



## COMMERCIAL GAMING IN THE UAE: KEY HIGHLIGHTS



**Rita Kaufmann**

**Senior Associate  
Solicitor (England & Wales)**

T: +971 7 233 8927  
E: rkaufmann@slglaw.cc

### **I. Introduction**

The UAE's economic potential is pushing boundaries as it moves closer to fully opening its doors to commercial gaming. The country is known for its rapid economic growth, and integrating gaming into its economy could offer new avenues for development and diversification.

The catalyst for the UAE's move towards the eventual approval of commercial gaming was Ras Al Khaimah's decision to green-light Wynn Resorts' proposal for a gaming resort, which was publicly announced in January 2022. Prior to this, various parties expressed interest in entering the UAE market, but their proposals were dismissed due to the illegality of gaming under UAE law and its conflict with Shariah principles.

In September 2023, the UAE established the General Commercial Gaming Regulatory Authority (GCGRA). This federal executive authority possesses exclusive jurisdiction over the regulation, licensing, and supervision of all commercial gaming activities and facilities in the UAE. This involves the regulation of activities such as lottery, internet gaming, sports wagering, and land-based integrated gaming facilities or resorts.

### **II. Legal Framework and Regulations**

As per the regulations set forth by the GCGRA, all individuals and businesses seeking to operate in this sector must first obtain a license. Engaging in gaming activities without a license or with unlicensed operators is illegal and can lead to legal consequences.

The UAE's commercial gaming industry is regulated by a comprehensive legal framework that includes several key Federal Laws, both directly and indirectly. These laws are primarily focused on combating money laundering, financing terrorism, and addressing illegal organizations, ensuring that the gaming industry operates within strict legal standards.

Actions that may result in administrative measures or penalties include non-compliance with legal or regulatory obligations, misrepresentation, significant omissions, fraudulent conduct, refusing to cooperate with the GCGRA or its representatives, and disregarding settlement agreements or GCGRA directives. Consequences for such actions may involve the denial, suspension, revocation, or restriction of a license, financial penalties, or other administrative steps imposed on or agreed to by the licensee or applicant.



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## III. Economic Impact

The integration of commercial gaming into the UAE's economy could significantly boost GDP. Based on [Bloomberg's prediction](#), it has the potential to generate an annual gaming revenue of USD 6.6 billion. Projected revenues from gaming could rival those of other key sectors like tourism and entertainment, offering a substantial economic contribution.

With incentives and opportunities for foreign investment, the UAE could become a key player in the global gaming market, attracting major industry players. The announcement of Wynn's gaming resort on Marjan Island, Ras Al Khaimah, has whipped the hospitality and real estate sectors into a frenzy as demands rise. The CEO of Al Marjan Island confirmed plans for 15,000 hotel keys and 12,000 residential units on Al Marjan Island. The island is fully sold out, and the emirate is developing various new projects across multiple locations to create master-planned communities, envisioned as the 'downtowns' of the future.

The development of a commercial gaming industry would also create numerous job opportunities, both directly and indirectly. This would range from positions within gaming establishments to roles in supporting industries, contributing to skill development and training programs in the country.



## IV. Responsible Gaming

The GCGRA prioritizes responsible gaming, as evident in its comprehensive framework. This [framework](#) includes the implementation of responsible gaming tools, ongoing reporting improvements for licensees, and voluntary self-exclusion for players.

### Cooling-Off Periods

Players can temporarily block access to an operator's platform for at least 72 hours. During this time, operators are prohibited from engaging in any direct or indirect marketing to these players.

### Voluntary Self-Exclusion Program

This program allows players who recognize a loss of control over their gaming behavior to voluntarily exclude themselves from gaming activities.

### Ongoing Improvement and Reporting

Licensees must develop strategies for evaluating and improving their programs, continually enhancing responsible gaming initiatives, and reporting their progress annually.

### Staff Training

Employees undergo comprehensive training in responsible gaming to ensure they understand company policies, local codes of practice, self-exclusion procedures, and regulatory requirements.

## V. Future Outlook

The future of commercial gaming in the UAE looks promising, with market forecasts indicating substantial growth. Companies must adhere to strict compliance guidelines, ensuring that their activities align with the UAE's legal framework. As the commercial gaming sector expands, we can expect more laws and regulations to be introduced, further shaping the industry's compliance landscape.

The nation's gaming market presents significant untapped potential, particularly within the hospitality, real estate, entertainment, and tourism sectors. Partnerships and collaborations are particularly promising in emerging gaming segments aligned with the region's technological advancements. If successful, the UAE could not only diversify its economy but also emerge as a key player in the global gaming industry.

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