



UNITED
NATIONS
SAUDI ARABIA

UN COUNTRY RESULTS REPORT

KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA
2021

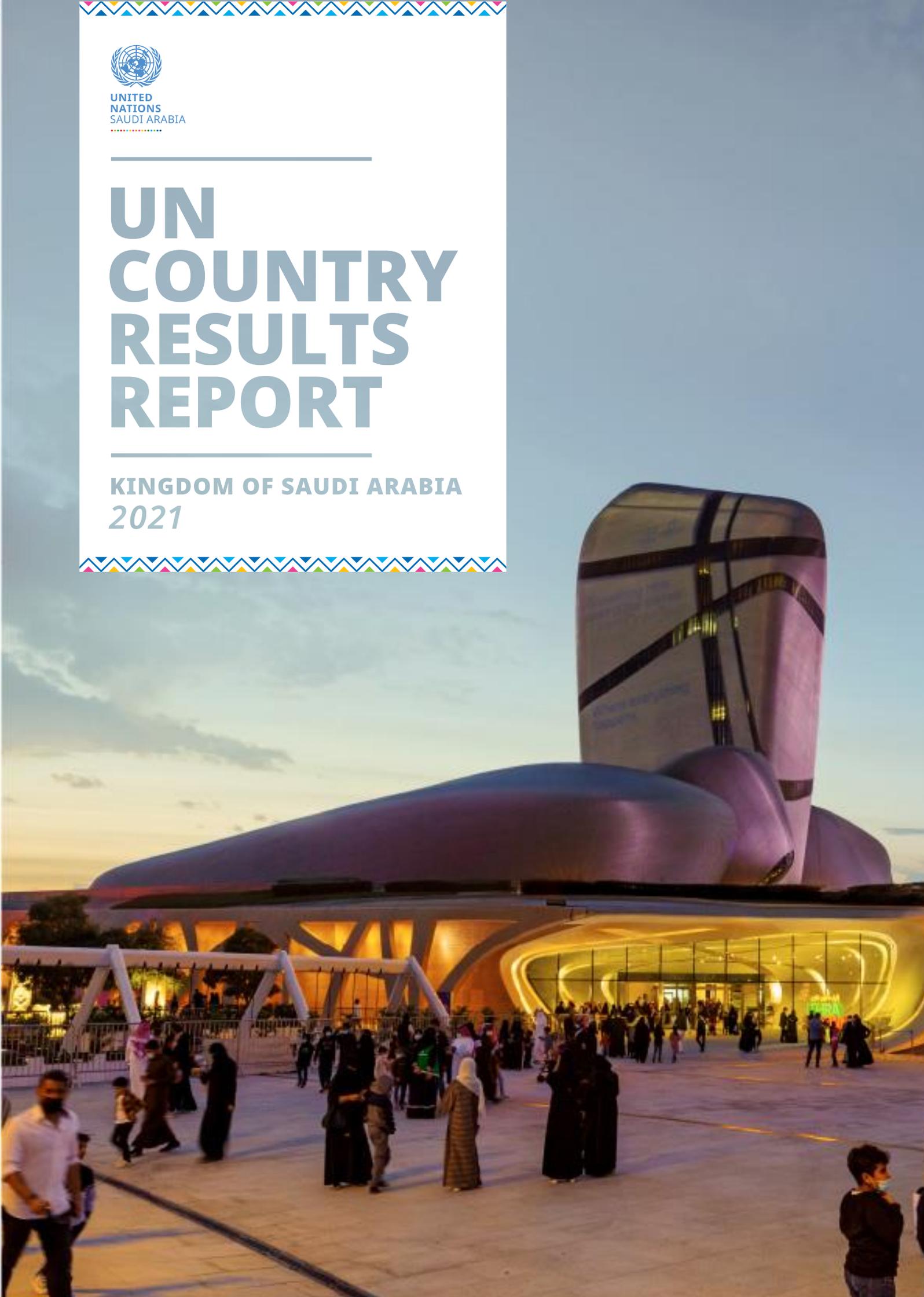


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◆ INTRODUCTION
UN Country Results Report

FOREWORD

2021 was a crucial year for the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) with critical milestones completed or finalized that built on the repositioning of the United Nations as a partner for the Government, private sector, civil society and academia and other key stakeholders.

The UNCT continued to support the Government engage in critical global fora such as the Food Systems Summit, develop solutions to emerging issues, and progress on the broader sustainable development agenda, underpinned by the multifaceted partnership strategy and supported by active strategic communications to raise awareness on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 17 SDGs, and the work of the UNCT. The UNCT supported and engaged in a wide range of fora on development issues and celebrated key international days, including World Environment Day, 16 Days of Activism, International Day of Education, UN Day, and Human Rights Day.

Engagement with academia was strengthened in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and through agency engagement. In collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, localization of the SDGs began to materialize with the first UNCT visit to Asir, one of the 13 Saudi regions, which took place in October 2021 and included engagement with local government, women's committees, and academia. In collaboration with UNDP and the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD), we launched a research paper on 'The Role of Awqaf in Achieving the SDGs and Vision 2030,' which raised awareness and sparked ongoing discussion on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the importance and role of sustainable financing for social development.

The development of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022 – 2026



Ms. Nathalie Fustier

Resident Coordinator
United Nations
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

was a milestone achievement in 2021, supported by the active and iterative involvement of all UNCT members and the engagement of the Government through the Ministry of Economy and Planning. The development of the Cooperation Framework was supported by strong analysis and research papers; assessments of SDGs, macroeconomic SDG forecasts, and SDGs interlinkages for the KSA; and policy briefs developed by UNCT working groups on disability inclusion, human rights, urban issues, and children and young people. The conclusion and signature of the Cooperation Framework was paced to match progress by the Government on the establishment of the KSA Sustainable Development Steering Committee (SDSC), which is chaired by the Minister of Economy and Planning and includes 18 Ministries and governmental entities at the level of Deputy Minister or equivalent. The SDSC will be the primary comprehensive mechanism to ensure that the Cooperation Framework and the work of the United Nations in KSA continue to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

We are pleased to present the United Nations Country Results Report for 2021, the fifth and final year of our United Nations Common Country Strategic Framework 2017 – 2021. Our annual report will follow the identified four priority areas:

- ◆ **Economic Development:** Knowledge-based equitable and sustainable economic development, underpinned by technology, innovation, and improved infrastructure;
- ◆ **Social Services and Education:** Effective and equitable delivery of social services and education for improved quality of life;
- ◆ **Public Sector:** An equitable, accountable, effective, and efficient public sector; and
- ◆ **Resource Management:** The sustainable management, use and preservation of natural and cultural resources.

We look forward to the challenges and opportunities that 2022 may present. ◆

UNITED NATIONS COUNTRY TEAM

▶ UNITED NATIONS IN THE KSA

The United Nations (UN) has been actively working with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) since 1948. The United Nations Country Team (UNCT), led by the UN Resident Coordinator, is composed of all UN entities working in or with the KSA. There are currently 23¹ UN agencies, funds, and programmes (AFPs) in the UNCT. Thirteen AFPs are physically present in the KSA, three of which (OCHA, IOM, and WFP) exclusively support operations in Yemen.

▶ IN-COUNTRY PRESENCE

The ten AFPs with offices in the KSA are the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), World Health

Organization (WHO), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and World Bank Group (WBG). The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and World Food Programme (WFP) are also physically present in the KSA; however, these three AFPs focus on supporting UN work in Yemen.

▶ OPERATING THROUGH REGIONAL OFFICES AND/OR HEADQUARTERS

The ten AFPs that operate through regional offices or headquarters in support of UN work in the KSA are the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), International Labour Organization (ILO), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), United Nations Volunteers (UNV), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC),² United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

▶ OBSERVERS

In addition, the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is active in the KSA, having opened its MENA regional office in Riyadh in May 2021. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is also present in the country. The WTO and ICAO are UNCT observers, as they have not joined the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG).



¹ The IOM is counted as both physically present in country in support of Yemen and operating through its regional office for the KSA. The United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) is also an observing member of the UNCT in the KSA; however, the UNDSS does not have any programmes in the country and is therefore not counted here among the 23 AFPs.

² UNCTAD is the only AFP operating through a headquarters without a regional office for the MENA region.



KEY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS OF THE UN DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN THE KSA

The United Nations would like to thank its many partners, without whose partnership the United Nations would not have been able to achieve the successes and accomplishments of 2021. Below is a list of some of our partners:

- ◆ Al Madinah Al Munawarah Development Authority
- ◆ Al Mawaddah Society for Family Development
- ◆ Al Nahda Society
- ◆ Amant
- ◆ Arab Gulf Programme for Development
- ◆ Attorney General's Office
- ◆ Authority for Persons with Disabilities
- ◆ Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers
- ◆ Centres for Disease Control and Prevention – Atlanta
- ◆ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
- ◆ Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia
- ◆ Development Authorities Support Office
- ◆ Environmental Development Foundation | Faseel
- ◆ Family Affairs Council
- ◆ Federation of Council Chambers
- ◆ General Auditing Bureau
- ◆ General Authority for Survey and Geospatial Information
- ◆ General Authority for Statistics
- ◆ General Commission for Survey
- ◆ General Directorate of Saudi Civil Defense
- ◆ General Intelligence Presidency
- ◆ Global Environmental Facility
- ◆ Gulf Cooperation Council
- ◆ Human Rights Commission
- ◆ Islamic Development Bank
- ◆ JAD International School
- ◆ King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue
- ◆ King Abdulaziz Medical City
- ◆ King Khalid Foundation
- ◆ King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre
- ◆ Leejam Sports Company
- ◆ Mawaddah Charitable Society
- ◆ Ministry of Communications and Information Technology
- ◆ Ministry of Culture
- ◆ Ministry of Economy and Planning
- ◆ Ministry of Education
- ◆ Ministry of Energy
- ◆ Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture
- ◆ Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- ◆ Ministry of Health
- ◆ Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development
- ◆ Ministry of Interior
- ◆ Ministry of Justice
- ◆ Ministry of Media
- ◆ Ministry of Municipal, Rural Affairs and Housing
- ◆ Ministry of National Guard – Health Affairs
- ◆ Ministry of Tourism
- ◆ Ministry of Transport
- ◆ Naif Arab University for Security Sciences
- ◆ National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking
- ◆ National Cybersecurity Authority
- ◆ National Centre for Environment Compliance
- ◆ National Centre for Wildlife
- ◆ National Family Safety Program
- ◆ National Centre for Meteorology
- ◆ National Ministerial Traffic Safety Committee
- ◆ National Permanent Committee for Reporting
- ◆ Nokia
- ◆ Oversight and Anti-Corruption Authority
- ◆ Prince Mohammed Bin Salman College of Business & Entrepreneurship
- ◆ Public Health Authority
- ◆ Regional Development Authorities
- ◆ Royal Commission for Riyadh City
- ◆ Royal Commission for Makkah City and Holy Sites
- ◆ Royal Commission for Al-Ula
- ◆ Saudi Arabian Football Federation
- ◆ Saudi Arabian Gymnastics Federation
- ◆ Saudi Commission for Tourism and Natural Heritage
- ◆ Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority
- ◆ Saudi Fund for Development
- ◆ Saudi Food Bank
- ◆ Saudi Food and Drug Authority
- ◆ Saudi Health Council
- ◆ Saudi Irrigation Organization
- ◆ Saudi National Committee of Workers Committees
- ◆ Saudi Olympic and Paralympic Committee
- ◆ Saudi Patient Safety Centre
- ◆ Saudi Sports for All Federation
- ◆ Saudi Telecom Company
- ◆ Standing Committee for Reporting
- ◆ Vision Realization Offices
- ◆ WHO Collaborating Centre for Disaster and Emergency Management
- ◆ WHO Collaborating Centre for Infection Prevention and Control and Anti-Microbial Resistance
- ◆ WHO Collaborating Centre for Child Maltreatment Research and Planning
- ◆ Zain

PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Working towards the achievement of SDG 17: *Partnerships for the Goals*, The United Nations in the KSA has developed a dual-pronged partnership strategy that aims to bring together stakeholders from the Government, Private Sector, Academia, and Civil Society and promote optimal conditions for cooperation to flourish between them. As a convener, the United Nations collaborates with key ministries, as well as regional- and municipal-level administrations and the diplomatic community. Simultaneously, the United Nations has taken on the role of an incubator for sustainable partnerships and sustainable financing of the SDGs and the KSA's Vision 2030. The United Nations Partnerships Working Group, which works closely with the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO), has been instrumental in solidifying existing, and forging new, partnerships throughout 2021.

