



Council Report:

Women in the U.A.E. Workforce

August 2019

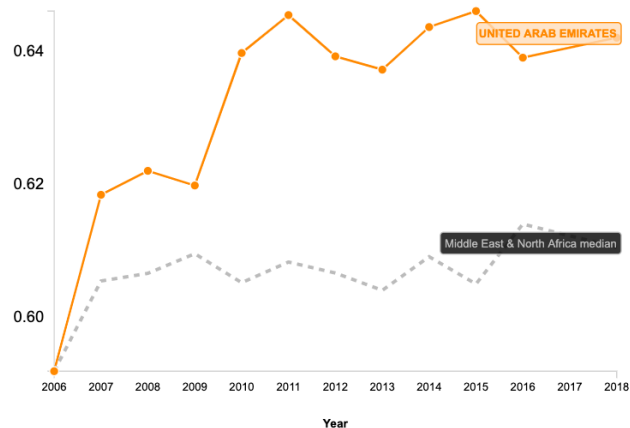
The United Arab Emirates will celebrate its fifth annual Emirati Women’s Day on August 28, 2019. Ahead of this celebration, it is important to note the progress this young nation has made to date in closing the gender gap, the size of the gap that remains, and the concerted steps the U.A.E.’s public and private sectors are taking to further close this gap.

Progress to Date

One of the most authoritative measures of gender equality is the Gender Gap Index, published in the Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum. The Gender Gap Index calculates gender-based gaps in access to resources and opportunities in the areas of health, education, the economy, and politics.¹

The U.A.E.’s Gender Gap Index score has consistently improved over time, and the U.A.E. ranks high relative to its regional peers.

- The U.A.E. ranks first among Gulf countries, and third out of nineteen Middle East North Africa (MENA) countries, in terms of gender equality.
- The U.A.E. ranks eleventh out of 149 countries worldwide in regard to wage equality for similar work.
- The U.A.E. scored 0.84 (1 = best, 0 = worst) in terms of advancement of women to leadership roles. This is higher than not only the U.S. (0.78), but also Israel (0.67) and Tunisia (0.62), the two MENA nations that outrank the U.A.E. in the Gender Gap Index.



U.A.E. Gender Gap Index Score 2006-2018²

Moving beyond the Gender Gap Index, there are two indicative figures that show both the U.A.E.'s progress in closing the gender gap and its continued room for improvement. On the one hand, 66% of the U.A.E.'s public sector labor force is female.³ On the other hand, 84.9% of the total U.A.E. labor force is male.⁴

Legal Framework

Gender equality is enshrined in U.A.E. law. The U.A.E. Constitution mandates equal access to education and employment for men and women and grants women the same legal status, claim to titles, and right to practice professions as men.

Furthermore, the U.A.E. Government has passed numerous pieces of legislation to assist working women and to encourage women to participate in the workforce. The U.A.E. has guaranteed paid maternity leave for a minimum of 90 days and has additional laws on the books that protect pregnant women from discrimination. The U.A.E. also passed an equal pay for similar work law, which not only promises equal pay for similar work but also establishes a Wage Protection Office to oversee enforcement. In addition, the government recently passed legislation requiring at least one woman to be on the board of every company and government agency, with a target to achieve 20% of women on corporate boards by 2020, showcasing the government's commitment to gender diversity in leadership.

The U.A.E. Government has not only enacted legislation to close the gender gap but also modeled gender equality in its ranks. Twenty-eight percent of the U.A.E. cabinet are women, including:

- Reem bint Ibrahim Al Hashimy, Minister of State for International Cooperation
- Noura bint Mohammed Al Kaabi, Minister of Culture and Knowledge Development
- Hessa bint Essa Bhumaid, Minister of Community Development
- Jameela bint Salem Al Muhairi, Minister of State for General Education
- Dr. Maitha bint Salem Al Shamsi, Minister of State
- Ohood bint Khalfan Al Roumi, Minister of State for Happiness and Wellbeing
- Shamma bint Sohail Faris Al Mazrui, Minister of State for Youth Affairs
- Maryam bint Mohammed Saeed Hareb Al Mehairi, Minister of State for Future Food Security
- Sara bint Yousuf Al Amiri, Minister of State for Advanced Sciences



*Dr. Noura Al Kaabi,
Minister of Culture and
Knowledge Development*



*Shamma Al Mazrui, 22-
year-old Minister of State
for Youth Affairs*

Moreover, in December 2018, U.A.E. President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa called for 50% of the seats in the U.A.E.'s Federal National Council to be filled by women, and 50% of the electoral college for the FNC to be women in the upcoming October 2019 elections. As the U.A.E. pushes towards greater female representation in the government, there is hope for continued movement towards greater female representation in the workforce as well.

Other Government Initiatives

The U.A.E. government has taken many other initiatives to help progress women in the workforce. Many of these actions are part of the U.A.E.'s National Strategy for Empowering Emirati Women 2015-2021, which aims to "position the U.A.E. among the most advanced countries in areas of women's empowerment."

