



A program led by



هيئة أبوظبي
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Abu Dhabi Early
Childhood Authority

The Future of Work: The Rise of Parent-friendly Workplaces in the UAE

An Insights and Impact Report
2024

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Foreword

Parent-friendly Label (PFL) program is one of Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority (ECA) innovative initiatives developed to empower working parents and promote their role in caring for their children. This can be realized by encouraging organizations to adopt parent-friendly policies and practices as part of their organizational culture.

Launched in May 2021, the PFL is now a UAE-wide program providing a set of criteria that all organizations operating in the country's semi-governmental, private, and third sectors can adopt to promote their parent-friendly workplace policies and practices.

The outcomes of the program's previous cycles underscore that parent-friendly workplaces are not only beneficial to working parents and their children but also have a significant impact on organizations and the community. This vision is aligned with our belief that promoting the well-being of families and children is a shared aspiration and effort that affects every aspect of our community and economic development.

As such, I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to the organizations across the UAE that have taken significant and qualitative steps to join the parent-supportive workplaces community.

We're pleased to partner with you and your employees to establish a parent-friendly work culture in workplaces across the UAE. We're also excited to support organizations at every step to earning the PFL.

Theyab bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan

Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority



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Executive Summary



Many countries, including the UAE, are witnessing significant shifts in the traditional balance between work and family life. The emerging result of these changes is a rapidly-evolving work culture that is becoming increasingly flexible and responsive to the needs of working parents.

This shift is being driven by a number of powerful forces, including a growing recognition that parent-friendly workplaces deliver tangible benefits to a wide range of stakeholders, including:

Organizations: in areas such as recruitment, retention, productivity, and profitability.

Working parents: in the form of improved health and parenting outcomes, stronger familial relationships, and a greater ability to balance their responsibilities at work and at home.

Children: in the form of measurably improved child development outcomes.

Communities: as a result of stronger families, reduced social problems, greater women's workforce participation, and the growth of more successful organizations

Parent-friendly workplaces support working parents, which positively impacts how they connect with and raise their children, resulting in stronger families, communities and more resilient future generations.

Combined with several other factors, the COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated the drive for more flexible working arrangements in many economies, and demonstrated the mutual benefits that parent-friendly policies and practices can deliver to employees and employers.

Against this backdrop, the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority established the Parent-friendly Label (PFL) program in 2021. The program was launched in Abu Dhabi for its first cycle. In 2022, it became a nation-wide, workplace award program, providing a range of criteria that private sector, semi-government and third sector organizations in the UAE can adopt in order to be recognized for their parent-friendly policies and practices.

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive analysis that has been conducted of applications and results of employee surveys submitted by organizations across the UAE, as part of a nation-wide cycle of the PFL program which ran from November 2022 to May 2023. In total, this pool of data comprised submissions from 75 organizations and 9,694 responses from employee surveys from across the UAE.

The report reveals a number of important trends driving the growth of parent-friendly workplaces across the UAE, including:

1. **An emerging shift from treats and perks to real flexibility, choice, and a holistic focus on work-life balance**, reinforced by our finding that 90% of employees that are satisfied with the parent-friendly support offered at their organization would be likely to recommend their employer as a parent-friendly place to work.
2. **Growing recognition of the power of organizational leadership in driving change**, reinforced by our finding that 87% of employees that believe that their managers apply parent-friendly policies fairly and consistently would be likely to recommend their employer as a parent-friendly place to work.

3. **Proactive dedication to ensuring long-term success by embedding good practices into sustainable policy**, with nearly half of the 75 organizations that applied in the PFL's first nation-wide cycle, totaling 31 organizations, reporting that they have proactively initiated upgrades to their policies or are actively considering such changes as a result of their engagement with the PFL program.

We have also identified a number of UAE organizations that are implementing change that goes above and beyond the criteria recommended by the PFL. A series of snapshots and examples from these pioneering organizations are provided in this report as a source of inspiration and as a potential model for others to follow.

Building on these and other global trends and insights derived from literature, we propose that the rise of parent-friendly workplaces in the UAE represents a positive and desirable vision for the future of work. Organizations that wish to join this growing movement can adopt the PFL criteria.

Ultimately, striving to earn the Label is evolving into a continuous and rewarding journey, and not a final destination. With that in mind, this report concludes by outlining a series of forward-looking recommendations for employers, managers, employees and policymakers respectively, that are intended to advance and accelerate the development of more parent-friendly workplaces in the UAE.

As we move forward, it is important to remember that the purpose of our collective efforts extends far beyond ticking boxes and meeting specific criteria. The fundamental goal is fostering positive change throughout the UAE: one new policy, one thriving organization, and one loving family at a time.

Part One: Introduction to Parent- friendly Workplaces



What is a Parent-friendly Workplace?

Parent-friendly workplaces are organizations that offer policies, practices and a culture that supports working parents. Examples of this include offering flexibility, listening to and understanding the needs of families, welcoming back new parents actively, offering special considerations for difficult circumstances such as a child illness or emergency, supporting the overall wellbeing of employees and their families and exceeding local legal requirements when it comes to parental leave days. This enables working parents to flourish at work and at home.

The Benefits of Parent-friendly Workplaces

Numerous studies have shown that parent-friendly workplaces deliver benefits to a wide range of stakeholders, including organizations, families and especially young children and communities.

