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The Premium Residency Programme in Saudi Arabia: History, Design, Acquisition Dynamics, and Holder Profile

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Executive Summary

Saudi Arabia's Premium Residency (PR) should be understood as part of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 strategy to attract investors, entrepreneurs, and highly skilled professionals, thereby supporting economic diversification, innovation, and knowledge transfer. This brief analyses the evolution of the Saudi PR system from its 2019 legal launch to its 2024 expansion into seven products, and examines what limited available data reveal about acquisition dynamics and holder profiles. The evidence suggests a large registration and application funnel but selective conversion, with inflows concentrated in talent-oriented and investor categories. Holders appear predominantly mid- to late career, overwhelmingly married, and regionally concentrated among nationals from Asian and North African countries. The brief argues that PR is evolving from a broad settlement privilege into a more targeted economic instrument linked to labour-market needs, capital attraction, and family retention. It recommends improving public data quality and disclosure, measuring investor and talent outcomes more systematically, publishing gender-disaggregated statistics, strengthening family-integration measures including youth and retirees, and widening access for highly skilled Saudi-born young professionals.

Introduction

Across the Gulf, states have introduced long-term residence schemes that loosen the traditional sponsorship model for selected categories of foreign residents, aiming to attract investors, entrepreneurs, and highly skilled professionals to support economic diversification, innovation, and knowledge transfer. The United Arab Emirates has developed the Golden Visa, while Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar have also introduced special long-term or privileged residence routes for investors and other targeted groups. Saudi Arabia's Premium Residency is part of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 strategy and belongs to this wider regional reconfiguration of migration governance, but it has developed its own institutional design, policy rationale and degree of selectivity. It combines settlement, investment, talent-attraction, and family-stability objectives within a single legal framework administered by the Premium Residency Center.

This policy brief examines the history and evolution of the programme, the design of its current seven-product architecture, the available evidence on registrations, applications, and issuances, and the socio-demographic and occupational profile of holders. Because official public data remain limited, fragmented, and methodologically uneven, the analysis can identify broad patterns but not provide a fully comprehensive assessment of Premium Residency dynamics. It argues that the programme's meaning changed significantly with the January 2024 expansion, which moved PR beyond its original limited- and unlimited-duration logic toward a more segmented tool for attracting strategic skills, capital, and long-term residents. The brief concludes by identifying the main policy implications of this shift and proposing recommendations to improve transparency, evaluation, and programme targeting.[1]

1. History and evolution of the Premium Residency programme[2]

1.1 Legal foundations and initial objectives

Following a Council of Ministers decision on 14 May 2019, Saudi Arabia's Premium Residency Law was issued by Royal Decree No. M/106 dated 10/9/1440H, 15 May 2019. It establishes the legal rules, rights, privileges, and obligations associated with Premium Residency.

The framework was designed to provide qualifying non-Saudis with a more stable and autonomous residence status than the conventional expatriate (kafala-based) system. While remaining subject to Saudi laws, foreign nationals holding Premium Residency reside in the Kingdom with expanded rights and benefits not available under standard residency, including:

- Ownership of residential property
- The right to engage in business and investment activities
- Protection of civil and financial rights
- Access to public services such as education and healthcare
- Freedom of movement in and out of the Kingdom without exit/re-entry permits or a visa
- The right to sponsor family members
- Employment rights for spouses and children in the private sector
- Exemption from certain expatriate and dependent fees[3]

While the Programme does not confer citizenship, it offers a stable, long-term, and legally protected environment for residence and business.

1.2 Institutional governance and legal embedding

The Premium Residency system is managed by an independent government entity: the Premium Residency Center (PRC). The Premium Residency Center is governed by a Board of Directors composed of senior government officials. Under the 2022 Regulation of the Premium Residency Center,[4] the Board consists of:

1. A Chair, appointed by order of the Prime Minister on the proposal of the Chair of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs
2. Minister of Culture
3. Minister of Investment
4. Minister of Human Resources and Social Development
5. Minister of Economy and Planning
6. Deputy Minister of Interior
7. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
8. CEO of the Royal Commission for Riyadh City

The PRC's mandate includes:

- Assessing eligibility of applicants
- Issuing and renewing Premium Residency permits
- Ensuring compliance with regulations
- Coordinating with other government bodies (Interior, Investment, Commerce, Human Resources, Central Bank).

