

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: EMPLOYMENT, INDUSTRIALIZATION AND SMES, AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN ARABIA

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—Abstract—

The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were endorsed by the leading global economies in 2015 to facilitate balanced economic growth and the

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enhancement of human well-being. These goals address the social, economic, and environmental challenges faced by underprivileged populations within nations. The SDGs comprise 169 specific targets and 248 indicators to monitor and assess their achievement across countries. Saudi Arabia has aligned the objectives of its Vision 2030 with the UN SDGs. This study seeks to evaluate the current status of employment, industrialisation, and economic growth in Saudi Arabia in relation to the attainment of the UN SDGs. Secondary data were sourced from the General Authority for Statistics of Saudi Arabia (GSTAT), the World Development Indicators of Saudi Arabia provided by the World Bank, and relevant UN publications. Analytical methods, including fixed base index numbers and percentage calculations, were employed to examine trends, proportional changes, and absolute growth of the variables. There is a pressing need to increase financial support and vocational training to strengthen small-scale industries within sectors such as mining and quarrying, electricity and gas supply, construction, wholesale and retail trade, and motor vehicle repair. Enhancing these industries can increase their contribution to overall employment for individuals under 35 years of age and stimulate GDP growth. Additionally, research and development alongside the tourism sector should be prioritised to advance progress towards SDG 8 and SDG 9.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, SDG 8, SDG 9, Employment, Industrialization, Saudi Arabia, United Nations.

INTRODUCTION

In the current global context, nations strive to achieve optimal growth and development across all sectors of the economy and dimensions of human well-being. Ensuring consistent progress in each sector is both crucial and significant. Sustainability encompasses not merely the maintenance of current conditions over time but also the attainment of reasonable progress in growth and development to realise established objectives. The SDGs of the UN reflect the contributions of diverse social stakeholders, with particular emphasis on disadvantaged populations. These goals address social, economic, and environmental dimensions and consist of 169 targets monitored through 248 indicators to assess progress at the national level. The SDGs broadly cover areas such as poverty reduction, prosperity, inequality, peace and justice, and climate and environmental protection. Saudi Arabia seeks to achieve the aims of Vision 2030 in alignment with the 17 UN SDGs.

Within the country, the UN contributes to this endeavour by addressing challenges and opportunities through the National Transformation Programmes and Vision 2030, guided by the Common Country Strategic Framework. The overarching objectives of the SDGs include the eradication of poverty, safeguarding the climate and environment, and promoting global peace and prosperity. Specifically, SDG 8 and SDG 9 focus on decent work, economic growth, industry, innovation, and

infrastructure. SDG 8 aims to foster sustainable economic growth through diversification and technological development, enhance employment opportunities, eliminate child labour, and support sustainable tourism and cultural initiatives. SDG 9 emphasises the development of infrastructure, promotion of sustainable industrialisation, technological innovation, and the expansion of financial access for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and other business ventures.

Table 1: Indicators of Sustainable Development Goal 8 and 9 of Saudi Arabia

Years	GDP Per Person Employed (Constant 2017 PPP \$)	GDP Growth (Annual %)	GDP Per Capita Growth (Annual %)	A/C at a Financial Institution or with a Mobile Money Service Provider (% of Population Ages 15+)	CO2 Emissions (Metric Tons Per Capita)	Manufacturing, Value Added (% of GDP)	Research and Development Expenditure (% of GDP)
2015	125269.919	4.690145	2.694521		17.25779	12.83363	
2016	123400.505	2.363075	0.321644		16.7951	13.19827	
2017	124057.552	-0.0697	-2.34007	71.7	16.07779	13.29363	
2018	122425.802	2.762244	0.341213		15.0655	12.56956	
2019	115299.506	0.83228	-1.44521		14.70302	12.48912	
2020	108867.749	-4.34139	-4.79247		14.26659	12.63789	0.49802
2021	110213.466	4.326105	4.461657	74.32	..	13.20718	0.4455
2022	116475.094	8.680736	7.312335		..	14.43588	

Source: <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=HIC,SAU>

Analysis of sustainable development indicators indicates that GDP per employed individual in Saudi Arabia has declined since 2015, though minor improvements have emerged in recent years. Similarly, the GDP annual growth rate, account ownership at financial institutions or via mobile-money-service providers, manufacturing value-added, and CO2 emissions all recorded reductions during 2021 and 2022. In contrast, Research and Development (R&D) expenditures remain minimal and display a continuing downward trajectory (Table 1).

