

Doing Business in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2023

A Tax and Legal Guide

March 2023





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Welcome to this guide

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is the largest economy in the Middle East with an economy historically driven by oil production. In April 2016, the KSA Government introduced the Vision 2030 plan which included a number of new initiatives aimed at diversifying the KSA economy.

The plan for Vision 2030 is to reduce KSA's dependence on oil, and develop service sectors, such as health, education, infrastructure, recreation and tourism. The sweeping reforms outlined in Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Plan affect vast areas of the government, the economy and foreign investors. The reform's tax and legal policies will play a significant role as part of the government's efforts to diversify revenues away from oil and address the broader social and economic objectives.

To help achieve Vision 2030, the Public Investment Fund, a sovereign wealth fund in KSA, was tasked with developing the "Giga Projects". The biggest Giga Projects to date are Qiddiya Entertainment City, NEOM, the Red Sea Project and Amaala Resort. These projects are intended to shape the future of tourism and meet the social and cultural needs of Saudi Arabian citizens.

The implementation of Vision 2030 as well as the recent amendments to the KSA Companies Law, the new Bankruptcy Law and the new Professional Companies Law makes this guide timely.

This guide is intended to provide an introduction to the legal and taxation aspects of doing business in KSA, particularly items that an inbound investor may typically have in mind.

We hope you find this guide useful.

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Introduction

KSA is located in the Middle East between the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea and is home to Islam's two holiest sites, in Makkah and Madinah. KSA was founded in 1932 and is divided into 13 provinces, with Riyadh being the capital. The official language is Arabic, with English widely spoken and heavily used in business and the Saudi Riyal (SAR) being the currency. Roughly, ten (10) million foreign workers play an important role in the KSA economy, particularly in the oil and service sectors.

The country is a leading producer of oil and natural gas and possesses about twenty per cent (20%) of the world's proven petroleum reserves. KSA is the largest exporter of petroleum, and plays a leading role in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). However, the government continues to pursue economic reform, diversification and growth within the private sectors. Diversification efforts are focused on power generation, telecommunications, tourism, natural gas exploration, and petrochemical sectors. Those efforts also include a number of "giga" projects including Neom, the Red Sea Development, Amaala, Qiddiya Entertainment City, Al Ula and others.

KSA is an absolute monarchy and does not have a written constitution. However, in 1992, the Basic Law of Governance (the Basic Law) was adopted by royal decree. The Basic Law is a constitution-like document that contains provisions similar to those found in other countries' written Constitutions.

The legal system is based on civil law, and relies on Shari'ah doctrines and Islamic teachings. KSA does not acknowledge the doctrine of precedent and in the event that various sources of law do not provide an answer, judges will apply their discretionary authority to render a decision. The lack of precedent has resulted in different judgments being awarded in similar cases. In 2010, the KSA Government announced its intention to codify Shari'ah to decrease the divergence in judgments, but this is yet to be implemented.

Shari'ah has also been supplemented by regulations issued by royal decree. Nevertheless, Shari'ah remains the primary source of law, especially in areas such as criminal and family law.

Legislative updates

KSA continues to announce significant legislative reforms to enhance the legal and judicial system. Set out below are brief details of some of the key recent new laws with other, like the Civil Transactions Law (see below) at the draft stage.

New Companies Law & Noteworthy Changes

The KSA Cabinet approved a new Companies Law in June 2022 which came into force in January 2023. The new Companies Law reflects the Vision 2030 and introduces a range of new provisions designed to further encourage foreign investment and support the private sector. The new Companies Law also includes additional provisions governing Professional Companies.

The previous mandatory statutory reserve of 30% of a company's capital has now been made optional subject to companies including the provision in their respective articles of association/company statutes.

Additional changes include the ability for joint stock companies issue different classes of shares, and the removal of the maximum number of board members

The new Companies law also introduces changes to regulations that apply if a company's losses exceed 50% of its share capital.

Tag-Along & Drag-Along Rights have now been introduced.

The Ministry of Investment of Saudi Arabia

Since becoming an independent ministry in 2020 the Ministry of Investment of Saudi Arabia (MISA) continues to provide an increasing range of services to assist foreign investors looking to invest in the KSA economy.

Regional HQ Initiative

In February 2021 the KSA government announced an initiative to encourage multinational companies to locate their regional HQ in the KSA. The initiative is being led by MISA and the Royal Commission for Riyadh City and offers a variety of incentives to support the initiative.

In 2021, the KSA government announced that, with effect from January 2024, it intends to cease contracting with companies and commercial institutions with regional headquarters not located in KSA.

The regional HQ should support, manage and provide strategic direction to its branches, subsidiaries and affiliates operating in the MENA region.

The Regional Headquarters Regulations stipulate that it must undertake certain mandatory activities, they also allow the RHQ to undertake various optional activities, with a minimum of three (3). The RHQ also stipulate the minimum number of employees the Regional Headquarters must have within the first year.

Anti-Concealment Law

After a delay in its implementation, the new Anti-Concealment Law has now come into force. The Anti-Concealment Law applies to KSA nationals, non-KSA nationals and accomplices who engage in any arrangement which enables a non-KSA party to carry out economic activities in KSA without being duly licensed by the respective authorities. The Anti-Concealment Law has introduced strict additional penalties which are determined on a case-by-case basis and which include fines, imprisonment, deportation, prohibition from entering the KSA market in the future and/or payment of all Zakat, taxes and fees associated with the concealment act.

E-Commerce Law

The E-Commerce Law provides a standalone framework which regulates e-commerce activities in KSA. It applies to both consumers and e-commerce service providers (whether inside or outside KSA). The E-Commerce Law imposes various obligations on service providers to protect consumer's personal data, to include specific provisions in their terms of business and a requirement register their E-store on the Ministry of Commerce's register.

