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WHY SHARJAH?

Special Report





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As the Sharjah FDI Office, we are dedicated to the continued transformation and economic diversification of the emirate and are committed to guiding foreign investors through a bespoke step-by-step facilitation process.



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WHY SHARJAH? *Special Report*

We are proud to present *Special Report: Why Sharjah*, a publication that examines the strategic, cultural, and economic trajectory of one of the UAE's most dynamic emirates. This report captures the essence of Sharjah's enduring vision—one that honors its deep-rooted heritage while embracing innovation, diversification, and sustainable growth.

Sharjah often stands out as the UAE's cultural capital, but as this report reveals, its contributions to regional development go far beyond the arts. Through exclusive interviews with senior public officials, C-suite executives, and visionary entrepreneurs, we shed light on the emirate's forward-looking policies in sectors as diverse as manufacturing, logistics, education, tourism, publishing, and green technology.

This special report arrives at a pivotal time. As the global economy continues to shift toward knowledge-driven and environmentally conscious models, Sharjah is demonstrating how strategic investment in education, research, and SME development can unlock long-term resilience and prosperity. From the groundbreaking

work being done at Sharjah Research, Technology and Innovation Park (SRTIP), to the emirate's growing reputation as a hub for creative industries, the momentum is unmistakable.

We are especially grateful to the leaders who lent their time and insight to this report. Their voices provide not only a snapshot of current achievements but also a roadmap for what lies ahead. Through their contributions, we explore how Sharjah's unique governance model, rooted in collaboration between public and private sectors, continues to foster inclusive growth and regional integration.

At The Business Year, we remain committed to documenting the narratives that shape economies and inspire global audiences. *Special Report: Why Sharjah* is both a reflection of our ongoing engagement with the UAE and a testament to the emirate's growing relevance on the international stage.

We invite you to read, reflect, and explore Why Sharjah—not just as a place of culture, but as a model of sustainable development, opportunity, and ambition. ✦

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This publication has been produced by The Business Year International's expert cadre of journalists, writers, editors, and designers. The content contained within is original and was compiled by our team on the ground.

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ONWARD & upward

Sharjah is prospering in many areas and proud of the socio-economic model it has developed as an example to the wider region.

BIO

In January 2023, Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan Al Qasimi was appointed Chairperson of the Board of Trustees and President of American University of Sharjah to align the institution with Sharjah's socio-economic, workforce, and innovation priorities. She is also Chairperson of the Board and President of the Sharjah Research, Technology, and Innovation Park (SRTIP), Chairperson of the Sharjah Book Authority, and established the Emirates Publishers Association, the UAE Board on Books for Young People, and Knowledge Without Borders.

Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi
CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD
OF TRUSTEES AND PRESIDENT
OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF
SHARJAH

How has Sharjah's economic vision evolved in recent years, particularly in terms of adapting to new global economic trends, and what new initiatives have been introduced to attract and support international investors?

In a world where permacrisis, climate change, and the onset of the fourth industrial revolution continue to drive disruption, Sharjah reassuringly offers a safe haven for engaged citizens, long-term investors, and anyone interested in building a thriving community despite this uncertainty. While we recognize the need to address the complex global socio-economic risks that threaten our future—from mass migration to humanitarian crises to technological disintermediation—we also recognize the need to create a robust economic model that is rooted in local realities. Our leadership has combined these two objectives to create a unique ecosystem that provides a strategic investment hub (and a gateway to the Northern UAE, the GCC and beyond) while offering a unique opportunity to learn, work and trade in a rich heritage of local assets. International investors are an intrinsic part of our long-term partnerships in manufacturing, international trade, and logistics, the growth of which has boosted our non-oil trade sector to contribute 96% of Sharjah's GDP. We have further enriched our STEM credentials to become a regional leader in R&D and our start-up ecosystem is now ranked fourth in the GCC. And we have achieved these ambitions by leveraging our unique culture sector. From the Sharjah Biennial to the Sharjah International Book Fair and the Sharjah Arts Foundation, some 10% of non-oil GDP now comes from cultural activities inspiring our youthful and growing cosmopolitan population. The principles of sustainability and equitable access have always informed our economic vision aligning global investor needs with local ambition. We have championed domestic investment as a catalyst for foreign investment ensuring that Invest in Sharjah, our dedicated investment arm, facilitates both. Free zones coupled with flexible investment options have helped us secure GDP growth of 6.5% in 2023 with our key local infrastructure thriving accordingly. Shar-

jah Sustainable City, powered by green energy to enable net zero, and the ambitious Maryam Island waterfront development with multi-purpose residences, both attract international investors while also providing eco-friendly real estate for our local community.

What steps is Sharjah taking to enhance sustainability and environmental stewardship in its economic growth plans?

