

Women in Business 2025 - UAE edition

Impacting the missed generation





Building on **21 years** of data and insight

For 21 years, Grant Thornton has cast a light on issues surrounding gender diversity in senior management among the world's mid-market businesses, exposing barriers and identifying action for change.

Coinciding with International Women's Day in March, this ground-breaking research focuses on monitoring and measuring the percentage of women occupying senior management roles in mid-market companies around the world.

The Grant Thornton Women in Business survey has explored what helps, and what hinders, women in the workplace, while offering businesses pragmatic solutions to encourage the creation of a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Grant Thornton United Arab Emirates

At Grant Thornton United Arab Emirates (UAE), we are proud to build on over two decades of insights from Grant Thornton International. For the past six years, our firm has carefully monitored the data and sentiments of business leaders in the UAE, both within mid-market companies and other multinational and public sector organisations operating in the country.





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Foreword

Hisham Farouk

Chief Executive Officer
Grant Thornton UAE



At Grant Thornton UAE, we have long understood that diversity, particularly gender diversity, is not just a corporate objective — it is a strategic imperative. For nearly six years, we have been tracking the progress of women in business across the UAE through our annual *Women in Business* reports. Each year, we have sought to not only measure progress, but also to engage in dialogue, inspire action, and challenge the status quo.

To accelerate gender balance, we need to take deliberate, coordinated steps that begin long before women reach the boardroom.

The foundations for success are already strong in the UAE and our role is to ensure we build on that momentum to create pathways that unlock the full potential of all talent — regardless of gender.

At Grant Thornton UAE, we took both a moral and business stance on gender diversity in our firm from our origins. Well before diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) became a global business priority or mandated by regulators, we embedded our commitment to gender balance into our purpose, values and policies.



We have always believed that to build a thriving, sustainable organisation, we must reflect the society we serve. As a proudly UAE-based firm, we align closely with the country's national agenda, including the UAE Gender Balance Council Strategy 2026, to ensure that our growth mirrors the country's ambitious vision for inclusion and prosperity.

We are particularly proud that female representation within our firm is steadily increasing, especially at leadership levels. Today, 40% of our workforce is female, and what's most rewarding is that half of our current female partners rose through the ranks internally — a clear testament to the strength of our policies, culture, and investment in talent development. These are not just numbers — they are tangible proof of our belief that opportunity should be available to everyone, and that talent and ambition should be the only prerequisites for leadership.

The costs of inaction are profound, with research from the International Monetary Fund indicating that closing the gender gap in developing markets alone could boost GDP by 23%. To accelerate gender balance, we need to take deliberate, coordinated steps that begin long before women reach the boardroom. It starts with early interventions — ensuring that young girls grow up in environments where they believe that leadership is not only possible but expected. Within organisations, it means intentionally creating a culture where talent thrives on merit, where unconscious biases are actively addressed, and where mentorship, sponsorship, and visible role models are the norm, not the exception.

Allyship also has a critical role to play in this acceleration. As a long-time advocate of gender equality, I strongly believe that gender diversity is not a “women's issue” — it is a business issue, a societal issue, and a leadership imperative.

This report will shine a light on the importance of allyship in creating environments where women at all levels, feel valued, supported, and empowered to progress into senior leadership positions.

Our commitment to accelerating action does not stand in isolation. We are proud to build on the findings of this report and connect it to broader research efforts, such as our '*Women on Audit Committees UAE 2024*' study conducted in collaboration with Heriot-Watt University. These customised insights provide a deeper, UAE-specific understanding of the structural and cultural shifts needed to advance gender parity across sectors, equipping both businesses and policymakers with the data and tools to drive sustainable progress.

At Grant Thornton UAE, we remain steadfast in our commitment to building a workplace — and contributing to a broader business environment — where gender is no longer a barrier to success. As we look ahead, we recognise that diversity is not only about doing what is right, but about unlocking innovation, strengthening resilience, and ensuring that our businesses are fit for the future.

I invite you to read this report with a mindset of action. Let us work together to collaborate to truly accelerate action, to ensure that gender balance becomes a shared reality in the UAE and beyond.

