

# “You Have One Hundred Days”

## Accelerating Government Performance in the UAE

### Abridged Case

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*“The Government Accelerators is an example of our drive for performance in government by shifting the paradigm about how fast and efficiently we achieve tangible impact and results.”*

- H.E. Ohood Al Roumi, Minister of State for Happiness and Director General of the UAE Prime Minister’s Office

By 2018, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) had built a reputation for governing at speed and with great ambition. Still, despite best efforts and significant resources, some problems remained stuck and seemed to defy attempts at innovation. To get them unstuck, the UAE had launched the Government Accelerators program, designed to catalyze bureaucratic progress through one hundred-day “sprints.” Huda Al Hashimi, assistant director-general for strategy and innovation at the prime minister’s office (PMO), spearheaded the program, which had a broad mandate. As she began selecting areas ripe for accelerated innovation, she realized that the problems that remained stuck were precisely the ones that most needed fast and creative solutions. The question she faced was determining which problems to bet on in the next sprint.

Two years earlier, the program was only an idea. In November 2016, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, vice president and prime minister of the UAE and ruler of Dubai, had announced the Government Accelerators via Twitter, describing them as “solutions-based collaboration[s] between government, private sector, and academic teams.”<sup>1</sup> Created with support from the Rapid Results Institute, the new program ran a series of one hundred-day challenges in which “acceleration” teams of frontline staff worked urgently across boundaries to tackle some of government’s most difficult problems.<sup>i</sup> (See Appendix 1 for more details.)

The program aligned with *UAE Vision 2021*, an ambitious cross-sector agenda the PMO had launched in 2006. By fall 2016, with the deadline fast approaching and progress lagging in several areas, the prime minister had turned to the Government Accelerators as a mechanism to unlock bureaucratic bottlenecks. (See Appendix 2 for UAE Economic Sectors and National Priorities.) When Al Hashimi and her team first pitched the idea of the Government Accelerators to the prime minister, the initial thought was to pilot it quietly with one program. But the prime minister was so eager to enact it “on a very large scale, and very openly,” said Al Hashimi, that he more or less immediately announced the launch on Twitter.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> For more information on the Rapid Results Institute, rebranded as RE!NSTITUTE in 2022, see: <https://re-institute.org/>.

The methodology behind the Government Accelerators had originated in the work of Robert H. Schaffer, a business consultant who pioneered the “rapid results” model in the 1980s. Schaffer’s key insight was that the best way to foster change within organizations was to focus on quick, measurable results rather than processes and long-term strategy.<sup>3</sup> He argued that aggressive goals and tight time frames enabled companies to “tap into hidden reserves of capacity and energy to get the job done.”<sup>4</sup> While senior managers defined goals, tracked progress, and removed obstacles, operational staff designed and carried out concrete action plans to drive results.<sup>5</sup> By the 2000s, major consulting firms such as Bain & Company were using one hundred-day challenges to help companies improve cash flow, capture synergies, or drive down costs. At the same time, the Rapid Results Institute adapted the approach to help communities around the world take on urgent social challenges such as homelessness, gender-based violence, workplace safety, and maternal and pediatric health.<sup>6</sup>

In the UAE, the Government Accelerators selected a cohort of around eight teams twice a year to tackle seemingly intractable government problems.<sup>7</sup> At the cohort kickoff, leadership teams, which included relevant agency heads, defined the challenges and appointed frontline staff to the acceleration teams. During the launch event, the acceleration teams defined goals and work plans and presented them to all the agency heads and other cohort teams. Fifty days later, all the teams came together again for a mid-point review to gauge progress and revise their work plans. On day one hundred, teams presented their results to a wider audience and recommended actions to sustain and scale them up. While some teams scrambled to meet the deadline, others found creative ways to collaborate across stakeholders and accomplished their goals by the fifty-day mark, devoting the remainder of their time to sustainability and scale.<sup>8</sup>

Teams involving multiple organizations or departments were required to set goals that touched people’s lives. These goals had to be clear and ambitious but still achievable in the one hundred-day timeframe. To spur creativity and a sense of urgency, teams were encouraged to set seemingly unreachable targets, while agency leaders granted them license to experiment and innovate in pursuing them.<sup>9</sup> Coaches (trained facilitators from the prime minister’s office) supported teams throughout the journey with workshops and milestone events. Sponsors (respected senior managers from key organizations) acted as intermediaries, keeping leadership up to date on the teams’ progress, escalating issues as needed, and drawing out plans for sustaining and scaling results.<sup>10</sup> Once the teams were appointed, however, neither agency heads nor team sponsors were permitted to interfere in the teams’ day-to-day work.