We are firm believers that sustainability and environmental stewardship are a mindset and not a tactic. As such, we embed these principles into our vision by leveraging expertise from the past. For generations, we have sought to better understand our ecology and to work with, rather than against it. From the Sharjah Safari, the largest safari project outside Africa, to the Buhais Geology Park, and over 20 museums, we proudly showcase how our ancestors managed our natural resources using innate knowledge. Our commitment to conservation has instilled in us an intergenerational sense of awe and pride in our unique desert landscape and maritime heritage. The Sharjah Institute for Heritage helps to fortify this commitment through education with regular lecture series that focus on raising awareness of the links between the maritime environment and local customs and traditions. Such initiatives serve to encourage responsible consumption and help us all strive for a reduced ecological footprint. Beyond the community, we have also adopted an institutional approach. The Pearl Initiative, for example, was the first regional institute to look at sustainability within governance. Sharjah's BEEAH Group, established in 2007, was a pioneer in waste management and environmental stewardship. And the Sharjah Sustainable City is a champion of the circular economy actively promoting green infrastructure, sustainable manufacturing, and food production. This mindset influences all sectors, from healthcare to tourism. The Sharjah Health Authority is pioneering locally provided health care that offsets dependence on external sources. Investing in R&D centers and facilities enables local provision of world class medical

care. Meanwhile, the Sharjah Tourism and Commerce Development Authority encourages experiential tourism whereby visitors help to protect the natural beauty of the Emirate while also creating sustainable local job opportunities. Today we marry the value of a progressive and forward-looking community with the vision and commitment to sustainability of all our economic actors. And we embed this in our education ecosystem. The University of Sharjah was ranked first in the country in sustainable development by the Green Metric International Ranking two years running thanks to its commitment to clean energy, green spaces, environmentally friendly buildings, and reduced consumption. This approach and belief that sustainability is a mindset has helped embed it in our institutional DNA and creates an ongoing strategy for ensuring our contribution to offsetting climate change.

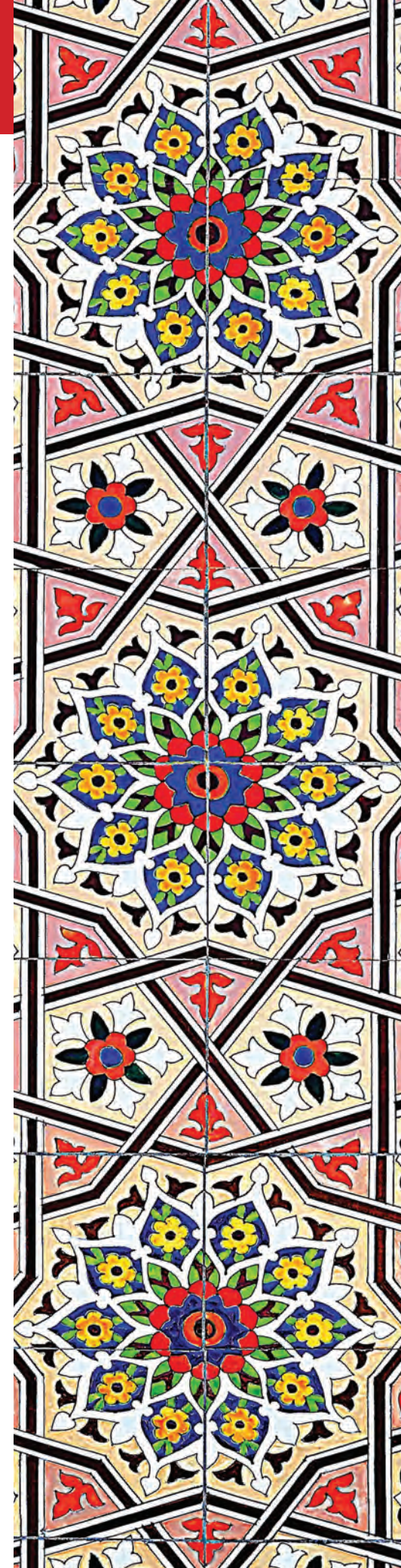
How is Sharjah leveraging research, technology, and innovation to remain competitive and attractive to global businesses and entrepreneurs?

From education to start-ups, Sharjah was ahead of the curve in developing digital capacity well before the current AI zeitgeist. We paved the way for nurturing talent in coding, gaming and digitization with the Sharjah Research Technology and Innovation Park (STRIP), now a regional magnet for start-ups fostering collaboration across the ecosystem and earning plaudits for diversity and innovation. The Sharjah Entrepreneurship Centre alone, a uniquely successful incubator, has supported 157 start-ups, delivered USD198 million in revenues, USD141 million in investment capital, and created over 1,400 jobs. The Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Sharjah Economic Development Department both serve to entrench this conducive entrepreneurial environment with easy start-up licenses and flexible visa rules. From educational gaming platforms to digital freight matching, Sharjah continues to incubate future unicorns gaining a reputation as a center of excellence for enterprise. The recent launch of an AI hub at the American University of Sharjah is just one example of how we align with the UAE's broader tech

ambitions which focus on incorporating AI into learning and leveraging its transformative power. A combination of government investment and venture capital in AI is expected to induce a USD96 billion contribution to our national GDP. We recognize this opportunity and the rapid digital transformation of all business sectors. For example, our venture builder, Shams Valley, set up by Sharjah Media City, supports AI adoption within the media sector by incubating start-up entrepreneurs.

