



## Advancing Gender Equity in the Middle East Workforce

Women of the GCC are transforming the region's workforce. Focused inclusion efforts can capitalize on this momentum.

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## Executive Summary

The last decade has brought sweeping redefinition to workplaces across the Middle East. To a degree not seen before in the history of the region, women are fulfilling active roles in the private and public sectors, and the region is making strides in closing its gender gap, with governments setting ambitious goals and an increasing number of organizations adding gender diversity to their agenda. Several of these organizations are homegrown and pioneering gender equity practices and policies at a global level in a way that is uniquely reflective of the region's cultural and societal context.

Despite these milestones, there is a long way to go to attain gender equity in the region, especially at the leadership level. For example, ~7% of board seats are held by women in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) vs. 20% globally.

By taking a closer look at the underlying causes, our research—which included a survey of 1,150 professional men and women, diagnostics of 25 of the largest GCC organizations, and interviews with 50 female leaders—indicates that gender stereotypes and biases persist.

Of the women surveyed, 70% highlighted that gender bias and stereotypes represent one of their biggest challenges to workplace advancement, along with inadequate mentorship, training, and support for work-life balance. These challenges directly hinder women's corporate leadership advancement in the region, and similar challenges are faced globally.

Increasing women's representation in the workforce is key to improving business results. Organizations undergo a "tipping point" in their journey toward gender equity success when women represent at least 30% of the total workforce. This effect is even more pronounced when women hold 30% or more of an organization's leadership roles.

To help organizations navigate their gender equity journey, we have developed an approach rooted in research and experience that helps organizations gain an understanding of their starting point and decide on the best path forward, in terms of practices. This approach encompasses five key pillars: (1) holistic gender equity strategy, vision, and leadership commitment; (2) workplace culture, inclusion, and belonging; (3) talent journey; (4) compensation and benefits; (5) external engagement with customers, suppliers, the community, and governments and clear, measurable goals supported by practical organizational policies and programs.

Based on these practices, three key organization models along different maturity stages of the gender equity journey emerge from our research: Tier 1: Emerging Adopters, Tier 2: Determined Learners, and Tier 3: Trailblazers. Our analysis showed that 50% of GCC organizations fall into Tier 1, while 40% are Tier 2, and less than 10% illustrate attributes of Tier 3. Our report defines tangible steps that organizations can take to help them get started or further accelerate their progress along this multiyear journey.

## Reimagining the workforce

Over the past decade, GCC countries have made dramatic strides in the representation of women in the workforce (see Figure 1). At the country level, this process has been primarily driven by top-down national policies and pledged commitments to internationally recognized gender equity best practices, such as the United Nation’s Women’s Empowerment Principles, coupled with organizations prioritizing the hiring, integration, and growth of women.

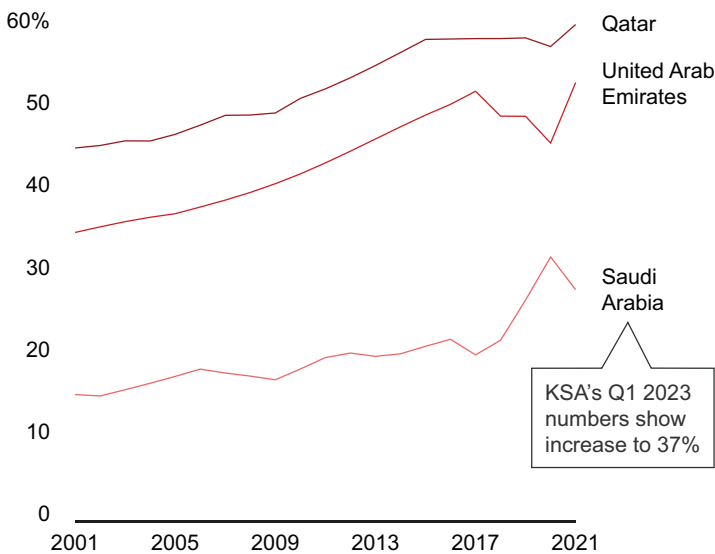
Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 plan—with goals to include 30% of Saudi women in the workforce and create 1 million new jobs for women—has spurred a platform of national policies that have elevated women’s workforce participation to a degree never before seen in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

In fact, women’s workforce participation in Saudi Arabia reached 37% in the first quarter of 2023, exceeding the country’s stated Vision 2030 participation goal more than seven years ahead of schedule. For this progress, the World Economic Forum recognized Saudi Arabia as one of the world’s top three most-improved countries helping to close the workforce gender gap in its 2022 rankings.

