



The Weekly Business Briefing

Functional Note - 17 April 2026

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Edito

The past week has been generally calmer, marked by several encouraging signals: the Israel–Lebanon ceasefire appears to be holding, no new Iranian strikes have been reported, and backchannel talks remain active in search of a potential off-ramp. Taken together, these developments create the impression of a gradual return to a degree of normalcy.

However, this easing of immediate tensions should not obscure the underlying reality: structural risks remain elevated, and it is still too early to consider the crisis over. Regional fragilities persist, and the overall balance remains unstable.

On the economic front, the effects of the situation continue to be felt across multiple sectors. In particular, the ongoing constraints around the Strait of Hormuz continue to weigh on logistics, transportation costs, and overall visibility for businesses.

In this context, our business community continues to operate with agility and resilience. Companies are adapting and moving forward in an environment that, while calmer on the surface, is neither fully stabilized nor back to normal.

At the same time, the announcement of the return to in-person schooling, under certain conditions and without school transport, is a positive development. It should help ease some of the pressures on human resources management, while still requiring flexibility in the days ahead. It remains, therefore, a day-by-day environment.

We continue our active mobilization to support our members and has also resumed in-person events, including two very insightful conferences in partnership with APM this week, as well as upcoming gatherings such as French Tuesday in Dubai and French Wednesday in Abu Dhabi next week.

In conclusion, this week's briefing is somewhat lighter than previous editions, which is in itself a positive sign.

We would like to thank all contributors for their input and wish you an insightful reading.

Kind regards,

The CCI France UAE Team

Human Resources

The overall sentiment across participants is more positive and cautiously optimistic, with a visible sense that the situation is easing locally. As a result, many organizations are moving from crisis-response mode toward gradual normalization, while keeping contingency plans active and reviewing unresolved legal, tax, and operational risks.

Workforce Visibility and Tracking

- Continued close monitoring of:
 - employees in-country vs. abroad
 - return rates and office attendance
 - operational utilization levels
- Some organizations use case-by-case tracking for individual situations (pregnancy, family concerns, safety hesitations).
- Several companies continue reviewing employee data accuracy (location, dependents, contacts) as part of readiness planning.
- Interest raised in real-time crisis management tools (apps/platforms) to monitor employee safety and communicate rapidly during incidents, though data privacy constraints remain a barrier in some countries.

Employee Mobility and Evacuation Requests

- Large-scale evacuation remains inactive and increasingly less immediate, but plans remain in place as a precaution.
- Discussion highlighted concern over corporate liability if companies independently organize charter evacuations without government coordination.
- Consensus emerging that any evacuation would need:
 - employee consent
 - external security guidance
 - strong alignment with embassies/government channels where possible.

Remote Work From Abroad

- Many organizations are now asking employees abroad to return, often with soft deadlines or by end of April.
- In most cases, employees appear willing to return, with limited resistance.
- Delays are now more often due to flight logistics, indirect routes or family considerations, rather than fear.
- For employees choosing to remain abroad: annual leave remains the primary solution, unpaid leave may be considered later.
- Corporate tax and Permanent Establishment risks remain a concern for prolonged cases, with several companies continuing to seek advice from Vialto.

Workplace Strategy (Return to Office)

- Strong momentum this week around office reopening and voluntary return.
- Multiple organizations reopened offices partially or fully on a voluntary basis.
- Attendance has increased quickly in several cases, with employees reportedly:

- happy to reconnect
- eager to return to normality
- missing the office environment.
- Some companies linking next steps to:
 - school reopening announcements (*with flexibility as school buses remain suspended*).
 - security outlook
 - HQ approvals.
- In some sectors, office presence is also linked to:
 - client-facing work
 - customer collaboration
 - field team solidarity.

Wellbeing & Mental Health

- Sentiment generally improved compared to previous weeks.
- Return to office is being viewed by some as a well-being lever, helping reduce isolation and restore social connection.
- A few employees remain highly reluctant to return or emotionally impacted, requiring one-to-one support.
- Leaders continue balancing operational decisions with psychological comfort levels.

Key Takeaways

- Stronger optimism this week, with many leaders sensing that conditions are improving.
- Return-to-office momentum is clearly being built, mostly on a voluntary basis.
- Remote work abroad is narrowing and likely temporary for most employees.
- Contingency planning remains alive, but less front-of-mind than in prior weeks.
- Legal/tax risk remains the main unresolved structural issue for prolonged out-of-country cases.