Private Sector: In May 2021, the UN signed a letter of understanding with the Ministry of Economy and Planning (MEP) and the Federation of Saudi Chambers (FSC) to enhance the participation of the Saudi private sector in supporting local and global sustainable development initiatives. This came shortly after the UN organized a CEO Roundtable in collaboration with the UN Global Compact, MEP, and FSC in February 2021 to encourage exchanges of best practices and knowledge around corporate sustainability and the SDGs. In September 2021, with the support of MEP and FSC, the UN launched the UN Global Compact Local Network with 33 members to further encourage private sector engagement with the SDGs in the KSA. With this, all G20 countries have now a UN Global Compact Local Network.

Civil Society: In October 2021, to raise awareness on SDGs, the UN celebrated United Nations Day around SDG3: *Good Health and Well-Being*. Using the #Active4SDGs hashtag, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, OHCHR, and UN-Habitat collaborated on events organized across the country in Jeddah, Makkah, Tabuk, Dharan, and Riyadh. Mobilizing support from prominent Saudi athletes and working in tandem with fitness organizations, the 76th celebration of the United Nations also earned governmental support from the Saudi Arabian Gymnastics Federation and the Authority for Persons with Disabilities.

Academia: The United Nations in KSA has conducted a survey on the role of Saudi academic institutions in achieving the SDGs and Vision 2030. Based on the results of the survey, in 2022, the UNCT will explore with the relevant government authorities the possibility to establish a local network for academic institutions with the objective to promote high quality research on SDGs in the Kingdom.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, continuous dialogue and cooperation between the WHO and the KSA's Ministry of Health allowed the country to ensure a safe Hajj season. Limiting the Hajj to 60,000 Saudi residents, the Ministry of Health successfully instituted vaccination/recovery requirements and strict social distancing measures alongside several innovative technological procedures to protect all pilgrims.

Since the conclusion of the KSA's G20 Presidency and time as Chair of the G20 Anti-Corruption Working Group in 2020, the KSA's Oversight and Anti-Corruption Authority (NAZAHA) emerged as the primary donor and sponsor of the Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities (GlobE Network). Headquartered in Vienna under the auspices of UNODC, this network has afforded the KSA the opportunity to strengthen its local commitment to anti-corruption efforts while sharing its expertise on a global level.

In October 2021, the United Nations in the KSA visited the Emirate of Asir in a first-of-its-kind delegation facilitated by the Ministry of the Interior to conduct regional outreach and explore new avenues for cooperation with local government and other stakeholders. The delegation engaged with stakeholders in the Emirate of Asir, ultimately allowing the United Nations in the KSA to gain a better understanding of the situation outside of Riyadh to better localize the SDGs.

2021 was a year full of meaningful, innovative, and ground-breaking partnerships, more of which are detailed in the following pages. The United Nations in the KSA looks forward to further bolstering its commitment to SDG 17: *Partnerships for the Goals* and ensuring that partnerships are a key and cross-cutting element in 2022. ♦

◆ CHAPTER 1
Key Developments



OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE KSA

Despite the challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the KSA made significant strides towards the realization of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development over the course of 2021, particularly in the domains of climate policy, women's empowerment, migration, and labour reform.

In a landmark event for the region, the Saudi and Middle East Green Initiatives were announced in October 2021 in Riyadh. As part of the Saudi Green Initiative, the KSA declared its intention to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2060 and pledges to plant 450 million trees and rehabilitate 8 million hectares of degraded land by 2030, among other initiatives.

Throughout 2021, the KSA has also been continuously realizing its intentions to empower women, particularly in their capacities as economic actors. In only four years, the labour force participation rate of Saudi women in the country nearly doubled, rapidly rising from 17.4% in Q1 2017 to 34.1% in Q3 2021. While gender disparities remain stark across sectors, this significant evolution over such a short period of time suggests that women's economic empowerment is continuing to benefit from increased social support. In February 2021, the KSA's Ministry of Defence issued a ruling that permitted women to join the army. Progress towards gender parity has also been made on the level of the courts. In June 2021, judicial authorities in the KSA rescinded Paragraph B of Article 169 of the Law of Procedure before Sharia Courts, allowing women the right to live alone without the permission of a male guardian.

The KSA also made notable progress over the course of 2021 in the realm of labour and migration reform. In March 2021, the KSA announced reforms to its migration sponsorship system via Resolution No. 51848/1442. Under this new legislation, migrant workers employed in the private sector are afforded the right to change employers of their own accord, without the consent of their original/current employer after having spent one year working in the KSA. This reform to the migration sponsorship system provides a solid basis for the development

of more extensive reforms that will afford similar rights to migrant workers in other domains, such as domestic workers and farmers, who remain among the most vulnerable migrant populations. Extending more extensive protections to each and every migrant worker is a global challenge and the KSA's 2021 reform is a positive step.

Two significant milestones in the KSA's journey to eradicating child labour and forced labour were reached in spring of 2021. The first was reached in April 2021 as the KSA's Council of Ministers approved the National Policy to Prevent Child Labour. Under this legislation and subject only to narrow exceptions, the minimum age for employment in the KSA is now 15. With this reform, the KSA officially fulfilled its international obligations under the ILO's Conventions No. 138 and 182. Emphasizing its commitment to the protection of children, the Saudi Cabinet also endorsed the National Action Plan to Prevent Child Labour. The second event occurred on May 26, 2021, when the KSA took a critical step towards eradicating forced labour and human trafficking with its ratification of the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention. Becoming the first member of the Gulf Cooperation Council to become party to the Convention, the KSA's firm ratification sets a vital precedent for its neighbours as the region works towards better protecting workers from fraudulent and abusive practices.

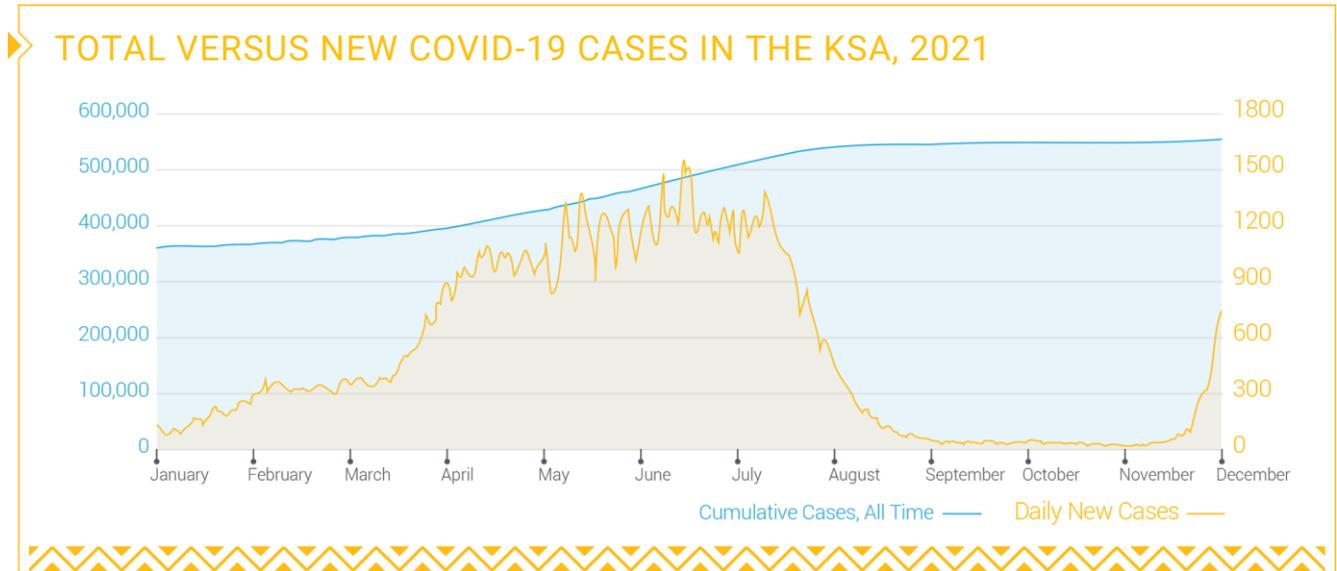
While many programme plans for 2020 were complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts were reoriented towards more short-term emergency responses, United Nations activity in 2021 largely steadied itself and achieved significant results by adapting to the altered pandemic context. While the pace of sustainable development in the KSA slowed in 2020 due to COVID-19 and low oil prices that impacted revenues, 2021 saw oil prices recover to pre-pandemic levels; the KSA's ambitious efforts to bring its Vision 2030 to life while pursuing the SDGs have been strong throughout the year.

Such efforts are sure to be bolstered by the KSA's Sustainable Development Steering Committee (SDSC), which was launched in August 2021 and to

which the RC has observer status. Chaired by the Minister of Economy and Planning, the SDSC brings together representatives from 18 Government

ministries and entities to work towards sustainable development. ♦

COVID-19 ANALYSIS



CONFIRMED CASES, 2021

▶ **TOTAL** **192,816**
Down from 362,741 in 2020

▶ **ANNUAL CASES DAILY AVERAGE** **528**
Down from 1,197 in 2020

DEATHS, 2021

▶ **TOTAL** **2,658**
Down from 6,214 in 2020

▶ **ANNUAL DEATHS DAILY AVERAGE** **7**
Down from 17 in 2020

VACCINATIONS, 2021

▶ **AT LEAST ONE DOSE**
25,017,090 people
70.79% of population

▶ **FULLY VACCINATED**
23,180,879 people
65.59% of population

▶ **RECEIVED BOOSTER**
2,696,173 people
7.63% of population

The Government of the KSA has managed the COVID-19 mitigation process throughout 2021. These figures³

are included in order to provide context for United Nations results described below. ♦

<https://covid19.who.int/WHO-COVID-19-global-data.csv>

³ https://github.com/owid/covid-19-data/blob/master/public/data/vaccinations/country_data/Saudi%20Arabia.csv

◆ CHAPTER 2
*UN Development System
Support to National
Development Priorities
Through the Cooperation
Framework*



CHAPTER 2.1: OVERVIEW OF RESULTS



▶ UNITED NATIONS 2021 STRATEGY

Five broad frameworks continued to inform the United Nations' strategy and activities in the KSA in 2021. They are (1) Saudi Vision 2030, (2) the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), (3) the United Nations Common Country Strategic Framework (UNCCSF) 2017–2021 for the KSA, (4) the five developmental pillars of United Nations guidance on COVID-19, and (5) the promise to 'leave no one behind' (LNOB), all underpinned by a strong commitment to the cross-cutting issues of human rights, gender equality, women's empowerment, and others.

