



Dirasat

Empowering women: Educational Programs and Reforms in a Diversified Saudi Economy

Fahad L. Alghalib Alsharif

Senior Research Fellow

King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies

Empowering women: Educational Programs and Reforms in a Diversified Saudi Economy

Fahad L. Alghalib Alsharif

Senior Research Fellow

King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies

© King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, 2019
King Fahd National Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Alsharif, Fahad L. Alghalib
Empowering women: Educational Programs and Reforms
in a Diversified Saudi Economy. / Alsharif, Fahad L.
Alghalib. - Riyadh, 2019

56 p ; 23 x 16.5 cm

ISBN: 978-603-8268-28-5

1- Women - Education I-Title
376 dc 1441/1632

L.D. no. 1441/1632

ISBN: 978-603-8268-28-5

Table of Contents _____

Abstract	6
Background	7
Female Education: The Long Road to Women's Empowerment in Saudi Arabia	12
Innovation in Education	18
<i>King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP)</i>	23
<i>What More Can Be Done?</i>	29
Nitaqat and Its Impact on Saudi Women in the Workforce	34
Challenges on the Road Ahead	44
Conclusion	47
References	50

Abstract

This article seeks to trace the impact that gradual changes in higher education have had on women's inclusion into the Saudi workforce. It focuses, in particular, on the early efforts to enhance the educational system, the nationalization of jobs, culminating with the Nitaqat system; the impact of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP); and the most recent Vision 2030 initiatives; all of which have left their imprint on the social role of women in Saudi society. This paper attempts to answer a wide array of interrelated questions, relying on a path-dependence assessment up to the present juncture, which aims at mirroring the nexuses between educational policy and labor performance with women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia as the central object of study. (13,333 words)

Keywords: Saudi women, education, early reforms, Queen 'Iffat, Saudi workforce, Saudization, Nitaqat, inequality, King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), Vision 2030.

Background

Since its formation in 1932, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been considered one of the most restrictive countries in the Muslim world. Its historical adherence to strict *Hanbali* interpretations of Islam, followed by the “War on Terror”⁽¹⁾ declared after the attacks of the World Trade Towers in the United States, has contributed to an image of a country reluctant to undergo social change and inflexible in its policies toward its own citizens. However, a closer look at its most recent social history shows a different reality. The presence of pragmatism, which on many occasions has trumped the religious authorities, has allowed Saudi society to include all its citizens, regardless of gender, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic background, in contributing to the future social and economic development of the Kingdom.⁽²⁾ This pragmatism can be seen both in the economy and education, which are the main interrelated fields analyzed in this paper.

Over the years, the religious establishment has been aware that “state building is different from war making, and that a certain level of pragmatism and tolerance for plurality in religious orientations had to be accommodated in order to establish the state writ.” Part of this flexibility is evident in the fact that the religious establishment has allowed the government to adopt economic policies that until recently were considered violations of Islam. Most evidently, this is the case of the Saudi policy of mortgages and, as is very important, the

(1) Mark Katz (2010), “What Exactly Is the ‘War on Terror?’ War on Terror in Perspective,” Middle East Policy Council Journal, <http://www.mepc.org/commentary/what-exactly-war-terror>.

(2) While it is beyond the scope of this study to compare the empowerment of Saudi women with that of women in other countries, it is relevant to note that the phenomenon of women empowerment is not endogenous or exclusive to women in Saudi Arabia. As Mary Davis reflects in her article, “An Historical Introduction to the Campaign for Equal Pay,” in regard to the British context: “The campaign for equal pay has a long history; one which is still ongoing. It is a demand which was not always supported by the trade union movement and in some instances was actively resisted by sections of it. As a movement it does not have a continuous history, reflecting the fact that although a constant part of the labour force in Industrial Britain, women were often a marginalized sector of it and were effectively excluded from many unions until the latter part of the 19th century.” See Mary Davis (n.d.), “An Historical Introduction to the Campaign for Equal Pay,” <http://www.unionhistory.info/equalpay/roaddisplay.php?irn=820>.

government's gender-based reforms, including the opening of a coeducational university for the study of science and technology (Bano 2018, 133).⁽³⁾

This paper tries to answer the following questions: (1) What is the history of women's education in Saudi Arabia? (2) What has been the role of the state in providing education for women? (3) How did Saudi women participate in the Kingdom's economy prior to Vision 2030? (4) How have women have been integrated into the job market? (5) Which have been, and continue to be the challenges, and what does the future hold for women's empowerment? (6) And what have been the consequences of policies such as Nitaqat on women's empowerment? It is not easy to answer these questions because the available data are not always complete. However, this author has tried to overcome that challenge by retracing the history of women's empowerment in the Kingdom through the history of education-related policies and reforms starting from the time of the country's establishment. The history of women cannot not, therefore, be told without referring to the different stages of state building.

In her 2017 article, "Higher Education and the Changing Aspirations of Women in Saudi Arabia," Namie Tsujigami links the need for a shake-up of the educational system with the demographic change experienced in the Kingdom within the last few decades. Tsujigami's study aimed to explore projects of higher education and job creation for women. This was accomplished in December 2013 along with a further exploration of Saudi women's academic and career goals. The research was driven by fieldwork at an anonymous university that was established in 2011.⁽⁴⁾

(3) Masooda Bano (2018), "Saudi Salafism amid Rapid Social Change," in *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change*, Volume 1, edited by Masooda Bano (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).

(4) Namie Tsujigami (2017), "Higher Education and the Changing Aspirations of Women in Saudi Arabia," in *Higher Education Investment in the Arab States of the Gulf: Strategies for Excellence and Diversity*, edited by Dale Eickelman and Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, pp. 42–54 (Berlin: Gerlach Press).

In her article, Tsujigami says that “Saudi Arabia’s population mushroomed from 5.7 million in 1981 to more than 30 million in 2014” (2017, p. 43).⁽⁵⁾ According to data reported by Tsujigami from the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) in 2015, ‘Saudi Arabia allocated SAR 2160 billion (\$580 billion) to education and human resource development comprising of 25.1% of the total budgeting appropriations for that year. In 2015, the total number of students registered in higher education was 1.5 million.’⁽⁶⁾

These changes did not happen at random. On the contrary, they were the result of a strong focus on education. From the 1960s through the 1990s, the main focus of education for both men and women revolved around conservative Islam. Some examples of the key educational principles are summarized next:

- Belief in Allah as the only God, Islam as the Religion, and Mohammed (May peace be upon him!) as God’s Apostle and Messenger.
- A total Islamic concept of life, the Universe, and Man.
- Seeking knowledge is the obligation of each individual, and it is the duty of the State to provide and spread education.
- Recognizing women’s right to obtain suitable education on equal footing with men in the light of Islamic laws.

Future objectives include:

- Promoting the spirit of loyalty to Islamic law.
- Demonstrating complete harmony between science and religion in Islamic law.
- Encouraging and promoting the spirit of scientific thinking and research, strengthening the faculty of observation and contemplation, and enlightening the students about God’s miracles in the Universe and God’s

(5) The total population in 2018 was 33,554,343 according to the General Authority for Statistics of Saudi Arabia.

(6) Tsujigami (2017).

wisdom in enabling his creatures to fulfil an active role in establishing our social life and steering it in the right direction.⁽⁷⁾

It is easy to see how the role of religious education has overpowered any other possible approach. For example, most of the school core curriculum emphasized teaching religious subjects instead of math and science. During those years, education did not have any needs in the changing economy, much less in adapting to a fast-changing society. The religious focus on education is still present,⁽⁸⁾ however, under the Vision 2030 plan, since the Ministry of Education insists on the quality of teaching as well as the importance of education and the labor market.

In an effort to create more job skills and to guarantee employment to its citizens, starting in 2016, the Saudi government announced the need to overcome the traditional rentier economy based on oil, and shift to a more diversified paradigm. One of the major steps toward achieving this goal is to empower Saudi women who constitute 50 percent of the population to participate and contribute their needed skills and talents to the Saudi labor market.

The official statement of Vision 2030 states:

Our economy will provide opportunities for everyone—men and women, young and old—so they may contribute to the best of their abilities. . . . Saudi women are yet another great asset. With over 50 percent of our university graduates being female, we will continue to develop their talents, invest in their productive capabilities and enable them to strengthen their future and contribute to the development of our society and economy. (Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030)

In a country where women have historically played only a restricted public role, relatively little consideration was paid to these groundbreaking goals when

(7) Abdulla Mohamed Al-Zaid (1981), *Education in Saudi Arabia: A Model with Difference*, translated by Omar Ali Afifi (Riyadh: Tihama Publications).

(8) According to Takamol, in 2016 there were over 170,000 female and male Saudi unemployed graduates in the fields of Islamic studies (interview, 2016).

Vision 2030 was first announced in 2016. Nevertheless, social and economic policies have rapidly shifted. In September 2017, the government announced that, from July 2018, women would be allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia for the first time.⁽⁹⁾ This was followed a month later with another announcement that women will also be allowed to watch live sports at the three main national stadiums, in Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam.⁽¹⁰⁾ More recently, in 2019, H.H. Princess Reema Bint Bandar Al Saud was appointed as ambassador to the United States, making her the first Saudi woman to ever hold this diplomatic position.

Despite the undeniable impact of these changes on the lives of Saudi women and on the Kingdom's society as a whole, very few people recognize that this trend had started much earlier, with the gradual reforms in the education of women. This change preceded the more comprehensive vision for the future, namely, Vision 2030.

To better understand the timeline, it is necessary to identify the different stages of women's education and empowerment in Saudi society as well as to identify the various policies and reforms that contributed to this empowerment from the birth of Saudi state up to the present time. It is very important to state that most of these changes were brought about by the process of Saudization, beginning in the 1970s, when Saudi Arabia, like other Gulf countries that were modeled on rentierism, attempted to limit the "vast numbers of expatriates, which had largely crowded nationals out of the private labor market in the 1970s boom."⁽¹¹⁾ What led to the current changes, and in particular, women's empowerment in education and in the job market, deserves further attention.

What follows is divided into five sections: the first section provides a historical background of the policies adopted since the foundation of the

(9) "Saudi Arabia Driving Ban on Women to Be Lifted" (2017, Sept. 27), *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41408195>.

(10) "Saudi Arabia to Allow Women into Sports Stadiums" (2017, Oct. 29), *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41798481>.

(11) Steffen Hertog (2010). *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).

country until 2004, with an emphasis on policies implemented by the late King Faisal and the actively supportive role played by his wife, Queen ‘Iffat Al Thunayan (1916–2000), which aimed at empowering Saudi women in the educational sector. The second section discusses the development of education scholarships for Saudis, including the three phases of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), launched in 2005. This section ends with a preliminary analysis of the impact of KASP on job creation and the empowerment of women in the Saudi labor market. The third section discusses the efforts to nationalize the labor force known as Saudization, with the establishment of the Nitaqat system in 2011. The fourth section explores the impact of the introduction of Nitaqat in increasing the supply of qualified Saudi female and male workers to enter the Saudi labor market, as well as those who are KASP graduates, in meeting this objective. The conclusion discusses the impact of all these changes on the inclusion of women in the education and labor markets.

