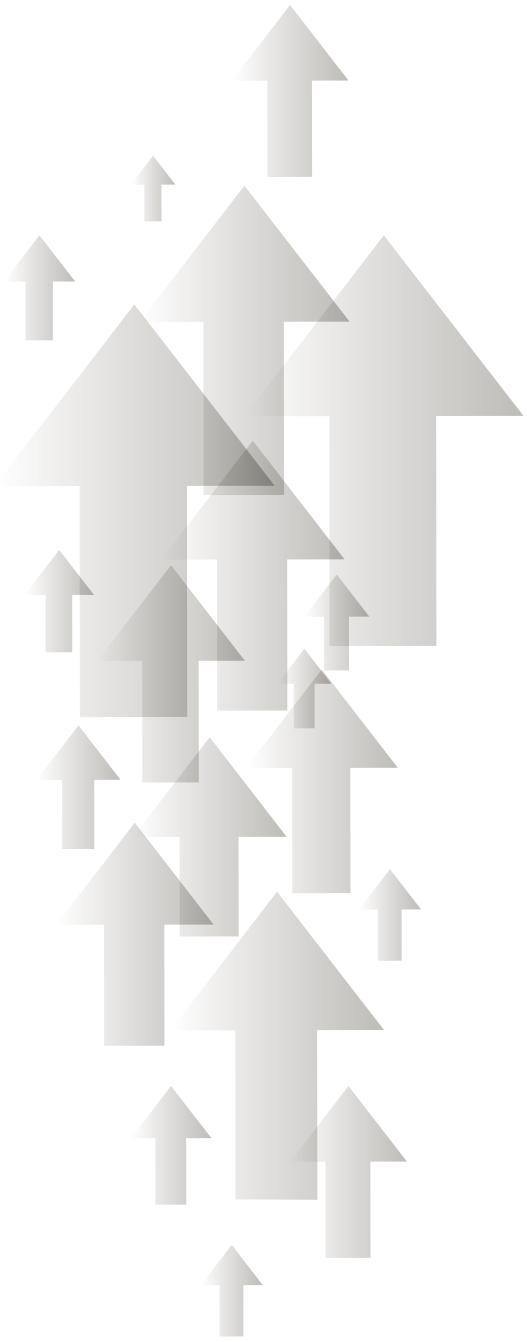
مؤسسة نماء للارتقاء بالمرأة
NAMA WOMEN ADVANCEMENT ESTABLISHMENT

PEARL INITIATIVE

KEY FINDINGS ON WOMEN IN THE ECONOMY

UAE OUTLOOK

Insights Across Four Sectors:
[1] Energy and Environment
[2] Healthcare and Wellness
[3] Finance and Investment
[4] Information and Communications Technology, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics



NAMA Women Advancement Establishment
T + 971 6 594 1262
F + 971 6 523 9339
P.O. Box 2334 ص.ب.
Sharjah, U.A.E. | الشارقة، أ.ع.م.
@namawomen
namawomen.ae
#نماء المرأة
#NamaWomen

Pearl Initiative
T +971 (6) 515 4605
F +971 (6) 515 4066
info@pearlinitiative.org
www.pearlinitiative.org
@pearlinitiative

Authors |
Carla Koffel, Executive Director, Pearl Initiative
Wassim Said, Senior Programme Manager, Pearl Initiative

Researchers |
Lamia Adi, Programme Assistant, Pearl Initiative
Afia Abdul Motaleb, Junior Programme Assistant, Pearl Initiative

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Visual Concept and Design |
Suhad Abu Kishk

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FOREWORD

مؤسسة نماء للارتقاء بالمرأة
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In recent years, there has been an increased focus on supporting women fulfil their potential and full economic participation, through a wide range of interventions, programs and policies across the United Arab Emirates. Against this background NAMA Women Advancement Establishment and the Pearl Initiative identified a lack of data to assist in the development, monitoring, and future shaping of such important policies, strategies and interventions. As a result, the main goal of this report is to highlight the need for a taskforce for data collection and analysis, and to call for the relevant organisations to unite in the pursuit of wider-outreach and quantifiable research. Furthermore, fostering a move towards more evidence-based programmes to support women's full integration in the economy.

Through this initial report we believe we have been able to highlight some of the provision-gaps that could hinder women from being an active part of the workforce, particularly within key sectors (Energy & Environment, Healthcare & Wellness, Finance & Investment, and ICT&STEM), and provide applicable recommendations to bridge these gaps. markedly, the presented key findings are based on a small sample to emphasize on the importance of further investigation and research in this field.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the Pearl Initiative for partnering with us, and to their dedicated team who have been instrumental in the successful delivery of this document. In addition to all the organizations and entities that have helped us achieve this report's goals by collaborating during our data collection phase and without whom this report would not be possible.

Reem BinKaram
Director
NAMA Women Advancement Establishment

FOREWORD

Diversity in the workforce has a significant impact in shaping a country's economic outlook. That is why efforts geared towards better understanding and further improving the extent to which women participate in the workforce are important. The Pearl Initiative is pleased to take part in contributing to these efforts in the Gulf Region.

We are honoured to partner with NAMA Women Advancement Establishment to conduct this research on four sectors in the UAE to not only contribute to the data currently available, but to encourage further research and collaboration across the Gulf Region. We also hope this, and future research will motivate the private sector to take action and to commit to inspire a culture that supports women achieve their career aspirations, thereby fostering competitiveness and resilience in businesses across the Gulf Region.

I would like to thank NAMA and all the people and organisations that took part in this research and the Pearl Initiative's partner companies for their public commitment to supporting and promoting a corporate culture of accountability and transparency.

Carla Koffel
Executive Director
Pearl Initiative

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The level of participation by women in the workforce has been a global topic of interest over the past few decades on both the international and national levels. Particularly in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), there is interest across both the Public and Private Sectors to be able to better gauge, understand and improve the extent to which women are engaged in the workforce and to guide the decision-making process to support diversity.

Diversity among business leadership has been a core topic for the Pearl Initiative since its inception, having facilitated substantial research and discussion around gender diversity. Together with our partner, NAMA Women Advancement Establishment, we have launched this report to analyse the level of women's engagement in the workforce in the UAE across four key sectors: Energy and Environment; Healthcare and Wellness; Finance and Investment; and ICT and STEM.

