

A wellbeing revolution: How the UAE evolved into a leading physical health destination.

Findings in the [Cigna Wellbeing 360° Survey](#) discovers a nation embracing exercise ahead of the return of the Dubai Fitness Challenge.



Foreword

“A marathon not a sprint,” that is the analogy often used when tracking projects which aim to deliver wholesale benefits. They often don’t move fast, and frequently fall short of their initial lofty aims.

But our latest research captured in the **Cigna Wellbeing 360 Survey** shows the UAE ripping up the rule book with marathon achievements in the space of **‘Physical Well-being’** delivered at a sprint, a pace that other countries around the world have been unable to match.

Cigna has continually invested in keeping a pulse on the health and well-being of people in the UAE. As with our surveys over the years, our eighth annual **360° Global Wellbeing Survey** has revealed interesting insights into people’s well-being – with UAE ranking among the best in the world.

We release research on **‘Physical Well-being’** as residents in the UAE begin looking forward to the sixth **Dubai Fitness Challenge**. Its contribution to well-being is unquestioned and its growth maps to the success Cigna has captured for the UAE as a whole. Some of the key findings of the research reveals:

- > UAE is amongst the fittest countries in the world, with a physical index at **65.4** compared to a global average of **60**
- > Over the last four years, the country’s physical index has grown by nearly 5 points. During the same period, the global average dipped
- > Women in the UAE have got fitter: From starting with the lowest Physical Well-being score of 59.2 back in 2018, women in the UAE have risen to **63.2 in 2022**
- > More millennials are now at a healthy weight, and are exercising regularly, as opposed to 2020

My congratulations to **His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Dubai Crown Prince and Chairman of The Executive Council of Dubai** and the team at the **Dubai Fitness Challenge** for delivering one of the largest and most successful community health initiatives in the world.



Jerome Droesch,
CEO of Domestic Health and Health Services,
Cigna International Markets

UAE amongst the world's fittest countries.

The UAE is now amongst the fittest countries in the world after a national exercise routine over the past five years that has delivered a dramatic fitness transformation for citizens and residents alike.

Women in the UAE have embraced exercise so much over that time that they are now beating men around the world in terms of **'Physical Wellbeing'**.

And, even working parents in the Emirates are thriving in **'Physical Wellbeing'**, scoring above the global average for those holding down a job and raising children - but also scoring higher than those working without children, both in the UAE and globally.

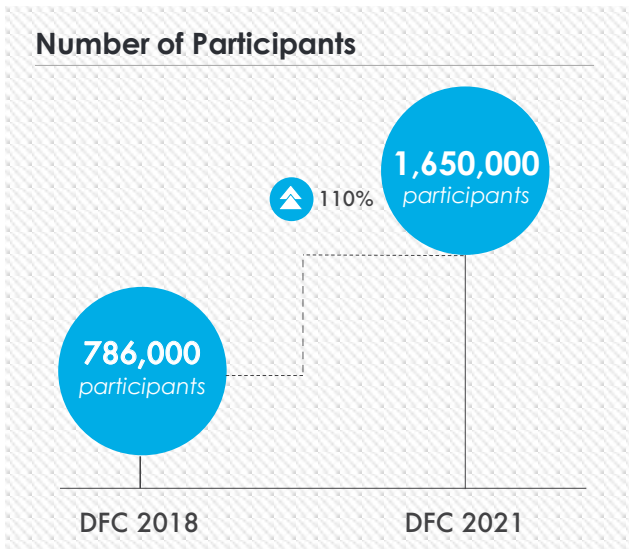


The data, captured by this year's **Cigna Wellbeing 360 Survey**, showing that the Emirates are well above the global average in the global health insurance provider's **'Physical Wellbeing index'** has been released as Dubai's population begins the 2022 edition of the annual **Dubai Fitness Challenge (DFC)**. An initiative of His Highness **Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum**, Dubai Crown Prince and Chairman of The Executive Council of Dubai, the DFC aims to make Dubai an even happier, healthier, and more liveable city.

Beginning on 29 October and running to 27 November, the challenge is one of the biggest and most effective community health initiatives in the world, with a month-long calendar of free workouts, exciting fitness events and wellness-centric entertainment.

