

Free Zone vs Mainland Checklist 2026

Use this checklist to decide whether a UAE free zone or mainland setup better fits your activity, trading model, visas and banking needs.

Prepared by UAE Freezone Compare Editorial Team. Reviewed by UAE Business Setup Research Team. Last reviewed: June 2026.

Comparison

Factor	Free zone	Mainland
Ownership	Often 100% foreign ownership	Often 100% foreign ownership for many activities
Mainland trading	May need distributor/permit depending activity	Direct mainland market access
Office	Flexi or office by zone/package	Office/ejari often relevant
Banking	Depends on activity, documents and substance	Depends on profile and activity
Cost control	Can be lower for service setups	Can rise with office and approvals

Choose free zone if

Use case	Why
Services/digital	Lower office burden may fit
E-commerce/export	Free zone may work if structure is clear
Low visa count	Packages can stay lean

Next step

Use the relevant calculator, finder or quote form on [UAEFreezoneCompare.com](https://uae-freezone-compare.com) to request a current verified quote for your activity, visa count, office requirement and shareholder structure.