen legal correspondence address in the Statement of Claim that is filled and submitted by the plaintiff. Therefore, we recommend the omission of this phrase, or its replacement with another more suitable information at the end of Article 44/2/b where the defendant or his legal representative has no known place of residence or place of work. In such case, the last known place of residence or place of work for the defendant may be mentioned here instead.

3.3 THE ELECTRONIC FILING OF ATTACHMENTS TO THE STATEMENT OF CLAIM OR APPEAL

Pursuant to Article 48/1 of the Civil Procedures Act, upon the legal registration of the Statement of Claim, the plaintiff shall submit a number of photocopies of this Statement of Claim that is equivalent to the number of defendants, in addition to a separate photocopy for the Case Management Office. Furthermore, the plaintiff shall also submit copies of all relevant documents supporting his claim, as well as any reports of expertise prepared by registered experts (if any). Nonetheless, since these stipulations are stated by the legislator for traditional cases that do not involve the use of telecommunication technology or electronic registration, the idea of submitting multiple copies for the Statement of Claim, relevant documents, and expert reports will not be that significant with the use of e-documents because all concerned parties and authorities will have access to the e-documents.

Additionally, by virtue of Article 48/2 of the same law, the defendant is also required to complete the electronic or paper-based filing of his defense memorandum and sign copies of all relevant documents. The party has to do this during a period of ten working days from the date of his legal notice of the claim.

4. THE INITIATION OF e-LITIGATION

The initiation of e-Litigation refers to communication of the filed case to all concerned parties, including the litigants (i.e. the plaintiff and the defendant) as well as the court adjudicating on the matter. Hence, the electronic registration of the Statement of Claim and the electronic legal notice are both considered essential steps for the existence of an electronic judicial litigation.²⁵

²⁵ Hashem, M. 1980. *Civil Judiciary Law, Part Two, (Litigation before the Civil Judiciary)*, Cairo: Dar Al Fikr Al Arabi. clause (186).

4.1 THE ELECTRONIC LEGAL NOTICE OF NATURAL PERSONS

4.1.1 Means of Electronic Legal Notice

According to Article 9/1/a of the Civil Procedures Act, it is permissible to use the following means of telecommunication to make the required legal notice:

- 1- recorded audio or video calls,
- 2- mobile phone text messages,
- 3- smart applications,
- 4- email,
- 5- fax, or
- 6- other technological means of communication.²⁶

In addition, as a result of this new use of telecommunication technology in judicial notice, Article 6/4 of the Civil Procedures Act has stated that it is permissible to make this legal notice at the level of the entire UAE, without any restrictions concerning the rules of spatial jurisdiction.²⁷

4.1.2 Duties of the Notice Official in case of the Electronic Legal Notice

In case of making the legal notice via any of the aforementioned technological means, the notice official in the court shall make sure that the means of communication used does indeed belong to the notified party. In addition, when making a recorded audio or video call, the notice official shall draft a minute verifying the following data: the call's content, the hour and date of the call, as well as the notified party's data. This minute shall be attached to the claim's file, and may be used as evidence of notice.²⁸

However, in case of making a legal notice via email, mobile phone text messages, or fax, the claim's file has to include some hard evidence made by the notice official to prove the sending of this email, text message, or fax.²⁹

4.1.3 When does the Electronic Legal Notice produce its Legal Effects?

In case of making the legal notice via fax, the notice's legal effects shall be considered valid as of the date of the defendant receiving the fax pursuant to Article 11/3 of the Civil Procedures Act and Article 7/4/b of the Minister of Justice's Decree.

If the legal notice is made via email, mobile phone text messages or any other technological means of communication, the notice's legal effects shall be considered

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- Dubai Court of Cassation, Court Ruling of May 10th 1992 in Appeal No. 27 of 1992 (Rights), Journal of Judiciary and Legislation, Issue No. 3, 1995, 483.
 - Federal Supreme Court, Commercial Cassation, Hearing of November 16th 2011, Group of Court Rulings issued by Civil and Commercial Circuits, from January to December 2011, Part II, No. 30, p. 356.

