

Universal Periodic Review of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

4th Cycle, 12 July 2023

Submission by the United Nations Country Team

Joint submission on behalf of the UN Country Team (RC Office, UNDP, ILO, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, UNHABITAT, IOM – UNODC, WHO, UNFPA, OHCHR, and UNESCO)

This submission was jointly prepared by the vast majority of the UNCT in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), comprising the following agencies: UNDP, ILO, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, UNHABITAT, IOM – UNODC, WHO, UNFPA, OHCHR, and UNESCO. It summarises available information falling within the mandates of resident and non-resident UN agencies. The report is structured around the recommendations emanating from previous UPR Cycle in 2018, as well as other International Human Rights Mechanisms (IHRM) like the Treaty Bodies and the Special Procedures, including the Mandate Holders, and other international mechanisms.

It is worth noting that the UNCT is not in a position to report on all UPR and other mechanisms recommendations, as either information is not available internally and/or UN agencies on the ground have no means to verify/confirm information from reliable sources. This document is also submitted while KSA has embarked into a process of strengthening its engagement with the IHRM, part of which is the country's obligation and commitment to promote a human rights culture. We hope that its outcomes will bring about a change, which will positively impact the lives of all people in the Kingdom and, at another level, will positively impact the climate and environment.

Universal Periodic Review of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

4th Cycle

Submission by the United Nations Country Team

12 July 2023

Contents

A.	Engagement with international human rights mechanisms.....	2
B.	Institution-building for national human rights mechanisms.....	3
C.	Civil and Political Rights.....	3
D.	Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.....	8
	Health:.....	10
	Social Protection:.....	10
E.	Groups at risk:.....	11
	Women and girls:.....	11
	National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.....	11
	Discrimination in nationality laws:.....	11
	Gender-based violence (GBV):.....	11
	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons (LGBT+):.....	12
	Children:.....	12
	Youth:.....	13
	Persons with disabilities:.....	14
	Migrant workers:.....	14
	Refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons:.....	14

This submission was jointly prepared by the vast majority of the UNCT in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), comprising the following agencies: UNDP, ILO, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, UNHABITAT, IOM – UNODC, WHO, UNFPA, OHCHR, and UNESCO. It summarises available information falling within the mandates of resident and non-resident UN agencies. The report is structured around the recommendations emanating from previous UPR Cycle in 2018, as well as other International Human Rights Mechanisms (IHRM) like the Treaty Bodies and the Special Procedures, including the Mandate Holders, and other international mechanisms.

It is worth noting that the UNCT is not in a position to report on all UPR and other mechanisms recommendations, as either information is not available internally and/or UN agencies on the ground have no means to verify/confirm information from reliable sources. This document is also submitted while KSA has embarked into a process of strengthening its engagement with the IHRM, part of which is the country's obligation and commitment to promote a human rights culture. We hope that its outcomes will bring about a change, which will positively impact the lives of all people in the Kingdom and, at another level, will positively impact the climate and environment.

A. Engagement with international human rights mechanisms

Ratification of and reservations to international treaties and conventions¹:

1. KSA supported 15 and noted 18 recommendations under "Acceptance of international norms" and four related to "Reservations" during the 2018 UPR. Since then, it has not ratified any of the four-core human rights treaties to which it is not part yet.²

Recommendations:

- Sign and ratify the remaining core international human rights treaties³.
- Specify the scope and dimensions of its reservations to CEDAW, CERD, CAT and CRC, to avoid general reservations, and work on their withdrawal.

Cooperation with treaty bodies⁴ and Special Procedures:

1. The KSA submitted reports under CERD in January 2023 (due in October 2020) and CEDAW in March 2023 (due in March 2022). The report under CRC (due in August 2021) is under a simplified reporting procedure and does not provide a deadline yet.
2. The KSA has not extended a standing invitation to the Special Procedures. No mandate holder was invited during the reporting period.⁵

¹ Theme A 12 Acceptance of International Norms, Theme: A13 Reservations.

² The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW).