The Premium Residency is integrated with other legal provisions and operates within the broader Saudi legal framework, including:

- Foreign Investment Law (economic activities)
- Companies Law (business establishment)
- Labour Law (employment of family members without sponsorship)
- Real estate ownership regulations for foreigners

1.3 Two phases of programme development

This first phase of the Premium Residency programme launched in May 2019 created its initial legal framework and the original two schemes of the programme, the limited- and unlimited-duration residency routes. The second major phase came in January 2024, when the Premium Residency Center launched five new products: Special Talent Residency, Gifted Residency, Investor Residency, Entrepreneur Residency, and Real Estate Owner Residency. These "products," residency categories or schemes, are intended to attract and retain talents, investors, and entrepreneurs, and to support Saudi Arabia’s economic transformation, employment creation, and knowledge transfer.[5] These five new categories were added to the existing Limited Duration and Unlimited Duration PR routes, producing the current seven-product architecture (Table 1).

This 2024 expansion is central to understanding the current profile of holders. It shifted PR from a broad privilege-based residency scheme to a more segmented economic instrument. Rather than relying mainly on the willingness and ability to pay for long-term residency, the programme now seeks to channel applicants into targeted categories linked to skills, capital, business formation, property ownership, cultural achievement and professional seniority.

1.4 Procedures for applicants to Premium Residency

Applications for Premium Residency are generally submitted through the Premium Residency Center's online portal. The standard process is to create an account, sign in, select the relevant product, complete the application form, and upload the required supporting documents. The applicant, or an authorized representative where permitted, then submits the file electronically, after which the Center verifies compliance with the applicable conditions and coordinates checks with the relevant authorities before deciding whether to issue, renew, or refuse the permit. If the required information or documents are not submitted within 30 days, or required fees are not paid, the Center cancels the application and closes the electronic account.

Applicants for employment-related categories are limited to professions opened to non-nationals, and to employers among international, regional, governmental, and semi-governmental entities, as well as private entities and companies with priority specialisations listed by the PRC. The eligibility criteria for the Special Talent residency product require an employment contract with private sector companies in the Kingdom listed on the dedicated page, for instance.[6]

Across the programme, the baseline requirements include a valid passport, proof of financial solvency, a clean criminal record, a health report showing the applicant is free from communicable diseases, and lawful residency status for those applying from inside Saudi Arabia. Product-specific tracks then require additional evidence, as described in Table 1.

2. Description of the current programme

The Premium Residency is designed to attract and retain talents, professionals, investors, and entrepreneurs, allowing holders to live in Saudi Arabia and enjoy various benefits. As indicated earlier, these include family Premium Residency, the ability to conduct business, real estate ownership, transfer between entities without fees, exemption from expatriate and dependent fees, travel to and from Saudi Arabia without a visa, and hosting or inviting relatives.[7]

The current seven "products," or residency programmes' categories and subcategories (as existing in the Special Talent and Entrepreneurs Residency programmes, for instance), are subject to different rules, regulations, fees, and conditions. They target different populations considered beneficial to Saudi Arabia's socioeconomic transition process.[8]

Table 1. The Premium Residency schemes in Saudi Arabia and their characteristics (as of May 2026)