Hisham Farouk

Chief Executive Officer
Grant Thornton UAE

Executive summary

Over the past six years, Grant Thornton UAE has tracked the progress of women in leadership across mid-market companies, multinational corporations, and the public sector. ‘*Women in Business 2025*’ highlights notable advances in female representation at senior levels, while also identifying the structural, cultural, and regulatory shifts driving change. However, the pace of progress must accelerate for businesses to fully capture the economic, innovation, and reputational benefits of gender-balanced leadership.



Key achievements and trends in the UAE

- **Rising representation in senior leadership**

Women in the UAE are increasingly occupying senior leadership roles, particularly in finance, operations, and marketing.

- **Data-driven business decisions**

37.8%

of Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) roles are held by women.

33.3%

of Chief Financial Officer (CFO) roles are held by women.

Growing

representation in Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) positions.

71.4%

of UAE businesses reported that clients and procurement teams requested gender diversity data when evaluating suppliers.

40%

of investors expect clear evidence of gender diversity in senior leadership before committing capital.



Government-led acceleration

Between **2021** and **2024**, the UAE achieved a **200%** increase in women holding board seats, rising from **47 to 141** board positions.

The UAE mandates that at least **20%** of board nominees must be women, accelerating gender diversity at board level.

Women now make up **45.7%** of the UAE workforce, **66%** of the public sector workforce, and hold **30%** of diplomatic corps positions.

Government-led acceleration in women's board representation (2021-2024)

