

Saudi Arabia in Focus

Update from the Saudi mission to the European Union



Special May 2017 Women in Saudi Arabia

The need to extend gender equality and further empower women in Saudi Arabia is one of the main priorities of the bold Vision 2030 reform plan adopted in 2016. This objective goes hand in hand with Art. 8 of our Basic Law of Governance: *“The government in Saudi Arabia is based on justice, consultation and equality in accordance with the Islamic law”*

There is no regulation preventing women from holding senior positions and decision-making roles in the private or public sectors. On the contrary, the government emphasizes the fact that *“merit is the basis for selecting employees.”* Saudi women hold senior positions in business conglomerates and financial service groups, in hospitals, research centres, universities, media, cultural and sport activities. The Kingdom wants to boost female participation in the workforce from 22% to 30% by 2030. Participation in political and public life in Saudi Arabia is the right of every citizen (female or male) through their contribution to decision-making and elections.

The status of women in general has improved immeasurably in Saudi Arabia over the years and the Kingdom has recently adopted new laws and regulations with regard to women's empowerment. We look forward to achieving greater progress in this domain at a pace that reflects our values.



Abdulrahman S. Alahmed

Ambassador and Head of the Mission to the European Union

The Women's Rights Journey in Saudi Arabia



Saudi Arabia has been the target of much criticism in recent weeks due to the Kingdom's election as a representative on the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women. The election to the UN Commission ought to be seen as a form of recognition for the advances made so far by the Kingdom in the area of gender equality.

In fact, Saudi Arabia has made much progress in the area of women's rights and continues to take steps to empower women in Saudi society. Saudi law makes no distinction between women and men across a large number of domains. Women and men have the same rights with regard to ownership of property, employment, access to education and training, parental custody of children, their choice of spouse, political engagement, suffrage,

standing for election and indeed participation in the decision-making processes of office. Whilst parity of the genders has not yet been reached in Saudi politics, we have come a long way in the last half-decade. Since women were first able to stand for election in 2015, 18 have already taken their seats on municipal councils. Furthermore, 30 women play an active role on the Shura Council, which plays an important role in advising the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz.

It should be accepted that sweeping societal changes do not come about overnight. This has been seen time again in many other countries, but the Kingdom is on the right path. This latest appointment to the UN commission on the Status of Women will only serve to accelerate the process.



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A prominent role for women in Saudi Society

Women in Education

- 49% of the total number of (4.3) million students in general education are female.
- There are more female students in secondary schools and at University in Saudi Arabia than there are male students.

Women at Work

- 40% of public jobs are occupied by women
- Saudi women can work in courts and are granted licenses to practice law. Many female lawyers have established their own law firms.
- Three Saudi women were recently appointed to lead the country's stock exchange, the Arab National Bank and the Saudi-American bank (SAMBA).
- The editor-in-chief of the main English-language national newspaper, Saudi Gazette, is female.
- Women are recognized through the legal guarantee of equal pay for equal work

Women in Parliamentary and Municipality Councils

- 20% of the members of the Al Shura Parliamentary Council are women (30 out of 150).
- The Saudi-European Parliamentary Friendship Committee includes four Saudi women.
- 81% of Saudi women (who were eligible to vote) participated in municipal elections in 2015.
- 18 women were elected in last Municipal councils.

Women's Representation in International Organizations

- Saudi women often represent their government at the Regional and International levels, as part of the local diplomatic missions or delegations.
- There are approximately 300 qualified Saudi women working in the Saudi diplomatic services.
- Saudi women have been assuming leading positions in international organisations such as the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

"There are key issues such as the employment of young people, who constitute 60 percent of the population under the age of 30, and income for households headed by women... We need to have our brothers involved in discussions and the formulation of recommendations because we all form one unit of citizens of our country."

International advocate for women, Thoraya Obeid is a trailblazer for women's rights in Saudi Arabia

1963: Received a government scholarship to study at a university in the United States.