Female Education: The Long Road to Women’s Empowerment in Saudi Arabia

The discovery of oil in the 1930s was a major development in the country as it began a structural shift from a traditional economy that depended solely on government revenues from *hajj* and *umrah*, to a rentier state based and dependent on oil-generated revenues. The lack of economic development, which required the training and education of the young population, together with the lack of stimulus for the creation of an alternative economy, provided support to conservative ideas that condemned women to segregation and exclusion in line with traditional social views. In his book, *‘Iffat al Thunayan: An Arabian Queen*, Joseph Kéchichian states, “Because of long established traditions that have encouraged the practice of segregation within the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, socio-economic and political conditions that affect women

have been defined by vehement prohibitions that have inevitably weakened a woman’s position in society” (Kéichichian 2015, p. 107).⁽¹²⁾

To trace the efforts made by the Saudi government in the education of women from 1924 to 2019. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the most important policies affecting women’s education and their role in the socioeconomic life of the Kingdom for nearly a century, in the years 1924–2019.

Table 1: Snapshot of the Most Important Policies Affecting Women’s Education (1924–Present)

Ruler	Year	Policy
King Abdul Aziz	1926	Became King of Hijaz and Sultan of Najd and its Dependencies; Directorate of Education established.
King Abdul Aziz	1928	Majlis al-Maarif (Council of Knowledge).
King Abdul Aziz	1936	Approved the establishment of a preparatory institute that prepared students to pursue a university degree abroad.
Crown Prince Faisal and H.H. ‘Iffat Al Thunayan	1943	Established the Taif Model School for Boys in 1943 and for Girls in 1953.
King Abdul Aziz and Crown Prince Faisal Bin Abdul Aziz	Early 1940s	Faisal, against all expectations, allowed Fatina Shakir to make history; first scholarship for women.
Crown Prince Faisal Bin Abdul Aziz	1954	Ministry of Education established.
Crown Prince Faisal and ‘Iffat Al Thunayan	1955	Founded the Dar Al Hanan, the first private school for women in Saudi Arabia. ⁽¹³⁾
King Saud Bin Abdul Aziz	1957	Established King Saud University, the nation’s first university.
King Saud Bin Abdul Aziz	1960	Decreed a general directorate for girl’s schools.
King Saud Bin Abdul Aziz	1962	First official primary school for girls in Riyadh opened.
King Faisal Bin Abdul Aziz	1970s	Saudization (nationalization) of the labor force

(12) Kéichichian (2015). p. 107.

(13) Dar al Hanan private school for girls included, in addition to girls from the royal family, other non-royal Saudi female students. The student body in ta’if Model School for boys included King Faisal and Queen Effat own children, other Al Saud offspring and other children from leading families who consented to attend.

Ruler	Year	Policy
King Faisal Bin Abdul Aziz	1970	First five-year development plan (1970–1975), Educational Policy directive created, and First college of education for women opened.
King Faisal Bin Abdul Aziz	1975	Ministry of Higher Education established.
King Faisal Foundation	1999	'Iffat College for Girls established.
King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz	2005	King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) established.
King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz	2008	College of Education renamed Princess Noura University, which has become the largest women's university in the world.
King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz	2011	Nitaqat was introduced.
King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz	2013	Quota of 20% for women in the country's legislative branch, the Al-Shura Council, enacted.
King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz	2015	Empowerment of women in the legislative Municipal elections. ⁽¹⁴⁾
King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz	2016	Vision 2030 plan announced.
King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz	2017-2020	Establishment of Your Job First and Then Your Scholarship Program, the third phase of KASP.
King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz	2018	In July women were permitted to drive and to watch live sports events at the three main national stadiums in Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam for the first time.
King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz	2018	Launch of a scholarship program for elite university.
King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz	2019	Appointment of first female ambassador to United States, HRH Princess Reema Bint Bandar Al Saud.
King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz	2019	Issue, on August 20, 2019, of a royal decree to further empower Saudi women by ending travel restrictions and giving them the right to register a child's birth, a marriage, or a divorce; be issued official family documents; and be eligible to serve as a guardian to children who are minors.

Source: Kéchichian (2015); Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Education; Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Labor.

(14) In 2015, history was being made in the Kingdom, more than 130,000 Saudi women out of 1.48 million eligible citizens registered to vote for the first time in municipal elections for 6,917 candidates, 979 of them women. Lulwa Shalhoub (2016), Saudi women in municipal councils: One year on. Arab News, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1024376/saudi-arabia>.

In its earlier history, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia adopted its contemporary political entity in 1926 when Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud took control of the Hijaz (the western province in the present Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) and began the long road to build a nation.⁽¹⁵⁾ It should be noted that in that same year, a Directorate of Education was established and formal education was introduced. However, as the first Saudi woman with a PhD, Fatina Shakir, explained it, “the progress of education . . . was very slow at all educational levels. In 1948, there were only 182 primary schools with enrollment of 21,409 pupils. By 1952, the number had risen to 301 schools with an enrollment of 39,920. In 1962, the UNESCO estimate of the percentage of Saudi illiterates of 15 years of age and above was 98%.”⁽¹⁶⁾

It was in 1960, some twenty-eight years after the establishment of the KSA (in 1932), that public education for women was finally introduced. Earlier, education⁽¹⁷⁾ was considered wicked for women on grounds it would corrupt them and divert them from their main responsibilities as wives and mothers. It was King Faisal who wished to free the nation from this religious, conservative view, by opening public schools for women as well. His wife, Queen ‘Iffat Al Thunayan, established the Taif Model School for Boys in 1943 and for Girls in 1955 and founded Dar Al Hanan, the first private school for women in Saudi Arabia. In 1999, ‘Iffat College for Girls was founded by the King Faisal Foundation in honor of the legacy of Queen ‘Iffat Al Thunayan.

(15) The present official name, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, was given to the nation in 1932 when a group of notables presented a petition to King Abdul-Aziz suggesting he change the name from “Kingdom of Hijaz and of Najd and Its Independencies.”

(16) Fatina Shaker (1972), “Modernization of the Developing Nations: The Case of Saudi Arabia,” Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, p. 99.

(17) Historically, it is worth noting that one of the oldest schools in the Hejaz region, prior to the unification of present Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, was the Al-Solatia School, which was founded by Sheikh Mohammed Khalil Othman in Makkah in 1858. A few years later, in 1873, a rich woman from India by the name of “Sawlat,” who came for hajj, donated funds for a new building for the school. In memory of this woman, the founder named the school after her name. See “Madrasah as-Sawlatiyah” (2018, Dec. 15), *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madrasah_as-Sawlatiyah.

Despite all these efforts, the schools had to be placed under the supervision of a board of ‘ulama as well as the Presidency for Girls’ Education, in order to guarantee that their education was in tune with the prevailing conservative views. Women’s education was then limited to a few subjects that were considered appropriate to their “nature,” meaning that the skills they acquired ought to constitute support to their main role as wives and mothers.

At this juncture, it is important to connect the progress of education to government revenues. The history of the economic environment in modern Saudi Arabia is composed of two main periods, before and after the discovery of oil, and the current third period, that of the Vision 2030 era, which aims to move the country toward a post-rentier state based on a diversified and knowledge-based economy. In 1938, Saudi Arabia began to export oil in commercial quantities that enabled the government to start building a modern economy and to seek a transfer of technology from Western societies.

When oil prices more than tripled in the 1970s, this introduced large-scale changes, including the opening of educational programs for both boys and girls. It should be noted that the boost to the state revenues was seen by the ruling elites as an opportunity for introducing these initiatives looking at the long term. Through the 1970s and 1980s, the government began to pay increasingly greater attention to the quality of education, building school facilities through successive five-year development plans. Later, increased revenues from oil were invested in financing education in foreign universities, through several very successful scholarship programs.

During this period, there were more boys enrolled in schools than girls. However, the gender gap was bridged at the middle and high school levels by 1994, and by 2000, female college and university students outnumbered their male counterparts,⁽¹⁸⁾ a trend that encouraged the establishment of the

(18) Tsujigami (2017). The male-female ratio differs depending on the statistics. Those of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) from 2015 show that male students constituted 54.4% of total newly enrolled students. See *Fifty First Annual Report*, 35–36.

King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) in 2005. In this regard, KASP, in addition to its scholarship abroad feature, had an internal and domestic scholarship branch for both women and men in Saudi private universities. In this regard, Zvika (2007) noted that in 2003, only eight public universities served a population of 22 million people. A year later, the Kingdom embarked on an extremely ambitious effort to expand and reform higher education. The budget of the Higher Education Ministry had nearly tripled by 2007, to \$15 billion, much of which was spent on opening more than one hundred new colleges and universities. The government lifted a decades-old ban on private institutions, offering free land and more than \$10 million toward scholarships and building costs.⁽¹⁹⁾ By 2015, the number of women exceeded the number of men attending colleges and universities, as Table 2 shows:

Table 2: Private Universities

Statistical Summary of Students in National Higher Education (Private Universities) for 2015–2016.		
National Higher Education	Registered Students	New Students
Male	37,866	11,480
Female	40,932	11,068
Total	78,798	22,548

Source: Saudi Statistics Authority, <https://www.stats.gov.sa/ar/413-0>.

In Table 2, data from private universities indicates that during that period, the total number of female students registered in private universities in Saudi Arabia was higher than that of male students, namely, 40,932 to 37,866. This difference was slightly lower for new students, at 11,480 to 11,068.

It is clear that in traditional Saudi society, women’s empowerment developed in small steps from the unification of the country to present-day KSA. The journey started in 1932 with the nation’s founder, King Abdul Aziz,

(19) Krieger, Zvika. (2007, Sept.). “Saudi Arabia Puts Its Billions behind Western-Style Higher Education.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54, no. 3: A1.

and continued during the reign of his six sons, beginning with King Saud and ending with King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz. The most significant changes, which ultimately led to the creation of the Vision 2030 and laid down the cornerstone of women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia occurred during the reign of King Faisal (1906–1975).