Professional Companies

As previously mentioned, the New Companies Law contains provisions concerning Professional companies although such companies will continue to be subject to additional restrictions and requirements in terms of ownership and management, including:

- a cap of 30% on the percentage of ownership of non-professional investors;
- a requirement for a minimum 25% KSA ownership; and
- eligibility criteria for the Manager.

Government Tenders and Procurement Law

The law sets out a comprehensive framework for the process to be followed in respect of tendering of contracts by government bodies. The law includes provisions that regulate the proportion of a relevant contract that can be subcontracted and dovetails with other laws in relation to Local Content.

New Personal Data Protection Law

A new unified Personal Data Protection Law was issued in September 2021, although its enforcement and the issuance of its Executive Regulations have been postponed to 2023. Once it comes into force and effect, the Personal Data Protection Law, will apply to any processing of personal data relating to individuals residing within the KSA, and will generally prohibit the transfer of any personal data outside the KSA, except in very limited cases and subject to certain conditions.

New Cloud Regulations

The Cloud Computing Regulatory Framework (CCRF) is wide-reaching in scope - it applies not only to cloud computing services provided to residents of Saudi Arabia, but also to any security breaches of data processed or stored within KSA.

Civil Transactions Law

In February 2021, Saudi Arabia announced its intention to undertake substantial legislative reforms to increase the efficiency of its judicial institutions. These reforms include, a Civil Transactions Law which was approved by the KSA Shura Council in May 2022 although the final law is yet to be adopted and issued.

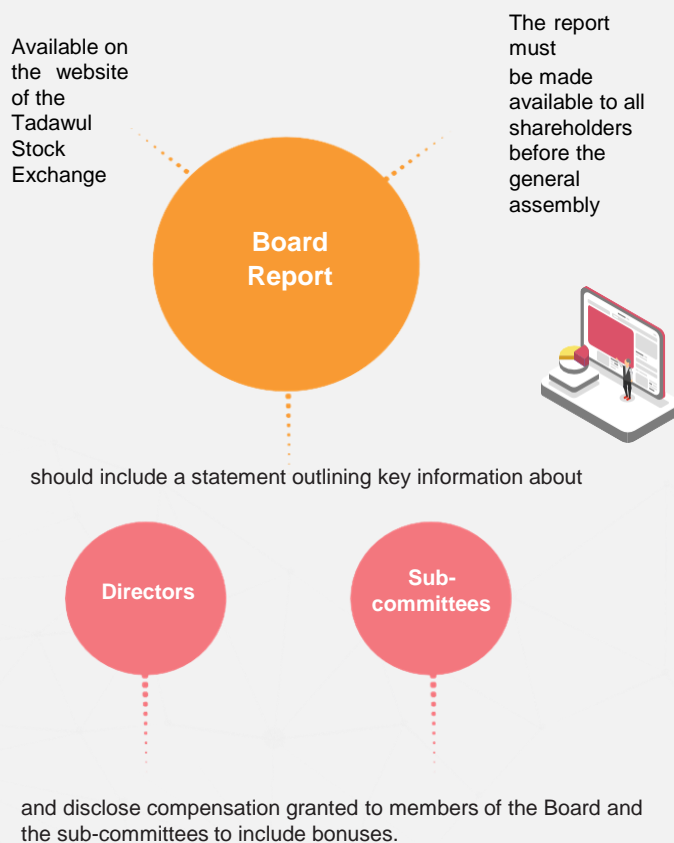


Corporate Governance in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

There are a number of rules and regulations that set out corporate governance requirements in the KSA. The key corporate governance rules are set out in the new Companies Law and the CMA Corporate Governance Regulations (**CMA Rules**) in the case of joint stock companies. The CMA Rules provide provisions related to a number of corporate governance matters including shareholder rights, director duties, the formation of company committees and disclosure and transparency standards.

It is important to note that each company type will have different requirements. Whilst there are different authorities regulating and supervising corporate governance across different sectors in KSA, the key authorities are the CMA, the Saudi Central Bank, MOC and MISA.

Professional companies are subject to the Professional Companies law (which became effective in March 2020) and the new Companies law. Professional companies are now allowed to be established as a LLC, joint stock company or partnerships limited by shares, rather than only as partnerships.



Directors Duties

The new Companies Law sets out in depth new responsibilities for directors, namely the duties of care to the company and provisions related to conflicts of interest, asset exploitation and competition among others. The CMA Rules set out additional guidance the duties of the board of directors.

Independence of Directors

The CMA states that the number of independent directors in a company shall not be less than two members or one-third of the board, whichever is greater. The CMA requires an independence annual review to be carried by the board in consultation with the nominations committee.

Permanent Committees

The CMA Rules state that nomination, remuneration, audit and risk committees shall be formed by resolution of the board or the ordinary general assembly, in the case of audit committee. The board's chairperson shall not be a member of the audit committee.

Board Meetings

Under the new Companies Law, the board meet as determined by the chairperson (at least once a year to approve accounts). The CMA requires joint stock companies to have not less than four board meetings per year. Joint stock companies are required to appoint a board secretary.

General Assembly

The new Companies Law and the CMA Rules focus on a number of areas, including, appointing board and audit committee members and approving buyback transactions.

Data Privacy

The primary regulatory authority is the the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SADAIA). The introduction of the Personal Data Protection Law (PDPL) was published in September 2021, although has yet to come into force. When enforced the PDPL will be the first dedicated data protection legislation in KSA and will be a significant development in KSA's legislative landscape that is likely to have implications on all entities operating in the market or who offer their services to KSA customers.



Cloud Computing Framework

The CCRF was issued by the Communications and Information technology Commission to regulate the provision of cloud computing services (which includes storage) to subscribers who are KSA residents. The CCRF prohibits the storage of government agency information on cloud computing systems outside of the KSA, or on any system belonging to a cloud service provider that is not registered with the CITC unless permitted by another law or regulation.

