

[Home](#) »

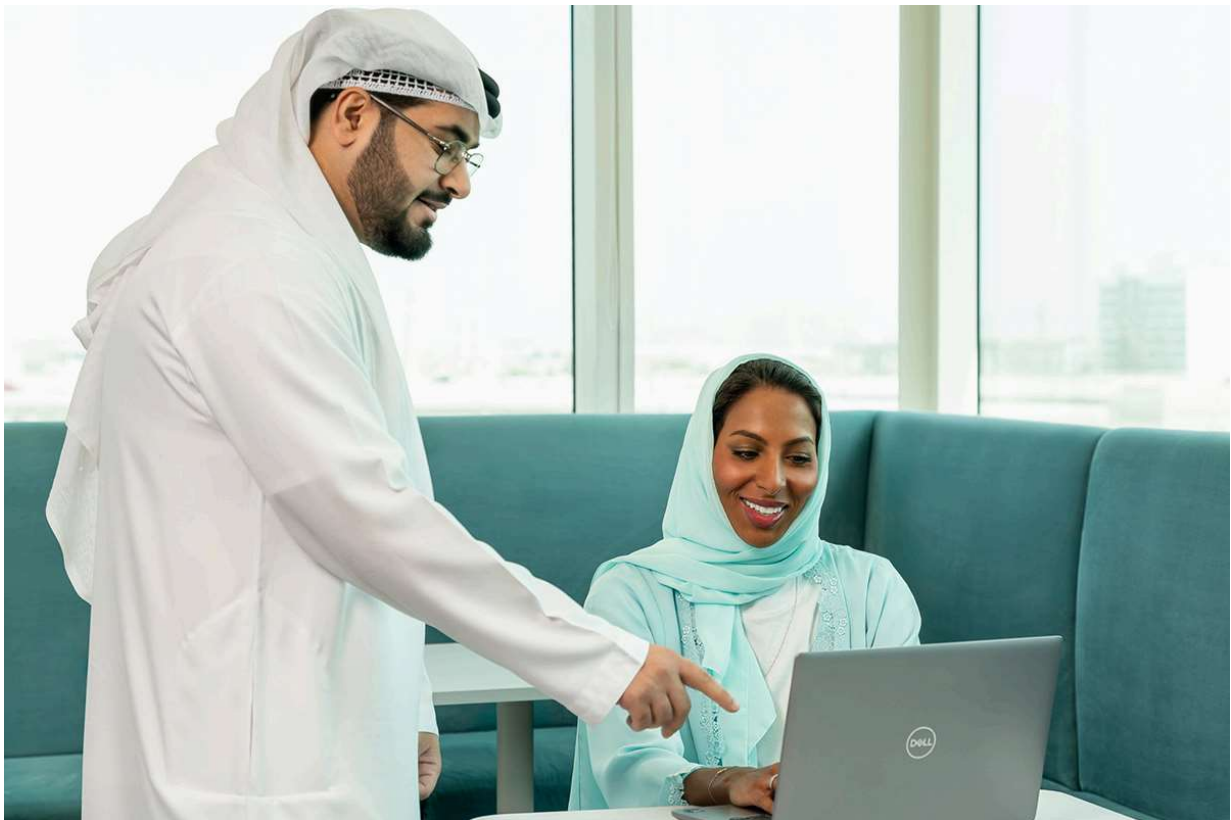
Empowering Emirati youth for tomorrow's economy

The most prominent challenge preventing young Emiratis from achieving their full potential is high competition for entry-level positions



Written By Mira Al Futtaim

Fri 7 Nov 2025



Nearly half of Emirati youth (46 per cent) said their parents were the most influential factor in shaping their career paths, far ahead of mentors, online platforms, or social media



The transformation underway across the **UAE's economic landscape** is strongly driven by ambitious visions for diversification and innovation. At the heart of this evolution lies the nation's most vital asset: its youth.

As part of our efforts to empower and develop young talent, Al-Futtaim **recently** surveyed over 500 young Emiratis between the ages of 18 to 25, to understand their thoughts and concerns when it comes to their careers. This study offers not just a snapshot of their aspirations and perceived challenges but also highlights their readiness to make the most of the

ArabianBusiness

Subscribe

Hi Amey Borkar

What emerged clearly from our research is a generation that is remarkably pragmatic and forward-thinking. Young Emiratis are not just focused on immediate job prospects; they are keenly observing the broader global landscape. A striking 42 per cent are thinking about the impact of rapid advancements in AI and automation on their careers, while 35 per cent are concerned about increased global competition for talent. This is a generation that wants to be prepared, not just for today's roles, but for the jobs of tomorrow.

Empowering the next generation: Culture, tourism and the future of youth in the UAE



As we enter this next chapter, we must ensure that young people are inspired, equipped and empowered to take on leading roles as creatives, entrepreneurs, and active contributors to these thriving ecosystems



Arabian Business: Latest News on the Middle East, Real Estate, Finance, and More

However, this foresight is coupled with significant perceived barriers. The most prominent challenge preventing young Emiratis from achieving their full potential is high competition for entry-level positions (33 per cent). This is compounded by a perceived lack of experience  practical skills (28 per

cent) and a lack of awareness about diverse careers (29 per cent). These findings point to a critical disconnect: a highly aware and ambitious cohort facing structural hurdles in accessing the very opportunities they are preparing for.