The United Nations in the KSA has prioritized activities and programs that advance the collaboration and mutual fulfilment of SDGs, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the KSA's Vision 2030. Section 2.2 will dive deeper into the details of the UNCT's main results for the year, focusing on relevant highlights rather than providing an exhaustive list of results. Some of 2021's highlights were United Nations-supported reforms in the domain of labour law; the forging and deepening of various partnerships between the United Nations and local organizations; hundreds of hours of capacity-strengthening workshops; the development of successful COVID-19 mitigation strategies, including a successful vaccination

campaign; and significant advances in preserving the KSA's natural and cultural resources, to name a few. The work of the United Nations in the KSA towards achieving the SDGs harmonizes with the KSA's advancement towards its tripartite goal outlined in its Vision 2030: a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation. Throughout 2021, the substantial complementarities and common interests that align the SDGs and Vision 2030 were leveraged towards a more sustainable future in the KSA.

▶ VISION 2030 AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

It is critical to emphasize the coinciding nature of progress towards the KSA's Vision 2030 and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The table below maps out the synergies between the two strategic frameworks and clarifies where the plans of the United Nations and the Government of the KSA coincide. As can be seen, 21 of Vision 2030's 27 'Level 2' outcomes can be linked to at least SDG, with most harmonies extending to SDGs 8: *Decent Work and Economic Growth* (12 links), 16: *Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions* (10 links), 4: *Quality Education* (9 links), and 11: *Sustainable Cities and Communities* (9 links). ♦

SYNERGIES: VISION 2030 (LEVEL 2) AND THE SDGS

Vision 2030, Level 2	SDGs
1.1 Foster Islamic values	10, 16
1.3 Strengthen national identity	4, 5, 8, 11
2.1 Improve healthcare service	2, 3, 10
2.3 Improve liveability in Saudi cities	1, 3, 11, 12, 16
2.4 Ensure environmental sustainability	2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15
2.5 Promote Culture and Entertainment	4, 8, 11
2.6 Create an empowering environment for Saudis	1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 16
3.1 Grow contribution of the private sector to the economy	16, 17
3.3 Unlock potential of non-oil sectors	4, 8, 17
3.5 Position KSA as a global logistic hub	16
4.1 Develop human capital in line with labour market needs	4, 8
4.2 Ensuring equal access to job opportunities	1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 17
4.3 Enable job creation through SMEs and micro-enterprises	4, 8, 9
4.4 Attract relevant foreign talents for the economy	1, 3, 5, 10, 11, 16
5.1 Balance public budget	8, 11
5.2 Improve performance of government apparatus	1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16, 17
5.3 Engage effectively with citizens	8, 16
5.4 Protect vital resources of the nation	2, 6, 12, 14
6.1 Enable citizen responsibility	1, 4, 8
6.2 Enable social contribution of businesses	8, 16
6.3 Enable larger impact of non-profit sector	1, 4, 8, 16

A self-reported questionnaire on the linkages between activities conducted throughout 2021 and the KSA's Vision 2030 'Level 2' outcomes was distributed to UNCT members in the country and answered by eleven members reflecting on the past year. The results show that UNCT activities corresponded to at least 19 of the 27 Vision 2030 'Level 2' outcomes. Activities were most often linked to 5.2 *Improve performance of Government apparatus* (nine times), 4.1 *Develop human capital in line with labour market needs* (seven times), 2.1 *Improve healthcare service* (five times), 4.2 *Ensure equal access to job opportunities* (four times), and 5.4 *Protect vital resources of the nation* (four times), and 6.3 *Enable larger impact of non-profit sector* (four times).



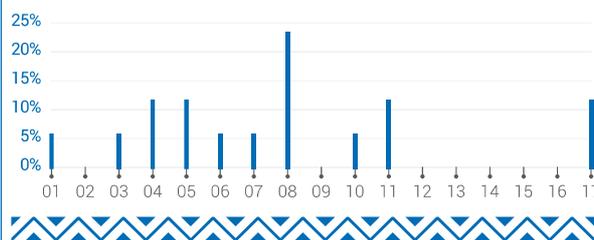
▶ UNITED NATIONS COMMON COUNTRY STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK (UNCCSF) 2017–2021

The United Nations' Common Country Strategic Framework (UNCCSF) 2017–2021 is organized into four priority areas that will be used to structure the following Section 2.2 that details Cooperation Framework Priorities, Outcomes, and Outputs for 2021. The four priority areas are the following:

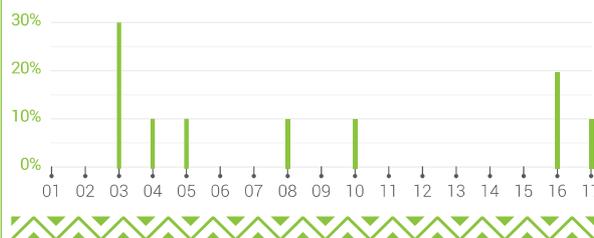
- ◆ **Economic Development:** Knowledge-based equitable and sustainable development underpinned by technology, innovation, improved infrastructure
- ◆ **Social Services and Education:** Effective and equitable delivery of social services and education for improved quality of life
- ◆ **Public Sector:** Equitable, accountable, effective, efficient public sector
- ◆ **Resource Management:** Sustainable natural and cultural resources management, use, and preservation

Connections can also be meaningfully drawn between the projects undertaken by the UNCT throughout 2021 under the framework of the four priority areas outlined in the UNCCSF 2017–2021 and the SDGs. The following figures were generated on the basis of the aforementioned self-reported questionnaire on the linkage of the four priority areas to the SDGs, which was distributed to UNCT members in the KSA and answered by eleven members reflecting on the past year. The results show that Priority Area 1 (Economic Development) was linked to ten SDGs and primarily targeted SDGs 8 and 17. Priority Area 2 (Social Services and Education) was linked to seven SDGs and primarily targeted SDGs 3 and 16. Priority Area 3 (Public Sector) was linked to eight SDGs and primarily targeted SDGs 5, 8, 10, and 16. Priority Area 4 (Resource Management) was linked to eight SDGs and evenly targeted SDGs 3, 5, 11, and 13–17.

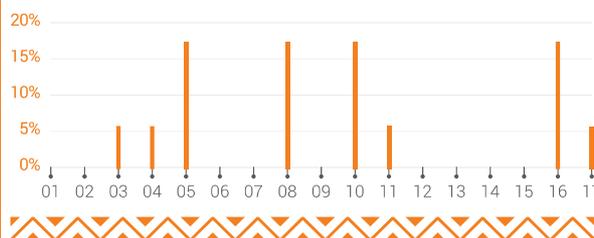
SDGS LINKED TO PRIORITY AREA 1 (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT)



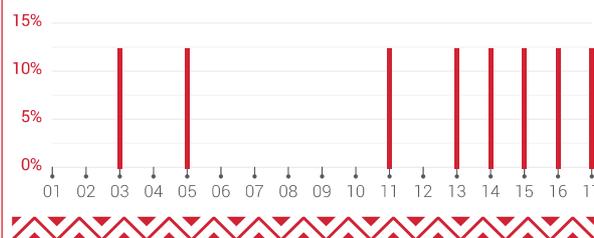
SDGS LINKED TO PRIORITY AREA 2 (SOCIAL SERVICES AND EDUCATION)



SDGS LINKED TO PRIORITY AREA 3 (PUBLIC SECTOR)



SDGS LINKED TO PRIORITY AREA 4 (RESOURCE MANAGEMENT)



▶ UNITED NATIONS GUIDANCE ON COVID-19

In April 2020, the United Nations released its framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19, which is broken down into five pillars that continued to inform COVID-19 relief efforts in the KSA through 2021:

- ◆ **Health First:** Protecting health services and systems during the crisis
- ◆ **Protecting People:** Social protection and basic services

- ◆ **Economic Response and Recovery:** Protecting jobs, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the informal sector workers
- ◆ **Macroeconomic Response and Multilateral Collaboration**
- ◆ **Social Cohesion and Community Resilience**

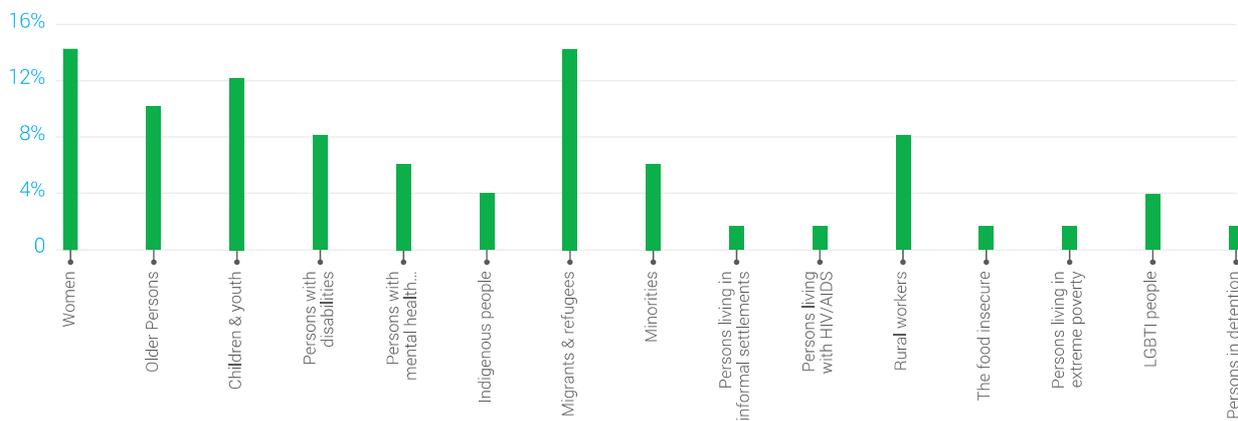
Efforts across the UNCT supported the realization of each of these five pillars, as will be detailed in the following section. Naturally, the WHO led the effort

to ingrain these pillars in the global pandemic response, and its work in the KSA is no exception. Throughout 2021, the WHO targeted its activities in the KSA towards bolstering Pillars 1: *Health First*, 3: *Economic Response and Recovery*, and 5: *Social Cohesion and Community Resilience*. Their results positively influenced the country's efforts to achieve SDG 3: *Good Health and Well-Being* while

simultaneously bolstering local efforts to reach Vision 2030's 'Level 2' objectives concerning 2.1: *Improve healthcare service*, 2.2: *Promote a healthy lifestyle*, and 2.3: *Improve liveability in Saudi cities*. The details of the WHO's instrumental activities throughout 2021 in the KSA are further detailed in Section 2.2.