The UN and its partners contribute support to 10 and 4 initiatives, respectively, out of a total of 52 activities associated with SDG 8 and SDG 9 in Saudi Arabia. For SDG 8, implementing partners include private sector organisations, the Saudi Ministry of Economy and Planning, the Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, and the Saudi Human Rights Commission. SDG 9 implementation involves the Royal Commission for Al Ula, the Royal Commission for Makkah City, the Saudi General Authority for Survey and Geospatial Information, the Saudi Ministry of Culture, the Saudi Ministry of Economy and Planning, the Saudi Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, and the General Authority for Statistics, operating under the investing partner Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The UN strategically allocates resources across these initiatives to facilitate progress towards the SDGs.

Table 2: Fund Allocation by UN for Different Years in Saudi Arabia for SDG 8 and SDG 9

SDG No.	Available Resources	Total Required Resources	Availability (%)	Scarcity (%)
8	4510000	13130000	34.35	65.65
9	21800000	42500000	51.29	48.71

Source: <https://saudiarabia.un.org/en/sdgs/8/funding#sdg-tab-content>,
<https://saudiarabia.un.org/en/sdgs/9/funding#sdg-tab-content>

Saudi Arabia requires significant financial resources to achieve SDG 8, which focuses on decent work and economic growth, and SDG 9, which addresses industry, innovation, and infrastructure. The total resources needed for SDG 8 represent only 30% of the total requirement for SDG 9, while the available funding for SDG 8 is approximately 20% of that allocated to SDG 9. Given the broader scope of industry, innovation, and infrastructure, the UN has prioritised higher resource allocation for SDG 9 relative to SDG 8 (Table 2). In the development of the tourism sector and cultural heritage, the UNWTO and UNESCO collaborate closely with the Saudi government. This partnership facilitates the protection, promotion, and advancement of culture, tourism, education, archaeology, and the arts in Saudi Arabia. The Sustainable Rural Agricultural Development (SRAD) programme enhances agricultural production and allied products, strengthens wool and milk supply chains in the Northern border, and promotes the participation of women farmers. SRAD also expands sustainable rural development infrastructure and encourages the adoption of advanced technologies in SMEs to increase the income of small enterprise owners.

The FAO, in cooperation with the Saudi Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture, delivers modern beekeeping training and technical guidance. To increase production of crops such as sorghum, pearl millet, and sesame, SRAD, together with Saudi REEF and the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture, organised a workshop in Riyadh on "Rainfed Cereals Production for Food Security and Sustainable Rural Development." Additionally, the FAO provides advisory services to address challenges in the Saudi coffee sector (United Nations Country Results Report Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2022). Consequently, evaluating the adequacy of these initiatives and monitoring progress in line with UN attainment standards is essential for achieving the SDGs in Saudi Arabia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Saudi Arabia, factors such as greenhouse gas emissions, decent employment, gender equity, women's empowerment, education, and training have a positive effect on GDP and contribute to the attainment of the SDGs. Conversely, poverty, hunger, and health challenges negatively influence GDP and hinder progress towards achieving these goals. Education and training enhance the country's economic, social, and health outcomes, while gender equality and technological advancement are

essential for promoting economic growth and developing human resources to support SDG achievement (H. P. Singh et al., 2022). Economic targets including SDG 8, SDG 9, and responsible consumption and production have reached a substantial degree of accomplishment; however, further efforts are required to meet SDG 4 (education), SDG 11 (sustainable communities), and SDG 13 (climate action) (Halkos & Gkampoura, 2021). The SDGs aim to establish a sustainable society grounded in justice and security, with the ultimate objective of improving living standards through multidimensional socio-economic growth. Vision 2030 incorporates the principles of the SDGs to promote balanced economic development, with various stakeholders playing a critical role in ensuring comprehensive sustainability (Alshuwaikhat & Mohammed, 2017).

There is direct relationship between economic growth and technological development, and poverty alleviation in Saudi Arabia. Technological advancements are the way to attain economic prosperity and sustainable development in Saudi Arabia (Chihaoui et al., 2023). Information and communication technology, innovation, and research are vital for transitioning from an oil-based economy to a knowledge-based economy (Nurunnabi, 2017). The application of e-commerce and e-planning in SME strategic management facilitates overcoming market challenges and achieving growth objectives (Alzahrani, 2018).