Meanwhile, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) continue to lead the GCC region in workforce participation. Sixty percent of Qatari women and 53% of Emirati women are employed in the workforce, according to the latest World Bank estimates. Female workforce participation in these countries well outpaces the current global average of 47.4%.

**Figure 1:** The GCC has experienced strong growth in women’s labor force since 2001

### GCC WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR FORCE (2001–21, percentage)



### HIGHLIGHTS



**Highest female participation** rate among GCC countries (60% in 2021), +33% since 2001



Female participation at ~53% in 2021, +51% since 2001. The country has made **massive strides** to improve women’s representation



Female participation **significantly increased**, reaching ~28% in 2021 and ~37% as of 2022, **exceeding the 2030 target; +141%** since 2001

Notes: 1.2% LinkedIn analyses; Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC); Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)  
Sources: World Bank: Labor force participation rate, female (percent of female population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate)

## Advancing Gender Equity in the Middle East Workforce

Qatar and the UAE's success at integrating women into the workforce can be linked in part to their ambitious gender equity platforms. The UAE's Women on Boards initiative, launched in 2012, requires all companies to have at least one female board member. The country's more recently launched Gender Balance Council aims to create a nationwide, comprehensive strategy to close the economic gender gap and increase women's participation in corporate leadership roles to 30%.

Targeting similar objectives, Qatar's Vision 2030 plan seeks to increase opportunities and vocational support for Qatari women and empower women to participate more fully in various leadership roles.

Several of these national policies target a 30% goal for the overall percentage of women in the workforce and the percentage of women in corporate leadership roles for a key reason: This figure is a "tipping point" for true gender equity reform. That's because minority groups reach a critical mass—and are empowered to disrupt previous social norms—when they represent roughly one-third of an organization's makeup, numerous sociological studies have shown.

While government initiatives have been the primary drivers of the region's female workforce participation boom over the last twenty years, the surge has also been supported by a perfect storm of economic and social change drivers, including some of the highest tertiary education enrollment rates in the world and a broadening of socially accepted roles for women within the region. There have also been pioneering organizations driving this change on the ground.

Several trailblazing organizations provide clear models for how best to create a workplace that is supportive and inclusive to all workers—regardless of gender. For example, Saudi-based multinational investment firm the Olayan Group began hiring women in 2001, at a time when female job placements were not widespread in KSA. In 2011, the organization founded the Olayan Women Network to further its gender diversity goals and promote women's empowerment across its working groups.

Olayan again amplified its commitment to engaging and promoting women in 2013, when it created a new head of diversity role charged with establishing the company as an undisputed pioneer of gender equity in the region. Since then, women's promotions within the organization have increased by a factor of 37, and the number of women in managerial positions has increased sixfold.

Similarly, since 2014, Chalhoub Group: retailer, partner, and creator of luxury experiences in the Middle East has prioritized gender equity within its workplace culture, going so far as to make diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) considerations key drivers of day-to-day business decision making. By integrating women's leadership training and a data-driven DEI dashboard that informs its hiring, promotion, and salary allocation practices, Chalhoub Group has achieved pay parity among genders and accelerated the integration of women at every level of the organization.

Organizational success stories such as those of the Olayan Group and Chalhoub Group illustrate the attainability of gender equity in the region when the appropriate frameworks are in place.

## Barriers to progress

In spite of these significant strides in women's workforce participation, the GCC region has accumulated one of the largest gender gaps in the world, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, which covers four dimensions, including economic participation and educational attainment. As of 2022, the region had closed ~64% of its gender gap vs. 80%+ for a selection of its global peers (e.g., Iceland, Finland, Namibia, Nicaragua).

This challenge is magnified in the leadership space. While women hold roughly 20% of board positions globally, our analysis found that females hold just ~7% of GCC board positions, although this rate is significantly higher in family-owned groups.

Further, while we determined that 6.7% of CEO positions in the UAE are held by women—higher than the global average of 5%—we uncovered no current examples of women holding CEO roles at the top publicly listed companies in Qatar or KSA, although there have been instances of women in CEO roles of large organizations in these countries in the past.

Foundational aspects for women's advancement, such as educational attainment and workforce participation, seem to be in place in the region. So, why are so few women reaching board and corporate leadership positions in the GCC?