2021

47

Board seats

2022

Policy changes introduced

2023

Diversity mandates enforced

141

Board seats

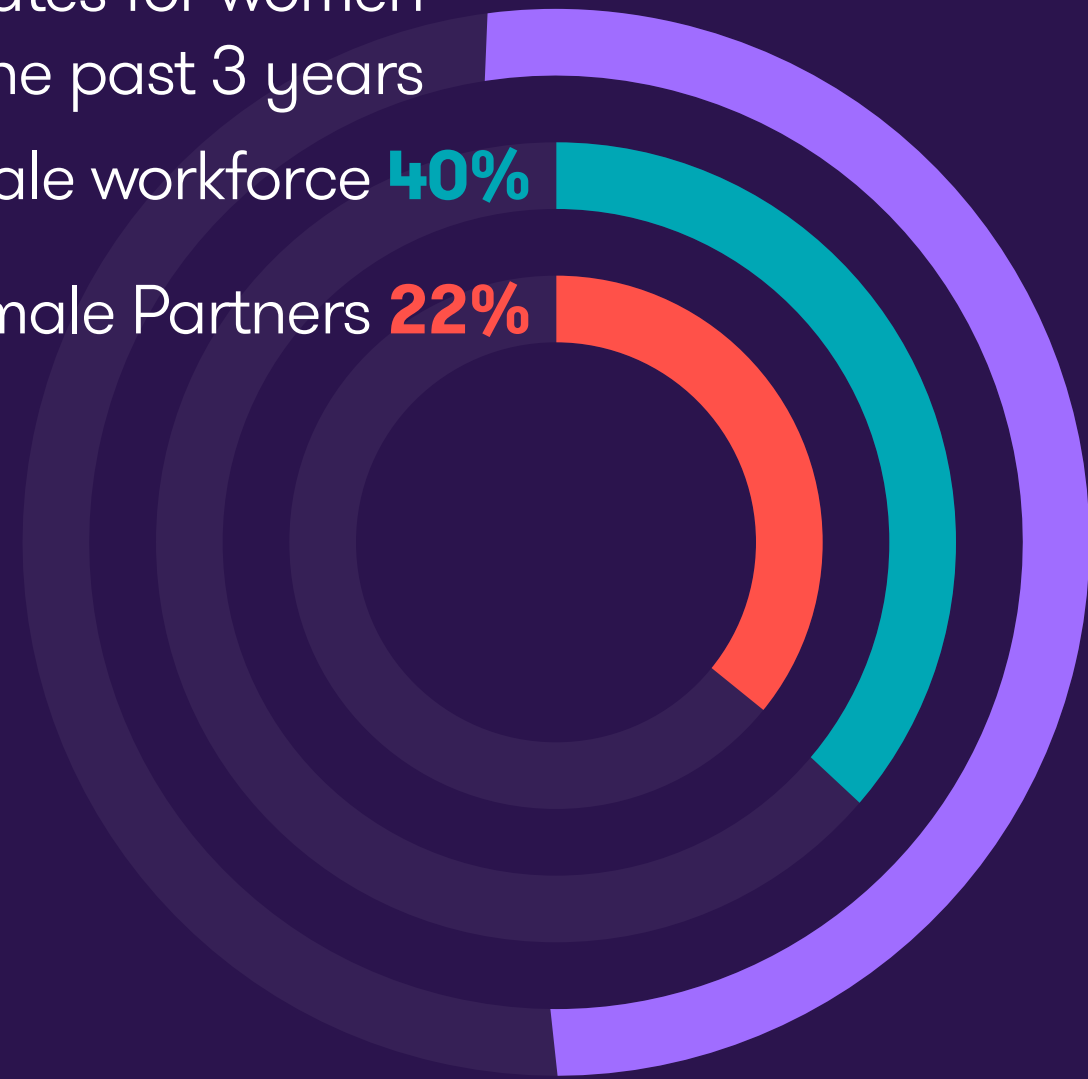
2024

Grant Thornton UAE's own progress

Equal promotion rates for women and men over the past 3 years

Female workforce **40%**

Female Partners **22%**



The competitive advantage of diversity

Gender diversity is no longer an aspirational goal — it's a commercial necessity. UAE businesses with diverse leadership teams are:

- Better positioned to win government contracts.
- More attractive to global investors with ESG mandates.
- Better equipped to attract and retain top talent across generations.



A call to accelerate action

The UAE's foundations are strong, but sustained action is critical. To accelerate action in gender balance, companies must:

- 01** Embed inclusive leadership accountability across all levels.
- 02** Build structured networks and sponsorship pathways for women.
- 03** Redesign talent processes to drive gender balance.
- 04** Amplify female role models and success stories.
- 05** Create safe spaces and continuous feedback loops.

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In the UAE, diversity isn't just good for business — diversity is the business.

George Stoyanov

Partner, Head of Markets
Grant Thornton UAE



Chapter 1:

Women in leadership: A competitive advantage for UAE businesses



Over the past decade, the conversation around gender balance in leadership has evolved from an aspirational goal into a business-critical priority for companies operating in the UAE. One of the most impressive findings from the ‘*Grant Thornton Women in Business 2025*’ survey data highlights that the representation of women in senior management roles in the UAE is accelerating at a notable pace, particularly in key decision-making positions that shape corporate strategy and performance.

“The UAE offers a unique opportunity to businesses and investors. We are not constrained by legacy barriers the way some older economies are. That allows us to move faster, think differently, and set new standards for gender inclusion,” said George Stoyanov, Head of Markets, Grant Thornton UAE.

Data from the survey confirms this. Roles that were historically male dominated in the UAE, are experiencing a marked rise in female representation, including:

Human Resources Officer (HRO) – women now hold **37.8%** of senior HR roles, reinforcing the growing importance of inclusive talent strategies at the executive level.

Chief Financial Officer (CFO) – women now occupy **33.3%** of these critical financial leadership roles, showing increasing investor and governance trust in female financial leadership.

Chief Operating Officer (COO) – demonstrating a shift in the operational leadership space, where diverse perspectives are increasingly valued.

Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) – a key role in which diverse leadership can shape brand narratives, customer engagement, and market positioning in increasingly global and digital environments.



This upward trend is both encouraging and instructive. It highlights the UAE's broader structural shift, where gender diversity is becoming not just a moral imperative, but a competitive differentiator — a trend particularly visible in the private sector, family businesses, and multinational corporations headquartered in the UAE.

“Once you have one woman on a board, the second is easier. It's being the first that's hard. No one wants to be the only woman in the room,” said Alexandra Will, Partner, Regulatory & Financial Crime Compliance at Grant Thornton UAE.

Diversity data requests: A new procurement and investment reality

In parallel with this leadership evolution, the business case for gender diversity in the UAE is gaining ‘commercial teeth’. According to the 2025 data, 71.4% of UAE businesses reported that potential new clients requested evidence of gender balance in senior management teams during procurement processes.