Although some aggregate data already exists, the report primarily seeks to address the data gap across targeted sectors through primary and secondary research. The report intends to provide data-driven insights essential to decision-makers involved in impacting the extent and ways in which women are engaged in the Private Sector. The report highlights the good practices organisations in these sectors are adopting to enhance the participation of women in the workforce, as well as facilitators and hindrances to achieving greater engagement by women in the workplace.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, the findings show that women value their careers and are motivated by the ambition to learn and grow on a personal level, followed by a focus on compensation and the desire to feel independent and self-reliant. When asked about factors encouraging women to enter the workforce, the organisational culture, leadership commitment and supportive families were found to be the top three considerations for women deciding to enter or remain in the workforce. On the other hand, a lack of support within the organisation, preconceptions about women's roles and social circumstances, such as having children, are all viewed as elements that impede women's career progression.

Across all sectors, gender-based biases and stereotypes were viewed as barriers for women engaging in the workforce. Apart from the Finance and Investments sector, survey respondents across all sectors perceived demanding work hours and conditions as one of the challenges to women's career advancement. In the Finance and Investment and ICT and STEM sectors, the lack of policies supporting women's advancement was highlighted as a key element hindering women from progressing in their careers. In contrast, the Energy and Environment sector, the lack of technical knowledge and skills were among the top three challenges women face.

> The findings show that women value their careers and are motivated by the ambition to learn and grow on a personal level, followed by compensation and the desire to feel independent and self-reliant.

When asked about what organisations could do to address the obstacles to women's engagement in the workforce, 74% of survey respondents viewed flexibility for work and life balance as essential. Second, active consideration of women in recruitment policies and succession planning, followed by policies that nurture a company culture that acknowledges gender bias are important.

To address the structural and social challenges concerning women's participation and engagement in the workforce, our recommendations, as inferred from both the survey and interviews, are that a strong "tone from the top" is crucial when implementing gender diversity initiatives. Once the tone is set, senior management can take the lead in addressing conscious and unconscious bias and develop holistic programmes and initiatives that aim to support and train women in their professional roles.

2.0 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

2.1 | PROJECT MOTIVE

To understand and build on efforts devoted to advancing the role of women in the workforce, locally and regionally, fact-based evidence is essential. Despite the surge in efforts across the Gulf Region to support the role of women in the workplace, very little data exists on the extent to which women are currently engaged in the workplace, including the level of women's representation across organisations. To further develop the role of women in the economy, it is important to continuously enhance, build and update the research and data available in the region, on which effective policy design and programme development can be based. Both the Pearl Initiative and NAMA's programmes are strategically aligned towards making international initiatives for women locally relevant through proper contextualisation allowing for organisations in the region to effectively implement international best practices into their businesses.

2.2 | RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research aims to better understand women's engagement in the UAE economy by understanding: [1] the extent and nature of women's current involvement; [2] the factors hindering the current extent of engagement; and [3] possible initiatives that can support women's engagement. The sectors we focused on are Energy and Environment, Healthcare and Wellness, Finance and Investments, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Sciences Technology Engineering and Math (STEM).

Along with the stated objectives, the research aims to propagate knowledge around the topic and stimulate further data-driven research and evidence-based programmes and recommendations.

Qualitative and quantitative data was collected through a survey and a series of one-on-one interviews. Interviews with 21 Private and Public Sector representatives were conducted and the survey was completed by 121 participants from the UAE between September and November 2017, with participants representing executive management, middle management and technical personnel.

3.0 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This section highlights key findings of our research about the overall and sector specific factors that facilitate and hinder the progression of women in the workplace.

3.1 | ORGANISATIONAL APPROACH BY SECTOR

Although most respondents agree that increasing the role of women in their industry has contributed to its short-term and long-term success, there was a mixed response about whether the leadership of their organisation was committed in supporting women's engagement and progression in the workplace. Across the four sectors, respondents felt that their organisations were not doing enough to raise awareness about issues related to women's careers.

Very few organisations are perceived as having gender targets or "quotas" for women's representation in the workplace, which was corroborated through the interviews with industry leaders. This highlights the need for increased efforts to ensure the participation of women across organisations.

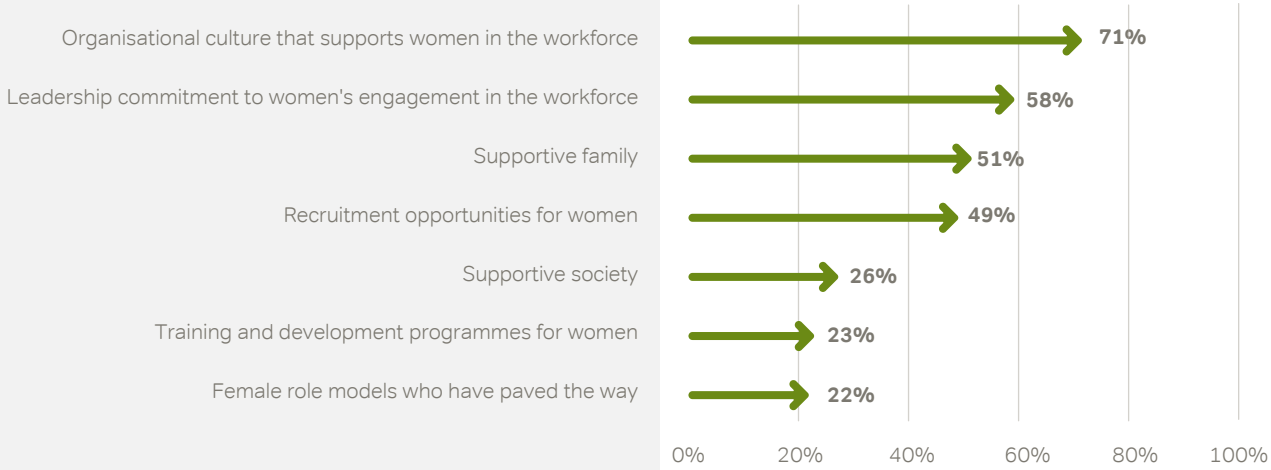
Statements	Overall*	Views by Sector*			
		E&E	F&I	H&W	ICT/STEM
Impact					
The increasing role of women in the industry sector I work in has contributed to its short term and long-term success	**91%**	88%	93%	100%	93%
Leadership					
1 My organisation's board has female representation	**73%**	71%	80%	89%	60%
2 My organisation's leadership is fully committed to women's engagement and progression in the workplace	**73%**	83%	49%	76%	61%
3 My organisation's leadership is actively trying to promote women to senior positions	**70%**	83%	47%	72%	59%
4 My organisation actively raises awareness about the issues related to women's careers within the organisation	**57%**	63%	40%	72%	44%
5 My organisation's work culture supports female employees	**90%**	96%	73%	100%	89%
Policies					
1 Work appraisals from my organisation's leadership have incentivised female employees to rise to senior positions	**60%**	67%	27%	72%	59%
2 My organisation has "gender targets" or quotas	**34%**	38%	33%	33%	24%
3 My organisation offers flexible working hours	**72%**	79%	60%	78%	65%
4 Maternity leave offered in my organisation is adequate	**71%**	70%	60%	89%	72%