To answer this question, we held discussions with 25 of the largest businesses and organizations in the UAE, KSA, and Qatar, whose total workforce represents more than 150,000 regional workers. We also surveyed 1,150 professional men and women (450 in the UAE, 450 in KSA, and 250 in Qatar) across all major industries in the region and all levels of employment, from entry-level through top executives. These initial discussions and surveys were followed by roundtable and one-on-one conversations with thought leaders, female pioneers, and gender equity researchers.

This research uncovered an uncomfortable truth: Lingering gender biases represent a foundational obstacle impeding women's workplace advancement in the GCC region.

In our study, 70% of women agreed that gender bias and stereotypes represent one of their biggest challenges to workplace advancement. Feedback from men seemed to support this assertion, as 20% of male survey responses included comments that could be characterized as biased, such as "men are better decision makers."

While these gender biases are not unique to the GCC region—they can be found in every region of the world—their existence nonetheless represents a nagging obstacle GCC women must overcome if they wish to pursue corporate leadership. Our research on gender parity in the workforce across 12 countries and 24,000 employees shows that bias continues to perpetuate differential treatment for women globally, rooted in conscious and unconscious bias, with "systems that were designed with the majority (men) in mind." The multiple forms this differential treatment can take (e.g., women being asked to take on more administrative work and emotional labor, celebration of assertiveness in men but not women in promotion discussions) can make climbing the corporate ladder more difficult for women.



Our data showed that in the GCC, anti-female biases are the root causes of the three systemic barriers most responsible for hindering the effective integration of women into the workforce and their path to leadership.

- **Lack of mentorship and sponsorship within the workplace**

Forty-five percent of women respondents noted a lack of mentorship or sponsorship opportunities within their workplace. Furthermore, one in three noted a lack of opportunities to make themselves visible within their organizations, and many shared feelings of being marginalized and ignored, particularly when they were the only woman working among a team of male colleagues. One Saudi female executive told us, “It’s a man’s world we live in. I feel excluded from key decisions on a regular basis, even as a female leader within my organization. The men go down for a smoke, and they come back, and a decision has been made.”

- **Limited training or career-building opportunities**

Twenty-five percent of female survey respondents identified a lack of relevant experience or skills as the primary barrier to workplace advancement. One in three women in the public sector named this factor as their primary advancement challenge. Another Saudi female executive mentioned, “As a newly promoted organization head, I wish women were given training in key leadership skills including accounting and finance skills. If I hadn’t studied this in university, I would have found myself unable to defend my organization’s budget to the board in my first month on the job—and I know several female leaders who have found themselves in this predicament.” This was also mentioned by male professionals as one of their top three challenges, but to a lesser extent than for their female counterparts.

- **Inadequate support for work-life balance**

Among parents with dependent children, 61% of women said they primarily handle day-to-day caregiving duties, compared to 44% of men. Thus, juggling job and at-home responsibilities primarily falls to women in the GCC, as is the case globally. While some organizations are beginning to introduce remote work or other flexible work options and childcare support facilities in the workplace to help ease this balance, several respondents noted that in the absence of clear organization-wide mandates, access to childcare support and flexible workplace accommodations requires commitment from leadership and approval from immediate managers, who may or may not approve these accommodations. A UAE-based executive confirmed this by saying, “My organization has hired dozens of women this year, so they are slowly changing their policies. But as a new mother I still find it challenging to find a balance between work and family as there are limited accommodations being made for parents.”

Our research illustrated measurable differences in women’s perceptions of workplace advancement barriers by sector. For example, 46% of women in the financial services industry reported lack of mentorship as their biggest overall advancement barrier. But, when responses were considered from across sectors, just 34% of female respondents ranked this as the largest obstacle.

Meanwhile, women from the healthcare sector tended to be less concerned about availability of mentors and more concerned about the fairness of the promotion process, likely because women have historically held active and visible roles in medicine and affiliate healthcare fields.

## How to overcome barriers and drive progress: Introduction to Bain's gender equity approach

Our definition of gender equity recognizes the historical disadvantages women have faced when pursuing workforce integration and promotion. In an effort to overturn these biases, we typically make concerted efforts to recruit, train, mentor, support, and promote female employees along their career trajectories and on the path to leadership.