▶ LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

UNCT ENGAGEMENT WITH VULNERABLE GROUPS



As a response to the ongoing pandemic, LNOB efforts that strive to better ensure the health, safety, and rights of vulnerable groups^[1] in the KSA continue to include free COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccination following the KSA's 2020 health amnesty reform that earned undocumented migrants the right to access COVID-19 health-related assistance without any potential legal ramifications. UNHCR worked in close coordination with Ministry of Foreign Affairs to advocate for the inclusion of people of concern in the national immunization plan and placed an emphasis on including persons of concern with irregular legal status. As of December 31, 2021, 66.6% of the KSA's population (over 23 million people) were fully vaccinated and efforts are ongoing to ensure that all residents benefit from the vaccine in order to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

Further LNOB efforts include knowledge exchange and information sharing and designing media campaigns that target migrants irrespective of their status by creating multi-language materials disseminated on various media channels. Such strategies, such as those taken in partnership with the IOM, are designed to ward against the discrimination of residents on the basis of their citizenship and/or legal status.

The KSA has one of the highest rates of temporary contractual workers worldwide, constituting over 70% of its labour force. The United Nations has continued supporting the Government as it empowers temporary contractual workers, as evidenced by the March 2021 reform that eased the constraints of the migration sponsorship system among migrant workers in the private sector. The United Nations in the KSA has assisted Government efforts to combat human trafficking, set up a fair and equitable labour market, expand migrants' rights, and enhance their socio-economic well-being, with particular focus on the most vulnerable migrant populations who continue to be strongly affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

UNHCR directed its activities towards social protection to assist vulnerable persons reach or maintain an adequate standard of living and good health. Such activities include cash transfers, food assistance programs, child benefit support, medical treatment referral, and legal services. Cash assistance programs have proven to be critical and flexible, benefitting many vulnerable persons of concern across the KSA, particularly those hardest hit by the pandemic and those in irregular legal situations. In consultation with the Government, UNHCR continues to provide critical protection

services to people of concern, including migrants from Syria, Yemen, and other countries. UNHCR continues to work with the Government of the KSA towards finding sustainable solutions to support

those in need of international protection who face threats of deportation. ♦



CHAPTER 2.2: COOPERATION FRAMEWORK PRIORITIES, OUTCOMES, AND OUTPUTS



PRIORITY AREA 1: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Knowledge-based equitable and sustainable development underpinned by technology, innovation, improved infrastructure

In 2021, the United Nations implemented various programs to advance equitable and sustainable economic development in the KSA, particularly through women's economic empowerment initiatives, improved urban infrastructure, and labour law reform.

▶ WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Working towards increasing women's economic empowerment in the KSA, UN Women collaborated with Nokia to generate knowledge and data regarding the drivers for and obstacles to increasing women's employment in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector. This partnership strives to address the gap between the number of female sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) graduates (now 59% of computer science graduates from

public universities in the KSA) and those who enter the workforce and will continue into 2022. UN Women also provided technical support to the collaboration between Nokia, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, and Zain regarding the development of women-centred business solutions for the retail ICT market, thereby demonstrating that women's leadership in tech has commercial market value, as well as being a social good.

▶ URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Urban development in the KSA has been focused on the role of cities in making economic shifts. The collaboration between the UNDP and UN-Habitat with the Ministry of Municipal, Rural Affairs and Housing has been particularly impactful in executing sustainable city strategies. The KSA has positioned housing at the centre of the national agenda through Vision 2030 and the Housing Program, recognizing that the availability of affordable and stable housing is instrumental to a thriving economy and future economic growth. Working with the Ministry of Municipal, Rural Affairs and Housing, UNDP and UN-Habitat have jointly supported two of the KSA's infrastructural projects: one on KSA's Developmental Housing Programme and the other on its National Spatial Strategy.

The Developmental Housing Programme aims to provide housing to Saudi's lowest-income and most vulnerable population. UNDP and UN-Habitat reviewed the KSA's current programme and provided recommendations for improvement based on international housing best practices and urban planning standards. This collaboration resulted in ten reports aimed to improve the program's regulatory and legal framework, non-profit involvement, the process for determining future building locations, and various other planning and

design aspects. The Ministry of Municipal, Rural Affairs, and Housing's newly updated Housing Programme 2021–2025 reflects the agility of the KSA's Government to update and refine its housing strategies with United Nations support.

The second project focused on backing the Deputyship of Town Planning's implementation of the National Spatial Strategy, aiming to support the localization of sustainable urban development at the national, regional, and local levels. The UNDP and UN-Habitat assisted in the classification and re-categorization of municipalities in KSA, the performance of municipal finance, the elimination of visual pollution, and the inclusion of cutting-edge urban design. Over the course of 2021, there have been at least three new initiatives within this programme towards working with the Royal Commission for Riyadh City, the Royal Commission for Makkah City and Holy Sites, and the Al Madinah Al Munawarah Development Authority to improve urban planning and urban development.

Striving to sustainably guide the rapid urbanization patterns that have deepened over the past decades, UNDP and UN-Habitat launched the Sustainable Housing Concept Plan Initiative in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipal, Rural Affairs, and Housing in October 2021. This series of collaborative workshops aims to foster innovative residential designs that reimagine and reconceive what housing and neighbourhoods could look like in the KSA. Ensuring that diverse perspectives, particularly those of young people and women, are taken into account in the process, the initiative strives to produce new designs that will contribute to a more inclusive future for Saudi housing. In addition to making the future development of Saudi cities more sustainable, the initiative continues to empower

Saudi women and bolster national capacities in the fields of architecture, urban planning, and housing.

With the support of the Islamic Development Bank, UN-Habitat embarked on the pilot phase of the programme Towards Arab Cities Without Informal Settlements by cooperating with local non-profit and private-sector stakeholders towards upgrading informal settlements in Taif city.

▶ LABOUR LAW REFORM

Since February 2020, UNOCD has collaborated with the Saudi Human Rights Commission, the chair entity of the KSA's National Committee on Combatting Human Trafficking (NCCHT) to 'Support and strengthen national capacities to prevent, suppress, and punish trafficking in persons (TiP) in accordance with international standards and best practices.' The March 2021 reform of the KSA's migration sponsorship system (Resolution No. 51848/1442) emerged partly as a result of UNODC's legislative advice to the NCCHT regarding national TiP legislation. Since the March 2021 reform, migrant workers employed in the private sector have been afforded the right to change employers without the consent of their original/current employer after having spent one year working in the KSA. Such an improvement to the KSA's framework of labour law is poised to contribute to the priority area of equitable and sustainable economic development.

The ILO has supported the establishment of a labour market information system inside the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development to be used for policy development.





PRIORITY AREA 2: SOCIAL SERVICES AND EDUCATION

Effective and equitable delivery of social services and education for improved quality of life

Together with the Government, the United Nations worked steadily towards ensuring that social services and education in the KSA are delivered in an effective and equitable manner. Some of the domains in which the results were most profound throughout 2021 were childhood protection and education, women's socio-cultural empowerment, regional COVID-19 response alignment, and healthcare.

► CHILD PROTECTION AND EDUCATION

As part of the KSA's Vision 2030 and the realization of the SDGs in connection with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, youth empowerment emerged as a central component of the KSA's efforts to bolster its social services and education in 2021. UNICEF has partnered with various government entities to ensure an improved quality of life for children and young people in the KSA.

UNICEF engages with the Government of the KSA on child online safety. With KSA's keenness on being a key player in this field, a strategic partnership is being forged between UNICEF and KSA to advance this agenda both nationally and globally. At the national level, UNICEF is supporting the Family Affairs Council in the development of a National Framework on Child Online Safety, including by means of an action plan to operationalize it with reference to a social and behavioural change component. In terms of bolstering online child protection, and under HRH, the Crown Prince's global initiatives on children protection in cyberspace and women's empowerment launched during the Global Cyber Forum 2020. UNICEF is in dialogue with the KSA's National Cybersecurity Authority to support similar work against cybercrime, with KSA's support, in multiple low and middle-income countries. This provides a great

example of the interlink between the national and global efforts on key programmatic areas like child online safety.

Alongside the KSA's strategy of better protecting children by means of improved cybersecurity, it has also taken its commitment to ending child labour seriously. To this end, in January 2021, UNICEF and Saudi Human Rights Commission organized a webinar entitled 'Child Protection: from child labour to cybercrime,' which emphasized the efforts of the Family Affairs Council in addressing child labour. As previously mentioned, the Government of the KSA reinforced its national child labour policies in April 2021.

Throughout 2021, UNICEF has also sought to improve public knowledge and evidence generation relating to early childhood development by initiating and completing a number of child-focused media campaigns, research projects, and studies. Striving to support children's development and address the impact of COVID-19 in terms of mental health, UNICEF designed an eight-week social media campaign in collaboration with the Family Affairs Council to address various topics regarding early childhood development and promote positive parenting practices. Approximately 1 million caregivers and service providers were reached through this campaign. Also, in partnership with the Family Affairs Council, UNICEF completed a study of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood (0–8 years) and their families, which was accompanied by a complementary policy brief. A knowledge, attitude, and practices study on early childhood development that will inform upcoming policy and programme work has also been launched and results will be available in 2022.

In October 2021, Jubail Industrial City was awarded one of UNESCO's ten annual Learning City Awards for its outstanding progress in providing lifelong learning opportunities to its population of over 200,000. Among other initiatives, Jubail Industrial City has successfully upskilled over 168,000 individuals by means of evening classes.

► WOMEN'S SOCIO-CULTURAL EMPOWERMENT

Towards improving the equitable delivery of social services to women and improving their quality of life in the KSA through its regional office, UN Women organized a series of workshops throughout 2021. In July 2021, UN Women and ESCWA co-organized a regional workshop entitled 'Services to Protect Women Survivors of Violence in the Arab Region' with participants from the KSA's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development. Through the facilitation of knowledge sharing and the presentation of the standards in services delivery,

the workshop sought to strengthen the capacities of participants to enhance the services offered to women survivors of violence. In November 2021, UN Women and UNFPA's regional offices engaged the Gulf Cooperation Council roundtable in a discussion on violence against women and data. The outcomes and presentations of the workshop were shared with all relevant stakeholders in the KSA, including the National Family Safety Program. Striving to strengthen data use and dissemination in the region, the presentations were held on rich and diverse topics, such as UN Women's session 'tools and guidance notes on admin data collection on violence against women.' Two international consultants provided by UNFPA highlighted the importance of quantitative data systems that monitor gender-based violence and the modalities of reporting on the processes made by the Gulf Cooperation Council governments in this regard through the Human Rights Reporting Mechanisms. Later that month, UN Women was invited by the

Women's Committee at the KSAs' Family Affairs Council to share its expertise on the best practices for rehabilitation and recovery programs for survivors of domestic violence. The informative webinar was held during the 16 days of activism, advocating to break the silence and stand against violence against women. The event also shed light on the efforts undertaken by the KSA towards improving its quality of services and reporting of domestic violence incidents.

