

**Gulf Labour Markets, Migration, and Population (GLMM) Programme  
Gulf Research Center (GRC)**

and

**Regional Programme Gulf States  
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)**

**Highly Skilled Migration to Saudi Arabia:  
Labour Policy Reforms and the Global Competition for Talents**

**Webinar**

**Wednesday 22 January 2025: 2pm-3:30pm AST**

In their quest to become global talent hubs, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States are reshaping their labour markets. Saudi Arabia, the Arab world's strongest economy and home to almost half of the GCC's foreign workforce is spearheading reforms to attract highly skilled migrants. As a laboratory of post-oil, social and economic transition, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 reform masterplan aims to diversify and decarbonise the Saudi economy to alleviate the country's vulnerability to the volatility of hydrocarbon revenues. This reform process thus encompasses the promotion of technical innovation (e.g., "green" economy, development of AI research and applications), the development of new economic sectors (tourism, health, sport, etc.), and profound socio-economic reforms to boost employment of Saudi citizens, especially focusing on increasing female participation in the workforce.

Saudi's ambitious agenda is supported by wide-ranging policies such as the *Nitaqat* policy of "Saudisation" of the workforce, launched in 2011. By investing in education, especially Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and aligning educational outcomes with market needs, Vision 2030 aims to enhance employment opportunities for nationals in the private sector and positioning technical innovation at the heart of internationally competitive, knowledge-based economies. Recent measures such as the "Labour Market Initiative", which seeks to reform the sponsorship system, and the Premium Residency Card (PRC) scheme, are designed to attract foreign talent while also creating pathways to retain resident skilled workers in the country.

Meanwhile, the UAE has also emerged as a competitor in attracting global talent through its own progressive reforms. The introduction of the Golden Visas in 2019, followed by the Green Visas and other specialised permits, has revolutionised the UAE's immigration landscape.

The webinar will reflect on the major reforms in Saudi Arabia's labour and migration policies over the last decade and assess the outcomes of these changes on future prospects for increased highly skilled migration to the Kingdom. A comparative insight with the UAE will be proposed.

Questions tackled in the webinar include:

- Economic and labour reforms, technological change: what are the new skills on demand?
- Expected impacts of the reforms on Saudi and foreign workers' profiles.
- Education and training programmes for young Saudi professionals: a success?
- Recent migration policy changes: are they enhancing the attractiveness of Saudi Arabia and the UAE to foreign talents?