Programme	Target population	Main requirements and fees	Benefits and conditionalities
Special Talent Residency	Exceptional professionals in scientific and healthcare fields, researchers and executives.	Salary and qualification thresholds vary by track (subcategory): • SAR 35,000 for health/scientific professionals, • SAR 14,000 for researchers, • SAR 80,000 for executives, plus points, experience, recommendation and qualification requirements. Fee: SAR 4,000.	General PR benefits. May become permanent if eligibility continues and the holder resides in Saudi Arabia for 30 months within five years.
Gifted Residency	Talents and specialists in sports, culture, and arts.	Must meet criteria approved by the relevant sports or culture ecosystem. Fee: SAR 4,000.	Five-year residency, renewable once if criteria continue to be met; possible pathway to permanent residency linked to continued eligibility and residence period.
Investor Residency	Investors seeking to invest in Saudi economic activities.	Valid investment licence, applicant share of at least SAR 7 million, and evidence of employing 10 employees. Fee: SAR 4,000.	Direct conditional permanent residency, subject to maintaining investment and employment conditions.
Entrepreneur Residency	Startup founders, entrepreneurs, and innovators.	• Category 1: entrepreneurial licence and approved investment round of at least SAR 400,000. • Category 2: investment round of SAR 15 million, plus ownership-share conditions. Fee: SAR 4,000.	General benefits; ability to nominate two staff members for Special Talent Residency; Nitaqat exemption for first three operational years; Category 2 may obtain conditional permanent residency if job-creation conditions are met.
Real Estate Owner Residency	Individuals owning or benefiting from qualifying real estate assets.	Residential real estate worth at least SAR 4 million, with valuation by accredited appraisers. Fee: SAR 4,000.	Residency linked to continued qualifying real estate ownership/value.
Limited Duration PR	Individuals wishing to live in Saudi Arabia	General statutory requirements: valid passport, financial solvency, clean criminal record, health report free from communicable diseases,	General benefits for the approved period.

	for a defined period.	and legal residence if applying from inside the Kingdom. Fee: SAR 100,000 per year.	
Unlimited Duration PR	Individuals wishing to live in Saudi Arabia on an unlimited basis.	Same general statutory requirements. Fee: SAR 800,000 per year.	General benefits on an unlimited basis, subject to compliance with PR law and regulations.

Source: https://pr.gov.sa/Select-products.

The design of the PR programme shows that Saudi Arabia uses PR for several policy goals at once. Special Talent, Gifted and Executive tracks are human-capital tools. Investor and Entrepreneur tracks are capital and firm-formation tools. Real Estate Owner Residency supports property-linked settlement and real-estate market participation. Limited and Unlimited Duration PR preserve the original broad-settlement logic of the programme, designed to attract and retain wealthy residents.

Compared to other special residency programmes in the region,[9] the PR rules set relatively concrete thresholds for qualifying for one of the seven schemes. For example, Special Talent Residency uses employment, salary, degree, and points-based requirements. However, meeting these requirements does not automatically confer the right to obtain Premium Residency. The Premium Residency Law states that, even when requirements are satisfied, the Center reviews the application and decides whether granting the Premium Residency, renewing it, or even revoking it is "subject to public interest,"[10] which may be interpreted in many ways; the permit is issued by decision of the CEO of the Premium Residency Center. The Board may also add special conditions when necessary.

3. Acquisition dynamics: a large funnel but selective conversion

3.1 The data issue

The Premium Residency Center portal publishes product information and service terms, but no downloadable statistical dashboard or ad hoc data in any form. The Premium Residency Center appears to submit annual reports to the Saudi Shura Council, however. The Council reportedly discussed the Center's annual report for FY 1446/1447H on 6 May 2026, but the press account does not share figures[11] and the PRC reports are not available to the public. Isolated figures quoted by government officials during interviews have been sporadically released in the press.

The partial data used in this paper were released in the Saudi Open Data Platform where government entities publish datasets, under the National Data Bank (hereafter: PRC files). However, the Open Data Platform and its content was no longer accessible to the author at the time of writing, which makes it impossible to update figures.[12] More generally, available data is scarce and cannot support comprehensive funnel analysis. Methodologically, figures in the source files seem to use different extraction periods and definitions. The scope of data is not systematically defined and conceals, for example, the profile of applicant/holder (prime holder or family member especially).

In another example, one file reports 68,516 platform registrants in 2024, while another reports 55,591 registrants for January 2024–July 2025. These figures may thus reflect different definitions, systems, extraction dates, or counting rules, and should therefore not be combined mechanically. Some datasets lacked dates of reference, rendering them unusable. Information useful for a longitudinal analysis of the PR dynamics is also missing. Beyond the partial numbers of registrations and applications quoted sporadically, comprehensive and timely records of approved, rejected, pending, and cancelled applications, as well as renewals (for one-year permits) and withdrawals, for instance, are not disclosed. Lastly, information on PR holders is presented as percentages and the number and characteristics of holders at specific reference dates (stocks) is unknown.