Beyond being the right thing to do, pursuing gender equity and inclusion makes good business sense. Based on global and GCC data,

- teams that are gender and geographically diverse make better business decisions 87% of the time;
- 76% of job seekers and employees indicate “diverse workforce” as an important factor when evaluating organizations and job offers;
- when organizations have diverse and inclusive teams in place, they are five times more likely to innovate;
- in the GCC, 70% of top performing teams have a higher percentage of women.

When establishing gender equity goals, organizations should keep in mind that the true “tipping point” of gender equity success tends to occur when women represent 30% of the overall workforce of the organization. This shift is even more keenly felt when women make up 30% of a workforce's executive leadership. As companies grapple with global talent shortages, women can be a key part of the solution.



“Closing the gender gap in the workforce is not only a moral imperative, but one that has a measurable impact on economic growth. Besides expanding the talent pool, gender diverse teams tend to make better decisions and drive higher profitability. It is important that businesses listen to women, to understand their needs and create clear pathways of success for them. Capable and forward-thinking HR departments can play a significant role here and make fair decisions that give equal opportunities to both genders.”

Muna Al Gurg, Vice Chairperson and Director of Retail Easa Saleh Al Gurg Group

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Hiring women is the first step, but it’s not the last. Once women are hired, workplaces must take steps to make them feel included and supported in their journey. Making women feel heard and valued in the workplace is critical to attracting and retaining talent. To create such an environment, workplaces should first take steps to identify and address lingering gender biases.

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“Today, women in the region have better access to quality higher education and are empowered to explore careers across some of the most vital and high-growth industries. Also, today our challenges are similar to those faced by women in other parts of the world. These challenges are real, and support at every level is imperative to make it possible for more women to access professional growth.”

Renuka Jagtiani, Chairwoman, Landmark Group, a multinational retail and hospitality conglomerate based in Dubai

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## Advancing Gender Equity in the Middle East Workforce

To better define what successful gender equity initiatives look like in practice, we created a holistic approach that considers organizations' progress across five key pillars of gender equity (see *Figure 2*): (1) establishing a DEI strategy, (2) creating women-focused training opportunities, (3) delivering equal compensation, (4) fostering inclusion, and (5) constructing clear corporate policies and external messaging related to gender equity.

We used this approach to determine where GCC organizations are positioned based on their practices. Generally speaking, we found workplaces in the financial sector and the consumer products and retail sectors to have more mature practices around the integration and retention of women, when compared to other sectors in the region. This progress is likely linked to the fact that many organizations in the finance sector long ago enacted environmental, social, and governance agendas that spurred along their DEI engagement. DEI advances in the consumer products and retail sector seem to be motivated by companies wanting to cater to their largely female consumer bases.

Our primary research uncovered several areas in which gender equity work remains to be done in the GCC:

- Less than 35% of organizations we contacted have formalized gender equity strategies in place, and only about half of senior-level survey respondents felt their corporate leadership articulates a clear set of organizational gender equity commitments and values, as outlined in the first pillar of *Figure 2*.
- Less than a third of surveyed organizations have formalized mentoring opportunities (second pillar) or affinity groups for women (fourth pillar).
- Awareness on gender equity is still broadly overlooked in the region; currently only around 20% of organizations offer trainings to address cultural awareness, unconscious bias, and inclusive behaviors, as outlined in the fourth pillar of *Figure 2*.

To address these gaps, the following section outlines actionable steps organizations can take if they wish to begin a gender equity initiative or further efforts already in place (see infographic). Based on the above practices observed in GCC organizations, three models emerged along the gender equity maturity journey. We classified the 25 GCC workplaces we analyzed or evaluated into the following categories:

- **Tier 1: Emerging Adopters**, organizations that are just starting on their equity journey.
- **Tier 2: Determined Learners**, organizations that are picking-up on the gender equity journey.
- **Tier 3: Trailblazers**, organizations that are the earliest pioneers of gender equity in the region and, in select cases, would also qualify as global pioneers.

Our analysis showed that 50% of GCC organizations fall into Tier 1, while 40% are Tier 2, and less than 10% illustrate attributes of Tier 3 (see *Figure 3*). However, organizations may adopt practices that fall across different tiers, regardless of their level of maturity.

Advancing Gender Equity in the Middle East Workforce

It is critical to understand that it is about having the right practices and ensuring those practices lead to tangible outcomes around workforce representation, leadership representation, recruiting and professional development, the gender pay gap, and the employee experience. Advancement will require an effective measurement engine within the organization to track progress over time.