What are your aspirations for Sharjah's role on the global stage in the near future, and how do you see it influencing the wider region?

These components of our DNA—sustainability stewardship, industrial pioneering, and education that aligns with the needs of tomorrow—have accorded us a unique reputation as a “one-stop shop” for progressive socio-economic development in the region. We are a microcosm of long-term thinking that seeks to leverage global opportunities (from AI to eco-tourism) but acknowledges global uncertainty and complexity. We manage the risks by embracing our past, while also being willing to disrupt our future. We future proof both our public and our private institutions with this open-minded, progressive philosophy that is writ large across our physical and institutional infrastructure. We believe that in Sharjah, we have developed a virtuous socio-economic model that can be scaled regionally and globally. Our multi-sector international partnerships help fortify this model and entrench an intergenerational way of thinking. From green health to green houses, we are committed to meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals in all respects—social, environmental, and economic. And we will continue to champion environmentally friendly living, applied research and a commitment to continuous learning about sustainability in our global outreach. With solid underlying financials, a GDP of around USD40 billion, a progressive, culturally rich society, and a highly trained workforce, we believe that Sharjah offers up a robust model of sustainable socio-economic transformation that can inspire others for generations to come. ✖



MORE TO *accomplish*

Invest in Sharjah empowers investors to seamlessly expand their businesses in the Emirate by offering a comprehensive range of support services.

Mohamed Juma Al Musharrkh
CEO,
SHARJAH FDI OFFICE (INVEST IN SHARJAH)



How does Sharjah plan to leverage its global recognition in FDI in 2023?

Sharjah is well-positioned to maintain its growth in FDI by adopting multi-pronged strategies and initiatives, focusing on attracting new investments, retaining existing ones, and creating an ideal investment destination. In 2023, Sharjah secured AED1.8 billion in FDI inflows. The stable investment climate for Sharjah, as highlighted by fDi Markets classification, has enhanced its position as fifth-fastest growing city in attracting FDI globally, with USD2.75 billion capital, creating 1,549 jobs. This achievement reflects the Emirate's dedication to adopting FDI-targeted strategies as well as its success in economic diversification, reinforcing its attractiveness, and strengthening its infrastructure. The newly established UAE Ministry of Investment is poised to be a catalyst for nationwide investment growth. Aligned with this initiative, Invest in Sharjah operates under the ministry's umbrella with the ambitious goal of attracting AED550 billion in foreign investment by 2031. We are firmly committed to supporting the ministry's unified strategies and policies to position the UAE among the top 10 countries globally for FDI attraction.

What distinguishes Sharjah as a preferred investment destination in the UAE and the region? In 2023, Sharjah recorded a remarkable 2064% growth in capital expenditures on FDI projects. This achievement can be attributed to Sharjah's unique blend of distinct advantages. One of these advantages is its strategic location, positioned in the heart of the UAE and at the crossroads of trade routes, Sharjah provides easy access to regional and global markets. Its high growth sectors enable the Emirate to foster innovation and growth in key areas like advanced manufacturing, green technology, and creative industries, offering investors exciting opportunities to be part of the

future. Sharjah's business-friendly environment results in streamlined processes, competitive tax rates, and robust regulatory frameworks, creating a welcoming environment for businesses to thrive. Furthermore, Sharjah offers strong government support through attractive policies, incentives, and dedicated agencies like Invest in Sharjah, ensuring a smooth and successful investment journey. Compared to other regional hubs, Sharjah offers competitive operational costs, making it an attractive option for businesses seeking to optimize their bottom line. In addition, Sharjah's rich cultural heritage and vibrant environment provide a unique and enriching experience for businesses and their employees.

Our role is to effectively communicate these advantages and build trust with the global market, through consistent messaging and a targeted value proposition, including: promoting Sharjah's advantages on the global stage and showcasing our unique offerings at international events; networking with potential investors and partners and forging strategic partnerships to expand our reach and opportunities; sharing our expertise and insights through industry publications and conferences; actively participating in industry events to connect with potential investors, remain up to date on market trends, and showcase Sharjah's investment potential; collaborating with influential figures and organizations to amplify our message and reach a wider audience; and showcasing the success stories of our existing investors and sharing positive testimonials to demonstrate the benefits of investing in Sharjah.

How does Invest in Sharjah actively facilitate and support the expansion of investors and foster the growth and development of businesses within the region?