Cigna's 360 research began tracking the physical fitness progress of the UAE back in 2018, shortly after the DFC's launch at the end of 2017. Back then an impressive 786,000 participated in the first five weekend carnivals but over the period of time tracked by the Cigna research the DFC had grown to encompass **two 30-day fitness villages and 14 fitness hubs by 2021**. This expansion has paid off in terms of the number of participants in the DFC, which has more than doubled since 2017, with **1,650,000 people taking part in 2021** - which represents nearly half of the population of Dubai.

This year, the **Dubai Fitness Challenge** is set to be the biggest event to date and participation levels are again expected to smash records. Iconic flagship community events return such **Dubai Ride** on 6 November and **Dubai Run** on 20 November. In 2021, the **Dubai Run** on Sheikh Zayed Road was the world's largest fun run with the participation of 146,000 people. There were record numbers also for **Dubai Ride**, which included almost 33,000 cyclists on Sheikh Zayed Road. The month of fun and inclusive fitness activities is spread across two fitness villages: **DP World Kite Beach Fitness Village, and RTA Last Exit Al Khawaneej Fitness Village, 17 community fitness hubs, a host of sporting events and thousands of free classes.**

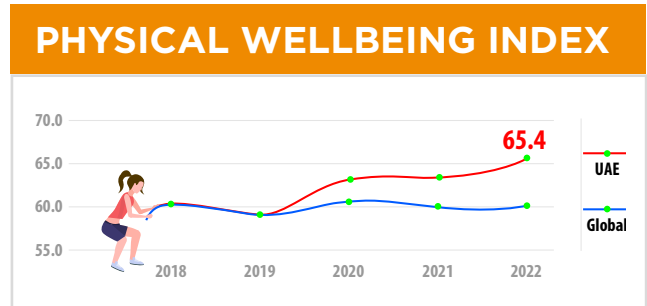


Designed to get people moving and enjoy the great outdoors, some of the many other highlights of the DFC have included more than 150 gym and fitness partners providing over 10,000 free fitness classes; global sports brands including adidas, ASICS, Nike and Under Armour, hotels and malls showing their support with bespoke events and exclusive promotions; free check-ups from health and wellness providers and schools across the city getting involved with 30x30 sessions integrated into the curriculum and visits to the Fitness Villages.