Implementing and carrying out practices that produce measurable outcomes is especially critical because all organizations—even trailblazers—are still learning. For organizational leaders seeking to attract and retain the best talent amid the current shortage, reap the business benefits of diversity, and pave the way forward, having a thoughtful approach to gender equity is a must.

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“If organizations truly want to make a difference in attracting and retaining women, conversations need to focus on four practical matters: hiring, promoting, putting money behind female leaders and maternity policies. These four elements have a practical impact on women’s participation and attaining equity and they are directly correlated with the percentage of women who then choose to stay and become leaders.”

Huda Al Lawati, Founder and CEO of Aliph Capital, the first female-founded private equity firm in the Middle East

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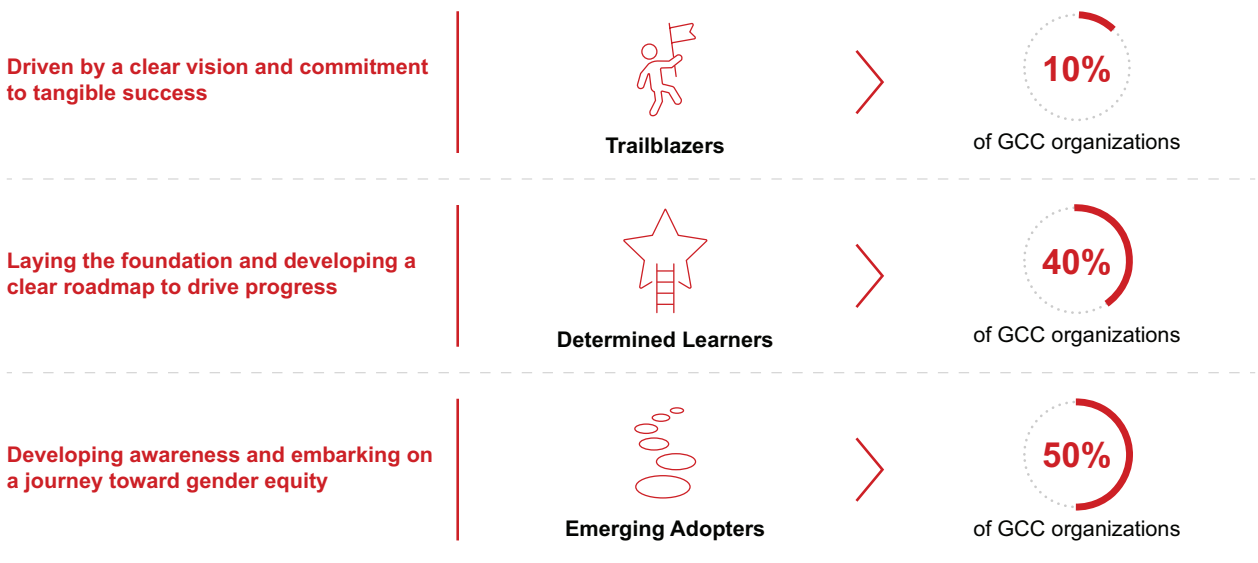
Advancing Gender Equity in the Middle East Workforce