* % of respondents agree

3.2 | FACTORS THAT ENCOURAGE CAREER PROGRESSION BY WOMEN

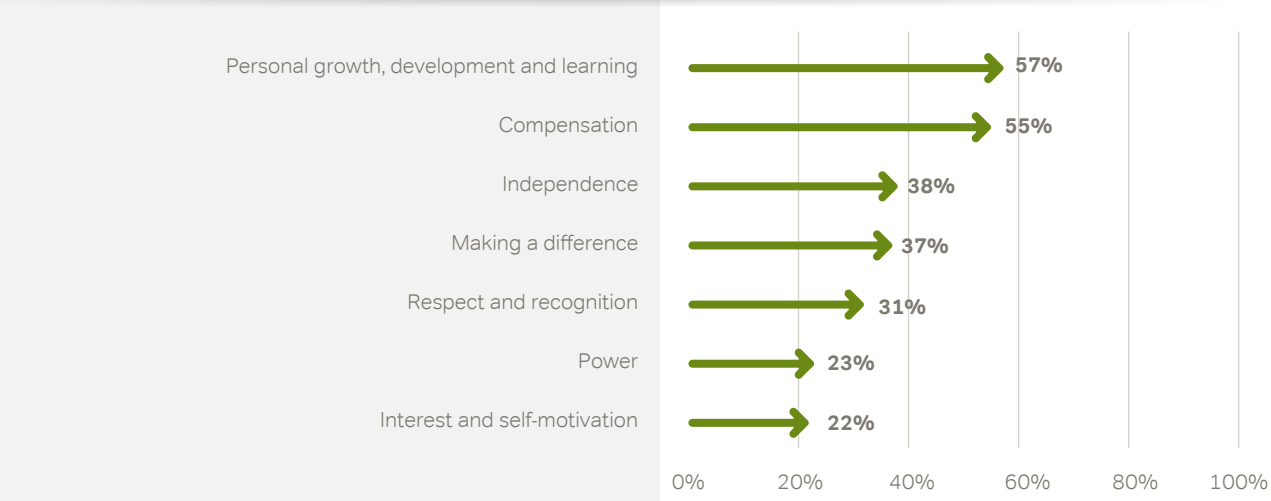
Survey participants were asked to rank the importance of common factors, identified in the graph below, that encourage women's career progression. The majority of respondents identified four main factors, namely: a supportive organisational culture, followed by leadership commitment, a supportive family and recruitment opportunities for women. Although respondents felt that there is value in having a supportive society, a supportive family was perceived to be more important to women's career advancement.

Fig. 1 Percentage of participants identifying factors that encourage career progression for women



Women respondents were also asked to reveal their personal motives in progressing in their careers. The most commonly identified factors were personal growth, development, learning and compensation. Independence, making a difference, as well as respect and recognition, while not as common are motivating factors for more than one third of female respondents.

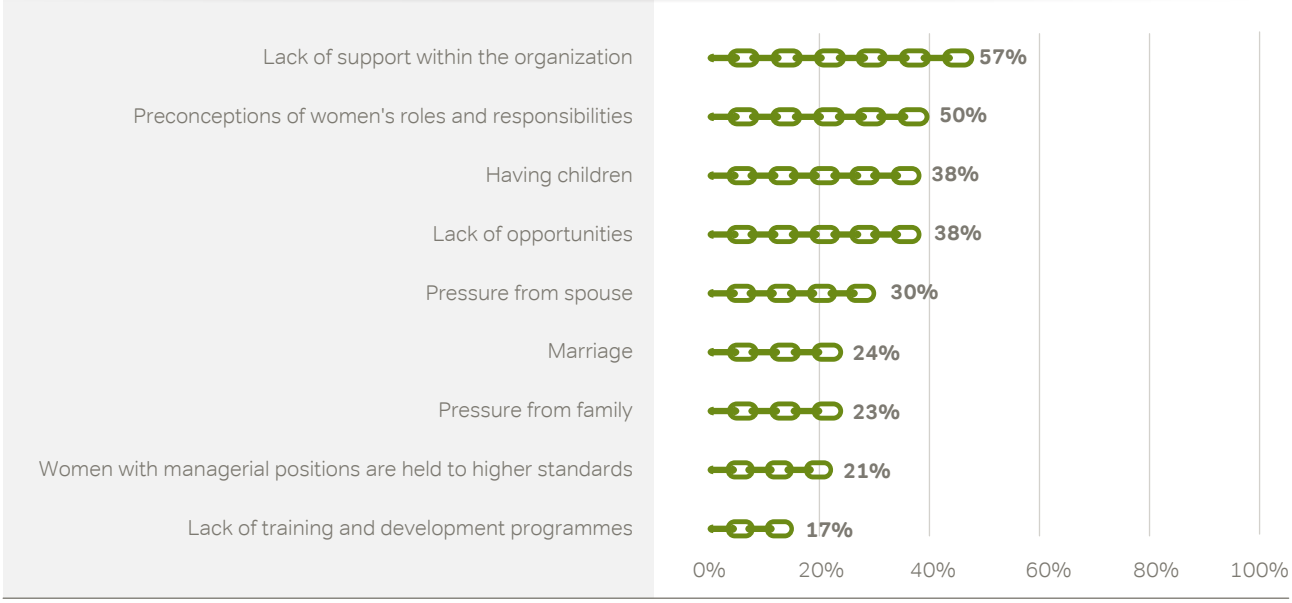
Fig. 2 Percentage of participants identifying personal motives progression



3.3 | FACTORS THAT HINDER CAREER PROGRESSION

The survey has shown that a lack of support within the organisation and preconceptions of women's roles and responsibilities are the two factors identified as hindering women's career progression the most. Having children and a lack of opportunities were other key factors, whereby almost 40% of participants surveyed identifying these as top challenges.