³ ICCPR, ICESCR, and the Optional Protocols thereto, ICRMW, ICPPED, OP-CAT, OP-CRC-IC, OP-CEDAW, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, ILO Convention No. 87, ILO Convention No. 98, ILO Convention No. 189, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the 1954 and 1961 statelessness conventions, and the Convention against Discrimination in Education.

⁴ Theme: A22 Cooperation with treaty bodies

⁵ Since the 2018 UPR review, reminders were set by the SR on torture (first half 2020), SR on migrants (2019), SR on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions (2019), SR on slavery (first half 2024) and SR on HR defenders (first half of 2024). Proposal on Dates were sent by WGAD (September – October 2022), and SR on freedom of assembly (November 2021).

3. From the 2018 UPR review until 30 April 2023, the KSA received 54 letters of allegation and urgent appeals from Special Procedures mandates of the UN Human Rights Council and responded to 52.
4. Since 2018, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) rendered 12 opinions concerning Saudi Arabia, finding that the deprivations of liberty of all complainants were arbitrary.
5. Since the 2018 UPR review, the KSA was reviewed by CRPD in May 2019.

Recommendation:

- Strengthen cooperation with the Special Procedures by accepting visit requests and consider issuing a standing invitation for such visits.

B. Institution-building for national human rights mechanisms:

National Human Rights Institution:

1. The KSA supported one recommendation⁶ for establishing a National Human Rights Institution.
2. The Saudi Human Rights Commission (SHRC), established in 2005, is tasked to promote and protect human rights following international standards and ensure that they rights are enforced. However, it is a governmental body⁷ and, as such, is not compliant with the 'Paris Principles'.
3. The Committee against Torture (CAT) was concerned that the Commission was subject to the authority of the executive, did not have independent funding and lacked unhindered access to all places of detention.⁸
4. Several Treaty Bodies recommended that the SHRC is brought in line with the 'Paris Principles' and provided with sufficient resources to discharge its mandate effectively and independently.⁹

Recommendation:

- Take steps towards establishing NHRI per the UN Paris Principles besides the SHRC.

National Human Rights Action Plan:

1. The KSA supported one recommendation¹⁰ to adopt a National Human Rights Action Plan, which has not been implemented yet.

Recommendation:

- Take steps towards the adoption of a National Human Rights Action Plan.

C. Civil and Political Rights:

Death penalty:

1. The KSA supported one and noted 16 recommendations¹¹ concerning the death penalty.

⁶ Theme: A45 National Human Rights Institution

⁷ Article 1 of the SHRC statute stipulates that it shall report directly to the king; article 3 stipulates that the Commission's president, vice-president, and Board members shall be appointed by a Royal Order (article 4).

⁸ Concluding observations on the second periodic report of KSA in June 2016 ([CAT/C/SAU/CO/2](#))

⁹ ([CERD/C/SAU/CO/4-9](#)) ([CEDAW/C/SAU/CO/3-4](#)) ([CAT/C/SAU/CO/2](#))

¹⁰ Theme: A46 National Plans of Action on Human Rights

¹¹ Theme: D23 Death penalty.

2. The KSA introduced the 2018 Juveniles Act, which abolished the death penalty for persons under 18 years at the time of the offence, except for crimes falling under [hudud](#), as prescribed by the Sharia law. A Royal Decree issued in March 2020 ordered the suspension of final death penalty judgments for juveniles and provided the application of the Juveniles Act sanctions without exception. The KSA committed to implementing this Decree by suspending executions of minors and reviewing the pending cases.¹²
3. However, the KSA continues to implement the death penalty massively, including for several offences that do not meet the most severe crimes threshold in other countries.
4. Several reports allege that the death penalty was imposed following proceedings that did not meet fair trial and due process guarantees for non-lethal crimes and upon persons who were children at the time of the offence. The number of executions spiked in 2022¹³, with the unprecedented mass execution of 81 convicts on 12 March 2022, and the resumption of executions for drug offences, following an unofficial moratorium¹⁴. The exact number of convicts on death row is not made public. OHCHR issued a statement calling on the Authorities to introduce de facto moratorium on executions, pending the abolition of the death penalty.¹⁵

Recommendation:

- Declare an official moratorium on the death penalty with a view to its abolition and commute the sentences already issued.

Prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment:

1. The KSA supported two recommendations on torture from six received.¹⁶
2. During the reporting period, the country received 30 communications from Special Procedures related to alleged torture.
3. The Saudi criminal law does not define the crime of torture as per Article 1 of the Convention against Torture.
4. In April 2020, the Supreme Court banned flogging as a punishment in non-hudud cases. However, the CAT noted that the KSA continues to apply corporal punishment, including flogging/lashing and amputation of limbs, which amount to torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment under the Convention.¹⁷
5. The CAT noted the corroborating reports of widespread use of torture by Al-Mabahith (General Intelligence) and members of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice.¹⁸
6. The Special Rapporteur on Counterterrorism and human rights expressed concerns about the large number of reports on the use of torture and admitting coerced confessions into

¹² See the response of the Government dated 30 May 2022 in the case [SAU 6/2022](#),

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gld=36969>, p7, point 8.

¹³ There were 149 executions in 2018, 184 in 2019, 27 in 2020, 65 in 2021 and 196 in 2022.

¹⁴ Following the end of a 21-month official moratorium.

¹⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/03/comment-un-high-commissioner-human-rights-michelle-bachelet-execution-81-people>

¹⁶ Theme: D25 Prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; Theme: A12 Acceptance of international norms

¹⁷ Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Saudi Arabia in June 2016 ([CAT/C/SAU/CO/2](#)), point 10

¹⁸ List of issues prior to submission of the third periodic report of Saudi Arabia, dated 5 January 2022, point 5 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CAT%2FC%2FSAU%2FQPR%2F3&Lang=en. It is worth mentioning that this institution is no longer active since a few years, as part of the ongoing reforms in the country.

evidence.¹⁹

7. On 3 May 2023, a group of Special Procedures mandate holders addressed the Saudi authorities regarding legal proceedings against citizens opposed to the Neom Project. They expressed serious concern that some of them had allegedly been subjected to torture and ill-treatment to extract confessions.²⁰
8. OHCHR received more than 30+ cases²¹ indicating that the KSA criminal investigation authorities resort to ill-treatment to obtain confessions from defendants, which are used as evidence against them, and that courts routinely dismiss allegations of forced confessions.

Recommendations:

- Include the crime of torture, as defined in Article 1 of the Convention, in the criminal legislation.
- Ensure that all allegations of torture and ill-treatment are promptly, effectively, and impartially investigated and that perpetrators are sanctioned, as required by Article 4 of the Convention.
- Adopt effective measures to ensure that coerced confessions are not considered in law and in practice, except when invoked as evidence against a person accused of torture.

Detention:

1. KSA supported three recommendations and noted two others regarding detention²².
2. 39 communications from Special Procedures involving arbitrary detention were received.
3. The CAT noted corroborating reports of widespread use of arbitrary and incommunicado detention and the alleged existence of secret places of detention.²³
4. There is no official, publicly available data on the number of detainees in the KSA.
5. Large irregular migration to KSA, mainly through the Eastern route (from Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, etc., through Yemen) led to massive detentions, deportations and expulsions.
6. There are media reports on alleged inhumane detention conditions of migrants pending their deportation. Footage and pleas for help have been shared widely in the public domain, indicating overcrowding, lack of basic humanitarian items, and poor health and sanitation conditions.²⁴

Recommendations:

- Fully implement the ‘Mandela Rules’ regarding the administration and conditions in detention and prison facilities.
- Strengthen data collection and publish periodic information on the number of detainees in the KSA, including gender, age and charges-relevant data.

¹⁹ A/HRC/40/52/Add.2, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc4052add2-visit-saudi-arabia-report-special-rapporteur-promotion-and>

²⁰ Mandates of the [Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing](#); [Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression](#); [Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#); [Working Group on arbitrary detention](#); [Working Group on Business and Human Rights](#); [Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights](#); [Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/05/saudi-arabia-un-experts-alarmed-imminent-executions-linked-neom-project>

²¹ <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=27993>

²² Theme: D26 Conditions of detention

²³ List of issues prior to submission of KSA’s third periodic report, dated 5 January 2022, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FC%2FSAU%2FQPR%2F3&Lang=en

²⁴ See for example <https://www.dw.com/en/deported-ethiopian-migrants-tell-of-suffering-in-saudi-arabia-detention/a-62223624>

- Explore where feasible alternative options to detention for immigration-related violations.
- Conduct returns in a dignified manner in line with international guidance and best practices.