3.2 Early acquisition dynamics

The uploaded applicant and holder synthesis shows a significant registration and application funnel. It records 55,591 platform registrants for the period from 1 January 2024 to 22 July 2025, compared with 40,163 applications over the same broad period.[13] PRC files record 25,639 applications from 10 January 2024 to 8 January 2025, and 22,171 product-level applications from 1 January to 30 September 2025. Press sources reported that, according to official statistics, 8,074 Premium Residency permits were issued in 2024 alone to more than 140 nationalities.[14] Yet, some of these may have been issued earlier, to pre-2024 applicants and cannot be compared to figures of applicants to the PR during 2024.

Saudi Arabia’s Premium Residency programme thus shows strong latent demand and a rapidly expanding applicant pipeline, especially after the 2024 expansion of categories. However, while clearly exceeding the scale of more selective or newer Gulf schemes such as Qatar’s permanent residency and Oman’s Golden Residency, Saudi Arabia remains behind the UAE’s more mature Golden Visa ecosystem, in terms of PR issued. Dubai, in particular, granted significantly larger numbers of special residencies: 151,666 Golden Visas were issued between 2019 and 2022, according to GDRFA Dubai.[15] More recently, Dubai reported over 167,124 residencies granted to families of specialised talents between 2021 and Q1 2026, plus large numbers for families of real-estate investors, scientists/specialists, investors, and retirees.[16] Bahrain, though demographically smaller, had issued more than 10,000 Golden Visas to beneficiaries of over 100 nationalities by the end of 2024.[17]

3.3 Distribution of inflows by programme

The only set of data showing the distribution of PR applicants and holders by programme and category concerns the first nine months of 2025 (01 January to 30 September 2025). Data in Table 2 suggests a concentration in "talents" related and "investor" related categories. This data, however, reflects inflows of applications and issuances over the nine-month period, and could differ from the stocks of PR holders at a specific date, considering the recent expansion in the PR categories. Also, it is unclear why the Executive Talent subcategory, which is part of the "Special talent" category, is singled out. This suggests that the "Special Talent" residency figures concern the other two subcategories composing this scheme (Researchers and Healthcare and Scientific Professionals).[18]

Table 2. Distribution of inflows of PR applicants and holders by programme/subcategory (1 January to 30 September 2025)

PR Programme/category	Applicants		Holders
	Number	(%)	(%)
Special Talent Residency	10,777	48.60%	49.50%
Investor Residency	7,113	32.10%	28.60%
Executive Talent (subtype)	2,333	10.50%	13.90%
Real Estate Owner Residency	765	3.50%	4.70%
Limited/Unlimited Duration	720	3.20%	1.80%
Gifted Residency	399	1.80%	1.10%
Entrepreneur Residency	64	0.30%	0.40%
Total	**22,171**	**100%**	**100%**

Source: Premium Residency Center (PRC)

Beyond substantial demand, three patterns stand out. First, talent-led acquisition dominates. Special Talent plus Executive Talent accounts for 59.1% of applicants and about 63.5% of holder shares. If Gifted Residency is included, talent-oriented tracks rise to 60.9% of applicants and 64.6% of holder share.

Second, Investor Residency is the second major pillar. It accounts for 32.1% of applicants and 28.6% of holders. The lower holder share relative to applicant share may reflect more demanding documentation, investment verification, timing lags, or stricter due diligence. The files do not provide enough evidence to identify the exact cause.

Third, the general Limited/Unlimited route is small in the new acquisition mix. It accounts for only 3.2% of 2025 applicants and 1.8% of holders. This suggests that the post-2024 targeted tracks are now more important than the older general premium-residency route.