Our focus areas include simplifying pro-

cesses by helping investors navigate through regulatory procedures, facilitating a smooth and efficient entry into the Sharjah market. We also expert guidance and market insights, helping investors make informed decisions and optimize their operations. In addition, we extend ongoing assistance beyond the initial setup, ensuring investors have access to resources and support throughout their journey in Sharjah. Our dedication to supporting expansion is exemplified by our recent success stories such as PureGlass, a global glass industry leader from Angola that invested over AED50 million; IPT Energy, a prominent Lebanese energy player that invested approximately AED40 million; and Alexandria International, a leading manufacturer of flooring and office furniture that inaugurated a 74,000-sqft logistics and distribution center in Sharjah. These examples showcase our commitment to creating a welcoming environment for investment, diversity, and success. ✖

BIO

Mohamed Juma Al Musharrkh is the CEO of the Sharjah FDI Office (Invest in Sharjah), the investment promotion office operating under the Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq), where he led Invest in Sharjah in its role as MENA's Regional Director for WAIPA from 2019-2021. Prior to joining Shurooq in 2012, Al Musharrkh served for seven years at the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI). He is a board member of the Sharjah Investors Services Center (SAEED), a member of the American University of Sharjah (AUS) Alumni CEO Club, and serves on the board of trustees at Pantheon-Assas University Paris II. Al Musharrkh holds a master's degree in international business management from the Australian University of Wollongong in Dubai and a bachelor's degree in international relations from the American University in Sharjah.



SHARJAH'S ECONOMIC VISION

Sharjah's economic diversification, infrastructure and investment opportunities are positioning it as an attractive destination for global businesses.

SHARJAH is emerging as a leading economic powerhouse in the UAE, combining a business-friendly environment with a strong commitment to sustainable development. With strategic initiatives led by organizations such as Invest in Sharjah, the Sharjah Economic Development Department (SEDD) and the Chamber of Commerce, the emirate is attracting investment across industries. For 2025, TBY sat down with numerous business leaders and public servants, who all highlighted Sharjah's ability to foster entrepreneurship and innovation, while government entities ensure a regulatory framework that supports long-term growth.

Sharjah, one of the UAE's seven emirates, is rapidly emerging as a business hub in the region. Already Sharjah represents about 10% of UAE's GDP, and its industry represents 16% of the Emirate's GDP. According to data from fDi Markets, Sharjah ranked fifth globally among the top 10 fastest-growing cities in attracting FDI inflows during 2023, in terms of new projects, capital expenditure growth, and job creation.

And it's not hard to see why. Situated between Europe, Asia, and Africa, Sharjah offers easy access to major international markets. Its ease of doing business and entrepreneur-friendly environment welcomes start-ups and established businesses alike, and investments in public health, education, and environmentalism make the emirate a pleasant place to live. Though often overshadowed by the two larger emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, Sharjah's potential remains vast and largely untapped. Its well-connected transport network, including roads, railways, ports, and airports, make it an ideal base for businesses looking to expand their operations in the Middle East and beyond—particularly those looking for a place outside of the hustle and bustle of Dubai.

Furthermore, the government of Sharjah has been implementing a range of initiatives to attract businesses and investors. These include free zones such as the Sharjah Airport International Free Zone (SAIF Zone) and the Hamriyah Free Zone, which offer tax incentives, 100% foreign ownership, and streamlined business setup processes. "Our goal is to foster Sharjah's development across various sectors, aiming to position it among the top cities globally," said Obaid Saeed Al Tunaiji, director general of the Sharjah City Municipality.

Indeed, Sharjah has invested heavily in infrastructure, including state-of-the-art business parks, logistics facilities, and technology hubs, to support the growth of various industries. As Badr Jafar, CEO, Crescent Enterprises told TBY, "Sharjah's economy is heavily diversified, with over 95% of its GDP coming from non-oil sectors." Since 1976, GulfTainer, Crescent Enterprises' ports and logistics subsidiary, has operated Sharjah Container Terminal, the Middle East's first container terminal. On the east coast, GulfTainer

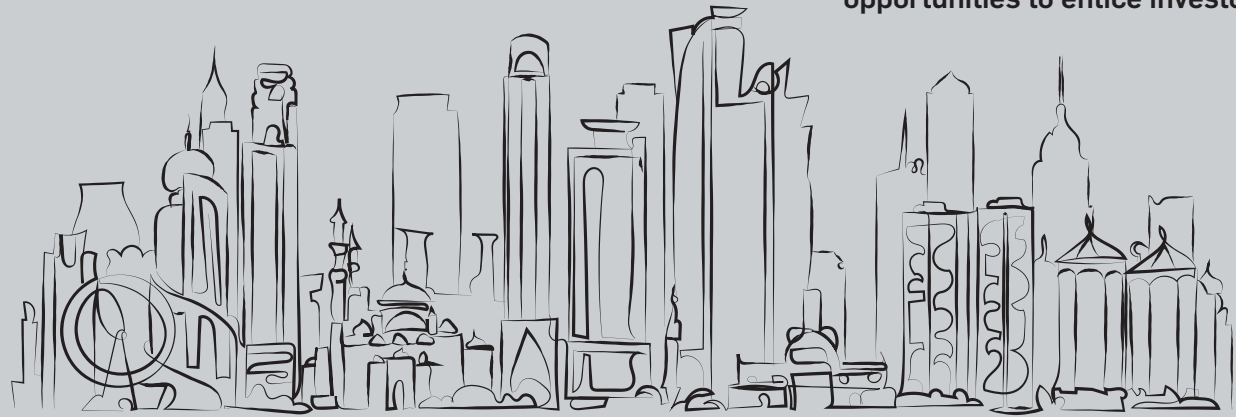
also operates Khorfakkan Container Terminal. In our interview, Jafar highlighted the industrial sector, the logistics sector, and the agricultural sector as key economic drivers for Sharjah going forward—especially in terms of sustainable developments that comply with international climate goals.

