

# **Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Examining Strategies and Government Initiatives for Advancing Emirati Women in the UAE Industrial sector**

**Jamal Al Memari, Khaoula Khlie and Jasim Alhadhrami**

Industrial Management Department, Faculty of Business

Liwa College, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

[Jamal012412@lc.ac.ae](mailto:Jamal012412@lc.ac.ae), [Khaoula.khlie@lc.ac.ae](mailto:Khaoula.khlie@lc.ac.ae)

## **Abstract**

Emirati women face challenges in the industrial sector in UAE, specifically the existence of glass ceiling barriers. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is steadfastly addressing the challenges faced by Emirati women, aligning with the United Nations' fifth Sustainable Development Goal and the International Labor Organization's commitment to gender equality. This is accomplished through a cooperative strategy involving the government, private sector, and local organizations. This study aims to investigate the strategies that can be implemented to overcome these barriers, and the role of the UAE government in supporting women's professional development and promoting gender equality in this sector. The primary objective is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to the glass ceiling and assess the UAE government's role in supporting women's professional development

## **Keywords**

Sustainability, Gender equity, UAE government, Industrial Sector, efficiency.

## **1. Introduction**

In the industrial sector, women face a complex challenge marked by gender discrimination that obstructs their path to leadership roles, reinforcing the "glass ceiling." Work-Life Balance and limited career growth opportunities further compound these difficulties. Overcoming these obstacles requires a dual approach: organizations must implement support programs and gender-sensitive assessments to foster diversity and equal opportunities, while women themselves can pursue higher education, showcase their competence, boost self-confidence, and actively seek leadership roles. This combination of efforts is crucial in creating a more inclusive professional landscape and facilitating women's advancement to leadership positions in these sectors.

The UAE government, with entities like the Gender Balance Council, has introduced initiatives such as the "Gender Balance Guide" to advance gender equality and women's leadership across various sectors. This collaborative approach plays a pivotal role in establishing an inclusive environment with equal opportunities for Emirati women in the private sector, contributing to the UAE's advancement in this regard.

### **1.1 Objectives**

This study focuses on understanding how the government efforts are helping in addressing these challenges.

## **2. Literature Review**

The UAE Labor Law firmly outlaws gender and any form of discrimination, ensuring fair treatment and equal opportunities for women. Companies are urged to comply with these regulations, fostering an inclusive work

environment. This commitment is rooted in the nation's dedication to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5, focused on "Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (un.org, 2017)."

To fulfill this goal, the UAE has taken significant steps to eliminate discrimination against women and promote sustainable development. One key initiative is the Gender Balance Council, which actively addresses challenges in women's industry management, incorporating gender perspectives into policy development and planning. It aims for a more gender-balanced society, guided by five principles, including equity of opportunities and collaboration with key partners to mainstream gender across policy areas.

The council's work aligns with four strategic pillars: closing the economic gender gap, promoting women in entrepreneurship and leadership, ensuring gender-equitable health support, increasing legal protections, and advancing global gender balance through action and partnerships (gbc.gov.ae, 2017). The UAE government has implemented legislation and initiatives aimed at protecting women's rights, granting them equal employment opportunities, ensuring their welfare, and encouraging their meaningful involvement in sustainable and developmental realms. Figure 1 shows the 3 main areas where the government is supporting to address the women challenges in the Industrial sector in UAE.

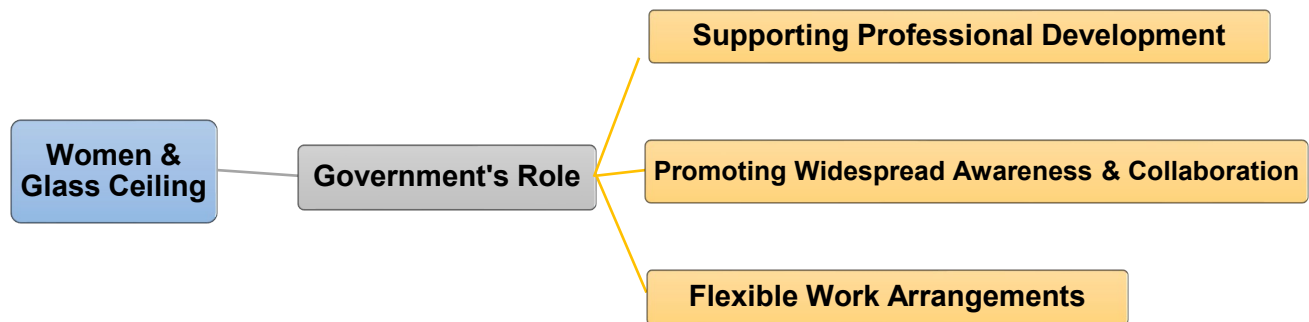


Figure1. Government role in addressing the women challenges in UAE

### **2.1. Supporting Professional Development for Women**

The UAE government has made significant efforts to support the professional development of women through accessible workshops and empowering resources. Evidence of this commitment can be found in several government initiatives. For example: The "Emirati Women's Training Program" is an initiative that focuses on enhancing the skills and knowledge of women in various fields (dwe.gov.ae, 2019). Moreover, the "She Leads" program by the UAE Gender Balance Council encourages women's leadership development and entrepreneurship.