The CCRF is based on international best practice and public consultation analysis and governs the rights and obligations of cloud service providers (CSPs), individual customers, government entities and businesses.

From a data protection perspective, one of the most important features of the CCRF are the cloud security requirements CSPs must adhere to.

Cloud service providers may be required to register with the Communication and Information Technology Commission, the telecommunications regulator in KSA.

Electronic Transactions Law

The Electronic Transactions Law imposes certain obligations on internet service providers (ISPs) stating that ISPs and their staff must maintain the confidentiality of information obtained in the course of business. This presumably includes all personal data collected. The law also states that personal data must only be obtained, whether directly or indirectly, with the individual's written consent.

Real estate

KSA law provides for land ownership and leasing. There are restrictions however on foreign nationals owning land in Madinah and Makkah.

Historically, title deeds in KSA were handwritten. However, the Ministry of Justice ratified the Realty In Kind Registration Law (RKR Law) which subsequently implemented an initiative to convert all handwritten title deeds into an electronic format. The aim of the RKR Law is to create a land identification, ownership and registration system for real estate in KSA in the designated areas, save for such real estate located in certain areas which are equivalent to having the UNESCO World Heritage status.

Although a new version of the RKR Law became effective in April 2022, the predominant practice of conveyancing is still carried out by executing a sale and purchase agreement in front of a notary public with the ownership traced and registered in the real estate registry through the various contractual agreements between the buyer and seller registered with the Ministry of Justice-notary publics.

Pursuant to the RKR Law, any transaction concerning a handwritten title deed must be converted into the electronic format prior to finalising any transaction (or any dealings concerning the transfer of land).

Value Added Tax regime

VAT regime was implemented in KSA effective 1 January 2018 pursuant to the promulgation of Common VAT Agreement of the States of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Supplies of goods and services broadly (with few exceptions) are subject to VAT rate of 15% (increased from 5% effective 1 July 2020).

VAT is payable to the tax authority on net basis i.e. after deducting the VAT incurred on supplies received (to the extent allowed) from VAT collected on supplies made.

Real Estate Transaction Tax

Effective 4 October 2020, disposal of real estate located in KSA (as defined in the related regulations) will be subject to 5% Real Estate Transaction Tax (RETT). Such RETT is not refundable, however few exceptions have also been included on certain disposal transactions.

FinTech Experimental Permit Instructions

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) can now issue a limited number of FinTech permits (or “ExPermits”), enabling the holder to use the CMA FinTech Lab to test a proposed product or service. It is important to note that the ExPermits are not a substitute for the existing authorisation procedure for testing FinTech products in the wider market. As of August 2022, 27 Fintech Businesses had been granted ExPermits.

SAMA Regulatory Sandbox

SAMA has already issued the Payment Services Provider Regulations, which apply to payment entities providing payment related services in the KSA. Additionally, in 2018 SAMA launched its regulatory sandbox which allows applicants seeking to carry on a Fintech business to do so by first testing their solutions in a controlled environment. If successful, applicants are permitted to roll out their Fintech business solution in the KSA, in accordance with the guidance issued by SAMA. As of August 2022, 38 Fintech businesses had been admitted to the sandbox.

The sandbox is of particular importance to industry participants seeking an avenue to deploy Fintech business solutions in the KSA in the future. The sandbox is suitable for FinTech start ups as well as established financial services industry participants seeking clarity surrounding the applicable rules and regulations for innovative digital solutions that do not easily fit into the KSA existing legal framework.



Establishing a business in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

There are five common strategies adopted by foreign investors looking to undertake business / commercial activities in KSA:

- Fly in fly out / operate from overseas;
- Conduct business through a local agent / distributor;
- Set up a local entity;
- Establish a joint venture (JV); and
- Acquire an existing local entity.

Ongoing changes to ISIC4

MISA and the Ministry of Commerce adopted the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC4) of all economic activities for the issuance of new foreign investment licenses. ISIC4 is used for the purposes of obtaining the relevant license from MISA and to determine the specific activities to be included on the Commercial Registration Certificate. ISIC4 provides a comprehensive framework and a list of detailed activities to be chosen based on the proposed investment sector but foreign investors should be aware that the list is regularly updated and so codes are liable to be removed.

1. Fly in fly out / trade from overseas

This form of operating allows a foreign company to do business in KSA from their home country, thereby avoiding the need to physically establish a presence in KSA. However, it is increasingly common for KSA based clients to require a registered physical presence in KSA (especially those in the public sector). Where operations are required in KSA, which require an “on the ground” presence, this is unlikely to be a viable option.

There are also certain business activities that require special licences and consents to carry out business, further limiting the viability of this option.

More importantly, in the absence of a formal presence in KSA, such activities may be liable to challenge as being in violation of the KSA Anti-Concealment Law, unless a local agent/distributor is appointed.

Contravention of the Anti-Concealment Law carries serious penalties for those involved.

In view of the Anti-Concealment Law, foreign companies that wish to undertake business activities or otherwise invest in KSA are required to obtain an appropriate investment license or, where appropriate, appoint an agent/distributor.

2. Conduct business through an agent / distributor

This option avoids the need for foreign companies to establish a legal entity or physical presence in KSA and provides foreign companies the opportunity to leverage the agent/distributor's existing infrastructure and local market connections.

The contractual agency/distribution is the most common type of agency/distribution, and involves an agent/distributor representing the foreign principal in the distribution and sale of products or the provision of services. The KSA Commercial Agencies Law (the Agency Law) governs the arrangement and regulates how the arrangement is conducted, who can act as an agent/distributor and the licensing requirements.

It is worth noting that the Agency Law is less onerous on foreign principles than its equivalents in some other GCC countries.

3. Establish a local entity

The three most commonly used options available to a foreign investor involve the establishment of:

- a limited liability company (LLC) partially or wholly owned by the foreign company;
- a branch entity of a foreign company; and
- a joint stock company.