Some organizations created that correspond with this strategy include:

- The Gender Balance Council – focused on increasing the role of women in leadership and strengthening institutional capacity
- The General Women's Union – created to assist with women's empowerment and policymaking to benefit women
- The Emirates Businesswomen Council – a network of business, professional, and academic women who host educational events and seminars targeted toward working women

The government is also encouraging women to open businesses by relieving them from certain fees and bank guarantees, offering special loans and financing funds, and hosting education and capacity building programs and trainings.

Helping Women around the World

The U.A.E. has demonstrated its commitment to following the principals of gender equality both at home and abroad. The 100% Women Initiative by the government aims to "incorporate gender equality and women's empowerment into all bilateral and multilateral foreign aid projects by 2021." The initiative intends to improve infrastructure, implement well-designed social protection systems, and provide public services globally.

Private Sector Initiatives

Several trailblazing Emirati women have reached the highest levels of business, serving as role models for their peers:

- Dr. Raja Easa Al Gurg is the Managing Director of Easa Saleh Al Gurg Group, one of the largest companies in the Middle East. Dr. Al Gurg is also the President of Dubai's Business Women Council and a Board Member of Dubai's Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dubai's Women's Association, and HSBC Middle East, where she is the first Emirati woman to be appointed to their board. Her success is noted in the 2018 list of the 100 Most Powerful Women in the World.
- H.E. Maryam Eid Al-Mheiri is the CEO of Media Zone Authority Abu Dhabi and twofour54, which is transforming Abu Dhabi's media landscape by creating a collaborative and supportive community. In 2017, Al-Mheiri was listed in Forbes 100 Most Powerful Arab Women.



Maryam Eid Al-Mheiri, CEO of Media Zone Authority Abu Dhabi and twofour54

At the same time, many leading U.A.E. companies are playing a role in closing the gender gap in the workforce through deliberate action and important initiatives.

- Emirates Nuclear Energy Company (ENEC) is a strong supporter of women in the workforce. In an industry where women generally make up only 10% of the workforce, 23% of ENEC's professionals are women.
- Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) pledged in 2016 to appoint at least one female CEO at one of its Group Companies, to ensure fifteen percent of its senior managers are women, and to increase the number of new Emirati women recruits to 30% all by 2020. In 2018, on Emirati Women's Day, the company highlighted the progress it had made towards these goals, including appointing two female CEOs and having thirteen percent of senior managers female.
- GulfTainer is another Emirati company committed to workplace equality. In addition to an increase in hiring female managers, they offer programs that train and empower women to rise up the corporate ladder.

Pioneering Women at U.S. Companies in the U.A.E.

A number of women are also at the helm of leading U.S. companies in the U.A.E.

- Dalya Al Muthanna is President and CEO of General Electric Gulf. Prior to her current role, Ms. Muthanna founded and served as CEO of Haya Enterprises, a retail organization built of multiple brands and exclusive franchises in the U.A.E.
- Elissar Antonios is the CEO of Citibank U.A.E, Citi's largest and most diverse franchise in the MENA region. She is also the Senior Executive Officer for Citi DIFC entities and the senior sponsor of Citi's Women network in the U.A.E. Ms. Antonios is listed in Forbes 100 Most Powerful Arab Women.

Importance

Research has demonstrated that increasing women's participation in the workforce is critical for economic reasons, as well as ethical and reputational ones. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates the legal and social barriers preventing female employment costs the MENA region \$575 billion per year.⁵ Additionally, companies with strong female leadership have been found to generate more revenue; The MSCI World Index found that companies with strong female leadership generated a return on equity of 10.1% versus those without strong female leadership that generated just 7.4%.⁶

Given the above, there are numerous ways the private sector can further support women in the workforce in the U.A.E. Company policies and materials can be written inclusively, for example not using gendered pronouns. Allocating a portion of budgets to gender balance programs can also be beneficial, especially if men attend training programs to make them more aware of the requirements and benefits of greater female involvement in the company. Training to help women returning from maternity leave acclimate to changes and manage stress can help keep women in the workforce after they have children. Companies should not stop with including women in the workforce; they should continue to promote women to executive roles as well. This can be done with changes to company policies, or tools to help highlight accomplishments.

Looking Ahead

The U.A.E. has made immense progress since its founding and is projected to further close the gender gap in the coming years. The number of women in the U.A.E.'s workforce is predicted to increase due to a rise in women's education— 70% of university students in the U.A.E. are female.³ The number of female legislators, senior officials, and managers is also expected to increase due to the legislation enacted to promote women in the workforce and other government initiatives. Additionally, more policies and initiatives to empower women to be more involved in the workforce can be expected as the U.A.E. leadership is determined to see change.

Recently, Sheikha Jawaher, the wife of His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, the Ruler of Sharjah, stated that "real empowerment of women does not come through pretty slogans or speeches, it comes through economic development and proper support." With the determination of the public and private sector, it is likely the gender gap will continue to close in the U.A.E. in the future.

References

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