Benefits to Organizations

Global research has shown that workplaces that implement parent-friendly policies, such as those that improve work-life balance and promote flexible working, can generate a range of organizational benefits:

Helps to retain employees



- A recent study showed that **40%** of employees surveyed had left their job or begun to look for a new one in search for better flexibility, and **20%** had done so for better work life balance.¹
- Another study showed that **71%** of respondents would consider flexible work options as an incentive to stay with their current employer.²

Enhances employer reputation, brand and attractiveness

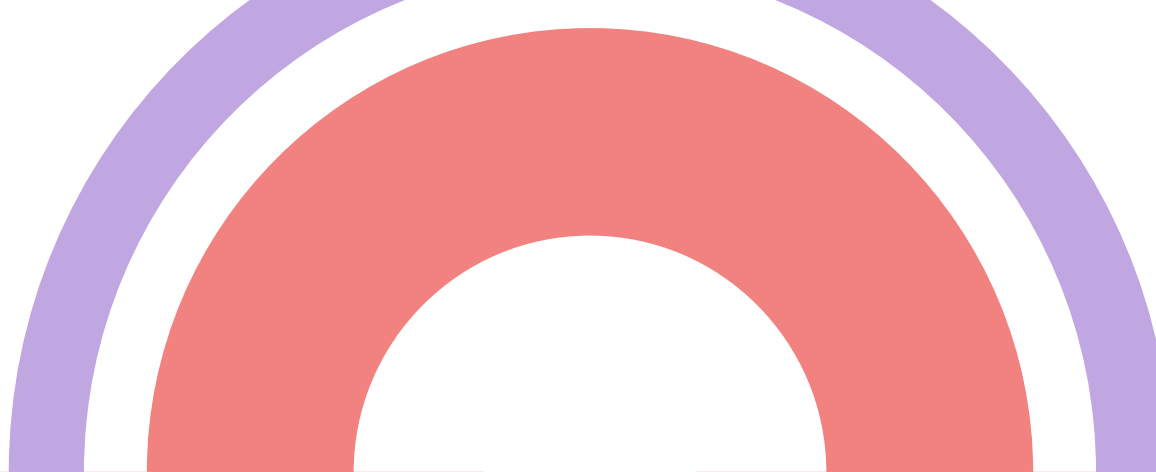


- Research shows that organizational support for work life balance is more than a nice to have. In one study, **87%** of employees reported that they expect their employer to support their ability to balance work and personal commitments.³
- This impacts employer attractiveness as well, with a reported **89%** of employees working at organizations that support wellbeing initiatives being more likely to recommend their company as a good place to work than those that do not.

Can contribute to increased profitability and performance



- Regarding for-profit businesses, at least one study has estimated that a highly engaged workforce can lead to **23%** higher profitability.⁴
- Parent-friendly policies and practices can also support organizations to advance and tangibly demonstrate their commitment to Economic, Social and Governance (ESG) and Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) goals.



Benefits to Families and Especially for Young Children

Research has shown that a parent-friendly workplace committed to supporting families with young children can reduce parenting stress and promote wellbeing, thereby contributing to better child development outcomes.

Good for mothers and their children



- Maternity leave is beneficial for infants in the first few months of life, where leave time is linked to better quality of mother-child interactions as well as increased attachment security for infants.⁵

Good for fathers and their children



- Extended paternity leave enables fathers to be more involved in the early years of their children's lives, improving child developmental outcomes and potentially leading to less behavioral problems and improved cognitive and mental health.⁷
- One study in Sweden found that fathers who took paternity leave in early parenthood were at lower risk for mortality during the next two decades, possibly due to the adoption of caring roles during infancy and development of health promotion attitudes.⁶

Helps mothers to stay in their professional roles



- A study conducted in the United States compared the job retention rates of women who had access to paid parental leave with those who did not. The study found that temporary leave after having a child is a significant factor in preventing women from quitting their jobs. The impact of paid leave policies is most pronounced for women with higher educational attainment, indicating that such policies can help to retain some of the most qualified and productive workers in the labor market.⁸

Benefits to Communities

Research shows that parent-friendly policies can produce numerous benefits to wider communities; socially, culturally and economically, and in terms of the health and wellbeing of the wider population.

Enhanced family wellbeing and reduced parental stress



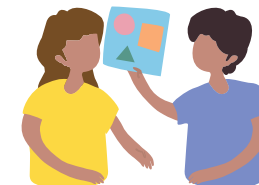
- Maternal stress following the first childbirth is associated with decreased marital satisfaction for some partners.⁹ Paid leave relieves some of the financial burden that comes with childbirth or adoption, and thereby potentially reduces relationship dissatisfaction among couples.¹⁰
- The positive impact generated from enhanced family wellbeing aligns with the 'We the UAE 2031' vision of a Forward Society that prioritizes the wellbeing of its residents.

Healthier mother and infant outcomes leading to reduced healthcare costs



- Research has shown that when mothers are supported in the workplace to nurse their babies, their infants have lower rates of acute infant chronic illnesses, and reduced likelihood of a variety of infections.¹¹
- Moreover, mothers who breastfeed for 12 months experience a reduced incidence of Type 2 diabetes,¹² and lifetime risk of breast cancer.¹³

