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**Human Rights Council**  
**Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review**  
**Forty-fifth session**  
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## **Saudi Arabia**

### **Compilation of information prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

#### **I. Background**

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, taking into consideration the outcome of the previous review.<sup>1</sup> It is a compilation of information contained in relevant United Nations documents, presented in a summarized manner owing to word-limit constraints.

#### **II. Scope of international obligations and cooperation with human rights mechanisms**

2. The United Nations country team noted that, during the previous review, Saudi Arabia had supported 15 and noted 18 recommendations concerning acceptance of international norms. Since that review, it had not ratified any of the four core human rights treaties to which it was not yet a party.<sup>2</sup>

3. The United Nations country team recommended that the Government sign and ratify the remaining core international human rights treaties.<sup>3</sup>

4. The United Nations country team also recommended that Saudi Arabia specify the scope and dimensions of its reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in order to avoid general reservations, and that it work on withdrawing them.<sup>4</sup>

5. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Saudi Arabia ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.<sup>5</sup>

6. The same Committee also recommended that Saudi Arabia consider ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.<sup>6</sup>

7. The United Nations country team urged the Government to strengthen cooperation with the special procedure mandate holders by accepting their visit requests and considering issuing a standing invitation for such visits.<sup>7</sup>



8. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) called on Saudi Arabia to ratify the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005).<sup>8</sup>

9. The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations of the International Labour Organization (ILO) asked the Government to take the necessary steps to amend section 3 of the Labour Law with a view to incorporating a comprehensive definition of discrimination which included direct and indirect discrimination and explicitly included the seven grounds listed in the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).<sup>9</sup>

### **III. National human rights framework**

#### **1. Constitutional and legislative framework**

10. The United Nations country team recommended that Saudi Arabia adopt legislation to guarantee the right to freedom of expression, both online and offline, and the absolute nature of the right to freedom of opinion, in accordance with international human rights law.<sup>10</sup>

11. The United Nations country team also recommended introducing freedom of expression and access to information legislation, in line with international standards, and aligning national legislation, in particular criminal provisions, including on defamation and blasphemy, with relevant international human rights standards.<sup>11</sup>

12. The United Nations country team further recommended that the Government amend legislation to ensure that victims of sexual abuse were exempt from any punishment or legal repercussions if they were unable to prove the case, and that it enhance the protection of victims from retaliation and potential legal implications.<sup>12</sup>

13. The United Nations country team called on the Government to amend existing legislation, including the Child Protection Law, to prohibit marriage under the age of 18 years, without exception.<sup>13</sup>

14. The Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism recommended that Saudi Arabia must urgently review the definition of terrorism in the 2017 Law on Combating Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing and bring it into line with international human rights norms. In particular, it must ensure that the Law's provisions were defined with precision and could not serve as a basis for prosecuting individuals engaged in non-violent expression and political advocacy.<sup>14</sup>

15. UNESCO recommended that Saudi Arabia revise its legislation to fix the absolute minimum age of marriage at 16 years under the specific conditions laid out in international human rights law.<sup>15</sup>

16. UNESCO also recommended that Saudi Arabia review the 2017 Law on Combating the Financing of Terrorism to ensure its compliance with international freedom of expression standards.<sup>16</sup>

#### **2. Institutional infrastructure and policy measures**

17. The United Nations country team noted that, during the previous review cycle, Saudi Arabia had supported a recommendation to establish a national human rights institution. The Saudi Human Rights Commission, established in 2005, had been tasked with promoting and protecting human rights, in accordance with international standards, and ensuring that they were enforced. Nevertheless, it remained a governmental body and, as such, did not comply with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).<sup>17</sup>

18. The United Nations country team recommended that the Government take steps towards establishing a national human rights institution that complied with the Paris Principles and adopting a national human rights action plan.<sup>18</sup>

