



EMPOWERING CHANGE

**THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY
ORGANIZATIONS IN SHAPING
THE UAE'S FUTURE**

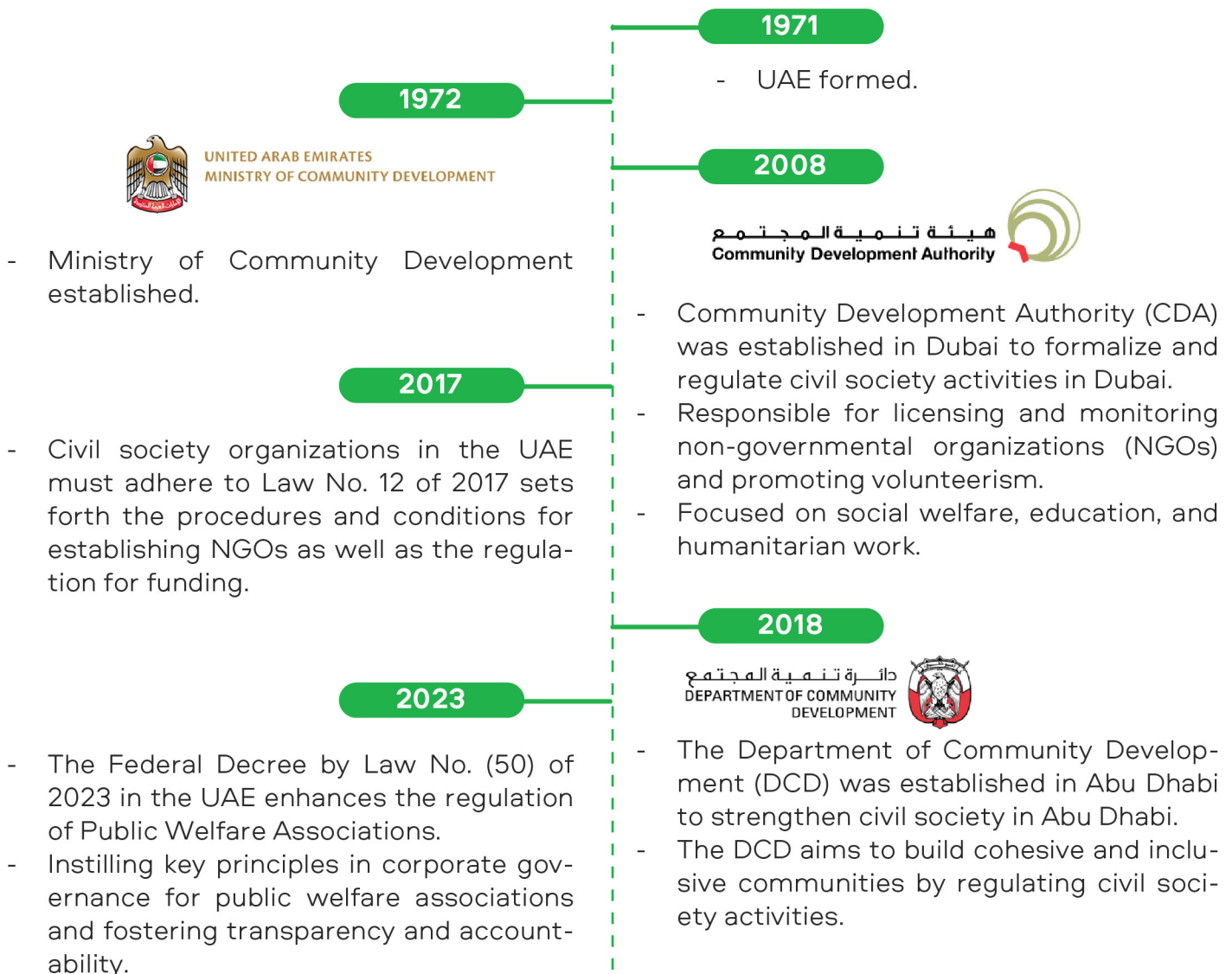


The UAE has achieved significant advancements in government services, emerging as a leader in the Arab world and ranking 13th globally in the latest UN E-Government Development Index. It has also transformed into a global hub for business, tourism, and innovation, securing 5th place in the Real Economic Growth Index. As the UAE moves forward, the pressing question is what comes next and how the nation can ensure a prosperous future driven by innovation and global citizenship. Hosting over 200 nationalities in a harmonious and inclusive environment, the UAE shall nurture this cultural mosaic to enrich its social fabric and realize its centennial vision of creating a happy, cohesive society. **This highlights the urgent need to foster civil society.**

1 History and Development of Civil Society in the UAE

The evolution of civil society in the UAE is shaped by government-led initiatives and strategic partnerships with diverse stakeholders. These efforts are dedicated to aligning with national priorities and fostering civil society development.