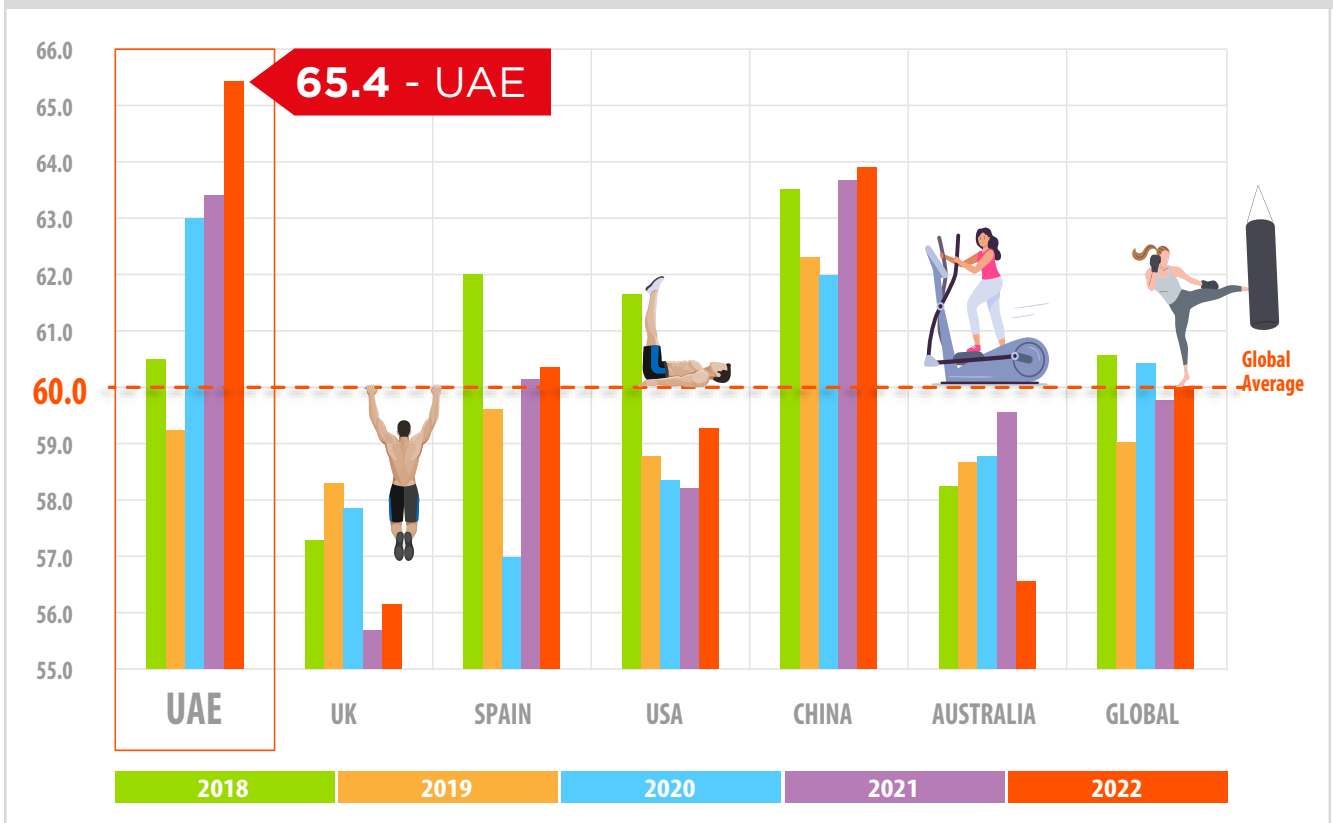


Physical Wellbeing

Cigna's latest data shows that since 2018 the UAE's fitness levels began slightly below the global average but have then since sprinted away to create an impressive lead as the Dubai Fitness Challenge has grown in stature. The **UAE's Physical Wellbeing Index** in 2018 was given a score of 60.5 by the health insurance giant, after a number of factors were taken into account, just below the global average of 60.6 based on the survey's findings across the world. By 2022 the UAE's metric has risen to **65.4**, rising **4.9** points while the global average has slipped slightly to 60.



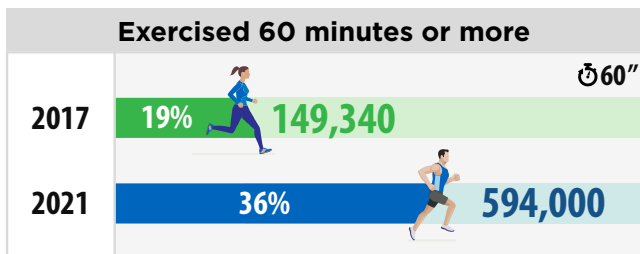
The UAE's Physical Wellbeing Index scores progress compared to five key nations:



From 2018 to 2022 only China managed a marginal increase from 63.5 to 63.9 while the rest all lost ground over the years.

The UAE's impressive global performance can be linked to residents embracing fitness during the DFC, which is seen a dramatic increase in the time participants are exercising during the initiative.

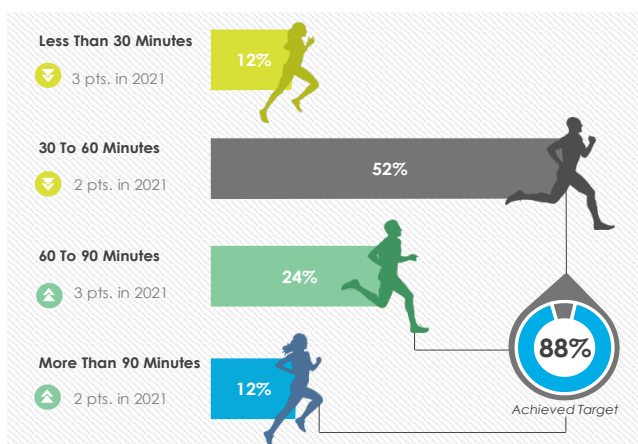
During the first iteration of the DFC, **19 percent** of those taking part were exercising 60 minutes per day or more, but by 2021 this had soared to **36 percent**. In real terms, given the increase in overall participation, the number of DFC participants exercising more than an hour per day has almost quadrupled from 149,340 in 2017 to **594,000 in 2021**.