19. The United Nations country team noted that Saudi Arabia had introduced the 2018 Juveniles Act, which abolished the death penalty for persons under 18 years at the time of the offence, except for crimes falling under *hudud*, as prescribed by sharia law. A Royal Decree issued in March 2020 had ordered the suspension of final death penalty judgments for juveniles and provided for the application of Juveniles Act sanctions without exception. The Government had committed to implementing that Decree by suspending the executions of minors and reviewing the pending cases.<sup>19</sup>

20. The United Nations country team reported that, nevertheless, the Government continued to implement the death penalty to a significant extent, including for several offences that did not meet the threshold of the most severe crimes.<sup>20</sup>

21. The United Nations country team noted that several reports alleged that the death penalty had been imposed following proceedings that had not met fair trial and due process guarantees for non-lethal crimes and on persons who had been children at the time of the offence. The number of executions had spiked in 2022, with the unprecedented mass execution of 81 convicts on 12 March 2022, and the resumption of executions for drug offences, following an unofficial moratorium. The exact number of convicts on death row was not made public.<sup>21</sup>

22. The United Nations country team recommended that Saudi Arabia declare an official moratorium on the death penalty with a view to its abolition and that it commute the sentences that had already been handed down.<sup>22</sup>

23. The United Nations country team urged the Government to consider adopting a comprehensive multisectoral national plan to strengthen the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security.<sup>23</sup>

24. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Saudi Arabia establish a mechanism, accompanied by the training of necessary personnel, for the comprehensive collection of data, disaggregated by sex, age, nationality and ethnic origin, on children attending military schools and academies, and asylum-seeking, refugee, migrant, unaccompanied and separated children who entered the country and might have been recruited or used in hostilities abroad.<sup>24</sup>

25. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that the Government establish a systematic mechanism to recognize organizations led, directed and governed by persons with disabilities and to effectively and meaningfully consult and actively involve persons with disabilities, including those with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities, through their representative organizations in all matters that affected them, such as the development of all laws, policies and programmes.<sup>25</sup>

## **IV. Promotion and protection of human rights**

### **A. Implementation of international human rights obligations, taking into account applicable international humanitarian law**

#### **1. Equality and non-discrimination**

26. The United Nations country team urged the Government to explicitly proscribe all forms of discrimination in education legislation.<sup>26</sup>

27. The United Nations country team noted that children of Saudi fathers acquired nationality automatically at birth, regardless of birthplace. Women, unlike men, could not confer their nationality on foreign spouses, although the law granted children born in Saudi Arabia to a Saudi mother and a foreign father citizenship at age 18, subject to several conditions, including fluency in Arabic, permanent residency and good conduct.<sup>27</sup>

28. The United Nations country team recommended that the Government amend the nationality laws to fully align them with article 9 (1) and (2) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, on nationality, and that it withdraw its reservations to article 9 (2).<sup>28</sup>

29. UNESCO recommended that Saudi Arabia explicitly proscribe discrimination in its education legislation.<sup>29</sup>

30. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that Saudi Arabia raise awareness among members of the judiciary, law enforcement officers, civil servants, employers, educational and health professionals and persons with disabilities themselves, of the right to equality and non-discrimination, multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination, the provision of reasonable accommodation and available legal remedies to foster an environment that enabled persons with disabilities to claim their rights.<sup>30</sup>

31. The same Committee recommended that the Government take measures to permit and promote the participation of women with disabilities in political and public life, including by setting and implementing specific quotas for women with disabilities and mainstreaming the rights of women with disabilities across all laws, policies and programmes, with an intersectional perspective.<sup>31</sup>

32. The same Committee recommended that Saudi Arabia repeal all discriminatory provisions in its legislation that affected women with disabilities, in particular those that required a male guardian to authorize a woman's exercise of her rights under the Convention.<sup>32</sup>

33. The ILO Committee of Experts, with a view to addressing the gender pay gap effectively, requested the Government to identify the nature and extent of wage disparities and analyse its underlying causes and adopt the necessary measures to address those causes. It requested the Government to provide information on the measures adopted to that effect and to indicate whether pay structures had been established, according to a system of job classification, at the national level for both Saudi and non-Saudi workers.<sup>33</sup>