The choice between establishing an LLC, a branch or a joint stock company partially depends on the nature of the business activity to be carried out in KSA.

MISA Investment License

To establish any type of entity structure, foreign companies are required to obtain an investment license from MISA pursuant to the Foreign Investment Regulations. There are different types of investment licenses depending on the type of activity the foreign company intends to carry out in KSA. The most common types of investment licenses are Industrial, Service, Professional and Commercial (wholesale and retail trade).

The requirements, including the minimum share capital and minimum investment commitment over the first five years of the licence vary depending on the type of investment licence with the requirements for a Commercial License being the most significant.

The Supreme Economic Council publishes a “Negative List” restricting certain business activities to KSA nationals and/or Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nationals (or companies wholly owned by them). The prohibited business activities listed on the Negative List generally fall within two sectors, industrial and services. The industry sector list includes oil exploration, drilling and manufacturing equipment, while the service sector's list includes security and detective services and real estate investment in Makkah and Madinah.

However, to support Vision 2030, MISA has been updating its regulations and relaxing some of its restrictions in relation to direct foreign investment. As a result, foreign investment is now permitted in relation to various activities that were previously restricted.

Types of legal entities

Broadly speaking, the new KSA Companies Law allows for the following legal forms to carry out business in KSA:

- Limited Liability Companies
- Joint Stock Companies
- Simplified Joint Stock Companies
- General Partnerships;
- Limited Partnerships;

As mentioned earlier, another option to carry out business in KSA would be to setup a branch of a foreign company.

Technical and Scientific Office (TSO)

A foreign-owned entity may obtain a technical and scientific services office license from MISA. This office may provide technical and scientific support to the parent company's KSA distributor, conduct market surveys, and undertake product research. TSO's are, however, prohibited from directly or indirectly engaging in commercial activities in KSA.

Temporary Commercial Registration (TCR)

A foreign investor may establish a TCR to carry out and perform a government contract in KSA for a short period of time (temporary). The TCR is restricted to companies that have contracts with government or semi-government entities. The registration process is similar to that for a branch, although less documentation is required to support the foreign investment license application, and there is no capital requirement.

4. Establish a Joint Venture (JV)

Foreign companies wishing to enter the KSA market or develop their existing operation beyond an agency or distribution agreement often favour a JV. A JV enables the foreign investor to take an equity stake and a role in the operation and management of their KSA entity, whilst still benefiting from the participation of a local shareholder. The local shareholder may contribute financially, by way of technical skills or local connections and reputation.

Shareholders' agreements are permitted and enforceable provided that their terms are in compliance with Shari'a and the KSA Companies Law.

4. Acquire an existing local entity

A final market entry strategy for foreign investors is to acquire or invest in an existing KSA company or business. In addition to typical considerations required for an acquisition of a company or business, the following considerations should be borne in mind:

- The limited amount of publicly available information (and, as such, the need for thorough due diligence);
- The likelihood of regulatory consents or approvals being required (i.e. GAC, SAMA, MISA, etc.);
- The need to deal with the transfer of employee contracts and Iqamas as part of any asset sale and purchase; and
- The impact on target's end of service benefits obligations in the case of a business transfer.

As discussed later in this guide, foreign investors considering either a joint venture or an acquisition need to be aware of the requirements of the KSA Competition Law and the likelihood that a formal approval will be required to be obtained from the General Authority of Competition before the arrangement is concluded.

6. Local Content:

In December 2018, a royal decree was issued to establish a local content authority (the Local Content and Government Procurement Authority) with the aim of developing KSA's local content and enhancing local capabilities and maximizing the benefit of the national purchasing power to build a strong and sustainable economy. The Local Content and Government Procurement Authority issued regulations and rules to apply minimum requirements of local content that apply on government authorities, ministries and institutions. The rules will also apply on government owned companies gradually.

Economic Cities and Special Economic Zones

In order to diversify the KSA economy, the Economic Cities and Special Economic Zones are investment opportunities for both national and international investors:

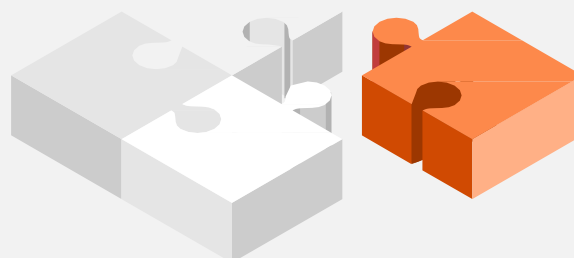
The King Abdullah Financial District (KAFD)

Originally conceived as a banking hub, this mixed-use development in Riyadh is one of several economic zones announced by the KSA government with the aim to attract foreign investors to the region. It is anticipated that KAFD will be open to all businesses and it is expected that incentives and a separate regulatory framework to be announced closer to the launch date of the KAFD to encourage foreign businesses to set up in the KAFD.

Special Integrated Logistics Zone (ILBZ)

The first of its kind in KSA, the ILBZ was first announced in 2018 and is located at the King Khalid International Airport. The ILBZ is part of an initiative by government authorities to attract foreign investment to KSA and is to be regulated by the General Authority for Civil Aviation (GACA) with MISA overseeing attracting investment. The ILBZ is intended to support a wide range of activities, including warehousing and fulfillment, inventory management and maintenance and repairs serving as a unified hub in which companies can engage in the above activities and access a network of transportation corridors in KSA and the broader GCC by air, land and sea.

The ILBZ currently offers a range of incentives to companies to establish operations within the zone including a tax holiday period and 100% foreign business ownership for companies undertaking 'Prescribed Activities'.



