

UAE GENDER BALANCE

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Overview

Empowering women is Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. SDGs are global goals for countries to achieve, in order to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This document aims to look at how UAE as a nation has supported and encouraged women to play an active role in important major decisions affecting the country locally and globally.

Gaps and challenges

For many decades, low priority has been given to women's needs. Women were restricted to the household and their decisions were limited and often not considered. Participation of women in the economic and political realms of the country was limited to a great extent. Education of women was also given a back seat. To a great extent, limitations were applied to every sphere of a woman's life. Economic independence and decision-making capabilities of a woman was mostly overlooked.

Initiatives & Impact

For any country to achieve success, there needs to prevail a sense of security and an environment of opportunities for the women of the country to shine and add value to the human capital of the country. UAE has taken up to create a safe and conducive environment for women constitutionally and economically so that they can shine and highlight their talents in various fields.

“The woman is man's equal partner on all levels of the development process. Today, a girl is no longer imprisoned by her traditional role. Wider horizons have been opened for her to become a full member of society.”

~HH Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak,

President of the General Women's Union, Supreme Chairwoman of the Family Development Foundation and President of the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood

Constitutional

A number of significant constitutional strides have been taken by UAE to ensure protection for women. The UAE Constitution guarantees equal rights to all its citizens, women and men. Women enjoy the same legal status, claim to titles, access to education, the right to practice professions, and the right to inherit property as men. Women are also guaranteed the same access to employment, health and family welfare facilities.

“Equality, social justice, ensuring safety and security and equality of opportunity for all citizens shall be the pillars of the Society.”

Article 14, UAE Constitution

“All persons are equal before the law, without distinction between citizens of the Union in regard to race, nationality, religious belief or social status.”

Article 25, UAE Constitution

UAE strongly advocates for equality for all and stresses on its importance through various articles in the constitution. This upholds the vision of UAE in creating a legal gender balance in the country.

A study report by the [Ministry of State for Federal National Council Affairs](#) observes that “Women’s empowerment, or lack thereof, was one of the three major deficits in the Arab region identified by leading Arab thinkers and policy makers in the 2002 Arab Human Development Report (UNDP 2002)”. In UAE, the Federal National Council is one of the main avenues for participation in the country’s political process.

One of the most historical events in UAE in regard to women is their active participation in the FNC elections of December 2006. The country’s modernization process achieved an important milestone in the history of the UAE. Through this election process, UAE women demonstrated their ability to move into the national political arena and compete as equals with men. Female candidates ran effective campaigns across the UAE on a number of issues from health and social welfare, education, economy, jobs, transportation, local housing and other substantive issues. One woman, Ms. Amal Al Qubaisi, won a seat through this election and further eight women were appointed. UAE’s women representation in the 2019 elections is set to be at 50%, doubling women representation in the FNC from the current 22.5 per cent.

“The possibility of women joining the Federal National Council (FNC) and assuming a ministerial portfolio is no longer a distant dream but inevitable.”

~ HH Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak,

President of the General Women's Union, Supreme Chairwoman of the Family Development Foundation and President of the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood

In 2006, 6,595 male and female citizens were given the right to vote. This number increased in 2011 to 135,308 citizens, then to 224,281 in the 2015 elections – an increase of around 66%. UAE leadership’s commitment to implement a holistic process for political empowerment is clearly reflected in these results.

Workplace

Sheikh Zayed believed that women should work and contribute to society, but that this right would be based on merit and not favoritism, once stating, “Like men, women deserve the right to occupy high positions according to their capabilities and qualifications.”

This vision is also supported by Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, Chairwoman of the General Women’s Union, Supreme Chairwoman of the Family Development Foundation and President of the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood, who leads the national efforts to empower women in the UAE.

According to the [statistics](#) from International Labor Organization, 51.14% of women participate in the labor work force in UAE. This is a glaring contrast to only 28.12% women participation in 1990 and 2% in 1975.