Timeline of Civil Society Development in the UAE



1.1 Early Development (1971-2000)

After the UAE's formation in 1971, civil society was primarily led by government initiatives and a few early community organizations. Notable among these were the Dar Al Ber Society, founded in 1978, and the Beit Al Khair Society, established in 1989, which focused on charitable efforts in education and healthcare.

1.1.1 Ministry of Community Development (established in 1972)

The Ministry played a key role in formalizing welfare and community efforts.

Main Initiatives

Social Welfare Programs

Provided support for vulnerable groups, including low-income families, healthcare access, and education.

Formalizing Charitable Efforts

Structured administration of social support and welfare programs.

Foundation for Civil Society

Laid groundwork for future community organizations, leading to the Community Development Authority in 2008

The ministry has consistently coordinated with governmental and non-governmental entities to enhance social cohesion, promote volunteerism, and ensure social welfare for all Emiratis and residents.



Most Recent Initiatives by the Ministry of Community Development

2021



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Social Security Community Integration Platform

This is a unified information platform that gathers citizen data from different local and federal authorities. It allows authorized employees to access essential data to assist with social security service applications. The platform supports inquiries into various areas, such as personal and work data, income, property, trade licenses, personal status, and records of births and deaths.



Hassantuk' Initiative

This initiative, launched in partnership with the Ministry of Interior's Civil Defense and Etisalat, seeks to implement and oversee smart fire and smoke alarm systems in residences. These complimentary devices will be supplied to eligible social security beneficiaries.

2022



Soun System

The "Soun" Innovative System, created by the Ministry of Community Development and partners, is designed to enhance family stability and well-being through identifying and preventing family abuse. It provides early detection with tailored questions, educational videos, policies, laws, and a family protection guide. It is accessible via the "MOCD Connect" app in Arabic and English.

UAE's Recent Civil society Initiatives

The UAE government has initiated numerous efforts to enhance civil society. A major milestone was hosting significant global events in September 2024, including the International Government Communication Forum. This event gathered over 250 speakers worldwide to discuss vital communication strategies, focusing on agile governance, innovation, and sustainability. Additionally, the World Congress on Rehabilitation is being held for the first time in Abu Dhabi from September 23-25, 2024, marking its debut in the Middle East. It emphasizes integrating People of Determination (individuals with disabilities) into society, focusing on education and employment. These events accentuate the UAE's dedication to promoting international collaboration and innovation across sectors, including government communication and healthcare for individuals with disabilities. Moreover, the UAE has actively promoted gender equality and women's participation in peace building and security through its National Action Plan (NAP) for Women, Peace, and Security. This plan, which runs until the end of 2024, aims to increase women's involvement in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and security sectors.



.2 Drawing Lessons from Global Civil Societies that are Relevant to UAE's Strategic Direction

2.1 Social Inclusion for Expats: Building a Harmonious Society



A- Germany's Model of Social Cohesion

In Germany, The National Action Plan on Integration serves as a model of how CSOs can work with governments to promote social cohesion. By bringing together various stakeholders, including civil society organizations, government bodies, and local communities, Germany has effectively integrated immigrants into society. This collaborative approach emphasizes language training, cultural orientation, and anti-discrimination measures, ensuring that newcomers can fully participate in and contribute to society.

The Role of Civil Society in the UAE:

- **Social Inclusion Pillar**

Given the large expatriate community in the UAE, Germany's National Action Plan serves as a highly pertinent model for fostering cultural exchange and community engagement. It offers a valuable approach to bridging cultural divides between various communities in the UAE.