Process and Time for Establishment

For foreign investors to establish an entity in KSA, they are required to register with a number of KSA governmental authorities after obtaining the investment license from MISA, these authorities include:

- Ministry of Commerce (MOC) in order to obtain a CR;
- The Chamber of Commerce;
- The labour office;
- The Municipality;
- The General Organisation for Social Insurance (GOSI); and
- Zakat, Tax, and Customs Authority (ZATCA)

All documents to be presented to any governmental authority in KSA must be translated into Arabic. Our experience is that the time required for foreign companies to execute, notarise and legalise the required supporting documents varies on a case by case basis depending on the availability of signatories and the relevant home jurisdiction. We typically see that process taking approximately 4-6 weeks.

The process to establish a Saudi subsidiary or a branch of a foreign company typically involves three phases:

Phase 1 - Obtaining the MISA investment license. This process typically takes 5-10 working days from the date of submission of the application to MISA, together with all supporting documents (notarise, legalise and translated, etc.)

Phase 2 - Name Reservation and obtaining the Commercial Registration from the MoC. This process takes between 10-15 working days from the date of issuance of the MISA license.

Phase 3 - Post Establishment Registrations and Approvals. The majority of the standard registrations and approvals (GOSI, MHRSD, ZATCA, etc.) can typically be obtained within 10-15 working days of receipt of the commercial registration. Other elements, such as the Municipality license for premises or sector specific registrations and approvals may take longer.

A brief overview of establishing an entity in KSA is as follows:

- Prepare the necessary documents to apply for a MISA investment license
- Apply for and obtain the commercial registration of the KSA entity at the Ministry of Commerce
- Register the KSA entity at the Saudi Chamber of Commerce
- Open a file for the KSA entity with the General Organisation for Social Insurance (GOSI), the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development; and Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority (ZATCA)

The estimated time to complete the entire process of applying and registering with the relevant authorities is between 12 to 15 weeks.



Key Considerations

By way of summary, investors in KSA may choose to invest through various different types of entities. Legal structures commonly used by foreign businesses to conduct business in KSA are joint-stock companies (JSC), limited liability companies (LLC) and branch offices of foreign companies. It is worth noting that JSC have higher capital and governance requirements than LLCs. With only limited exceptions, (please refer above to the Negative List), foreign investors are able to own shares in a KSA company without limitation although, for those undertaking Trading activities, 100% foreign ownership will impact the share capital and investment required. Investors may acquire shares of existing local companies, joint venture with a KSA partner or establish their own companies in KSA, although we note the impact of the KSA Competition Law on acquisitions and joint ventures.

Taxation

Tax Overview

The government authority that administers and collects Zakat and tax liabilities is the Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority ("ZATCA", formally known as "GAZT") which is a separate authority under the Saudi Ministry of Finance.

KSA has two main direct taxation regimes: corporate income tax and / or Zakat (a form of a religious levy imposed on KSA legal / commercial entities to the extent they are owned by Saudi / GCC nationals).

In essence, the tax profile of taxpayers in KSA is determined by the profile of their owners, including whether the relevant taxpayer is subject to corporate income tax, Zakat or a combination of both (in case ownership comprises both Saudi / GCC and non-Saudi / non-GCC shareholders).

For corporate income tax, KSA adopts a worldwide principal of taxation whereby all income of KSA tax resident entities generated within or outside of KSA should be subject to taxation in KSA after deducting certain expenses. Whereas, Zakat is calculated by reference to the higher of the Zakat adjusted net income and the Zakat base (which should be determined by additional reference to certain balance sheet items). More specifically, the Zakat base is typically calculated by deducting certain qualifying assets / investments from equity / long term debt items. In addition, under KSA tax legislation, taxes should be withheld from certain payments (or deemed payments) made to non-resident parties by Saudi-resident entities. WHT rates vary between 5% and 20% depending on the nature of the service and the relationship between the contracting parties.

Who is subject to income tax in KSA?

Persons subject to tax in KSA are as follows:

- A resident capital company to the extent of its shares owned directly or indirectly by non-KSA/non-GCC shareholding;
- A resident capital company for shares owned directly or indirectly by non-Saudi person as well as for the shares owned directly or indirectly by persons engaged in oil and hydrocarbons production;
- A resident non-KSA natural person who conducts business activities in KSA;
- A non-resident person who carries out activities in KSA through a PE;
- A non-resident person who has other income subject to tax from sources within KSA;
- A person engaged in natural gas investment fields; and
- A person engaged in oil and other hydrocarbon production.

Tax rates and fiscal years

The corporate income tax rate on taxable net income allocated to foreign shareholders is generally a flat rate of 20%. The corporate income tax rate would differ for companies involved in the production of oil and hydrocarbons business. The corporate income tax rate for companies engaged in the exploitation of natural gas sector is 20%. The corporate income tax rate for companies engaged in the production of oil and hydrocarbons is determined on the basis of the company's capital investment. These rates are as follows:

- 85% for capital investment of USD 60 billion or less
- 75% for capital investment between USD 60 billion and USD 80 billion
- 65% for capital investment between 80 billion and USD 100 billion
- 50% for capital investment exceeding USD 100 billion.

As of 1 January 2020, a tax rate of 20% applies for five years on the tax base from oil and hydrocarbon downstream activities; however, the taxpayer must separate its downstream activities during the five-year period or otherwise will be subject to tax based on capital investment amounts as outlined above.

The taxable year of a taxpayer for all activities is the state's fiscal year.

A taxpayer's first fiscal year shall start as of the date of its commercial registration or license unless evidence proves otherwise.

A taxpayer may use a different fiscal year under the following conditions:

- The taxpayer has been using a different fiscal year approved by the ZATCA prior to the enactment of the Law;
- The taxpayer is using a Gregorian fiscal year; or
- A company is a member in a group of companies or is a subsidiary of a foreign company using a different fiscal year.

Tax holidays and incentives

The KSA government is in the process of developing a number of economic cities in several areas around KSA. Investments made in the below listed economic cities (located in underdeveloped areas of KSA) may be able to benefit from certain tax incentives.