One of the main reasons touted for women to restrict themselves from working is maternity and the stigma surrounding women returning to work after giving birth. The UAE government has addressed these issues with strong maternity leave laws relating to women in their workplace. An extensive maternity leave is allowed by Articles 55,56 of The Civil Service Law with amendments made to Civil Service Rules in 2005. [The Decree No. \(14\) of 2017 Concerning Maternity, Miscarriage/ Stillbirth, and Childcare Leave](#) for Female Employees of the Government of Dubai provides various benefits to women returning to work after giving birth including nursing breaks. There is a prohibition for employers in UAE to terminate employment for a female employee on the grounds of pregnancy, delivery or parenting.

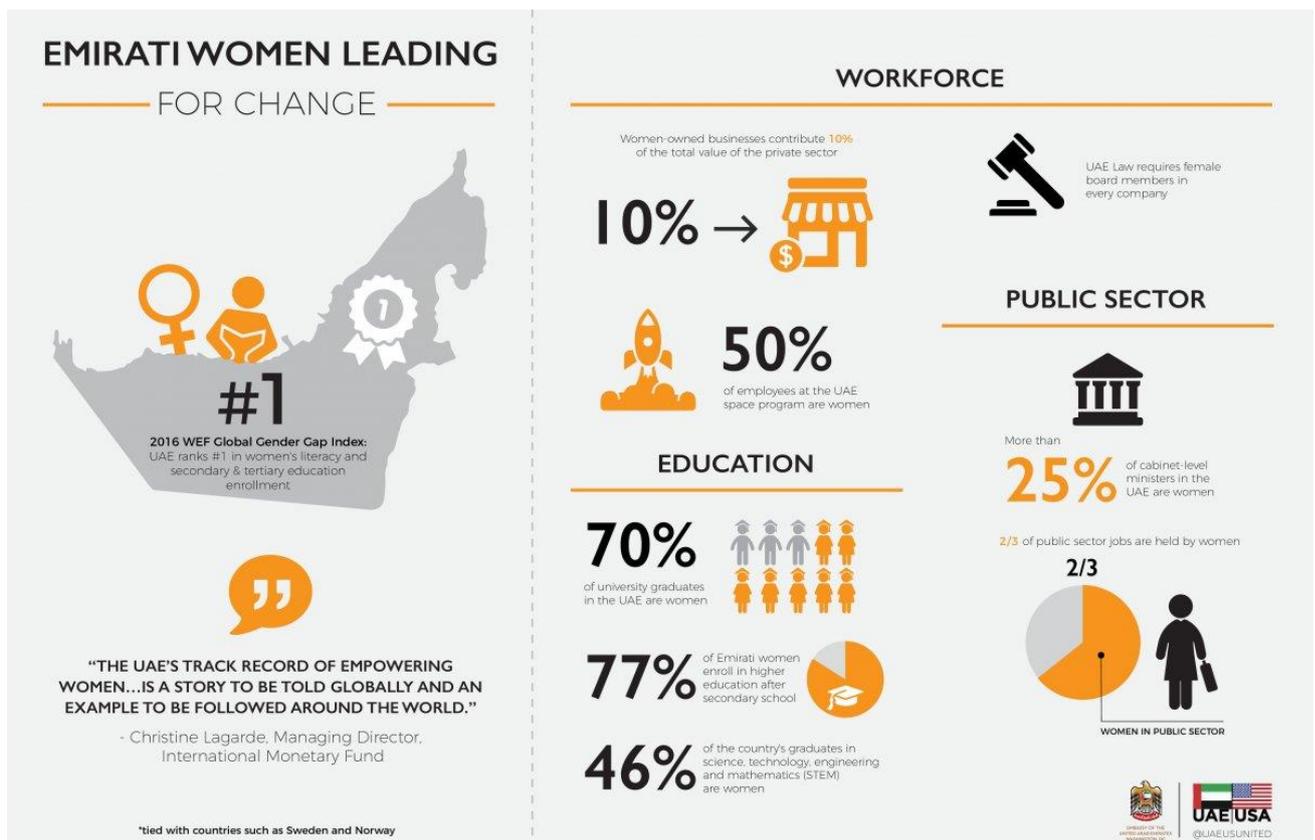
Not only in public sector, government frameworks and policies have helped women achieve in various industries. The UAE had the highest number of women on Forbes' 100 Most Powerful Arab Businesswomen in 2017 with 19 Emirati women on the list. Women business-owners account for 10% of the total private sector in the UAE. 23,000 Emirati businesswomen run projects worth over AED 50 billion and occupy 15% of the positions in the boards of chambers of commerce and industry nationwide.