2.2 Innovation & Entrepreneurship: Driving Sustainable Development



A- The Kauffman Foundation: A Model for Innovation and Entrepreneurship

The Kauffman Foundation in the United States provides a compelling example of how CSOs can drive innovation and entrepreneurship. By offering financial support, mentorship, and networking opportunities, the foundation has empowered entrepreneurs, particularly those from underserved communities, to launch and scale their businesses. This approach has been crucial in fostering an inclusive innovation ecosystem that drives economic growth across various sectors.



B- The Nesta Foundation: Supporting Technology and Social Enterprises

Similarly, the Nesta Foundation in the UK has focused on funding and supporting innovation in technology, creative industries, and social enterprises, demonstrating how CSOs can boost economic and technological development.

The Role of Civil Society in the UAE:

- **Innovation & Entrepreneurship Pillar**

We strongly believe that the experiences of the Kauffman and Nesta Foundations can inspire UAE civil society. Initiatives such as mentorship programs, seed funding, and networking opportunities for entrepreneurs will advance the nation's economic diversification and innovation goals.

2.3 Knowledge-Based Economy: Laying the Foundations for Future Growth



The transformation of institutions like **Harvard University** and the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)** into world-leading hubs of education and innovation emphasizes the critical role of civil society in building a knowledge-based economy. Both institutions were initially founded by private citizens who were committed to advancing education and research. Over time, they have developed into global centers for innovation, driving technological advancements and economic growth.

South Korea's Example



In South Korea, civil society has significantly contributed to the country's transformation into a tech powerhouse. Organizations such as the Korea Foundation for the Advancement of Science and Creativity (KOFAC) foster innovation and creativity through education and research, propelling South Korea as a technology and innovation leader.

Germany's Collaborative Model



The Fraunhofer Society in Germany, a leading applied research organization, exemplifies how civil society can drive innovation by connecting science with industry. Unlike basic research institutions, which focus on advancing knowledge, applied research organizations aim to solve practical problems through research and development (R&D). They collaborate closely with businesses and public entities to transform scientific discoveries into tangible solutions for technological, economic, and societal challenges.

The Role of Civil Society in the UAE:

• Knowledge-Based Economy Pillar

In the pursuit of becoming a knowledge-based economy, the UAE can draw inspiration from the development of esteemed institutions like Harvard and MIT. By investing in educational programs, research initiatives, and technological advancements, CSOs play a vital role in developing the human capital necessary for sustaining a knowledge-driven economy. Encouraging CSOs to lead these efforts is essential to maintaining the UAE's competitive edge on the global stage.






3 Key NGOs and Civil Society Organizations in the UAE

Civil society in UAE is still at a nascent phase with great potential ahead to meet the challenges of a constantly growing population from diverse backgrounds & ethnicities.

According to the most recent data available, as of 2022, more than 280 NGOs were registered in the UAE, across different sectors like education, healthcare, and environmental advocacy.

3.1 Socio-Economic Development Organizations

Civil society organizations serving socio-economic development include key actors as illustrated below:

Type	Organization	Mission
Public-private partnership	 Emirates Foundation	Promote social responsibility through youth empowerment and environmental projects
Government-backed initiative	 Authority of Social Contribution – Ma'an	Supports social enterprises and volunteerism for community development
NGO dedicated to research funding, education programs, and community health initiatives.	 Al Jalila Foundation	Medical education, research, and healthcare development
NGO focused on philanthropic work	 Zayed Foundation for Charitable and Humanitarian Works	Charitable initiatives, healthcare, education, disaster relief
NGO dedicated to educational initiatives globally	 Dubai Cares	Children's access to quality education in developing countries

3.1.1 Expatriate-Focused Organizations

Several organizations and communities in the UAE cater specifically to expatriates, offering support, networking opportunities, and various services. These organizations help expatriates adjust to life in the UAE and connect with others in similar situations.

