

IDEATION CENTER INSIGHT

# The trends shaping the UAE's youth sector after the COVID-19 pandemic



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## The Emirates Youth Council

The Emirates Youth Council (EYC) is an independent council that serves as an advisory body to Cabinet. The EYC provides a channel for the government to continuously listen to the challenges, aspirations and recommendations of Youth, as well as advises UAE Leadership on policies, strategies and initiatives to enable and empower Youth. The Council also serves as an advisor on policy and strategy to the Federal Youth Authority, focusing on national-level youth engagement and coordination with relevant stakeholders from the private and public sectors.

The EYC consists of seven members who represent the different Emirates of the UAE; the Council is headed by HE Shamma Al Mazrui, Minister of State for Youth Affairs. The EYC was established by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and ruler of Dubai, in February 2016, as a unique tool to ensure Youth represent their points of view and needs at all stages of the policy development process.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Today, youth represent the largest demographic in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with nearly 50 percent of the UAE population being between the ages of 15 and 35.<sup>1</sup> This is the largest number of young people to transition to adulthood in the country's history.**

UAE youth are living during unprecedented times. Volatile oil prices and a protracted pandemic have accelerated change in all sectors and industries and fast-tracked the arrival of Industry 4.0 (advanced, connected manufacturing), which will further change the nature of work and require new skills and competencies.

Strategy& worked with the Emirates Youth Council to identify and synthesize the top 10 trends that have been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and that will shape the UAE's youth sector over the next decade.

By understanding these trends, the relevant entities can tailor the right policy responses to each trend, thereby adequately supporting UAE youth to overcome the challenges they face and create socioeconomic opportunities. These trends also serve as key considerations for UAE youth when making critical decisions for their future.

Investing in youth and creating the right conditions to help them realize their full potential is essential to future-proof the economy. While the last 50 years of the UAE was built by natural resources and oil, the next 50 will be built by the most important part of its human capital, its youth.

This report includes ten key trends, under five key themes:

### **Education and Human Capital**

1. Digitized, personalized, and life-long education

### **Employment and Productivity**

2. Agile, entrepreneurial, and resilient workforce

### **Health and Safety**

3. Enhanced attention to healthier lifestyles
4. Elevated mental fortitude

### **Society and Sustainability**

5. Mindful consumption and shifting financial habits
6. Sustainable, resource-efficient lifestyles
7. Strong social cohesion

### **Citizenship**

8. Social protection, inclusion, and empowerment
9. Values-driven, socially responsible youth
10. Civic participation through innovative channels



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■ Education and Human Capital    
 ■ Health and Safety    
 ■ Citizenship  
■ Employment and Productivity    
 ■ Society and Sustainability



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# YOUTH

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The large youth population in the UAE represents an opportunity for the country. In 2020, nearly 50 percent UAE's population was between the ages of 15 and 35, a group that will shape the country's socioeconomic development.

The rapid acceleration in the development and adoption of new technologies is driving change in all sectors and industries. New technologies and the transition to Industry 4.0 are changing the nature of work, and the skills and competencies required in a digital age. Education systems therefore need to keep pace with these new technologies so that the workforce has the skills the economy requires.

However, with the right policy measures and effective youth engagement, the relevant entities can turn these youth challenges into opportunities, leading to a stronger and more inclusive economy and society. An engaged youth cohort can be a powerful force for change, leading to innovation and economic growth. Already, the UAE has launched an array of initiatives and policies to support youth in different areas of development, including appointing a young person as the Minister of State for Youth and forming the Emirates Youth Council, the consultative branch of the UAE government focusing on Emirati youth.

The Emirates Youth Council partnered with Strategy& to synthesize 10 trends that have been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and that will shape the UAE's youth sector over the next decade (*Exhibit 1, page 4*). We then developed priorities for both young people and the relevant entities in response to these trends.

## EXHIBIT 1

### The top 10 youth trends



① Digitized, personalized, and life-long education

② Agile, entrepreneurial, and resilient workforce

③ Enhanced attention to healthier lifestyles

④ Elevated mental fortitude

⑤ Mindful consumption and shifting financial habits

Sustainable, resource-efficient lifestyles

Strong social cohesion

Social protection, inclusion, and empowerment

Values-driven, socially responsible youth

Civic participation through innovative channels

Source: Strategy&

### 1. DIGITIZED, PERSONALIZED, AND LIFE-LONG EDUCATION

#### The UAE's current situation

The UAE has a high graduation rate from upper secondary education of 98 percent,<sup>2</sup> higher than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 80 percent.<sup>3</sup> In 2020, 28 percent of UAE students graduated in science and engineering.<sup>4</sup> To further increase this percentage, the government has launched education reforms and national strategic measures, such as the Advanced Sciences Agenda and the Fourth Industrial Revolution strategy.<sup>5</sup> In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UAE introduced remote teaching for all schools and universities after March 2020, thereby allowing around 1.1 million students to stay home. The country was able to do so because it had invested in the necessary technologies.

#### The future outlook

##### 1. Distance e-learning and digitization will transform the education ecosystem

Globally, spending is growing on education technology (see *Exhibit 2*). Digitization, personalized data, and e-learning will transform the education ecosystem. Collaboration apps will provide blended and community-based learning. Chatbots enabled by artificial intelligence (AI) will support self-paced, personalized, and adaptive learning. Augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), extended reality (XR), and gamification will make online learning more immersive, motivating, and effective. Assessment services will go beyond standardized tests to encompass digital badges that help students build a portfolio of digital skills and achievements.

##### 2. Education pathways will become more personalized and flexible

Flexible curricula and personalized learning will create “classroom 2.0,” or “education clouds.” The role of established education, especially formal degrees, will likely diminish.<sup>6</sup> Students will customize their learning experiences through flexible engagement models. For example, there will be a hybrid of in-person enrollment, independent distance study opportunities, and increased experiential learning, all tailored to the needs of individual students. The rapid growth of massive online open courses, such as the offerings of Coursera and UDEMY, will foster life-long and deep learning experiences that enable people to expand their professional and personal development and get college-credit classes without incurring significant debt.

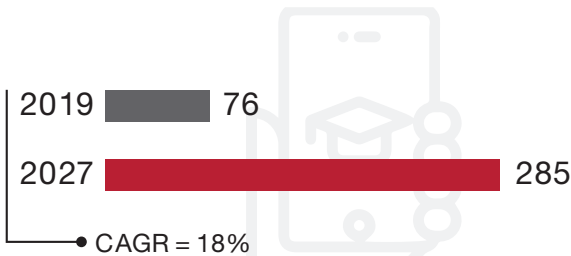


3. Transdisciplinary learning and cross-disciplinary skills will become even more critical

STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math)-based education will become more prevalent to prepare students for Industry 4.0 jobs and the more flexible economy. Schools and governments will focus on developing technological and computational skills in areas such as big data, machine learning, and cloud computing, along with soft skills such as empathy, design thinking, agility, communication, and creative thinking. Vocational education and training, and innovative university courses taught by industry leaders, such as Harbour Space University in Barcelona, play a critical role by adapting their offerings to emerging industries.

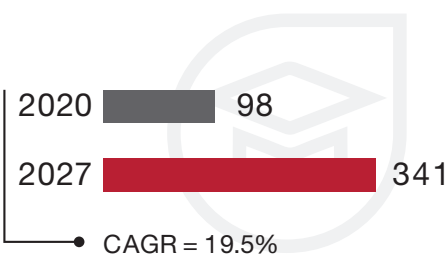
EXHIBIT 2  
Global spending on education technology and digital badge initiatives is rising

Global education technology market size  
[US\$ Bn]



Note: CAGR = compound annual growth rate.  
Source: Grand Review Research, "Market Analysis Report," July 2020

Global digital badges market  
[US\$ Mn]



Note: CAGR = compound annual growth rate.  
Source: Report Linker, "Global Digital Badges Industry," September 2020



## 1. DIGITIZED, PERSONALIZED, AND LIFE-LONG EDUCATION

### YOUTH PRIORITIES

01

Be ready for Industry 4.0, ramp up on emerging technology, and become an early adopter of the skills of tomorrow

02

Enroll in STEAM disciplines and pursue life-long learning and skills improvement programs through online courses and micro-credentials

03

Seek private-sector internship opportunities and participate in entrepreneurship programs, digital bootcamps, and hackathons