UNHCR held meetings with national entities in the KSA that provide a social protection network for women and children, including the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Affairs. Discussions focused on the creation of a referral system whereby UNHCR can refer women and children of survivors of concern for social and psychosocial support and medical follow-up, as well as legal counselling that allows them to become independent to carry out their lives.



► REGIONAL COVID-19 RESPONSE ALIGNMENT

In December 2021, UNESCO organized the 4th Management of Social Transformation (MOST) Forum of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs in collaboration with the Government of the KSA and the League of Arab States. Held in Riyadh, the forum considered the asymmetric impact of COVID-19 and sought pathways to inclusive recovery in the

Arab region. Complementing the critical health policies pursued by the region in tandem with the WHO, this event highlighted the need for more robust social protection for vulnerable groups such as disabled people and the elderly in pandemic context as the KSA strives to achieve its Vision 2030 and the SDGs as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This event followed the November 2021 Arab Ministerial Forum that considered 'The Future of Social Protection in the Arab Region: building a vision for a post-COVID-19 reality.' Coordinated by UNICEF, ILO, and ESCWA with support from the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth and the socialprotection.org platform, the forum provided an opportunity for the KSA's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development to discuss the financing of comprehensive and sustainable social protection systems. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development was deeply involved in both forums.

► HEALTH INITIATIVES

Continuing its tremendous and invaluable global efforts in combatting the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO has been actively engaged with the Government of the KSA and its Ministry of Health throughout 2021. The WHO has provided evidence-based guidance on COVID-19 and an overall strategy and response plan, continuously sharing information on: transmission, guidance on public health measures, virus variants of concern, standard laboratory investigations, diagnosis and treatment guidelines, vaccine effectiveness, and safety. The WHO has also encouraged the Ministry of Health and other health and academic institutions to contribute to COVID-19 studies; the

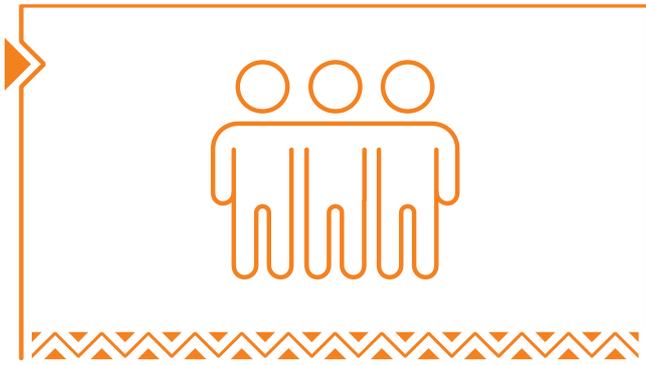
KSA now has the largest number of published studies on COVID-19 in the region. Collaborating with the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority, the WHO is in the process of creating a Pandemic Research Fund that will utilize pandemic data and AI tools to conduct additional research.

Beyond COVID-19-related work in the field of health, in October 2021, a new WHO collaborating centre was initiated in the KSA, bringing the country's total to seven. The new centre, entitled the WHO Collaborating Centre for Disaster and Emergency Management, is the first of its kind in the region and one of only a few worldwide.

In terms of supporting the health of vulnerable populations in the KSA and reflecting the commitment to LNOB, UNHCR provided essential medical assistance to persons of concern in need of critical medical treatment who, due to their irregular status, have no access to public healthcare services. These medical services were provided by local partners to which UNHCR referred many persons of concern for medical treatment.

In September 2021, the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force awarded the Saudi Food and Drug Authority with the UNITAF award on Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). The award celebrates the success of the KSA's multi-sectoral Healthy Food Strategy, which started in 2018, and the country's distinguished commitment to public health.





PRIORITY AREA 3: PUBLIC SECTOR

Equitable, accountable, effective, efficient public sector

Over the course of 2021, the United Nations focused a substantial portion of its resources on improving the public sector in the KSA, notably prioritizing the improvement of its equity, accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency. UNCT capacity-building and strengthening efforts were particularly successful in improving the KSA's public-sector data, human rights, and migration infrastructures, particularly towards countering trafficking in persons.

▶ DATA

Data emerged as one of the most significant domains of United Nations action in bolstering the KSA's public sector throughout 2021. In order to better integrate statistical analysis into decision-making and strengthen the KSA's statistical system, UNDP supported the General Authority for Statistics by addressing statistical needs triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic context. UNDP's support for KSA's improved data infrastructure has positively reinforced the work of the Ministry of Economy and Planning as it works with UNDP to ensure evidence-based planning and the work of the Saudi Food and Drug Administration, with which UNDP is developing a comprehensive risk-assessment framework to enhance business continuity planning in the aftermath of COVID-19.

In 2021, UNFPA and UNDP entered into an agency-to-agency agreement to provide technical assistance and support to the General Authority for Statistics in order to ensure that the KSA's 2022 population and housing census meets the international standards and relies on cutting-edge technologies and communications tools and plans. The first activity under the associated Workplan was successfully implemented and activities are expected to continue into 2022. The 2022 census will be the fifth held in the country and the first since 2010 – its reliability and accuracy will facilitate more

effective and tailored public sector development plans as the KSA moves forward in pursuit of its Vision 2030 and the SDGs as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

▶ HUMAN RIGHTS

In support of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, the ILO has supported capacity building in order to enhance social dialogue in the KSA by establishing a new Social Dialogue Unit inside the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development to further enhance its ability to promote inclusive and productive social dialogue in the country. The ILO continues to work with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development to enhance its efficiency and contribute to a more effective public sector.

The mainstreaming of human rights across the KSA in 2021 has meaningfully contributed to the cultivation of a more equitable public sector. By means of its valuable technical cooperation programme and various capacity development programme activities, OHCHR has enhanced the capacity of law enforcement institutions and rights holders to protect and promote human rights in an effective and efficient manner. As a consequence of ongoing OHCHR advocacy efforts, the Al Nahda Society will submit a parallel report to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee in time for the submission of the KSA's periodic report in March 2022. The OHCHR activities that led to this significant development included a workshop for civil society organizations on drafting parallel (shadow) reports and the provision of training for women civil society organizations in the KSA. While drafting the CEDAW periodic report, the Saudi National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow Up (NMRF), also known as the Standing Committee for Reporting, adopted the recommendation implementation plan (RIP). The adoption of the RIP emerged from OHCHR efforts to deliver training on drafting RIPs and ongoing consultations between the OHCHR, Saudi Human Rights Commission, and the NMRF. Significantly, the RIP's clustered recommendations can easily be cross-linked to SDGs as a means to building synergies between the various aspects of SDGs and human rights.

Throughout 2021, OHCHR held a number of trainings and capacity-building exercises to prevent and reduce human rights violations in the context of the KSA's law enforcement and justice systems. Over 180 law enforcement officials; lawyers; representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Economy and Planning, Oversight and

Anti-Corruption Authority, Saudi Human Rights Commission, and General Audition Bureau; and officials from the Saudi General Intelligence Presidency benefitted from the OHCHR's capacity-building programs. Similarly, OHCHR enhanced the skills of over 380 rights holders to promote and protect human rights and combat discrimination in the KSA, including representatives from the Saudi Human Rights Commission, members of civil society organizations, and journalists.

Despite Government efforts to improve human rights protections in the KSA, gaps remain that have yet to be addressed, particularly in terms of impeded access to UNHCR persons of concern in immigration detention centres. Throughout 2021, UNHCR advocated for the Government to allow access to detainees of concern to assess their situation, provide necessary assistance, and help identify sustainable solutions. UNHCR continues to advocate that the Government consider measures to protect persons with irregular legal status and migrants who have been detained because of their status – especially those who fear persecution in their country of origin. The advocacy encourages Saudi authorities to consider a review of their status and alternative measures to guarantee their access to essential services, without prejudice to residency rules.

► MIGRATION

During January 2021's Global Forum for Migration and Development, the Government of the KSA, the Government of the UAE, and the African Union Commission announced their intention to partner with one another to form an orientation programme for labour migration between Africa and the Gulf. Against this backdrop, IOM, with the support of the Joint Labour Migration Program, carried out mapping and needs assessments to identify available resources and information gaps at the pre-departure and post-arrival phases of labour migration. These findings and recommendations will feed into the development of materials and programming in the Gulf. IOM is also continuing to support the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development in piloting a post-arrival orientation programme as part of the comprehensive information and orientation programme under the Abu Dhabi Dialogue. The Ministry of Human Resource and Social Development has validated all training material developed by IOM, including four training videos that will disseminate key information for newly arrived migrant workers in the KSA. Further, following the IOM's launch of the Global Policy Network on Recruitment in December 2020, the Saudi Human Rights Commission officially confirmed its membership in the network. The

Global Policy Network on Recruitment will act as a key platform for sharing knowledge, identifying best practices, and showcasing the KSA's future work in strengthening its recruitment practices.

Within the framework of its partnership with Naif Arab University for Security Sciences, IOM conducted two successful workshops concerning immigration and border management for Saudi audiences in June and September 2021. Over 150 participants from the Ministry of Interior in the Najran Governorate received training on the IOM Migration and Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) and Health, Border, and Mobility Management (HBBM) while over 80 participants in Jeddah attended the IOM's regional training workshop on maritime search and rescue.

As co-chair of the United Nations Network on Migration (UNNM) with the RC, the IOM was instrumental in the network's endorsement of a policy brief on vaccination focusing on migrants with irregular legal status, emphasizing its commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind and that vulnerable groups are prioritized. In 2021, the UNNM project proposal 'Addressing Challenges of Irregular Migration from the Horn of Africa to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Specifically Related to Children and Vulnerable Migrants' was developed and submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior for consideration. Through the UNNM, UNHCR continued monitoring the situation of populations of concern, notably Rohingya, Syrians, Yemenis, Ethiopians, and Palestinians communities. Together with the UNNM, UNHCR participated in several meetings with Government officials to advocate for the rights of those in need of international protection and offered to help Saudi authorities work towards durable solutions for those facing critical protection needs. After persistent advocacy for the Ministry of Interior to exempt them from payment of heavy immigration fines, UNHCR managed to assist several refugee families in irregular situations depart the KSA through a third country solution. Through its yearly resettlement program, UNHCR was also able to resettle a number of refugee families in Canada and Sweden.

► COMBATTING TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

In 2021, IOM drafted guidelines for shelters for victims of trafficking in persons (VOTs) and finalized standard operating procedures and a training-of-trainers manual to help build the capacity of front-line officials to identify and assist VOTs. IOM also assisted the Saudi Human Rights Commission in the production of four videos and in raising awareness about trafficking during the

World Day Against Trafficking in Persons in July 2021. Further, IOM assisted 136 migrants, including 53 VOTs, with information, referral, and either localized assistance or voluntary return, depending on their situation and needs. Since 2020, UNODC has assisted the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT) in drafting the KSA's new national strategy against trafficking in persons. As a result, the new National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons was adopted for the period 2021–2023, with four pillars: (1) prevention, (2) protection and assistance, (3) prosecution, and (4) partnerships. Evinced the KSA's commitment to combatting TiP not only within its borders but also around the world, the NCCHT hosted a virtual roundtable in March 2021 with the support of the IOM and UNODC to bring together 13 foreign embassies to the KSA.

