

Complete Checklist to Opening a Branch of a Foreign Company in Dubai

Step 1: Choose the Right Jurisdiction

Mainland- Full access to the UAE market, but requires a National Service Agent (NSA)

Free Zone → 100% foreign ownership, tax perks, but trading limited outside the zone

Your jurisdiction decides the licensing process, rules, and market reach

Step 2: Appoint a Local Service Agent (LSA)

LSA, a UAE national or Emirati-owned company

Handles government formalities, no ownership or profit share

Pay an agreed annual service fee (not profit sharing)

Step 3: Document Preparation and Legalization

Submit application for initial approval with DED or free zone authority

Notary → MoFA → UAE Embassy → UAE MoFA

Validity 3–6 months, submit on time

Step 4: Trade Name Reservation

Use parent company name if compliant

Avoid restricted or unclear terms

Modify slightly to meet UAE rules

Step 5: Initial Approval from Ministry of Economy (MoE)

MoE approval needed for both zones

Submit plans to Dubai Municipality (mainland) or free zone authority

Takes 5–10 working days; valid for 4 months



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Step 7: Office Lease / Ejari or Free Zone Facility Agreement

Physical office space is mandatory

Mainland branches need an Ejari lease; free zone branches use a facility agreement

Registration takes 1–5 working days; agreements are valid for 1 year and renewable.

Step 8: Final Trade License (DED or Free Zone Authority)

Final trade license issued by DET (mainland) or Free Zone Authority

License is valid for 1 year and must be renewed

Delays often occur due to missing/incorrect documents

Step 9: Registration with Ministry of Economy / Free Zone Authority

Register branch with MoE or Free Zone Authority (1–3 days) after license

This step finalizes legal status, enabling hiring, banking, and full operations

Complete registration immediately to avoid other delays

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