Investment in future generations and national development

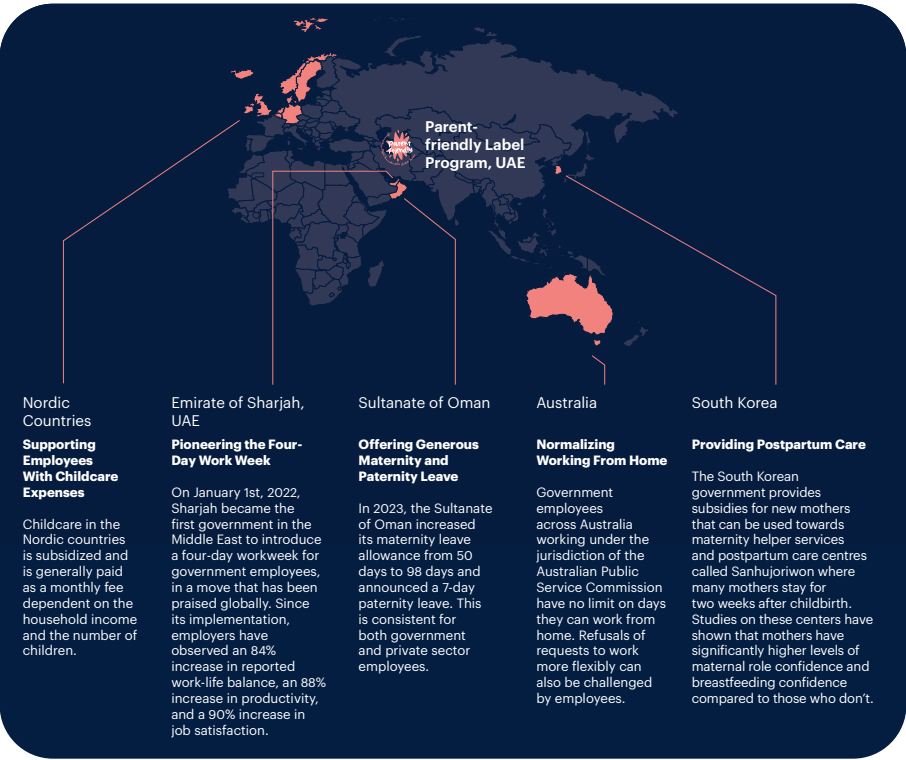


- Parent-friendly policies contribute to the development of future generations, ensuring that children receive the necessary support for optimal growth.
- Investment in the wellbeing of children and families aligns with the UAE's broader goals of national development.

Local and International Trends Driving the Shift to Parent-friendly Workplaces

There is growing momentum around the world for workplace policies and practices that improve wellbeing, promote flexibility, and provide support to employees with caregiving responsibilities. This movement is underpinned by an increasingly widespread recognition that fostering a culture of work-life balance is not only beneficial to employees and their families, but also strategically advantageous for organizations and communities.

In recent years, several public sector entities in the Middle East and around the world have enacted legislation and workplace policies aligned with this broader trend:



The shift to parent-friendly workplaces is being driven by several powerful factors, including:

Ongoing Impact of COVID-19 Era Policies and Practices

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the landscape of work has undergone profound transformations, reshaping the way organizations function and the expectations of employees. The pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of traditional work structures leading to a re-evaluation of how businesses operate and how they can better support their workforce. It also accelerated the proliferation of technologies that allow us to be better connected to work, wherever we are and at any time.

The pandemic brought with it a forced experiment in remote work and flexible arrangements. As offices shuttered and schools closed, parents faced the unprecedented challenge of balancing professional responsibilities with caregiving duties. This unique situation highlighted the critical need for organizations to accommodate the diverse needs of their employees, particularly parents. Research conducted by Pew Research Center revealed that a significant percentage of working parents experienced heightened stress levels during the pandemic due to the lack of suitable support from their employers.¹⁴ Research by the ECA noted that mothers, in particular, reported higher amounts of parenting stress compared to fathers.¹⁵

Companies that swiftly adapted to the crisis by implementing flexible working policies, extended parental leave, and comprehensive support systems witnessed not only enhanced employee loyalty but also increased productivity. Recognizing these benefits, many employers have maintained elements of these policies, suggesting that even in a post-COVID-19 environment, the various measures put in place during the pandemic could have far-reaching implications for the future of work.

Growing Evidence of the Productivity Benefits of Remote Work and Employee Autonomy

The growth of remote work, enabled by technology and further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has challenged traditional notions of office-centric productivity. This ongoing shift has revealed that productivity is not necessarily attached to a physical location. Parent-friendly workplaces capitalize on this newfound autonomy by acknowledging that flexibility fosters motivation and productivity. Research shows that employees that work flexibly report higher job satisfaction and productivity.¹⁶

and are more likely to remain committed to their organizations.¹⁷ When coupled with parent-friendly policies, remote work becomes a catalyst for retaining top talent and boosting overall performance.

Greater Awareness of the Return on Investment of Employee Wellbeing

As the importance of mental health and the prevalence of 'burnout' becomes more widely understood, many employers are recognizing that the wellbeing of their employees is intrinsically linked to their ability to innovate and adapt. Parent-friendly workplaces exemplify this understanding, demonstrating a commitment to holistic employee wellness. Research affirms that businesses focusing on employee wellbeing outperform their peers in terms of revenue growth and employee engagement.¹⁸

Increasing Recognition of the Intrinsic Value of Uniquely Human Skills

In an economic landscape increasingly shaped by automation and AI, the future of work hinges on human skills that are inherently difficult to replicate by machines—skills like creativity, critical thinking, empathy, and complex problem-solving. These skills thrive when individuals are given the space and flexibility to balance their personal and professional responsibilities. Parent-friendly workplaces recognize that parents, given the support to manage their familial commitments, can more effectively contribute their unique human talents to the workplace. Analysis by the World Economic Forum has consistently underscored that nurturing a workforce equipped with these distinct skills will be pivotal for organizational success in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The Future of Work is Parent-friendly

Taken together, these trends indicate a fundamental shift in the attitudes of employers, the expectations of employees, and the nature of work-life balance in a rapidly changing world.

The convergence of automation, remote work, and greater understanding of the paramount importance of employee wellbeing, positions parent-friendly policies as more than just a compassionate approach or a 'nice to have', but a strategic imperative for the future, for all types of organizations.

The continuing influence of post-COVID-19 era policies and practices, ongoing shifts in the nature of work, and the accelerated adoption of parent-friendly policies and practices around the world, makes it increasingly clear that the future of work is parent friendly, and this has driven the UAE to strive to be at the forefront of this growing movement.