4. Socio-demographic characteristics of PR holders

A 2025 PRC dataset on the age distribution of Premium Residency holders portrays them as a relatively senior and economically established population (Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of inflows of PR holders by age group (1 January to 31 December 2025)

Age group	Share of holders
21–30	1.6%
31–40	15.9%
41–50	42.0%
51–60	28.3%
61–65	6.8%
66 and above	5.4%
Total	**100.0%**

Source: Premium Residency Center (PRC)

The 41–60 age groups alone account for 70.3% of holders, while the 31–60 range accounts for 86.2%. This is consistent with the programme's emphasis on investors, executives, senior experts, researchers, and established professionals.

The geographic origin is also concentrated: Asia and Africa together account for 84.3% of holders. The files do not provide nationality-level data, so the analysis cannot identify the leading countries of origin. However, given the dominance of low-wage workers among nationals of Sub-Saharan African countries in Saudi Arabia,[19] it is likely that the large numbers of Africans granted PR are mostly nationals of Arab countries, especially Egypt or Sudan. Such a regional distribution is indeed consistent with Saudi Arabia's broader expatriate labour-market geography and the presence of long-established Asian as well as Arab professional communities in the Kingdom, from North African and Mashreq countries (Table 4). It is worth noting that some PR holders may have been born in Saudi Arabia but still hold the citizenship of their ascendants. This is due to the Gulf states' general absence of birthright citizenship or naturalization based on long-term residence. Moreover, acquiring nationality through marriage to a national is generally not available to foreign men.

Table 4. Distribution of inflows of PR holders by continent of origin/country of nationality (n.d.)

Continent	Share of holders
Asia	55.2%
Africa	29.0%
Europe	9.9%
North America	5.6%
South America	0.3%
Total	**100.0%**

Source: Premium Residency Center (PRC)

The marital-status distribution of PR holders is striking. About 94.8% of holders are married, compared with 3.6% single, 1.2% divorced, and 0.4% widowed. This suggests that PR is functioning as a family-stability instrument as much as an individual economic-status instrument. The official benefits reinforce the notion that family residence, exemption from dependent fees, and easier mobility are likely to be central to the programme's attractiveness.

No gender breakdown is available in the uploaded files. There is no basis to conclude that the holders are exclusively male, nor is there any basis to assess gender balance. This is an important data gap.

5. Occupational profile: healthcare, investors and executives

The most frequently uploaded category is Special Talent/Exceptional Talent, but as indicated earlier, Special Talent targets exceptional professionals across several sectors and occupations: scientific and healthcare fields, researchers, and executives. Table 2 indicates that Executives accounted for 13.9% of all inflows from PR holders in 2025.

No specific data is available on the economic sector of PR holders, beyond sporadic estimates quoted during officials' interviews at dedicated events. For example, the Saudi press quoting the Ministry of

Communications and Information Technology reported that 685 exceptional talents and researchers in the technology sector had been awarded premium residencies in Saudi Arabia under the Special Talent Residency product, as of early 2025. These experts hailed from diverse countries worldwide, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Brazil, India, Pakistan, and Egypt.[20]

Healthcare is one of the publicly documented occupational segments. According to the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), as of October 2024, some 2,645 exceptional healthcare professionals had received Special Talent Premium Residency across 152 priority healthcare specializations and 56 countries. The announcement refers to doctors and other practitioners, indicating a broader clinical and health-practitioner profile.[21]

Broader health workforce data helps explain why healthcare is a priority. Healthcare workforce statistics from the Ministry of Health indicated that foreign physicians and nurses, for instance, outnumbered their Saudi counterparts. The 74,613 non-Saudi physicians and 243,336 nurses employed in the Kingdom made up 57 percent of their respective professions.[22] However, workforce size should not be confused with PR-holder eligibility. Ordinary staff nurses may be numerous, but the PR requirements for healthcare/scientific professionals are more likely to favour senior, specialized, or highly paid profiles. The SAR 35,000 salary threshold for healthcare professionals may therefore exclude most nurses, despite their essential role in sustaining healthcare systems in Saudi Arabia and across the Gulf. The difficulty of meeting this financial threshold is one of the reasons behind Gulf states' difficulties retaining these professionals in the country. Filipino nurses, especially, often migrate onwards from the region to Western countries, from the region to Western countries, which are perceived as offering more rewarding financial and social inclusion conditions.[23]

Outside healthcare, the largest clearly identifiable PR-holder category is Business Investors. The uploaded data show Investor Residency at 28.6% among holders and 32.1% among 2025 applicants. SPA separately reported that 1,238 international investors had obtained Investor Residency, as of November 2024.