In 2021, UNODC continued to implement a comprehensive capacity-building programme for member entities of the NCCHT to support and strengthen the operationalization of the first National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for Victims of TiP (which was launched in March 2020) across the country. A total of 1,332 participants from 13 governorates representing various sectors were trained. Through these trainings, UNODC strengthened participants' capacities to better detect, identify, and respond to alleged and confirmed TiP cases, as well as to better manage the NRM and enhance TiP data collection, analysis and reporting. Building on 2020's launch of the NRM, UNODC also worked to support the NCCHT's development of an electronic NRM system (e-NRM) in 2021.





PRIORITY AREA 4: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Sustainable natural and cultural resources management, use, and preservation

The United Nations is committed to the sustainable preservation, use, and management of its natural and cultural resources in the KSA. In terms of natural resource preservation, the UN-supported the KSA's efforts to preserve its biosphere reserves, reduce its national carbon footprint, and ensure the sustainability of its agriculture and water practices. In terms of cultural resources, UNESCO has been active in safeguarding the KSA's unique cultural practices.

▶ NATURAL RESOURCES

In September 2021, UNESCO's Man and Biosphere (MAB) Council approved the nomination file for the KSA's 'Juzur' Farasan Marine Sanctuary to become the country's first biosphere reserve under the MAB Program. As the national focal point for the program, the KSA's National Centre for Wildlife has developed a management plan for the 2021–2023 period driven by the KSA's aim to sustainably manage its natural resources and diversify its income generation away from the oil revenues by developing its emergent tourism sector.

Under the strategic cooperation agreement between UNEP and the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture, UNEP is supporting the implementation of the National Environment Strategy through the Saudi Environment Sustainability Programme (2020–2025). Among its achievements in 2021 are the development of the framework and methodology for the National Environmental Performance Index and State of Environment Report; the review of air quality legislation and standards in light of the new WHO Guidelines for Air Quality; the development of a Handbook on Environmental Law in the KSA; and the training of staff of the National Centre for

Meteorology and the National Environmental Compliance Centre on data processing and air quality management, respectively. UNEP also supported the National Environmental Compliance Centre's development of a national chemical strategy and reports to Stockholm and Minamata Conventions on chemicals.

Working towards promoting climate-friendly measures in the KSA, UNEP continued supporting the country in its implementation of a hydro-chloro-fluoro-carbons (HCFCs) phase-out management plan regarding the Montreal Protocol on the Protection of the Ozone Layer. In addition to providing policy and technical assistance to facilitate the ratification of the Kigali Amendment on HFCs, UNEP supported the establishment of a national ozone unit by means of an institutional strengthening project – thus, rendering the KSA fully compliant with its obligation under the Montreal Protocol.

▶ AGRICULTURE

Throughout 2021 and under the ambit of the FAO–Saudi Technical Cooperation Program, the FAO directly supported the implementation of the Saudi Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture's flagship Sustainable Rural Agriculture Development Program. The latter program, which covers nine components (coffee arabica, rose, beekeeping, sub-tropical fruits, livestock, fisheries, rainfed cereals, value addition, and natural resource management), saw many successes throughout the year, including eight sector reviews on coffee, beekeeping and honey production, rose production, small-sector fisheries, rain-fed cereals, national parks and rangelands, and cooperatives. Its 2021 accomplishments regarding natural resource management include: the selection of 26 rangeland management sites to develop a national programme for sustainable rangeland management; a review of the KSA's National Park sector; the establishment of criteria and indicators for prioritization of ecotourism development sites; and the delivery of eight training courses for small holders, government staff, and value-chain actors on the sustainable cultivation of various agricultural resources.

▶ WATER

In order to strengthen the integrated management of non-oil resources in the KSA, UNDP has been providing institutional and technical support to partners such as the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture and the Ministry of Energy, amongst others. UNDP has succeeded in applying the integrated water resources management system to

the water sector. It has also established numerical models, along with geological, hydrogeological, and hydrological data and tools, to quantify resources and ensure their sustainable management.

The FAO is also working towards shoring up sustainable and efficient water management in the KSA from the angle of agricultural irrigation. Within the ongoing framework of the MoU between the FAO and the KSA that runs through 2025, two new technical assistance project agreements were reached in December 2021. One seeks to promote efficient irrigation and water productivity amongst farmers while the other aims to enhance national capacities for irrigation management. These new collaborations with the Saudi Irrigation Authority will draw upon \$6.8 million in funds and reinforce the KSA's position as one of the FAO's most active partners in both the Near East and the world.

► CULTURAL RESOURCES

The preservation of the KSA's cultural resources was advanced considerably in 2021, with a number of developments emerging with the support of UNESCO. In addition to the official recognition of Hima – a mountainous area home to one of the world's largest ancient rock art sites – as the KSA's

sixth UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2021, the end of the year witnessed a number of significant milestones for cultural preservation in the KSA. Perhaps most significantly, in November 2021, a MoU was signed between UNESCO and the KSA's Royal Commission for Al-'Ula to develop, protect, and promote the Al-'Ula site over the next four years. Encompassing a broad range of initiatives across archaeology, tourism, culture, education, and the arts, this moment marked a meaningful step towards the cultivation of the KSA's tourism sector as part of its Vision 2030 development plan and its path towards the SDGs. November 2021 also saw Bureida become the second city in the KSA to be included in UNESCO's Creative Cities Network for its flourishing gastronomical scene. The following month, two new Saudi elements were inscribed in UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity: Falconry, a living human heritage; and Arabic calligraphy, knowledge, skills, and practices. December 2021 also saw the launch of UNESCO's World Atlas of Languages, the Arabic chapter of which was supported by Sultan bin Abdulaziz Charitable Foundation and led by Her Highness Princess Haifa Al-Mogrin, the KSA's Permanent Representative to UNESCO. ◆



CHAPTER 2.3: SUPPORT TO PARTNERSHIPS AND FINANCING THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

As part of the KSA's adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, the country has committed itself to pursue the 17 SDGs. Among them, SDG 17: *Partnerships for the Goals* is the basis for the cultivation of deeper and more extensive partnerships in order to support the realization of the other 16 SDGs. In 2021, new partnerships were forged, and established partnerships were enriched in pursuit of a more sustainable future. This section provides insight into a mere portion of the UNCT's extensive partnership developments and financial mobilization towards the achievement of the SDGs in the KSA.

▶ LOCALIZATION OF THE SDGS

In October 2021, the United Nations in the KSA visited the Emirate of Asir in a first-of-its-kind delegation facilitated by the Ministry of the Interior to conduct regional outreach and explore new avenues for cooperation with local government and other stakeholders. The delegation engaged with stakeholders in the Emirate of Asir, ultimately allowing the United Nations in the KSA to gain a better understanding of the situation outside of Riyadh to better localize the SDGs.

The UNDP worked closely with the General Authority for Statistics and the KSA's Ministry of Economy and Planning to localize the SDGs by building governmental capacities to enable more precise and reliable reporting towards SDG indicators. It is worth mentioning here that in situations where UNDP made full use of the SDG language throughout the project cycle, the Government of the KSA's buy-in to the SDGs increased.

In partnership with Prince Mohammed bin Salman College of Business and Entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Education, and the Babson Global Centre for Entrepreneurial Leadership, UNDP began implementing a national SDG competition among

14 universities and colleges across the country in November 2021. Its objective is to inspire the development of innovative solutions that will tackle local challenges to the SDGs and generate a positive social impact on local communities. In this context, UNDP's role is to promote SDG awareness in general while diving deep into the three dimensions of the SDGs: their economic, environmental, and social relevance. UNDP successfully ran two webinars on SDG awareness in December 2021 and four more are slated for 2022. The competition is set to increase SDG awareness among young graduates and galvanize their imaginations and their capacities, encouraging them to come up with innovative solutions to help achieve the SDGs and the KSA's Vision 2030. It is hoped that one or more of the companies affiliated with the United Nations Global Compact will adopt one or more of the proposed ideas and apply them in the KSA. In parallel, UNDP launched its Saudi Accelerator Lab in November of 2021, linking the KSA's development apparatus to a global network of 91 labs that serve 115 countries around that world as they work in tandem towards the achievement of the SDGs. While this initiative primarily aligns with SDG 9: *Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure* and SDG 17: *Partnerships for the Goals*, its extensive knowledge-sharing repertoire is sure to unlock progress that cuts across the entire SDG landscape. With the aim of forging new pathways to accelerate the local realization of the SDGs, the inauguration of the lab marks the beginning of a new era in sustainable development in the KSA.

In partnership with the Saudi Human Rights Commission, the Technical Cooperation



Programme (TCP) of the OHCHR developed, planned and organized a series of capacity development activities to support the mainstreaming of SDGs and strengthening national and inter-governmental collaboration. For instance, the OHCHR TCP, working together with the King Khalid Foundation, UNDP, and UN-Habitat, organized a workshop for civil society organizations on 'Advocacy Skills for Sustainable Development.' The first training of its kind in the KSA, it aligned with Saudi ambitions to build an ambitious and integrated society through effective partnerships with civil society, towards the achievement of SDG 16: *Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions* and SDG 17: *Partnerships for the Goals*.

Two other workshops run by the TCP in 2021 further demonstrate the assorted ways in which the OHCHR is forging partnerships and supporting the localization of the SDGs. Its workshop on 'Protecting and Promoting Human Rights During Natural and Health Disasters' sought to raise awareness on the methodology of managing crises through a human rights-based approach (including vulnerable groups) in mitigating health crises and natural hazards. The seminar was implemented in line with SDG 3: *Good Health and Well-Being*. Its main objective was to build resilience and promote risk-informed decision-making through cross-sectoral and trans-disciplinary collaboration with stakeholders and civil society organizations, in accordance with international human rights standards and the sustainable development goals

targets. The other pertinent training workshop was held in May 2021 on World Press Freedom Day on the topic of 'Information as a Public Good.' It highlighted the special role that the press plays in producing news and promoting information as a public good – striving to raise awareness and strengthen the capacity of national staff and government institutions to promote access to public information, the seminar harmonized with the intention behind SDG 16: *Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions*.

► FINANCING THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The financing of the SDGs in the KSA has been generously supported by the Government of the KSA throughout 2021. In line with national priorities and considering the most vulnerable groups, funds have been re-aligned and delivered more efficiently over the past year. The path of the ILO provides an illuminating example of the way the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is financed and meaningfully advanced. The ILO supported the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development and social partners in the KSA in 2021, relying on funds provided by the Government of the KSA. These funds were channelled towards activities in the country that were designed to support an enabling environment for decent and productive job creation, in particular alignment with SDG 8. Funds were allocated to activities in response to national priorities and needs,

particularly those of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development and social partners, who were actively engaged in project implementation to ensure their commitment and buy-in. Funds supported the development of policy based on evidence-based analysis and contributed to strengthening the capacities of national constituents to ensure long-term, sustainable results and lasting, real-world impacts, especially for vulnerable groups such as migrant workers. As the KSA pursues the SDGs deeper into the 21st century, future government expenditures in support of labour market development will build upon achievements made to date, including the many successes of 2021.

