

Women in business 2026

The value of visibility

Grant Thornton's latest Women in Business research shows that the UAE has made tangible progress in advancing women's representation at senior levels, reflecting a period of acceleration rather than completion.

This momentum has largely been driven by leadership intent, underscoring the importance of visible sponsorship and accountability from the top. While representation has increased, particularly in functional leadership roles, the data also highlights the need to extend progress into the most senior decision-making positions.

As global benchmarks continue to evolve, the UAE's experience reinforces a clear message for leaders: sustained progress depends not only on commitment, but on how visibly gender-balanced leadership is embedded into governance, succession planning and long-term strategy.

Progress is real, but not guaranteed

Women's representation in senior management in the UAE has risen sharply in recent years, while global progress has fluctuated. History shows gains can stall without sustained commitment.

Leadership outcomes are advancing faster than organisational readiness

WIB 2026 shows that around one quarter of UAE organisations operate without any DE&I initiatives, citing limited capability or perceived value. At the same time, over half of UAE organisations reviewed their DE&I initiatives in 2025, signalling rising awareness but uneven maturity.

Compared with global peers, UAE organisations are less likely to embed gender equality into formal governance cycles, creating a gap between leadership outcomes and organisational systems.

Where progress is not reinforced through governance and accountability, it remains more exposed to leadership change and shifting priorities.

The UAE position in 2026



30.8%

of senior management roles are held by women in the UAE, versus 32.9% globally



+7.9pp

increase in the UAE since 2024



1.1pp

global decline year on year



2051

projected global parity if momentum holds

Gender balance is becoming a commercial and talent-driven issue

In 2026, WIB data shows that:

- ◆ **26.5%** of UAE organisations report investors asking about senior leadership gender balance.
- ◆ **91.9%** of leaders say gender equality initiatives influence where senior talent chooses to work

Clients, regulators and candidates are increasingly requesting visibility on leadership composition, signalling that gender balance is moving beyond internal culture into market credibility and access to opportunity.

Women in Business 2026 marks a transition point for the UAE.

The data confirms that progress can be made, and quickly. The next challenge is whether progress can be scaled across organisations, embedded into governance, and sustained through leadership cycles.

Those that treat gender balance as a leadership system, rather than a symbolic outcome, will be better positioned for long term resilience in the UAE.



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