6. Policy interpretation

The PR programme appears to be moving from a broad, wealth-based settlement privilege toward a targeted attraction and retention system. Its acquisition profile is dominated by talent and investors; its demographic profile is older and family-based; and its official design links residency to economic contribution, knowledge transfer, and strategic-sector value. This gives the programme a dual policy role: attracting new high-value entrants while offering a more secure institutional position to (in other words, retaining) selected long-term residents already embedded in the Kingdom.

This interpretation has several policy implications.

First, PR is not primarily a youth-mobility route. The age structure points toward established residents with capital, credentials, experience, or seniority, which is coherent with the programme's criteria but may limit its usefulness for early-career talent. Available public data also do not distinguish between applicants already residing in Saudi Arabia and applicants applying from abroad. A substantial share of PR applicants may therefore be long-term expatriate residents, especially among married and older cohorts, using PR less as an entry channel than as a mechanism for long-term family stability and institutional certainty.

At the same time, the scope for youth mobility remains constrained by Saudization policies and the size of the young Saudi labour force. PR holders' family members, especially children under the age of 25,[24] may benefit from PR-derived residence and some access to the private-sector, but their transition into employment is not equivalent to an open youth-mobility pathway. For exceptionally gifted youth, the Saudi Gifted Residency creates a targeted route in culture, sports, and related fields; however, regional competition means that the programme's attractiveness will depend on whether it is accompanied by visible education, training, and career opportunities.

Second, family benefits are not secondary. The high married-holder share implies that family inclusion may be one of the programme's strongest retention mechanisms. Schooling, healthcare access, housing, spouses' employment, children's transition into the labour market, and secure options around retirement should therefore be treated as part of the PR policy ecosystem. For many long-term expatriates, PR is not only about investment or job mobility, but also about reducing uncertainty about family continuity, settlement security, and future planning.

Third, PR is not merely an investor visa. Investors are a major category, but the largest pillar is human capital. In policy terms, the programme should be evaluated not only by investment volume, but also by retained expertise, research output, sectoral capability, leadership development and knowledge transfer.

Fourth, PR should be understood as a regulated mobility instrument rather than unrestricted labour-market access. It can reduce dependence on the traditional sponsorship structure and allow PR holders to move between private-sector employers more freely than standard expatriate workers, but employment-related tracks remain tied to qualifying occupations, salary thresholds, and continuing eligibility (see Table 1). Since June 2026, PR holders also require a dedicated work permit through the Qiwa labour platform for employment, adding a formal regulatory step to job mobility.[25] The rules do not appear to provide a guaranteed unemployment grace period: a short job gap may be manageable if the residency remains valid, but loss of the qualifying contract, extended unemployment, or movement to a position below the relevant threshold may create risks to renewal, permanent conversion, or continued compliance.

Fifth, PR sits at the intersection of immigration policy and labour-market reform. The central policy question is whether the programme is evolving primarily into (1) a talent-attraction mechanism for new inflows, (2) a retention mechanism for already established high-skilled expatriates and their families, or (3) a hybrid institutional layer between temporary migration and permanent settlement. The currently available evidence points mainly toward the second and third functions, while its longer-term effectiveness will depend on alignment with Saudization, private-sector employment policy, and national workforce planning.

7. Policy recommendations

1. Disclose best quality, detailed, and timely data: a PR statistical bulletin. First, the funnel definitions should be clarified**.** By defining and separately publishing registrants, started applications, submitted applications, eligible applications, approved holders, rejected applicants, pending cases, and withdrawals, the PR system would prevent confusion between interest, applications, and actual grants.