Seeking additional financing models in addition to the Government of the KSA's generous funding, the UNCT's Partnerships Working Group worked together with the Islamic Development Bank/ICD to deliver research on 'The Role of Awqaf in Achieving the SDGs and Vision 2030' in September 2021. Awqaf, an element of Islamic finance that counts assets upwards of 281 billion SAR (approximately \$75 billion), exhibits qualities that harmonize with some of the objectives and goals of the SDGs. Conducted with a Saudi lead researcher and, under the supervision of the Advisory Committee that includes several senior Saudis, including two government officials, and heads of Islamic finance and research institutions, as well as civil society organizations, the Islamic Development Bank/ICD, and the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO), the research eventuated in a systematic exploration of

awqaf as an untapped financial stream with great potential for the realization of the SDGs. Its publication constituted a great success for the United Nations in the KSA in 2021.

Seeking to secure additional funding towards the environmental SDGs (6, 12, 13, 14, 15), UNEP is supporting the KSA in accessing funding from the Multi-Lateral Fund to support the phase-out of ozone-depleting substances and from the Global Environment Facility to support the preparation of reports to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Finally, the generosity of the King Salman Humanitarian Relief and Aid Centre (KSRelief) must be mentioned: in terms of strategic financing, the invaluable work of the WHO in the KSA is very closely tied to KSRelief. The centre supports the WHO's humanitarian activities in Yemen, Syria, Bangladesh, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Palestine. In addition to supporting joint health programs, the partnership includes capacity building and training in the areas of monitoring and evaluation, planning, communication, and technical support as it relates to the COVID-19 response. KSRelief's \$23.4-million contribution towards the UNHCR's 2021 humanitarian response plan was also critical in extending much needed humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable populations in the KSA. Entering calendar year three of the COVID-19 pandemic, such financial support will continue to prove integral to the pursuit of SDG3: *Good Health and Well-Being*. ♦



CHAPTER 2.4: RESULTS OF THE UN WORKING MORE AND BETTER TOGETHER

In 2021, the United Nations Development System in the KSA continued implement reform efforts with positive results and benefits for the UNCT, the Government, and partners. The Resident Coordinator continued to pursue a strategy of external engagement and internal coherence to promote a more effective and efficient presence of the United Nations in the country.

The most significant example of this is the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022 – 2026, which used a highly collaborative and consultative process to set a solid foundation for United Nations support to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and progress on the 17 SDGs. The Cooperation Framework, closely coordinated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Economy and Planning, provides the vehicle for coherent coordinated United Nations support to evolving and emerging Government priorities on sustainable development through strong linkages to the new KSA Sustainable Development Steering Committee. A joint results framework and M&E plan will be developed under this partnership.

The Resident Coordinator continued to support initiatives to raise the profile of the United Nations system and add value to the work of the United Nations and its support to the Government. For example, the RC and the UNCT supported the engagement of the KSA in the Food Systems Summit.

The branding of the United Nations in the KSA has significantly improved, with an increased multilingual presence on Twitter, LinkedIn, and the United Nations in the KSA website; as well as through systematic coverage on social media of United Nations activities in the KSA, enhanced by a strong 'One-UN' approach. To improve the 'One-UN' approach, the United Nations Communications Group instituted a monthly internal newsletter on

events that serves as a useful planning and information tool. The Resident Coordinator Office Communications team supported the United Nations Communications Group through the completion of a media mapping of the KSA, which helps identify media platforms across the country for more efficient and effective media partnering.

The United Nations in the KSA jointly celebrated key international days, including World Environment Day, 16 Days of Activism, International Day of Education, and Human Rights Day. United Nations Day, which was celebrated across the country around SDG 3: *Good Health and Well-Being*, brought United Nations agencies together in a community-level social mobilization programme with partners including the Saudi Arabian Football Federation, Saudi Sports for All, Leejam Sports Company, the Saudi Arabian Gymnastics Federation, the Saudi Olympic and Paralympic Committee, and the Authority for Persons with Disabilities, and was broadly covered and relayed thanks to our collaboration with several young Saudi influencers. The Saudi Sports for All organization included a sign-up event for the 'UN Day Challenge' on their app, which allowed 1,982 participants from across the KSA to join the #Active4SDGs campaign. The JAD International School participated in United Nations Day by raising awareness on the SDGs, with a focus on SDG 3: *Good Health and Well-Being*, through virtual and in-person events.

The UNCT has met monthly to promote broad engagement and ensure that all agencies are fully aware of the key priorities of the United Nations in addition to initiatives that are helping deliver results. The Resident Coordinator continues regular bilateral meetings with all heads of agencies to discuss topics of importance to each agency and to the Resident Coordinator. ♦

CHAPTER 2.5: EVALUATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

This section highlights some of the lessons learned and evaluations performed by various UNCT members. Throughout 2021, the process of developing the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for the 2022 to 2026 period, led by the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO), proved to be an opportunity for various United Nations actors to apply their particular expertise and ensure that the next UNSDCF, of the next generation of United Nations cooperation frameworks, is appropriately mainstreamed to take into account different vulnerable groups and lives up to its commitment to leave no one behind. As part of this process, the active and iterative input of the UNCT's Gender Working Group / Taskforce, chaired by UN Women, ensured that the new UNSDCF fully integrates gender equality in its myriad dimensions. The OHCHR also provided active and iterative support for the RCO in integrating a human rights perspective that can be felt throughout the new UNSDCF. As part of its efforts, the OHCHR's Technical Cooperation Programme prepared a draft report on how to develop and finalize a UNSDCF that is fully mainstreamed for human rights, including in it a compilation of modalities from different OHCHR sources. For its part, the UNCT's Partnerships Working Group – a hub for collaboration and incubating sustainable partnerships and finance – also left its mark on the new UNSDCF, which will ingrain SDG 17: *Partnerships for the Goals* as a cross-cutting element across its four strategic priority areas. Seeking to ensure transparency and mutual accountability, the Partnerships Working Group has decided to rely on the Advisory Committee and Letters of Understanding in its future activities.

In addition to providing guidance on the UNSDCF, both UN Women and OHCHR strengthened the knowledge and capacity of the UNCT in the KSA in the domains of gender equality and human rights. While UN Women's support significantly advanced the UNCT's performance against minimum gender standards in 2021, the OHCHR successfully advocated for the UNCT to apply a human rights-based approach (HRBA) in their programs, projects,

and actions. By making explicit the linkages between the SDGs, women's rights, and human rights and sharing their insights with the wider UNCT team, these initiatives have meaningfully inflected United Nations practice in the KSA.

The development of the new UNSDCF was not the only United Nations practice that benefitted from the learned wisdom of United Nations entities in the KSA. For instance, throughout 2021, UNDP held four project evaluations that resulted in a number of lessons learned. The evaluations found that UNDP projects, in general, were aligned with the KSA's national development priorities and the UNDP Country Programme and Strategic Plan. Outputs emerging from the theory of change relating to the country programme outcome were found to be designed to contribute to desired results. For the most part, Rapid Response Facilities included specific and measurable targets for the completion of projects. Among the most salient lessons learned that will be implemented in future UNDP activity is that, in some cases, UNDP project documents lacked mitigation strategies – a point that will be shored up in plans for future projects. UNDP also determined that the presence of a chief technical advisor is an absolute necessity for all projects moving forward. These reflections will prove valuable not only for UNDP, but their lessons learned and their attendant programme adaptations will reverberate across the entire UNCT team in the KSA.

In 2021, UNFPA had a significant breakthrough when it was able to revive its cooperation with the General Authority for Statistics and provide significant technical assistance to the authority. Despite challenges relating to its non-resident agency status, the 'deliver as one' approach proved remarkably useful in aiding and abetting UNFPA's work. Its agency-to-agency agreement with UNDP, a key partner of the General Authority for Statistics, facilitated UNFPA's support by improving communication with the General Authority for Statistics. As a well-established resident agency, UNDP's agreement with UNFPA provided the opportunity for the two to develop a joint framework that can respond to the KSA's needs and requirements while assisting in implementing the

KSA's national development strategy. UNFPA's work supporting the KSA's 2022 census has been bolstered by UNDP's support and its success will allow the census to serve as a critical mechanism to enhance and amplify the KSA's decision-making processes relating to sustainable development.

Similar to UNFPA, UNESCO faced challenges relating to its status as a non-resident agency. It has identified the need to improve intra-UNESCO cooperation so as to better coordinate between its headquarters in Paris, its regional offices in Cairo and Beirut, and its sub-regional office in Doha to better deliver its projects in the KSA in its future operations and overcome this logistical barrier. UNESCO's operations throughout 2021 also emphasized the need for reinforcement in the domain of political and policy dialogue with its counterparts in the KSA.

In its support of better employment policies, practices and outcomes, the ILO provided support to relevant tripartite constituents – Government, employer, and worker representatives – in the KSA with both technical and capacity-building aims. This dual-pronged approach was deemed necessary and will be replicated in future cooperation programs. The ILO's capacity-building activities, in particular, facilitate the realization of long-term objectives by ensuring that national actors are trained to apply methods and/or implement strategies after the project completion. The ILO has emphasized its intention to intensify its capacity-building efforts to ensure the sustainability of its project results and activities. Among its lessons learned in 2021, the ILO has highlighted the benefits of engaging tripartite constituents in the development of policies and in the capacity-building process in the KSA. Such a practice of tripartite involvement ensures that all relevant actors who impact the world of work feel a sense of ownership over developed policies and strategies. Having been engaged in their development, this approach better secures their commitment to implementing them.

As the ILO's capacity-building activities indicate, a number of United Nations agencies executed targeted capacity-building exercises with non-state actors out of increased recognition that they have significant potential to positively impact development practices. For example, UNPFA learned that the engagement of civil society organizations in the KSA, especially those that are women-led, is vital to ensure the continuous buy-in and engagement of women in the discourse on gender equality and women's empowerment,

enhance their participation and their position in addressing gender-based violence, and generally implement the KSA's national development agenda. Along a similar vein, UN-Habitat's reflections on its practices have shed light on the fact that non-profit organizations and the private sector can and should be better mobilized to bring about results in the domain of urban development in the KSA. In 2021, UN-Habitat was proud to have developed turnkey tools and templates to be utilized in the KSA's non-profit sector so as to better implement the country's Developmental Housing Program.

The successes of United Nations agencies in 2021 also established blueprints for future actions. For example, UNICEF conducted a formative evaluation of the National Family Safety Program's domestic violence prevention program, which will be used to inform child protection strategies in the KSA moving forward. Similarly, the KSA's National Child Labour Policy, developed with the ILO's support, will be used for the design of future activities aimed at supporting the eradication of child labour in the KSA, including the potential child labour survey to be completed in the coming years.