### POLICY PRIORITIES

01

Continue investment in digital education, partner with technology- and innovation-focused universities to offer on-demand, innovative Industry 4.0 courses

02

Partner with large technology corporations to provide youth with internship and apprenticeship opportunities

03

Develop an accredited digital badge system to certify youth skills and achievements

## 2. AGILE, ENTREPRENEURIAL, AND RESILIENT WORKFORCE

### The UAE's current situation

The nature of work is changing faster than are education systems, and education systems need to adapt to prepare youth for the jobs of the future (*Exhibit 3*). UAE youth still show a preference for jobs in the public sector. According to the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Center in 2019, 78.2 percent of employed UAE nationals worked in federal and local government entities, while 11.9 percent worked in semi-government entities, and only 8 percent worked in the private sector,<sup>7</sup> a figure that needs to grow to support the UAE's development and diversification. With regards to entrepreneurship, the UAE came fourth globally, and was the highest in the GCC region, in the Global Entrepreneurship Index 2020. The UAE's ranking improved after it came second in terms of how a national government responded to the pandemic lockdown and the effect on entrepreneurship activity.<sup>8</sup>

### The future outlook

#### 1. Remote and digital working will be the new normal

The COVID-19-induced shift to remote working is changing work exponentially and permanently.<sup>9</sup> In the UAE, remote working protocols allow government employees to work outside their offices, either fully or partially. The adoption of emerging technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT, the network of connected devices), 5G, holographic rendering, and AI will scale up and create seamless ways to work remotely. VR and XR will enable the creation of immersive office spaces and conferences.

#### 2. The gig economy and liquid workforces will become more prevalent

Continued technological innovations and automation will render low-skill workers redundant and increase the demand for highly skilled talent. The gig economy, comprising independent freelance projects and fluid workforces and roles, will create a state of continuous change in the work environment. Employee sharing, in which an employee is hired by multiple employers, and job sharing, in which an employer hires multiple employees to jointly fill a specific job, will become more widespread. Crowd employment, in which an online platform matches employers and workers, will also enable tasks to be split up among a "virtual cloud" of workers.<sup>10</sup> This will require agility among employees and the flexibility to grow through "just-in-time" learning and adaptive re-skilling to keep pace.



### 3. The generation now joining the workforce will be the most entrepreneurial and innovative yet

Some 55 percent of youth in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)<sup>11</sup> and 40 percent of Arab youth plan to become entrepreneurs.<sup>12</sup> The “de-institutionalized economy,” along with technological innovations and new business models, will entice youth to pursue their passions and tap into a whole ecosystem of services that support entrepreneurs. They will take part in the “maker movement” that places value on individuals’ ability to create things. They will look for work that fuels their sense of purpose, freedom, innovation, individuality, and ownership. They are digital natives who are already CEOs of their personal brands.<sup>13</sup> They will seek coaches over managers and fluid career paths over predefined boundaries.

#### EXHIBIT 3

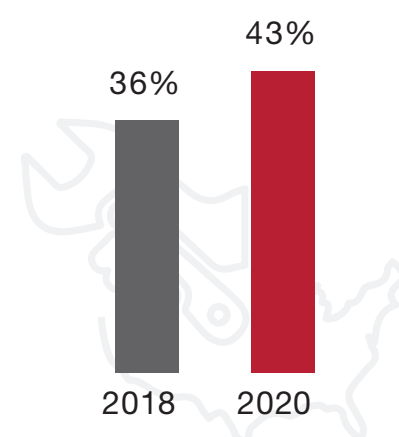
#### The nature of work is changing

##### Future of jobs in numbers [2022]

Share of workforce needing re-skilling/skills improvement	54%
Share of companies expecting to cut permanent workforce	50%
Share of companies expecting to hire specialist contractors	48%
Share of companies expecting to grow workforce	38%
Share of companies expecting automation to grow workforce	28%
Jobs projected to be displaced	75 million
Jobs projected to be created	133 million
Share of total task hours performed by machines in 2017	29%
Share of total task hours performed by machines in 2022	42%
Share of total task hours performed by machines in 2025	52%

Source: Oliver Cann, “Machines Will Do More Tasks Than Humans by 2025 but Robot Revolution Will Still Create 58 Million Net New Jobs in Next Five Years,” World Economic Forum, September 17, 2018

##### Gig workforce in the U.S. [share of the workforce]



Source: I. Mitic, “Gig Economy Statistics 2020: The New Normal in the Workplace,” Fortunly, May 20, 2020



## 2. AGILE, ENTREPRENEURIAL, AND RESILIENT WORKFORCE

### YOUTH PRIORITIES

01

Stay ahead of the employment curve; explore alternate career pathways across emerging industries — particularly in the private sector — and subscribe to job platforms

02

Boost digital, data-analytics, innovation, design, entrepreneurial, and soft skills

03

Turn startup ideas into reality; identify fast-growing industries and sectors for entrepreneurship, along with financing, infrastructure, and mentoring opportunities; participate in startup challenges to test and refine business ideas

### POLICY PRIORITIES

01

Launch a skills-swap model between the government and the private sector

02

Expand career guidance, mentorship, job-shadowing, and tailored employment assistance to UAE youth, and subsidize capability development programs

03

Foster a youth entrepreneurship ecosystem and enhance access to financing opportunities for young entrepreneurs and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

### 3. ENHANCED ATTENTION TO HEALTHIER LIFESTYLES

#### The UAE's current situation

Healthcare is one of the most important service sectors in the UAE, and a recipient of major government and private-sector investment and innovation. Consequently, Dubai ranks as the main medical tourism destination in the region and the sixth most preferred in the world.<sup>14</sup> As of May 2021, almost 70 percent of people eligible for the Covid-19 vaccination in the UAE have been inoculated against the virus, according to the latest information from the National Crisis and Emergency Management Authority (NCEMA).<sup>15</sup> The UAE has been investing heavily in its healthcare systems and in medical technology by allocating approximately AED 4.8 billion (US\$1.3 billion) from the federal budget to healthcare in 2020.<sup>16</sup> However, UAE youth still face some challenges related to their physical well-being. For instance, 82 percent of the population between 11 and 17 does not get enough physical activity,<sup>17</sup> and 70 percent of male adults under 30 are overweight or obese.<sup>18</sup> According to the WHO, cardiovascular diseases account for 40 percent of the country's deaths,<sup>19</sup> and there is a high incidence of type 2 diabetes.<sup>20</sup>

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health has been limited in the UAE, due to the proactive and integrated approaches adopted by the government. The UAE set up the largest COVID-19 detection lab in the world outside of China,<sup>21</sup> and it ranks high in per-capita testing rates and second globally in the vaccine administration rates.

#### The future outlook

##### 1. Fitness will become more holistic and more digitally enhanced

Youth in general put a higher priority on being physically fit due to peer pressure and the influence of social media. They also understand the value of prevention against such lifestyle conditions as obesity and cardiovascular diseases. Youth are using new technologies to create a broader definition of fitness, which encompasses whole-body health, rather than limiting it to weight loss. This is enabled by the disruption of the fitness industry in recent years by technological innovations.<sup>22</sup> The future of fitness is therefore becoming holistic, and increasingly accurate, digitally enhanced, and personalized, and accessible for all. For instance, there is growing adoption of continuous glucose monitors that provide real-time readings, wearable biosensors that continuously measure vital signs, and smart clothing that tracks exposure to harmful UV rays. While the wider use of enhanced fitness offerings that draw upon data to provide accessible and affordable real-time tracking and identify disease early on is important, what matters is that more and more users will use such technologies in the future, not just those with underlying conditions.