Innovation in Education

Despite these innovations, women's education took a long time to transform what was imparted in academic circles into sectors of the labor market, where women were sorely needed. The change from the teaching of very traditional skills to those that were in demand in the job market required care and gradualism. At the same time, the imbalance in the supply and demand of qualified Saudi human resources to meet requirements for specific skills and specialties in the Saudi private and public market has pressured Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to pursue a number of strategies to overcome indigenous skill deficits and to develop human capital geared toward a diversified knowledge-based economy. One of the strategies pursued by Saudi Arabia to address the indigenous deficit in fields such as science, technology, engineering, and medicine (STEM) and in management and business skills, and the perceived risks associated with over dependence on foreign labor, included: (1) building high-quality national institutions, (2) sponsoring national students to seek higher education abroad in areas of national priorities, and (3) thorough nationalization of the labor force. Saudi Arabia has pursued the first two strategies simultaneously, as exemplified by the building of high-quality national institutions and funding of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), which began in 2005.⁽²⁰⁾

(20) The program gave Saudi citizens full scholarships to attend overseas universities for undergraduate and graduate degrees, starting with up to a one and half year of English as Second Language training. The scholarship included a monthly stipend, which was awarded to the students and their family, a full scholarship that covered all academic expenses, medical

Dealing with the increasing need to lower unemployment in the labor market, the government established over twenty universities and other vocational courses to absorb the increasing numbers of youth. The output of graduates from these new universities indicates that the number of women in different fields increased steadily, allowing their inclusion into the Saudi labor force. This trend is exemplified in Table 3 for the academic year 2014-2015. The data refers to bachelor's, master's, and PhDs degrees from different educational institutes. The table shows (1) students who graduated in the previous year, (2) students registered in 2015, and (3) new students.

and dental coverage, complimentary round-trip tickets for the students and their families to return to Saudi Arabia once a year, academic supervision, and rewards for obtaining a high grade point average (GPA).

Table 3: Data on Three Categories of Student Status and Degree Levels from Twenty Saudi Educational Institutes during (2014–2015) Academic year

Institutes	Graduates of (2014)					Registered Students					New Students					
	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA
Public Universities																
Degree	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA
Male	67,709	7,680	55,293	4,736	631,019	31845	582,197	16,977	149,304	13,396	127,641	8,267	143,812	14,077	271,453	15,603
Female	85,512	7,030	72,547	5,935	692,673	31041	639,441	22,191	165,225	14,077	143,812	7,336	143,812	14,077	271,453	15,603
Total	153,221	14,710	127,840	10,671	1,323,692	62,886	1,221,638	39,168	314,529	27,473	271,453	15,603	271,453	27,473	542,906	31,206
General Organization for Technical and Vocational Training																
Degree	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA
Male	18,717	0	4	18,713	93,595	0	526	93,069	40,172	0	413	39,759	40,172	0	413	39,759
Female	2,565	0	0	2,565	10,944	0	0	10,944	4,025	0	0	4,025	4,025	0	0	4,025
Total	21,282	0	4	21,278	104,539	0	526	104,013	44,197	0	413	43,784	44,197	0	413	43,784
Prince Sultan Military Facility for Health Science, Dhahran																
Degree	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA
Male	83	5	58	20	712	2	604	106	167	0	153	14	167	0	153	14
Female	53	0	53	0	492	0	492	0	113	0	113	0	113	0	113	0
Total	136	5	111	20	1,204	2	1,096	106	280	0	266	14	280	0	266	14

AL-Jubail and Yanbu Industrial Faculties												
Degree	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA
Male	2,255	0	524	1,731	12,524	0	3,094	9,430	6,440	0	774	5,666
Female	447	0	447	0	3,911	0	3,911	0	742	0	742	0
Total	2,702	0	971	1,731	16,435	0	7,005	9,430	7,182	0	1,516	5,666
Institute of Public Administration												
Degree	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA
Male	1,032	169	0	863	2,678	302	0	2,376	764	45	0	719
Female	146	0	0	146	423	22	0	401	85	0	0	85
Total	1,178	169	0	1,009	3,101	324	0	2,777	849	45	0	804
National Higher Education												
Degree	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA
Male	3,452	885	2,567	0	37,866	4,352	33,514	0	11,480	1,525	9,955	0
Female	3,151	811	2,340	0	40,932	3,611	37,321	0	11,068	921	10,147	0
Total	6,603	1,696	4,907	0	78,798	7,963	70,835	0	22,548	2,446	20,102	0
Grand Total from Five Vocational Institutions												
Degree	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA	Total	PhD	MS	BA
Male	93,248	8,739	58,446	26,063	778,394	36,501	619,935	121,958	208,327	14,966	138,936	54,425
Female	91,874	7,841	75,387	8,646	749,375	34,674	681,165	33,536	181,258	14,998	154,814	11,446
Total	185,122	16,580	133,833	34,709	1,527,769	71,175	1,301,100	155,494	389,585	29,964	293,750	65,871

Source: Adopted from Ministry of Education, data from 2015 on twenty public universities; General Organization for Technical and Vocational Training; Prince Sultan Military Faculty for Health Science, Dhahran; AL-Jubail and Yanbu Industrial Faculties; Institute of Public Administration; National Higher Education; and five vocational institutions.

These data show that the total number of females graduating with bachelor's, master's, and PhD degrees in Saudi Arabia in 2015 is 85,512 for females, a figure higher than the total number of male graduates for the same degrees (67,709). Data from the General Organization for Technical and Vocational Training show that the total number of females graduating with a PhD, master's, and bachelor's degrees from technical and vocational training is much lower than the male students (2,565 versus 21,282, respectively).

In the case of the Prince Sultan Military Faculty for Health Science, Dhahran, more men earned a degree than women (83 versus 53). In AL-Jubail and Yanbu Industrial Faculties, there were four times more men than women (2,255 versus 447). In the Institute of Public Administration, almost all the graduates were men (1,032 versus 146 women). In the case of national higher education, there were slightly more male than female graduates (3,452 versus 3,151).

These data show a steady increase in the number of women registered or graduating from public universities and vocational training in Saudi Arabia. The table illustrates that both the number of women who enrolled in university programs and the number that graduated from them were greater than the number of men. Despite these encouraging results, however, women are still underrepresented in many important areas, in particular in the technical sectors. This is due to the fact that women are still very much subject to tradition and prefer to train in areas, such as education, where they can be more easily employed. In this regard, Tsujigami (2017) states:

What was striking about [a group of female students who were interviewed] is that only one student said that she was interested in getting married, whereas twelve students preferred either to study in a master or doctoral course, eleven were interested in studying abroad, ten wanted to start working, and two to start businesses—multiple answers were allowed. Although the sample is limited and it is not considered improper for a young, unmarried woman to express

interest in getting married to an outsider. . . , it can be concluded that the students preferred to continue their studies after graduation. Even the student interested in marriage also showed interest in continuing to study. It is no wonder that students are attracted to pursuing an academic path, considering the generous government allowances for education, including scholarships abroad.⁽²¹⁾

Despite the limited sample, it is evident that there has been a shift in the way women sees their traditional role in society and that this change is largely due to increased opportunities.

King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP)

In 2005, the idea that Saudi students had to compete in a global market led to the launch of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). The purpose of this program was to support both public and private sectors in the development of human resources by sponsoring academically distinguished Saudi citizens to study in the world's best universities in specific disciplines reflecting the needs of the Saudi labor market. Upon completion, graduates would be expected to return to the Kingdom and contribute to the country's development. A pilot project allowed 9,252 Saudi men and women to study in the United States. It was intended only to be a five-year program; however, it was extended due to its success. It included language training as well as bachelor's, master's, and PhD programs and medical fellowships abroad, in countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. Due to the success of the program, as displayed in the data shown in Table 3, the Saudi government nearly tripled the education budget in 2007, to \$15 billion, and then authorized the creation of more than one hundred new colleges and universities by offering free land and more than \$10 billion toward scholarships and building costs. In 2014, it allocated \$ 56.150 billion, a fourth of its overall budget, for the KASP's

(21) Tsujigami (2017), P. 34.

tenth cycle of students. By 2014, nearly 200,000 Saudi students had graduated under this scheme, which in the meantime included other countries including India, Pakistan, and South Korea. The scholarship program was extended until 2015 when it was renamed the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Overseas Scholarship Program with the ascension to power of King Salman.

While the government sponsorship of studying abroad is common in all GCC countries and most of them have developed some form of scholarships for advanced studies abroad, Saudi Arabia stands out in terms of the magnitude of resources committed in pursuit of this strategy as manifested in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (2005-2015).

Drawing from a brief report entitled, “Thirteen Years of Outbound Student Mobility of Saudi Women and Vision 2030: Does Gender Matter?”⁽²²⁾,

The scale of the initiative can be measured from the fact that in 2014/15, 59,945 students from Saudi Arabia (60% of all outbound students) were studying in the United States alone (up over 1,700% from 2005 when the scholarship scheme was introduced). In 2014, Saudi Arabia obtained the fourth leading place of origin for international students for the 5th year in a row, and ranked first in the Middle East in terms of outbound student mobility. In 2017, as Mohammed Alshaikhi notes, the Ministry of Education announced that the number of Saudi scholarship holders with their family (that include the spouse and children) sent abroad to pursue higher education was 189,271. In America, [it was] 66,823 students and 35,782 family members.”⁽²³⁾

The report also states that the most impactful contributions of KASP to the empowerment of Saudi women to enter the labor market are evident in our study,⁽²⁴⁾ where our Key Insights were as follows:

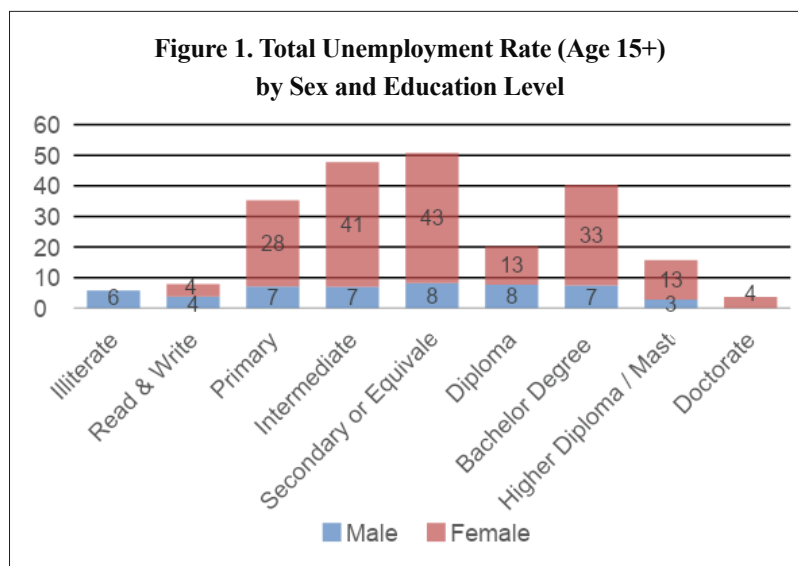
(22) Alsharif and Abdul Ghaffar Mughal (2018b), “Thirteen Years of Outbound Student Mobility of Saudi Women and Vision 2030: Does Gender Matter?” brief presented to Harvard University and the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education through the Harvard Kennedy School Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD) research program.

(23) Mohammed Alshaikhi (2017), “189,271 Saudi Students and Family Members Abroad,” *Saudi Gazette*, Live.saudigazette.com.sa.

(24) Alsharif Fahad and Abdul Ghaffar Mughal (2018b).