### **2.2. Promoting Widespread Awareness and Collaboration**

The UAE government is proactive in promoting awareness of gender equality and women's empowerment. One notable initiative is the "Year of Tolerance" in 2019, which aimed to foster a more inclusive society. During this year, various events, campaigns, and forums were organized to raise awareness about gender equality and the importance of women's participation in the workforce (moec.gov.ae, 2019). The annual "Emirati Women's Day" celebrations also provide a platform for highlighting the achievements and contributions of women. Additionally, the UAE Gender Balance Council actively collaborates with various government departments, involving a substantial workforce percentage in promoting gender equality.

### **2.3. Flexible Work Arrangements**

The "Work-Life Balance" program, initiated by the UAE Ministry of Community Development, aimed to establish a balanced relationship between work and personal life for UAE employees (mocc.gov.ae, 2022). It provided tools and encouraged employers to adopt policies like flexible hours and telecommuting to support work-life balance. This program aligned with the UAE government's commitment to improving overall well-being, in harmony with initiatives such as the UAE National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing. Additionally, a recent International Labor Organization (ILO) report (ilo.org, 2023) emphasized the value of flexible work arrangements in enhancing women's

work-life balance, highlighting potential gender disparities and recommending balanced regulations and "work-life boundary" policies to afford women greater flexibility in managing family and career responsibilities.

Despite their qualifications and ambitions, UAE women face challenges breaking the "glass ceiling" hindering their progress to leadership positions. Gender disparities and limited career development in the private sector contribute to unmet career aspirations and create disparities between women in the public and private sectors. To address this issue, comprehensive strategies like support, enhanced training, fair performance evaluations, diversity targets, women's involvement in leadership selection, and top leadership commitment to gender diversity are essential. The UAE government plays a vital role in supporting women's professional development, raising awareness about gender equality, and promoting flexible work arrangements to create a more inclusive and equitable work environment.

### 3. Methods

In the context of research methodologies, two primary approaches, namely inductive and deductive, are commonly employed by researchers, as noted by Creswell (2008). While inductive and deductive approaches serve distinct purposes, the present study adopts a deductive approach. The deductive approach is chosen when a pre-established hypothesis exists, and the goal is to validate this hypothesis using established concepts and newly collected data. The deductive approach fits well as all variables are predetermined, and the primary aim is to establish relationships between them.

### 4. Data Collection and Analysis– Effectiveness of the government initiatives

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives led by the UAE government to overcome the glass ceiling, we conducted a survey on 60 women working in the Industrial sector representing 15 companies where 2 questions were related to this purpose:

- To what extent do you believe the government's role in supporting the private sector to Overcome the glass ceiling is effective?
- To what extent do you believe the government's policies and initiatives have positively impacted gender equality and the glass ceiling in the private sector?

In Figure 2, the responses of 60 participants were displayed regarding the effectiveness of the government's role in supporting the private sector in overcoming the glass ceiling. A significant proportion of participants, 40%, considered it moderately effective, while 23.3% found it very effective. Additionally, 21.7% believed it was slightly effective, and a small percentage of 3.3% deemed it not effective at all. Only 11.7% regarded it as extremely effective. This data highlighted varying perceptions about the government's role in addressing the glass ceiling, emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive evaluation of these initiatives to promote gender equality and diversity in the sector.

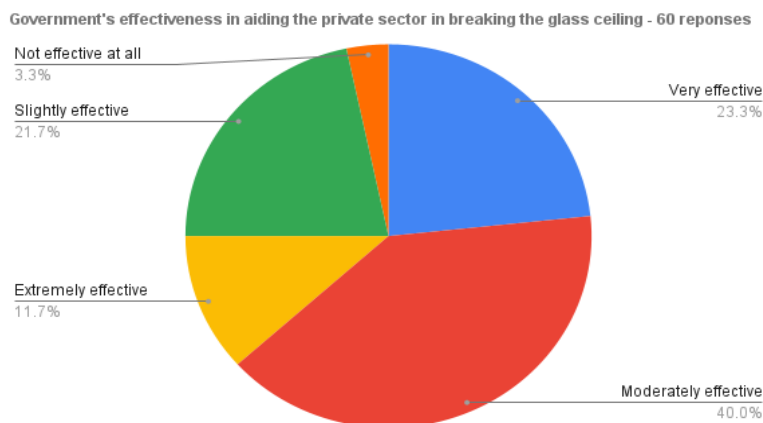


Figure 2. Pie-Chart for Government's Effectiveness in Aiding the Private Sector in breaking the Glass Ceiling