This represents a higher demand for diversity data disclosure in the UAE compared to other regions. Procurement teams – both in the private and public sectors – are increasingly embedding gender diversity as a measurable selection criterion. This puts companies with more diverse leadership teams at a distinct advantage when bidding for contracts, particularly in industries with strong government oversight or international partnerships.

Source: Grant Thornton International Business Report (IBR) research

Diversity reporting is no longer confined to corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports; it is becoming a performance metric directly tied to revenue generation.

“It's not about representation for the sake of representation. When we see diverse boards, it's not just good optics — it's good governance. Diverse perspectives make better businesses” said George Stoyanov, Partner Head of Markets at Grant Thornton UAE.

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Diversity has moved from the ‘S’ to the ‘G’ in ESG — it's not just about good intentions anymore. It must be measured, tracked, and reported. It is encouraging that clients want to see who's on your leadership team, and they want proof you care about diversity. It's not just ESG; it's about trust.

Alexandra Will

Partner, Regulatory and Financial Crime Compliance,
Grant Thornton UAE



Investor expectations

Beyond procurement, the survey data highlights how UAE-based investors and financial institutions are embedding gender diversity requirements into their due diligence processes. Nearly 40% of potential investors now expect clear evidence of gender diversity at senior levels before committing funds.

This is part of a broader global shift towards gender-lens investing, where institutional investors prioritise companies with clear diversity policies, representation targets, and track records of inclusion.

UAE companies that can demonstrate meaningful progress are not only meeting compliance expectations but positioning themselves as attractive investment prospects in a global capital market where Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors play an increasingly influential role.

“Our metrics on diversity and ESG play a very big role in how we’re evaluated by global clients — and we now see a similar approach being adopted by our domestic and regional stakeholders” said Mazin Khalil Partner, Regulatory Risk Advisory at Grant Thornton UAE.

Source: Grant Thornton International Business Report (IBR) research





The role and impact of regulation on gender balance

“The UAE’s economic growth was matched with rapid social progress — gender diversity is now part of the country’s DNA. For example, a record 200% increase in board seats held by women in public joint stock companies in the UAE from 2021 to 2024 — from 47 to 141 seats in accordance to the Securities and Commodities Authority (SCA) — is proof that policy and cultural change are working,” said Mazin Khalil.

Approximately 20% of businesses surveyed reported that government departments requested gender diversity data over the past year. This aligns with the UAE Vision 2030 agenda, where economic diversification, inclusive growth, and women’s empowerment are explicitly linked to national competitiveness and long-term prosperity.

Sources:
Securities and Commodities Authority: Women’s Representation on Boards of UAE Public Joint-Stock Companies
International Report: Gender Inequality Index by UNDP
MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme

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We are fully aligned with the national agenda — not just meeting quotas but creating meaningful opportunities for Emirati women to grow within our firm.

Hisham Farouk
Chief Executive Officer,
Grant Thornton UAE



Female business leaders as a competitive differentiator

The cumulative impact of these factors is a strong indicator that gender diversity is becoming a key driver of business competitiveness in the UAE.

Whether companies are competing for large government contracts, pitching to multinational clients with global diversity expectations, or seeking funding from institutional investors focused on ESG, the ability to demonstrate credible, measurable progress on gender diversity in leadership is fast becoming a non-negotiable requirement.

The UAE's leadership diversity story is rapidly evolving into a globally relevant case study for how policy, market pressure, and corporate ambition can converge to drive meaningful change. Companies that embrace this momentum and proactively integrate diversity into their leadership pipelines and governance structures will not only lead in compliance — they will lead in competitiveness.

"I understand the need for connection and opening of doors, so I created a network to connect, exchange knowledge and share opportunities. Through this network, we've helped women get onto audit committees and boards," said Dana Alyazeedi, Partner, Business Risk Services, Grant Thornton UAE.

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The UAE's tone from the top is crystal clear — gender diversity and inclusion is embedded within the policy framework across various sectors including the public sector, financial services, education and are now expanding across various sectors.

Mazin Khalil

Partner, Regulatory Risk Advisory
Grant Thornton UAE



Did you know?