## **2. Right to life, liberty and security of person, and freedom from torture**

34. The United Nations country team recommended that the Government include the crime of torture, as defined in article 1 of the Convention against Torture, in its criminal legislation.<sup>34</sup>

35. The United Nations country team urged the Government to ensure that all allegations of torture and ill-treatment were promptly, effectively and impartially investigated and that perpetrators were sanctioned, as required by article 4 of the Convention against Torture.<sup>35</sup>

36. The United Nations country team called on Saudi Arabia to adopt effective measures to ensure that coerced confessions were not considered in law or in practice, except when invoked as evidence against a person accused of torture.<sup>36</sup>

37. The United Nations country team noted that the significant levels of irregular migration to Saudi Arabia, mainly along the eastern route from other States in the region, had resulted in mass detentions, deportations and expulsions.<sup>37</sup>

38. It highlighted reports alleging that migrants had been held in inhumane detention conditions pending their deportation. Footage and pleas for help had been shared widely in the public domain, indicating overcrowding, a lack of basic humanitarian items and poor health and sanitation conditions.<sup>38</sup>

39. It recommended that Saudi Arabia fully implement the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) with regard to the administration and conditions in detention and prison facilities; and that it strengthen data collection and publish periodic information on the number of detainees in Saudi Arabia, including data disaggregated by gender, age and charge.<sup>39</sup>

40. It urged the Government to explore, where feasible, alternative options to detention for immigration-related violations; and to conduct returns in a dignified manner, in accordance with international guidance and best practices.<sup>40</sup>

41. The Special Rapporteur on terrorism recommended that Saudi Arabia was obliged to investigate, promptly and ex officio, all allegations of torture and ill-treatment and other serious human rights violations committed under its counter-terrorism and national security framework. It must establish an independent, effective and accessible avenue by which

victims could lodge complaints about torture and ill-treatment in all places of detention. Genuinely independent investigations must be established whenever there were reasonable grounds to suspect ill-treatment. The Government must ensure that complainants were not subject to reprisals and that victims of torture or ill-treatment received adequate compensation. As part of that obligation, the relevant authorities were under an obligation to ensure the availability of independent consensual medical examinations at the time of arrest and at regular intervals thereafter.<sup>41</sup>

42. The Special Rapporteur also recommended that, given the prevalence of torture allegations in terrorism cases, the Government must ensure that coerced confessions were always inadmissible in law and in practice, except when invoked as evidence against a person accused of torture. Improved judicial training should be introduced to ensure that all judges were made aware of their obligation to take any allegation of torture seriously and to investigate it thoroughly.<sup>42</sup>

43. He further recommended that measures should be taken to strengthen the independence of the Specialized Criminal Court and to ensure increased transparency in its proceedings.<sup>43</sup>

### **3. International humanitarian law**

44. The Committee on the Rights of the Child reminded Saudi Arabia that it had primary responsibility for the protection of civilians, particularly children, whose safety should be a priority in all air strikes and other military operations carried out in a neighbouring State and that it should prevent civilian casualties.<sup>44</sup>

45. The same Committee urged the Government to put an end to the air strikes, prioritize the protection of children in all military operations in a neighbouring State, take concrete and firm precautionary measures and prevent the indiscriminate use of force so that no more civilians, in particular children, were killed or maimed.<sup>45</sup>

46. It also urged Saudi Arabia to remove without delay restrictions on the provision of humanitarian supplies to the civilian population, in particular children, and fulfil its obligation to facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief and unhindered access to medical facilities, in a neighbouring State and elsewhere.<sup>46</sup>

47. It further urged the Government to ensure observance of the core international humanitarian law principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in military operations, including air strikes on or affecting children, including through a more effective child protection unit and the conduct of post-attack assessments in all cases. In addition, it urged the Government to ensure that child victims of attacks, incursions and air strikes, and their families, were always provided with redress and compensation.<sup>47</sup>