Prohibition of Slavery and Human Trafficking:

1. Saudi Arabia has invested significant resources and efforts to combat human trafficking, namely the establishment of a National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Trafficking, a Victims Assistance Fund, building capacity of frontline workers victim identification, launching national strategies and action plans to combat Trafficking in Person; establishing a National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking (NCCHT), and specialised courts in all regions to adjudicate trafficking cases.
2. The Kafala (sponsorship) system is being reformed, and the Kingdom revised the legislation to introduce a more flexible visa framework.

Recommendations:

- Continue to strengthen national capacities for proactive identification and protection of potential victims, effective prosecution and sentencing of convicted traffickers, including through the continuous improvement and operationalisation of the NRM and the establishment of its electronic version (E-NRM), following international human rights instruments (the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children), and international best practices.
- Extend the same measures to identify and assist Victims of Trafficking that entered Saudi Arabia irregularly.

Administration of justice and fair trial:

1. KSA supported seven recommendations²⁵ on this issue.
2. On 17 December 2020 a group of Special Procedures mandate holders²⁶ issued comments and suggestions on the 2017 Law on Combating Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing, amended on 19 June 2020.²⁷
3. The Mandate Holders noted that various articles appear to be contrary to the international human rights norms, as they contain severe punishments for ambiguously defined crimes, and may be used to restrict the legitimate and internationally protected activities of certain groups, such as human rights defenders and journalists. They also expressed concerns with the practices of extended, potentially arbitrary administrative detention in so-called "Correction and Rehabilitation" Centres. Additionally, various provisions of the law seem to permit violations of fair trial standards, enable temporary incommunicado detention, or extended pre-trial detention, potentially putting individuals at risk of enforced disappearance.²⁸
4. Numerous complaints from individuals, information, and reports from CSOs have been published, alleging arbitrary and incommunicado detentions, enforced disappearances and unfair trials under the Terrorism Law.

²⁵ Theme: D51 Administration of justice & fair trial.

²⁶ Mandates of the SR on counterterrorism and human rights; the WGAD; the SR on freedom of opinion and expression; the SR on the situation of human rights defenders; the WGEID; and the SR on torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

²⁷ Saudi Arabia JOL [SAU 12/2020](#)

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=25726>

²⁸ Ibid, p. 1 and 2

Recommendation:

- Conduct a thorough review of the Terrorism Law and other criminal legislations and align them with international human rights standards.

Freedom of Conscience and Belief:

1. The KSA supported four and noted one recommendation on freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.²⁹

Recommendation:

- Conduct a thorough review of the Terrorism Law and align it (including the definition of terrorist crimes) with the international human rights standards so it does not interfere with freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

Freedom of opinion and expression:

1. The KSA supported 23 recommendations on freedom of expression³⁰ and noted four.
2. The Saudi Basic Law of Governance³¹ does not explicitly mention freedom of expression. It requests media and other means of expression to be courteous, fair and abide State laws and bans everything that may compromise the State's public image or offend one's dignity (article 39).³² Defamation is criminalised by the Basic Law of Governance on Broadcasting.³³ The Cybercrimes Law³⁴ also makes online defamation a criminal offence, as well as "impinging on public order, religious values, public morals, and privacy" on the internet (article 6). Penalties range from heavy fines to imprisonment. Article 30 of the Terrorism Law threatens five to ten years in prison for describing the King or the Crown Prince as an infidel or challenging him in his religion or justice".
3. Article 8 of the Law of Printed Publications³⁵ guarantees freedom of expression within the limits of Sharia and law. Article 24 stipulates that journals shall not be censored unless approved by the Prime Minister.
4. The Mandate Holders noted that there appears to be a pattern of widespread, systematic arbitrary arrests and detentions, including of human rights defenders, for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of opinion and expression, belief, assembly and association.³⁶ Political and religious authorities thoroughly censor media, and the criticism of the State is often met with criminal accusations of "blasphemy", "inciting chaos", jeopardising national unity", or "harming the image and reputation of the King and the State".