- Ha'il;
- Jazan;
- Najran;
- Al-Baha;
- Al-Jouf; and
- Northern territory.

Among the incentives offered to certain qualifying companies is allowing tax deductibility for additional training and salary costs. More deductions are granted if investment capital for any project exceeds certain amounts stipulated by the government.

Furthermore, an exemption from customs duties is available on machinery and raw materials that are required for approved projects, provided that they are not available in the local market. Such exemptions should be applied for prior to their importation and are subject to certain terms.

KSA has also announced the establishment of a Special Logistic Zone, located at King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, which focuses on integrated logistics and enjoys special rules and regulations aimed at attracting more multinational companies to the country, such as providing tax exemption for companies registered and operating in the special logistic zone. The zone is governed by the General Authority for Civil Aviation (**GACA**) while MISA oversees attracting investment.

This economic zone will support a wide range of activities, including warehousing and fulfillment, inventory management, maintenance and repairs, staging, testing, and assembly. It will also serve as a unified hub in which companies can engage in these activities and access a vast network of transportation corridors by air, land and sea.

Permanent Establishment

A permanent establishment of a nonresident in the Kingdom, unless otherwise stated in the Tax Regulations, consists of the permanent place of the non-resident's activity through which it carries out business, in full or in part, including business carried out through its agent.

Permanent establishment should fulfill the tax compliance requirements similar to resident corporate taxpayers.

Tax Administration

Tax Return Filing

Tax filings are based on the company's fiscal year. Returns are due to be filed with the ZATCA and any Zakat / corporate income tax due must be paid within 120 days after the taxpayer's year-end. The system is one of self-assessment.

Applicable tax penalties

Item	Penalty as per Tax Law
Non-registration	From SAR 1,000 to SAR 10,000
Failure to file the tax return	From 5% to 25% of the unpaid tax
Delay payment	1% of the unpaid tax for each complete 30 days of delay
Evasion	25% of the unpaid tax

Advance tax payments

Advance tax payments are required to be made for a current tax year under the following conditions:

- The taxpayer has earned income during the year;
- An advance payment is 25% of the amount resulting from the taxpayer's tax liability based on the previous year's return;
- The computed payment is at least SAR 500,000;
- Three equal advance payments of tax on the last day of the sixth, ninth and twelfth months of the tax year; and
- Late payment of an advance payment is subject to a delay penalty of 1% of the amount due for every 30 days of delay.

Capital gains tax

According to the Saudi Income Tax Regulations, the gain or loss from the disposal of an asset is calculated as the difference between the compensation received for the asset and its cost base. No gain or loss on disposal of a depreciable asset is taken into account other than what is treated according to the provisions of tax depreciation calculation.

Capital gains are taxable at 20% according to the Saudi Income Tax Regulations in the absence of a treaty relief.

Capital gains realized from disposal of securities traded in the stock market in the Kingdom are exempt from tax in KSA, also capital gains realized from disposal of securities traded outside the Kingdom are exempt from tax in KSA provided that such securities are also traded in the stock market in the Kingdom regardless of whether such disposal has been carried out through a stock market inside or outside the Kingdom or through any other expedient in accordance with restrictions specified in the Regulations.

No capital gain or loss is calculated in case of transferring an asset from a corporation to another within the same corporation group, or in case of transferring the asset between corporations within the same corporation group, and no capital gain or loss to be calculated for the corporation that received the asset subject to the following conditions:

1. The corporations have to be within a wholly owned corporations group (either directly or indirectly) by one corporation.
2. These assets should not be transferred outside the group before two years from the transfer date.

Tax calculation

To determine the taxable income for any business, the net income (accounting profit / loss) should be adjusted by adding non-deductible expenses. Non-deductible expenses include, but are not limited to, salaries paid to owners, partners or shareholders, social security contributions paid abroad, all kinds of provisions (e.g. end of service, provision for bad debt, etc.), fines and penalties "other than fines or penalties paid for breach of contractual obligations", payment by branches to their head offices for royalty, loan charges indirect administrative and general expenses allocated on estimated basis.

Non-deductible expense also include depreciation in excess of the depreciation expenses according to ZATCA's allowed depreciation rates.

Deductible expenses for tax purposes include but not limited to the utilised provisions and exempted income (capital gain realised from disposal of securities traded in Stock Market in KSA) subject to certain criteria.

If a taxpayer realises losses in a year of operation, he may carry forward these losses to the following years until the cumulative loss is fully utilized. The tax loss utilisation is limited to 25% of the year's taxable profits as reported in the taxpayer's return.

There is currently no concept of taxation on a consolidated basis for related companies in KSA. However, Zakatable companies and their fully owned subsidiaries either directly or indirectly by the same owners may pay Zakat on a consolidation basis based on a consolidated Zakat return, noting that each subsidiary should submit an informative return. However, an entity operating in KSA that has undertaken more than one project under the same commercial registration is required to consolidate the results of such projects into the financial statements of that entity and subject them to taxation as a single operation.

Furthermore, intra-group transfers of cash, shares, financial securities and other tangible and intangible assets can now be done tax neutrally provided the following conditions are met:

- Such companies should be part of a group of capital companies that are wholly owned directly or indirectly by one capital company; and
- Such assets should not be disposed of to a company outside the group before two years have passed from the date of the transfer.

Zakat calculation

Zakat is calculated by reference to the higher of the Zakat adjusted net income and the Zakat base. The Zakat base is calculated by deducting certain qualifying assets / investments from equity / long term debt items. We have listed below key additions and deductions to the Zakat base:

Examples for additions

- Zakat adjusted net income.
- Capital held for one year or more or used to finance Zakat-deductible assets / investments.
- Long term debts including government and commercial loans, creditors, accounts payable, notes payable, shareholder loans, etc. that meet certain conditions (to the extent of Zakat deductible assets).
- Balance of all provisions (less balance utilised during the year).