Key UAE News of the Week

UAE Central Bank Develops e-KYC Platform

The Central Bank of the UAE is developing a nationwide electronic Know Your Customer (e-KYC) platform as part of its Financial Infrastructure Transformation programme. This initiative aims to modernize the financial sector by creating a unified system for verifying customer and business identities.

The platform will streamline onboarding processes by reducing duplication in due diligence checks, lowering compliance costs, and accelerating access to financial services. It will also integrate trusted data sources and automate workflows, improving efficiency for banks and fintech companies. Security and privacy are central to the project, with data sharing based strictly on customer consent. Authorities highlight that the platform will strengthen anti-money laundering compliance and reinforce the UAE's position as a leading global financial hub.

Source: Gulf News, <https://gulfnews.com/business/banking/uae-central-bank-to-develop-e-kyc-platform-1.500507493>

UAE Emerges as a Leading Global AI Hub

The United Arab Emirates has been recognized as one of the world's leading artificial intelligence hubs in the AI Index Report 2026 by Stanford University. The country stands out for its strong institutional support, including advanced strategies, governance frameworks, and widespread awareness of AI technologies.

The UAE performs strongly across key indicators such as talent, skills, job creation, and adoption, with AI usage exceeding expectations relative to its economic size. More than 80% of employees reportedly use AI in the workplace, reflecting high trust and integration across sectors. Rapid growth in AI talent, education initiatives, and national strategies further reinforce its position. Authorities aim to strengthen innovation and global competitiveness, positioning the UAE as a central player in the future of artificial intelligence.

Source: Gulf News, <https://gulfnews.com/business/economy/uae-ranks-among-leading-global-ai-hubs-in-ai-index-2026-1.500508377>

Investors Continue to Favor UAE Despite Regional Tensions

Despite ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, investors continue to view the United Arab Emirates as a safe and attractive destination for capital. The country benefits from strong policy consistency, legal clarity, and a business-friendly regulatory environment, which provide reassurance during uncertain times.

The UAE's diversified economy and strategic position as a global trade hub further reinforce investor confidence. Its advanced infrastructure, connectivity between major markets, and openness to international business make it resilient compared to other regional economies.

Additionally, stable financial systems, strong liquidity, and government support measures help maintain market stability. Even amid short-term volatility, investors remain focused on long-term fundamentals, viewing the UAE as a reliable hub for growth and capital preservation.

Source: Gulf News, <https://gulfnews.com/business/markets/why-investors-keep-choosing-uae-despite-regional-tensions-1.500508105>

UAE and China Strengthen Trade Ties with 24 Agreements

The United Arab Emirates and China have signed 24 agreements aimed at boosting trade, investment, and economic cooperation, marking a significant step in their strategic partnership. The deals were concluded during the visit of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to Beijing.

These agreements cover key sectors such as energy, technology, infrastructure, and sustainability, reflecting both countries' commitment to deepening collaboration and fostering

innovation. The partnership builds on already strong economic ties, with non-oil bilateral trade surpassing \$100 billion for the first time, reaching over \$110 billion in 2025.

Officials from both sides emphasized the importance of expanding investment flows, enhancing connectivity, and creating new business opportunities. The UAE and China aim to further scale their trade relationship, with long-term ambitions of reaching \$300 billion in bilateral trade by 2030.

Source: Gulf News, <https://gulfnews.com/business/markets/uae-and-china-sign-24-deals-to-push-trade-past-100-billion-1.500505401>

Dubai South introduces new incentives for free zone firms

Dubai South has introduced a new package of incentives to support companies operating within its free zone and reduce overall business costs. These measures include significant administrative relief, such as fee waivers on license renewals and the removal of penalties for late payments, allowing companies to regularize their status without additional financial pressure. In addition, businesses can benefit from more flexible payment plans, making it easier to manage cash flow in uncertain conditions.

The initiative also provides support for new company formation, with simplified procedures and reduced setup costs to encourage entrepreneurship and attract new investors. These measures aim to ease entry barriers while helping existing firms sustain their operations.

By easing operational constraints, Dubai South aims to help firms maintain stability and continue their growth. This move is part of Dubai's broader strategy to strengthen its position as a leading global business hub, attract new investors, and enhance economic resilience, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Source: Gulf News: <https://gulfnews.com/business/markets/dubai-south-rolls-out-new-incentives-for-free-zone-firms-1.500510006>