By mid-2018, twenty months after launching, the program appeared to be a success. Twenty-six teams had participated in three cohorts, meeting ambitious targets in diverse areas, such as streamlining business registrations, significantly reducing traffic fatalities, and curbing NOx emissions in an amount equivalent to removing roughly 450,000 cars from the streets.<sup>11</sup> As Sultan Al Shaali, director of the Government Accelerators, pointed out, “The Government Accelerator [teams] have shown so many great results . . . without any extra budget . . . without changing organizations’ structures.”<sup>12</sup> He added that while government agencies had hesitated to be involved at the outset, the Government Accelerators had received around 150 requests to participate in the next cohort.

While these successes were gratifying, questions remained about the sustainability of the results, as did concerns about whether some of the metrics had been cherry-picked or whether other, less

positive side effects had been captured. Even if the approach was a net success, Al Hashimi did not want to rest on her laurels. “In the UAE government, we celebrate fast,” she said. “Because if you celebrate for too long, you get lax.” She and her team at the Government Accelerators had to continue delivering, especially in the strategic areas with high impact on citizens’ lives that, despite all efforts, were still not moving forward.

One of these areas was health. Despite technological advances, many people, particularly in more remote areas of the country, died of diseases that were curable if detected in time. In her next meeting, Al Hashimi and her team would be evaluating one potential challenge for the next cohort: reducing the incidence of breast cancer. This was not an easy decision. Only eight Accelerator teams could participate, and they had to select the teams with the highest need for the Government Accelerators’ support and greatest impact potential. Was the breast cancer project the right challenge for the Government Accelerators?

## The Government Accelerators in Action

The selection of challenges was crucial to the success of the Government Accelerators initiative. As Al Hashimi prepared for the meeting to evaluate breast cancer as a potential challenge, she reflected on two recent accelerator projects and what they suggested about whether to proceed.

### *The Newborns Package*

The first project concerned registration of newborn babies. While most parents could secure a birth certificate for their child in under three days, they had to work with multiple government entities in at least seven different transactions to get additional family certificates and obtain a passport. This was true for all 34,794 Emirati families that had babies in 2015.<sup>13</sup> The process took each family upwards of fifty-six hours, which amounted to nearly two million hours in bureaucratic transactions a year at a moment in life when time is most precious.

The Ministry of Interior and the Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (TRA) brought the issue to the Government Accelerators in 2017. Other key agencies, including the Ministry of Health and Prevention, the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship, and the Emirates Post Group, were invited to participate. Hospitals and private-sector partners were also invited. During the kick-off session, the leader of the TRA and later sponsor of the project, Mohammed Al Khamis, made the case for the challenge’s impact in citizens’ lives. Other stakeholder agencies, he said, “understood it straightaway, because every one of them is a father or has a child.”<sup>14</sup> After some back and forth, the leaders of the involved entities reached an agreement: “We need to enable a newborn documentation package across the UAE,” said Al Khamis.

During the two-day launch event, the freshly appointed twenty-two-member acceleration team agreed to create a system that could deliver the whole package in a single transaction. They gave themselves sixty-five days to integrate systems and processes across entities into a single platform. They planned to roll out the new system in three hospitals from three different Emirates over the last thirty-five days, with the goal of registering at least 60 percent of births in those hospitals by the end of the one hundred-day period.

Suad Al Shamsi from the TRA, who had nine years of experience in the private sector and four years in government, led the team. When she first heard about the project, she thought it was impossible. “I had just led another project, and it took us around a year to achieve integration with seven entities.”<sup>15</sup> This project involved ten entities and gave them a little over three months to meet the goal.

At the two-day launch event, the eight teams in the cohort, including the newborns package team, participated in different exercises. Most team members did not know each other, and the exercises provided a bonding opportunity. Some, like Al Shamsi, were skeptical but, with dozens of their peers across government participating, went along despite their doubts. One exercise required team members to pass a tennis ball sequentially, with each person touching it within seconds. When teams protested it was impossible, coaches insisted others had done it. Teams began to think creatively, and some even managed to beat the clock. Only then did the coaches admit they had lied. It was a revelatory moment. “It’s the brain that blocks what’s possible and what’s not possible,” realized Al Shamsi, “There is no such thing as ‘not possible.’”