48. It recommended that Saudi Arabia explicitly criminalize the recruitment and use of children in hostilities by the armed forces, non-State armed groups and private security companies, and define and punish the recruitment of children under the age of 15 as a war crime.<sup>48</sup>

49. It urged Saudi Arabia to ensure that all allegations of unlawful attacks on children as well as recruitment and use of children in armed conflict were promptly, independently and impartially investigated and that suspected perpetrators and violators of children's rights and norms of international humanitarian law were pursued effectively, brought to justice and given appropriate sanctions in order to prevent and combat impunity. Saudi Arabia should also ensure that child victims were provided with an effective remedy.<sup>49</sup>

### **4. Human rights and counter-terrorism**

50. The Special Rapporteur on terrorism recommended that all individuals charged under the counter-terrorism legislation must be afforded a genuinely fair trial that respected the international guarantees of due process. The 2017 Law on Combating Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing should be amended to provide effective protection of the right to access counsel, the right to judicial oversight of detention and the right to limits on the length of pretrial detention.<sup>50</sup>

51. The United Nations country team reported that there had been numerous complaints from individuals, in addition to information and reports from civil society organizations, alleging arbitrary and incommunicado detention, enforced disappearances and unfair trials under the counter-terrorism legislation.<sup>51</sup>

52. It recommended that Saudi Arabia conduct a thorough review of the counter-terrorism legislation and other criminal legislation and align it with international human rights standards.<sup>52</sup>

53. The United Nations country team stated that, given the overly broad nature of the acts defined as “terrorism”, there were concerns about the possible interpretation and application of the provision in the counter-terrorism legislation indicating that no meeting or gathering could be held for a terrorist purpose and that the authorities could use force to dissolve a meeting or gathering when necessary, as that provision appeared to grant the authorities broad and advance permission to use force to dissolve meetings or gatherings, potentially including peaceful assemblies or public demonstrations.<sup>53</sup>

## **5. Administration of justice, including impunity, and the rule of law**

54. The United Nations country team recommended that the Government ensure judicial oversight in cases related to blocking of online content.<sup>54</sup>

55. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that the Government ensure that the detention of children was used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period, and that, if criminal charges were brought against children, trials were held before civilian courts and in compliance with international standards on juvenile justice, including the standards enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and elaborated in the Committee’s general comment No. 10 (2007) on children’s rights in juvenile justice.<sup>55</sup>

56. The same Committee also recommended that Saudi Arabia ensure that children were not arbitrarily arrested, detained or prosecuted by military courts for their membership in armed groups or for military offences such as desertion.<sup>56</sup>

## **6. Fundamental freedoms and the right to participate in public and political life**

57. The United Nations country team recommended that Saudi Arabia adopt legislation to guarantee the right to freedom of expression, both online and offline, and the absolute nature of the right to freedom of opinion, in accordance with international human rights law.<sup>57</sup>

58. It also recommended that the Government adopt measures to protect journalists, human rights defenders, activists and social media users from intimidation, threats and arbitrary arrest for exercising their rights to freedom of opinion, expression and belief.<sup>58</sup>

59. It further recommended complying with international standards in measuring access to information.<sup>59</sup>

60. It urged Saudi Arabia to guarantee the right to freedom of assembly following the applicable international standards, and to ensure that all peaceful gatherings were protected and facilitated without any use of force and that potential limitations in the context of public assemblies strictly met the requirements of necessity and proportionality.<sup>60</sup>

61. The Special Rapporteur on terrorism recommended that Saudi Arabia should urgently establish an independent national security and due process review mechanism to carry out a thorough independent review of all cases involving crimes allegedly committed in speech or writing. The mechanism should first seek to identify all individuals who were currently serving sentences of imprisonment for acts that objectively constituted the exercise of their right to free speech, freedom of thought, conscience, religion or opinion, or the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. The mechanism should have the power to commute or pardon all such prisoners with immediate effect and should proceed to do so.<sup>61</sup>