Part Two: Introducing the Parent-friendly Label

Origins of the Parent-friendly Label (PFL)

The Parent-friendly Label (PFL) is a UAE-wide workplace award program that provides a range of criteria organizations can adopt in order to be recognized and awarded by the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority (ECA) for their parent-friendly policies and practices.

Organizations can be awarded the Label at one of two levels. The first (Parent-friendly Label) recognizes workplaces in the UAE that exceed local requirements and standards. The second (Parent-friendly+) recognizes workplaces in the UAE that meet or exceed global leading practices and policies.

The PFL program was established in 2020 by the ECA, which is guided by a strategic focus on the importance of early childhood development.

The establishment of the PFL was driven by several factors, including an Abu Dhabi Quality of Life Survey published by the Abu Dhabi Department of Community Development earlier that year, which found that 78% of the study's respondents cited "time" as the main factor that negatively impacted family cohesion. In the same study, a further 56% of female respondents reported facing challenges as working women trying to balance work and childcare responsibilities, and 54% of Abu Dhabi residents of both genders cited "work pressure" as the biggest source of stress.

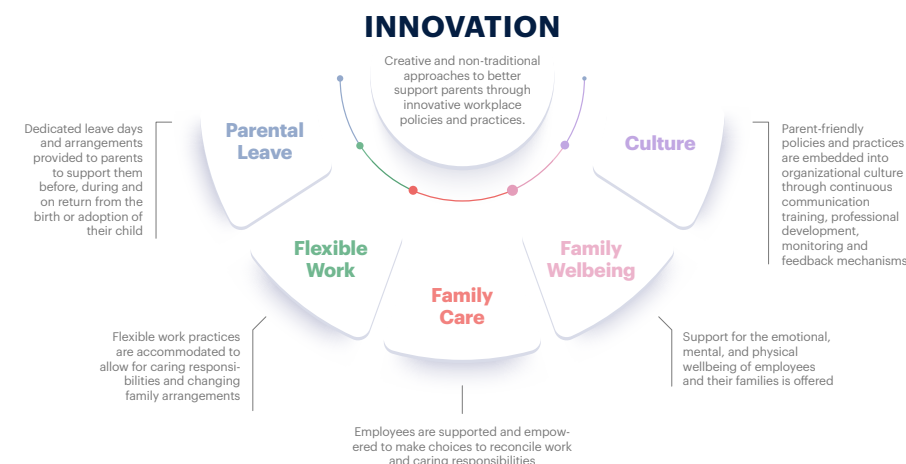
By actively supporting the development of more parent-friendly workplaces, leaders in the UAE are seeking to create a future in which the integration of work and family life is a cornerstone of the country's culture and identity, that makes a positive contribution to the quality of life of its citizens and residents.

Internationally, the PFL is directly aligned with at least three of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (and indirectly aligned with several others), including Goal 3, Goal 5 and Goal 8:



How the Parent-friendly Label (PFL) works

The PFL identifies 19 criteria spanning 5 categories through which organizations can take action to support working parents. The criteria were developed through a series of rigorous steps that included gathering research and data from leading global institutions such as the OECD and the International Labor Organization, and gaining an understanding of global leading practices from 16 countries, including the Nordic nations, as well as 9 existing global award programs. To develop robust and versatile criteria, the ECA also collaborated with semi-government and private sector organizations and worked closely with experts in the field to ensure diverse market needs and conditions were accounted for. Finally, the PFL criteria and targets were thoroughly reviewed and praised by UNICEF Gulf.



Organizations applying to earn the PFL are encouraged to be inspired by the criteria to enhance their current policies and practices and to create positive change. To apply, organizations must provide evidence with their application and also circulate a Parent-friendly Experience Survey to their employees to capture their independent perceptions of the work culture. The application is free and applicants incur no direct costs to their organization to apply.



These two inputs – the application and the employee survey – are both essential components of the PFL application process, because together they provide employers with unprecedented visibility into the extent to which an organization's policies and practices are in alignment with actual employee perceptions of the workplace culture.

However, it is not the objective of the PFL to cast judgement on organizations that voluntarily agree to participate in the program, or to shame them into taking certain actions. Rather, the PFL is a resource that is there to provide help and support.

We understand that all organizations are at different stages on the road to adopting more parent-friendly policies and practices, and those that participate in the program are actively seeking to accelerate their own progress.

The PFL is therefore intended to be a journey, not a test or competition, and we are eager to support any organization that wishes to explore the adoption of more parent-friendly policies and practices in their day-to-day operations, wherever they may be on that continuum.

In fact, every applicant, regardless of the outcome of their application, receives a free customized feedback report on their strengths and areas for potential improvement.

Through the PFL program, we continue to encourage the development of more parent-friendly workplaces across the country, helping to establish a culture, policies and ways of working that are more compatible with the needs of working parents of young children. When multiplied across workplaces in various industries and sectors throughout the UAE, this growing cultural shift is expected to have a positive social and economic impact on our community.

Although government organizations in the UAE are not eligible to earn the Parent-friendly Label, we encourage local and federal government entities to be inspired by the criteria to enhance their organization's policies and practices, where applicable.

The Parent-friendly Label Reach and Impact

Our Reach


Since the Parent-friendly Label launched, we are proud to have directly or indirectly touched the lives of:



148,000+
Employees



50,000+
Children 0-8



66,890
Parents



1,492
Children of Determination



25
Industries

Our Impact

Furthermore, many organizations that applied to earn the PFL have upgraded or are actively considering upgrading their policies as a result of their engagement with the program, resulting in a direct impact on the lives of:



59,947
Employees in
UAE

32,093
Parents

22,873
Children 0-8

253
Children of
Determination

Part Three:

Learnings and Insights from the Program



One of the key benefits of the PFL program is the first-hand data and insights that we are generating in direct collaboration with a wide range of private sector organizations committed to enhancing the parent-friendliness of their policies, practices and workplace culture.