1. There are significant differences *between* KASP⁽²⁵⁾ and the employer-sponsored scholarship awards/self-financed studies, as well as, *within* KASP in terms of levels and fields of study, and participation of women.
2. Despite the significantly lower representation of women in the study abroad programs in comparison with their slight majority in tertiary enrollment within the Kingdom, as illustrated in Table 3 above, the gender gap in outbound student mobility has been closing since the launching of the KASP in 2005.⁽²⁶⁾

As a result of its findings, it offers Figures 1 and 2, which are based on the statistics on the first quarter of 2018 regarding the labor market.⁽²⁷⁾

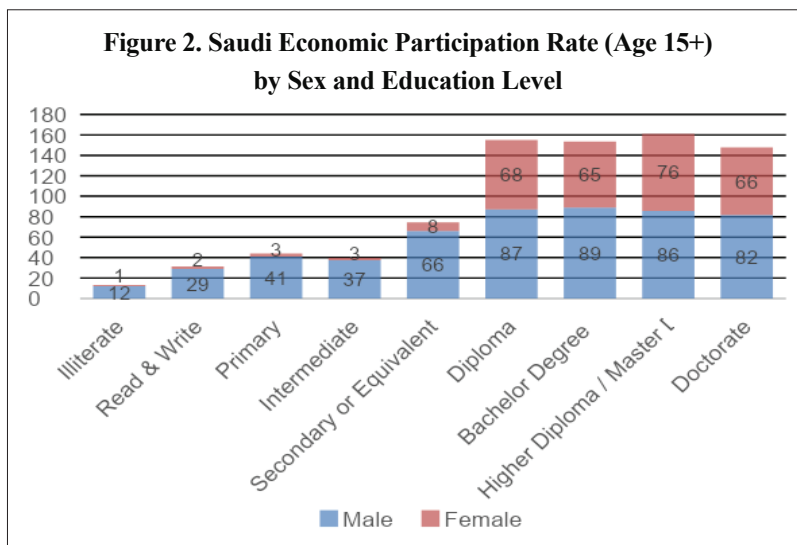


Source: Saudi Arabia, General Authority for Statistics (GaStat): Labor Market 2018, First Quarter (%).

(25) KASP stands for the King Abdullah Scholarship Program. With the ascension to power of King Salman, KASP was renamed as “The Custodian of Two Holy Mosques Overseas Scholarship Program.”

(26) Alsharif Fahad and Abdul Ghaffar Mughal (2018b).

(27) Alsharif Fahad and Abdul Ghaffar Mughal (2018b).

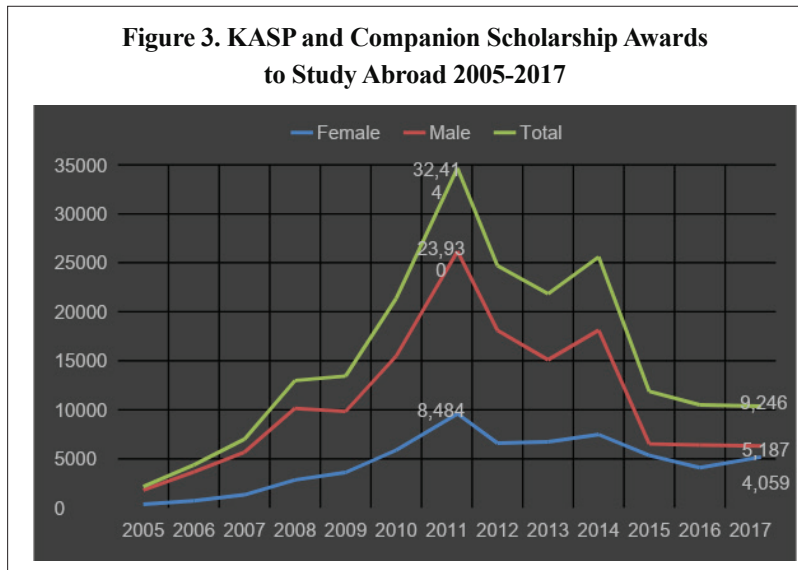


Source: Saudi Arabia, General Authority for Statistics (GaStat): Labor Market 2018, First Quarter (%).

From the data provided it is easy to deduce that the popular image of Saudi Arabia broadcast by the media as an immobile, conservative society is contradicted by the fact that the Saudi government has sponsored more students per capita to study abroad than any other government in the world over the last thirteen years. In particular, U.S. institutions received 52% of these students. It is also very important to notice that approximately 85% of the approximately 200,000 KASP scholarship awards over the last thirteen years have been in disciplines within the broad fields of STEM, while business, administration, and law are subjects that are tailored to the most promising fields of employment in a fast-changing labor market of the Kingdom. However, it is undeniable that gender disparities have characterized many aspects of Saudi life and outward student mobility patterns have not been immune from it. As depicted in Figure 3, KASP embodies a clear turning point in this regard to the gender gap. Thus, the percentage of women in the new government- and employer-sponsored scholarship⁽²⁸⁾ awards grew

(28) The employers are mostly government agencies, hospitals, and public institutions, with a small fraction accounted for by private institutions.

from a low of 16% in 2005 to 40% in 2017. Having graduated in fields that are presumed to be in high demand in the Saudi labor market, by 2017, 35%⁽²⁹⁾ of a total of 55,274 female KASP⁽³⁰⁾ primary and companion⁽³¹⁾ women scholars had returned to the Kingdom.



Source: Alsharif, Fahad and Abdul Ghaffar Mughal (2018b).

Despite the fact that KASP represented a change in the efforts of empowering women, there are noticeable differences between male and female KASP scholars in the following areas: number of awards, fields of studies, and marital status. First, despite the steadily shrinking gender gap, on average, over the last thirteen years, seven out of ten KASP awards have been awarded to men. Second, some of the gender differences reflected in Saudi public universities have either reversed or have narrowed. Thus, the pattern has reversed in health and welfare (with 21% enrolment, double the percentage

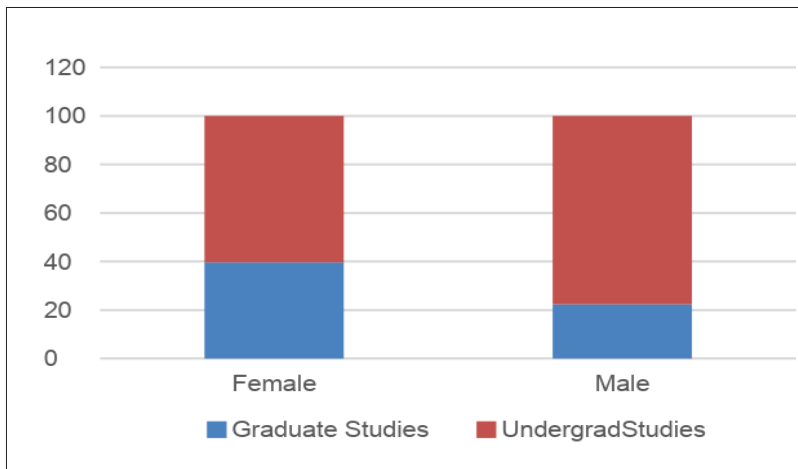
(29) Alsharif and Mughal (2018b).

(30) KASP includes both primary and companion awardees unless otherwise noted.

(31) Companion refers to the male Mahram (i.e., father, husband, brother, and first degree uncles).

of men). The gap has narrowed in business administration (29% versus 36% for men). Over 40% of the KASP female graduates over the thirteen-year period pursued one of the STEM subjects, and 28% graduated with a degree in business, administration, or law. This is remarkable considering the concentration of women in education and humanities as women’s fields of choice at the domestic institutions. It is no surprise that the latest Global Innovation Index (GII) ranks the Kingdom very high in terms of the number of STEM graduates. The most remarkable difference is in the academic level of study: 40% of all KASP awards to women over the thirteen-year period were for studies at the graduate level, versus 22% for their male peers.

Figure 4: Gender Distribution of KASP Awards by Level of Study (2005–2017)⁽³²⁾



Source: Alsharif Fahad and Abdul Ghaffar Mughal (2018b), “Thirteen Years of Outbound Student Mobility of Saudi Women and Vision 2030: Does Gender Matter?” brief presented to Harvard University and the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education through the Harvard Kennedy School Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD) research program.

(32) Alsharif and Abdul Ghaffar Mughal (2018b)

What More Can Be Done?

The equalizing effect of KASP is seen in the share of women in the combined primary and companion awards rising from a low of 16% in 2005 to 44% in 2017. This can be demonstrated from the significant differences between KASP and the employer-sponsored scholarship awards and self-financed studies, as well as within KASP in terms of levels and fields of study and the participation of women. The proportion of women among government-sponsored students abroad (29%) is currently about 33% higher than the proportion of women among self-financed students abroad (19%). This suggests that government sponsorship has played a pivotal role in narrowing the gender gap in the Kingdom's outbound student mobility. Despite this, policy makers ought to be concerned, as seven out of ten awardees during the thirteen-year period have been men. Of the female students who graduated between 2005 and 2017, the proportion of those married was the highest among employer-sponsored students (49%) and lowest among self-sponsored students (32%). Also, at 37%, the proportion of married female primary KASP scholars was higher than that of male married primary KASP scholars for all awards initiated within the same period.

Consequently, the higher marital rates of women awardees in *sponsored* programs suggest that the legal requirements of the guardianship system and the prevailing social norms lie at the root of this differential marital pattern. Given the marginal benefits of women's participation in tertiary education in terms of high labor force participation (as shown in Figure 1), the imperative of economic diversification embedded in Vision 2030, the futuristic automated city NEOM⁽³³⁾ project, and the global and regional challenges facing the Kingdom, extraordinary efforts to bring about gender balance in the sponsorship of study abroad programs are called for. Another area that

(33) NEOM is a \$500 billion Saudi project for a smart and tourist-friendly robotic city along the Red Sea coast.

deserves the attention of policy makers is in consistent and comprehensive tracking of the KASP alumni following their return to the Kingdom in order to dovetail the program with the demands of the fast-changing labor market.

According to the same report, KASP⁽³⁴⁾ primary and companion awards show an inverted U-shaped pattern over the last thirteen years, starting with a few thousands in 2005, reaching a peak in 2011 at 32,414 and registering a decline with new awards in 2017 falling to slightly over 4,000. This recent drop in the number of awards is largely accounted for by increasingly stricter eligibility criteria and a reduced share of KASP in the overall education budget. This implies that a review of the program is due in order to face the economic restriction imposed by the drop in oil prices.

With the initiation of the third phase of the scholarship in 2015, some restrictions based on prior academic work were put into place, resulting in a reduction in the number of primary scholarship holders pursuing academic degrees.⁽³⁵⁾ For example, in order to be admitted into a PhD program, it is necessary to complete a master's degree with a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.00 (the maximum is 4.00). In countries using percentages as the GPA, the minimum score is 80% out of 100%. In addition, candidates must have obtained a master's degree less than five years before the application date, they should not be older than thirty-five at the time of application, and they must have achieved at least 70% in the University Qudarat (abilities) test (similar to the GRE and GMAT exams). In order to be granted a scholarship for a master's degree, it is necessary to have completed a bachelor's degree with the same scores mentioned for being eligible to earn a PhD. In addition, the candidate should have obtained their bachelor's degree less than five years before the time of application and should not be older than twenty-seven. The candidate should have received at least 70% in the University Qudarat test. For

(34) Alsharif and Mughal (2018b).