62. UNESCO recommended that Saudi Arabia: introduce freedom of expression and access to information legislation that was in accordance with international standards; decriminalize defamation, in accordance with international standards; and assess the autonomy of its media regulatory bodies to ensure their independence, in accordance with international standards.<sup>62</sup>

## 7. Prohibition of all forms of slavery, including trafficking in persons

63. The United Nations country team noted that Saudi Arabia had invested significant resources and effort in combating human trafficking. It had established a national referral mechanism for victims of trafficking and set up a victims assistance fund, built the capacity of front-line workers to identify victims, launched national strategies and action plans to combat trafficking in persons, established a national committee to combat trafficking in persons and set up specialized courts in all regions to adjudicate trafficking cases.<sup>63</sup>

64. The United Nations country team also noted that the *kafalah* (sponsorship) system was in the process of being reformed and that the Government had revised the relevant legislation to introduce a more flexible visa framework for migrant workers.<sup>64</sup>

65. It recommended that Saudi Arabia continue to strengthen national capacity in proactive identification and protection of potential victims, effective prosecution and sentencing of convicted traffickers, including through the continuous improvement and operationalization of the national referral mechanism and the establishment of an electronic version of the mechanism, in accordance with international human rights instruments (including the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime) and international best practices.<sup>65</sup>

66. It also recommended extending the same measures to identify and assist victims of trafficking who entered Saudi Arabia irregularly.<sup>66</sup>

## 8. Right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work

67. The United Nations country team recommended that the Government align the Labour Law and other relevant legislation with the requirements of the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).<sup>67</sup>

68. It also recommended that the Government develop social insurance reforms in line with international standards, introduce a social insurance scheme for maternity and sickness, extend social insurance to all workers, reform end-of-service benefits, replacing them with a centrally administered national fund, and improve coordination with sending countries.<sup>68</sup>

69. It further recommended that Saudi Arabia align its reforms of social assistance schemes with United Nations standards on social protection floors and Sustainable Development Goal 1.3, and effectively implement the National Policy on Equality in Employment and Occupation and the Child Labour Policy.<sup>69</sup>

## 9. Right to social security

70. The United Nations country team recommended that the Government consider further strengthening social protection coverage for migrant workers in areas such as child and family benefits, maternity protection, unemployment support, sickness, invalidity/disability and survivors' benefits.<sup>70</sup>

71. It also recommended that Saudi Arabia consider disbursing lower value benefits with longer duration in times of emergency, instead of one-off payments, extending existing transfer programmes to additional beneficiaries when necessary, and removing the limit on per capita benefits to accommodate the large household sizes of poorer families.<sup>71</sup>

## 10. Right to an adequate standard of living

72. The United Nations country team noted that, against the backdrop of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and Housing had recognized the vulnerability of migrant workers and initiated a comprehensive approach to improving housing for low-income workers. It included increasing the occupancy rate of existing organized accommodation, converting unorganized accommodation to organized accommodation and filling the remaining gaps in supply through the construction of more housing units.<sup>72</sup>

73. It noted that, by 2021, organized accommodation for an additional 270,000 workers had been added since the outbreak of the pandemic.<sup>73</sup>

74. It recommended that Saudi Arabia adopt regulations that supported housing for migrant workers living in the country, provide housing for migrants, especially vulnerable migrants, including housing options to meet demand at the city level, and update urban development plans and policies to make them more inclusive of all sectors of local communities, with the minimum relocation of migrant workers.<sup>74</sup>

## **11. Right to health**

75. The United Nations country team recommended that, while it was restructuring the national health and insurance system, the Government ensure that all citizens and residents had inclusive access to health services, and that it provide all citizens, residents and individuals with irregular residency status with comprehensive health care, in accordance with the principle of equality and non-discrimination.<sup>75</sup>