COVID-19-related challenges spurred innovative programme and project implementation methods within UNEP. To overcome some of these logistical challenges, UNEP adopted hybrid virtual meetings for trainings and capacity-building programmes to strengthen environmental governance in the KSA. Similarly, remote advisory services were provided by experts who were not able to travel to the KSA. The engagement of experts from UNEP headquarters and the Regional Office for West Asia proved to be valuable in guiding national processes that respond to the requirements of the multilateral environment agreements, as well as in the standardization of approaches based on international norms, such as in the case of the development of the State of Environment report.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, it became clear to UNICEF that its technical and programmatic expertise, global network of best practices, and agility to respond to crises are of great value to high-income countries the world over. The KSA, in particular, sought out UNICEF's expertise in social and behavioural change and community engagement to the extent that future programming is likely to devote increased resources to these domains as the country moves forward with its plans for sustainable development. ♦

CHAPTER 2.6: FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

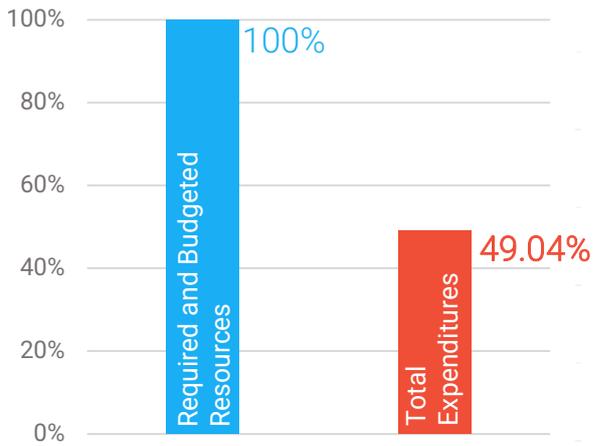
The table below displays the financial overview of project funds reported by United Nations agencies, funds, and programmes in the KSA in 2021. It should be noted that OCHA and WFP activities are primarily focused on Yemen and, therefore, are omitted from the table. The Resident Coordinator Office is entirely funded through the Special Purpose Trust Fund (SPTF) and is not included in the table. The ESCWA is omitted from this table because it is a regional economic social commission and does not have any explicit financing in the KSA.

UNCT	Required and Budgeted Resources (USD)	Received Resources (USD)	Total Expenditures (USD)
UNDP	30,116,197	13,230,680	23,230,903
UNEP	25,471,000	4,889,000	3,524,678.15
UNESCO	50,000	50,000	90,000
UN-HABITAT	30,000,000	15,200,000	14,600,000
UNICEF	1,032,604	1,032,604	556,668
ILO	406,862	406,862	373,840
IOM	2,721,167	2,721,167	917,836.63
UNODC	*	1,019,216**	872,000
OHCHR	1,639,277.44	1,639,277.44	816,690.38
UNFPA	75,000	23,567	18,200
WHO	2,823,408	1,484,092	1,236,079
UN Women	50,000	50,000	50,000
TOTAL	94,385,515.44	41,746,465.44	46,286,895.16

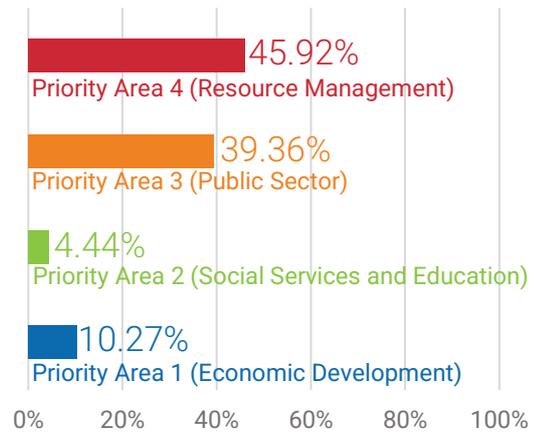
* No information provided.

** Estimation based on funding allotted for two and two-and-a-half year periods.

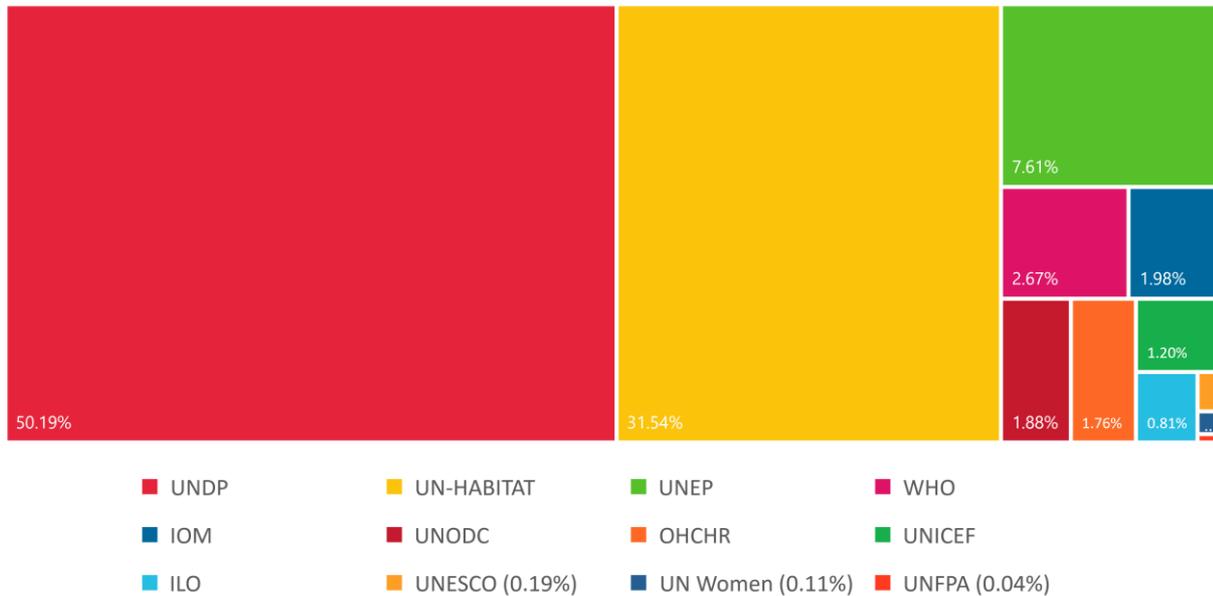
REQUIRED AND BUDGETED RESOURCES VERSUS TOTAL EXPENDITURES, 2021 (PERCENTAGE)



ALLOCATION OF REQUIRED AND BUDGETED RESOURCES BY PRIORITY AREAS, 2021 (PERCENTAGE)



EXPENDITURES OF UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES IN THE KSA, 2021 (PERCENTAGE)



◆ CHAPTER 3

Looking Forward



UNCT IN 2022

Looking forward to 2022, the KSA has many positive developments on the horizon in terms of its collaborative efforts with the United Nations towards the dual fulfilment of its Vision 2030 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its attendant SDGs. Projected economic growth bodes well for both plans: the World Bank anticipates that the KSA's GDP will grow +4.9% in 2022 as a consequence of the global rebound in oil prices, which is expected to bolster the country's exports. The KSA's Ministry of Finance is more bullish about its 2022 forecast, expecting a +7.5% increase in real GDP.

The year 2022 marks the beginning of a new cycle in terms of the cooperation between the Government of the KSA and the UNCT. The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2022–2026, under discussion between these two parties, promotes a coherent and coordinated strategy to implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development while contributing to the attainment of the KSA's Vision 2030. Its goals are operationalized in the form of the 17 SDGs, which have been mapped onto the '5Ps' – People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership – and ultimately organized into four Strategic Priority Areas:

01 Strategic Priority Area 1: People – according to the principles of 'Leave No One Behind' (LNOB), ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity, equity, and equality in a healthy environment (SDGs 1–5)



02 Strategic Priority Area 2: Planet – protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably manage its natural resources, and take urgent action on climate change (SDGs 6, 12–15)



03 Strategic Priority Area 3: Prosperity – ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives (SDGs 7–11)



04 Strategic Priority Area 4: Peace, Partnership, and Other Cross-Cutting Issues – foster peaceful, just, and inclusive societies and mobilize the means required for implementation (SDGs 16–17)



The next five years will benefit from this UNSDCF, which has been designed to identify mutually reinforcing connections between Vision 2030 and the SDGs so as to better clarify policy bundles that will contribute to greater policy effectiveness and efficiency. It is critical to mention that the Saudi 2022 census will be of great importance for the future of sustainable development in the country; its results will inflect policy development moving forward so that the Government of the KSA and the United Nations can better tailor their projects and programs to the needs of the Saudi population.

While the year 2021 witnessed considerable progress in different areas and the UNSDCF lays out a robust plan for cooperation moving forward, challenges remain. The implementation of the United Nations programs in 2022 might be affected by various factors that could have adverse effects on the attainability of expected results. As in years past, the issues to keep an eye on in the coming year related to both national and international contexts. First and foremost, it remains difficult to rely upon any degree of global market stability given the tumultuous and capricious context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As the course of 2021 has demonstrated, the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be safely said to be reaching its conclusion. The potential emersion of new harmful virus variants in 2022 certainly threatens to keep both the KSA and the world on the defensive, continuing to hamper economic growth and constrain social transformation.

The KSA is still in the midst of navigating the myriad socio-economic challenges posed by the pandemic. While oil prices have surged over the course of the year and the country's financial situation has certainly improved since the initial outbreak of the virus, the KSA is continuing on with its plans to restrict public spending. This strategy diverges from the KSA's historical tendency to increase spending during oil booms and, while it projects to positively impact the country's budget deficit (next year, the KSA expects to harbour its first budget surplus since 2013), this decision could potentially negatively impact society's most vulnerable groups. In June 2020, in an effort to counter the economic impact of COVID-19, the KSA abruptly tripled the country's value-added tax from 5% to 15%, increasing the financial burden of its population in the process. While the Government of the KSA has emphasized the temporary nature of

this increase, it remained in place throughout 2021 and no current plans are in place to repeal the measure.

Increased regional migration flows are another factor that has the potential to negatively impact United Nations programs in the KSA in the coming year, particularly as they relate to geopolitical instability and climate change. In states surrounding the KSA, a number of significant geopolitical situations are causing the mass displacement of populations, including the ongoing war in Yemen, instability in Ethiopia, and the precarious situation in Afghanistan. The stabilization of regional conditions will be critical to ensure that migration flows into the KSA can be safely and effectively managed in 2022. In terms of climate change, the MENA region is particularly vulnerable to the effects of the climate crisis, which has been fuelling drought and wildfires in what is already one of the world's most water-stressed and dry regions. As the risk of climate emergencies heightens in the region, climate refugees may put more pressure on already strained migration routes to the KSA.

Towards addressing climate change, the KSA committed itself to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2060 in October 2021. The Government plans to invest \$187 billion in climate action by 2030 in pursuit of its Vision 2030 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, despite substantial active and planned investments in renewable energies and environmental interventions, the KSA has not laid out a plan to exit oil. With the next two United Nations Climate Change Conferences to be held in Egypt and the UAE, the KSA has an opportunity to come together with its regional neighbours to arrive at even more robust environmental commitments.

On the whole, the United Nations in the KSA is optimistic about the year 2022. As the country continues its progress in managing the COVID-19 pandemic, there are many promising developments to look forward to in the new year. With a more integrated UNSDCF to begin the new cycle and a robust 'One United Nations' mindset, the United Nations in the KSA feels itself better positioned to cultivate transformative change and sustainable growth, both in the country and in the region. ♦



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