Projections indicate that Saudi Arabia is likely to achieve only 47% of its SDG targets by 2030. Increased investment in renewable energy and the engagement of skilled and talented youth are critical for accelerating economic development (AlArjani et al., 2021). Despite rapid industrialisation in certain sectors over the past four decades, SMEs in electronics and optics, tobacco, computers, transport equipment, and pharmaceuticals remain underdeveloped. Technical support, conducive labour laws, and entrepreneurial assistance are necessary to stimulate growth in these sectors (Ali, 2020). Entrepreneurship foster economic growth and Saudi Arabian government is committed to support entrepreneurship programs to support Saudi Arabian youths to get employment. Saudi Arabian government is not only farming policies for the growth and development of the MSMEs but providing technical and financial assistance (Nalband & Alfaqieh, 2024). In long run, capital formation, petroleum exports, and human resources enhance economic growth in Saudi Arabia. There is unidirectional influence of capital formation, environmental pollution, labor force, and fuel exports on the economic growth of Saudi Arabia (Murshed, 2022).

Formulating national policies addressing employers, job seekers, and higher education institutions is effective in reducing unemployment (Yusuf & Jamjoom, 2022). The leading sectors of the economy influence other sectors, and stronger interconnections between manufacturing, non-manufacturing, service, and agricultural sectors enhance overall productivity. Strategic governmental interventions are required to strengthen these inter-sectoral linkages (Al-Otaibi & Elimam, 2024). Investments in renewable

energy and tourism are key to transitioning from an oil-based to a non-oil economy (Waheed et al., 2020), while sustainable growth requires balanced blue and green economic forces, with maritime trade and tourism supporting SDG implementation (Waheed, 2023). Economic diversification is necessary to shift to a knowledge-based economy (Al Naimi, 2022).

While Vision 2030 does not fully address education for sustainable development, education remains crucial for achieving both national and SDG objectives (Essa & Harvey, 2022). Government effectiveness and governance positively influence human and economic development, with law and order, political stability, and sound administration contributing to sustainable growth (Albassam, 2021).

Positive correlations are observed between SDG planning and sustainable development variables such as water, education, and sustainability priorities (Gasmi & Belloumi, 2022). Financial development, particularly through sustainable monetary policy, supports renewable energy projects and promotes economic growth (Benlaria & Hamad, 2022). Green growth positively influences both the financial sector and trade globalisation, with energy resources indirectly governing green growth (Abro et al., 2023). Competitiveness indices and economic variables are interlinked, with SDG 9 influenced by environmental and social factors, while open innovation facilitates SDG compliance across sectors (Del-Aguila-Arcenales et al., 2022).

The mining sector maintains a long-term relationship with SDG dimensions and significantly contributes to social and economic goals (Zmami et al., 2021). Health expenditure per capita supports sustainable development, whereas foreign direct investment (FDI) has negative implications, highlighting the need to redirect investments toward greener sectors. Institutional transformation is required to realise Vision 2030 and SDG objectives (Mustun, 2022). Awareness of Vision 2030 is essential for SDG attainment (Ali et al., 2023). Economic empowerment of women, wage equality, and targeted awareness programmes further promote economic development (Alessa et al., 2022). Globally, listed SMEs demonstrate closer alignment with SDGs compared with non-listed SMEs (Oppong, 2022), while over half of countries have not actively pursued SDG 9 among 124 evaluated nations (Saieed et al., 2021).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilises secondary data sourced from the GSTAT, the World Development Indicators of Saudi Arabia provided by the World Bank, and relevant UN publications. To assess trends in employment, SMEs, industrialisation, and economic growth, fixed base index numbers and percentage analyses were employed to evaluate the trajectory and relative changes associated with SDG 8 and SDG 9.

$$FBI = \frac{V_{cy}}{V_{by}} 100;$$

$$\text{Average (Av.) Growth} = \frac{\sum FBI}{n}$$

Where,

FBI= Fixed Base Index Numbers;

V_{cy} = Values in the Current Years;

V_{by}= Values in the Base Years;

$\sum FBI$ = Summation of FBI;

n = Number of Periods.

Clustered column charts were employed to visually represent and facilitate comparison of the variables.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

To achieve the study's objectives, the analysis was categorised into two sections: the status and progress of employment, industrialisation, and economic growth in Saudi Arabia; and the initiatives undertaken by the Saudi government to realise SDG 8 and SDG 9.