²⁶ The legislator added this phrase to adapt with any new means of communication that may exist in the future.

²⁷ Kandeel, M. E. 2020. "The Impact of the UAE Legislator's Use of Telecommunications Technology on Judicial Notices." *The Lawyer Quarterly* 10 (4): 521–32. <https://tlq.ilaw.cas.cz/index.php/tlq/article/view/435>.

²⁸ Article 9/2 of the Civil Procedures Act.

²⁹ Article 7/1/a of the Minister of Justice's Decree.

valid as of the date of sending the email, mobile phone message, etc., according to Article 11/3 of the Civil Procedures Act and Article 7/4/a of the Minister of Justice's Decree.

In case the legal notice is carried out via a recorded audio or video call, the notice's legal effects shall be considered valid as of the date of the defendant verifying the recorded audio or video call (i.e. the date of making the recorded audio or video call) pursuant to Article 11/3 of the Civil Procedures Act and Article 7/4/c of the Minister of Justice's Decree.

4.2 THE ELECTRONIC LEGAL NOTICE OF PRIVATE LEGAL ENTITIES

A legal notice for private legal entities³⁰ may be completed through the use of any of the aforementioned technological means of communication, or through the use of any other methods of communication as set forth in this law upon the agreement of both parties such as recorded audio or video calls, mobile phone, text messages, smart applications, email, or fax. That is to say, the notice shall be delivered at the management offices of those entities on their legal representatives, acting legal representatives, or any of the partners, as the case may be. In case none of them is available, the legal notice may be delivered to any official working in their office. In addition, in case of the management office's termination or cessation, or in case of the managing director or the competent official's rejection to receive the notice, then the legal notice shall be considered as duly delivered by its direct affixing to the house door, without the need for any court order, or by its publishing in a local newspaper, as the case may be.³¹ Any of these actions is permissible, and can be chosen unless other methods of legal notice are stated by virtue of the provision of any other piece of legislation pursuant to Article 10/2 of the Civil Procedures Act.

5. PREPARING AND MANAGING THE CLAIM ELECTRONICALLY

The case is prepared and managed electronically at the Case Management Office in accordance with the rules of Article 6 of the Minister of Justice Decree No 260 of 2019.

The Case Management Office will estimate and collect the stated fees electronically. After collecting the fees, the Office will register the claim in the relevant electronic record. The system will include information about the date of registration of the claim, as well as the plaintiff's knowledge of the date of his court hearing. Then, the submitted Statement of Claim will be saved electronically at the Case Management Office.

On the day following the date of electronic registration of the Statement of Claim at the latest, the Office will send a copy of this Statement of Claim electronically to the defendant.

³⁰ This refers to private legal entities, associations, companies, private institutions, individual firms, and foreign corporates with branches or offices in the United Arab Emirates (i.e. if the legal notice is concerned with the company's UAE branch); pursuant to Article 10/2 of the Civil Procedures Act.

³¹ Federal Supreme Court, Civil Cassation, Hearing of March 8th 2011, Group of Court Rulings issued by Civil and Commercial Circuits, from January to December 2011, Part I, No. 15, p. 60. Federal Supreme Court, Commercial Cassation, Hearing of November 30th 2011, Part II, No. 36, p. 380.

Subsequently, the Office will send the litigants and their legal attorneys their respective encrypted passwords, allowing them to have access to the court's information system. This grants the parties and their representatives access to and review of all relevant e-documents concerning the claim. The Office will send them those files electronically via any of the modern technological means of communication or via electronic media as the office determines. This is an additional procedure to guarantee that they are informed of the documents.

After this, the Office will order the defendant to submit a memorandum of his defense as well as signed copies of all relevant documents in this regard. The defendant will have to send these documents within a period of ten calendar days from the moment the defendant received the legal notice of the Statement of Claim. The defendant has to submit these documents electronically accompanied by the memorandum bearing his electronic signature.