##### 2. Diets and dietary guidance will become personalized

Youth will pay more attention to nutrition. One-size-fits-all approaches to address obesity, diabetes, and other preventable diseases are being overtaken by personalized nutrition that uses tech innovations and AI to offer tailored dietary guidance based on individual biochemistry,

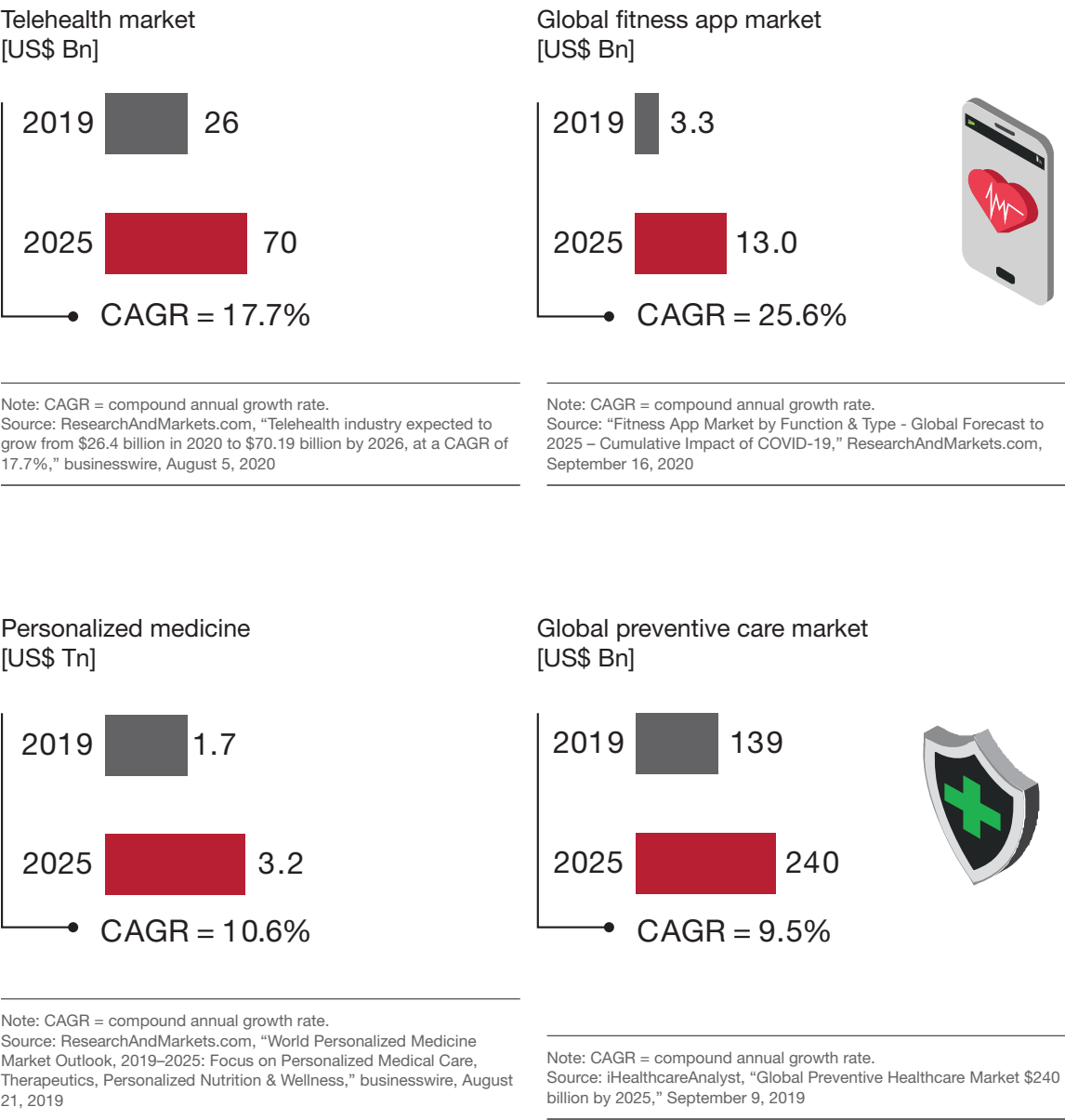


genetics, and metabolism.<sup>23</sup> In addition, youth will increasingly pay a premium for healthy products, such as all-natural, sustainable, and vitamin-fortified food.<sup>24</sup>

3. Medical technologies will deliver data-driven preventive care, and improve longevity

Emerging technologies that have gathered momentum due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as genomics and telemedicine, have the potential to revolutionize healthcare (see *Exhibit 4*). Regenerative medicine will replace or repair damaged tissues. AI will be used for disease diagnosis, VR for pain management and rehabilitation, 3D printing for implants and prosthetics, and robot-based surgeries for more precision. “Beyond the pill” solutions may include more direct patient interaction, digital patient interfaces, and continuous engagements with patients throughout their healthcare journeys.

EXHIBIT 4  
Globally, healthcare is becoming personalized, preventive, and data-driven



### 3. ENHANCED ATTENTION TO HEALTHIER LIFESTYLES

## YOUTH PRIORITIES

01

Take personal responsibility for your own health through such healthy lifestyle habits as exercise, healthy eating, adequate sleep, and mindfulness practices

02

Set physical activity prompts and goals that are specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and within a time frame

03

Adopt telemedicine and personalized healthcare and use point-of-care diagnostics, biosensors, and trackers for preventive medicine

## POLICY PRIORITIES

01

Expand green urban spaces and built walking and cycling paths to promote active lifestyles

02

Continue to promote the use of digital healthcare applications such as telemedicine by public hospitals and other local healthcare providers

03

Introduce pilot programs to enhance personalized healthcare offerings

### 4. ELEVATED MENTAL FORTITUDE

#### The UAE's current situation

Globally and regionally, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of mental health and building resilience. According to the Arab Youth Survey 2019, 54 percent of young Arabs believe that quality medical care for mental illnesses such as anxiety or depression is difficult to access (the figure declines to 28 percent if considering only GCC countries). Cultural and social stigmas lead to under-reporting of mental health-related problems — some 50 percent of Arab youth say that there is a stigma around seeking medical care for mental health issues, although the figure declines to 36 percent in the GCC. Additionally, 16 percent of GCC youth consider that family issues are the main driver of stress in their daily life.<sup>25</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the mental health challenge, depriving people of social relationships and fostering feelings of loneliness and sadness. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UAE launched a national campaign for mental support for all UAE residents in April 2020, followed by a free national helpline to help those struggling with the stress, fear, and anxiety.<sup>26</sup>

#### The future outlook

##### 1. Mental health issues will lose their stigma

As awareness grows, the stigma around mental health will diminish among younger people. They will begin treating mental health issues in the same way they do medical issues. Multisystem therapy that focuses on addressing all environmental factors that affect young people's mental health will gain influence. Employers will also realize that employees' mental well-being is critical for business continuity. Depression and anxiety are estimated to cost the global economy \$1 trillion per year in lost productivity. Every \$1 invested in the treatment of mental disorders generates a return of \$4 in improved health and productivity.<sup>27</sup>

##### 2. More effective treatment strategies will be adopted

The spreading awareness about the need to address mental health issues will facilitate the earlier identification of such problems and stress the importance of early interventions. Healthcare professionals and others will get better at identifying markers for mental illness. Furthermore, multifaceted treatments, combining medical treatments with counseling sessions, will use new technologies (e.g., telepsychiatry, remote monitoring). More effective medical treatments will become available. For instance, electroconvulsive therapy is being replaced by Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation, which has proven to be highly effective and results in less side effects than older therapies.<sup>28</sup>



### 3. Technology will provide on-demand and more accessible health services

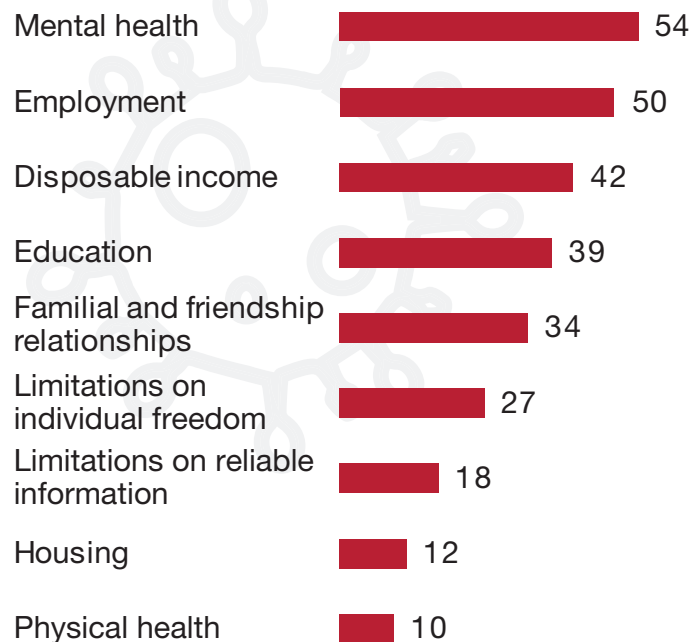
Tech-enabled, mental health-related solutions will offer better care to a wider range of people (see *Exhibit 5*). AI-based chatbots can check on patients and recommend activities based on a person's condition. Mindfulness apps can equip people with preventive tools to avoid mental health issues. Telepsychiatry will link patients to healthcare professionals. Other multimedia, web-based programs can solve work-related stress with mobile support from an eCoach.