Figure 2: Assessment dimensions of the Gender Equity Opportunity Identifier

1. Strategy, vision, and leadership commitment	1.1 Strategy & commitments <i>(e.g., clear set of gender equity values, commitments, goals from leadership; goals are measurable, tracked)</i>	1.2 Dedicated resources <i>(e.g., dedicated lead to drive efforts; budget with sufficient resources)</i>	1.3 Incentives linked with gender equity performance <i>(e.g., employees' perf. reviews, compensation tied to org's gender equity goals)</i>	1.4 Representation goals <i>(e.g., women's rep across overall workforce, exec. team; hiring, promotion rates)</i>	1.5 Other tracked data <i>(e.g., female applicant pipeline, reasons for voluntary exits)</i>	1.6 Internal communication <i>(e.g., goals and activities comm. to exec. team/full workforce; in interactive Q&amp;A sessions)</i>	
	2. Career journeys	2.1 Recruitment <i>(e.g., approaches to diversify talent source: partner with univ., clubs; remove bias in hiring; inclusive lang., candidate slate includes women)</i>	2.2 Onboarding <i>(e.g., intro. to benefits, culture; access to buddy/affinity group for women)</i>	2.3 Performance evaluation <i>(e.g., consistent criteria for eval., input from various seniority levels)</i>	2.4 Career pathways <i>(e.g., clear skills-based pathways, requirements communicated to everyone)</i>	2.5 Mentoring & sponsorship <i>(e.g., formal programs, training for sponsors)</i>	2.6 Upskilling & professional development <i>(e.g., equal access to opportunities; tuition assistance)</i>
3. Compensation and benefits parity for men and women		3.1 Pay equity analysis <i>(e.g., third-party analysis every 1-2 years, results shared with leadership/all employees)</i>	3.2 Additional benefits <i>(e.g., flexible work policies, maternity insurance coverage, childcare assistance, transportation benefits)</i>	3.3 Supplementary leaves <i>(e.g., paid leave for serious health conditions, parental leave, unpaid leave of absence)</i>	3.4 Part-time work policies <i>(e.g., shift swapping, guaranteed hours, standard start/end times)</i>		
	4. Workplace culture, inclusion, and belonging	4.1 Employee sentiment & listening tools <i>(e.g., focus groups, sentiment surveys; topics covered)</i>	4.2 Affinity groups for women <i>(e.g., presence of group, practices to support the group: budget, team)</i>	4.3 Gender equity education & training <i>(e.g., regular voluntary trainings; topics covered: bias, allyship)</i>	4.4 Leadership sponsorship <i>(e.g., participate in setting goals, host forums/discussions)</i>	4.5 Employee feedback <i>(e.g., regular feedback process, upward feedback)</i>	4.6 Gender related complaints/offenses <i>(e.g., anonymous reporting portals, investigation team)</i>
5. External community engagement and communication		5.1 Engagement with customers/beneficiaries <i>(e.g., female customers' inputs in product/ service design, customer-facing employees trained on gender equity topics)</i>	5.2 Practices to promote diverse suppliers <i>(e.g., procure from women-owned businesses, build capabilities of women-owned suppliers)</i>	5.3 Contribution to community causes <i>(e.g., volunteering, donations; statement issuance, public advocacy on gender equity topics)</i>	5.4 External reporting of gender equity metrics <i>(e.g., share current and target workforce/ leadership rep. data with general public or on website)</i>		

Source: Bain analysis

Figure 3: Gender equity journey spreads across three main stages



Regardless of the starting point, there are actions that can be taken to drive progress on gender equity

Note: GCC: Gulf Cooperative Council  
Source: Bain analysis

“At Chalhoub Group, we strongly believe in the power of DEI, and are committed to empowering women in the workplace. In 2022, we launched our Women in Leadership (WiL) programme of learning modules, mentorship, and coaching, supporting more women in the Group to seize opportunities to lead. Through this program, and our other initiatives, we want to meet our pledge that 35% of senior leadership roles will be represented by women by 2023.”

Patrick Chalhoub, Group President of Chalhoub Group: retailer, partner, and creator of luxury experiences in the Middle East

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# Advancing Gender Equity in the Middle East Workforce

The following examples do not reflect the categorization of different organizations. They are illustrations of potential practices that organizations can take to launch aspects of their gender equity efforts or move from one tier to the next. Organizations may adopt these practices across tiers regardless of their maturity levels (e.g., Olayan Group is a Trailblazer organization, but is featured with an example of a practice they do which typically falls under Tier 1).



## Tier 1 Workplaces: Emerging Adopters

*(those at the beginning of their journey)*

**Enact listening strategies (surveys, focus groups, town halls) to better understand your starting point and learn from the experiences of employees on an ongoing basis (typically yearly).**

**EXAMPLE:** The Olayan Group established an annual survey to measure female employees' satisfaction levels related to various workplace culture issues and identify opportunities for improvement.

**Signal visible leadership commitment to DEI through clear ambition and goals, which will create cascading accountability throughout the organization.**

**EXAMPLE:** In the UAE, Emirates Global Aluminium officially announced its vision to have a more diverse leadership team, setting a goal to increase the numbers of females in supervisory roles from 20% in 2021 to 25% in 2025.

**Identify and address workplace biases to create an inclusive environment for women via trainings and awareness sessions.**

**EXAMPLE:** In the GCC, Bain & Company has developed interactive trainings with actors showcasing real-life scenarios of internal unconscious bias across its offices to raise awareness about gender, seniority, and language inclusive behaviors.



