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Trident Trust: Wealth Structuring in a Shifting UAE Landscape

The UAE continues to accelerate its role as a global wealth hub, with regulatory reforms creating fresh opportunities for international families and their advisers. In recent months, two developments have stood out: tax exemptions for passive holding companies beneath family foundations, and a strengthening of the RAK Foundation law with new asset protection features.

Dave Lange, Managing Director & Senior Executive Officer at Trident Trust, spoke to Hubbis about the implications of these changes and how private wealth clients are reshaping their strategies. With decades of experience in fiduciary and financial services across multiple jurisdictions, Lange emphasised that the UAE is no longer simply about lifestyle migration - it is rapidly maturing into a sophisticated platform for long-term wealth preservation.

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Find out more about Trident Trust

Dave is speaking at our upcoming [Hubbis Wealth Planning & Structuring Forum - Dubai 2025], giving us a unique opportunity to carry on the conversation on these topics.

Taking place on Wednesday 10th September from 9.00am to 5.00pm, this forum will bring together over 300 senior wealth management professionals to explore the latest tax, structuring, and succession trends shaping Dubai's role as a global wealth hub.

Find out more about the forum HERE.

DAVE LANGE
Managing Director &
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"Under Ministerial Decision 261 of 2024, Clients are now able to hold their assets through a passive company underneath the foundation," Lange explained. "And crucially, that company does not have to be located in the UAE. It could even be in an offshore jurisdiction, like BVI or Cayman. That flexibility has been very welcome."

Regulatory Tailwinds Driving New Confidence

The tax exemption granted by the Federal Tax Authority marks a pivotal shift. Previously, uncertainty around corporate tax treatment created hesitation for families structuring wealth through UAE foundations. The new dispensation clarifies that passive holding companies under foundations could also be exempt from corporate tax on a look-through basis, increasing the incentive for families to establish robust succession structures.

In parallel, the recent reforms to the RAK Foundation Law have introduced fresh provisions for asset protection while drawing on some key lessons from the ADGM and DIFC frameworks. This convergence of best practices across jurisdictions is enhancing confidence among clients and advisers alike.

"There is never a shortage of interesting regulatory developments in the UAE," Lange noted. "But these two are particularly significant. They demonstrate a commitment to making the framework more competitive."

Client Cases Illustrate Shifting Priorities

Trident Trust is currently engaged in a diverse set of mandates that reflect how global families are rethinking structures in light of these regulatory updates. One of the more prominent trends is the re-domiciliation of BVI companies into the DIFC, where they are subsequently placed under DIFC foundations. This is creating integrated structures that combine international familiarity with local advantages.

At the same time, there is a steady pipeline of family office set-ups. "We have seen strong demand both inside and outside the DIFC," Lange explained. "Clients are increasingly looking for family structures that allow them to consolidate oversight and planning."

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Rising Interest in DIFC Trusts

Another notable development has been the growing attention on DIFC trusts. Although the trust regime has not been widely used in the past, interest is increasing, particularly from Indian clients seeking to hold offshore assets. This has sparked practical questions around trustee appointments, as there are relatively few independent professional trustees operating in the jurisdiction.

In some cases, families are exploring private trust company structures to retain oversight, while others are weighing the benefits of professional trusteeship. The discussions reflect a broader effort to tailor governance models to specific family needs rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

Wills Remain a Core Requirement

Alongside foundations and trusts, Wills remain a consistent priority for clients. The DIFC Wills Service Centre and comparable frameworks continue to provide an important layer of certainty for expatriates seeking to manage succession across multiple asset classes. For many families, the ability to integrate Wills into a broader wealth planning structure is becoming central to long-term strategy.

Avoiding Common Mistakes in UAE Migration

As more international families relocate to the UAE, missteps in structuring are becoming increasingly visible. One frequent issue arises when clients acquire property worth AED 2 million in their personal name to qualify for the Golden Visa. While this secures residency, it complicates subsequent succession planning.

"Once the property is held personally, moving it into a foundation creates both cost and complications," Lange explained. "The land transfer incurs a 0.125 percent gift rate

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and, more importantly, the individual risks losing the Golden Visa linked to that property."

Lange highlighted that property ownership is only one of several options available. Entrepreneurs can obtain residency by paying themselves a salary above AED 35,000 per month. Alternatively, injecting AED 2 million as share capital into a UAE company also qualifies.

Another increasingly popular route is the fixed deposit option, whereby AED 2 million is placed with a local bank for a period of at least two years.

"The key point is that there are multiple avenues for securing residency," Lange said. "With the right structuring advice from the outset, clients can avoid unnecessary costs and achieve both their immigration and wealth planning objectives."

Looking Ahead

For Lange, the UAE's trajectory as a wealth hub is defined by both opportunity and responsibility. The regulatory improvements of recent months have provided greater clarity and opened new structuring pathways, but sustainable growth will depend on careful execution and the right professional guidance.

"Markets and regulations will continue to evolve," he noted. "Our role is to ensure clients are not just reacting to changes but building frameworks that can endure across generations."

Trident Trust's focus remains on combining technical expertise with long-term client relationships. As families continue to consolidate assets, establish governance frameworks and secure residency, the firm is positioning itself as a partner that can navigate both the complexity of global wealth and the unique dynamics of the UAE.

The message is clear: successful wealth planning in the region is not about quick wins or headline reforms. It is about establishing durable structures that integrate tax, governance, succession and immigration considerations from the outset. As Lange concluded, the industry's responsibility is to equip families with the right platforms, people and principles to ensure their wealth is both protected and prepared for the future. ■