Methodology

The insights in this report have been derived from a comprehensive analysis of applications and employee surveys provided as part of the first nation-wide cycle of the PFL program which ran from November 2022 to May 2023.

The employee surveys are provided as part of the PFL application process, alongside the documentation and evidence provided by employers. They serve a crucial purpose, by

gauging the extent to which the parent-friendly policies and practices that employers have put into place are having a measurable impact on the culture of the workplace and the perceptions of its employees. If the two do not align, employers have an opportunity to find out why and to take practical steps to close the gap. The surveys can also help to identify which interventions are likely to have the most positive impact in the lives of employees, and on their perceptions of the parent-friendliness of their workplace.

With such a breadth of data, we have gained an expansive view into the growing status of parent-friendliness within the UAE's workplaces.

Number of employee survey responses:

9,694

respondents from across the UAE

47% Women



53% Men

18% employees without children



82% with children

21% UAE Citizens



79% Residents

This is largely representative of the workforce living with children in the UAE

Key findings: three emerging trends

Our analysis identifies these emerging trends in the evolving landscape of parent-friendly workplaces in the UAE:

- 1 An emerging shift from treats and perks to flexibility, choice and a holistic focus on work-life balance
- 2 Growing recognition of the power of organizational leadership in driving change
- 3 A progression from undocumented and ad-hoc practices to sustainable and future-proofed policies

Trend 1: A shift from treats and perks to flexibility, choice, and a holistic focus on work-life balance

Based on our analysis, the era of offering superficial treats and perks to new parents is giving way to a more comprehensive, meaningful and sustainable approach. An increasing number of forward-looking organizations, including many of those that have applied to earn the PFL, understand that parent-friendliness in practical terms is not simply about token gestures. It's about providing genuine flexibility and choice to employees.

As a result, instead of merely designating a room for nursing mothers, more organizations are embracing the power, privacy and flexibility of remote work. This dynamic shift allows new mothers to work from the comfort of their homes, thereby enabling a more flexible approach to balancing parenthood and career

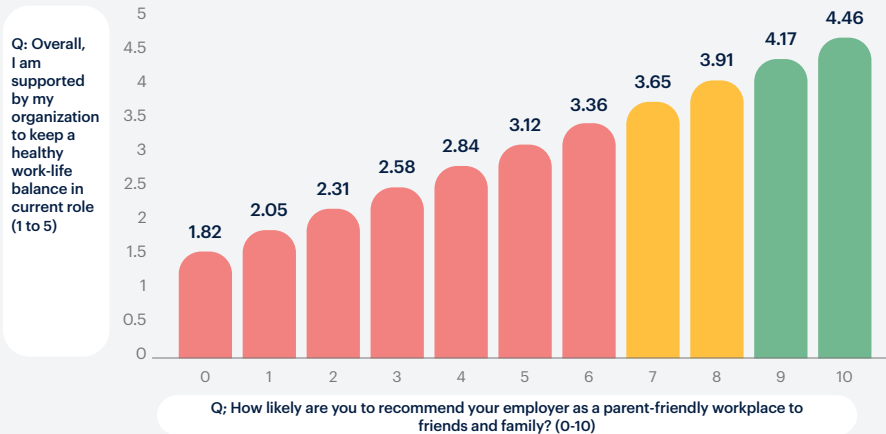
development. This shift recognizes that every family's needs are unique and everchanging, and seeks to ensure that work adapts to life, rather than the other way around.

This is a welcome development for working parents, but one that is also likely to become a competitive advantage for employers over time, both in terms of their ability to recruit and retain top talent, but also in terms of the productivity, creativity and morale of their workforce.

Data collected by the PFL program reveals an undeniable correlation between employees' perceptions of the extent to which their employer supports their work-life balance, and the likelihood that they would recommend their organization to others as a parent-friendly workplace.

¹ One of the key questions in our employee survey is "How likely are you to recommend your organization as a parent-friendly workplace to friends and family?" This question was analyzed using a Net Promoter Scale out of 10, with scores of 0 to 6 defined as Detractors that are "unlikely to recommend," and scores of 9 to 10 defined as Promoters that are "likely to recommend."

People who say that their employers support their healthy work-life balance are more likely to recommend their organizations as a parent-friendly place to work



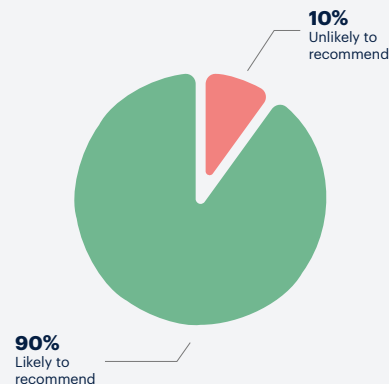
Numerous studies show that poor work-life balance for employees can cost businesses significantly in the longer term, including through higher absenteeism and turnover rates on the one hand, and lower productivity and creativity on the other.¹⁹ Conversely, effective work-life balance initiatives have been shown to directly contribute to lower turnover rates.

The importance of parent-friendly support

According to our analysis, **90% of employees that are satisfied with the parent-friendly support** offered at their organization **are likely to recommend their employer** as a parent-friendly place to work.

Organizations aiming to maintain a competitive edge in the market and be viewed as employers that support working parents must therefore invest in providing a satisfactory level of parent-friendly support through policies and practices. This includes comprehensive benefits, resources, and a culture that values the needs of working parents. However, our research indicates that one of the most appreciated forms of parent-friendly support comes in the form of more flexible working arrangements.