## Tier 2 Workplaces: Determined Learners

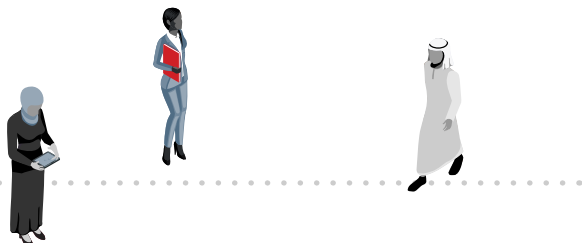
*(those who have set gender equity goals but do not yet have dedicated resources)*

**Allocate dedicated resources (i.e., personnel and budget) to shape and drive equity strategies and DEI initiatives.**

**EXAMPLE:** In KSA, planned smart-city NEOM appointed a director of people, culture, and transformation to shape its DEI efforts.

**Design and implement the right organizational policies to foster flexibility for all, taking into account the needs of women.**

**EXAMPLE:** On a national level, in the UAE, Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority established a parent-friendly label to identify semi-government, private, and third-sector entities who adopt parent-friendly work practices, such as having a clear flexible working policy in place.





Advancing Gender Equity in the Middle East Workforce



○ Tier 2 Workplaces: Determined Learners

*(Continued)*

**Provide growth and systemic support to women in their professional development journey.**

**EXAMPLE:** Regionally, Emirates NBD banking group provides education assistance to both male and female employees. In the UAE, ADPG partnered with Aurora50 to create GLOW, a career support vehicle for its female talent pool.

**Facilitate connection by establishing dedicated affinity groups or employee resource groups for women.**

**EXAMPLE:** In KSA, SABIC Women’s Network aims to develop women as leaders, raising issues relevant to women and increasing women’s participation in business decisions.

**Ensure gender pay equity across all levels of the organization.**

**EXAMPLE:** Dubai-based luxury goods retailer Chalhoub Group has achieved pay parity for women by using a data-driven DEI dashboard to inform its salary allocation practices.



○ Tier 3 Workplaces: Trailblazers

*(those who have a clear equity strategy in place and are focusing on strengthening the path of women to leadership)*

**Formalize sponsorship programs for women in middle and top management and train mentors and sponsors regarding best practices to support mentees.**

Our global research on inclusion shows that sponsorship is one of three success factors required for employees to feel fully included at work. Interestingly, similar levels of inclusion can be fostered even when mentors and mentees have different identities (i.e., a man can mentor a woman, and this will have the same effect as a woman mentoring another woman).

**EXAMPLE:** In KSA, Aramco’s Women Development and Diversity Division Mentorship Program connects female colleagues with experienced mentors to help build and develop their professional skills.

**Provide coaching and job-specific skill development programs to promote women’s paths to leadership.**

This is reflected globally as “growth opportunities and transparent feedback” and is seen as the most effective enabler of increasing feelings of inclusion in an organization, for men and women.

**EXAMPLES:** Qatar Financial Centre, a leading onshore business and financial firm in Doha, encourages female employees to accept “secondment positions”—temporary positions at other firms—so they can gain new, cross-organizational expertise.

In KSA, the Olayan Group invites promising employees to participate in its Management Development Program, which includes multistage coaching and training sessions to develop their skills for senior managerial positions.

## Conclusion

Achieving proactive, measurable gender equity for women in the GCC workforce is possible, as the success of the Olayan Group and Chalhoub Group has shown. In fact, our research identified several examples of thriving female workplaces in the region.

But creating a climate where these organizations can continue to advance their gender equity successes—and where other organizations can meaningfully advance their own gender equity pathways—will require a concerted partnership between organizations and governments and a continued top-down push.

As mentioned, the recent momentum in women’s workforce integration and advancement in the region has been primarily driven by government policies, such the Vision 2030 plans of KSA and Qatar and the UAE’s Gender Balance Council initiative. To further build on these efforts, GCC governments must continue prioritizing policymaking charged with building workplace and social environments suitable for women’s advancement.

## Methodology

The findings and recommendations in this report were informed by surveys, interviews, and secondary research that was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023 and industry expertise from Bain & Company. We examined publicly available data on companies that operate in KSA, UAE, and Qatar and held discussions with 25 of the largest organizations in the GCC. We also surveyed 1,150 executives and interviewed more than 50 female leaders in the region. In this report, “executive” refers to CEOs and positions that report directly to the CEO.

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