Fig. 3 - Percentage of participants identifying factors that hinder career progression



The survey results were in line with the findings from the one-on-one interviews where misconceptions about women's personalities and abilities were identified as key obstacles to women's progression in the workplace.

> The survey has shown that lack of support within the organisation and preconceptions of women's roles and responsibilities are the two factors identified as hindering women's career progression the most.

3.4 | FACTORS AFFECTING CAREER PROGRESSION BY SECTOR

At an industry level there are some differences in the factors that hinder women's progression in the workforce. Gender-based preconceptions and stereotypes in the sector were the most important factor for all sectors, except Finance and Investment where a lack of leadership commitment to gender diversity was identified as the top factor. A lack of requisite technical knowledge and skills was only listed as an important factor for the Energy and Environment sector. Demanding hours are perceived as an issue for all industries except Finance and Investment and lack of policies was more important for Finance and Investment and ICT and STEM sector than for other sectors.

Fig. 4 - Most Important Factors Hindering Career Advancement: Energy and Environment

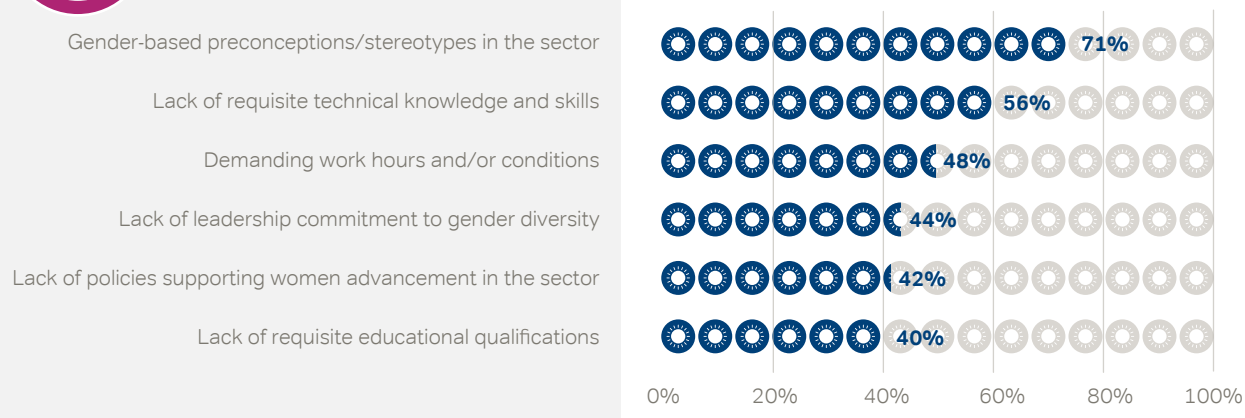


Fig. 5 - Most Important Factors Hindering Career Advancement: Finance and Investment

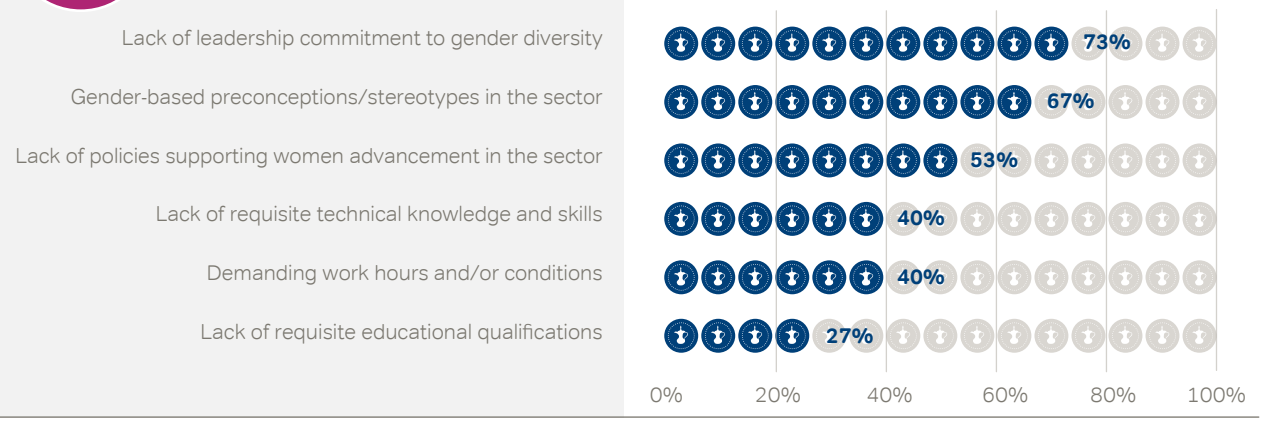


Fig. 6 - Most Important Factors Hindering Career Advancement: Healthcare and Wellness