The solution, as highlighted by the youth themselves, lies in practical, hands-on development. Young Emiratis are actively seeking more direct support to advance their careers. Their top demands include more internship and mentorship opportunities (30 per cent) and improved access to information about job market trends (29 per cent). This is a clear signal to employers, educators and policymakers: theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient. The path to future-proofing our talent lies in experiential learning, real-world exposure, and transparent career guidance.

Our survey also reveals that a significant 36 per cent of young Emiratis are open to working abroad, with an additional 15 per cent open to short-term international roles. While 20 per cent prefer to stay in the UAE, this openness to global experience highlights their ambition and desire for diverse learning opportunities. This global outlook is a tremendous asset for the UAE, fostering cross-cultural understanding and bringing back invaluable international best practices.

However, it also presents a challenge for talent retention. To ensure that the UAE remains the first-choice destination for its brightest minds, we must proactively cultivate a domestic job market that is not only robust but also globally competitive in terms of opportunity and career progression. This means offering roles that provide the same level of challenge, exposure, and growth that might be sought overseas.

The insights from our survey, further enriched by discussions at our recent roundtable with key stakeholders from government, academia, and the private sector, highlight that supporting youth is about more than creating jobs, it is about reshaping the entire talent ecosystem.

One of the most striking findings was the central role of families in career decisions. Nearly half of Emirati youth (46 per cent) said their parents were the most influential factor in shaping their career paths, far ahead of mentors, online platforms, or social media. For employers and educators,

this means engaging parents is just as important as engaging students. Transparent communication about career pathways, role models in the private sector, and family-inclusive career events can go a long way in shifting perceptions.

At the same time, systemic challenges remain. Pension disparities continue to deter many from seeing private sector roles as long-term options, with (41 per cent) explicitly citing concerns about financial security. Until these issues are addressed through reforms that create equity and portability across sectors, the private sector will struggle to compete with the security of government employment.

Equally urgent is the question of timing. Too many young people face critical career choices without sufficient exposure to the workplace. Roundtable participants noted that as many as (90 per cent) of Grade 11–12 students lack clear career direction, with (80 per cent) still choosing their studies based on family preference rather than aptitude or market needs. By embedding structured internships, micro-internships, and mentorship as early as secondary school, we can help students make informed decisions and develop the soft skills such as resilience, adaptability, and collaboration, that employers consistently value.

We are already seeing innovative approaches. From gamified career development programmes to cross-industry mentorship networks, companies and universities are experimenting with new ways to connect ambition with opportunity. These initiatives not only meet the practical needs of youth but also tap into their strong desire for purpose. Contributing to the nation's growth is seen by many as just as important as financial reward, and when organisations align their missions with national priorities like AI, sustainability, and innovation, they inspire a generation to lead with pride.

Beyond this, fostering an innovation ecosystem within companies that encourages entrepreneurship and continuous learning will align with the youth's desire for dynamic workplaces. Ultimately, strengthening domestic opportunities to offer competitive growth and exposure to cutting-edge



projects will ensure a fulfilling work environment that can rival international prospects.

The future of the UAE's economy is tied to its ability to empower its next generation. By understanding their aspirations, addressing their perceived barriers, and proactively building an ecosystem that fosters practical skills, innovation, and global competitiveness, we can ensure that young Emiratis are not just participants but true leaders in shaping the nation's successful future.

Author

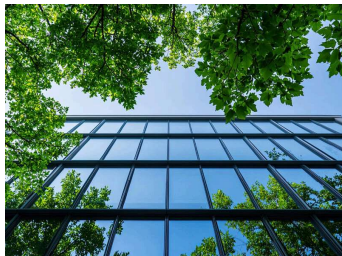


Mira Al Futtaim

Mira Al Futtaim, Chief Future Education Officer at Al-Futtaim Education Foundation and Chairwoman of Emiratisation at Al-Futtaim.

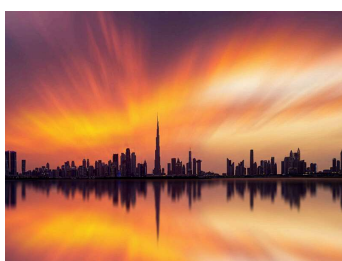
[View all posts](#)

More of this topic



Opinion

Planting change: Why the future of sustainability lies in partnerships of credibility and creativity



Opinion

Dubai's real estate market isn't crashing, it's correcting – and that's good news for investors





Opinion

Saudi's transformation, stress-tested and more focused

Latest News



Banking & Finance

Aqua Labs backs UAE's Vision 2030 with launch of \$20mn startup fund



Banking & Finance

Alpha Dhabi sells 8.5% Modon stake to Abu Dhabi government's L'imad Holding



Banking & Finance

ADNOC Distribution delivers its strongest EBITDA since IPO for Q3

Latest News

Dubai News

Real Estate

Industry

Travel & Hospitality

Subscription Plans

Privacy Policy

Terms of Use

Copyright © 2025. ITP Media Group. All Rights Reserved