A [2018 United Nations Human Development Report](#) found that UAE has the highest level of gender equality in the GCC region, with a significant growth of women in the workforce and more women continuing higher education than men. This has led to a representation of women filling more than half the positions in government entities today.

15 Emirati women joined the country's first Women's Firefighting Unit at the Sharjah Civil Defence in February 2018. Some of the other notable women achievers are listed below:

- Captain Aysha Al Hamli- The first female pilot of UAE
- Elham Qasimi- The first UAE national and the first Arab woman to reach the North Pole unassisted
- Nahla Al Rostamani- The first female F3 driver of UAE
- Maryam Al Saffar- The first Emirati woman controller of the Dubai Metro
- Kholoud Al Dhaheri- The first woman judge of UAE

With its commitment to substantially improve gender index rankings on a global scale, UAE has a score of 0.642 (with 1.00 being perfect) and ranked 121 overall in the [2018 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index report](#). UAE ranks number one in literacy rates with 91.5% being women as compared to 89.5% of men.



Community

"Behind every great community stand great women, leading each generation and raising our families and nation higher."

~HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum,

Earlier traditional role of women in UAE was domestic, largely, taking care of households when men were far away from home earning income through pearl diving, fishing or trading overseas. Women back then started participating in the community by making and selling handicrafts from palm trees, perfumes and tailoring. Evolution of the UAE community after an oil boom saw women progressing into various other territories even bringing in income for the households.

The late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, Founding President of UAE was a huge advocate of women participation in both the economy and household matters. His wife, Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak has been a huge pioneering force for women's empowerment and development in the region since the inception of the Union. As early as 1973, she has been championing and spearheading the women's empowerment movement by creating the first women's assembly followed by the establishment of the Women's Union in 1975 and the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood in 2003 and the inauguration of the Family Development Foundation in 2006. Following are some prominent stations in the course of work towards women's empowerment led by Sheikh Fatima:

- Launching the Women Literacy and Education Strategy in the UAE in 1975
- Joining the Arab Women's Union in 1975
- Establishing the Women's Handicraft Centre in 1978
- Joining the Coordinating Committee for Women's Action in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula in 1984
- Launching the National Productive Families Project in 1997
- Launching the Fatima Bint Mubarak Award for the Ideal Family in 1997
- Sponsoring the National Survey of the Characteristics of the UAE Family in 1998
- Establishing the Child Visitation Office in 2001
- Launching the UAE National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in 2002
- Launching the program of strengthening the role of women parliamentarians and women's political empowerment in 2004
- Launching the UAE National Gender Mainstreaming Initiative in 2006 in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program
- Launching the Women in Technology program in the UAE in cooperation with Microsoft in 2006
- Announcing the 28th of August as the Emirati Women's Day on 30 November 2014

- Launching the National Strategy for Emirati Women's Empowerment and Leadership in the UAE in 2015
- Launching an online interactive platform of the Emirati Women's Day in August 2016
- Announcing the establishment of the Development Center for Innovation and Creativity in September 2016
- Opening the UN Women's Communication Office in October 2016
- Contributing to the amendment of the maternity leave regulations
- Joining the Arab Women Organization
- National Strategy for Motherhood and Childhood 2017-2021.