TBY also spoke to Hamad Ali Abdalla Al Mahmoud, chairman of the Sharjah Economic Development Department (SEDD), who advised: "The three largest sectors in terms of relative weight in the emirate [in 2022] were the wholesale and retail trade sectors and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, with a value of AED32.9 billion and a relative weight of 24%, the manufacturing industries sector with a value of AED22.8 billion and a relative weight of 16.7%, followed by the real estate activities sector, with a value of AED13.2 billion and a relative weight of 9.7%." SEDD dedicates itself to helping companies thrive in the emirate, from getting the right licenses to offering support for investors and companies looking to expand. But it's not just the established and experienced that succeed in Sharjah—the emirate also hosts the Sharjah Research Technology and Innovation Park, a decision which Sheikh Fahim Bin Sultan Bin Khalid Al Qasimi, executive chairman of the Department of Government Relations, calls "One of the wisest decisions by His Highness, the ruler." After over 25 years of establishing two leading academic institutions in the University City, Al Qasimi believes they have moved from an "era of teaching" to an "era of research." The leadership of both universities has helped to attract top talent in their respective fields to teach and innovate in Sharjah, and graduates of Sharjah's higher education institutes are well-regarded and highly sought-after. "The intersection of a robust academic foundation, supported by research and development facilities, and a thriving diverse economy presents an opportunity to develop innovative and transformative technology companies in Sharjah," said Jafar.

Beyond just work and school, many people simply enjoy living in the emirate. "[The city of Sharjah] is one of the best places in the country and the region in terms of costs of living, costs of communication, business, and use of internet networks," said Al Mahmoud of SEDD. Sharjah's focus on sustainable development and green initiatives, such as the Sharjah City Municipality's efforts to expand green spaces to approximately 23.5 million sqm, also improve the quality of life in the city. "Our vision for urban planning and infrastructure is focused on creating welcoming and functional urban spaces to support population growth and boost economic activities," said Al Tunaiji. Sharjah's strategic location, supportive government policies, and commitment to public services and sustainability all position it as a promising business hub in the region. ✖

WHY SHARJAH?

While its famous neighbors might grab the headlines, Sharjah is quietly becoming a secret powerhouse that offers a wide variety of activities and opportunities to entice investors.



POPULATION: 1.8 MILLION



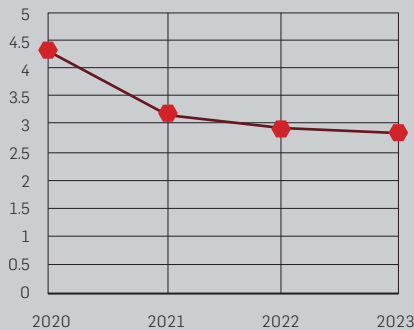
GDP SHARJAH: AED145.2 BILLION

• Non-oil sector contribution to GDP: **AED 142.5 billion**

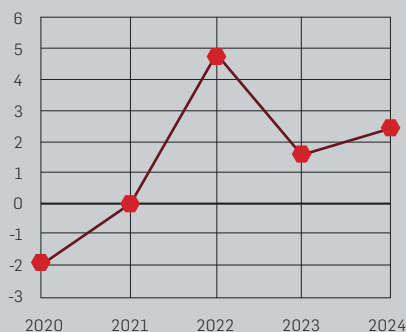
GDP per capita in Sharjah: AED80,666

GDP of UAE: AED1.83 TRILLION

Unemployment in Sharjah (%)



Inflation in Sharjah (%)



Top three contributing sectors to GDP in Sharjah (AED72.5 billion)



Wholesale, retail trade, motor vehicle repairs



Manufacturing



Construction

3 largest free trade zones in Sharjah

• Sharjah Airport International Free Zone (SAIF Zone)

- **Location:** Near Sharjah International Airport
- **Focus:** Manufacturing, logistics, aviation

Key features:

- Hosts 9,000+ companies
- Offers warehouses, office space, and industrial land
- 100% foreign ownership, zero corporate and income tax

• Hamriyah Free Zone (HFZA)

- **Location:** Near Hamriyah Port
- **Focus:** Heavy industry, oil and gas, petrochemicals, marine

Key features:

- 26 million sqm
- Pre-built warehouses, office space, land for lease
- 100% foreign ownership, duty-free imports and exports

• Sharjah Publishing City Free Zone (SPC Free Zone)

- **Location:** Near University City, Sharjah
- **Focus:** Publishing, media, education, technology, e-commerce