#### EXHIBIT 5

#### As mental health concerns grow, tech-enabled solutions are proliferating

Youth Greatest Concerns

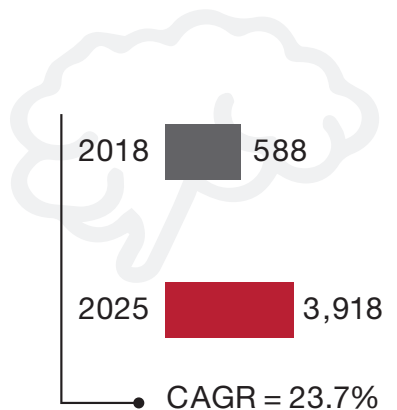
[% of youth who responded to the survey]



Source: "Youth and COVID-19: Response, recovery, and resilience; OECD Survey on COVID-19 and Youth," OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19), June 11, 2020

Mental Health Apps Market

[US\$ Mn]



Note: CAGR = compound annual growth rate.  
Source: "Mental Health Apps Market Accounted for US\$587.9 million in 2018 and is Expected to Generate a Revenue of US\$3918.4 million by 2027, at a growth rate of 23.7% from 2019–2027," CISION PR Newswire, February 3, 2020

#### 4. ELEVATED MENTAL FORTITUDE

### YOUTH PRIORITIES

01

Build mental fortitude and resilience; recognize the importance of maintaining a lifelong, healthy state of mind and learn about the early symptoms of mental distress before they lead to illness

02

Break down mental health stigmas; support people who speak about their challenges and get involved in youth mental health networks

03

Build a community of like-minded people to pursue hobbies, build kinship, and avoid loneliness and isolation

### POLICY PRIORITIES

01

Strengthen mental health awareness in communities; implement strategies to reduce mental health stigma

02

Develop and expand comprehensive, integrated, and responsive mental health services; launch diversified, accessible, tech-enabled mental health solutions

03

Strengthen multi-sectoral collaboration to mainstream “mental” well-being in policies, programs, and initiatives, at all levels of government and the private sector

### 5. MINDFUL CONSUMPTION AND SHIFTING FINANCIAL HABITS

#### The UAE's current situation

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a deep impact on changing consumer attitudes, behaviors, and preferences. Youth are reassessing their spending habits and focusing on saving for the future.<sup>29</sup> The UAE is considered as one of the most advanced e-commerce markets in the Middle East and North Africa with a penetration rate of 4.2 percent, and the largest annual spending per online shopper at \$1,6248, thanks to its young population and its enthusiastic adoption of digital technology and social media.<sup>30</sup> Given these changes in consumer habits, it is important for youth to improve their financial literacy and planning skills.

#### The future outlook

##### 1. Youth will focus less on immediate gratification and more on financial accountability

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the trend toward mindful consumption, which is leading to the broad adoption of a “waste-nothing” mentality. Youth will become less materialistic and reduce their luxury and discretionary spending. A generation of supersavers will emerge as they will seek to hoard money or invest in cryptocurrencies to hedge against financial uncertainties.<sup>31</sup>

##### 2. The sharing economy will have to be reinvented

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a decline in usage rates for sharing-economy apps, such as Airbnb, Uber, and Zipcar due to health concerns. However, the underlying need remains strong, and the sharing economy will likely resume growing once the pandemic abates, provided companies reinvent their service offerings (see *Exhibit 6*). As the appetite for the sharing-economy increases, so will e-commerce. Carpooling companies will offer self-drive options, and co-working organizations will offer more space per employee. Moreover, temporary access and temporary use of assets are gaining relevance. For instance, despite the pandemic, the global online clothing rental industry is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 8.7 percent from 2020 to 2025.<sup>32</sup>

### 3. Immersive digital experiences, and consumption of local products, will increase

The entertainment and media industries are shifting to immersive digital experiences and innovative offerings. For example, online gaming, virtual museums, and online concerts are gaining popularity.

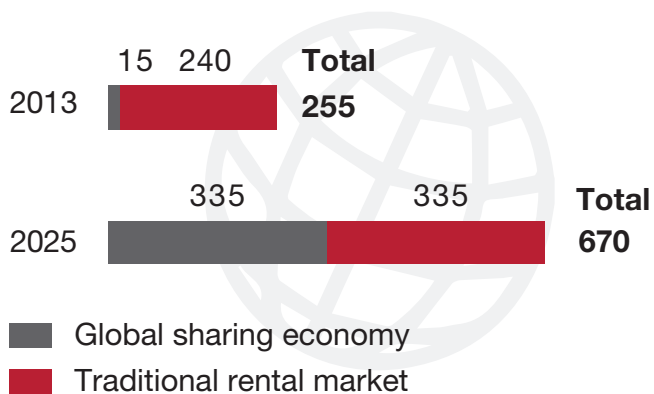
Companies will also increasingly shift from the sale of products to providing services and experiences, including subscription-based models to boost consumer engagement. Moreover, there will be increased interest in gaming and e-sports, such as Amazon's Recommendation Engine and Spotify's Account Customization.<sup>33</sup>

Simultaneously, local products and brands will become a necessity due to the reversal of globalization and localization of supply chains, and also to support home-grown brands and foster national pride.<sup>34</sup>

#### EXHIBIT 6

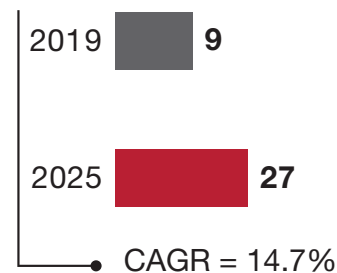
#### The sharing economy is growing much faster than the traditional rental market

Size of global sharing economy vs. traditional rental market [US\$ Bn]



Source: "Sharing or paring? Growth of the sharing economy," PwC, 2015

E-commerce market size [US\$ Tr]



Note: CAGR = compound annual growth rate.

Source: Grand View Research, "E-commerce Market Size, Share and Trends Analysis Report By Model Type, By Region, and Segment Forecasts, 2020-2027," May 2020



## 5. MINDFUL CONSUMPTION AND SHIFTING FINANCIAL HABITS

### YOUTH PRIORITIES

01

Be financially responsible and financially literate by developing money management skills; plan, invest, and save for the future

02

Leverage fintech solutions, commitment devices, default settings, and text alerts for personal budgeting and spending; reduce debt and understand the risks of credit

03

Shift consumption toward “Made in UAE” products whenever possible, and become ambassadors for local brands

### POLICY PRIORITIES

01

Study the behavioral barriers to building savings and managing credit among the UAE youth

02

Encourage financial planning through digital solutions; provide accessible financial guidance to help youth spend within their means, save money, and avoid debt

03

Further leverage technology to enhance sustainable, local food production, boost local value creation and consumption, and reduce dependence on imports



### 6. SUSTAINABLE, RESOURCE-EFFICIENT LIFESTYLES

#### The UAE's current situation

The UAE has been actively working on achieving the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for “Affordable and clean energy” and “Responsible consumption and production.” Moreover, the UAE has put forth several federal and local strategies and plans with clearly defined sustainability goals. For example, the UAE Energy Strategy 2050 aims for nuclear to provide half of the UAE’s energy in the future, while UAE Climate Change Plan 2050 aims to manage greenhouse gas emissions and increase climate resilience. Dubai is seeking to establish floating solar power plants, while Abu Dhabi is looking to expand solar rooftop installations.<sup>35</sup> All in all, the UAE aims to make clean energy sources account for 50 percent of the total energy capacity mix by 2050. Along with these plans, there is growing public awareness of sustainability, especially among young people — 65 percent of UAE youth are eager to take action to protect the environment.<sup>36</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic, which led to dramatic improvements in air<sup>37</sup> and water<sup>38</sup> quality due to the drop in transportation and industrial activities, has further educated the public, in the UAE and globally, as to the benefits of reducing unsustainable consumption.

#### The future outlook

##### 1. Youth will be more active in encouraging further actions on climate change

Youth will have an increasing role in encouraging authorities and rest of society to aim for more ambitious sustainable development targets. The voices of the GenZ and Millennial generations, whose futures will be affected by accelerated global warming, will gain more momentum and power in the coming years to encourage pro-environmental behavior. Youth will play an increasing role in climate change policymaking, defining climate change strategies and initiatives, and leading by example.