As impressive is the dramatic fall in the number of participants of the DFC exercising less than 30 minutes per day, which dropped from 29 percent in 2017 to just 12 percent in 2021. **Even in real terms this translated into a drop despite the massive increase in participation, from 227,939 in 2017 down to 198,000 in 2021.**



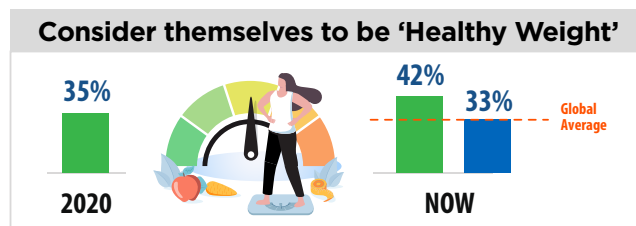
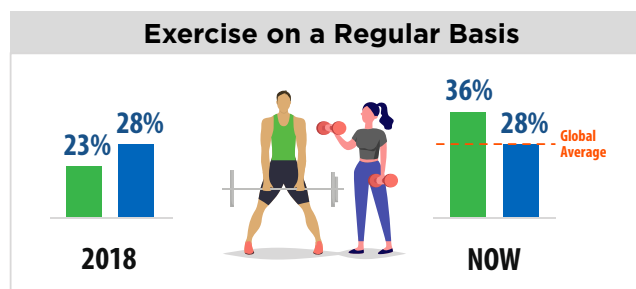
In fact, in 2021 88 percent of participants in the DFC, nearly nine out of ten, claimed to have the achieved the goal of the challenge of at least **30 minutes of activity daily for 30 days.**



Walking, running, swimming, yoga, football, gym workouts and HIT classes plus rowing and badminton were among the most popular activities during the DFC.

This increase in exercise is reflected in the latest Cigna research, which in 2018 reported that the percentage of people in the UAE who said they

'Exercise on a Regular Basis' was 23 percent compared to the global of 28 percent. In 2022 the survey returned to discover that now 36 percent of all UAE respondents (regardless of gender) exercised regularly, outstripping the global average of 28 percent.



It was a similar picture when asked whether they considered themselves to be a **'Healthy Weight'**. Over the course of the four years, and the iterations of the **Dubai Fitness Challenge**, that metric in the UAE rose from 35 percent to 42 percent in 2022, again beating the average across the world of 33 percent. And, closing off a triangle of metrics, the UAE is also getting more **'Quality Sleep'**, that's risen from 39 percent to 43 percent while global sleep levels have dropped to just 34 percent.

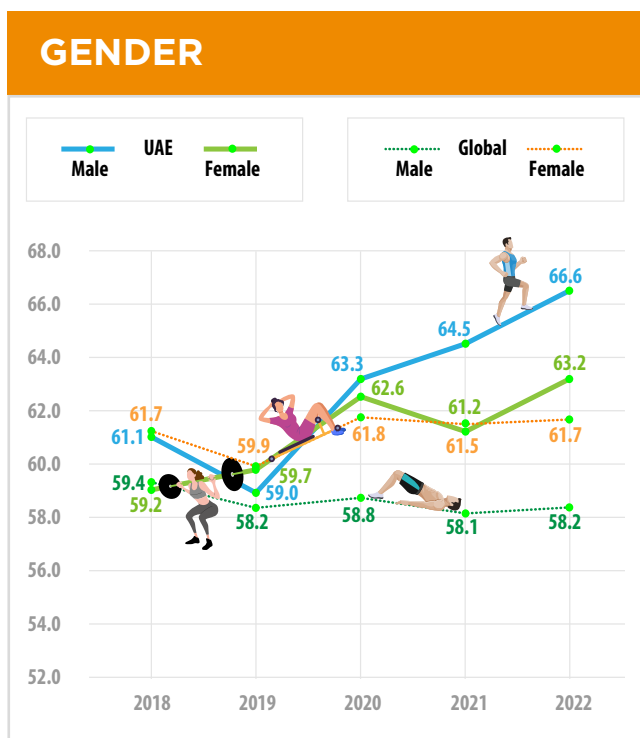
This increase in physical activity has contributed to overall wellness, with the DFC 2021 event delivering against its objective to positively impact societal wellbeing across a broad spectrum of wellness, sporting and fitness activities.

Participants reported immense psychological benefits key among them being positive self esteem with 28 percent reporting gains and 25 percent reporting a reinforcement of their mental wellbeing.