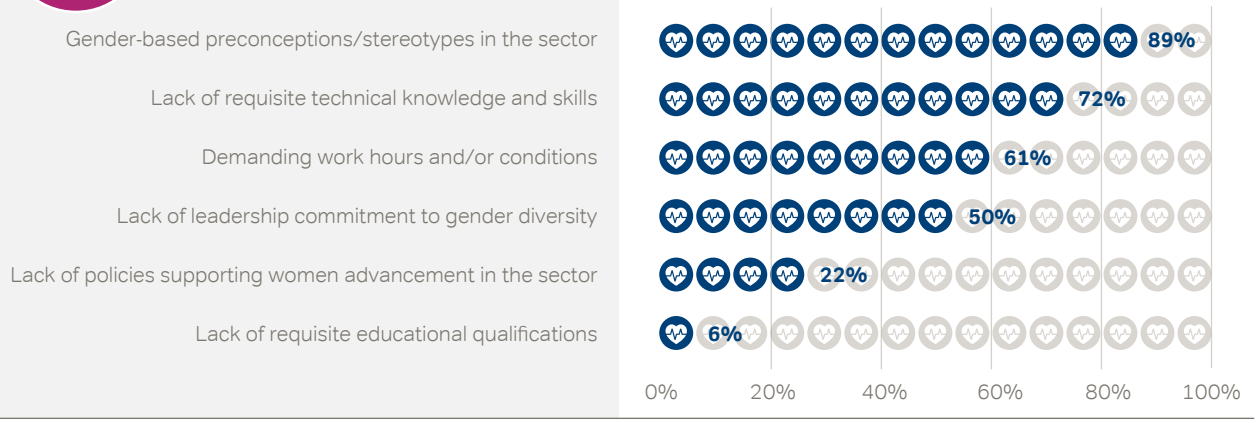
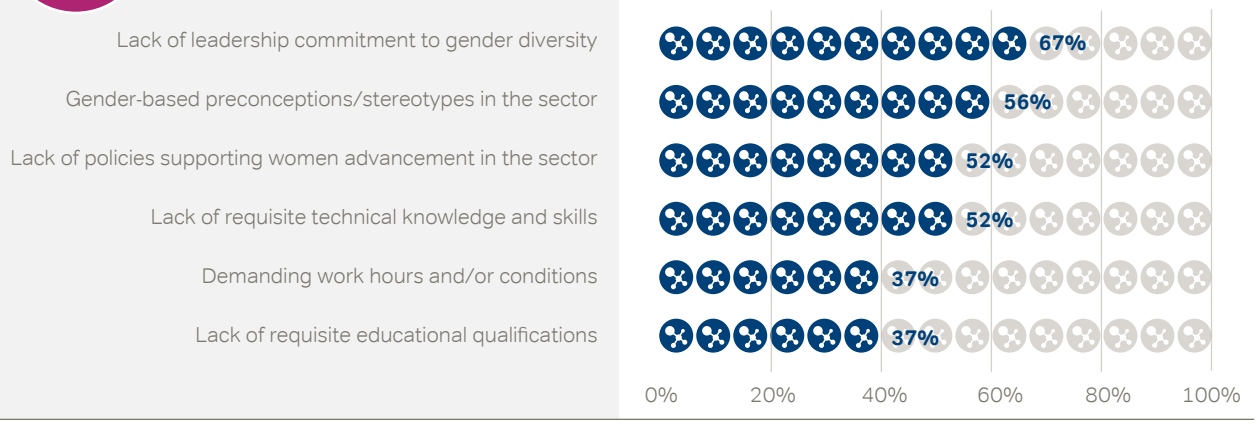


Fig. 7 - Most Important Factors Hindering Career Advancement: ICT and STEM



Additional sector-specific hindrances to women's engagement identified for the Energy and Environment sector were social and cultural barriers that limit mobility and therefore limit women's engagement in field jobs. The Finance and Investment sector is perceived as having an aggressive culture where women are viewed as being less suitable to work in the parts of the business that are more aggressive. Both sectors are often considered to be male-dominated, which can deter women entering these sectors.

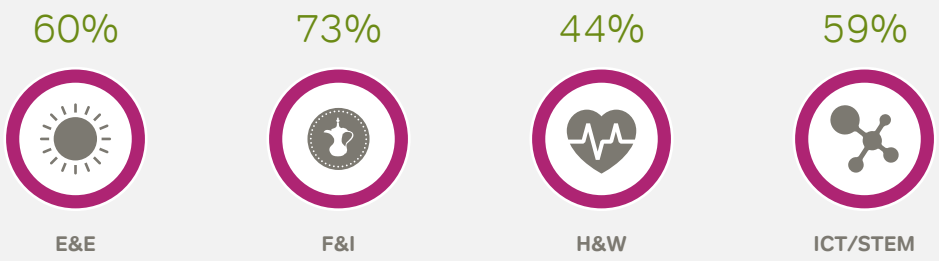
In the Health and Wellness sector, a perception of a lack of work-life balance due to demanding working hours and workload is a hindrance to career progression. In the ICT and STEM sector, stereotypes surrounding women's personalities, often viewed as soft and uncompetitive, is identified as a factor that has led to the current level of engagement of women being lower than that of male employees.

3.5 | OTHER OBSTACLES TO ENGAGEMENT OF WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

When asked about the importance of their careers, most female respondents consider their careers to be very important. On a scale of 1-6, with 6 being most important, the majority ranked their careers 5 or 6.

However, when asked if they face any personal obstacles to their career progression, aside from the Healthcare and Wellness sector, more than half responded that they do face such obstacles.

Fig. 8 - Percentage of women participants expressing the presence of personal obstacles for career progression



Of those reporting obstacles to their career progression, all agreed that they were not willing to sacrifice other aspects of life for work such as having a family. Respondents from the Healthcare and Wellness and ICT and STEM sectors specifically cite the negative effect of a career break and those from the Energy and Environment and Finance and Investment sectors consider that they do not have the required skills to move up to the next level as another hindering obstacle. Lacking sufficient confidence about their abilities was another personal obstacle pervasive across all sectors.