Examples for qualifying assets / investments

- Net book value of tangible long-term assets (including certain qualifying investments).
- Net book value of certain intangible long-term assets.
- Spare parts inventory not held for sale.

Examples for non-qualifying assets / investments

- Cash and receivables (even long term receivables).
- Inventory (other than spare parts not held for sale).
- Advance payments to suppliers for purchase of non-deductible assets (e.g. inventory).
- Short term investments and investments in foreign subsidiaries (unless certain criteria are met).

The Zakat regulations provide that in case a Zakat payer is using a Gregorian fiscal year (e.g. 31 December year-end), then the Zakat rate applicable would increase to factor the difference between Hijri year (354 days) and Gregorian year (365 days). This is applicable to all elements of the Zakat base except for net adjusted Zakatable income.

In essence, all elements of the Zakat base (except for net adjusted Zakatable income) should be subject to c.2.578% and net adjusted Zakatable income should be subject to 2.5% Zakat in case the Zakat payer is paying Zakat based on Gregorian year.

Withholding tax

Service, interest, royalty and dividends payments made from a resident party or a PE of a non-resident party to a non-resident are subject to withholding tax (WHT) at a rate varies from 5% to 20% according Saudi tax regulation based on the payment nature and the relationship with the beneficiary, noting that the WHT may be eliminated or the WHT rate may be reduced in case there is an effective DTT providing a relief.

The withholding tax should be paid within the first 10 days of the month following the month during which the payment was made.

Double tax treaties

Saudi Arabia has entered into tax treaties with more than 50 countries. Certain other treaties are at various stages of negotiation. Treaties generally follow the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Model Treaty and provide certain relief, including withholding tax on dividends, interest, capital gains tax and royalties.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia has signed the Multilateral Convention (MLI) to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) issued by OECD on 18 September 2018. The MLI allows countries to implement the anti-tax treaty abuse BEPS measures and other aspects of the OECD BEPS program into existing double tax treaties (DTTs). The MLI does not directly amend the underlying text of DTT, but will instead be applied alongside existing DTTs, modifying their application.

Transfer pricing

On February 15, 2019, ZATCA in KSA published the Transfer Pricing By-Laws (the By-Laws), as well as an accompanying FAQs document (the FAQs). This was followed by the publication of the detailed transfer pricing guidelines (the KSA TP Guidelines). As per the FAQs, the By-Laws are applicable for all taxpayers (including Permanent Establishments) whose due date for filing the tax return falls on or after January 1, 2019.

The requirements in the By-Laws are largely aligned with the Transfer Pricing Guidelines published by the Organisation of Economic Development (OECD TP Guidelines) including the requirements to prepare the master file, local file and country-by-country report (CbCR), subject to materiality thresholds specified below.

Companies are also required to furnish an annual transfer pricing return (referred to as Disclosure Form of Controlled Transactions or DFCT) along with an Affidavit which is to be obtained from a Licensed Accountant, confirming whether the controlled (i.e. related party) transactions are in line with the Group's transfer pricing policy. The requirements in the By-Laws have been summarised in the table below:

Requirements / Parameters	Local File and Master File	CbCR and notification	DFCT and Affidavit
Applicable to taxpayers	Yes	Yes	Yes
Applicable to Zakat payers (Refer to Note 1)	Pending new legislation	Yes	DFCT & Affidavit - Pending new legislation
Threshold for applicability	Aggregate arm's length value of Controlled Transactions in excess of SAR 6 million (Refer to Note 2)	Consolidated Group turnover in excess of SAR 3.2 billion (approx. Euro 750 million)	DFCT & Affidavit - None
To be submitted to ZATCA	Upon request only	Yes	Yes
Due Date	To be submitted to ZATCA within 30 days of request	Filing due within 1 year from the end of financial year. Notification due with the return (Refer to Note 3)	Within 120 days from the end of the financial year

Notes:

- On 4 July, 2022, ZATCA released a public consultation paper proposing to extend the existing By-Laws to zakat payers. If enacted, zakat payers with related party transactions would have to prepare the DFCT, Affidavit and Master File / Local File documentation (subject to the materiality threshold noted in the table above).
- Even in cases where the aggregate value of controlled transaction does not exceed SAR 6 million, the taxpayer would need to maintain sufficient documentation to demonstrate that the transactions meet the arm's length test.
- CbCR is to be filed by the Ultimate Parent Entity (UPE) or the Surrogate Parent Entity (SPE) which is based in KSA. Additionally, a constituent entity (i.e. local entity) that is not a UPE / SPE may also need to file the CbCR with the Tax Authorities in KSA, under the following situations:
 - UPE / SPE is not obligated to file CbCR in the country of its residence;
 - UPE / SPE is resident of a country with which KSA does not have an agreement providing for exchange of CbCR; and
 - UPE / SPE is a resident of a country which systematically fails to provide CbCR to KSA.

Sales Tax/VAT

The Common VAT Agreement of the States of the Gulf Cooperation Council set forth the legal framework to introduce VAT in the GCC States.

VAT was introduced in KSA on 1 January 2018 at a rate of 5%. The rate was afterwards increased to 15% effective from 1 July 2020.

VAT is a tax on consumption that is paid and collected at every stage of the supply chain, starting from when a manufacturer purchases raw materials until a retailer sells the end-product to a consumer. Unlike other taxes, persons registered for VAT will both:

- Collect VAT from their customers equal to a specified percentage of each eligible sale; and
- Pay VAT to their suppliers, if any, from whom they have received the goods or services, equal to a specified percentage of each eligible purchase.

VAT is payable to the tax authority on net basis i.e. after deducting the VAT incurred on supplies received (to the extent allowed) from VAT collected on supplies made.

Custom duties

KSA is part of the GCC Customs Union, which was established in 2003 to remove customs and trade barriers among the GCC member states. KSA is a member of the WTO since 2005 and a member of the WCO since 1973.