Status of Growth and Progress of Employment

SDG 8 emphasises productive employment, safe working conditions, and the provision of decent work opportunities for all Saudi and non-Saudi human resources. Increases in employment across all categories serve as indicators of progress towards achieving the SDG targets. [Table 3](#) presents the growth of employees in Saudi Arabia across different economic activities between 2019 and 2022. Substantial increases were observed in the average growth of employees engaged in water supply and sewerage activities (245.69%), transportation and storage (126.06%), accommodation and food services (127.09%), information and communication (122.34%), real estate activities (117.24%), human health and social work (116.65%), arts, entertainment and recreation (117.35%), finance and insurance (107.14%), and professional services (110.66%).

In contrast, employment in mining and quarrying (92.27%), electricity and gas supply (79.42%), construction (98.69%), and wholesale and retail trade including motor vehicle repair (93.52%) declined over the same period. The temporary reductions in employees engaged in professional services and education during 2020 and 2021, followed by recovery in 2022, may be attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Persistent unemployment remains a significant barrier to achieving the SDGs, limiting the effective utilisation of human resources in the Kingdom.

Table 3: Growth Status of Employees by Economic Activities in Saudi Arabia

Economic Activity	No. of Employees and their Growth								
	2019	FBI	2020	FBI	2021	FBI	2022	FBI	Av. Growth (%)
Mining & Quarrying	184527	100	178062	96.5	176650	95.73	141816	76.85	92.27
Manufacturing	814190	100	825975	101.45	852925	104.76	1033933	126.99	108.30
Electricity, Gas Supply	91048	100	80679	88.61	78129	85.81	39390	43.26	79.42
Water Supply; Sewerage Activities	16953	100	19245	113.52	23850	140.68	106556	628.54	245.69
Construction	2254241	100	2126216	94.32	2058439	91.31	2460230	109.14	98.69
Wholesale & Retail Trade; Repair of Motor Vehicles	1937469	100	1893542	97.73	1790879	92.43	1626050	83.93	93.52
Transportation & Storage	241397	100	255182	105.71	281064	116.43	439565	182.09	126.06
Accommodation and Food Service	403652	100	432419	107.13	555301	137.57	675154	167.26	127.99
Information & Communication	72082	100	75178	104.3	82149	113.97	123331	171.1	122.34
Financial & Insurance	74291	100	74871	100.78	77924	104.89	91291	122.88	107.14
Real Estate Activities	35611	100	37464	105.2	39303	110.37	54627	153.4	117.24
Professional Activities	141516	100	133059	94.02	138157	97.63	213687	151	110.66
Administrative and Support Service	1064994	100	1029837	96.7	977737	91.81	1175278	110.36	99.72
Education	153555	100	134412	87.53	140899	91.76	180694	117.67	99.24
Human Health and Social Work	349034	100	368743	105.65	470352	134.76	440396	126.18	116.65
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	24143	100	26851	111.22	29992	124.23	32338	133.94	117.35
Other Service	217420	100	218343	100.42	209986	96.58	237962	109.45	101.61
Total	8076123	100	7910078	97.94	7983736	98.86	9072298	112.33	102.28

Source: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/919>

Figure 1 indicates a high level of unemployment among young individuals in Saudi Arabia. A negative correlation exists between age and unemployment among Saudi workers. Nevertheless, employment rates declined across all age groups between 2017 and 2020. In addition to unemployment, low wages contribute to reduced human resource productivity and limit access to decent work opportunities. Moreover, Figure 2 demonstrates that monthly earnings of employees in Saudi Arabia are positively associated with age. Employees aged 45 to 49 receive higher salaries compared with other age groups. Overall, monthly salaries exhibited an upward trend between 2017 and 2020. Additionally, SDG 8 aims to ensure workplace safety and security, thereby guaranteeing decent work for all.