The Office will also make sure that all submitted e-documents are duly certified. This concerns both cases in which the e-documents have been issued abroad or domestically. Each type of certification has certain requisites to fulfill. Furthermore, the Office will ensure that all submitted e-documents in languages other than Arabic are duly translated and certified pursuant to the provisions of law.

Lastly, the Office may receive any relevant petitions for addition, intervention, correction, forfeiture, or incidental requests electronically. All such petitions will be saved electronically at the Office, in order to be submitted to the presiding judge or the competent court, as the case may be, for consideration and adjudication.

6. THE PROGRESS AND CONCLUSION OF e-LITIGATION

6.1 THE LITIGANTS' APPEARANCE BEFORE THE COURT ELECTRONICALLY

By virtue of law, a judicial litigation will always be considered as "*In Presentia*" on the plaintiff's part, even in case of his failure to appear in person at any court hearing; as the litigation is originally initiated through the submission of a statement of claim submitted by the plaintiff, where he has stated his requests and supporting arguments. Differently, the litigation will be considered as "*In Presentia*" on the defendant's part, if the party appears in person or represented by a legal attorney before the Case Management Office, the court hearings, experts or arbitrators, or, alternatively, in case of submitting a memorandum on his defense, even if subsequently he fails to appear before the court when summoned.³²

In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the phrase "*Litigation in Presentia*" is completely different from the phrase "*Remote Attendance*" stated in Article 328 of the Civil Procedures Act. That is to say, the phrase "*Litigation in Presentia*" has a legal significance concerning the legality of appearance before the court. Differently, the phrase "*Remote Attendance*" refers to the physical appearance of litigants, witnesses, or others before the court, which can be duly fulfilled through the use of telecommunication technology (i.e. electronic attendance).

On this basis, the litigants or their legal attorneys may appear electronically before the Case Management Office at the stage of discovery; and that is through the use of

³² Article 54/1 of the Civil Procedures Act.

telecommunication technology. Similarly, electronic appearance may be relied upon at the stage of the hearing of the claim before the competent court. Consequently, according to Article 8/4 of the Ministerial Decree No. 260 of 2019, in case of any failure by either one of the litigants or both of them to use the specified means of telecommunication at the court hearing, all relevant legal provisions and effects of such absence will take effect pursuant to Articles 53, 55 and 56 of the Civil Procedures Act.³³

6.2 THE EXCHANGE OF DOCUMENTS AND MEMORANDA ELECTRONICALLY

According to the law, the legislator has deemed that it is permissible to exchange all relevant documents and memoranda between litigants via electronic methods. The electronic exchange of documents and memoranda can be conducted as follows before the UAE Civil Courts:³⁴

- 1- To exchange documents, the assigned attorney at law will have to acquire the official electronic means of communication of the competent court from the court secretary; and at the same time, the attorney will provide him with his email address.
- 2- The attorney will then be able to send the e-documents and memoranda for the party he represents to the competent court via the determined electronic means of communication, as approved by the competent court. Generally, the attorney will then contact the court secretary via email in order to make sure the court duly received his e-documents and memoranda.
- 3- The court secretary receives all e-documents, memoranda, and requests of the attorneys. The e-documents can be received via the approved electronic means of communication during and after the remote court hearing, as the case may be. After receiving the e-documents, the court secretary resends them electronically to the counterparty and its attorney. The court secretary ensures that this process of exchange of documents between the litigants has been

³³ Article 53 states that:

“1. If neither the Plaintiff nor the Defendant appears, the court shall decide on the case – if judicable; otherwise, it shall decide a nonsuit. If [30] thirty days have passed and neither litigant has submitted an application to proceed with the case during that period, or if the parties fail to appear after proceeding with the case, the case shall be deemed null and void. In addition, the Case Management Office shall present such a case, after the lapse of the time limit referred to in this Paragraph to the competent judge in order for the latter to issue a decision in respect thereof.

2. The court may order a nonsuit if the Plaintiff fails to appear at any hearing and the Defendant appears, unless the latter demands adjudication on the case.

3. If the case is pending before the Case Management Office, the decision of nonsuit shall be based on a decision of the supervising judge to be immediately issued after the lapse of the time limit referred to in Clause [1] of this Article.”