76. It also recommended that Saudi Arabia focus on the rights of older persons, persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups, operationalize health in all policies, in line with Saudi Vision 2030, and strengthen the health system to make it more efficient, less wasteful and of higher quality.<sup>76</sup>

## **12. Right to education**

77. The United Nations country team noted that, despite increased spending on education and relatively small class sizes compared to countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, educational outcomes in Saudi Arabia had not improved, according to the Programme for International Student Assessment. Students in Saudi Arabia had performed significantly worse than the averages in mathematics, reading and science in countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.<sup>77</sup>

78. It observed that, as part of Saudi Vision 2030, the Government had identified the importance of skills development among its labour force to meet the needs of a more diversified economy. In order to achieve that aim, the uptake of skills training and development opportunities would need to increase.<sup>78</sup>

79. The United Nations country team recommended that Saudi Arabia focus on improving the quality of education and teacher training, particularly in terms of teaching lower-income and disadvantaged students. Teacher training should support inclusive education that allowed for lesson plans to be adjusted to different ability levels, from early childhood through to secondary school, in order to facilitate the integration of all children in the same schooling environment.<sup>79</sup>

80. It also recommended that the Government legally guarantee 12 years of free primary and secondary education and at least one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education.<sup>80</sup>

81. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Saudi Arabia pursue and strengthen its educational initiatives to systematically include human rights, including children's rights, and peace education in the compulsory curricula of all schools and in teacher training programmes, including with specific reference to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and methods of identifying children who were especially vulnerable to practices contrary to the Optional Protocol.<sup>81</sup>

## **B. Rights of specific persons or groups**

### **1. Women**

82. The United Nations country team recommended that the Government: enforce existing laws and adopt legislation criminalizing all forms of violence against women; and enhance the health and legal/executive authority referral systems for those who were subject to gender-based violence, especially for the most vulnerable groups, such as domestic workers.<sup>82</sup>



83. It also recommended strengthening the legal framework in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to eliminate gender-based violence and domestic violence against women and girls.<sup>83</sup>

84. It further recommended that Saudi Arabia improve the complaint and reporting mechanisms for domestic workers and women migrant workers in order to improve the assistance available in their native languages, and improve the availability of data on the prevalence of gender-based violence in the country.<sup>84</sup>

## **2. Children**

85. The United Nations country team noted that only very limited data on child protection-related issues continued to be available to the public. No data were available on issues such as violence against children.<sup>85</sup>

86. It also noted that Saudi Arabia, with assistance from ILO, had adopted a policy on eliminating and preventing child labour. The aim of the policy was to create a society free from child labour, where children enjoyed their rights to a childhood, education, dignity and the full development of their potential. To expand the knowledge base, the Government had been working with ILO on the possibility of conducting a child labour survey.<sup>86</sup>

87. The United Nations country team recommended that the Government fully implement the policy on eliminating and preventing child labour, increase the availability of data relating to child protection and conduct a nationwide survey on violence against children, applying international standards.<sup>87</sup>

88. It also recommended that Saudi Arabia partner with universities to develop coursework in social work education focusing on child protection, and that it build capacity in child protection case management and develop standardized tools for assessment and treatment of victims of violence against children.<sup>88</sup>

89. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Saudi Arabia explicitly and consistently stipulate in all its domestic laws that children must not be subjected to compulsory enlistment or compulsory recruitment into the armed forces or take any part in hostilities, including in times of armed conflict.<sup>89</sup>

90. The United Nations country team recommended that Saudi Arabia improve data collection on children in conflict and in contact with the law, and that it make the data accessible.<sup>90</sup>

91. It also recommended that the Government: launch a programme to promote child-friendly justice, focusing on laws, policies, services and capacities; launch an initiative to promote community-based alternatives to justice for children; and reduce immigration detention of children and develop age assessment models, vulnerability screening, referral pathways, appropriate temporary care models and reception facilities.<sup>91</sup>