General Women's Union

The General Women's Union was established in 1975 under the chairmanship of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak. It is touted as the national instrument to achieve the vision of empowerment of women in the United Arab Emirates. It serves various forums locally and globally. The Dubai Women's Association, Women Union Association in Sharjah, Um El Moameneen Association in Ajman, Umm Al Quwain Women Association, Association of Women's Renaissance in Ras Al Khaimah are all members of GWU. The last four decades of work by the GWU are each characterized by:

- First Decade (1975-1985): the era of spiritual, intellectual and social advancement.
- Second Decade (1986-1995): the era of capacity- and skill-building.
- Third Decade (1996-2005): the era of empowerment.
- Fourth Decade (2006 – Now): the era of harvest and pursuit of sustainability.

For achievement of closing the gender gap in the Arab world, UAE won the first place in the WIP awards of the Women in Parliaments Global Forum based on the rankings of the Global Gender Report by World Economic Forum in 2013.

Dubai Women's Establishment

Formed in 2006 by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum and headed by Her Highness Sheikha Manal Bint Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, The Dubai Women's Establishment is a statutory body of Dubai Government that focuses on its mandates to include extensive research that identifies and quantifies status of women in the workforce of Dubai along with creating opportunities. It aims to provide recognition and acknowledgement to women in arts, sports, leadership, philanthropy, humanitarian and politics. The mission of the DWE encapsulates its goals and objectives, which is "To contribute to the policy making of economic, human and social development that aims at creating opportunities to engage UAE women in the country's development process."

The result is that UAE achieved the first rank globally among 132 countries in the indicator of “Women Treated with Respect” in the [Social Progress Index Report, 2015](#). This also led to the UAE Cabinet approving the law on equal wages for men and women, the first legislation of its kind in the region.

UAE Gender Balance Council

As a testament to UAE’s continuous support to women in the region, [the UAE Gender Balance Council](#) was created under the leadership of Her Highness Sheikha Manal bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who serves as its President, in line with the federal government’s unwavering support to gender balance. The UAE is the first country in the GCC region to establish a federal level entity dedicated to reducing the gender gap and enhancing UAE’s global ranking in regard to the gender balance agenda.

The UAE Gender Balance Council supports the implementation of the 'Gender Inequality Index' issued annually by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). UAE's Vision 2021 aims to enhance the nation's efforts to drive women's participation in the development of the UAE which is well supported by the Gender Balance Council. This council is instructed to also oversee the index and implementation of best practices and processes ensuring federal entities hit their gender balance targets. The common and ultimate aim is to achieve a position of UAE being one of the world's top 25 countries for gender equality by 2021.

Apart from that, in 2004, the UAE signed the United Nations [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW). It signed various international treaties and participated in international conferences on women’s issues such as [Child Protection Convention](#) (1997), the [Hours of Work \(Industry\) Convention](#) (1982), the [Equal Remuneration Convention](#) (1996), the Convention concerning [Night Work of Women Employed in Industry](#) (1982) and the [Convention on Minimum Age](#) (1996). In 2016, a [regional UN Women office](#) was opened in Abu Dhabi, the first in the region.

Global Initiatives & Impact

The UAE has been committed to consistently meet and exceed international standards that are needed to raise the bar for the country. The UAE is a dominant global player when it comes to initiatives relating to women and their needs. It is this characteristic that has led UAE to making various strides on a global level with supporting women initiatives. Since its founding in 2010, UAE has donated more than [\\$26 million to UN Women](#).

Multiple institutions have provided support for women empowerment programs throughout the world. In 2017, UAE pledged \$50 million to the World Bank's [Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative](#) fund.

Conclusion

Consistent efforts and an indomitable spirit of the UAE government has helped women take huge strides and made them move from the background to the forefront of playing an active role in the shaping the nation's future and creating a sustainable environment paving way for more opportunities for women of upcoming generations.

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