Article 55 states that: “Without prejudice to the provisions of Article [56.1] of this Code, in the event that the duly-served Defendant fails to appear before the court, the latter shall render a judgment on the case, and such a judgment shall be deemed as if issued in presence for the parties who fail to appear.”

Article 56 states that: “1. In the event of absence of the Defendant and where it has been revealed to the court or the Cases Management Office that the service of the statement of claim sustained nullity, then it shall adjourn the case to an upcoming hearing for duly serving the same upon the Defendant.

2. In the event of absence of a Defendant and where it has been revealed to the court that such Defendant has not been acquainted with the details of the hearing as per law, then such a court shall adjourn the case to an upcoming hearing to be duly served upon the Defendant.”

³⁴ Article 9 of the Minister of Justice’s Decree.

completed successfully, and that all litigants have received their respective copies successfully.

- 4- The litigants and their attorneys are entitled to direct access to all e-documents concerning their claim at the court's electronic system; and that is through the use of their respective encrypted passwords (delivered to them as previously as explained in section 5), hence permitting their access to the court information system.

6.3 HIRING AN INTERPRETER DURING THE ELECTRONIC JUDICIAL LITIGATION

Article 25 of Judicial Authority Law No. 32 of 2022,³⁵ states: "The language of all State courts is specified in the Arabic Language; however, the court shall also hear all relevant statements of litigants or witnesses who cannot speak the Arabic Language; and that through the hiring of an interpreter, after taking the decisive oath pursuant to the provisions of law". In this regard, the competent court may use means of telecommunication technology in order to assign an interpreter, according to established legal procedures.³⁶ For this the presiding judge or the competent court will order the assignment of an interpreter. The court order mentioning the date of the court hearing will be sent to all concerned parties (i.e. the assigned interpreter, litigants, and witnesses).

The assigned interpreter will fulfill the necessary technical requirements such as internet with high speed, security protocol, screen, camera, microphone, etc. He also has to be capable of using all devices that enable his communication with the presiding judge or the competent court, as the case may be; in addition, the full clarity of sound and image has to be assure, so that the interpreter can see and hear the litigant or witness, whose statements or defenses are being translated.

Lastly, all proceedings of the court hearing during the judicial litigation shall be recorded electronically for documentation and preservation purposes, as well as the possibility of converting it into paper information when needed.

6.4 INVESTIGATING THE CLAIM ELECTRONICALLY

Based on Article 330 of the Civil Procedures Act, the legislator has deemed that it is permissible to use telecommunication technology in the examination of a judicial claim. The presiding judge or the competent civil court in the UAE may hear all witnesses and interrogate all litigants through the use of telecommunication technology according to Article 13/1 of the Minister of Justice's Decree. In this case, as previously mentioned in section 6.1, all stated legal procedures and controls will be followed and applied, regarding the appearance of all concerned parties before the court via means of telecommunication technology.

Nonetheless, pursuant to Article 13/2 of the Minister of Justice's Decree, the competent judge may – upon his own motion or upon a petition by either litigant – order the physical attendance of the interrogated litigant or witness at the court premises. In this regard, we believe that the legislator should be commended for adding this stipulation. That is to say, the competent judge may decide that the physical

³⁵ Federal Official Gazette, Judicial Year (52), Issue No. 737, October 10th 2022, 37.

³⁶ Article 14 of the Minister of Justice's Decree.

appearance of the interrogated litigant or witness in his person before the court would provide better chances to unravel the truth of the heard claim. In addition, the competent judge may decide that there is a real need for a confrontation between all concerned parties, as well as any other similar examination procedures.

6.5 ONLINE PLEADING

By virtue of Article 330 of the Civil Procedures Act, it is permissible to use means of telecommunication technology in pleading before the competent court in the UAE; as this online pleading shall be conducted according to certain procedural requirements.³⁷

First, the competent judge will determine the exact date and time of the hearing of the claim. At the established time for the hearing, the judge will initiate the entire court hearing proceedings via electronic means of communication.