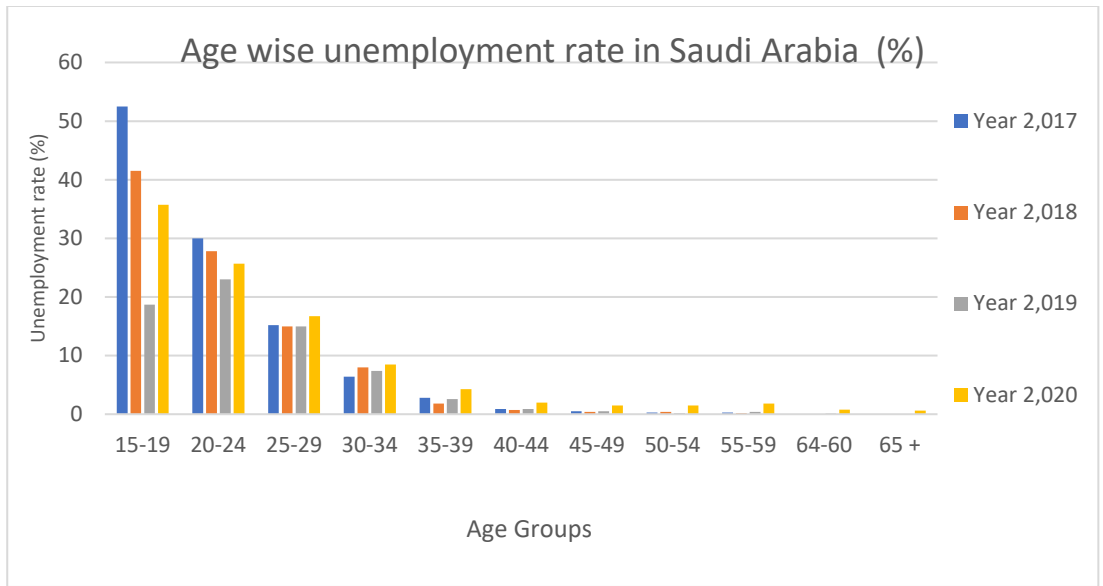


Figure 1: Age Wise Unemployment Rate in Saudi Arabia

Source: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/985>

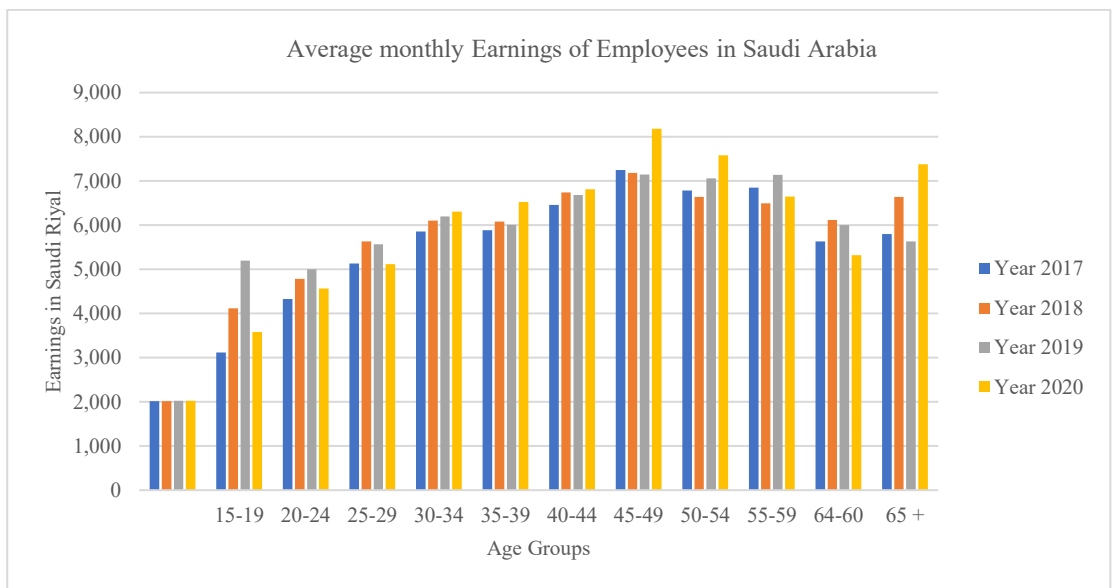


Figure 2: Average Monthly Earnings of Employees in Saudi Arabia

Source: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/985>

Table 4 indicates a declining trend in both fatal and non-fatal workplace injuries in Saudi Arabia. Injuries among female employees are minimal. This suggests that business organisations and manufacturing enterprises in the Kingdom generally provide a safe and secure working environment for all employees.