Employees satisfied with parent-friendly support offered and their likelihood to recommend their employer as a parent-friendly place to work

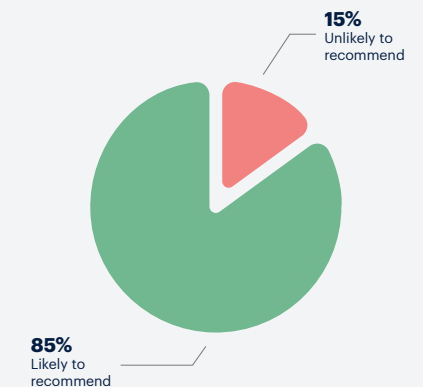


The power of flexible working arrangements

The impact of these types of measures is striking, with **85% of employees who are satisfied with the flexible working arrangements** that are available to them reporting that they would be **likely to recommend their employer** as parent-friendly place to work.

Organizations that want to remain competitive in the market and to be viewed as an employer that supports working parents, must therefore invest in the provision and promotion of flexible working policies. When these policies are developed and actively encouraged and demonstrated by leadership, it sends a powerful message that work can harmonize with family life. This not only supports the efforts of employers to attract and retain top talent, but also fosters a culture of adaptability and inclusivity that benefits the organization in many ways.

Employees satisfied with flexible working arrangements and likelihood to recommend their employer as a parent-friendly place to work



Trend 2: Growing recognition of the power of organizational leadership in driving change

Today, it's not just about policy changes; it's about leadership's willingness to embrace, drive and champion change. This includes demonstrating the right behaviors throughout the organization, listening to employees and creating the right environment for effective change to occur. It also includes investing in working parents by adopting and continually upgrading policies, even when they may result in short-term costs to the organization.

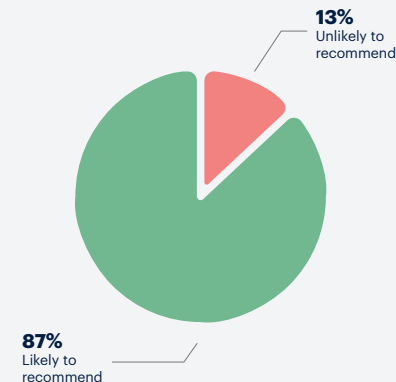
The role of managers

Managers have a crucial role to play in this process. In fact, our research indicates that “manager fairness” is one of the top three factors that will determine the likelihood that an employee will recommend their organization as a parent-friendly place to work, alongside more tangible benefits such as parent-friendly support and flexible work arrangements. Interestingly, there is not a strong difference between the attitudes of parents and non-parents on this issue. This emphasizes the importance of ensuring that managers at all levels are trained, empowered and incentivized to apply an organization's policies and practices in a fair and consistent manner to all employees.

This is not just a question of fairness. It can also have a meaningful impact on an organization's reputation, with **87% of employees that believe that managers** apply parent-friendly support consistently to all employees being **likely to recommend their employer** to others as a parent-friendly place to work.

Managers play a pivotal role in translating policies into actions that benefit employees and impact the way that employees perceive their employers overall. A vital component of a parent-friendly workplace is the fair and consistent application of parent-friendly policies to all employees across the organization. This requires periodic training and ongoing monitoring to ensure that managers are well-equipped to facilitate and administer these policies consistently and effectively.

Employees that believe that managers apply parent-friendly support consistently across the organization and their likelihood to recommend their employer as a parent-friendly place to work



Trend 3: Proactive dedication to ensuring long-term success by embedding good practices into sustainable policy

While relying on good practices may suffice in the short term, forward-thinking organizations understand that it's not sustainable nor the ideal way to deliver fair and consistent outcomes. The real strength lies in the transformation of good practices into documented policies that apply equally to everyone. By documenting these practices, organizations future-proof themselves, ensuring that the benefits of a parent-friendly approach remain even as it evolves and adapts to changing needs.

The impact of the PFL program

This is where the PFL program appears to be having a significant impact. According to the submissions that we have received, 31 of the 75 organizations that applied in the PFL's first nation-wide cycle have proactively initiated upgrades to their policies or are actively considering such changes as a result of their engagement with PFL. This underscores a growing commitment among organizations to prioritize the needs of working parents, bolstered by their participation in the PFL program.

According to these organizations, the top areas where they have improved their policies due to engaging with the PFL program are:

39%

formalized practice into policy

35%

adopted flexible work policies

35%

improved nursing facilities or hours

22%

made parental leave upgrades, including increased maternity and paternity leave benefits, special parental leave benefits, and leave transition support benefits.

These policy enhancements made at organizations not only represent a growing commitment to fostering parent-friendly workplaces, but are also translating into tangible benefits for employees, their families and their communities. In this way, parent-friendly workplaces are producing real change that is making a practical and meaningful difference in people's lives.

Above and Beyond: A snapshot of leading parent-friendly practices from across the UAE



The PFL identifies a set of specific targets across the various dimensions of the PFL criteria. These targets reflect a local and global set of leading practices. However, the evolving landscape of parent-friendly workplaces in the UAE reveals an emerging set of leading practices and trends as diverse as the UAE itself, many of which go beyond the recommended criteria in certain areas.

In this snapshot of parent-friendly workplaces in the UAE, it is clear that innovation and adaptability are common features. These organizations understand that being a parent and pursuing a career need not be at odds. By redefining traditional norms and placing employee wellbeing at the heart of their strategies, they are not only attracting top talent but also cultivating a workplace where every employee can thrive.

Above and Beyond: Real-Life Parent-friendly Policies and Practices From PFL Earners That Exceed the PFL Criteria

Parental Leave: Breaking Boundaries of Support



Equal Opportunities for All: Providing equal amount of paid parental leave for both female and male employees – a policy adopted by three of our PFL earners, all offering between 90 and 126 days.