Second, in preparation for the first court hearing on the specified date, the Case Management Office or the competent court secretary, as applicable, shall electronically notify all concerned parties of the date and hour specified for their remote court hearing.

Third, before the beginning of the scheduled court hearing, the competent technical official shall duly prepare all devices used in the remote trial. The technical official is expected to be well equipped for all required quick responses in case of any technical failures or outage during the court hearing.

The attorneys are also expected to fulfill the required technical preparation such as internet with high speed, security protocol, screen, camera, microphone, etc. He shall also be capable of using all devices that enable their communication with the presiding judge or the competent court, as the case may require. Additionally, the applicable rules request that the attorneys abide by the request of full clarity of sound and image during the hearing, and that the selected venue from which they appear in the remote hearing is suitable to the court's prestige.

During the court hearing via the electronic means of technology determined by the court, the attorney must submit a verbal summary of his memoranda, pleading, and requests.

Further, all proceedings of the court hearing will be recorded electronically. During the court hearing, the court secretary will also write down all that is dictated to him by the judge or the litigants in the minutes of the court session, which are annexed to the case files. It is worth noting that the court shall use these minutes as a source for the writing of the judgment.

A final important element to mention is that all court hearings conducted via telecommunication technology are hearings that are open to the public. When a court hears a case, the remaining litigants in the other cases are considered members of the public. Some courts also allow the public to access their websites to attend hearings after registration.

6.6 ONLINE DELIBERATION AND RULING

6.6.1 Online Deliberation between Judges

Deliberations in remote trials shall be conducted via a secure, private website provided by the court, which may only be accessed by judges. However, during electronic

³⁷ Article 8/3 of the Minister of Justice's Decree.

deliberations, the rules and provisions stipulated in Article 128 of the Civil Procedures Law regarding traditional deliberations on judgments must be adhered to. Therefore, electronic deliberations must be confidential among the judges collectively, and no one other than the judges who heard the pleadings may participate in these deliberations.

6.6.2 Issuing and Signing Court Rulings Electronically

Pursuant to Article 129/1 of the Civil Procedures Act, the use of telecommunication technology in civil trials will necessarily result in the electronic issuance of a court ruling that will have to be signed electronically by the competent judges. This electronic version of the court ruling shall bear the electronic signatures of all competent judges as well as the court president. The electronic court ruling issued by the court will include all the claims made in the proceedings, the legal grounds used, and the final verdict.

Once signed, the judgment will be deposited electronically in the claim's file. For this, the court president will send a copy of the electronic court ruling to the court clerk via a secure e-information system. The court clerk will then proceed to deposit and save the issued ruling in the file of the claim's.

The court president and the judges are required to verify their respective electronic signatures at the beginning of every judicial year because their electronic signatures are duly saved on the secured e-information system, so that they can affix their electronic signatures easily each time they issue an electronic version of the court rulings.³⁸

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 RESULTS

After studying the legal regulation of electronic litigation in accordance with the UAE Civil Procedure Act issued by Federal Decree-Law No. 42 of 2022, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- 1- In light of the legal organization and the human and technical capabilities currently available, all litigation procedures before the UAE civil courts can be completed using electronic means. The legislator has explicitly permitted the use of remote communication technology concerning the procedures of the litigation process and any procedures that may precede them related to registering the lawsuit, collecting fees, and judicial notification, or any procedures that may follow them, such as filing appeals and execution, and that these procedures are considered valid in this case.
- 2- It can be said that there is currently a legal regulation for litigation via electronic means before the UAE civil courts. This encompasses the entire timeline of a case, from the time the lawsuit is filed until the issuance of the judgment ending the litigation.
- 3- It can be asserted, in light of the current application of existing legislation, that litigation via electronic means is currently carried out before the UAE civil courts. Electronic litigation can be defined as the legal status arising from the

³⁸ Article 16 of the Minister of Justice's Decree.

use of the right to file a lawsuit via electronic means. The lawsuit consists of a set of successive procedural actions undertaken by the judge, his assistants, the opponents, their representatives, and third parties via electronic means. It begins with the electronic registration of the lawsuit. Then, the court notifies the defendant of the case and prepares for the electronic hearing to take place with the exchange of documents and memoranda, and all investigation procedures. The electronic trial ends with an electronic deliberation between the judges. Once this phase is completed, they will proceed to issue the judgment and sign it electronically.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Although a lot has been achieved in carrying out electronic proceedings in the UAE civil courts, the practice of the courts in this area have revealed a number of points where improvements can be made. In order for the legal regulation of electronic litigation before UAE civil courts to be complete, it would be useful that a number of additional legislative interventions be carried out by the UAE legislator.