1

There has been a record **increase of 200%** in women's representation on the boards of listed public joint-stock companies in the past three years. In 2024, **women held 141 seats in boardrooms compared to only 47 seats in 2021.**

2

In 2019, The Central Bank of the UAE released new Corporate Governance Regulations which mandate that **at least 20% of candidates** of the board member nomination process considered **must be female.**

3

Among the **37** ministers of the UAE government, **nine are women (2024).**

4

The UAE is ranked **7th globally** out of 166 countries in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index (GII) and is **leading the MENA region.**

5

Women make up **66%** of the public sector workforce in the UAE.

6

Today, women constitute **45.7%** of the labour force in the UAE.

7

About **75%** of positions in education and health sectors in the UAE are occupied by women.

8

Women make up **30%** of the UAE's diplomatic corps, where they occupy **234 positions, 42 working** on missions abroad, and **nine being ambassadors.**

Sources:
[Securities and Commodities Authority: Women's Representation on Boards of UAE Public Joint-Stock Companies](#)
[UAE Government: Online Services for Women](#)
[UAE Gender Balance Council official website](#)
[International Report: Gender Inequality Index by UNDP](#)



Chapter 2:

Grant Thornton UAE's commitment to women in business





At Grant Thornton UAE, we believe that creating opportunities for women in business goes beyond increasing representation. It is about ensuring they have the support, visibility, and sponsorship needed to lead with impact. Our commitment is reflected in our leadership development programmes, inclusive culture, and structured career pathways that enable women to progress into senior roles.

As part of our firm's 2027 Strategy, we are committed to maintaining strong female representation at the highest levels. Today, women make up 22% of our partnership, and as we continue to grow our partnership, we are focused on sustaining this momentum with a target of at least 20% female partners by 2027. A significant milestone in this journey has been the recruitment of our first Emirati female partner, reinforcing our commitment to advancing national talent and gender diversity in senior leadership.

“What makes a good ally?” asks George Stoyanov. “Someone who understands that one gender, one voice isn't enough. Real allies act the same way whether someone's watching or not.”

Our firm's value proposition for female professionals is built on three core pillars: fair and transparent career growth, ensuring advancement is based on merit and potential; an inclusive and empowering culture, where diverse perspectives are valued and supported; and tailored development opportunities, including leadership programmes and flexible working policies that promote long-term success. By providing clear career pathways, a strong support network, and an environment where women can lead with impact, we are not only enabling individual success but also strengthening our leadership pipeline.

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We have a very fast-paced growth story, doubling in growth over the last three years. What's made a difference is the small steps — changes in policy and changes in culture — that ensure women feel as welcome and comfortable as their male counterparts.

Neha Julka

Partner, Financial Advisory
Grant Thornton UAE



Grant Thornton UAE appoints first Emirati partner in Advisory practice - Dana Alyazeedi, Partner, Business Risk Services

In 2024, we were delighted to announce the appointment of the first female Emirati partner in our Advisory practice.

Appointed a partner in the Abu Dhabi office, Dana has an extensive track record of over 14 years' experience in internal audit, risk management, and corporate governance across numerous organisations in the UAE, including the UAE's Department of Health and state-owned investment company Mubadala.

Hisham Farouk, CEO of Grant Thornton UAE said, "Dana adds a wealth of experience to the team and will sustain our momentum of strengthening our resources to cater to a growing clientele and our exceptional track record in the market."

Source: [Appointment of Dana Alyazeedi, Consultancy-me.com](#)





We recognise that the expectations of female professionals are evolving. Career progression, work-life balance, and purpose-driven work have become key priorities, and we have adapted by embedding flexibility, leadership visibility, and structured development programmes into our approach. As hiring trends shift, we are seeing more women actively pursue leadership roles earlier in their careers, and we are committed to ensuring they have the opportunities and support to do so.

“Our DEI strategy aligns with the firm’s 2027 Strategy, ensuring that DEI are integral to how we operate. We have implemented cross-team interviews and automated hiring assessments to ensure fair hiring practices and unconscious bias training across recruitment, performance management, and recognition. Our internal mentoring programme, which pairs female colleagues with senior leaders, supports professional growth in line with our commitment to Leadership as Allies,” explains Lynne Meyer, Partner, People and Culture.