##### 2. Youth will influence businesses to be more eco-friendly

As youth increasingly adopt sustainable consumption and conservation habits to reduce their carbon footprint, businesses will be incentivized to become more eco-friendly.<sup>39</sup> GenZ and Millennials are on average more likely to pay a premium for sustainable products than older generations<sup>40</sup>; consequently, businesses are expected to steadily shift their operations and marketing strategies toward eco-friendly options to entice younger generations. Apple, for example, has plans to invest in green technology and become carbon neutral by 2030.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, other multinational corporations such as Dell, British Telecom, and PepsiCo have made commitments to support the development of circular economies.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, prioritizing sustainability can help businesses attract young professionals, who consider their holistic work environment before joining a company and who enjoy working at an environmentally responsible company.<sup>43</sup>

##### 3. Youth will have increased opportunities for green education and renewable jobs

The number of green jobs in the UAE is expected to increase from around 49,500 in 2018 to around 83,000 by 2030<sup>44</sup> (see *Exhibit 7*). Green jobs contribute to preserving, restoring, and enhancing environmental quality. To ensure that those jobs are filled by UAE youth, universities will offer more technical subjects, including graduate programs in areas such as renewable energy, environmental engineering, and sustainability.

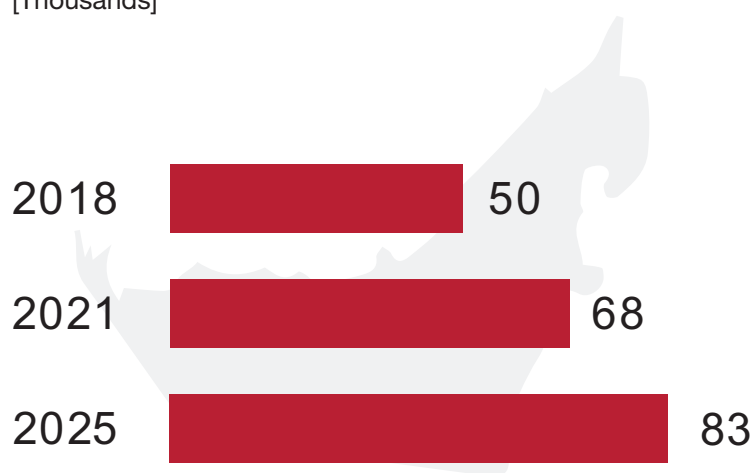
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**EXHIBIT 7**

**The number of green jobs in the UAE is growing rapidly**

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Green jobs in the UAE  
[Thousands]



Greener  
economy could  
create 24  
million new  
jobs by 2030

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Source: UN Sustainable Development Goals, "Green economy could create 24 million new jobs," April 3, 2019

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## Key UAE climate change initiatives and international cooperations

### UAE'S INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION EFFORTS

- 1989**.....
  - Signed the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer
- 1990**.....
  - Signed the Montreal Protocol
- 1995**.....
  - Became an official party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- 2005**.....
  - Acceded to the Kyoto Protocol as a Non-Annex I Party
- 2007**.....
  - Submitted the First National Communications to the UNFCCC
- 2009**.....
  - Became a member and host of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)
- 2010**.....
  - Supported the Copenhagen Accord
  - Submitted the Second National Communications to the UNFCCC
  - Agreed on the Establishment of the Global Green Growth Institute
- 2011**.....
  - Became a host to the regional office of the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI)
- 2012**.....
  - Ratified the Doha Amendment under the Kyoto Protocol
- 2013**.....
  - Submitted the Third National Communications to the UNFCCC
- 2016**.....
  - Signed the Paris Agreement

### UAE STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

- 2006**
  - Founded the Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company (Masdar), which aims to achieve commercial benefit in the fields of renewable energy and sustainable technologies
  - Launched the UAE Ecological Footprint Initiative
- 2011**
  - Launched the UAE Vision 2021 with Sustainable Environment and Infrastructure as one of its main pillars
- 2012**
  - Announced the UAE Green Growth Strategy – “Green Economy for Sustainable Development”
- 2015**
  - Adopted the UAE Green Agenda 2015–2030, as the implementation framework of the UAE Green Growth Strategy
  - Launched The National Environmental Education and Awareness Strategy 2015–2021
  - Signed the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- 2016**
  - Formed the UAE Council on Climate Change and Environment (MOCCAE)
  - Launched the Dubai Declaration on Sustainable Finance
  - Launched the ‘Our Generation’ Initiative. It involved developing a school curriculum that raises students' awareness and encourages them to take measures to reduce their carbon footprint.
- 2017**
  - Launched the National Climate Change Plan of the UAE 2017–2050
  - Launched the UAE Energy Strategy 2050

## 6. SUSTAINABLE, RESOURCE-EFFICIENT LIFESTYLES

حلقات شبابية  
Youth Circles

### YOUTH PRIORITIES

01

Develop eco-friendly habits. Conserve food, water, energy, and other resources, by adopting a sustainability mind-set

02

Adopt the “reduce, reuse, recycle” approach and contribute to the sharing and circular economies

03

Participate in sustainable development activities; pursue green education and renewable jobs

### POLICY PRIORITIES

01

Integrate environmental education in school curricula in all emirates and encourage environmentally friendly behaviors

02

Set up youth-tailored incentives to encourage recycling, efficient resource usage, and green habits in line with the UAE Centennial 2071

03

Continue to build climate resilience by minimizing risks and strengthening capacity for climate adaptation

### 7. STRONG SOCIAL COHESION

#### The UAE's current situation

Social and family cohesion in the UAE have improved in recent years. For example, The UAE divorce rate has been estimated at 0.5 percent for the past decade, and is expected to fall to 0.4 percent from the year 2023 onwards in Dubai, in contrast to the trend in EU countries in which divorce rates are rising and marriage rates are declining (see *Exhibit 8*).<sup>45</sup> The country's Social Cohesion Index, a composite indicator measuring the level of social cohesion among the people in the UAE, was at 96 percent and the Family Cohesion Index, a composite indicator measuring the social bond between family members, was at 91 percent in 2019.<sup>46</sup> The UAE Cabinet launched the "Cohesive Family 2021" campaign to strengthen family ties and promote the central role of family in preserving the UAE's national culture and identity.

#### The future outlook

##### 1. Socioeconomic factors will change family structures

Household structures and socioeconomic factors — including increased life expectancy and declining birth rates — will change family composition. The expansion of higher education and female participation in the labor market, coupled with increasing numbers of dependent elderly, will require new policies. Care leave eligibility may be transferred to an employee's wider network, such as the grandparents or aunts. Moreover, paternity and maternity leaves will increasingly be used interchangeably by couples with newborns. Innovations that reshape the design of homes may be introduced to make them more suitable for an aging population.

##### 2. Technological advances will narrow the intergenerational gap

The harnessing of technology by society, such as the concept of Society 5.0 pioneered in Japan, is expected to result in older generations using digital applications, thereby reducing the intergenerational gap. Technological innovations and increasing connectivity will improve family cohesion and enable family members who live apart to remain connected. Furthermore, by helping with the monitoring of the elderly people and intervening automatically, these technologies will reduce the costs of caregiving and increase quality of life. Modern tech solutions will enable real-time monitoring of the elderly and identify preventive treatments. In addition, the use of Industry 4.0 to address societal challenges will facilitate easier access to key services for the elderly, such as telemedicine for remote consultations. The digital innovations of Society 5.0 are being driven by the ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit of youth to support the elderly. For instance, a non-profit called Cyber-Seniors is helping older people through an intergenerational volunteer model in which youth act as digital mentors to the elderly.<sup>47</sup>



### 3. Global citizenship education will foster greater social cohesion

Private and public education that incorporates key societal values can instill cohesion. For example, well-developed programs can reduce bullying and lead to increased tolerance of differences among people, and tech applications can help students report cyber-bullying and can alert parents and teachers that such problems are emerging.<sup>48</sup> To better prepare students to be successful in the workplace of the 21st century, schools must provide students with the skills of global citizenship. These include an understanding of, and respect for, cultural and individual values and identities, shared responsibilities, and collaboration for sustainable development, empathy, and solidarity. Such education will also, in turn, strengthen social cohesion. For example, well-developed education programs to increase tolerance of differences among people can lead to a reduction in bullying.