Special Leave for Special Moments: Introducing unique leave offerings, such as one day per month for menstrual leave, half-day leave for children's birthdays, and dedicated leave for child-bonding.

Leave Handbooks for Parents and Managers: Equipping managers with a 'Parental Leave Handbook' to boost awareness and provide guidance on effectively supporting teams through the provision of parental leave. Similarly, developing a 'Parental Leave Playbook' for working parents, outlining a recommended 14-step approach for employees approaching and returning from parental leave.

Extra Care for Unique Situations: Recognizing unique family situations, such as multiple births. For twins, providing additional 10 days of leave for female employees and 8 days for male employees. For triplets, offering 20 additional days for female employees and 16 days for male employees.

Compassion in Difficult Times: In cases of stillbirth after 6 months of pregnancy, extending full maternity leave benefits (90 days) for female employees and allowing male employees to take up to 15 days of paternity leave.

Flexible Working: Breaking Boundaries of Location



Tailored Work Arrangements: Offering a range of alternatives to the traditional 9-5 working model, including remote working options, staggered hours, and flexibility around school events to accommodate diverse caregiving responsibilities.

Summertime Flexibility: Implementing a 'Work from Anywhere' policy during the summer months of July and August, fostering a flexible approach to work during an active time for many families.

Post-Maternity Flexibility: Allowing female employees to continue working from home after their maternity leave ends until they are ready to return to the office, especially during the nursing period.

Family Care: Breaking Boundaries of Support

Empowering Nursing Mothers to Manage Their Nursing:

Granting female employees unlimited nursing breaks. Additionally, providing 2 hours per day for early office departure, combinable with lunch breaks, totaling 3 hours daily.

Nursing Room Availability: Offering a dedicated and private nursing room that is clearly labelled and equipped with appropriate amenities, including but not limited to a fridge for storing milk, comfortable seating, and electrical sockets.

Financial Support for Family Needs:

Offering reimbursements for eligible after-school programs, domestic helper expenses, day care services, pre-school, day camps, and tutoring.

Encouraging Breastfeeding: Facilitating the purchase of breast pumps, subsidized by the organization for up to USD 350, to encourage and support breastfeeding.



Caring for Children of Determination (CoD):

Building on the UAE's status as a leader in the provision of care and opportunities to CoD, we have also noted some exceptional existing workplace policies and practices in the UAE for parents caring for CoD, including:

Enhanced Maternity Leave: Mothers of CoD are entitled to additional support such as:

- Ten days of paid maternity leave and 30 days of unpaid maternity leave until their child turns two.
- Following the expiration of maternity leave, mothers can take an additional 100 consecutive or non-consecutive days of unpaid leave if her or her baby's health condition, confirmed by an official health certificate, prevents her from returning to work.
- In situations where a child has a health condition requiring constant companionship, the employee is entitled to an additional 25 calendar days of unpaid maternity leave per year.

Expanded Benefits: To support inclusivity, overall benefits policies are extended in specific ways to accommodate CoD, including increased education assistance allowance, medical insurance, airfare assistance and a raising of the typical cap on eligible dependent children for employees.

Enhanced Wellbeing Support: Additional counseling and support offered including coaching, occupational therapy sessions, therapy reimbursements, and specialized online resources with one PFL earner organization offering up to 40 sessions per year based on employee feedback and requests.



Family Wellbeing: Breaking Boundaries of Care

Mental Health and Resilience:

Providing free counseling support and resilience coaching, addressing topics such as preventing burnout for working parents. In one example, a 'Big Sister Program' connects employees with similar experiences for sharing insights and mutual learning.

Peer-Led Support: Launching peer-led support groups organized by children's ages and parenting needs, fostering a network for sharing knowledge and stories among current and prospective parents and carers. Many PFL earners facilitate these types of networks, with some groups attracting hundreds of employees.

Digital Wellbeing Services: Providing employees and their families with access to a dedicated app offering comprehensive wellbeing services that is reliable, anonymous and secure.

Professional Coaching Support: Offering access to professional coaching, including providing unlimited one-on-one coaching for three months before and after birth to support working parents.



Culture: Breaking Boundaries of Inclusivity

Confidential Concern Platform:

Establishing a confidential platform for employees to share concerns with leadership, including in relation to specific challenges for working parents, thereby facilitating effective resolutions and maintaining trust.

Fostering Open Communication:

Providing "Culture Labs" as a forum for employees to communicate factors enabling or preventing the utilization of policies or implementing new working methods, including those of particular relevance to working parents.

Continuous Improvement Through Feedback:

Regularly collecting employee feedback to identify areas for policy enhancement, ensuring policies align with employee satisfaction and updating parental and related policies accordingly.



Part Four:

Forward-Looking Recommendations

As we embark on the journey ahead, the PFL recognizes the pivotal role that organizations, managers, employees and policymakers play in shaping the world of work and fostering parent-friendly workplaces. Building on the momentum created by our collective efforts, we now look towards the future with a shared commitment to catalyzing positive change. The following are actionable steps that different stakeholders could take, that are designed to enhance the parent-friendly landscape, support employee wellbeing, and contribute to a thriving work environment where families and organizations can flourish.



Organizations

- 1. Embrace a Holistic Approach to Supporting Working Parents:** Adopt a comprehensive approach to parent-friendly support that goes beyond traditional benefits and parental leave. Consider flexible work arrangements, support networks, and mental health resources to create a well-rounded ecosystem for working parents.
- 2. Formalize Policies:** Document good parent-friendly practice into formal policies. By formalizing these initiatives, organizations send a clear message of commitment to their workforce and set the foundation for sustained change, future-proofing the parent-friendliness of their workplace.