To further strengthen the leadership pipeline, we provide targeted learning programmes, including ‘Thriving in a Diverse Environment,’ ‘Becoming an Inclusive Leader,’ and ‘Creating a Respectful Workplace.’ We also host internal networking events that enable women at all levels to expand their professional networks. Over the last three years, we have also maintained an average 50/50 promotion rate between female and male employees, reflecting our commitment to gender-balanced career progression.

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Creating an intentional culture and strategy to support gender balance requires deliberate action beyond increasing representation.

Lynne Meyer

Partner, People and Culture
Grant Thornton UAE





Female representation within the firm

Grant Thornton UAE demonstrates a notable female representation across its workforce, with women comprising 40% of the overall employee population in January 2025. This gender ratio reflects a positive shift towards a more balanced and diverse workforce, particularly within professional services, where gender balance remains an industry-wide challenge.

“If you want to accelerate action, you need to break the unconscious bias, especially at the middle management level, where women often get stuck,” said Hisham Farouk.

The progress at Grant Thornton to address the impact on the ‘missed generation’ is reflected in the data. We are proud that at Grant Thornton UAE, 59% of our workforce is comprised of men, while 41% are women. At a leadership level, one of our highlights is that 50% of our leadership in Regulatory Risk and Financial Crime Compliance advisory practice (manager level and above) are women.

Gender representation across grades and service lines, however, highlights areas where further progress can be made. While women represent a significant proportion of entry- to mid-level roles, the data signals a declining trend in female representation at more senior levels.

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We all have the personal and professional responsibility to make sure that when the next generation of women leaders at Grant Thornton look back, they can see that the policies and culture has evolved to support them — and that leaders like us played a part.

Mazin Khalil

Partner, Regulatory Risk Advisory
Grant Thornton UAE



This is a common challenge observed in professional services firms globally, where career progression pipelines for women may be impacted by a range of factors including career breaks, promotion pathways, and structural barriers.

To address this, Grant Thornton UAE has implemented targeted initiatives under its ‘Elevating Women at GT’ programme, aimed at customising support for different female employee groups to ensure tailored interventions across career stages. This approach supports the firm’s commitment to cultivating an inclusive and equitable environment, ensuring women have access to leadership development, mentorship, and opportunities for advancement.

“I walk into every meeting expecting to be treated exactly like my male colleagues — not better, not worse. It’s the culture we’re building.”
said Neha Julka.

The representation of women at senior levels within Grant Thornton UAE has increased significantly due to structured career development, strong mentorship, and targeted leadership programmes.

“While we are proud of the progress we have made, we remain focused on sustaining momentum by strengthening leadership pipelines and ensuring long-term gender balance as the firm continues to grow,” said Lynne Meyer.





As we look ahead, our focus remains on creating long-term impact, ensuring that every woman at Grant Thornton UAE has the opportunity to lead, succeed, and shape the future of business in the UAE. Our commitment to sustaining gender balance at the senior leadership level is embedded in our long-term strategy, ensuring that as the firm grows, so do opportunities for women to advance.

Overall, the UAE has seen a significant shift in how different generations of women engage with business and leadership. Millennial and Gen Z women are entering the workforce with higher educational attainment, global outlooks, and a focus on purpose-driven careers.

“Younger women prioritise flexibility, inclusion, and career progression and actively leverage digital platforms and entrepreneurial opportunities to shape their own professional journeys,” said Neha Julka.

As a firm, we are adapting talent strategies to meet the differing expectations of each generation, blending leadership development and flexible pathways for experienced professionals with mentorship, digital skills training, and entrepreneurial support for younger talent.

“What makes Grant Thornton UAE stand out is our commitment to action. It is not just about creating opportunities—it’s about making sure women have the right support, sponsorship, and environment to step into leadership roles with confidence. The culture here ensures that talent is recognised, growth is encouraged, and success is accessible to all,” said Lynne Meyer.

Sources:
MENA-OECD Competitiveness Programme



Chapter 3:

Key areas of impact for accelerating action





How to create an environment where female leaders thrive in business

Organisations across the globe — including those in the UAE — are recognising the urgent need to accelerate progress on gender diversity, not just for equity's sake, but for the proven business benefits linked to diverse leadership teams. Creating an environment where female leaders thrive requires a multi-faceted approach that tackles systemic barriers, unconscious biases, and outdated processes, while intentionally building a culture of inclusion, sponsorship, and visible advocacy.