But doubts about the feasibility of the newborns project remained. At the end of the launch, Al Shamsi, as the team leader, had to present the team’s goal to the public, including the ministers. “As I drove back home, I was thinking to myself, ‘Are you crazy? What did you get yourself into?’” The challenge sponsor, Al Khamis, also had his doubts: “Coming from a technical background, I understood what it takes to basically connect systems together—what problems they would come across, the different mentalities, the different maturity of the systems. Really, really, really, I wasn’t sure it would be done. However, . . . I believed in Suad; I believed in the team.” According to Al Shamsi, the first meeting after the launch did not go well: “We didn’t reach . . . even a simple conclusion about the next steps. . . . My brain was always focused on the stress of the time. Time is passing, what are we doing? . . . I left and I went to my boss and said, ‘I don’t know what we’re doing.’”

“At the beginning [Al Shamsi] was not very confident, to be honest, but she was very strong, technically,” recalled Amal Abdulrahim, one of the coaches.<sup>16</sup> Al Khamis added, “There wasn’t that team spirit, I would say. Everyone looked just at what they needed to do, and they didn’t care about everything else.” It was hard for him to watch the team struggle with difficult decisions, but “we had very clear instructions from the Government Accelerators: Do not get involved. Let them do the job.” However, he could and did help expedite approvals and negotiate with leaders from other agencies.

Al Shamsi gradually earned her team’s trust. “She was very technically savvy,” said Ahmad Lootah, another coach, “and I think because she was involved in that very early concept design, she was able to get that trust from the rest of the team.”<sup>17</sup> Al Khamis concurred: “I think she gained the respect of the team by being sharp, responsive—able to respond to difficult questions and to involve different stakeholders.” In the weekly meetings, Al Shamsi started to use motivational techniques. “I divided them into three groups, and we started to have this healthy competition. We started to support each other, and I used to buy them gifts and also announce [the winners of the mini competitions] on WhatsApp.” Slowly, she saw a collaborative spirit emerge.

Forty days into the challenge, however, the team was behind schedule. Al Shamsi told the leadership, “We’re too late, and even if we worked day and night, we’re too late.” She was travelling to the US when she got word that His Highness himself wanted to check progress with the team. Al Shamsi

decided, “You know what? That’s okay. The US can wait. This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I want to go for it.” She flew back to Dubai for His Highness’s visit. “In his eyes, we saw how excited he was with our challenge,” she recalled. This was the push she and the team needed: “Now there was nothing which was possible or not possible. I had made my commitment, so it had to happen.”

Fifteen days later, at 5:30 am, Al Shamsi recalled, she got a text message: “Our system is up and running.” She rushed to the hospital in Abu Dhabi to see the first parents use the system. But when they started the online registration process, the system failed. A few hours of frantic tinkering later, she noted, “we made it work, and the father got registered into the system, and we apologized to him. He was still very excited.”

In its haste to hit the target, the team had to balance the need for security against the quality of the service. “The security component, the identity component—this had to be truly tested, and there were no sacrifices. But for the other . . . we did as much as we could from a minimum good-case-scenario perspective. Anything outside that scenario, we would deal with it later.” By the one hundredth day, two hundred newborns had been registered into the new system, 66 percent of them born in the pilot regions in the previous thirty-five days. Less than a year later, twenty-four hospitals were participating, and 2,900 babies had been registered. In March 2018, the team received a prize at the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva. The Government Accelerators’ success had crossed borders.

### *The Small Claims Court*

An example of a project with a very different dynamic concerned inefficiencies in the court system. According to the World Bank, getting a contract enforced in Emirati courts took, on average, 445 days in 2018. It was also expensive: lawyers, court fees, and enforcement fees cost up to 21 percent of the claim amount.<sup>18</sup> The Ministry of Justice, well aware of the need to provide businesses with legal certainty and efficient resolution of disputes, participated in the Government Accelerators to improve the operation of the courts. The leaders of all the judicial entities at the federal and Emirate level participated in the kickoff leadership meeting, and they nominated judges and court presidents at all government levels to form the acceleration team.