Second, the Premium Residency Center could publish statistics of stocks and flows of PR applicants and holders on a regular basis, and disaggregate data by product, subtype, nationality, gender, age, marital status, sector, occupation, approval status, approval rate, rejection reason, cancellation, and renewal. This would improve policy evaluation (assess whether programmes are attractive enough to the targeted specialties) and public understanding.

2. Improve PR programme's awareness for prospective applicants. Better data would also improve prospective applicants' confidence in the system and help channel relevant candidates. For example, disaggregating the Special Talent category into healthcare/scientific professionals, researchers, and executives, and breaking down the healthcare cohort by profession, is essential for assessing whether PR helps address shortages in a priority sector such as healthcare. As discussed in section 6, the PR regulations should also include sufficiently clear information regarding predictable grace periods or transition mechanisms that reduce perceived employment-risk penalties during job changes. Even if such flexibility exists administratively in practice, uncertainty from the user's perspective can influence behaviour, and trust in the programme's sustainability for various profiles of highly skilled professionals.

More generally, advertising the PR programme's characteristics and achievements would encourage more high-value-added foreign residents to apply and actively contribute to Saudi Arabia's socioeconomic advancement process.

3. Build family-integration policy around PR and expand target populations. Dependent residence and spousal labour-market access are addressed in the PR programme. However, given the high married-holder share, PR could be better supported and promoted to new target populations by adding to the programme policies on schooling, housing, and promotion of long-term settlement services, targeting retired parents of beneficiaries and retired beneficiaries. Being able to stay in the Gulf legally after retirement is a recurrent concern of foreign residents, whose descendants are often established in the Gulf.[26] Opening avenues for secure stay, more accessible financially than the limited/unlimited duration PR, would greatly add to the attractiveness of the programme among foreign professionals.

4. Prepare tools to measure investor outcomes. After a sufficient amount of time has elapsed to allow evaluation of the PR programme, investor PR, especially, should be evaluated through investment maintained, jobs created, sectors entered, business survival, local procurement, and technology transfer—not only the number of permits issued. The "entrepreneur" track may also be strengthened: Entrepreneur Residency is small in the uploaded data, but strategically important. Future metrics should include funding raised, startup survival, Saudi employment, intellectual property, revenue growth, and ecosystem contribution. Conceiving "measurable economic performance indicators, with periodic reviews to ensure a shift from a focus on quantity to maximizing quality and sustainable economic impact" was actually a demand expressed to the PRC Board by the Shura Council during the Council's last meeting on 6 May 2026.[27]

5. Publish gender-disaggregated data. The lack of gender information prevents meaningful assessment of women's participation among PR holders. This is especially important for healthcare, research, and entrepreneurship.

6. Promote the inclusion of Saudi-born young professionals. The analysis of the age structure of PR holders in 2025 highlighted the dominance of late-career professionals. However, recent research and fieldwork on Gulf-born, second- and third-generation highly skilled young professionals show strong attachment to the societies in which they were born and raised, familiarity with local cultural and social norms, and a clear willingness to contribute their skills to Saudi Arabia's socioeconomic development.[28] Making Premium Residency more accessible to these highly skilled young professionals would help retain their skills in Saudi Arabia and align them with the Kingdom's economic needs, rather than encouraging them to seek long-term stability elsewhere.[29]

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia's Premium Residency programme is a strategic instrument for attracting and, especially, for retaining economically valuable residents. Its history begins with the legal framework of 2019, but its current policy meaning is shaped by the 2024 expansion into targeted products. Available evidence indicates that most beneficiaries entered the PR programme through the Special Talent and Investor pathways. Holders are mainly mid-career to senior professionals, overwhelmingly married, and concentrated among Asian nationals and, likely, Arab nationals from North Africa and the Mashreq, with smaller numbers from Western countries. Data will help clarify this further and draw further conclusions and implications for future programmes, especially for the kind of talent and investors that would be best placed to contribute to the economic diversification, development, and capacity building of the Kingdom.

Healthcare professionals are clearly an important PR group, but no evidence is available to measure their distribution across professions and medical specialties. Outside healthcare, Business Investors are the largest clearly identifiable category, while Executives are the largest identifiable professional role.