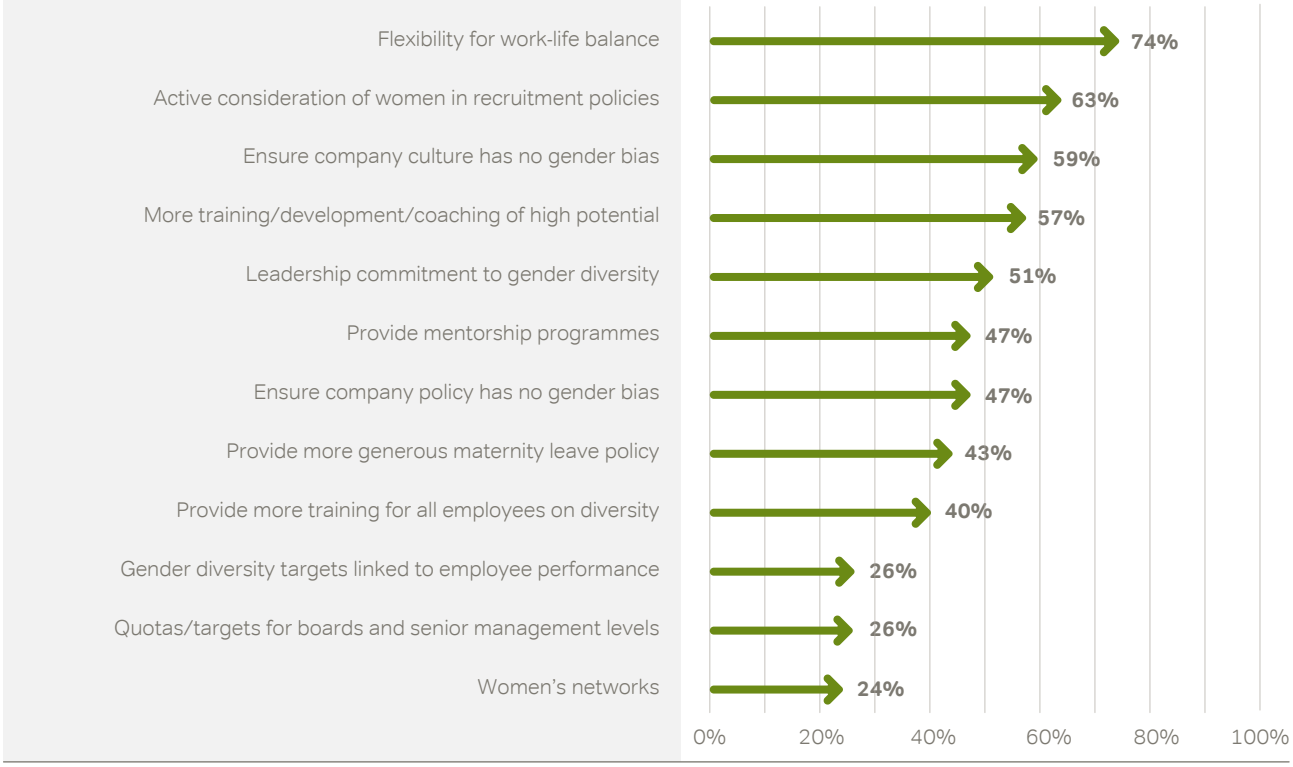
Fig. 9 – Most cited personal obstacles by participants who acknowledged their presence

Statements	Views by Sector*			
	E&E	F&I	H&W	ICT/STEM
1 I don't want to sacrifice other aspects of life for work such as family, children etc	**25%**	**21%**	**28%**	**32%**
2 I feel I do not have the required skills to move up to the next levels	**21%**	**21%**	0%	3%
3 I feel I do not have sufficient confidence	**16%**	14%	11%	**16%**
4 It's difficult for me to move location	13%	14%	6%	8%
5 Taking a career break negatively impacts my career plans	5%	7%	**28%**	**18%**
6 I do not have enough experience	6%	7%	11%	11%

3.6 | WHAT CAN ORGANISATIONS DO TO RETAIN AND DEVELOP WOMEN?

Based on the survey, 74% of respondents consider flexibility for work-life balance is the most important element in retaining and developing women, followed by recruitment policies and having a gender bias free corporate culture.

Fig. 10 – Participants preference to what organisations can do to retain and develop women



According to the data gathered during the one-on-one interviews, some initiatives that impact the retention and development of women identified include: (i) ensuring leadership commitment to gender diversity in the organisation, thereby, facilitating the creation of an organisational culture that supports the progression of women in the workplace; (ii) the involvement of men in the move to establishing a more diverse workforce in the region and tackling gender bias; (iii) spreading awareness about the existing prejudice and stereotypes and about the advantages of having a diverse workforce, particularly among youth, this will support the establishment of a future where a gender inclusive workforce is normalised; (iv) soft-skills training to build women's confidence.

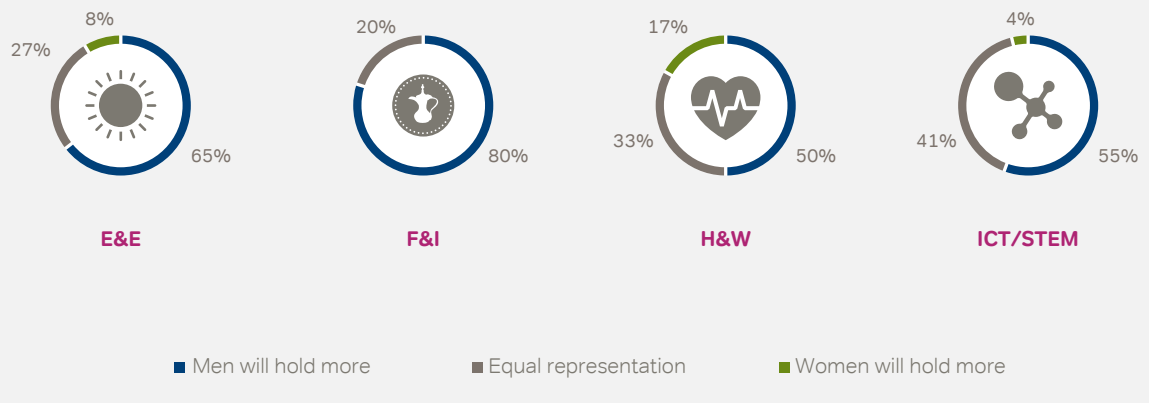
It is important to note that the Public Sector is an attractive employer for the UAE national female workforce. The sector is the main employer of Emirati women. In 2016, the leadership introduced a gender quota across all management levels in the Public Sector, including the boards of the government entities. This creates a disparity between the opportunities for women in the Public and Private Sector and for the Private Sector to be equally attractive, it will need to address the gap created by these government led interventions. Some private entities have introduced policies which mirror the government's initiative. The policies, working arrangements, compensation and benefits for the local talent in the Private Sector within each industry must adapt to have a greater appeal for Emirati women.