At the two-day launch event, the team members selected their leader—the most senior judge among them—and discussed the problems of the court system: high workloads, lack of resources, uncoordinated systems across Emirates, and so on. The challenge sponsor, Salem Al Qaidi, president of Dubai Courts, recalled, “Each of them wanted to get their own opinion across. They disagreed with other people’s opinions. But then eventually, they wrote down a list of all their ideas and decided together which of the ideas were the most appropriate.”<sup>19</sup>

Ayesha Al Joker, the team’s other coach, noted, “They were the last team in the cohort [to choose their goal]. . . . They were thinking of a lot of different aspects that they needed to consider, and we were asking them to set a goal that was ambitious—one which seemed unreasonable but could be achieved.”<sup>20</sup> Finally, Al Joker recalled, the team leader took the podium and announced the team goal: within one hundred days, they would reduce adjudication of minor misdemeanors and civil claims that did not exceed 100,000 dirhams from two months to one day in all courts across the UAE.

Difficulties emerged right away. Senior members of the acceleration team were skeptical of the coaches’ exercises. Nour Sabbagh, a coach, explained that the exercises “did not land with the team members because they were too senior and they saw straight through [them].”<sup>21</sup> In contrast to other projects, this team was composed mainly of senior judges with legal training rather than frontline workers with different backgrounds. Their focus on legal aspects made it hard for the coaches, who lacked legal expertise, to help them draft the action plan. Nonetheless, the coaches urged the team to think outside the box: “I was trying to direct them to think of other solutions,” said Al Joker, “something related to the administrative work. This was maybe the difficult part for them—to think not of the law but of other ways of achieving the goal. They spent the first three weeks only talking, discussing in too much detail all the content that this proposed law should cover.”

Another team member, Linda Fitz-Alan, acknowledged, “It’s the nature of the beast with lawyers.”<sup>22</sup> She was registrar at the Abu Dhabi Global Markets Court, which focused on foreign investments. Her background as a lawyer in Australia allowed her to bring an international perspective: “We were able to . . . look at other small claims courts in Australia, the UK, and Singapore.” With that input, Al Qaidi explained, they “drafted the journey of each of these claims in a very detailed way and then created bylaws that would address each of these steps within those journeys.”

Despite these contributions, the team still could not agree on the legal changes needed to meet their goal of resolving small disputes in one day. Close to the fiftieth day, and after several meetings at the Government Accelerators over this period, they convened in one of the coffee shops upstairs. “Maybe [because] the setup of the place was different . . .,” said Al Joker, “they were able to finalize the law and agree on all the points that they needed to include.”

Immediately afterwards, the team was asked to fold their proposed changes into a law that a different Government Accelerators team was already working on. According to another coach, Mohammad Haddad, “It was very hard for the small claims team. They had spent fifty days working hard, and now all this effort would be transferred to the other team.”<sup>23</sup> They were so disappointed that during the mid-point review workshop with all the cohort teams, they left and decided not to come back. Some members wanted to withdraw from the Government Accelerators altogether.

The week after the mid-point review, the coaches canceled the regular meeting and instead invited the team to lunch outside. Working with the sponsor, they focused on calming tensions and helping the team refocus on achieving some results by the end of the one hundred days. Using Haddad’s contacts, they then reached out to two judicial training institutes and organized a series of trainings on the legal changes that would take effect once the law was passed. Sixty-four judges and lawyers were trained, giving the team a way to test the proposed changes directly with the law’s future users.

When the hundredth day arrived, the team could not report full achievement of the goal. They had indeed agreed on the legal reforms needed to create a small claims court to solve cases expediently, but that law had to be approved by the cabinet and the prime minister, something beyond the team’s powers. The reward did come in September 2018, however, when the prime minister announced the law’s passage, launching the first one-day court in the UAE. “The development of our government continues,” he tweeted. “The promotion of our economy does not stop. The journey for the competitive lifting of our economy has no end line.”<sup>24</sup>