UAE's men and women fitter

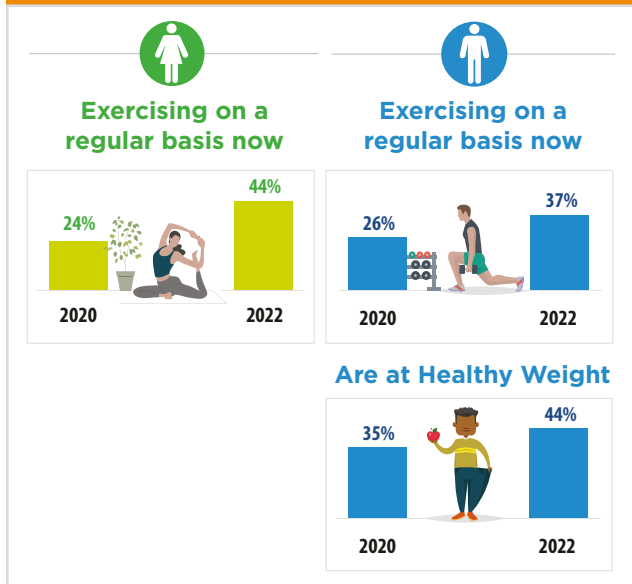
When looked at by gender, both men and women have contributed to the UAE's rising picture of fitness. From starting with the lowest **Physical Wellbeing score** of 59.2 back in 2018, in 2022 women in the UAE have risen to 63.2, surpassed not only their fellow females globally (who have slipped to 58.2) but also men globally at 61.7.



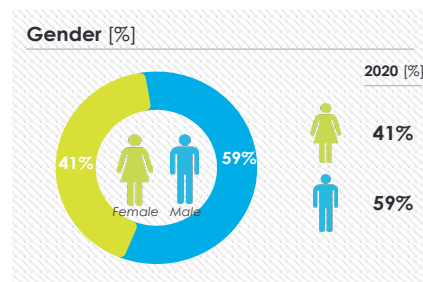
When looked at through the lens of the UAE's working population, the **Physical Wellbeing scores** for men and women were almost identical, 65.6 for women and 66.6 for men. Reflecting the overall progress of women, that metric beat the global average of 60.3 by 5.3 points, meanwhile UAE men still beat their global counterparts and their average score of 63.2 by 3.4 points.

This directly connects with data captured by the DFC, which has seen increasing numbers of women join the initiative's movement towards fitness. In 2018 63 percent of DFC participants were men and 37 percent women, in 2021 the number of women taking part had risen four

MAIN REASONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT IN UAE SCORES:



percent to **41 percent** with men making up **59 percent**. In real terms, given the huge increase in numbers taking part in the DFC this has seen the number of women participating rocketing more than 130 percent up from **290,820** in 2017 to **676,500** in 2021. The number of men taking part in the challenge has almost doubled too, from **495,180** in 2017 to **973,500** in 2021.



"The number of women participating in the Dubai Fitness Challenge has rocketed more than 130 percent up from 290,820 in 2017 to 676,500 in 2021."

Increased Investment in Fitness

Sports, fitness and wellness have become a key part of Dubai’s strategy to become the happiest city on the planet.

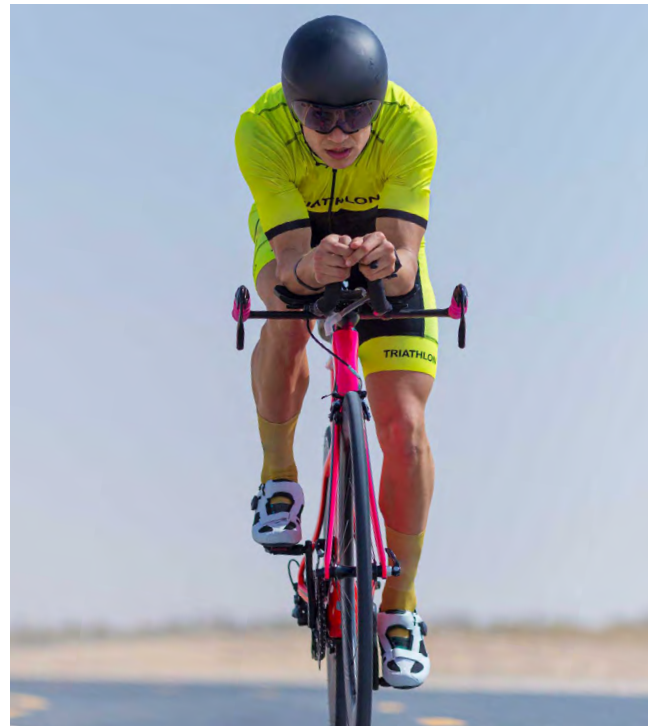
The sports sector now contributes **Dh4 billion (\$1.08bn)** a year to the economy of Dubai, which hosts a number of national and international events and attracts visitors from around the world.