Recommendations:

- Adopt legislation to guarantee the right to freedom of expression, both online and offline, and the absolute nature of the right to freedom of opinion, per international human rights law.

²⁹ Theme: D42 Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

³⁰ Theme: A41 Constitutional and legislative framework; Theme: D43 Freedom of opinion and expression; Theme: D26 Conditions of detention

³¹ <https://www.saudiembassy.net/basic-law-governance>

³² https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Saudi_Arabia_2013.pdf?lang=en

³³ <https://laws.boe.gov.sa/BoeLaws/Laws/LawDetails/83431376-5cf3-4374-875a-a9a700f16985/1>

³⁴ <https://laws.boe.gov.sa/BoeLaws/Laws/LawDetails/25df73d6-0f49-4dc5-b010-a9a700f2ec1d/1>

³⁵ <https://www.saudiembassy.net/law-printing-and-publication>

³⁶ See 30 Nov 2021, Saudi Arabia, JAL [SAU 13/2021](#), p. 4

- Introduce freedom of expression and access to information legislation as per international standards.
- Align national legislation, in particular criminal provisions, including on defamation and blasphemy, with relevant international human rights standards.
- Ensure judicial oversight in cases related to blocking of online content.
- Adopt measures to protect journalists, human rights defenders, activists and social media users from intimidation, threats, and arbitrary arrests for exercising their rights to freedom of opinion, expression, and belief.
- Adopt the UN survey instruments to measure global progress on access to information.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and association:

1. Mandate Holders noted with concern that article 26(1) of the Terrorism Law states that "no meeting or gathering may be held for a terrorist purpose", and that the "authorities may dissolve the meeting or the gathering by the use of force when necessary."
2. Given the overly broad nature of the acts defined as "terrorism", there are concerns about the manner that this article may be interpreted and applied, as it appears to provide the authorities with broad and advance permission to use force against meetings or gatherings, potentially including peaceful assemblies or public demonstrations.

Recommendation:

- Guarantee the right to freedom of assembly following the applicable international standards and ensure that all peaceful gatherings are protected and facilitated without any use of force, and that potential limitations in the context of public assemblies, strictly meet necessity and proportionality requirements.

D. Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:

Adequate standard of living including housing:

1. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Ministry for Municipal, Rural and Housing recognised the vulnerability of migrant workers and initiated a comprehensive approach to improving housing for low-income workers. It included increasing the occupancy rate of existing organised accommodations, converting unorganised housing to organised and filling the remaining gaps in supply through the construction of more housing units.
2. As of 2021, the total capacity of organised housing units added since the outbreak accommodates around 270,000 workers.

Recommendations:

- Adopt regulations that support housing for migrant workers living in the country.
- Provide housing products for migrants, especially the vulnerable, including housing options as well as spatial scenarios to accommodate demand at the city level.
- Update the urban development plans and policies to become more inclusive for all segments of the local communities with minimum relocation possibility of migrant workers.
- Adopt a clear national/local policy and regulation for upgrading informal areas and link them to the housing policy.

Education:

1. Despite increased spending on education and relatively small class sizes compared to OECD countries, educational outcomes in KSA have not improved, according to the Programme for International Student [Assessment](#). KSA performs significantly worse than the OECD averages in math, reading, and science.
2. As part of Vision 2030, KSA has identified the importance of skill development among its labour force to meet the needs of a more diversified economy. This will require higher uptake of skill training/development opportunities.
3. Existing school transportation is insufficient to reach all school-age children and requires additional investment to reach the most disadvantaged pupils and those in remote locations.

Recommendations:

- Focus on improving the quality of education and teacher training, particularly in terms of teaching lower-income and disadvantaged students.
- Training teachers should support inclusive education that allows for adjusting lesson plans for different levels of ability, from early childhood through secondary school, to integrate all children into the same schooling environment.
- Explicitly proscribe all forms of discrimination in the education legislation.
- Legally guarantee 12 years of free primary and secondary education.
- Legally guarantee at least one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education.