First, with regard to remote proceedings outside the jurisdiction of the competent court, we propose amending the provisions of Ministerial Resolution No. 260 of 2019. On the one hand, determining the entity responsible for organizing remote trial proceedings in the emirate where the procedure is to be taken. On the other hand, amending the phrase “when necessary” concerning coordination between the competent court and the competent authority in the emirate where the person against whom the procedure is to be taken resides. It would be desirable that such coordination becomes mandatory to achieve the effectiveness of remote litigation and the success of this system. Given the presence of a federal and local judicial authorities, we can implement this amendment by applying the provisions of Federal Law No. 10 of 2019 regarding the regulation of judicial relations between federal and local judicial authorities, particularly Articles 5 and 6, which regulate judicial delegation.

A second desirable legislative amendment that would facilitate the activity of the courts conducting civil procedures electronically is to have the phrase “if any” added at the end of Article 44/2/b of the Civil Procedure Act, which relates to the defendant’s information in the statement of claim. At present, the legislator requires providing the defendant’s telephone number, fax number, or email address, as well as the same details of his representative. This is problematic in practice because the plaintiff may not have all these details or they may not be available. If the phrase “if any” is added, this would allow for the necessary flexibility that is required by the reality of the proceedings, because the defendant or his representative may not have an email address or fax number. Thus, being required to provide all this information creates difficulties in continuing the proceedings electronically.

A third useful legislative intervention concerns Paragraph (b) of Article 44/2 of the Civil Procedure Act. The phrase “If the defendant or his representative does not have a domicile in the country, he shall appoint a domicile of his choice” should be deleted because this phrase was included in this text as a material error. It was copied verbatim from Paragraph (a) of the same provision related to the plaintiff’s information. The domicile of choice is determined by the person himself. This cannot be made by the plaintiff. Therefore, it is impossible for the defendant to appoint a domicile of his choice in the statement of claim drafted by the plaintiff. Additionally, we propose adding another phrase at the end of this paragraph to address the situation where the

defendant or their representative has no known domicile or place of business, so that the defendant's last known domicile or place of business could be used. The wording of such a provision could be as follows: "...if the defendant or their representative has no known domicile or place of business, their last known domicile, residence, or place of business shall be used".

Lastly, although the UAE legislator in the Federal Judicial Authority Regulation Law issued by Federal Decree-Law No. 32 of 2022, as well as the Civil Procedures Act, has provided litigants with many litigation guarantees that ensure the smooth running of the judiciary and the sound performance of its functions on the one hand, and that individuals receive fair justice, protect their rights to defense, and prevent them from being harmed by delayed settlement of disputes on the other hand, an additional step would be beneficial for the entire process. We recommend that the legislator adds an explicit text to the Civil Procedures Act, with a new article numbered 339. This proposed article should emphasize the necessity of applying all litigation guarantees in the case of traditional judiciary in the field of judicial litigation via electronic means, in particular, the guarantees related to protecting the right to privacy, confidentiality of information, achieving the principle of publicity during remote litigation procedures, and the rights of defense.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Moustafa Elmetwaly
 Kandeel, 'Electronic Judicial
 Litigation Procedures
 Before the UAE Civil Courts:
 An Analytical Study' (2025)
 16(2) *International Journal
 for Court Administration*
 2. DOI: [https://doi.
 org/10.36745/ijca.688](https://doi.org/10.36745/ijca.688)

Published: 08 October
 2025

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*International Journal for
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 International Association
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