(35) Alsharif and Mughal (2018b).

a bachelor's degree, the candidate should have graduated from high school in the Natural Science concentration with 90% of the grade or its equivalent not more than three years before the application, should not be older than twenty-two years, and should have earned a minimum score of 80% in the Tahsili (achievement) and *Qudarat* test in its Arabic or English versions or through a computerized test (CBT).⁽³⁶⁾ These strict criteria were not applied in previous years.⁽³⁷⁾ Despite these new restrictions, according to the statistics provided by the Ministry of Education, during the academic year 2014–2015, there were 26,437 self-financed students, with a total 183,532 studying abroad.

As mentioned in the report⁽³⁸⁾, in addition to the guidelines that were already mentioned, there are two additional tracks for applying for a scholarship award. The first track allows self-financed⁽³⁹⁾ students to receive the scholarship award if they manage to enroll in academic study at one of the top one hundred ranked universities worldwide or are enrolled in one of the fifty approved universities in a specialized program. The prerequisites to obtain a scholarship in this case are similar to those stated previously.⁽⁴⁰⁾

KASP changed its name to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Overseas Scholarship Program with the introduction of phase 3 (2015–2016). The new phase responded to candidates' need for a job upon graduation, and its motto was "Your Job First and Then Your Scholarship." The framework that guides the scholarship program was launched in 2005. The program was composed of three stages, of five years each. The first and second stages aimed at meeting the need for greater capacity and an increase in the study of scientific disciplines at the international universities. The program

(36) Translated into English from the Saudi Ministry of Education website.

(37) Interview with officials in charge of the Your Job First and Then Your Scholarship Program, at the Saudi Ministry of Education (2018).

(38) Alsharif and Mughal (2018b).

(39) This track was always available for the self-financed student, but became more difficult to join due to stricter conditions.

(40) Interview with officials from the Saudi Ministry of Education (2018).

has witnessed significant development and made a qualitative leap. The numbers of universities and of places available to scholarship holders have increased abroad, and the specializations offered by the universities have become diverse.

In 2015, it became necessary to develop a work mechanism for the program to increase its effectiveness in line with the requirements of the current stage to serve comprehensive, and sustainable development, especially in light of the emergence of indications that some of the graduates who benefited from the program were late in getting the intended job of their choice, as well as the emergence of signs that some of the disciplines for which the graduates received scholarships were offered by domestic universities. In this way, the application for the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques overseas scholarship program (Your Job First, and Then Your Scholarship) is strictly linked to jobs that have been already announced.

As a consequence, this last stage of the program is strictly dependent on the development of partnerships with public institutions and the private sector after an assessment of their needs in terms of human resources, disciplines, and academic levels. Overseas scholarships are awarded accordingly, and beneficiaries will be guaranteed the jobs for which they receive scholarships. This stage targets all the male and female students who graduate from domestic and foreign universities and meet the new stricter conditions.⁽⁴¹⁾ In this regard, the drop in the number of awards is largely accounted for by increasingly stricter eligibility criteria, enhanced domestic capacity, and the reduced share of Saudi scholarship in the overall education budget (from a peak of 13% in 2012 to 7.7% in 2018).⁽⁴²⁾

(41) Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Education (2009, Jan. 17), "Your Job First and Then Your Scholarship Program," <https://www.moe.gov.sa/en/studyaboard/The%20CustodianOfTheTwoHolyMosquesOverseasScholarshipProgram/Pages/YourJobFirstAndThenYourScholarshipProgram.aspx>.

(42) Fahad Alsharif, Abdul Ghaffar Mughal, Ina Ganguli, and Tahani Ashgar (2019), "Final Report for Skill Development and Job Creation in Saudi Arabia: An Assessment of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program in Light of the Saudi National Transformation Program."

Since its inception, it was evident that KASP could not have been successful without a complete reform of the educational system. This reform focused mainly on the support of specialized education and training that matched the needs of the labor market. After years of investing in education, the Saudi government realized that having an education does not guarantee students a job and that new initiatives were necessary in order to establish a productive link between education and the job market. For this reason, in 2013, the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) launched a new initiative called Jahiz (Arabic for “ready”).⁽⁴³⁾ The aim of this new initiative was to improve employability for the first generation of KASP holders, both men and women, by providing them a secure job once they returned to Saudi Arabia. The Jahiz initiative arranged jobs for KASP graduates and indirectly assisted in increasing the number of qualified Saudis entering the labor market and contributing to the Nitaqat policy, which was introduced in 2011.

It should be noted that the dynamic change in scholarship programs is one of the government initiatives to enhance the number of qualified Saudi individuals in order to gradually substitute foreign expatriates in the private sector and enhance skills in the public sector where needed. The stricter criteria to secure an overseas scholarship after completing secondary school or joining it after privately studying abroad, as well as the new mechanism of the Your Job Then Your Scholarship Program and gaining entry to the most elite universities allow decision makers to control the number of available scholarships in a reduced-budget scenario, thus permitting them to allocate scholarships to the most brilliant Saudi women and men in fields of studies that are essential for meeting the Vision 2030 objectives.

Additionally, we contend, with stricter criteria, policy makers can increase the number of internal and overseas scholarships for Saudi women, who are still

(43) *Arab News* (2019, Sept. 4), “New Initiative to Help Saudi Grads Obtain Jobs,” <http://www.arabnews.com/news/450847>.

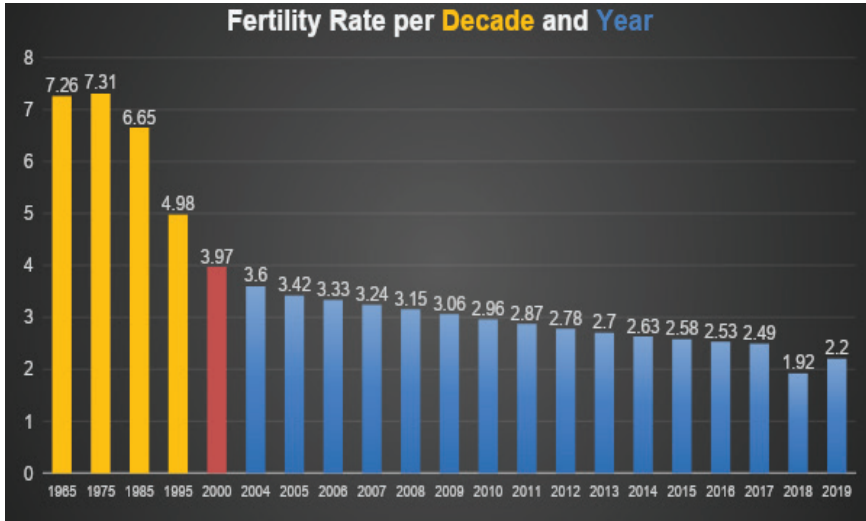
underrepresented in the labor market. The establishment of KASP and the salient program's graduates during the first (2005–2010) and second (2010–2015) phases have contributed to the Nitaqat policy by enhancing male and female graduates' opportunities to enter the labor market, together with providing an indirect benefit toward the objective of Saudization. The third phase of the scholarship program, beginning in 2015 and up to present time, has contributed more to Nitaqat in terms of specifically needed academic training in STEM, due to the more restrictive criteria, as discussed in the next section. Meanwhile, all these efforts coincided with the Vision 2030 objectives, as one of its major concerns is empowering Saudi women in the labor force by designing policies that increase the percentage of their participation from 8.5% to 30% by the year 2030.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Nitaqat and Its Impact on Saudi Women in the Workforce

Women's inclusion in the job market became a priority within that of guaranteeing a job to the new generation of young, newly graduated Saudis. In 2011, the government of Saudi Arabia introduced the Nitaqat system, which had the dual purpose of reducing increased unemployment and involving the private sector in hiring more Saudis instead of foreign workers. Since the 1970s, the introduction of foreign workers into the Kingdom has been the rule, with private companies, in particular oil companies, being keener to import both skilled and semiskilled labor forces. However, over the last four decades the Saudi government has called for a Saudization of the workforce (see Table 4). The main reason is the increase in the population of both young women and young men. According to the World Bank statistics summarized in Figure 5, despite women having on average, fewer children than the previous generation, the demographic curve shows the presence of a young population that suffers from unemployment.

(44) Basil M. K. Al-Ghalayni (2018, Oct. 14), "Women's Empowerment in the Saudi Workforce," *Arab News*, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1387356>.

Figure 5: Some Indicators of Saudi Fertility (1965–2019)



Source: World Bank (2019), “Fertility Rate, Total (Births per Woman),” <https://data.albankaldawli.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?end=2017&locations=SA&start=1960&view=chart>.

According to Ismail (2019), a number of factors affected the decline in the birth rate in Saudi Arabia to 2.2 in 2019, compared to 7.3 in 1970. The author indicates that the most prominent factors are as follows: women may work, the couple may live apart, the cost of living is high, and the couple may desire to limit their family size. She continues to add that what happened is not surprising, especially with the big and radical changes that are going through Saudi society, explaining the most important factors that influenced this change, most notably the education of women, in addition to their participation in the labor market⁽⁴⁵⁾.

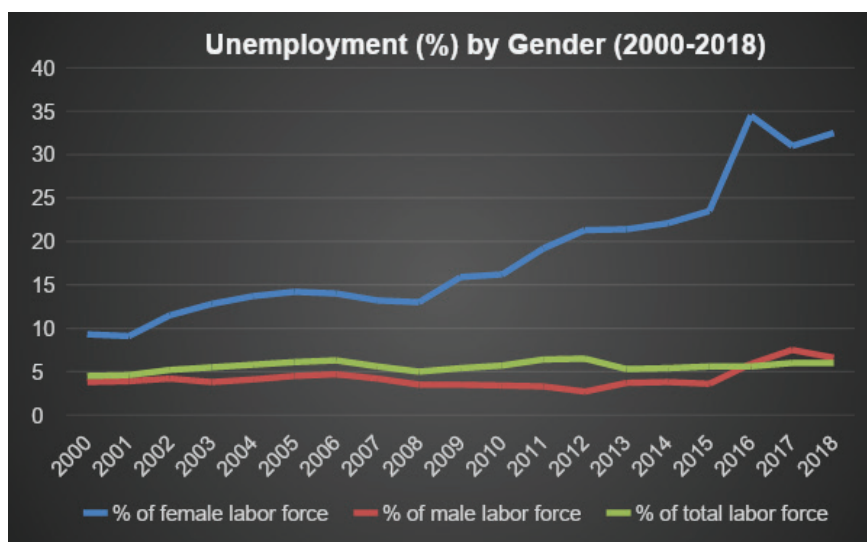
However, as Françoise De Bel-Air states in *The Socio-Political Background and Stakes of “Saudizing” the Workforce in Saudi Arabia: The Nitaqat Policy*,

(45) Somaya Ismail (2019, May 24), “11 Factors Affecting the Low Birth Rate in the Kingdom to 2.2,” Alwatan online, <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/1010574/-انخفاض-معدل-حياة-11عاملا-تؤثر-على-انخفاض-معدل-المواليد-بالمملكة-إلى-2.2>

[The total number of births] remains a high figure. Even though youth's relative share in total unemployment percentages is decreasing, their total numbers are still expanding (6.1 million in 1992; 7.1 million in 2013). As the number of live births has also been increasing [Figure 5], it is expected that the demographic pressure on infrastructure (education, health, leisure, etc.) will continue for some years.⁽⁴⁶⁾

The figures on unemployment until 2019 are very significant in this sense, as they show a striking rise up until 2019, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Unemployment Rate in Saudi Arabia, 2000–2018
(% of Labor Force)



Source: World Bank indicators, various years.