Labour rights:

1. KSA ratified important ILO instruments since the last UPR. A National Child Labour Policy and a National Policy on Equality in Employment and Occupation were also adopted.
2. Despite progress in institutionalising social dialogue, fundamental conventions on freedom of association and collective bargaining remain unratified.
3. While the contributory social insurance system is being reformed to enhance comprehensiveness, discrepancies in coverage based on nationality remain³⁷.
4. The Labour Reform Initiative improved internal labour mobility for migrants but excluded domestic workers, who remain vulnerable to forced labour practices.

Recommendations:

- Align the Labour Law and relevant legislation with the requirements of the 1958 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111).
- Advance social insurance reforms in line with international standards.
- Introduce a social insurance scheme for maternity and sickness and the extension of social insurance to all workers.
- Reform End-of-Service benefits and replace them with a centrally administered national fund and improve coordination with sending countries.
- Align reforms of social assistance schemes with UN standards on social protection floors and SDG 1.3.

³⁷ Especially in terms of unemployment insurance and pensions.

- Effectively implement the National Policy on Equality in Employment and Occupation and the Child Labour Policy.

Health:

1. Saudi Arabia has witnessed a significant improvement in socio-economic development, especially health, in the past decades. Major developments included considerable strides in the piloting and implementation of the health sector transformation activities, a push towards e-health and electronic transformation of all functions of health administration and provision; a focus on non-communicable diseases, the main burden of morbidity and mortality in the Kingdom; and a comprehensive COVID-19 response.
2. Improving health in all policies became a priority and has led to the improvements of many of the numerous related indicators in the past few years.

Recommendations:

- Ensure an inclusive access to health services for all citizens and residents, while the government is restructuring the national health and insurance system, and provide comprehensive health care for all citizens, residents, and individuals with irregular residency status according to the principle of equality and non-discrimination.
- Focus on the rights of the elderly population, people with disabilities and vulnerable groups.
- Operationalise "Health in all Policies" in line with the country's Vision 2030.
- Strengthen the health system to be more efficient, less wasteful and of higher quality.

Social Protection:

1. In response to COVID-19, KSA enacted a USD18.7 billion stimulus package, which included policy measures targeting health, wage payments, subsidies and business support.
2. KSA implemented various social protection responses. A Ramadan aid top-up was provided to existing beneficiaries of the social security programme, which covers Saudi orphans, persons with disabilities and the elderly, among other vulnerable groups. Migrant workers are included in the social insurance system in KSA, ensuring health coverage and employment injury benefits, and access to end-of-service indemnity.
3. A key implementation change to the social security programme was halting beneficiaries' re-verification, even if they no longer fulfil eligibility conditions. The COVID-19 testing was free for all residents, including migrant workers, regardless of their residency status, and children through the "Sehaty" app. An inclusive in-kind emergency transfer, including migrants, was set up under the 'Our Food is One' initiative by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. However, no information is available on how beneficiaries were identified, registered, or received the support.
4. The contributory social insurance system in Saudi Arabia is undergoing reforms to enhance comprehensiveness, financial sustainability, and harmonise pension parameters between public and private sector workers. Workers are still covered through employer-financed social protection – which is not in line with international social security standards for maternity and sickness. Migrant workers participate in the national employment injury insurance scheme but are excluded from the unemployment insurance scheme and the pension system. Furthermore, there is no clarity on social protection coverage for migrants with irregular status.

Recommendations:

- Consider further strengthening social protection coverage for migrant workers in areas such as child and family benefits, maternity protection, unemployment support, sickness, invalidity/disability, and survivors' benefits.
- Consider disbursing lower benefit values with longer duration, instead of one-off payments, in times of emergency and expanding existing transfer programmes to additional beneficiaries when necessary.
- Remove the limit on per capita benefits to accommodate the large household sizes of poorer families.

E. Groups at risk:

Women and girls:National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security

1. KSA made significant achievements in women's empowerment across various sectors.

Recommendations:

- Consider adopting a comprehensive multi-sectoral national plan to strengthen the implementation of the 1325 "Women, Peace and Security" resolution.