## Looking to the Next Cohort

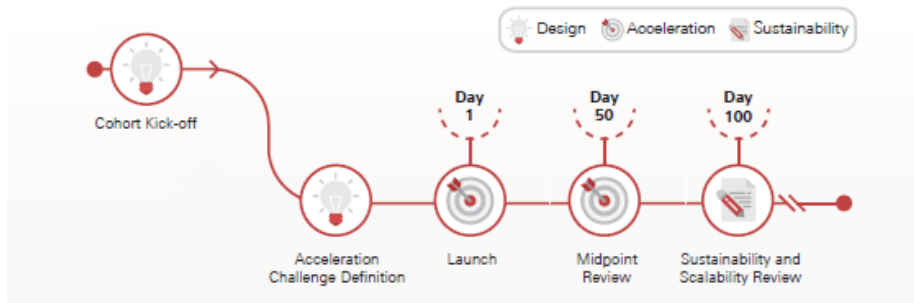
As she reflected on these and other projects that had gone through the Government Accelerators, Huda Al Hashimi considered what characteristics of the team, the challenges, or the context had made for successful cases and what factors prevented teams from achieving their goals. She and her team had to make sure that results were sustainable and not just a mirage that would last only during the program. They also had to make sure that the chosen challenges needed their support and would be a good use of the Accelerators’ limited resources.

The deadline for *UAE Vision 2021* was approaching, and the Accelerators’ challenges would be under scrutiny. Preventive medicine was undoubtedly a component of “world-class healthcare.” Breast cancer was often curable if discovered early, and the impact on families was easy to recognize. But the topic had its challenges. Increasing cancer screening meant overcoming cultural and mental barriers. Convincing someone who is ill to get treatment was easy, but getting healthy people to take preventive measures was another story. And getting human resources, machines, and transportation to women in remote areas—across valleys and mountains—was a major logistical hurdle. Tackling these challenges, moreover, required action from the Ministry of Health and Prevention, hospitals, the private sector, and civil society entities involved in education and service provision. The possibility of saving lives and getting closer to a top national priority was worth the effort, but, Al Hashimi wondered, how could the Government Accelerators help?

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Short description of the one hundred-day methodology and global reach of RE!NSTITUTE<sup>ii</sup>

#### The 100-Day Challenge’s Five Key Milestones Along Three Phases

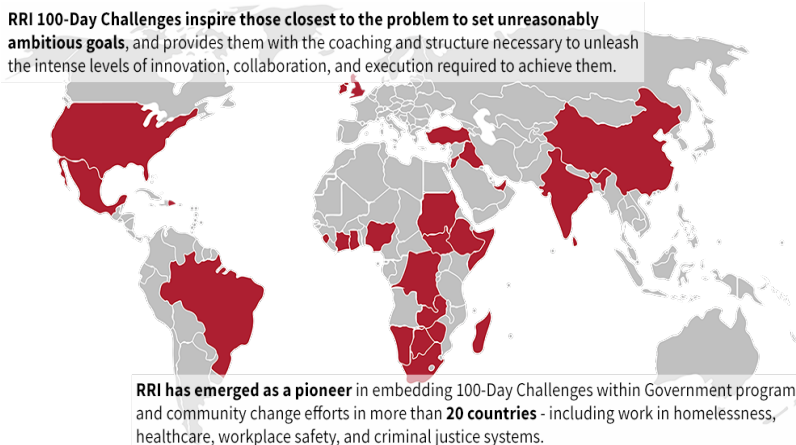


1. The launching of a Cohort and the proposal submission process—the Government Accelerators announce that they are starting to receive proposals from entities that wish to enroll with them.
2. The definition of the Challenges—after reviewing the proposals they receive, the Government Accelerators define Challenges with the Leadership Team
3. The Launch workshop—after Challenges are defined, Acceleration Teams are selected and the one hundred days countdown starts. During this event, Acceleration Teams set their goals for the one hundred days and design a work plan to achieve this goal.
4. The Midpoint Review workshop—fifty days after the countdown starts, Acceleration Teams reflect on their progress to date and revise their work plans to ensure they are able to achieve their goal.
5. The Sustainability and Scalability Review workshop—at the end of the one hundred days, Acceleration Teams conclude their experience at the Government Accelerators and recommend actions to sustain and scale the results they achieved.

Source: “Government Accelerators,” Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), June 2019, 11, accessed May 2026, <https://assets.u.ae/api/public/content/61f51c2c8cc84dc19877e7c471f55dd9?v=89d04437>

#### The 100-Day Challenge’s Global Reach

RRI 100-Day Challenges inspire those closest to the problem to set unreasonably ambitious goals and provides them with the coaching and structure necessary to unleash the intense levels of innovation, collaboration, and execution required to achieve them.