This framework outlines **five key focus areas of impact**, supported by actionable steps, that organisations operating in the UAE can implement, measure, and embed into their day-to-day culture and long-term strategy. Following from the market research and consultation with our own partners, we believe these actions will not only improve gender balance and diversity at senior levels, but also embed a culture where female talent can contribute, thrive, and lead confidently. Our own experience reminds us that real change requires more than one-off initiatives. It demands structural, cultural, and leadership shifts embedded into the organisation's DNA. To advance the goal of more women in leadership roles we believe there are five key areas of impact that will accelerate action.

01

02

03

04

05





01 Embed inclusive leadership accountability across all levels

Accountability must start at the top. Leaders should be held responsible for achieving gender diversity targets in leadership roles and creating inclusive cultures. This includes unconscious bias training, formal accountability structures, and ensuring that diversity allies at senior levels actively advocate for female talent.

Practical actions

Set measurable gender diversity targets for leadership roles.

Mandate unconscious bias and inclusive leadership training.

Appoint senior male and female diversity allies with clear mandates.

Measure to drive progress

- Align targets with national priorities and internal DEI goals.
- Report progress quarterly to the executive team and board.
- Implement mandatory training for all leaders and managers, refreshed annually.
- Incorporate real-life scenarios relevant to the organisation's culture.
- Track participation and gather post-training feedback to measure mindset shifts.
- Formalise the role of "gender allies" at senior levels.
- Task them with actively advocating for female talent in promotion and succession processes.
- Ensure gender allies report actions and impact at leadership forums.



02 Build structured networks and sponsorship pathways for women

Women in the UAE would benefit from sponsors and structured support systems to progress into leadership roles. This means formalising sponsorship programmes, creating internal and external networking opportunities, and ensuring visibility for high-potential women across the organisation and industry.

Practical actions

Measure to drive progress

Create internal women's networks with executive sponsorship

- Establish cross-functional forums for women at all levels to connect, learn, and advocate.
- Assign an executive sponsor to champion network visibility and influence.
- Track attendance and member satisfaction to gauge engagement.

Formalise sponsorship programmes for high-potential women

- Identify top female talent and match them with senior leaders (male and female) as career sponsors.
- Set clear goals for career progression within sponsorship relationships.
- Measure promotion rates and visibility improvements for sponsored women.

Facilitate external networking and visibility opportunities

- Encourage and fund participation in industry panels, leadership programmes, and professional associations.
- Track participation and external recognition (awards, board appointments, speaking engagements) as a measure of visibility.



03 Redesign talent processes to drive gender balance

Systemic bias is often embedded in hiring, promotion, and performance processes. Organisations must audit and redesign talent processes to ensure equal opportunity, particularly at key transition points (e.g. manager to senior leader). Family-friendly policies should be normalised for all, not just for women, to avoid reinforcing stereotypes.

Practical actions

Review, reframe and redesign recruitment, employment and promotion policies

Measure to drive progress

- Conduct an independent audit of hiring, promotion, and performance evaluation processes to identify systemic biases.
- Implement structured interview frameworks with gender-balanced panels.
- Track gender split at all stages of recruitment and promotion cycles.

Practical actions

Mandate unconscious bias and inclusive leadership training.

Appoint senior male and female diversity allies with clear mandates.

Measure to drive progress

- Develop tailored career development plans for female talent, focused on closing experience gaps that can be barriers to leadership.
- Track progression rates of women across levels and functions.
- Align pipeline targets with leadership diversity goals.
- Normalise family-friendly policies for all, not just for women, to avoid reinforcing stereotypes, including that parental leave (for women and men), and return-to-work programmes are standard, not exceptions.
- Track uptake rates by gender to ensure policies are accessible and used.
- Communicate these policies clearly during recruitment and promotion processes to attract and retain female talent.



04 Amplify female role models and success stories

Visible female role models inspire the next generation and normalise women in leadership. Organisations must actively share success stories, nominate female leaders for external recognition, and encourage senior women to mentor others, creating a continuous cycle of advocacy.