- 3. Embed Flexible Work Arrangements:** Acknowledge and promote flexible work arrangements as the norm, not the exception.
- 4. Invest in Nursing Facilities:** Recognize the importance of nursing facilities and hours for new parents. Doing this promotes inclusivity for working mothers and supports the well-being of mothers and infants.
- 5. Lead from the Top:** Foster a culture of inclusivity by equipping senior leaders and managers with the skills and awareness to advance and consistently apply parent-friendly policies. Provide ongoing training programs to empower leaders at all levels to champion diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organization.
- 6. Prioritize Manager Training at All Levels:** Place a strong emphasis on comprehensive training programs for managers at all levels, highlighting the significance of their role in implementing parent-friendly policies and influencing organizational reputation.
- 7. Listen, Monitor and Evaluate:** Implement a system for listening, monitoring and evaluating the needs of working parents and evaluating the design and effectiveness of parent-friendly policies regularly. This ensures that policies remain relevant and impactful.
- 8. Make Awareness and Transparency a Priority:** Foster transparent communication regarding the organization's commitment to parent-friendly policies. Clearly communicate these policies to all employees, emphasizing the benefits that are available to them.

- 9. Benchmark with Industry Leading Practices:** Stay informed about best practices in parent-friendly workplaces such as those highlighted in this report.

- 10. Recognize that Parent-Friendliness is a Journey:** Whether your organization has applied for the Label in the past, earned it or is considering applying, remember that the journey does not end when you earn the Label, or when you don't. Parent-friendly workplaces are committed to continuous improvement.



Policymakers

- 1. Set a Positive Example:** Prioritize the adoption of family-friendly policies and practices in your own workplace, to improve organizational outcomes and set a positive example for other stakeholders.
- 2. Embrace Innovation and Ensure Consistent Enforcement:** Explore the development of innovative policy measures that create

incentives for organizations to accelerate the adoption of parent-friendly policies and practices. Ensure laws and regulations related to the provision of family-friendly policies and practices are actively and consistently enforced.

- 3. Always Consider Child Development Outcomes:** Keep in mind the cross-cutting nature of early childhood development across all areas of government policy, and consider the impact of new policies and laws on parents and families. This also means understanding the science of early childhood development and ensuring that it is properly taken into account.
- 4. Consult and Listen:** Provide opportunities for stakeholders, including employers and members of the public, to share their views and influence the development of policies and laws related to parent-friendly policies and practices.
- 5. Collaborate for Impact:** Facilitate collaboration between the public and private sectors to optimize the impact of existing policies and laws, and to encourage partnerships on programs and initiatives that can support the development of a more parent-friendly working culture.



Managers

- 1. Lead by Example:** Demonstrate commitment to parent-friendly policies by integrating them into your own work practices, thereby showcasing the benefits of flexibility and support for working parents through your leadership. Become a proud advocate within the organization for resources and programs that support the physical and mental wellbeing of all employees.
- 2. Facilitate Open Communication:** Create an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing their needs. Encourage open dialogue about work-life challenges and be receptive to suggestions for improvement.
- 3. Ensure Fair Treatment:** Consistently apply parent-friendly policies across the entire organization. Avoid favoritism and ensure that all team members, including parents and non-parents alike, feel supported and treated fairly.



Employees

- 1. Communicate Openly with Managers and Peers:** Maintain open and transparent communication with managers and peers regarding your particular needs and challenges as a working parent. Propose potential adjustments to your work arrangements or schedules that can better accommodate your family responsibilities while meeting work objectives. Clearly communicate boundaries with your colleagues to establish a mutual understanding of when you will be able to be fully present for work-related responsibilities.
- 2. Utilize Parental Leave and Nursing Breaks:** Make the most of parental leave options provided by your organization. Take the time to bond with your child during critical developmental stages, contributing to a positive parent-child relationship.
- 3. Stay Informed on Child Development:** Stay informed about child development milestones and needs. This awareness can help you better balance your work commitments with the evolving needs of your child at different stages of their lives.
- 4. Prioritize Quality Time:** Actively prioritize quality time with your child. Establish dedicated periods for family activities and ensure that work commitments do not compromise these essential moments.
- 5. Active Engagement and Feedback:** Actively engage in providing feedback on existing parent-friendly policies and suggest areas for improvement. Your insights are valuable in shaping a work environment that caters to the diverse needs of employees beyond your personal needs.

Conclusion



As this report demonstrates, the journey toward fostering parent-friendly workplaces is both a visionary pursuit and a pragmatic approach, echoing the visionary leadership of the UAE and aligned with wider trends that are reshaping the relationship between work and family life.

Parent-friendly workplaces bring immense benefits to employers, families and our society. The strides made by organizations in the UAE, as illuminated by the PFL program, exemplify a commitment to shaping a future where the integration of work and family life is not merely an aspiration but a vibrant reality.

The growth of the PFL program to date has been mirrored by the introduction of meaningful changes in workplaces across the country. The ripples of transformation extend even further, touching the lives of thousands of young children, creating a brighter future for families and the wider community. This widespread impact speaks to the power of our mission. It's not about providing accolades to individual organizations; it's about generating real and lasting change for the benefit of everyone.

We applaud the organizations that have voluntarily heeded the call to redefine workplace norms, prioritize family, and champion inclusivity. Thanks to your efforts,

we are shaping a future where the balance between work and life is not a distant dream but an accessible reality. For those organizations that have already earned the label, let this be a further catalyst, inspiring continuous innovation and a steadfast commitment to the wellbeing of your employees and their families.

For those organizations that are yet to embark on this transformative path, we extend an invitation to join a community dedicated to driving positive change. Embrace the resources and insights shared within this report, and consider the PFL program as a roadmap on your journey towards greater levels of inclusivity and organizational excellence.

Together, we are not just redefining the workplace; we are shaping a future where every individual thrives, and every organization can flourish, on the leading edge of the future of work.

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