The intent of the Nitaqat has been to reverse the heavy dependence on foreign workers in order to guarantee a job to Saudis citizens. However, these efforts faced challenges, as the private sector traditionally was keen

(46) Françoise De Bel-Air (2015), *The Socio-Political Background and Stakes of "Saudizing" the Workforce in Saudi Arabia: The Nitaqat Policy*, Gulf Labor Markets and Migration, GLMM-EN, no. 3. P. 7.

to hire foreigners because of lower costs and were considered more reliable. However, the Nitaqat system defined 180 different nationalization quotas according to the size and activities of business entities, as follows:

Table 4: Target Percentage of Saudization According to Size of Business Category⁽⁴⁷⁾

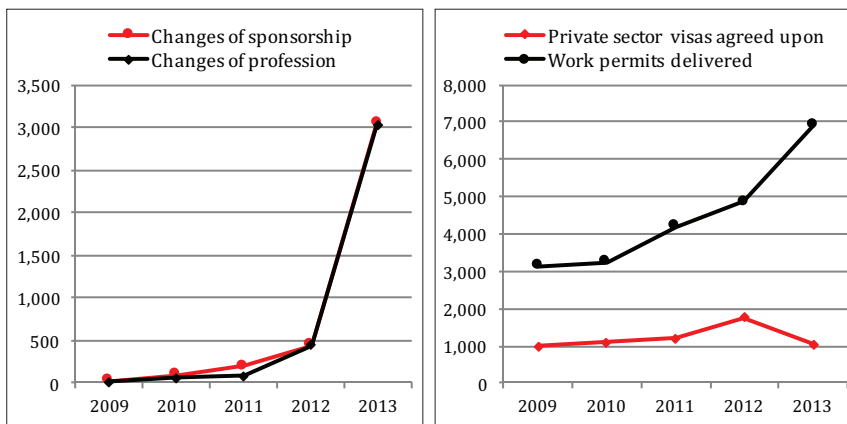
Business Size	Red	Yellow	Green	Premium
(Small (10–49	4%–0	9%–5	39%–10	40%≤
(Medium (50–499	5%–0	11%–6	39%–12	40%≤
(Large (500–2,999	6%–0	11%–7	39%–12	40%≤
(Huge (3,000+	6%–0	11%–7	39%–12	40%≤

Source: Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Labor.

At the same time, levels of incentives were established for companies that were mandated to participate in the program. The Ministry of Labor’s *Statistical Year Book for 2013* shows that the tendency to hire foreign workers gradually changed with the introduction into the labor market of a more skilled and better-educated Saudi workforce (see Figure 7).

(47) Platinum (Blue) and green, obtain certain benefits that the other zones do not. These benefits include; being able to obtain and renew work permits for foreign employees through an expedited online process, allowed to hire employees from red and yellow zoned companies without approval from the employer. Yellow zoned companies are only allowed to renew visas for employees that have stayed in Saudi Arabia for less than 2 years. Companies that fall under the yellow zone are also not permitted to apply for new work visas as well as issue new work permits. Red zone have the most restrictions; they are unable to hire new expatriate employees, renew work permits, or open a new business or branch in Saudi Arabia until they have improved their Nitaqat rating.

Figure 7: Private Sector Work Permits, Charges of Sponsorship, and Changes of Profession



Source: Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Labor, Statistical Yearbook 2013; Peck (2019).

Even if the result did not seem dramatic, it was obvious that the Nitaqat program started to have an impact on the labor force in Saudi Arabia, which showed that internal and international pressures can play a role in changing traditional policies because “The economic reform process . . . has high socio-political stakes. Yet, the necessity of economic reform is linked to the international credibility of the Saudi government and also to domestic politics. Governmental actors had no choice but to attempt to regain control over the economy and the management of the labor market.”⁽⁴⁸⁾

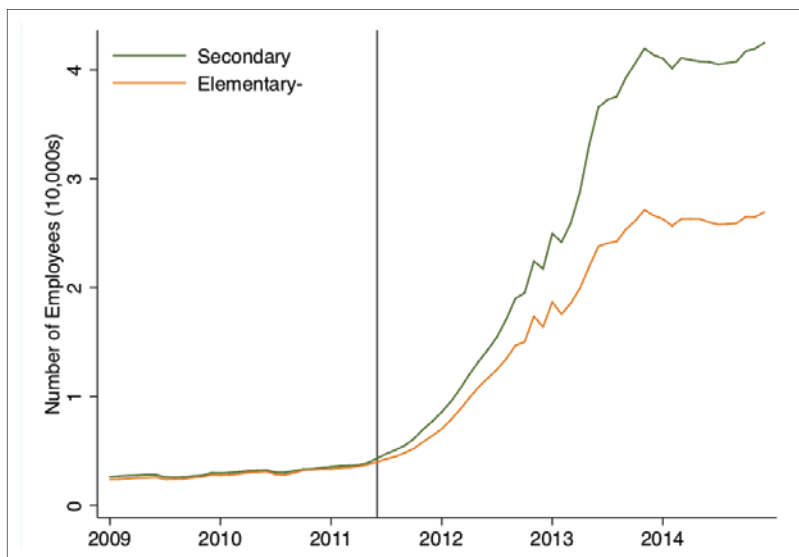
Saudi Arabia has experienced transformative growth in women’s economic engagement in the post-Nitaqat period. It is also true that all these changes were favored much before the launch of the Nitaqat in 2011 since they were already included in the KASP starting from 2005. KASP and later Nitaqat were thus the two catalysts which led to the rapid growth in female labor force participation (LFP) from 10.1% to 19.6% between 2000 and 2018.⁽⁴⁹⁾ This

(48) De Bel-Air (2015).

(49) Jennifer Peck (2019, Mar. 3), “Participating More: Labor Policy and Women’s Employment in Saudi Arabia,” public lecture, King Faisal Hall, KFCRIS.

is a very impressive increase if we consider that at the very beginning the only employer of women was the public sector, where 74% of women were employed as teachers. In this sense it is still vital to overcome the challenges of increasing the presence of women in the private sector. Some steps have already been taken with KASP, Nitaqat, and other initiatives, such as the Hafiz unemployment assistance program (2011), the Retail Employment Decree (2012), the updates made to the guardianship system, and the reversal of the driving ban (2018), and in particular with the insertion of this particular challenge into the goals of Vision 2030. The important element is that these changes are based on a positive trend since the employment of women into the private sector has improved, in particular for women with a higher education. This can be seen in Figure 8, which reports this phenomenon from 2009 to 2014, according to data from the General Organization for Social Insurance.

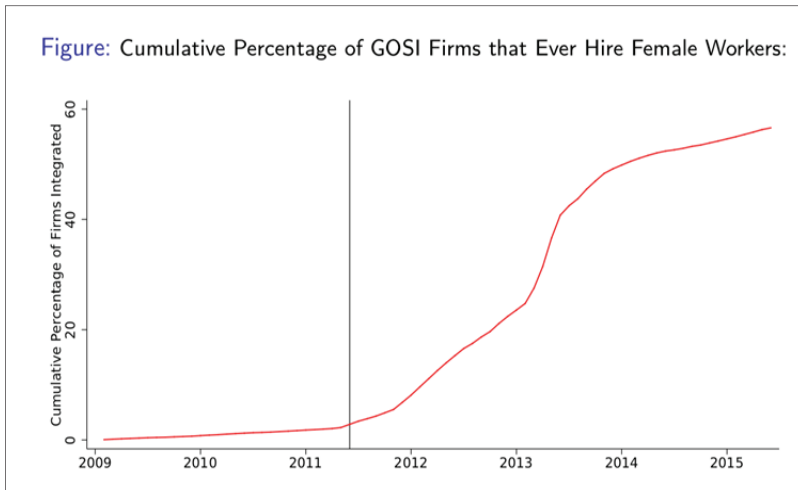
Figure 8: Female Private Sector Employment by Education



Source: Saudi Arabia, General Organization for Social Insurance (GOSI) dataset.

In regard to women, Nitaqat had the power to dramatically change the role of private companies in the process of inclusion of women into the workforce. Since 2009 there was a large increase in the percentage of firms with any female employees, which can be seen in Figure 9.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Figure 9: Cumulative Percentage of GOSI Firms That Ever Hire Female Workers



Source: GOSI, cited in Peck (2019).

However, despite the positive results of the last decades, women are still underrepresented in the workforce in the private sector. The goal of Vision 2030 is to make it possible to increase female labor force participation (LFP) from 10% to 30% by 2030, based on the fact that Saudi women are now very well educated, and that thanks to the aid they have received, women from the lower strata of society who had opportunities to access higher education gained a set of skills that can provide access to different markets and guarantee substantial benefit to their families.

(50) A more informed study on the effect of Nitaqat on female labor force by Dr. Jennifer Peck and other researchers both in Saudi Arabia and abroad is still in progress.

After examining the connections between the different policies undertaken by the Saudi government to make the shift from a rentier economy to a knowledge-based one, it is necessary to analyze how these same policies have affected the inclusion of women in the educational system, and consequently in the economic development of the Kingdom.

An examination of figures related to employment opportunities in the Kingdom, and especially the contribution of women to the new course of the Saudi economy, may shed fresh light on the many changes that are underway. In 2011, when the Nitaqat was introduced, women's employment in the private sector was still very limited. In 2017, only six years later, over 500,000 Saudi women had entered the labor market in both the public and private sectors, according to figures released by the General Organization Social Insurance (see Figure 8). These changes coincided with the lift of the driving ban and the creation of a new transport program for working women called Wusool ("arriving"). This program saw a huge number of registrations in just a few weeks, in particular from women who were employed in the private sector. The introduction of these policies was perfectly in tune with the ambitions stated in Vision 2030: first, to lower the country's unemployment rate from 11.6% to 7%, and second, to increase women's participation in the workforce to 30% by 2030.⁽⁵¹⁾

However, these two approaches will have a double positive impact on the economy. First, some analysts predict that "the value of the economic impact [will be] US\$ 90 billion by 2030—suggesting a potential rise in the country's GDP by 0.4%–0.9% each year until then."⁽⁵²⁾ Second, families will not have to spend money on drivers, and part of this substantial increase in families' spending power can circulate in the wider economy.⁽⁵³⁾

(51) Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030, April 2017.