Table 4: Fatal and No-Fatal Injuries in Saudi Arabia

Indicators	Gender	Years				
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Fatal and Non-Fatal Occupational Injuries Per 100,000 Workers	Male	535	538	353	289	206
	Female	1	3	1	2	1
	Total	536	541	354	291	207
Growth (FBI) of Total Fatal and Non-Fatal Injuries		100	100.93	66.04	54.29	38.62

Source: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/985>

Status of Growth and Progress of Saudi Economy

The progressive growth of a nation’s economy reflects its prosperity and supports the achievement of the SDGs. GDP serves as an indicator of economic growth and provides insight into the overall economic trends of the country. Figure 3 illustrates that the annual growth rate of real GDP per capita and per employed person has been either negative or marginal. Saudi Arabia, renowned for its Islamic religious sites, benefits from tourism, which contributes to GDP and reinforces the national economy.

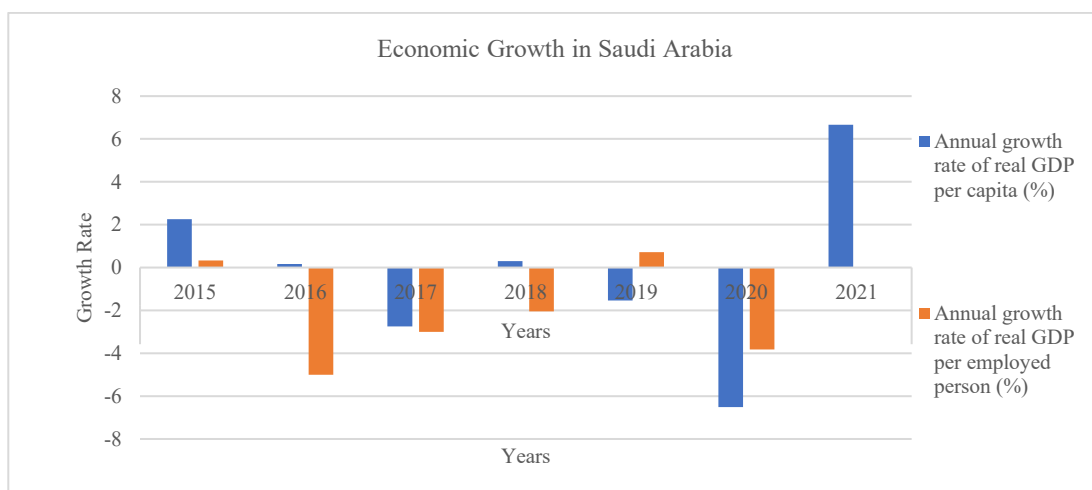


Figure 3: Economic Growth in Saudi Arabia

Source: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/985>

Table 5 presents the contribution of tourism to Saudi Arabia’s GDP and its growth trends.

Table 5: Growth of Contribution of Tourism Direct GDP to Total GDP

Indicator	Years				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Tourism Direct GDP as a Proportion of Total GDP and in Growth Rate	2.4	2.3	2.14	3.8	1.7
Growth (FBI)	100	95.83	93.04	177.57	44.74

Source: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/985>

While tourism's contribution began to rise in 2019, it declined sharply due to the impact of the pandemic. Banks and financial institutions, regarded as the backbone of the economy, play a critical role in meeting the financial needs of individuals and businesses by providing resources for various purposes.

Table 6 illustrates that the growth of commercial bank branches (average growth rate = 94.71%) and ATMs (95.86%) per 100,000 adults has been declining in Saudi Arabia. The reduction in the number of commercial bank branches has been more pronounced compared with ATMs. An increase in bank account holdings reflects the development of banking habits among the population. Moreover, Table 7 demonstrates a substantial increase in the number of bank accounts in Saudi Arabia, with an average growth rate of 192.26%. This indicates a rising propensity for banking among the Saudi population.

Table 6: Growth of Commercial Bank Branches and ATMs per 100,000 Adults

Items	Years						Av. Growth (%)
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Commercial Bank Branches	8.5	8.4	8.2	8	7.6	7.6	94.71
Growth (FBI)	100	98.82	96.47	94.12	89.41	89.41	
Automated Teller Machines (ATMs)	74.8	74.6	74.2	73.1	69.2	64.3	95.86
Growth (FBI)	100	99.73	99.2	97.73	92.51	85.96	

Source: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/985>

Table 7: Adults (15 Years and Older) with an Account at a Bank or Other Financial Institution