Key features:

- First zone dedicated to publishing and media
- Provides over 1,500 business activities
- Offers flexible office spaces and co-working hubs

FDI IN 2023:
USD2.75 billion

NUMBER OF NEW FDI PROJECTS IN 1H2023:

34
(AED1.2 billion)

TOP-5 SECTORS ATTRACTING FDI:

- 1) **Real estate & construction**
- 2) **Manufacturing & industrial**
- 3) **Technology & innovation**
- 4) **Tourism & hospitality**
- 5) **Education & research**

SUSTAINABLE *development*



Hamad Ali Abdalla Al Mahmoud
CHAIRMAN,
SHARJAH ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
(SEDD)

SEDD will continue to work on fostering a sustainable investment environment in Sharjah through greater promotion and marketing, simplifying procedures, and collaboration with entities to develop strategic sectors and value-added industries.

How do you align the economic development policies and strategies of Sharjah with the UAE Vision 2021 and the UN's DGS?

Sharjah represents about 10% of UAE's GDP, and its industry represents 16% of the emirate's GDP. Sharjah has a sustainable development economic vision that integrates the three sectors of development into one crucible, which are: economic development, social development, and environmental development. SEDD's vision in economic planning and attracting investment is consistent with UAE's vision, including six national priorities and 52 indicators in the educational, health, economic, security, community, and infrastructure sectors, as well as government services, on which the Department focuses strongly, which goes in line with the continuous pursuit of HH Sheikh Sultan bin Mohamed bin Sultan Al Qasimi, Crown Prince, Deputy Ruler of Sharjah and Chairman of the Executive Council. In addition, SEDD's vision is consistent with UAE 2021 vision, which is divided into six national aspects representing its main sectors. The department has taken its vision from building a knowledge-based and competitive economy, investing in education, and encouraging investment in integrated infrastructure. This is done in order to provide a safe and strong society in which the standards of sustainable development are met, which is the vision and goals that were achieved in the Emirate of Sharjah before the UN adopted the Millennium Goals for sustainable development.

“SEDD's vision in economic planning and attracting investment is consistent with UAE's vision.”

and development of human resources and cadres, thanks to universities and scientific institutions that it holds. It is also one of the best places in the country and the region in terms of costs of living, costs of communication, business, and use of internet networks. This is reflected on its leadership in the sectors of investment, business, infrastructure, and attracting human resources, which has thus made it one of the best cities in the world to live and work at the same time. Sharjah has also invested in the ease of obtaining licenses, in enhancing an attractive environment for FDI, and in providing all facilities to attract international companies and major investments from outside the country, with continuous development of its infrastructure to provide all facilities and information for companies, and to invest in the quality of life of the population. Sharjah is also a pioneer in investing in the smart and interactive cities sector and to be a regional center for emerging companies that have the infrastructure and applications of AI for business in Sharjah, in addition to the quality of life and its human character. Making the Emirate a center for emerging companies and innovation is important and can be accomplished through a sustainable economic growth strategy depends on a number of sustainability policies that the emirate is taking in various fields and designing new environmental and urban policies to raise the quality of life in the country. It was also achieved through creating main paths covering a wide range of legislation, policies, programs and projects, including the green

BIO

Hamad Ali Abdalla Al Mahmoud was appointed Chairman of SEDD in October 2023. He also holds a number of honorary positions including is one of the executive members of the Emirate of Sharjah, a member of Emirates Association for Franchise Development, a member of the National Entrepreneurship Council, chairman of Sharjah Foundation for Supporting Entrepreneurship (RUWAD), and chairman of the Projects Funding Committee at the RUWAD Foundation. Al Mahmoud holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Sharjah and graduated from Leadership Program from Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government.

Sharjah enjoys a reputation for fostering startups through its robust regulatory environment and its business-friendly policies. What are some examples of the benefits of starting a business in the Emirate?

Sharjah has obtained a number of international positions and titles based on its provision of economic, environmental and social capabilities that help and create an incubator environment that is business-friendly and helps in the growth

energy path, the green cities path, the path of reducing carbon emissions from industrial and commercial facilities, the green life path, and the green technology and technology path. This contributed in helping the Emirate to achieve popularity among the approved future indicators whereas it was ranked third in the Middle East and ninth in the world in terms of business-friendly economic and environmental capabilities, human resources, and standard of living.

How do you promote the development of non-oil sectors, such as tourism, logistics and manufacturing in Sharjah?