(52) McKinsey Global Institute (2015, Dec.), "Saudi Arabia beyond Oil: The Investment and Productivity Transformation," executive summary, https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Employment%20and%20Growth/Moving%20Saudi%20Arabias%20economy%20beyond%20oil/MGI%20Saudi%20Arabia_Executive%20summary_December%202015.ashx.

(53) "Saudi Royal Decree Will Help Families Save Money Currently Spent on Private Drivers" (2017, Sept. 27), *Arab News*.

The indirect benefit of this measure is that women can finally participate in the social and political life of the Kingdom, increasing its economic potential by increasing the wealth of every single family. At the same time, the role of women is bound to change. Martin Hvidt, in *The New Role of Women in the New Saudi Arabian Economy*, talks about the changes introduced by Heir Apparent Mohammad bin Salman and asserts that

relaxing the religious controls and enhancing the role of women in the public sphere have become important aims . . . to successfully transform the Saudi society into the post-oil era. . . . the hallmark of previous interpretation of Islam no longer is considered necessary. . . . [The] challenge is to turn a population, basically spoiled by 60 years of high oil incomes, back to a more ordinary type of society where societal wealth is based on the skills, talent and hard work of the population. Redressing the role of women in society are seen to be an important part in achieving this goal.⁽⁵⁴⁾

The success of the measures taken by the Saudi government in both the public and private sectors to increase the presence of women in the workplace can be seen from the huge response of women to job advertisements. Heir Apparent Mohammad bin Salman has asked companies in the private sector to publish job ads that directly target women, setting a clear example of forward-looking leadership and the course of the Saudi economy, which is deeply embedded in Vision 2030. This has constituted a considerable step forward, especially in a country where, out of 5 million employees, only 1 million are women. It is important to note that airports and land border crossings opened new positions for women that further improved their visibility. Simultaneously, their contribution is needed also in knowledge-based professions, such as researchers, administrators, and investigators as the ads published by the Kingdom's Public Prosecution Office and the Ministry of Justice illustrate. In addition, employment

(54) Martin Hvidt (2018), "The New Role of Women in the New Saudi Arabian Economy," p. 4.

of women within the military has been opened up too.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The relaxing of the rules has, therefore, been seen by the majority of Saudis as a step closer to the realization of a society more in tune with the rest of the world. At the same time, this can be seen as a window of opportunity for businesses such as tourism, which until now had to be carried out abroad, in Dubai, for example, and that now can have an opportunity for development in Saudi Arabia itself.

In addition to the different policies that were already discussed, there are other programs, which are not affiliated with government programs, that are part of Vision 2030, such employment at Takamol Holdings. The different programs provided by Takamol are very important because they provide a link between education and job market through initiatives that, in cooperation with the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF), can contribute to the empowerment of women in the labor market through the following programs: (1) Qurrah Portal, a service created to support working women by providing care for their children (the Children Hospitality Program); (2) Wusool (the Access Program), which is aimed at assisting women in overcoming the difficulties of transportation to and from the workplace; (3) Droop (“Roads”), the national e-training platform, which seeks to empower working women and men to develop their abilities and skills by providing online training in various fields such as English, computer skills, communication skills, accounting, data analysis, marketing, secretarial skills, photography, and training as insurance representatives. In this regard, and in order to achieve the ambitious goals of Vision 2030, Takamol Holdings is a private initiative created with the purpose of being “the execution arm that connects the private sector with the public sector with a particular impact on women. [The aim is] directly to boost the labor market and social development, empower women and improve the business infrastructure.”⁽⁵⁶⁾

(55) Hvidt (2018).

(56) See <http://takamolholding.com/>.

These initiatives are useful because they ease women's entrance and participation in the Saudi workforce by providing day care for their children, if they have any, and transportation to work if they do not drive or their social circumstances do not allow them to. In addition, the Droop initiatives fill the gap in market demand and graduates with needed skills by advising students on undertaking technical and vocational courses to meet the needs of private companies, since despite all the changes, 93% of companies in Saudi Arabia are having difficulty in finding skilled staff because 50% of Saudi university students graduate with degrees in the theoretical disciplines.

It is clear that the combination of reforms in the education and in the labor market have favored the inclusion of women in the Saudi workforce. The change can be traced back to the establishment of the Kingdom, and it is still permeating Saudi society nowadays with Vision 2030. This program, which has the twofold purpose of "improving the quality of education, and ensuring that the education provided matches the needs of the modern economy and helps to create skilled manpower that can help Saudi Arabia to meet its Vision 2030 objective of diversifying its economy beyond an exclusive reliance on oil revenue."⁽⁵⁷⁾

Challenges on the Road Ahead

Despite all these efforts, the road ahead for women is still very steep indeed because old and new prejudices against their full incorporation into society are still prevalent. The government is making every effort to reduce the pragmatic obstacles that can slow the process, and the lift of the driving ban is just one of the most recent examples. However, it is necessary to remove other obstacles as well. These challenges, both economic and cultural, can be overcome only with a comprehensive action, which should include:

(57) Bano (2018) pp. 141-142.

1. Government support for a more significant participation of the private sector in the recruitment of women. This can be done by offering private firms support to face up-front integration costs for the creation of workspaces suitable for women. It is important to note that not every kind of governmental support will be necessary and systematically beneficial. The long-term objective, we assume, is that the government will withdraw its support and private firms will remain interested in hiring women. Therefore, the policies must be enduring and ensure that the incentives do not disappear once the public incentives are gone.
2. The government should encourage research in order to design and implement policies that can identify eventual employment barriers, for example, workspaces devoted only for women, which can prevent the inclusion of women into the labor market.
3. A relaxation of religious controls over the public sphere, including on women's dress code and on the traditional gender segregation, would attract more foreign investments with the creation and development of alternative economic sectors such as tourism and entertainment, for example, which could offer employment to women.
4. Increase internal and external female scholarship percentages.
5. Improve efforts to increase the use of women with children through the Qurrah Portal, which is a unified portal for children's hospitality. At the same time, government should lower the cost of using the program (\$213 per child) as much as possible. This will support the empowerment of working mothers to join labor market and maintain their employment.
6. Strengthen the Wusool (access) program for the transfer of working women to their workplace, which will help them overcoming transportation difficulties. Both this program and the children's hospitality portal are supported by the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF).

7. Encourage more participation by semiskilled and skilled women with DROOP (“paths”), the national e-training platform initiated by the HRDF.
8. Increase practical work experience offered to students at the university level through internship training in the private and public sectors.
9. Encourage more interactions between private sector businesses and industries and high school students to explore potential future careers.
10. Introduce the importance of research and good work ethics early in the high school curriculum.

These are just a few of the steps that the Saudi government could take in order to include women into the labor market. Still, efforts have to be introduced first in order to prepare Saudi society to the radical cultural changes that all these measures will surely bring about.

Conclusion

The history of inclusion of women into education and later into the job market started at the very beginning of the establishment of the Kingdom in 1924 and has increased until 2019. It had to go through different stages, defying old and new religious and cultural prejudices, which are becoming less restrictive with the awareness that a wider participation in the social and economic life of the country is needed with the contribution of both men and women.

In fact, the policies implemented in the last few decades, including the integration of women into the workforce, are no longer seen as an obstacle, especially with the new policies being adopted to make women more autonomous, as well as allowing them to reach positions of great responsibility. In a recent pioneering study on the changing perception of young Saudi students toward the future of labor market in Saudi Arabia published in February 2019, Mark Thompson highlights their awareness that future jobs in the Fourth Industrial Revolution depend on automation and programming.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Government policies and reforms, as well as young people, are increasingly aware of the importance of a scientific education. This trend is observed in the figures regarding the education and employment of women in the last few years. This continuing process of women's empowerment has allowed an increasing number of women to enter the employment market while slowly reducing their number working as teachers in the public sector. According to the latest data from between 2012 and 2016, only seven years after the launch of KASP and one year after Nitaqat was implemented, the number of women employed in the private sector increased to over 500,000 according to figures published in March 2017 by the Ministry of Labor.

Remarkably, Vision 2030 is fulfilling its main purpose of making a shift from an oil-based rentier economy to a knowledge-based one by including

(58) C. Mark Thompson (2019), "How Do Young Saudis View Skills for Future Jobs?" King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, <http://kfcris.com/en/view/post/207>.

women's workforce into the social and economic life of the Kingdom. The introductions of KASP in 2005 followed by the launch of the Nitaqat in 2011 and, more recently, with the opening of Vision 2030 in 2016 represent continuity in the measures adopted by the Saudi government toward the empowerment of women. This rethinking of the educational system as the basis of the future development of Saudi society has the purpose of producing researchers and scientists spanning primary, secondary, vocational, and tertiary education, particularly in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. However, it is also responding to women's aspirations within a more globalized economic and social environment.

The launch of initiatives in the last few years aimed at including women in society, such as the end of the driving ban and permission to attend public sport events, constitutes only the tip of the iceberg concerning changes in women's image and perception in today's Saudi Arabia. The inclusion of women in the labor market calls for a cultural change that could trigger a deep cultural transformation of Saudi society. This is a challenge that all Saudis will have to face and that will need all the pragmatism that can be mustered for the realization of the reforms implemented since 1924.

At this juncture, historically, Saudi women are not alone in facing challenges and obstacles that they have to overcome to be an active partner in their society. Women from other countries, like their Saudi sisters, have faced or still face the same difficulties, but in various degrees. In this regard, different studies conducted in different parts of the world have found substantial differences between men and women in employment opportunities, salary, and job mobility, among other's women empowerment issues. Even in the most advanced societies in the West, there is still some type of discrimination against women in the labor market. In her 2019 article, "Swedish Women in Blue-Collar Jobs Lose Out," Gunhild Wallin contends that the gender wage gap continues to narrow in Sweden. But take a closer look at the numbers,

and you see that not everyone is part of the positive development. Ahead of the 8th of March the international women's day, [the Swedish Trade Union Confederation] again warns that women in blue-collar jobs are lagging behind.⁽⁵⁹⁾

In Saudi Arabia, female labor force participation has long been low due to the many reasons touched on in this article. From the 1960s on, however, Saudi policies and reforms have come a long way to empower Saudi women. Most recently, the KASP program has accelerated this endeavor in the education sector, which has resulted in more Saudi women receiving higher education both inside Saudi Arabia, by building more universities, and providing overseas educational scholarships, by increasing that budget. Most recently, starting with the third phase of King Abdullah scholarship program in 2015, the government switched from quantity to quality with the Your Job Then Your Scholarship Program, concentrates on sending the brightest Saudi female and male students to college by providing scholarships in the needed areas of specialization. These changes match the spirit of the Vision 2030 initiative for empowering women.