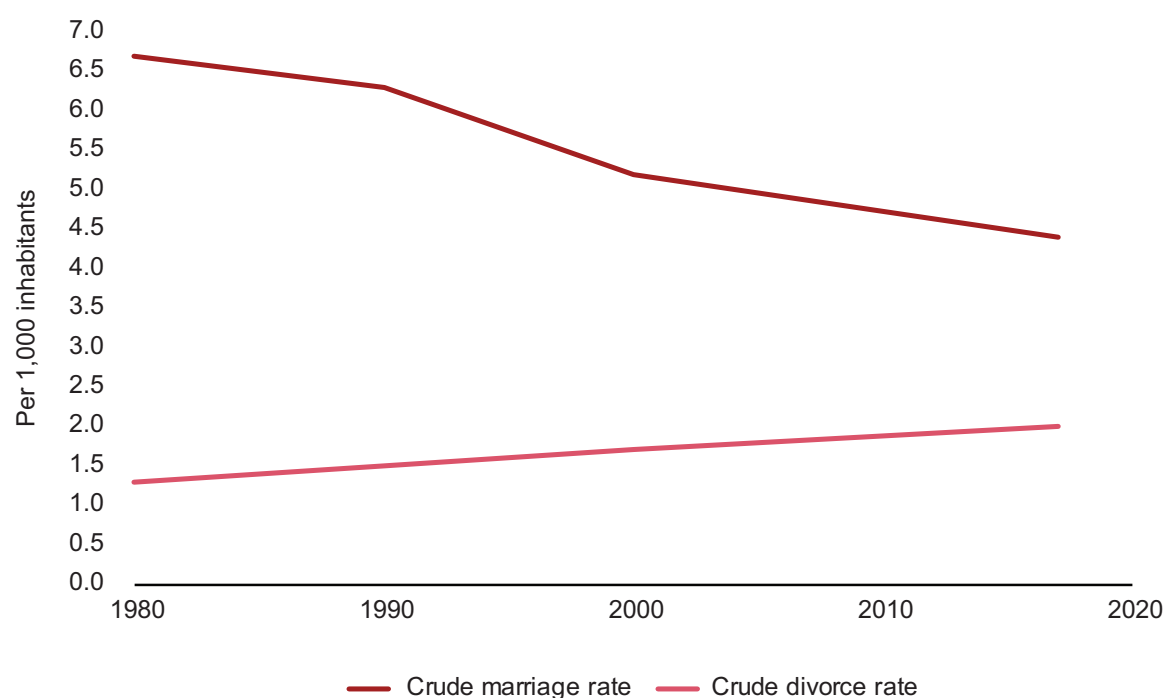
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#### EXHIBIT 8

#### In the EU, marriage is in decline and divorce is on the rise

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Crude Marriage and Divorce Rates, EU-27  
[Marriages and divorces per 1,000 inhabitants]



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Source: Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2017

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## 7. STRONG SOCIAL COHESION

### YOUTH PRIORITIES

01

Continue prioritizing quality family time and nurture close-knit family ties. Keep developing family routines, fun rituals, shared activities, and interests

02

Bridge the digital divide across generations by helping the elderly build digital skills

03

Take a stand against bullying and continue to embody the UAE's values of tolerance, respect, and diversity

### POLICY PRIORITIES

01

Expand on existing activities and initiatives to promote UAE family values through the school curriculum

02

Launch digital skill-building programs to close generation gaps in society

03

Set up social media and ideation platforms to further promote intercultural dialogue, tolerance, and understanding

# 8. SOCIAL PROTECTION, INCLUSION, AND EMPOWERMENT

## The UAE's current situation

The UAE has taken steps to promote social protection and inclusion. For instance, in 2018, the UAE passed a resolution to support the rights of people of determination in the field of employment. In September 2020, the Abu Dhabi government launched a Comprehensive Strategy for People of Determination 2020–2024. The strategy focuses on creating an integrated and enabling environment for people of determination, as well as addressing their needs at all stages of life from health and education to social care, sports, and culture, among others.

As for gender equality, the country has also enacted a new law to require equal pay in the private sector in September 2020, following a previous requirement for equal pay in the public sector. According to the UAE government, in 2015, women occupied 66 percent of public-sector jobs, one of the highest proportions worldwide, while 30 percent of them occupy senior leadership positions associated with decision-making roles.<sup>49</sup>

## The future outlook

### 1. Social protection schemes will be adapted to changing work patterns

Initiatives to facilitate and accelerate youth employment are gaining momentum, such as the Youth Guarantee program in the EU,<sup>50</sup> and the G20 Youth Roadmap 2025. Similarly, employment-oriented capability-building programs will better serve youth that is “Not in Education, Employment, or Training” (NEET) by equipping them with skills that businesses demand. For those currently employed whose jobs are made redundant by technology, governments should offer income-protection schemes that are contingent on participation in skills improvement programs. New forms of employment, such as self-employment and flexible work arrangements, also require adapting social protection systems. For example, the Danish model, known as the “flexicurity model,” combines high mobility between jobs with a comprehensive income safety net for the unemployed and an active labor market policy.

### 2. The rise of the “sheconomy” will help bridge gender parity gaps and boost growth

Countries will continue the push to meet the U.N. SDG 5, Gender Equality: “To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” Workforces and leadership teams will grow more balanced across genders, with a rising share of women in senior leadership roles across sectors and industries. As women’s career prospects rise, they will become more financially independent. Furthermore, the rise in female labor participation will create growth. It is estimated that a 25 percent reduction in the labor participation gap worldwide by 2025 could add \$5.3 trillion to global GDP.<sup>51</sup>

### 3. People of determination will benefit from increased inclusion opportunities

Digital innovations and platforms, assistive technologies, telework, and universal design codes will offer people of determination more access to life-long learning and employment opportunities. The social and solidarity economy, an approach that prioritizes welfare of people over profits, also has been paving the way for cultural change by encouraging schools and employers to be more inclusive. New York City and Cisco have started an initiative to help people of determination acquire skills in information and communications technologies. Similarly, the Neurodiversity Hub, which is an association of universities and employers in Australia, the U.K., and the U.S., assists students with different abilities in completing their studies, thereby making it more likely that they can secure employment and career paths.<sup>52</sup> New breakthroughs in technology such as AI, robotics, and virtual reality will help people with special needs achieve independence and find new jobs, as evidenced by a restaurant in Japan in which employees operated robot waiters.<sup>53</sup> The UAE is already exploring specialized assistive technologies. Self-driving wheelchairs were trialed in 2019 by Abu Dhabi airport with positive results.

#### EXHIBIT 9

#### Legislation for female protection, inclusion, and empowerment

	Laws that affect women passed in benchmark countries			
	Equal passport application process	Protection from discrimination	Domestic violence protection	Paternity leave
Passed in the UAE?	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year passed	2017	2019	2019	2020
Legal basis	Federal decree law No. 16 of 2017	Federal law No. 11 of 2019 amending certain provisions of federal law No. 2 of 2015, on combating discrimination and hatred	Federal domestic violence law No. 10 of 2019	Federal decree law No. 6 of 2020, art. 74 to the labor law

Source: World Bank, "Women, Business and the Law 2021," UAE (<https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/data/exploreeconomies/united-arab-emirates/2020>)

## 8. SOCIAL PROTECTION, INCLUSION, AND EMPOWERMENT

### YOUTH PRIORITIES

01

Advocate for the increased participation and representation of women in leadership positions within organizations and at key events

02

Support people of determination to increase their integration into the job market and continue to advocate for their rights

03

Become more aware of social protection schemes and social welfare programs

### POLICY PRIORITIES

01

Continue to enhance the inclusion of women and people of determination — for example, by expanding the scope and scale of inclusive policies, quotas, and flexible work arrangements

02

Ensure existing job-seeking portals have special features for vulnerable groups including mentorship and capability development, and provide finance for hiring incentives

03

Set up income protection schemes for individuals at risk of exclusion from the job market



## **9. VALUES-DRIVEN, SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE YOUTH**

### **The UAE's current situation**

Youth worldwide are significantly more committed to social impact than older generations (see *Exhibit 10*). As a country, the UAE ranks as the world's largest state donor of development assistance in proportion to its gross national income, according to the OECD.<sup>54</sup> As a society, the UAE ranked 14th globally in the World Giving Index in 2019.<sup>55</sup> The UAE government stresses the culture of volunteering in promoting sustainable development and building a better future for new generations. The UAE has many organizations that engage in volunteering activities and community service, including a national volunteering portal that supports volunteering activities across the country. Indeed, while the COVID-19 pandemic halted many volunteer activities, people responded by increasing their charitable giving. The government has also sought to encourage volunteering by developing the Volunteers.ae portal.<sup>56</sup> The government also launched a National Volunteer Program for Emergencies, Crises and Disasters, which matches registered volunteers with organizations and creates, and trains, a volunteer base.