Currently, there are more than **20,000 people employed in Dubai’s sports sector**, and the emirate’s advanced sports infrastructure, which includes dedicated cycling and running tracks, plus the rise in the number of sports academies and fitness centres, have played a crucial role in the growth of the sector.

In 2021 more than **51,000 athletes** were registered members practicing 56 types of sports and participating in hundreds of tournaments across Dubai. There were also **130 international sports events** and more than **70 camps** were hosted for international teams and clubs.



Dubai has created **463km of cycles paths** and plans to extend that to **759km by 2026** as part of the **Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan**, with paths mapped out for 29 city districts, plus doubling green and leisure areas as well as public parks to provide a healthy environment



for residents and visitors. The city already boasts kilometres of dedicated running paths across the emirate, including on the iconic Palm Jumeirah, along picturesque Jumeirah Beach and in lush parks such as Safa Park and Dubai Creek Park.

Of the **Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan**, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, said: *“Our strategic development plans are focused on creating the best possible environment and infrastructure to enhance the community’s happiness and wellbeing and support the fulfilment of the greatest human aspirations for both our citizens and people from around the world.”*

“The number of DFC participants in 2021 represented almost half of Dubai’s population – an increase of 110 percent since the Challenge began five years ago.”

Spanning generations

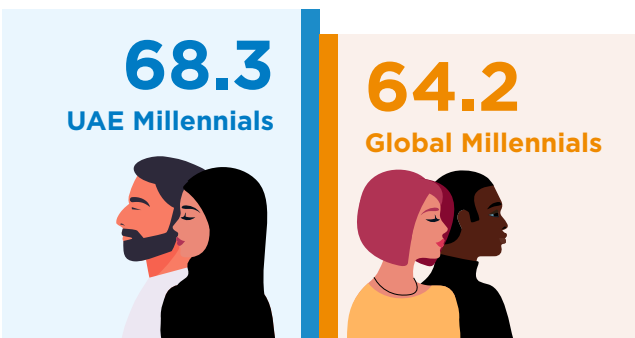
It's clear that residents are putting these facilities to good use, with the Cigna research showing that millennials in the UAE, the generation currently aged between 25 and 34, ranked the highest in the world for their **Physical Wellbeing score** with their rank of 68.3, outstripping the global average by more than four points, the worldwide score being 64.2.

During survey interviews, this was mainly attributed to more millennials feeling they are at **'Healthy Weight'** in 2022 – 50 percent vs 37 percent in 2020 and **'exercising regularly'**, 40 percent now vs 25 percent in 2020.

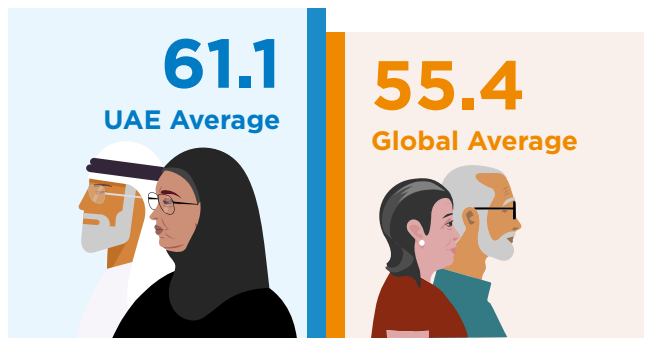


But the benefits weren't just being felt by the young, with the over 50s also higher than global average wellness, with UAE awarded a score of 61.1 vs 55.4, in the UAE the over 50s have consistently scored higher than global over the past five years. When questioned during the survey, respondents mainly attributed to feeling they are at **'Healthy Weight'** in 2022, 38 percent vs 24 percent globally and that they get **'Quality Sleep'** – 35 percent now vs 26 percent globally.