> Based on the survey, 74% of respondents feel that flexibility for work-life balance is the most important element in retaining and developing women.

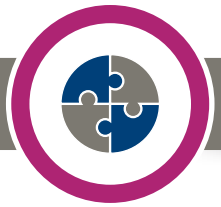
3.7 | FUTURE OUTLOOK

While the ICT and STEM sector had the lowest representation on the board and only 60% of respondents thought their organisation's leadership is actively trying to promote women to senior positions, more than 40% thought that men and women would hold the same number of managerial positions over the next five year." Respondents from the Finance and Investment sector were the least optimistic with only 20% predicting that both genders will hold an equal number of managerial positions. Most of the sectors consider that men will still hold the majority of senior positions in the next five years.

Fig. 11 - Percentage of participants by sector who predict men or women will hold more managerial positions in the future (or equal representation)



4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

A comprehensive approach that instils an organisational culture that is supportive of women is required in order to make a holistic change.

Women's engagement in the workplace is not about a one-off initiative, but rather establishing a comprehensive approach, based on data, that is tailored to the organisation. Apart from the need for organisations to start somewhere and with a sense of urgency, it is of utmost importance to introduce multi-faceted programmes that are sustainable. Sustainability is impacted by the organisation's willingness to commit to gender inclusion, the administrative feasibility and the continuous value creation of the programmes or initiatives.

PROACTIVELY DISCUSS CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSICOUS BIAS

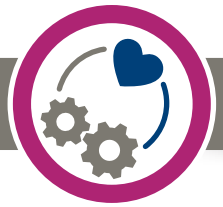
Conscious and unconscious gender bias in the workplace needs to be proactively discussed.

People's inherent biases, as well as the working environment and culture of the organisation are factors that limit the recruitment and promotion of women. Increasing the awareness that conscious and unconscious bias exists in the workforce, the way it limits diversity in an organisation and how to address it can have a positive impact on increasing the engagement of women in the workforce. This includes designing internal frameworks that identify and address all types of biases, including gender, and the impact they have on organizations.

OVERCOMING INDUSTRY STEREOTYPES

Overcoming industry stereotypes requires a commitment from the leadership.

The industry specific stereotypes, namely those most relevant in the Energy and Environment and ICT and STEM sectors, can be addressed by senior management decisions to persistently promote women into senior roles and actively increase recruitment into technical roles.



FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

A commitment to flexible working arrangements needs to be addressed.

The benefits of flexible working arrangements being incorporated into organisational policies have been established and results include improved productivity, higher retention, and gender inclusion are pervasive. Models are different and may need to adapt to industry particularities and address commonly-held attitudes that flexible working means the employee will be contributing less, and acknowledge that when implemented correctly, can have a significant impact.

PATERNITY AND MATERNITY LEAVE

Paternity and maternity leave need to be reconsidered.

One recurring theme while discussing maternity and paternity leave, is that if leave is only provided for women then it re-enforces the perception that the woman is the only caregiver. By introducing paternity leave, or by having family leave distributed amongst the couple as per their preference, opportunities would be created to address this stereotype.

4.2 | FUTURE WORK

Embracing gender parity in the workplace in the UAE and across the region ultimately serves a dual purpose: positively impacting business performance, and creating opportunities for women to be a part of every aspect of an organisation based on their chosen career path. Data-collection and evidence-based research is required to build the pool of knowledge from which effective policy, initiatives and action can be grounded. The results of this limited research suggest potentially three areas of further research:

- The varying results shown per sector establish a case for sector specific studies. A deeper analysis of each sector can generate detailed insights into the progress made, challenges and ways to address them.

- For comparative purposes and to generate consolidated outlooks for the Gulf Region, it is recommended that this study be expanded to all the countries in the Region and understand any commonalities and differences in the organisational, cultural and technical context.

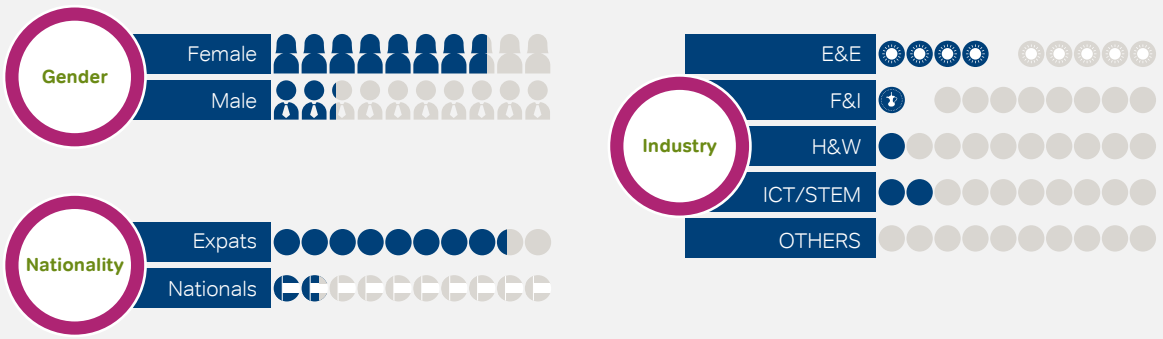
- With the region attracting a multi-national workforce, future research could analyse the perspective of both the national and expatriate workforce while juxtaposing the experiences of expatriates and nationals, as well as that of international entities operating in the region in comparison to local employers.

5.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our approach centred on the current status of women's engagement in the workforce and primary data was collected through interviews and questionnaires. The limitations of secondary data accessibility of all entities hinder the ability to validate perceptions against measurements.