### **The future outlook**

#### **1. Youth social responsibility and collective giving will gain more prominence**

Civic education in schools and universities, coupled with greater awareness of socioeconomic and environmental issues, is boosting social responsibility among youth. Self-actualization and peer recognition are increasingly motivating young people to engage with community causes that are meaningful to them. Establishing social connections, acquiring specialized skills, and bolstering resumes are other motivations.

#### **2. "Profit with purpose" motivations will increase the traction of social ventures**

Social entrepreneurship will gain more prominence among youth, driven by both financial and social impact motivations. Innovative digital incubators and technologies have created a more conducive environment for social startups to address societal challenges. For example, Accelerate 2030 is a UNDP program that aims to grow the impact of entrepreneurs as part of sustainable development and to promote the development of youth-led social ventures to help meet the SDGs.

#### **3. Virtual volunteering platforms will increasingly connect volunteers with worthy causes**

Online channels and social media are increasingly powerful platforms to communicate social needs, crowdsource, and match volunteers to worthy causes, particularly highly skilled individuals. Partnerships between companies, universities, and non-profit organizations are creating a network effect and drawing people to where they can contribute their skills, knowledge, and time.

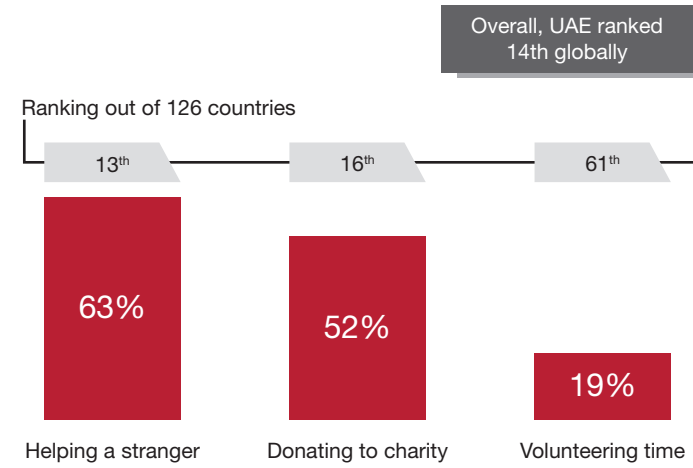
**EXHIBIT 10**  
**Millennials worldwide are more attuned to social issues**

U.S. Millennials who:

Consider a company's social and environmental commitments when deciding where to work	64%
Believe that work should have a greater meaning than just money	75%
Won't take a job if a company doesn't have strong corporate social responsibility values	64%
Would be more loyal to a company that helps them contribute to social and environmental issues	83%


Source: "2016 Cone Communications Millennial Employee Engagement Study," Cone Communications, November 2, 2016

UAE population engaged in giving [% of respondents to the World Giving Index Survey, 2019]



Source: Charities Aid Foundation, "CAF World Giving Index 2019, 10th edition"





## 9. VALUES-DRIVEN, SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE YOUTH

### YOUTH PRIORITIES

01

Prioritize volunteering and dedicate skills and knowledge to the betterment of society and the building of social capital

02

Raise awareness of the community's socioeconomic and environmental issues and mobilize youth volunteers to support various causes

03

Lead a life honoring and upholding the UAE's values and Emirati national identity

### POLICY PRIORITIES

01

Showcase, recognize, and reward youth social responsibility and community engagement

02

Establish a youth-led crowdsourcing platform to generate and mobilize community support ideas

03

Launch funding opportunities to promote and scale up social ventures, and boost social entrepreneurship

## 10. CIVIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH INNOVATIVE CHANNELS

### The UAE's current situation

The UAE government has sought youth involvement at all stages of the decision-making process. In 2018, the UAE government established the Federal Youth Authority as the main entity responsible for the UAE's youth sector, demonstrating the government's desire to engage with youth and to understand their specific problems. To date, 106 youth councils have been established with 1,163 young men and women now participating in the decision-making process at the federal and local government levels, and in the private sector. Moreover, youth constitute more than 60 percent of the members of the Federal National Council's electoral college, while 37 percent of candidates applying to be members of the Council in 2019 were youth as well.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, youth are encouraged to participate in global platforms through the Emirates Youth Global Initiative and the boards of federal entities through the "Youth Boards of Directors policy."<sup>58</sup> As in other countries, these measures can increase trust in public institutions among young people (see *Exhibit 11*).

### The future outlook

#### 1. Tech platforms will strengthen youth civic participation

Technology is creating innovative and sustainable means of youth civic engagement. Participatory budgeting, such as that adopted by the city of Boston in the U.S., will enable youth to claim their fair allocation of public resources. Crowd-sourcing platforms, such as the CitizenLab and Canada's Youth Impact Challenge, will enable youth to submit innovative ideas to tackle particular issues such as climate change.

#### 2. Tech platforms will enable broader youth participation in policy decisions

Citizen-centred change underpinned by the objectives of increasing innovation and experimentation, advocacy, and cooperation, will increase young people's participation in government decisions and policy-making. Governments will exploit technology to deploy large-scale participation platforms (such as "Reach" in Singapore) to promote generalized involvement of the youth in policy discussions.<sup>59</sup>

#### 3. Global missions and initiatives will create youth ambassadors

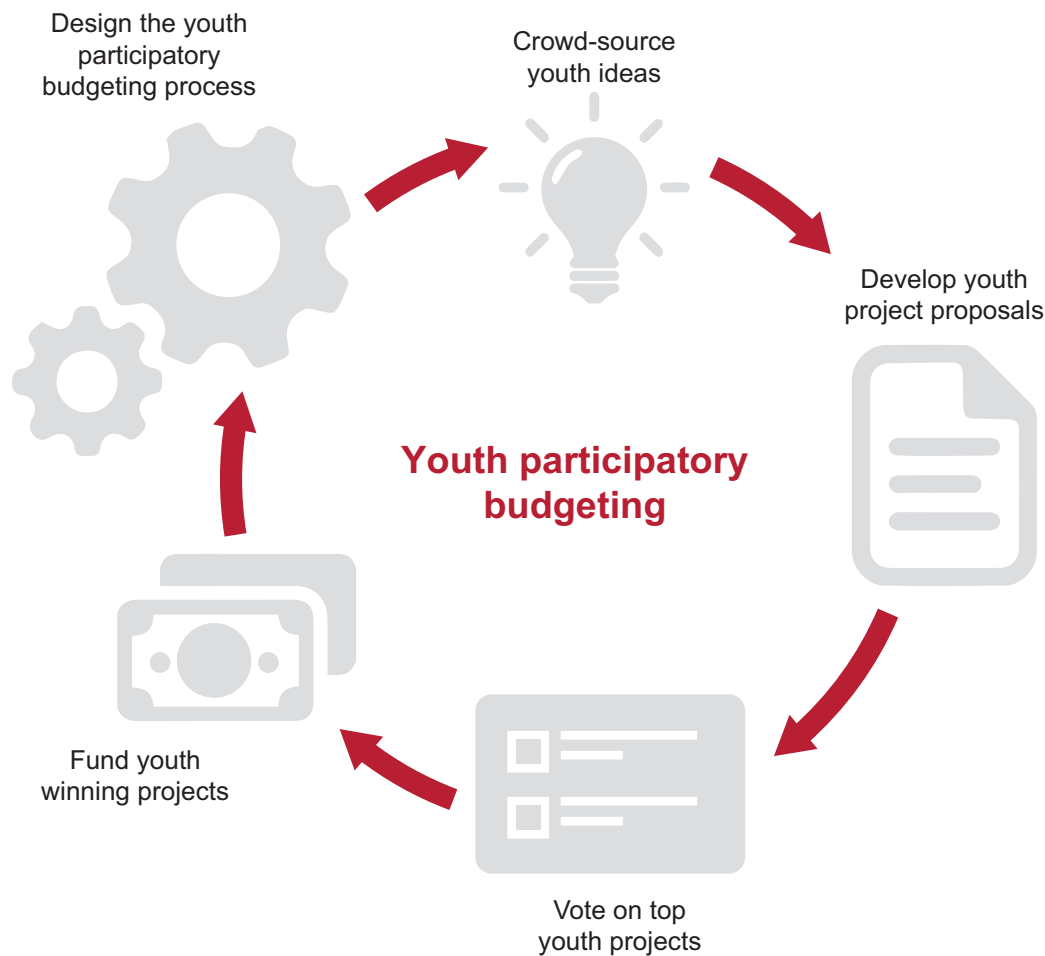
Young people will increasingly participate in global networks and events. They are considered critical agents of change in the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which includes a working group on Youth Inclusive Governance Indicators. In this regard, the UAE has established a Youth Advisory Council on SDGs. The International Youth Day 2020, whose theme was "Youth Engagement for Global Action," recognized how youth engagement at both the national and global levels is enriching institutions, policies, and processes.

