

UAE company setup checklist

From choosing the jurisdiction to the first tax filing, with a quote sheet so no setup agent chooses for you.

Tick each step in order. Keep digital copies of every document - you will upload them to the bank, the tax authority and every platform. Align the licence and visa renewal dates and set reminders sixty days ahead.

1. Decide the jurisdiction

- ☐ Where are the first twenty customers, and how do you deliver? Online services abroad or in the GCC: free zone. Goods or on-site services to UAE companies and government: mainland or a dual licence.
- ☐ Fintech, legal or financial activity: DIFC or ADGM, which have their own regulators and courts.
- ☐ Eligible for a subsidised route? DIFC Innovation Licence, in5, Sheraa S3, Hub71 - check before buying a standard licence.

2. Compare two zones, itemised

Item	Zone A	Zone B
Zone name and activity list covers your activity?		
Registration (one-time)		
Licence (annual)		
Establishment card		
Flexi-desk or office (annual) - required?		
Visa quota with that desk		
Each visa (entry permit, medical, Emirates ID, stamping)		
Renewal in year two (licence + desk + card)		
Banks their companies commonly open with		
Total year one / year two		

3. Licence

- ☐ Business activities chosen (match what you will actually invoice).
- ☐ Trade name approved (no religious or political words; a personal name only if it is the owner's).
- ☐ Initial approval received.
- ☐ Memorandum of association signed; flexi-desk or office lease signed.
- ☐ Licence issued. Copy saved.
- ☐ Establishment card issued; immigration e-channel registration done.

4. Visa and Emirates ID

- ☐ Entry permit issued (or change of status if already in the country).
- ☐ Medical fitness test done.
- ☐ Biometrics and Emirates ID application done.
- ☐ Residence visa stamped; Emirates ID received. Copies saved.
- ☐ Dependants and employees: quota known; applications planned.

5. Bank account

- ☐ Documents ready: licence, MOA, establishment card, passport, Emirates ID, proof of address, website, one-page business description, contracts or invoices if any.
- ☐ Digital bank applied (Wio Business or similar) the day the Emirates ID arrives.
- ☐ Traditional bank applied in parallel if you expect large or international receipts.
- ☐ Account open; first licence or desk payment made from it; accountant has read access.

6. Tax

- ☐ Corporate tax registration with the Federal Tax Authority done (late registration carries a fixed penalty).
- ☐ Decision on Small Business Relief made with an accountant (revenue up to AED 3 million; check the current end date).
- ☐ VAT thresholds tracked monthly: mandatory at AED 375,000 taxable turnover, voluntary at AED 187,500.
- ☐ Accounting software connected to the bank from day one; invoices show TRN and VAT once registered.

7. Recurring dates

Item	Rule	Your date	Reminder set
Licence renewal	Annual, on the licence anniversary		
Establishment card and desk lease renewal	Annual - align with the licence		
Residence visa renewal	Every two years (standard investor visa)		
Ultimate Beneficial Owner register	Keep current; update within 15 days of a change		
Corporate tax return	Within 9 months of the financial year end		
VAT returns (once registered)	Quarterly or monthly as assigned		
Audited financial statements	If your zone or size requires		

Economic Substance Regulations notifications were withdrawn for financial years from 2023; do not pay to file them.

General information as of October 2026. Not legal, tax or investment advice; fees, thresholds and programme terms change - check the official page before relying on a figure, and use a qualified professional where the roadmap says so.