As indicated in Figure 3, participants evaluated the extent to which they believed the UAE government's policies and initiatives had positively impacted gender equality and the glass ceiling. The responses revealed that a substantial

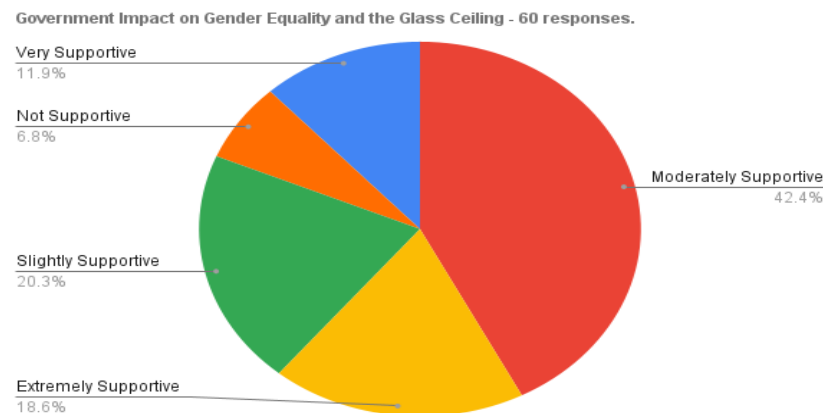


Figure 3. Pie-Chart for Government Impact on Gender Equality and the Glass Ceiling.

18.6% found the government's efforts to be "extremely supportive," while an additional 11.9% considered them "very supportive." The majority of participants, 42.4%, regarded the government's policies as "moderately supportive." A significant portion, 20.3%, found them to be "slightly supportive," and a small percentage of 6.8% believed they were "not supportive at all." These responses reflected the diverse perspectives on the effectiveness of the government's initiatives in promoting gender equality and addressing the glass ceiling in general.

The UAE government has taken a proactive stance in supporting the professional development of women within the private sector of industrial management, firmly grounded in the pursuit of gender equality and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5 (un.org, 2017). As part of these efforts, the establishment of the Gender Balance Council stands out, with a mission to foster a more gender-balanced society by emphasizing principles like equity of opportunities and the mainstreaming of gender considerations in policy development (gbc.gov.ae, 2017).

Furthermore, the government has implemented specific programs to bolster women's professional growth, exemplified by initiatives such as the "Emirati Women's Training Program," dedicated to enhancing women's skills and knowledge in various domains (dwe.gov.ae, 2019). Additionally, the "She Leads" program, administered by the UAE Gender Balance Council, has been instrumental in encouraging women's leadership development and entrepreneurship. The government has also been active in raising awareness about gender equality and women's empowerment, as evidenced by initiatives like the "Year of Tolerance" in 2019 and the annual "Emirati Women's Day" celebrations, both of which provide platforms for celebrating and recognizing women's achievements (moec.gov.ae, 2019). In collaboration with numerous government departments, the UAE Gender Balance Council ensures a substantial workforce percentage is engaged in promoting gender equality.

Moreover, the government has recognized the importance of work-life balance, notably through the "Work-Life Balance" program initiated by the UAE Ministry of Community Development (mocd.gov.ae, 2022). This initiative aimed to create a harmonious relationship between work and personal life by offering tools and encouraging employers to adopt policies like flexible hours and telecommuting to support work-life balance. These policies are in line with the government's commitment to overall well-being, aligning with initiatives such as the UAE National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing. Nevertheless, varying opinions on the effectiveness of the government's role in addressing the glass ceiling have emerged from survey responses.

While some participants found it to be moderately to very effective, others had mixed views, highlighting the need for comprehensive evaluations of these initiatives to further advance gender equality and diversity in the industrial management sector. In the future, the UAE government will continue to build upon its existing strategies and collaborate with various stakeholders to create a more inclusive and equal workplace environment for women in the

industrial sector. This dynamic interplay of governmental initiatives, awareness campaigns, and collaboration sets the stage for the advancement of gender equality and the shattering of the glass ceiling in the Industrial sector.

## **6. Conclusion**

In summary, this research sheds light on the challenges faced by Emirati women in the UAE's industrial sector, particularly the hurdles known as the "glass ceiling" that block them from reaching top positions. The United Arab Emirates is actively working to overcome these challenges, following international goals for gender equality. The government, alongside businesses and local groups, is working together on plans to support women in their professional growth and break through the barriers that limit their progress. The study emphasizes that while the government has introduced various initiatives, opinions about how effective they are can differ, showing that there's still work to be done to ensure fairness and equality for women in the industrial field.

In the future, the UAE government aims to improve on its current strategies and work closely with different groups to make the industrial workplace more inclusive and more fair for women. By continuing these efforts, the UAE is moving towards a future where gender equality is more than just a goal on paper, and women have equal opportunities to advance in the industrial sector, breaking through the barriers that have held them back.

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