The wise leadership has launched the principle of economic diversification, so that economic growth does not depend on a single sector or resource. We also see that UAE does not rely on the oil and gas sectors but rather relies on focusing on the diversification of wealth in the sectors of tourism, trade, manufacturing, financial services, and technological innovation. This is achieved through economic strategies that encourage diversification and enhance investment in a variety of economic sectors. This helps in enhancing diversity in facilities and developing economic zones such as industrial and craft zones and focusing on qualifying the workforce with skills that suit the needs of new and diverse sectors, with continuous development of infrastructure. In addition, it supports the growth of various sectors, improve the business environment, and invest in R&D to enhance innovation to develop diverse economic sectors. It is worth mentioning that Sharjah's economy is approaching AED140 billion in GDP for economic sectors, with growth rates rising from 4.4% to 5.2% from 2021 to 2022. The Emirate's main economic sectors achieved significant growth, including the accommodation and food services sectors, which grew by 18%; followed by the human health and social service activities sector, with a growth rate of 7.9%; and the public

administration, defense, and compulsory social security sectors, with a growth rate of 6.6%. The three largest sectors in terms of relative weight in the Emirate were the wholesale and retail trade sectors and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, with a value of AED32.9 billion and a relative weight of 24%, then the manufacturing industries sector with a value of AED22.8 billion and a relative weight of 16.7%, followed by the real estate activities sector, with a value of AED13.2 billion and a relative weight of 9.7%. These are sectors that indicate strength and sustainability in economic growth, as they are driving sectors.

What are your main priorities and targets for the coming year?

The Emirate of Sharjah focuses largely on services and investment response, and SEDD's mechanisms and vision are focused around this concept. Among our goals and priorities, the first is to provide a sustainable investment environment through the continuous development of laws and procedures appropriate for investment, competitive requirements, and changes in the global market. In addition, we will work on continuous promotion and marketing, applying the investment map in industrial areas, and encouraging commercial sectors. This resulted in making the wholesale and retail trade sector a giant sector in Sharjah whereas it reached AED32.9 billion and represents 24% of the output of the Emirate's economy and 14.3% of the volume of licensing activities registered at SEDD. It is the sector that achieved economic growth in Sharjah of 5.7% in the last statistic studies. Third, we aim to simplify procedures and reduce costs, as well as constantly removing any obstacles facing investors. In addition, we will support the logistical infrastructure to facilitate production and export operations, and encourage and attract investments alongside with prioritizing investment in education and training. ✖



COMPLEMENTARY *ecosystem*

The Department of Government Relations plays an important role in helping to position Sharjah at an international level and coordinate its portfolio of trade, tourism, culture, and educational ties across the globe.

Sheikh Fahim Bin Sultan Bin Khalid Al Qasimi
EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN,
DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS



What initiatives does the Emirates offer to further enhance its appeal to international investors and businesses?

One of the wisest decisions by His Highness, the ruler, was bringing together our two leading academic institutions, both the University of Sharjah and the American University of Sharjah, to cooperate and build the Sharjah Research Technology and Innovation Park. We have spent over 25 years building two leading academic institutions in the University City. After that era of teaching, we are now in the era of research. The leadership of both of those universities has highlighted the key drivers of why we can build that innovation ecosystem today. Number one is a fantastic group of students who are the pride and joy of Sharjah. The second one is the quality and caliber of the faculty. The leadership of both universities has attracted top talent in their respective fields to teach and innovate in Sharjah. Last, but not least, is connectivity. Innovating and studying in Sharjah is not just studying in Sharjah; it is about connecting with global institutions like universities or with academics in the region, or with other students from other universities and other innovation institutions in the globe. Global connectivity is a message that Sharjah's innovation ecosystem will continue to emerge as being a key part of.

Where do you see greater opportunities in terms of cultural, heritage, or educational exchanges?

Our agenda for Sharjah has predominantly been driven by a consistent theme under the leadership of His Highness: "culture is where we begin." Cul-

tural relations or cultural diplomacy in Sharjah is the reason why many partners from around the world come here to collaborate. We have worked with our archeological department and our publishing industry to foster global cultural relations across the globe. Cultural exchanges go hand in hand with our economic diplomacy. Partners such as Invest in Sharjah or the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce work with us to identify opportunities for us to trade. The third part is our education diplomacy, and this is where the two leading universities in the region work with us. Our main agenda post-pandemic is looking close to home, and we are excited about the GCC as a region. We have cultural institutions in Sharjah like the UN's International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), the Arab Parliament for Children under the auspices of the Arab League, and the Islamic World Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ICESCO). Today, those institutions play a leading role in providing cultural leadership for the region, which mirrors Sharjah's role. We will look more into countries within the region to partner with including Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and countries within the wider Middle East and South Asia. That is where we will chart our economic diplomacy in the coming months.

How are the government, the Department of Government Relations, and the private sector working to position Sharjah at an international level compared to the other Emirates?