Discrimination in nationality laws:

1. Children of Saudi fathers acquire nationality automatically at birth, regardless of birthplace. Women cannot confer their nationality on foreign spouses like men, although the law now grants children born in KSA to a Saudi mother and foreign father citizenship at age 18, subject to some conditions (fluency in Arabic, permanent residency, good conduct, etc.).

Recommendations:

- Amend nationality laws to fully align with CEDAW Articles 9 (1, 2) on nationality and withdraw reservations to Article 9 (2).

Gender-based violence (GBV):

1. Despite laws criminalising domestic violence and harassment, violence against women (VAW) is pervasive; marital rape and economic violence are non-criminalised. Male relatives may also bring legal claims against females fleeing domestic violence. Female victims of sexual violence who press charges risk criminalisation if accusations are unproven and considered sexual relations outside marriage (zina), punishable by flogging or stoning. In addition, domestic violence is still considered a family issue and hence a challenge to understand and address in policy and legal frameworks.

Recommendations:

- Enforce existing laws and adopt legislation criminalising all forms of VAW.
- Amend legislation to ensure that victims of sexual abuse are exempted from any punishment or legal repercussions if they can't prove the case and enhance victims' protection from retaliation and potential legal implications.

- Enhance the health and legal/executive authority referral systems for those who are subject to GBV, especially for the most vulnerable groups such as domestic workers.
- Strengthen the legal frameworks consistent with the CEDAW convention to eliminate GBV and domestic violence against women and girls.
- Improve functional complaint and reporting mechanisms by domestic workers and women migrant workers to improve assistance in their languages.
- Advance availability of data on gender-based violence prevalence in the Kingdom.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons (LGBT+):

1. Same-sex relationships are prohibited under Sharia law and punishable by flogging, imprisonment, and death. However, flogging was abolished in 2020. Societal discrimination against LGBTI+ groups are widely prevalent across Saudi Arabia, making them targets of violence and abuse, with very little legal recourse against perpetrators. Additionally, LGBTI+ groups and individuals continue to suffer from harassment through social media and being arrested for their actual or perceived gender identity and sexual orientation.

Recommendations:

- Review the situation of the LGBTI+ groups and individuals, considering the Kingdom's fundamental values prohibiting any form of discrimination, and Saudi Vision 2030 Pillar 1, level-3 objective 1.1.1.
- Explicitly prohibit discrimination and cyberbullying on any media platforms.
- Prevent torture and cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment of LGBTI+ people.
- Repeal laws that discriminate based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

Children:

1. Data on child protection-related issues continue to be very limited to the public, with no representative data available on issues like violence against children.
2. The CRC has called for the establishment and strengthening of mechanisms and procedures for confidential, accessible and child-friendly reporting, response, and rehabilitation for violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, including trafficking. However, the quality and coverage of the child protection systems remain limited, with few specialised services, limited case management and insufficiently trained staff. Families often depend on private psychosocial services, which can be cost-prohibitive. Protocols and guidelines for dealing with child survivors of violence are not in place. Qualified professionals in specialised child protection services need to be hired/trained, including social workers, judges, police and prosecutors. Sophisticated accreditation schemes for social workers across the sub-region are also necessary.

a. Child labour:

1. The Government adopted a policy on Eliminating and Preventing Child Labour, with ILO's assistance. Its aims to create a society free of child labour, where children enjoy their right to childhood, education, dignity and the full development of their potential. To expand the knowledge base, the Government is discussing with the ILO the possibility of undertaking a Child Labour Survey.

Recommendations:

- Fully implement the Eliminating and Preventing Child Labour policy.
- Increase data availability related to child protection and conduct a nationwide violence-against-children survey using international standards.
- Partner with universities to develop coursework in social work education focusing on child protection.
- Build capacity in case management and develop standardised tools for assessment and treatment planning.

b. Justice for Children:

1. For GCC countries, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has made several observations about the increase in the number of children in conflict with the law. The Committee has urged all countries in the subregion to build or strengthen systems of restorative and rehabilitative justice for all children without discrimination.

