



Saudi Arabia ended its long-standing ban on women driving in June.

## IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

**Saudi Arabia's ban** on women drivers ended in June, a clear win for women's rights activists in the country. But what does it mean for the ride-hailing companies that have relied on Saudi women's business as riders? When the ban was in place, women represented 80 percent of Uber's customers in Saudi Arabia and 70 percent of riders at competitor Careem, according to CNN.

So far, Uber and Careem have insisted that they view the royal decree as a benefit to their business rather than a hindrance because they have gained a large new pool of potential drivers. Careem expects that

female drivers also will open a new market of riders: Conservative women in Saudi Arabia whose customs inhibit them from being driven by a male stranger.

Uber has held what it calls "listening sessions" for women in Riyadh with an aim to "shape the company's priorities and upcoming plans for women in the Kingdom," though there are no details about what this might mean. But the company already demonstrated strong ties with Saudi Arabia in 2016 when it won an impressive \$3.5 billion in funding from the kingdom's primary investment fund.

## POLICING PLASTIC

The European Commission is officially declaring war on plastic, and it has major companies on its side. Earlier this year, the commission proposed a ban on a swath of single-use plastic items, including plates, cutlery and straws, in the hopes of reducing the amount of litter in European Union beaches and seas. According to the organization, plastics make up 85 percent of marine litter around the world.

It could be a few years before the commission's draft rules go into effect. In the meantime, plenty of businesses already are pledging to make changes. Swedish furnishing giant Ikea is one of the latest, having announced that it will stop selling single-use plastic products in its stores and cease using them in its in-store restaurants by 2020. Coca-Cola, as another example, is focused on packaging, trying to develop plant-based resins and reduce the amount of plastic in each of its containers.

On the other hand, the plastics industry is less than thrilled about the strong eco movement. PlasticsEurope, an association of the industry's manufacturers, called the European Commission's ban a shortcut, adding, "plastic product bans are not the solution ... as alternative products may not be more sustainable."