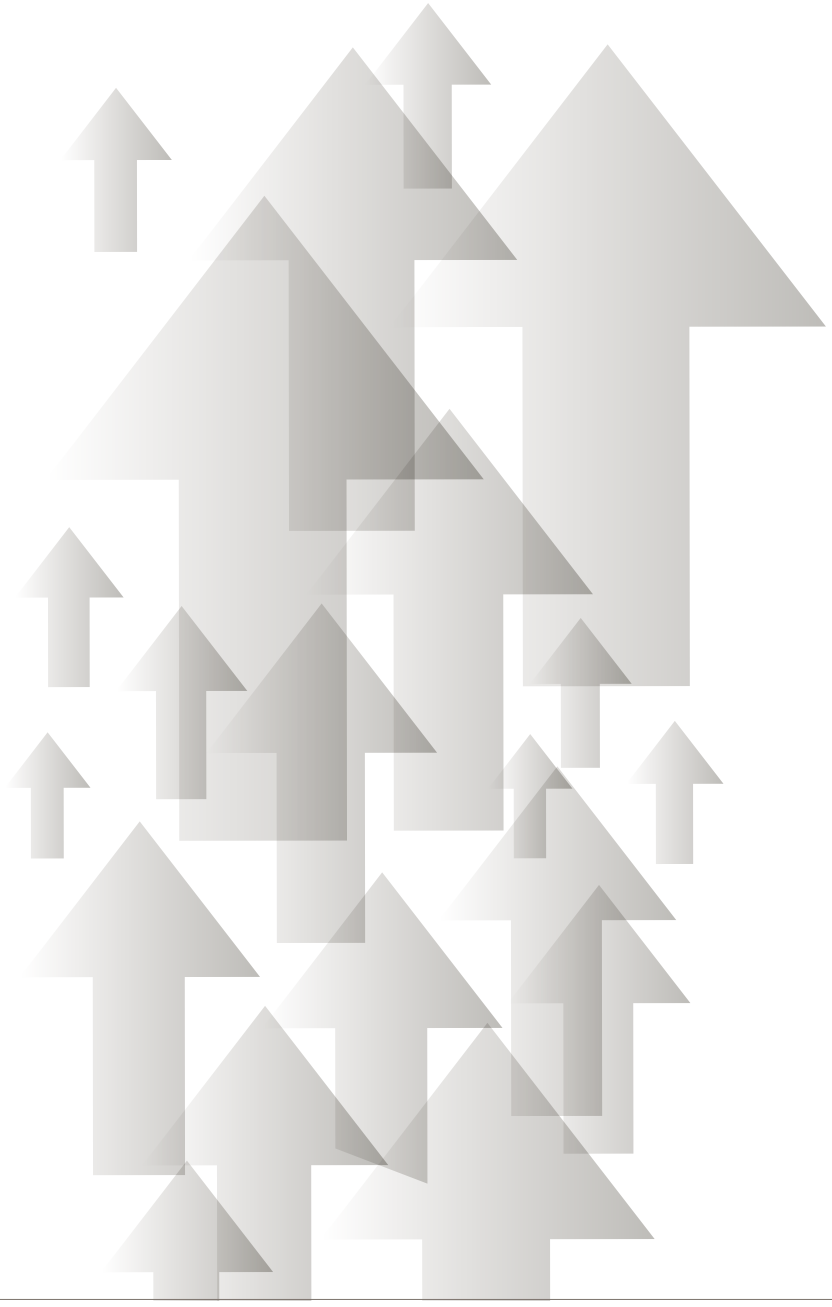
The respondents were assured of anonymity and briefed on the study objective. The participants distributions as per nationality, gender, industry, and sector are the following:

Fig. 12 - Participants by various demographic categorisations



RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The research to identify sector-specific enablers regarding women's engagement resulted in industry insights, yet certain limitations constrained the depth and breadth of the scope of the research. Insofar as demographic representation, future work will highlight the Emirati's outlook as compared to the total workforce. The research was also limited to four sectors in the UAE and thus would require complementary work if it were to portray the UAE's overall outlook comprehensively as well as that of the wider the Gulf Region. Secondary data from the participating sources was not fully disclosed in order to provide confidentiality. Aside from the constraints presented, the research set a precedent to industry specific analysis that provides a platform for further study as shall be presented.



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ABOUT NAMA WOMEN ADVANCEMENT ESTABLISHMENT

VISION

Shape an Equitable World for Women

MISSION

Enable access for women to rights, services, support systems and resources that advance them to reach their highest potential economically, professionally and socially.

OUR PURPOSE

Established by His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammad Al Qasimi, Member of the UAE Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah. NAMA is chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohammed Al Qasimi, Wife of His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah.

Our core philosophy at NAMA is to raise awareness that women are an indispensable human resource for the development of every nation. NAMA was conceived to go beyond the remit of supporting women and ensuring gender equality to a broader scope that aims to see women become influential key members of society, thereby enabling them to climb the ladder of success.

It encourages policies and legislation to support women and actively pursues programmes that support gender integration into all sectors and abolishes unjust practices and policies that discriminate against the advancement of women. Its five affiliates, Sharjah Business Women Council, Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council, NAMA Fund, Badiri Education and Development, and Anwan, fall under the umbrella of NAMA Women Advancement Establishment.

ABOUT THE PEARL INITIATIVE

OUR PURPOSE

Fostering a Corporate Culture of Accountability & Transparency in the Gulf Region

Founded in 2010, the Pearl Initiative works across the Gulf Region to improve corporate accountability and transparency. It is a regionally-focused growing network of business leaders committed to driving joint action, exhibiting positive leadership and sharing knowledge and experience, to support the regional business and student community towards implementing best practices.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

- Established in cooperation with the United Nations Office for Partnerships
- Strategic partnership with the United Nations Global Compact

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Gulf Region Focus
- Competitiveness Drive
- Non-Profit Independent Organisation
- Created by Gulf Business, for Gulf Business

APPROACH

Programmes and Research

Events & Workshops

University Collaborations

Resource Centre

KEY TOPICS OF INTEREST

Corporate Governance 360

Anti-Corruption Best Practices

Diversity in Business Leadership

Corporate Reporting Best Practices

Ethical Leadership Development

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS*

13
Regional Insight Reports

264
High-Level Regional and International Speakers

6,564
University Students Reached Through Our Workshops and Case Study Competitions

30
Universities Engaged Across the Gulf Region

95
Events and Workshops Across the Gulf Region

6,752
Business Leader Participants in Our Forums

***As of February 2018**

OUR PARTNERS*

*As of February 2018