Here are some notable expatriate-focused organizations in the UAE:

Name	Focus	Services
 Dubai Expat Woman	Women expatriates	Offers a supportive online platform with forums, articles, meetups, and networking events. Provides practical advice on settling in the UAE.
 InterNations	Global expat community	A global community for expatriates, offering networking events, social gatherings, and helpful information for settling into life in the UAE.
 The British Business Group (BBG)	British expatriates and businesses	A business network for British expats and professionals. Hosts events, provides business advice, and creates opportunities for networking.
 French Business Council Dubai & Northern Emirates (FBC)	French expatriates and businesses	Offers business networking opportunities, cultural events, and support services for French-speaking expatriates.
 Canadian Business Council (CBC)	Canadian expatriates	Provides networking opportunities and hosts events for Canadian expatriates and businesses.
 South African Business Council	South African expatriates	Provides support, events, and networking for South African businesses and professionals in the UAE.
 German Emirates Club	German expatriates	Offers events, networking opportunities, and business support for German-speaking expatriates in the UAE.

These organizations provide a sense of community, helping expatriates navigate life in the UAE through social, cultural, and business support.

3.2 UAE's Civil Society Initiatives

There are also key initiatives indicating a positive trajectory for civil society's development and maturity, including.

A- Sustainability Initiatives

The UAE CSO Network Roundtable is a key platform where CSOs collaborate on sustainability projects. This roundtable involves about **60 key participants** from both state-owned enterprises and the private sector.

B- SDG Engagement

The UAE has integrated CSOs into Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the SDG Data Hub, which connects over **300,000 stakeholders globally** and showcases 14 major initiatives.

C- Education, Research, and Innovation

In the UAE, organizations like the Al Jalila Foundation and the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation propel education, research, and innovation. Al Jalila Foundation, for instance, has invested over **AED 300 million in medical research and education**, aligning with the UAE's commitment to a knowledge-driven economy.

D- Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning

CSOs in the UAE champion vocational training and lifelong learning initiatives that are pivotal for sustaining a knowledge-based economy. Initiatives include:

- **Technical skills programs for youth** like the "Think Science" program by the Emirates Foundation.
- **Entrepreneurship training for women** through the Dubai Women Establishment.
- **Up-skilling initiatives for adults** by ADVETI.
- **Advocate for scholarships and collaborate with private sector** to offer vocational training in industries vital to the UAE's economic diversification.

These efforts support the UAE's vision of becoming an education and technological excellence hub, and support the UAE's vision of becoming a hub for technological and educational excellence.



.4 The Role of Civil Society in Aligning with the SDGs

4.1 The Role of Civil Society in UAE's Sustainable Development

Civil society in the UAE plays a key role in advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by filling gaps in healthcare, education, and environmental sustainability through advocacy, public awareness, and essential services.

As the UAE diversifies its economy, CSOs are increasingly focused on promoting sustainable practices and addressing the needs of a growing urban population. In collaboration with government institutions, CSOs contribute to national and international development by:



Raising awareness.










Advocating for policy reforms.



Supporting education, clean energy, and sustainable development.

4.2 The UAE's Ministry of Community Development in Action

The Ministry of Community Development contributes to achieving the SDGs through a range of initiatives that have a direct impact on these global objectives.

Goal Number	Initiative	Details
1	 No Poverty	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Apply for Social Aid 2. Support products for Production families 3. Marriage grants
3	 Good Health And Well-Being	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nemow App 2. Registration of a Senior Emirati (elderly people) in an elderly Care Center 3. Providing health care to People of Determination (disabled people)
4	 Quality Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rehabilitation Schools for People of Determination 2. Booklet: Conscious Generation... A Safe Community
5	 Gender Equality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Federal Child Rights (Wadeema) 2. Request for family counseling
8	 Decent Work & Economic Growth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Training and vocational education for productive families
10	 Reduce Inequalities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Massara Card for Senior Emiratis 2. Integrate People of Determination into society 3. Participation in the Eddad Program
17	 Partnerships for the Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Signing MOUs with many federal and local government departments 2. Signing a MOU with NEM Blockchain 3. Signing a MOU with The Alliance for Global Sustainability AGS on the circular economy 4. Sign a MOU with NOON

Civil society organizations in the UAE have the potential to be influential agents of change, both within the country and across the region and at a global scale. By drawing on successful global examples, such as those in Germany, the United States, and South Korea, the UAE can strengthen the role of its CSOs in promoting social inclusion, fostering innovation, and becoming a knowledge-based hub. As the UAE continues to develop, its CSOs can lead the way in driving social and economic progress, helping the nation to remain resilient, innovative, and influential globally.

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