We play highly complementary roles, also understanding the role each indi-

vidual Emirate has within the UAE. Every investment into our infrastructure is done in line with the domestic landscape and the UAE strategy. We are all working toward the economic prosperity of the UAE. Sharjah has played a unique role in specific sectors, and rather than competition against other Emirates, there is instead complementarity. Within Sharjah, there is a strong opportunity with mid-scale manufacturing as a base. We have also seen positive growth in our real estate sector. There has been investment by large multinational UAE companies in the banking sector and others that are leveraging Sharjah as a core part of their workforce. In the coming years as the UAE continues to grow, we will not see people comparing one Emirate over another. Rather, it will be a complementary overview of all the Emirates as a whole. ✘

BIO

Sheikh Fahim Bin Sultan Bin Khalid Al Qasimi is a member of the Executive Council of Sharjah. In his role as Executive Chairman of the Department of Government Relations, Al Qasimi leads the cooperation between Sharjah government departments and international governments and NGOs. Prior to joining the Sharjah government, he worked in strategic advisory and performance monitoring of a portfolio of state-owned assets in the UAE. He has been awarded the Grand Collar of the Order of Antonio José de Irisarri from the President of Guatemala. Sheikh Fahim serves as the Vice President of the Alliance Française of Sharjah. Al Qasimi holds a master's degree in international relations from the University of Cambridge and speaks English, Arabic, French, and German.

The Sharjah Municipality building



NEW lifestyle



Sharjah Sustainable City is a key part of the Emirate's efforts to position itself globally as a benchmark for sustainable living and a major culture, tourism, and sustainability player in the region.

Yousif Ahmed Al-Mutawa
CEO,
SHARJAH SUSTAINABLE CITY

Cultivating a city that embodies environmental, economic, and social sustainability

Aims to inspire sustainable living

Sharjah Sustainable City is the first sustainable master-planned community in the Emirate of Sharjah. What have been the key milestones of the project?

Sharjah Sustainable City is the first sustainable master-planned community in the emirate of Sharjah, developed in partnership with the Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) and Diamond Developers, a private entity in Dubai renowned for pioneering sustainable real estate. Inspired by the success of Dubai Sustainable City, we aim to create a thriving community that sets new standards for sustainability in Sharjah's real estate landscape. Our goal is ambitious: to cultivate a city that embodies environmental, economic, and social sustainability and inspires others to embrace sustainable living. With 1,250 villas, we exceed the scale of Dubai's project, reflecting our commitment to pushing boundaries. Our joint venture, established in 2018, paved the way for construction. We acknowledge the unique demands of Sharjah's climate and lifestyle preferences. For example, while traditional sustainability models might discourage vehicular traffic within the city, we recognize the need for proximity and convenience, especially in light of the weather. Balancing sustainability with practicality, we have tailored our approach to meet the community's needs. While our commitment to sustainability remains steadfast, we acknowledge the importance of adapting to the expectations and lifestyles of our residents.

What makes this model ideal for future sustainable developments in the region?

The masterplan is designed on grid lines, focusing on integrating innovative technologies, including a motorized cleaning system for solar panels atop the roofs. Every rooftop in the community is equipped with solar panels, to provide each villa with its own sustainable power source. This approach sets a new standard in the UAE's residential market, harnessing the abundant sunlight to benefit residents. Every aspect of the villas is designed with sustainability in mind, from UV-reflective glass that reduces AC consumption to carefully selected building materials that optimize energy efficiency. Our advanced AC systems utilize the latest VRF technology, minimizing power consumption by centralizing the cooling process. Water-efficient

fixtures and energy-saving appliances are included in each unit, further promoting sustainable living practices. The project also features a green spine dividing the community, with biodomes at its center where residents can enjoy chemical-free vegetables grown on-site. To encourage community engagement, urban farms are provided between blocks, offering residents the opportunity to cultivate their own crops with guidance from our staff.

What specific initiatives or features of the city have the most significant impact on promoting a sustainable lifestyle?

Collectively, these elements contribute to a holistic lifestyle. Our aim is to foster a healthy way of living that aligns with the climatic conditions of the UAE. We prioritize creating shaded areas and promoting walkability and wellness, enhancing the overall appeal of the properties. Furthermore, integrating smart technologies adds another layer of attractiveness. By providing residents with the ability to monitor power consumption, we gain insights into their behavior, allowing us to tailor community workshops and address daily needs accordingly.

What are the key goals and priorities for the coming year in Sharjah?

Upon completing both the commercial and residential components, our intention is to retain the management of the community rather than transferring it solely to individual owners to form an association, as is customary. Our vision extends to integrating the community with an Internet of Things system, aiming for a fully integrated city infrastructure. While not entirely autonomous, this system will streamline operations, reducing the workforce needed for day-to-day tasks. Embracing such technological advancements is crucial for maintaining accuracy, presence, and facilitating future enhancements to the city. Once this integration is achieved, our primary goal is expansion. We have observed demand for individual homes alongside townhouses, prompting us to explore opportunities to develop larger mansions within the community. Recognizing the appeal of spacious living within a sustainable city, we anticipate that residents will be willing to invest in such offerings. ✖

BIO

Yousif Ahmed Al Mutawa is the CEO of Sharjah Sustainable City. He started his career in 2006 as a project manager for Shurooq, embarking on a 14-year professional journey within the group across a variety of strategic leadership roles spanning project management from design until construction, property management, operations, and investment management. He holds a bachelor's degree in e-commerce from the Higher College of Technology - Sharjah and is a certified Project Management Professional and a member of the Project Management Institute (PMI).



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