Practical actions

Measure to drive progress

Showcase female leaders in internal and external campaigns.

- Feature successful female leaders in internal newsletters, videos, and external thought leadership.
- Use storytelling to highlight career journeys, challenges overcome, and leadership impact.
- Track engagement metrics (views, shares, feedback) to measure visibility.

Actively promote female leaders for external recognition.

- Nominate female leaders for industry awards, board appointments, and external speaking roles.
- Collaborate with external organisations to source opportunities for visibility.
- Track nominations and awards as a metric for leadership visibility.

Encourage women to mentor and advocate for others.

- Establish internal mentoring programmes where senior female leaders guide mid-level and junior women.
- Incentivise mentoring participation through leadership KPIs.
- Measure mentee career progression and satisfaction as programme impact indicators.



05 Create safe spaces and continuous feedback loops

Women need safe spaces to share challenges and experiences, particularly in cultures where they are underrepresented. This includes anonymous feedback mechanisms, regular listening sessions, and formal channels to report and address bias incidents — with transparent follow-up and corrective actions

Practical actions

Establish safe feedback channels for women.

Measure to drive progress

- Set up anonymous surveys, focus groups, and ‘listening circles’ to gather honest feedback on workplace culture and barriers.
- Conduct these at least bi-annually and ensure findings are shared with leadership for action.
- Track action taken and visible changes arising from feedback.

Practical actions

Normalise open dialogue on gender and inclusion issues.

Create mechanisms to report and address bias incidents.

Measure to drive progress

- Incorporate gender and inclusion check-ins into team meetings and performance reviews.
- Equip managers with tools to have constructive conversations on inclusion.
- Track inclusion sentiment through engagement surveys segmented by gender.
- Establish clear and confidential reporting processes for gender bias incidents.
- Ensure reports are acted upon swiftly, with outcomes communicated transparently (where appropriate).
- Track incident types, response times, and resolutions to monitor cultural health.



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Contributors

Hisham Farouk

Chief Executive Officer,
Grant Thornton UAE

Alexandra Will

Partner, Regulatory & Financial Crime
Compliance Advisory,
Grant Thornton UAE

Dana Alyazeedi

Partner, Business Risk Advisory,
Grant Thornton UAE

George Stoyanov

Partner, Head of Markets,
Grant Thornton UAE

Lynne Meyer

Partner, People & Culture,
Grant Thornton UAE

Mazin Khalil

Partner, Risk & Regulatory Advisory,
Grant Thornton UAE

Neha Julka

Partner, Financial Advisory,
Grant Thornton UAE

Methodology

The *International Business Report (IBR)* is the world's leading survey of mid-market companies. Launched in 1992, the IBR provides insights into the views and expectations of around 14 000 businesses. The research runs quarterly, interviewing senior leaders within mid-market organisations across 31 economies. Including chief executive officers, managing directors, chairpersons and other senior executives from all industry sectors. Questionnaires are translated into local languages and fieldwork is undertaken through both online and telephone interviews.

The findings in this *Women in Business 2025* report are drawn from interviews conducted between July and September 2024. It should be noted that this year, the data was collected nine months after the previous data set, as opposed to the previous year, where data was collected on an annual basis.

The definition of mid-market varies across the world: in mainland China, we interview businesses with USD 5 million to USD 500 million in revenue; in the United States, those with USD 100 million to USD 4 billion in annual revenues; in Europe, it's commonly those with 50 to 500 employees. We have rounded the percentages and data points explored in this report to the nearest one decimal point. For this reason, some charts may not total 100%.



Survey respondents in the UAE

The Grant Thornton's global research survey interviewed approximately 100 senior business leaders in the UAE. Respondents represent a diverse range of sectors, including professional services, technology, healthcare, financial services, energy, and industrial products.

The majority of respondents (approximately 67 out of 88) were male, with 20 female participants. The age profile reflects a strong presence of mid-career and senior leaders, with 41 respondents aged 35-44 and 16 aged 45-54.

From a seniority perspective, 19 respondents hold the position of CEO or managing director, with 12 respondents occupying other senior management roles.





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