Recommendations:

- Improve data collection on children in conflict and contact with law and make them accessible.
- Launch a programme to promote child-friendly justice, focusing on laws, policies, services, and capacities.
- Launch an initiative to promote community-based alternatives to justice for children.
- Reduce immigration detention of children and develop models of age assessment, vulnerability screening, referral pathways, and models of appropriate and temporary care and reception facilities.

c. Child marriage:

1. A 2019 order banned marriages below the age of 18. However, it allowed courts to consider exceptions for marriages between the ages of 15 and 18 on a case-by-case basis.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen the implementation and monitoring of the existing legislation on child marriage to ensure that no forced marriages occur.
- Amend existing legislation, including the Child Protection Law, to prohibit marriages before the age of 18 years, without exception.
- Conduct surveys and studies to gauge the extent of marriages below 18 years.
- Launch social and behavioural change campaigns on preventing early marriage.

Youth:

1. According to the global youth wellbeing index, Saudi Arabia has contrasted scores within the Index. It ranks first for the health of its youth and last for participation. The ranks are also low for safety and security and gender equality.
2. Saudi Arabia's rank in the health indicator is bolstered by a low rate of adolescent fertility (8 per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19) and of youth suicide (4 deaths per 100,000 young people). Furthermore, only 17 per cent of youth use tobacco.

Recommendations:

- Enhance youth/citizen participation in the decision-making process and mechanisms.
- Develop an effective youth policy to strengthen youth role in political and social life.

Persons with disabilities:

1. KSA developed a comprehensive legal and institutional framework to protect people with disabilities (PWDs). Saudi' Vision 2030' highlights the importance of providing PWDs with equal opportunities and the Government guarantees their right to prevention, care, and rehabilitation. It also promotes comprehensive access to education for children with disabilities.
2. Several initiatives have been launched to help PWDs access the labour market, including a 4% quota in companies and public entities with more than 25 employees (Article 28 of the Labor Law).
3. However, KSA faces remaining challenges, including:
 - The lack of a coherent disability inclusion national strategy.
 - PWDs are not always involved in developing related policies.
 - The KSA approach to disability inclusion follows a charity model, focusing on compassion rather than rights and social integration.
 - Many services for PWDs are not available in rural areas.
 - The data are not always disaggregated enough to support the development of related policies.

Recommendations:

- Develop a comprehensive national disability inclusion strategy to implement the CRPD requirements.
- Consult with PWDs on all matters affecting them.
- Update the legal framework to shift from a charity-based to a rights-based approach.
- Expand the services for PWDs in rural and remote areas.
- Strengthen the data collection system to get more disaggregated data on PWDs.

Migrant workers:

1. Since 2021, KSA has been undertaking significant labour market reforms, including the 'Labour Reform Initiative,' which established more balanced relationships between workers and employers. Other key reforms took place in the system of absconding (i.e., work absenteeism), the Wage Protection System, and insurance for workers in case of employer insolvency.

Recommendations:

- Initiate legislative reform to ensure that all migrant children, regardless of their parents' nationality, immigration, and work status, can have their birth registered.
- Extend ongoing labour reforms to cover migrant domestic workers.

Refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons:

1. The Saudi Nationality Law (1985) incorporates a discriminatory point banning people with mental or physical disabilities from acquiring Saudi citizenship. Several procedural requirements, such as oaths or language tests, also present obstacles for persons with particular disabilities.
2. The Law also incorporates gender discrimination, denying Saudi women the right to confer citizenship to their children born to a foreign father.

3. People eligible for international protection but with irregular legal status due to national immigration proceedings are subject to deportation from KSA, which violates the principle of non-refoulement. They are also denied access to public social services such as healthcare, birth registration, education, and other fundamental social protection mechanisms.

Recommendations:

- Review and amend national laws on refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons to ensure alignment with the related international standards.
- Consider incorporating legal safeguards to protect residents who meet the international protection definition against deportation due to irregularity.
- Consider compliance with the ICPD Plan of Action in providing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHRs) reproductive healthcare services to migrants and temporary workers on an equal and equitable basis.