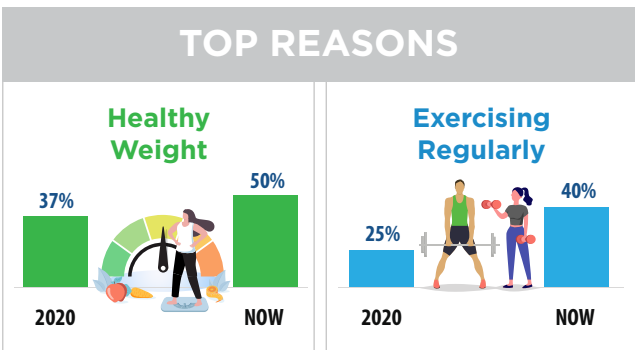
PHYSICAL WELLBEING (MILLENNIALS)



PHYSICAL WELLBEING (AGE GROUP: 50+)



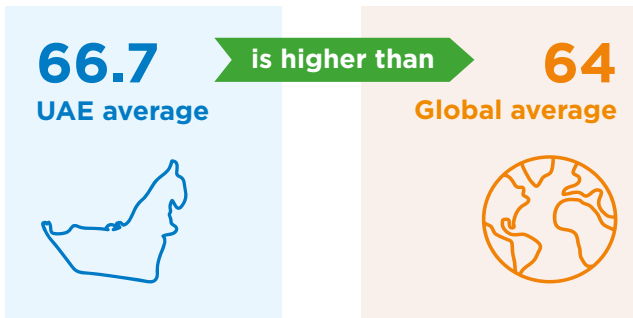
Consistently higher than global over the years



Families are thriving

In the UAE, not only did working parents with children beat their global counterparts in their **Physical Wellbeing score**, 66.7 vs 64, they even beat those working without children in the Emirates who scored 65.3. Both working parents and those without children in the UAE scored significantly better than the global average for working people without children who scored 58.2.

WORKING INDIVIDUALS WITH KIDS

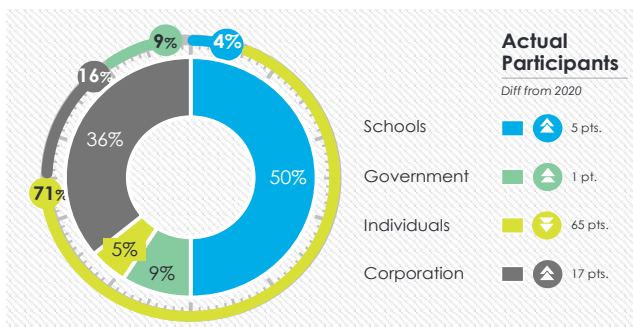


This maps directly to the DFC's aim to improve family fitness, particularly actively encouraging children to get involved. In 2021, more children participated in the DFC than all participants in the first edition back in 2017. Indeed, school participation in the DFC has risen from 44 percent at launch to 50 percent in 2021, however



One factor for this increase is the fact that as of 2021, 100 percent of schools in Dubai had signed up to participate in the DFC.

It perhaps is no surprise that research in the latest Cigna 360 that specifically targeted 'Family Well-being' also showed the UAE leading the way globally, with a score of 73.1, way ahead of the UK (67.1), the US (68), Australia (66.1), China (67.9) and Spain (68.5).



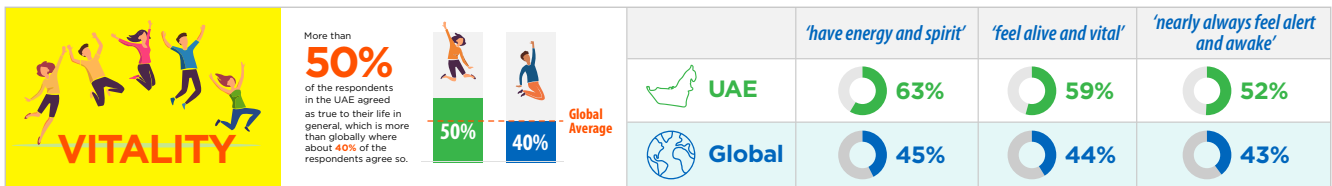
when tracked in real terms this has seen the number of school children participating rising 139 percent from **345,000 in 2017 to 825,000 in 2021.**

"The number of school children participating has risen 139 percent from 345,000 in 2017 to 825,000 in 2021, with 100 percent of Dubai schools now entering the Dubai Fitness Challenge."

Energy and spirit

Again, when asked about **'Vitality'** levels, the UAE came out in the lead against the global backdrop, with 50 percent of respondents in the Emirates positive, compared to the world norm of 40 percent.