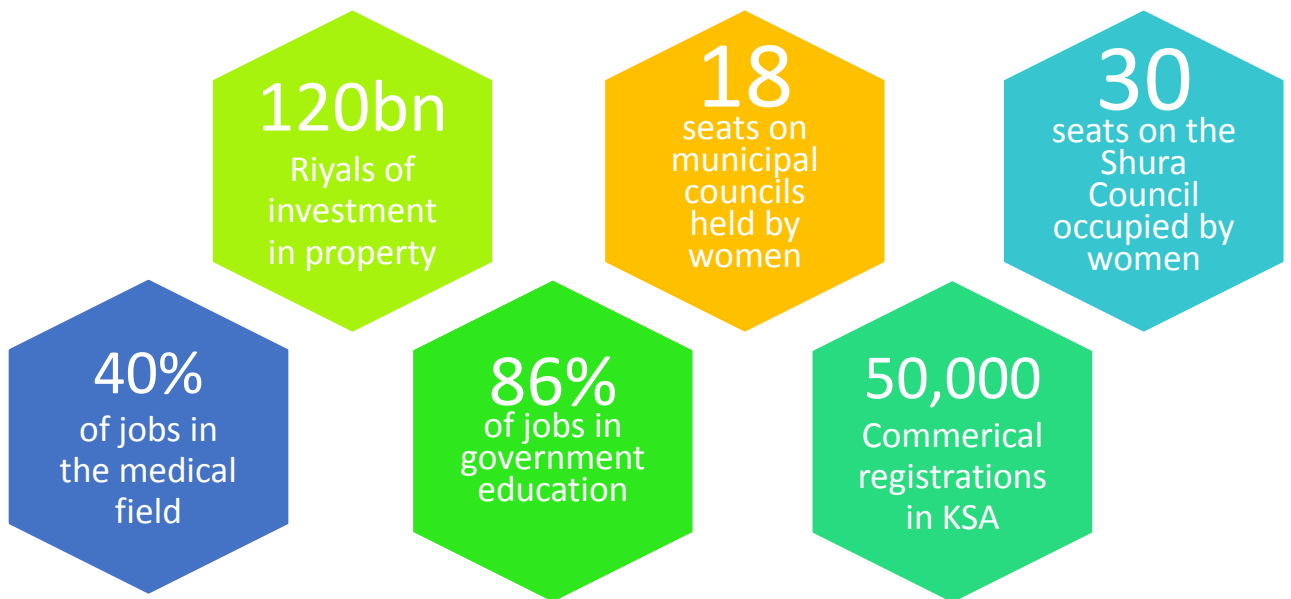
1975: Began working for the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, and she became deputy executive secretary in 1993

2000: Named executive director of the UN Population Fund – the first Saudi national to head a UN agency.

2013-2016: Served on Shura Council



The Success of Saudi Women in Numbers



"I owe everything in my life to my parents, family and my country, Saudi Arabia, which I indescribably love... The Saudi King has always been keen on developing our beloved country and people. Our Saudi youth has all potential for success, only if executives facilitate the appropriate environment and support for them."

Dr Ghada Almutairi is celebrated as the pride of the entire nation who will change the world of medical care

2008: Became a faculty member at the University of California, San Diego and is director of UCSD's Center of Excellence in Nanomedicine

2009: Dr Al-Mutairi received the highest award for scientific innovation in the United States for her project: Chemically Amplified Response Strategies for Medical Sciences.

Dr Almutairi invented a new technology that enables the conduct of medical operations in the human body through light and without the need for surgery.



More Saudi Women who have reached the top

Haifaa al-Mansour

A Saudi film director. Her movie "Wadjda" has been released in many movie festivals and movie theaters all over the world.

Mrs. Lubna Al-Olayan

First Saudi woman to be elected as a board member of Saudi Hollandi Bank. She is a Principal of Olayan Investments Company Establishment, the parent company of The Olayan Group as Chief Executive Officer (40 companies). She has been ranked by Arab Business Economy magazine as the 2nd most powerful female figure in 2011 among the top 100 Arab women.

Princess Reema bint Bander Bin Sultan

Vice-President of the General Authority of Sport (Women's Section). She featured in 2014 Forbes Middle East's "200 Most Powerful Arab Women" and "Most Powerful Arab Women in Saudi Arabia".

Ms. Rasha Al Hoshan

Founder and General Manager of Rasha Al Hoshan Exhibitions and Museums Design Company (one of the largest interior design companies in the Kingdom), has twice entered the list of Forbes magazine for Arab businesswomen in 2012 and 2014

Princess Adelah Bint Abdullah bin Abdulaziz

Co-founder and Chairperson of Sanad Children's cancer Support Society to support children with cancer and Vice President of the King Abdul Aziz Women's Committee

Hind Al-Zahid

First Saudi woman to work as an executive director and member of Dammam Airports Executive Board.

Dr. Lama Al-Sulaiman

First Saudi woman elected to the Board of Directors of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (in 2009).

Ms. Anji Al Jaroudi

One of the first Saudi women to hold senior manager position in banks (Banque Saudi Fransi).

Dr. Maha Al-Muneef

Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Associate Professor of Pediatrics at King Saud University for Health Sciences and Founder & Executive Director of the National Family Safety Program.

Dr. Suad Bin Amer

Founder and co-chairman of Zahra Breast Cancer Association.

Ms. Sarah Al Attar

First Saudi female participating in the Olympics.

Ms. Aseel Al-Shuhail

The first Saudi woman to win a seat in the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva.

Ms. Raha Muharrak

First Saudi woman reaches the top of Everest.

Ms. Samar Fattani

First Saudi woman in the media sector. She has worked in the Saudi Ministry of Information as the head of the English section and a presenter at Radio Jeddah for 30 years.

Mrs. Lama Aggad

Founder of Al Multaka Trade Establishment and Al Multaka Ladies Center i.e. a center specialized in Culture, Art and Social Affairs of Saudi Women.

Ms. Budour Al-Sudairy

A Saudi artist, whose work "Candy for the Rich, Nourishment for the Poor" has been shown at international exhibitions in the UK and in Italy.

Dr. Laila Al Bassam

Professor of Clothing and Textiles at the Department of Fashion Design in Princess Noura bint Abdul Rahman University.

Ms. Hanadi al-Hindi

First female captain of a plane in Saudi Arabia.

Her Excellency Dr. Noura Al Fayez

First Deputy Minister of Education.