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**EXHIBIT 11****Young people trust government more when they are involved, such as through participatory budgeting**

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Participatory budgeting aims to engage citizens in the process of consultation and decision-making regarding the allocation and use of public funds



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Source: Dr. Jessica K. Taft and Daniel Rodríguez Ramírez, "Youth Participatory Budgeting in the Americas," Research Center for the Americas, Dialogues Without Borders, Winter 2019 ([https://rca.ucsc.edu/images/youth-participatory-budgeting\\_taft--rodriguez-winter-2019-final-1.pdf](https://rca.ucsc.edu/images/youth-participatory-budgeting_taft--rodriguez-winter-2019-final-1.pdf))

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## 10. CIVIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH INNOVATIVE CHANNELS

### YOUTH PRIORITIES

01

Share ideas to design the UAE's next 50 years through the channels and portals provided by the government

02

Develop design thinking skills to participate in co-designing human-centered government and business solutions

03

Become global ambassadors representing the UAE in international networks and key events

### POLICY PRIORITIES

01

Continue to foster youth civic engagement in national dialogues

02

Expand and mainstream online participatory platforms where youth can voice their concerns, share ideas, provide policy input, and prioritize the allocation of public resources

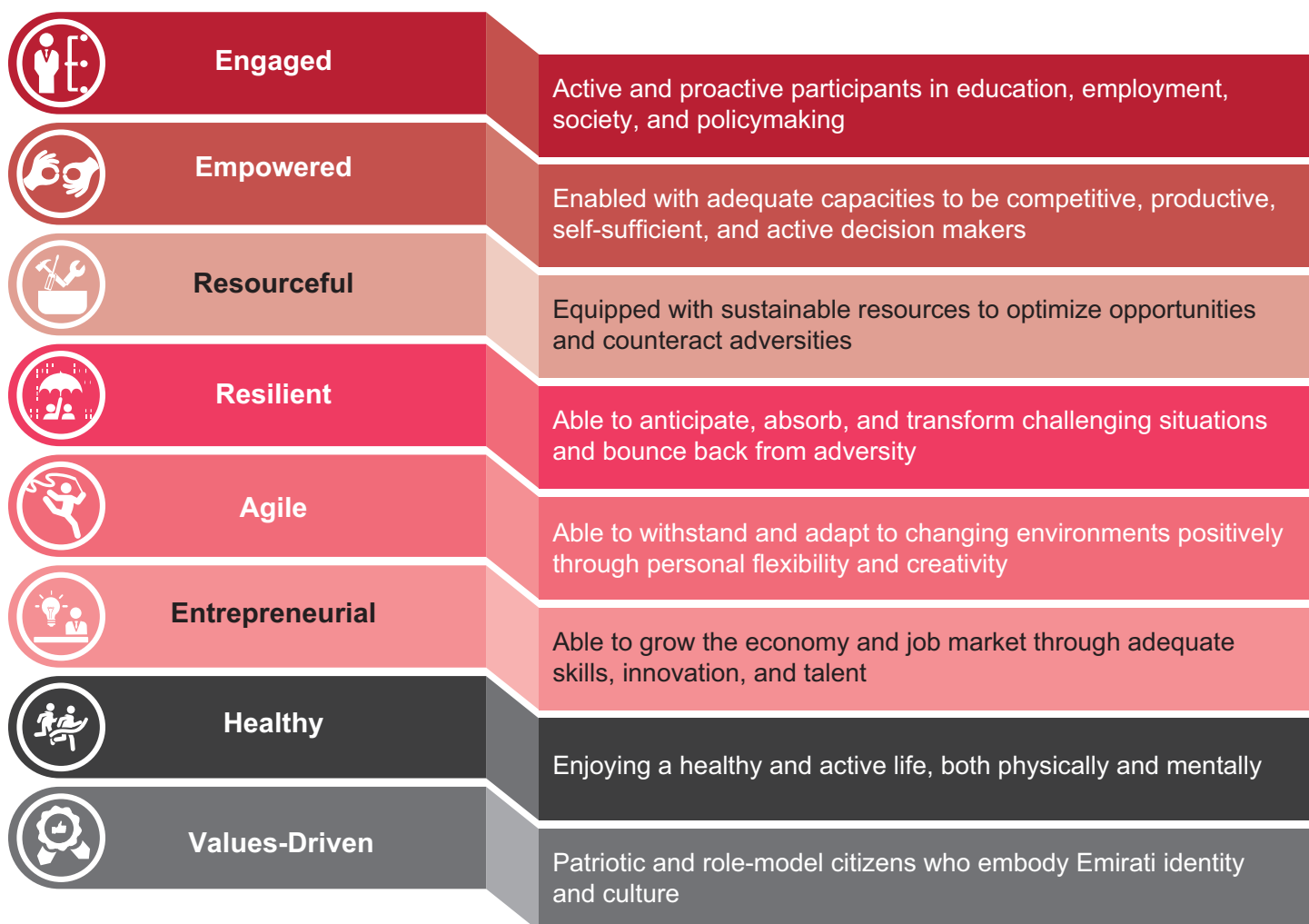
03

Organize online accelerators to challenge youth to develop and design innovative post-COVID-19 solutions to societal and youth challenges

## KEY ATTRIBUTES OF UAE YOUTH

The 10 trends discussed here will bring new changes. They also have the potential to bring about societal transformation. We believe these trends can bring out the best attributes in UAE youth — a population that is engaged, resilient, entrepreneurial, and more (see *Exhibit 12*).

**EXHIBIT 12**  
**Key attributes of UAE youth**



Source: UAE Emirates Youth Council; Strategy&

## CONCLUSION

The UAE's large youth population can be a significant resource in shaping the country's socioeconomic development. To make this contribution, the relevant entities and youth should understand and act upon the 10 major trends influencing the UAE youth's sector, trends accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

These 10 trends are already reshaping the lives of UAE youth. They signal that UAE youth will benefit from digital and personalized education throughout their lives. This will make them part of a more enterprising and resilient workforce that is more agile in response to challenges. On a personal level, they will put more effort into having a healthier lifestyle and place more stress on good mental health. As consumers, they will be more mindful, develop better financial habits, while leading lives that have less negative environmental impact and that use resources more efficiently. UAE youth will mature in an environment of greater social cohesion in which there is greater social protection, inclusion, and which further empowers them. As citizens, they will be socially aware and responsible, act upon their values, and have the opportunity to participate in civic life through innovative channels.

This report presents these 10 trends as opportunities, for youth and decision makers alike. Youth should consider these trends as priority areas when embarking on the next chapters of their lives. Relevant entities should respond by tailoring the right policy responses to each trend, thereby making the economy and the society more robust for the future.

In particular, relevant entities should continue to engage, empower, and invest in youth and in doing so encourage all young people to increase their involvement in co-designing solutions. For example, among the measures the government can take is forming partnerships with large technology companies to provide youth with internships and apprenticeships, and foster a youth entrepreneurship ecosystem, while enhancing access to financing opportunities for young entrepreneurs and SMEs.

This combination of policy and youth initiative in response to these trends can be powerful. Together their contributions and engagement can help to create a more prosperous UAE and enable UAE youth to reach their full potential and be ready for the future.

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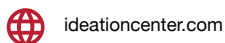
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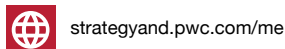
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