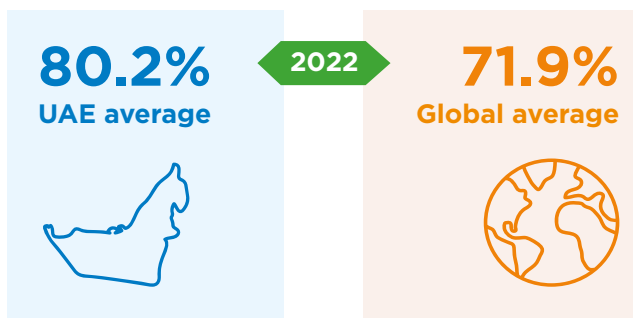
When asked if they had **'Energy and spirit'**, 63 percent of UAE responded they did, as opposed to the 45 percent global average. Likewise, those asked in the Emirates if they felt **'Alive and Vital'** again answered more positively, 59 percent vs 44 percent globally. And, asked if they **'nearly always feel alert and awake'** some 52 percent of the UAE respondents agreed, higher than the global 43 percent.



Respondents were also asked what constitutes **'Whole Health'** 80.2 percent in the UAE considered exercise, diet, and sleep as very important to whole health compared to 71.9 per cent globally.

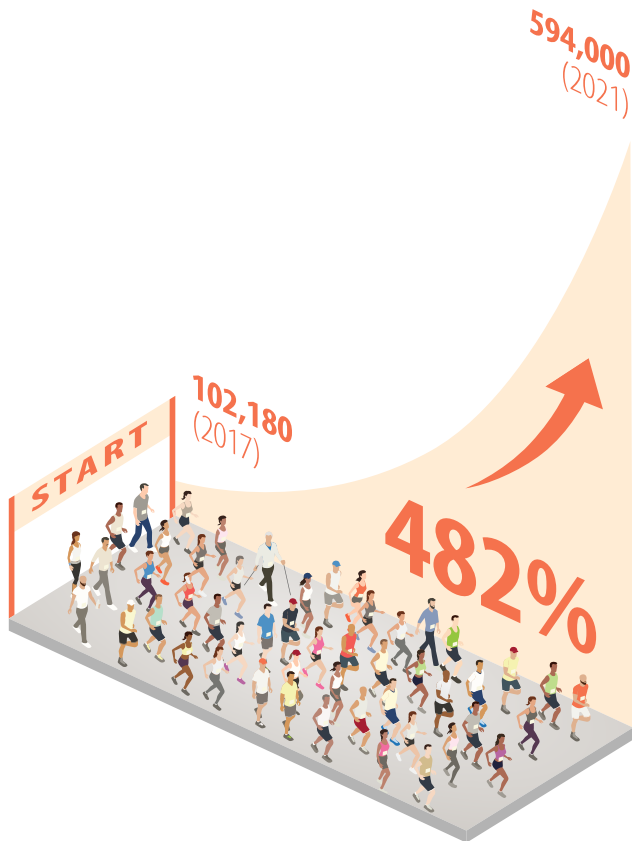
In parallel with that growth, customer satisfaction has continued to grow, from 88 percent in 2017 to 93 percent in 2021 either **'happy'** or **'extremely happy'** with their experience.

WHOLE HEALTH



Considered exercise, diet, and sleep as very important to 'whole health'.





Companies getting involved

The private sector has also leaned into the DFC since its launch, both in terms of participation and in terms of support.

In terms of participants the ranks joining the **Dubai Fitness Challenge** from corporations have grown from **13 percent in 2017 to 36 percent in 2021**. That impressive growth is amplified when looked at in real terms, with the number of corporate entries growing **482 percent from 102,180 in 2017 to 594,000 in 2021**.

The initiative was also increasingly supported by a huge number of partners from both the government and private sector who helped strengthen the spirit of the community including organisers **Dubai Economy and Tourism** and **Dubai Sports Council**.

“This incredible achievement demonstrates the commitment of Dubai’s community to a more active lifestyle, with almost 9 out of 10 participants achieving their 30x30 goals and reaping the benefits of the Dubai Fitness Challenge for both their physical and mental wellbeing.”

Methodology

To monitor and track the annual evolution of well-being, the Cigna 360 Global Well-Being Survey looks at five key components - family, financial, physical, social, and work. In partnership with Kantar, a leading data, insights, and consulting company, Cigna International Markets has analyzed the findings to uncover the latest trends and challenges for health and well-being.

Survey Evolution

2022 Cigna 360 Global Well-Being Survey is the 8th edition of the annual survey.

In 2022, the team surveyed 11,922 people aged 18-65, in 15 markets including Australia, Belgium, Mainland China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, The Netherlands, UAE, UK, and U.S.

Topic Evolution