Source: Government of the United Arab Emirates, accessed October 2020, <https://www.accelerators.gov.ae/>

<sup>ii</sup> The Rapid Results Institute was renamed RE!NSTITUTE in early 2022 (see <https://re-institute.org/blog/rapid-results-institute-becomes-reinstitute>).

**Appendix 2** UAE Economic Sectors and National Priorities

Economic Sectors in the UAE GDP

Economic Sector	Contribution to the GDP for 2014 (in percent)
Extraction of crude oil and natural gas	34.3
Wholesale and retail trade	11.3
Repair services	11.3
Real estate	10.3
Businesses	10.3
Construction	9.0
Manufacturing	9.0
Other	4.5

Source: Government of the United Arab Emirates, accessed October 2020, <https://www.government.ae/en/about-the-uae/economy>

Six National Priorities of *UAE Vision 2021*

**NATIONAL PRIORITIES**



Source: Government of the United Arab Emirates, *UAE Vision 2021*, accessed October 2020, <https://www.vision2021.ae/en>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, November 20, 2016, 10:41, <https://twitter.com/hhshkmohd/status/800363340623003650?lang=es>.

<sup>2</sup> All quotes from Huda Al Hashimi are from case writer interviews conducted in person on May 16, 2018, and October 15, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Robert H. Schaffer and Harvey A. Thomson, “Successful Change Programs Begin with Results,” *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1992, accessed April 2026, <https://hbr.org/1992/01/successful-change-programs-begin-with-results>.

<sup>4</sup> “Schaffer Methodologies: Rapid Results,” Schaffer Consulting, accessed April 2026, <https://schafferconsulting.com/what-we-do/transformation/>.

<sup>5</sup> Schaffer and Thomson, “Successful Change Programs.”

<sup>6</sup> “Our Projects,” REINSTITUTE, accessed April 2026, <https://re-institute.org/our-work/our-projects>.

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted, information about how the Government Accelerators worked was provided by the Government Accelerators team to the case writers.

<sup>8</sup> “Government Accelerators,” Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), June 2019, accessed May 2026, <https://assets.u.ae/api/public/content/61f51c2c8cc84dc19877e7c471f55dd9?v=89d04437>.

<sup>9</sup> “Government Accelerators in United Arab Emirates,” REINSTITUTE!, accessed April 2026, <https://re-institute.org/our-work/our-projects/governance/government-accelerators-united-arab-emirates>.

<sup>10</sup> “Government Accelerators,” Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, 13.

<sup>11</sup> “Government Accelerators in United Arab Emirates,” REINSTITUTE, accessed May 2026, <https://re-institute.org/our-work/our-projects/governance/government-accelerators-united-arab-emirates>.

<sup>12</sup> All quotes from Sultan Al Shaali are from case writer interviews conducted in person on May 13, 2018, and October 14, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> “Live Births National and Non-National,” bayanat.ae, 2019, accessed October 2020, [http://data.bayanat.ae/en\\_GB/dataset/live-births-by-nationality](http://data.bayanat.ae/en_GB/dataset/live-births-by-nationality).

<sup>14</sup> All quotes from Mohammed Al Khamis are from a case writer interview conducted in person on May 17, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Unless cited otherwise, quotes from Suad Al Shamsi are from case writer interviews conducted in person on May 17, 2018, and October 15, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> All quotes from Amal Abdulrahim are from a case writer interview conducted in person on May 15, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> All quotes from Ahmad Lootah are from a case writer interview conducted in person on May 15, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> World Bank, “Doing Business 2018. Reforming to Create Jobs,” <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/909941510208110482/Doing-Business-2018-reforming-to-create-jobs-United-Arab-Emirates> (United Arab Emirates: World Bank, November 2017), link, accessed November 2019.

<sup>19</sup> All quotes from Salem Al Qaidi are from a case writer interview conducted in person on May 14, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> All quotes from Ayesha Al Joker are from a case writer interview conducted in person on May 15, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> All quotes from Nour Sabbagh are from a case writer interview conducted in person on May 15, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> All quotes from Linda Fitz-Alan are from a case writer interview conducted in person on May 14, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> All quotes from Mohammad Haddad are from a case writer interview conducted in person on May 16, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, September 16, 2018, 6:33, <https://twitter.com/HHShkMohd/status/1041319288244789248>.