92. It further recommended that the Government strengthen the implementation and monitoring of the existing legislation on child marriage to ensure that no forced marriages occurred.<sup>92</sup>

93. UNESCO recommended that Saudi Arabia legally guarantee 12 years of free primary and secondary education and at least one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education.<sup>93</sup>

## **3. Persons with disabilities**

94. The United Nations country team noted that Saudi Arabia had developed a comprehensive legal and institutional framework to protect persons with disabilities. Saudi Vision 2030 highlighted the importance of providing persons with disabilities with equal opportunities and the Government guaranteed their right to prevention, care and rehabilitation. It also promoted comprehensive access to education for children with disabilities.<sup>94</sup>

95. The United Nations country team also noted that several initiatives had been launched to help persons with disabilities access the labour market, including a 4 per cent quota in companies and public entities with more than 25 employees.<sup>95</sup>

96. The United Nations country team recommended that the Government develop a comprehensive national disability inclusion strategy to implement the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and that it consult with persons with disabilities on all matters affecting them.<sup>96</sup>

97. It also recommended that the Government update the legal framework to shift from a charity-based to a rights-based approach, expand services for persons with disabilities in rural and remote areas, and strengthen the data collection system to obtain more disaggregated data on persons with disabilities.<sup>97</sup>

98. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommended that Saudi Arabia prohibit violence against children with disabilities, including corporal punishment, impose sanctions for perpetrators and adopt and implement a strategy to combat stereotyping of and discrimination against children with disabilities.<sup>98</sup>

99. The same Committee recommended providing capacity-building programmes on the rights of children with disabilities for all those who provided services, including health, educational and social services, for children with disabilities. It also recommended developing and implementing a mechanism that guaranteed the full participation of children with disabilities, their families and their representative organizations in decision-making processes and in policy development to guarantee that services provided to them met their requirements.<sup>99</sup>

#### **4. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons**

100. The United Nations country team noted that same-sex relationships were prohibited under sharia law and that in Saudi Arabia, they were punishable by flogging, imprisonment and death. Nevertheless, flogging had been abolished in 2020. Societal discrimination against LGBTI+ persons was prevalent throughout Saudi Arabia, making them targets of violence and abuse and affording them very little legal recourse against perpetrators. In addition, LGBTI+ groups and individuals continued to suffer harassment on social media and were arrested based on their actual or perceived gender identity and sexual orientation.<sup>100</sup>

101. The United Nations country team recommended that Saudi Arabia review the situation of LGBTI+ groups and individuals, considering the Kingdom's fundamental values prohibiting any form of discrimination, and the objectives contained in Saudi Vision 2030.<sup>101</sup>

102. It also recommended that Saudi Arabia explicitly prohibit discrimination and cyberbullying on all media platforms, prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of LGBTI+ persons, and repeal laws that discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and expression.<sup>102</sup>

#### **5. Migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers**

103. The United Nations country team stated that, since 2021, Saudi Arabia had been undertaking significant labour market reforms, including the Labour Reform Initiative, which established more balanced relationships between workers and employers. Other key reforms had focused on absenteeism, the wage protection system and insurance for workers in case of employer insolvency.<sup>103</sup>

104. The United Nations country team recommended that Saudi Arabia initiate legislative reform to ensure that all migrant children, regardless of their parents' nationality, immigration and work status, could be registered at birth, and that it extend its ongoing labour reforms to cover migrant domestic workers.<sup>104</sup>

105. It also recommended that the Government review and amend national laws on refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced persons to ensure they were in accordance with the relevant international standards, and that it consider incorporating legal safeguards to protect residents who met the criteria for international protection against deportation owing to irregularity.<sup>105</sup>

106. It further recommended that Saudi Arabia consider complying with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development on sexual and reproductive health and rights, by providing reproductive health-care services to migrants and temporary workers on an equal and equitable basis.<sup>106</sup>