The programme's next stage should focus on measurement. The first question may be whether strong demand already exists. The number of applicants and conversion rate may tell different stories. A second policy question is whether PR holders are delivering the intended outcomes: investment, innovation, job creation, knowledge transfer, sectoral capacity, and long-term family settlement. Better data, and more immediately, more data made available to the public by relevant data producers (primarily, the PR center, as well as the General Authority for Statistics--GAStat, information channels opened by beneficiaries, etc.) would allow Saudi Arabia to demonstrate the programme's contribution to Vision 2030 and refine it into one of the region's most sophisticated talent-and-investment residency systems

Endnotes

[1] I would like to express my gratitude to the reviewers of this paper for their enriching remarks and suggestions.

[2] The definition and legal foundations of the Premium Residency system are taken from https://pr.gov.sa/ and from AlMadani and Co. (n.d.) The Premium Residency in Saudi Arabia: A Comprehensive Legal Guide for Investors, Professionals, and Individuals under Saudi Law. https://almadanilaw.com/the-premium-residency-in-saudi-arabia-a-comprehensive-legal-guide-for-investors-professionals-and-individuals-under-saudi-law.

[3] https://pr.gov.sa/benefits.

[4] Regulation of the Premium Residency Center, Council of Ministers Resolution No. 555 dated 17/9/1443H, Article on the Board of Directors, published by the Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers. https://laws.boe.gov.sa/BoeLaws/Laws/LawDetails/bc27d6e4-560a-4778-9364-aeac00ca7e3b/1.

[5] Saudi Press Agency. (2024, January 10). *Saudi Premium Residency Center launches five new products to attract and retain talents, investors and entrepreneurs*. https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/w2026872.

[6] https://pr.gov.sa/product-details-apply-special-talent.

[7] https://pr.gov.sa/services-terms; https://mcit.gov.sa/en/node/205189.

[8] https://pr.gov.sa/premium-residency-regulations.

[9] For example, the UAE Golden Visa framework uses both objective thresholds and authority recommendations. The UAE rules allow direct applications through the ICA platform, but also applications by recommendation/nomination from competent federal or local authorities. They also provide that Golden Residence may be granted to prominent or influential persons in listed or other categories based on authority recommendation (see: https://uaelegislation.gov.ae/en/legislations/1601/regulations/836/download).

[10] https://pr.gov.sa/services-terms, item 12.1 (h).

[11] Shura Council. (2026, May 6). مجلس الشورى يعقد جلسته العادية الثلاثين من أعمال السنة الثانية للدورة التاسعة [The Shura Council holds its thirtieth ordinary session of the second year of the ninth term]. https://www.shura.gov.sa/wps/wcm/connect/ShuraArabic/internet/News/19-11-1447-02/.

[12] https://data.gov.sa/. Last consulted on 25 February 2026. The author is based outside Saudi Arabia and could not access the platform from the end of April to 30 June 2026, the period during which the Brief was written and revised. It is unclear whether it is due to an IP-based or network-level restriction, possibly geoblocking.

[13] Based on section 1.4, applicants are those who have moved beyond registration into the Premium Residency application process, whether pending review, incomplete within the allowed period, rejected, or approved but not yet issued a permit.

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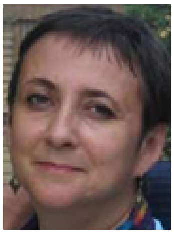
About the author



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Referencing Publications: Citations and quotations should always include either the long or the short reference. Generally the long reference should be used. In exceptional cases (e.g., not enough room) the short reference should be used.

- **Long reference:** Françoise De Bel-Air, "The Premium Residency Programme in Saudi Arabia: History, Design, Acquisition Dynamics, and Holder Profile", Policy Brief No. 35/2026, Gulf Labour Markets, Migration, and Population (GLMM) Programme, https:// www.gulfmigration.grc.net.
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- **Short reference:** F. De Bel-Air, "The Premium Residency Programme in Saudi Arabia: History, Design, Acquisition Dynamics, and Holder Profile", Policy Brief No. 35/2026, GLMM, https://www.gulfmigration.grc.net.
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