However, female employment opportunities have failed to keep pace, causing high unemployment rates among women, especially those new to the workforce. The recommendations will continue to face obstacles due to cultural and economic concerns in Saudi Arabia, which will raise distinctive challenges for female employment and influence the type of implementable policy interventions. However, an important policy trend has begun since the formation of country in 1924, and continues until the present time, in programs, policies, and reforms under the auspices of the guidance of the Vision 2030 initiatives designed to promote economic growth by increasing the ability of women to participate in the nation's skilled labor force.

(59) Source: Gunhild Wallin (2019, Mar. 6), "Swedish Women in Blue-Collar Jobs Lose Out," *Nordic Labour Journal*, <http://www.nordiclabourjournal.org/i-fokus/in-focus-2019/gender-equality-barometre-2019/article.2019-03-04.7633366348>.

References

- Abdul Latif Jameel Company. (2018, Jan. 31). "A Changing Future: The Economic Role of Women in Saudi Arabia."
<https://openingdoors.alj.com/en/issue/winter-2017/changing-future-economic-role-women-saudi-arabia/>.
- "About Takamol Holding." (n.d.). Accessed Mar. 15, 2019.
<https://takamolholding.com/en/#about>.
- Al Rawaf, Haya Saad, and Cyril Simmons. (1991), "The Education of Women in Saudi Arabia." *Comparative Education*, 27, no. 3: 287–295.
- Alshaikhi, Mohammed. (2017). "189,271 Saudi Students and Family Members Abroad." *Saudi Gazette*. Live.saudigazette.com.sa.
- Alsharif Fahad, Abdul Ghaffar Mughal, Ina Ganguli, and Tahani Ashgar (2019), "Skill Development and Job Creation in Saudi Arabia: An Assessment of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program in Light of the Saudi National Transformation Program." Final Report submitted to Harvard University and the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education through the Harvard Kennedy Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD) research program.
- Alsharif, Fahad, and Abdul Ghaffar Mughal. (2018a). "Outbound Student Mobility of Saudis and Government Sponsorship of Intensive English Language Studies Abroad." Brief presented to Harvard University and the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education through the Harvard Kennedy Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD) research program.
- Alsharif, Fahad, and Abdul Ghaffar Mughal. (2018b). "Thirteen Years of Outbound Student Mobility of Saudi Women and Vision 2030: Does Gender Matter?" Brief presented to Harvard University and the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education through the Harvard Kennedy School Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD) research program.
- Al-Zaid, Abdulla Mohamed. (1981). *Education in Saudi Arabia: A Model with Difference*, translated by Omar Ali Afifi. Jeddah: Tihama Publications.

- Bano, Masooda. (2018). "Saudi Salafism amid Rapid Social Change." In *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change*, Volume 1, edited by Masooda Bano. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
- Davis, Mary. (n.d.). "An Historical Introduction to the Campaign for Equal Pay." <http://www.unionhistory.info/equalpay/roaddisplay.php?irn=820>. Accessed: june 2019.
- De Bel-Air, Françoise. (2015). *The Socio-Political Background and Stakes of "Saudizing" the Workforce in Saudi Arabia: The Nitaqat Policy*. Gulf Labour Markets and Migration, GLMM-EN, no. 3.
- Gulf News*. (2018, Mar. 19). "Saudi Crown Prince Says Abaya Not Necessary." Gulf News, published March 19, 2018. <https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/saudi/saudi-crown-prince-says-abaya-not-necessary-1.2190993>.
- Hertog, Steffen. (2018, Mar. 14). "Mohammed bin Salman Isn't Wonky Enough." *Foreign Policy*. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/14/mohammad-bin-salman-isnt-wonky-enough/>.
- Hvidt, Martin. (2018), "The New Role of Women in the New Saudi Arabian Economy." Center for Mellemøstudier. https://www.sdu.dk/-/media/files/om_sdu/centre/c_mellemoest/videncenter/artikler/2018/hvidt+article+april+2018.pdf?la=da&hash=A0045F5725D8AAB15BF9C7D398F14F32DA9D4A4F.
- Ismail, Sumaya (2019, May 24), "11 Factors Affecting the Low Birth Rate in the Kingdom to 2.2," Alwatan online, <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/1010574/-حياة/11عاملا-تؤثر-على-انخفاض-معدل-المواليد-بالمملكة-إلى-22>
- Katz, Mark. (2010). "What Exactly Is the 'War on Terror?' War on Terror in Perspective." *Middle East Policy Council*. <http://www.mepec.org/commentary/what-exactly-war-terror>.

- Kéchichian, Joseph A. (2015). *Iffat Al Thunayan: An Arabian Queen*. Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press.
- Khorsheed, Mohammad S. (2015, fall). *Saudi Arabia: From Oil Kingdom to Knowledge-Based Economy*, 22, no. 3.
- Kinninmont, Jane. (2018, Mar. 19). “Can Mohammed bin Salman Really Save Saudi Arabia?” *Prospect Magazine*.
<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/can-mohammed-bin-salman-really-save-saudi-arabia>.
- Krieger, Zvika. (2007, Sept.). “Saudi Arabia Puts Its Billions behind Western-Style Higher Education.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54, no. 3: A1.
- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (n.d.). *Vision 2030: Strategic Objectives and Vision Realization Programs*. Accessed Feb. 20. <https://vision2030.gov.sa/en>.
- Mughal, Abdul Ghaffar, Ina Ganguli, and Tahani Ashgar. (2018), “Skill Development and Job Creation in Saudi Arabia: An Assessment of King Abdullah Scholarship Program in Light of the Saudi National Transformation Program.” Brief presented to Harvard University and the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education through the Harvard Kennedy Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD) research program.
- Naffee, Ibrahim. (2014, Sept. 21). “Heavy Penalties for Hiring Female ‘Ghost Workers.’” *Arab News*. <http://www.arabnews.com/news/633201>.
- Peck, Jennifer. (2017), “Can Hiring Quotas Work? The Effect of the Nitaqat Program on the Saudi Private Sector.” *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 8, no. 1: 316–347.
<http://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-economics/423>.
- Peck, Jennifer. (2019, Mar. 3). “Participating More: Labor Policy and Women’s Employment in Saudi Arabia.” Public lecture, King Faisal Hall, KFCRIS.
- Saudi Arabia. Central Department of Statistics and Information. (2014). *Labor Force Survey 2014—Round 2*, 15.

- Saudi Arabia. Saudi Vision 2030 and National Transformation Program 2020. <http://vision2030.gov.sa/en>.
- Saudi Arabia Monetary Agency. (2015). "Fifty First Annual Report," 35–36. http://www.sama.gov.sa/en-US/EconomicReports/AnnualReport/5600_R_Annual_En_51_Apx.pdf.
- Taylor, Charles, and Wasmiah Albasri. (2014, Oct.). "The Impact of Saudi Arabia King Abdullah's Scholarship Program in the U.S." *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 2, 109–111. http://file.scirp.org/pdf/JSS_2014102914323227.pdf.
- Thompson, Mark. (2019). "How Do Young Saudis View Skills for Future Jobs?" King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. <http://kferis.com/en/view/post/207>.
- Toumi, Habib. (2017, Jul. 4). "130% Spike in Saudi Women Joining Workforce; 11.1 million Expats in Private Sector." *Gulf News*. <https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/saudi/130-spike-in-saudi-women-joining-workforce-111-million-expats-in-private-sector-1.2052841>.
- Tsujigami, Namie. (2017). "Higher Education and Changing Aspirations of Women in Saudi Arabia." In *Higher Education Investment in the Arab States of the Gulf: Strategies for Excellence and Diversity*, edited by Dale Eickelman and Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, pp. 42–54. Berlin: Gerlach Press.
- Varshney, Deepanjana. (2019). "The Strides of the Saudi Female Workforce: Overcoming Constraints and Contradictions in Transition." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 20, no. 2, 359–372. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol20/iss2/24>.
- Wallin, Gunhild. (2019, Mar. 6). "Swedish Women in Blue-Collar Jobs Lose Out." *Nordic Labour Journal*. <http://www.nordiclabourjournal.org/i-fokus/in-focus-2019/gender-equality-barometre-2019/article.2019-03-04.7633366348>.

About the Author

Dr. Alsharif received his Ph.D. Political Economy from the University of Exeter, UK. His Dissertation, supervised by Professor Tim Niblock, was titled: *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Undocumented Labour in Saudi Arabia: The case of Jeddah*. He received his M.Sc. in Administration specializing in Management from the Lindenwood University (Summa cum laude), and received his B.Sc. in Business Administration from the University of San Francisco, US. Prior to joining the KFCRIS in 2017, he worked as an independent consultant at various public and private agencies. At present, his research interest's covers: Public policies, labor migration, and Saudi labor force. He received a grant from the Saudi Human Resource Development Fund (HRDF) and Harvard University for a project entitled "Skill Development and Job Creation in Saudi Arabia: An Assessment of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) in Light of the Saudi National Transformation Program. The project produced two Briefs: Alsharif and Mughal (2018), "Thirteen Years of Outbound Student Mobility of Saudi Women and Vision 2030: Does Gender Matter?", and "Outbound Student Mobility of Saudis and Government Sponsorship of Intensive English Language Studies Abroad." His published and forthcoming work: Alsharif, Fahad (2017), "Calculated Risk, Agonies, and Hopes: A Comparative Case Study of the Yemeni and Filipino Undocumented Migrant Communities in Jeddah," in Philippe Fargues and Nasra Shah (Ed.) (Gulf Research Center, Cambridge). Alsharif, Fahad (2018), "City of Dreams, Disappointments and Optimism: The Case of Nine African Undocumented Migrants Communities in the City of Jeddah." KFCRIS, Riyadh. Joseph A. Kéchichian and Fahad Alsharif (book, expected 2019), "Sacred Duty versus Realistic Strategies: Saudi Policies Towards Migrants and Refugees." Alsharif is a member of the Saudi Arabian political science association, the American Political Science Association, and the British society for Middle Eastern Studies.

King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (KFCRIS)

The KFCRIS is an independent non-governmental institution based in Riyadh, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Center was founded in 1403/1983 by the King Faisal Foundation (KFF) to preserve the legacy of the late King Faisal and to continue his mission of transmitting knowledge between the Kingdom and the world. The Center serves as a platform for research and Islamic Studies, bringing together researchers and research institutions from the Kingdom and across the world through conferences, workshops, and lectures, and through the production and publication of scholarly works, as well as the preservation of Islamic manuscripts.

The Center's Research Department is home to a group of established and promising researchers who endeavor to produce in-depth analyses in various fields, ranging from Security Studies, Political Economy, African Studies and Asian Studies. The Center also hosts the Library which preserves invaluable Islamic manuscripts, the Al-Faisal Museum for Arab Islamic Art, the Al-Faisal Institute for Human Resources Development, the Darat Al-Faisal, and the Al-Faisal Cultural Press, which issues the Al-Faisal magazine and other key intellectual periodicals. For more information, please visit the Center's website: www.kfcris.com/en



P.O.Box 51049 Riyadh 11543 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Tel: (+966 11) 4652255 Ext: 6892 Fax: (+966 11) 4659993
E-mail: research@kfcris.com