Women in the UAE

The constitution of the United Arab Emirates guarantees equal rights for both men and women. Under the Constitution, women enjoy the same legal status, claim to titles, access to education and the right to practice professions as men. They are also guaranteed the same access to employment, health and family welfare facilities. The rights of women to inherit property are also guaranteed and ensured.

Education and literacy

- The literacy rate of women in the UAE was 90 percent in 2007.
- The number of UAE national women enrolled in higher education is actually 24 percent more than the number of UAE national men enrolled in higher education. In fact, 77 percent of UAE females continue on to higher education from high school.
- Three of every five students in the public higher education system are women.
- The UAE has begun training women as muftis, or Sunni Muslim scholars who interpret Islamic law.

Women in government and business

Women graduates in the UAE can now be found working in government, engineering, science, health care, media, computer technology, law, commerce, and the oil industry.

- Four UAE cabinet ministers are women—including Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi, Foreign Trade Minister, who was on Forbes magazine’s 2007 list of the 100 most powerful women in the world.
- Women form two-thirds of government sector workers. In October 2008, the first female judge was appointed. Women make up 20 percent of the diplomatic corps.
- Nine women hold seats within the Federal National Council, accounting for 20 percent of the membership. The FNC is a consultative parliamentary body.
- In 2003, for the first time, the Abu Dhabi police trained 32 women to work with the special security forces. The UAE has four women fighter pilots, the first to serve in UAE military forces.
- Women finance one-third of the transactions in the financial and banking sector.
Employment protections

Employers in the UAE are prohibited from firing or threatening to fire a female employee on the basis of pregnancy, delivery, or parenting. Maternity leave in the public sector is two to six months. While on maternity leave, a woman is entitled during the first two months to full pay, the third and fourth months to half salary, and the last two months to no pay. A woman may take one paid hour break from work per day for 18 months to nurse her baby.

International participation

In 2004, the UAE became a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The UAE regularly participates in and hosts international and GCC conferences on women’s issues.

The 2007 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) status report no Millenium Development Goals recognized the positive outcome of the UAE’s target-oriented policies in a number of areas, including women’s empowerment. It particularly noted that the state legislations in the UAE do not discriminate on the basis of gender with respect to education, employment, or the quality of services provided.

According to the findings of the report, educational indicators show that women’s achievements in education have reached its targeted levels, and in some cases, exceeded that of men because of a strong desire among women to become financially independent and professionally successful.

In the UNDP’s Gender-Related Development Index for 2009, the UAE ranks 35th among 182 countries. And the country holds 25th place in the world for gender empowerment.

The UAE released a report in the fall of 2008, *Women in the United Arab Emirates: A Portrait of Progress*, which outlines both the developments and challenges associated with the status of women in the Emirates. The report notes that “Having made significant progress, the UAE does not intend to stagnate with regards to its women’s empowerment policies but rather to continue and develop... The UAE intends to establish a new benchmark for gender empowerment in the region.”

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