Items	Years						
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
No. of Adults	22,857,592	26,214,277	28,359,262	30,273,071	32,866,937	33,707,903	43,945,187
Growth (FBI)	100	114.69	124.07	132.44	143.79	147.47	192.26

Source: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/985>

Status of Growth and Progress of Industrialization

Industrialisation involves the creation of new enterprises and the expansion of existing industrial capacities. It generates value through manufacturing and processing activities, delivering goods and services. Such organisations contribute to GDP, increase per capita income, and strengthen the national economy. Table 8 illustrates the progressive contribution of transformative industries to Saudi Arabia's GDP. Between 2015 and 2021, both the value-added percentage (average growth rate = 114.71%) and the per capita share (113.25%) of these industries positively impacted the national economy. Manufacturing organisations continue to serve as key sources of employment in any country.

Table 8: Manufacturing Value Added as a Proportion of GDP and Per-Capita in Saudi Arabia

Item	Years							Av. Growth (%)
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Added Value Percentage for Transformative Industries (%)	12	11.54	13.46	13.96	14.19	13.63	17.58	114.71
Growth (FBI)	100	96.17	112.17	116.33	118.25	113.58	146.5	
Per Capita Share of the Transformative Industries Added Value (SAR)	9585	9328	10600	10714	11410.857	10246.656	14099.76	113.25
Growth (FBI)	100	97.32	110.59	111.78	119.05	106.9	147.1	

Source: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/985>

Table 9 presents employment in the manufacturing sector, with an average growth rate of 77.42%, as a proportion of total employment in Saudi Arabia. Between 2016 and 2021, the manufacturing sector's relative contribution to overall employment declined annually. Within this sector, small-scale industries continue to play a crucial role in both employment generation and production.

Table 9: Manufacturing Employment as a Proportion to the Total Employment

Indicator	Years						Av. Growth
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Manufacturing Employment to Total Employment (%)	15.63	15.7	10.07	10.08	10.44	10.68	77.42
Growth (FBI)	100	100.45	64.43	64.49	66.79	68.33	

Source: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/985>

Furthermore, Table 10 highlights the contribution and capacity of small-scale industries within Saudi Arabia's industrial sector. Between 2016 and 2021, their contribution to total industrial output has shown a declining trend, with an average growth rate of 93.48%. Communication technology is essential, serving as a critical resource for information, and should be regarded as a key factor of production.

Table 10: Proportion of Small-Scale Industries in Total Industry

Indicator	Years						Av. Growth
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Small-Scale Industries to Total Industry Value Added (%)	9.67	9.42	8.82	9.72	8.44	8.17	93.48
Growth (FBI)	100	97.41	91.21	100.52	87.28	84.49	

Source: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/985>

Figure 4 illustrates the population coverage of mobile networks in Saudi Arabia. While 4G network coverage has been increasing, 3G coverage has remained largely

stagnant. The Kingdom launched 5G networks in 2021. Information and communication technology is essential for manufacturing, production, and research, while R&D facilities support the development of advanced, efficient, and cost-effective manufacturing processes, leading to the provision of higher-quality products and services. In addition to this, Table 11 presents the state of research and development facilities in Saudi Arabia. Both the number of researchers and the level of research expenditures remain low relative to those in developed countries.