107. The ILO Committee of Experts urged the Government to continue to strengthen its legal and institutional framework to ensure that, in practice, migrant workers were not exposed to practices that might increase their vulnerability to practices amounting to forced labour, including passport retention and non-payment of wages. The Committee also requested the Government to strengthen the capacity of the labour inspectors and law enforcement bodies to allow better identification and monitoring of the working conditions of migrant workers, and to ensure that penalties were effectively applied for any violations detected.<sup>107</sup>

### Notes

- 1 [A/HRC/40/4](#) and [A/HRC/40/4/Add.1](#) and [A/HRC/40/2](#).
- 2 United Nations country team submission for the universal periodic review of Saudi Arabia, p. 2.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 [CRC/C/OPAC/SAU/CO/1](#), para. 45.
- 6 *Ibid.*, para. 29.
- 7 United Nations country team submission, p. 3.
- 8 UNESCO submission for the universal periodic review of Saudi Arabia, para. 21.
- 9 See [www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100\\_COMMENT\\_ID,P13100\\_COUNTRY\\_ID:4129458,103208:NO](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID,P13100_COUNTRY_ID:4129458,103208:NO).
- 10 United Nations country team submission, p. 7.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 14 [A/HRC/40/52/Add.2](#), para. 71.
- 15 UNESCO submission, para. 15 (v).
- 16 *Ibid.*, para. 19.
- 17 United Nations country team submission, p. 3.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 3 and 4.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 24 [CRC/C/OPAC/SAU/CO/1](#), para. 15.
- 25 [CRPD/C/SAU/CO/1](#), para. 6 (c).
- 26 United Nations country team submission, p. 9.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 UNESCO submission, para. 15 (ii).
- 30 [CRPD/C/SAU/CO/1](#), para. 8 (b).
- 31 *Ibid.*, para. 10 (a).
- 32 *Ibid.*, para. 10 (b).
- 33 See [www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100\\_COMMENT\\_ID,P13100\\_COUNTRY\\_ID:4012757,103208:NO](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID,P13100_COUNTRY_ID:4012757,103208:NO).
- 34 United Nations country team submission, p. 5.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 [A/HRC/40/52/Add.2](#), para. 71.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 [CRC/C/OPAC/SAU/CO/1](#), para. 17.

- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid., para. 29.
- 49 Ibid., para. 31.
- 50 [A/HRC/40/52/Add.2](#), para. 71.
- 51 United Nations country team submission, p. 6.
- 52 Ibid., pp. 6 and 7.
- 53 Ibid., p. 8.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 [CRC/C/OPAC/SAU/CO/1](#), para. 37.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 United Nations country team submission, p. 7.
- 58 Ibid., p. 8.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 [A/HRC/40/52/Add.2](#), para. 71.
- 62 UNESCO submission, paras. 16–18.
- 63 United Nations country team submission, p. 6.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid., p. 9.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Ibid., p. 11.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Ibid., p. 8.
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- 80 Ibid.
- 81 [CRC/C/OPAC/SAU/CO/1](#), para. 27.
- 82 United Nations country team submission, pp. 11 and 12.
- 83 Ibid., p. 12.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Ibid., p. 13.
- 88 Ibid.
- 89 [CRC/C/OPAC/SAU/CO/1](#), para. 19.
- 90 United Nations country team submission, p. 13.
- 91 Ibid.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 UNESCO submission, para. 15 (iii) and (iv).
- 94 United Nations country team submission, p. 14.
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 Ibid.
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- 99 Ibid., para. 12 (c) and (d).
- 100 United Nations country team submission, p. 12.
- 101 Ibid.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 Ibid., p. 14.
- 104 Ibid.
- 105 Ibid., p. 15.
- 106 Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> See [www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100\\_COMMENT\\_ID,P13100\\_COUNTRY\\_ID:4013822,103208:NO](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO:13100:P13100_COMMENT_ID,P13100_COUNTRY_ID:4013822,103208:NO).

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