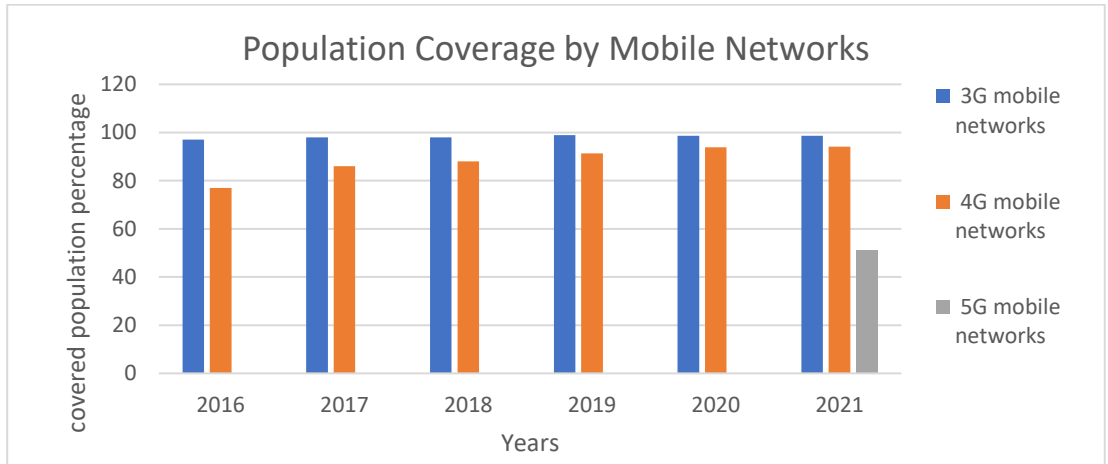


Figure 4: Population Coverage by Mobile Networks in Saudi Arabia

Source: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/985>

Table 11: Research and Development in Saudi Arabia, 2021

Research and Development Indicators	
Research and Development Expenditure as a Proportion of GDP	Number of Researchers (In Full-Time Equivalent) Per Million Inhabitants
0.555	725

Source: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/985>

Initiatives by Saudi Arabia to Attain the SDG 8 and SDG 9

To achieve the objectives of Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has undertaken initiatives in collaboration with the private sector to support the realisation of the SDGs. The government has identified areas of national priority, allocating substantial budgets for infrastructure development and research and development activities. Job creation strategies aim to stimulate SMEs and emerging industries, safeguard major Saudi enterprises, promote travel and tourism, and increase female participation across various sectors. Additionally, the government has emphasised the establishment and expansion of vocational training programmes to improve employability, alongside developing a national platform to raise awareness of volunteer work (Sustainable Development Initiatives by Saudi Arabia).

DISCUSSION

Between 2015 and 2022, the GDP growth rate and expenditures on R&D in Saudi Arabia exhibited a declining trend. The UN's funding allocation for SDG 8 and SDG 9 in the Kingdom is insufficient, with shortfalls of 65.56% and 48.71%, respectively. The total resources required for SDG 8 represent only 30% of those needed for SDG 9, while the actual funds provided by the UN for SDG 8 remain markedly lower than for SDG 9. During 2019 to 2022, employment increased in sectors including transportation and storage, accommodation and food services, information and communication, real estate activities, professional services, human health and social work, and arts, entertainment, and recreation.

In contrast, the number of employees declined in mining and quarrying, electricity and gas supply, construction, wholesale and retail trade, and motor vehicle repair. To achieve the targets of SDG 8 and SDG 9, the UN must enhance funding for economic diversification, technological advancement, job creation, eradication of child labour, promotion of sustainable tourism and cultural development, infrastructure expansion, sustainable industrialisation, technological innovation, and improved financial access for SMEs and other enterprises. The manufacturing sector is trending upwards and contributes to GDP growth, yet employment within this sector is decreasing, while the share of small-scale industries in total industrial employment is also declining. This highlights the need to promote small-scale industries to strengthen their contribution to total industry, increase youth employment, and support overall economic development. Unemployment is higher among younger workers compared with those aged 35 and above, and monthly earnings are greater for the older age group. Workplace safety has improved, as indicated by declining rates of fatal and non-fatal injuries, reflecting the provision of decent work. Although tourism contributes to GDP, its impact remains limited. Banking infrastructure, including branches and ATMs, is relatively low per 100,000 adults, while communication technology is advancing, with growing 4G and 5G coverage. Despite the progress, R&D facilities remain underdeveloped relative to developed countries.

CONCLUSION

The study and discussion indicate that the Saudi Arabian government is making substantial efforts to achieve the SDGs of the UN. However, the funds allocated for SDG 8 and SDG 9 remain insufficient to fully realise their objectives. The funding shortfall for SDG 8 is greater than that for SDG 9, both in absolute and proportional terms. Specifically, the total resources required for SDG 8 constitute only 30% of those needed for SDG 9, while the available funding for SDG 8 represents approximately 20% of that provided for SDG 9. Between 2019 and 2022, employment declined in mining and quarrying, electricity and gas supply, construction, wholesale and retail trade, and motor vehicle repair sectors. There is a pressing need to expand

financial support and vocational training to develop small-scale industries within these sectors, thereby increasing their contribution to total industrial employment and providing more job opportunities for youths under 35 years of age. Saudi Arabia possesses considerable potential in the tourism sector, particularly given its global prominence in religious tourism for Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. Additionally, strengthening research and development initiatives and facilities is essential to stimulate GDP growth, enhance employment, and advance industrialisation in the Kingdom.

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