The GCC member states apply a Common Customs Law and a Unified Customs Tariff with a standard customs duty rate of 5% of goods' Cost, Insurance and Freight value. Additionally, KSA levies higher duties on a number of tariff lines, according to the Integrated Tariff System, a 12-digit based system. While the rates range from 5% to 25%, most of these tariff lines are subject to the 5%-15% range.

KSA applies the GCC Common Customs Law as the legal framework for customs operations, which generally aligns with the global customs principles established by the WTO and WCO, including customs duty reliefs and exemptions such as temporary admission, bonded zones/warehouses, and other customs procedures.

KSA does not levy export customs duties, but levies anti-dumping duties on a number of commodities.

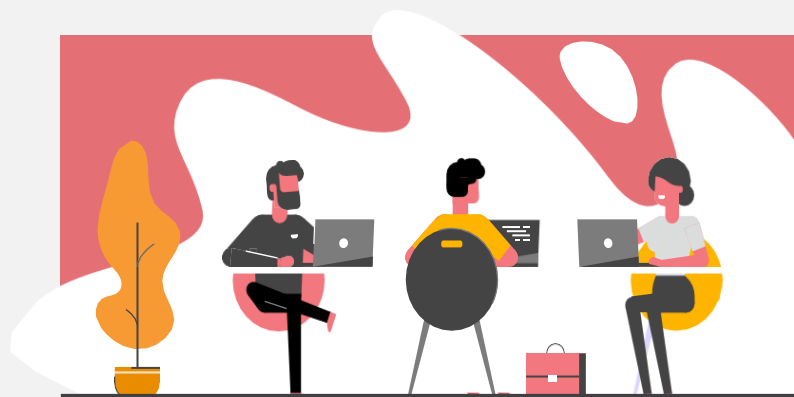
KSA grants duty free imports to most national goods originating in other GCC member states, member countries of the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement (GAFTA), Singapore, and member countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) if certain conditions are met.

The Saudi Standards, Metrology and Quality Organisation (SASO) has implemented a Conformity Assessment Programme (CAP) covering goods destined for KSA. CAP requires quality checks and inspections on companies looking to export to KSA. Proof should be provided in the form of a Certificate of Conformity. MOC provides details of these import procedures, which are broadly available online through the SABER portal.

Recently, the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ('KSA') has announced an increase in the customs duty rates for an extensive range of goods, including live animals, foodstuffs, mineral, chemical, plastic, glass products, base metals (namely aluminum), machinery, equipment and electrical equipment and vehicles. The measure affects a total of 17 Chapters and 99 Tariff Lines of the KSA Integrated Customs Tariff for the purpose of protecting and encouraging national industries and local agricultural products.

The announced increase in customs duty rates entered into effect on June 12, 2022. The full list of products was officially published on 12 June 2022 and can be accessed through this link (only the Arabic version is currently available): [HS codes subject to increased duty rates](#).

- Live animals
- Foodstuffs
- Mineral products
- Chemical products
- Plastic products
- Glass products
- Base metals, namely aluminum
- Machinery, equipment, electrical equipment
- Vehicles



Additionally, the Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council ("GCC") has recently released '[The Unified Guide for the Gulf Cooperation Council Authorized Economic Operator Program \(GCC AEO\)](#)' ("Unified Guide"), which provides a framework that underpins the AEO application process in the GCC region. The Unified Guide provides a baseline under which the AEO application process and monitoring of AEO compliance in each GCC country must broadly follow. While the Unified Guide specifies that AEO status cannot be obtained for multiple entities / countries in one application, it does provide common framework amongst the GCC countries in terms of AEO to facilitate the certification of groups operating across the region.

It is worth mentioning that the GCC AEO started its pilot phase from August 1st, 2022 to December 31st, 2022, and it was officially effective from January 1st, 2023.

GCC established businesses who obtain the GCC AEO certificate can secure significant customs benefits, which are available at two levels:

- **GCC-wide benefits:** Once the GCC AEO status is granted by the customs administration in the relevant GCC country, the entity will gain access to the vast number of benefits in all GCC countries.
- **National benefits:** the competent customs authorities within the country where the GCC AEO certification has been granted, may provide additional local advantages and benefits, including facilitating customs transactions for the operator in the same country (provided that each country publishes this on its domestic websites).

Excise Tax

Excise Tax is an indirect tax levied on selected goods that are deemed to pose a health risk in accordance with the law and the Implementing Regulations. The tax is collected from the Taxable Person, which could be the producer of the excise good, the importer or a tax warehouse keeper. Consequently any person intending to import, produce and/or hold excise goods in a tax warehouse under a tax suspension arrangement is required to register for Excise Tax with the ZATCA within 30 days from the date of the corresponding Excise Tax activity. The tax is levied on the retail sales price (RSP) of the excise goods and is typically included within the price of subsequent sales, including the sale to end customers.

The Excise Tax is applicable to the following goods at their respective rates:

- Tobacco (100%)
- Energy Drinks (100%)
- Carbonated Drinks (50%)
- Sugar Sweetened Beverages (50%)
- Electronic Devices and Equipment used for smoking and their equivalents (100%)
- Liquids used in electronic devices and equipment used for smoking and their equivalents (100%)

Recently, ZATCA has announced an amendments to the executive regulations of the Excise Tax Law, which will apply to importers, exporter and holders of Excise goods, and concern errors in the excise tax return, date of payment of the excise tax due, and tax warehouse license, including:

- The addition of new sub-clauses to article 17, allowing taxpayers to self-disclose excise tax that has not been paid correctly, within a period not exceeding 15 days.
- Changes to article 26, regarding the criteria for obtaining the status of a licensed tax warehouse. These changes aim to facilitate the process of obtaining such status for locations where no Excise goods are produced, in order to provide cash-flow flexibility options to excise tax payers.
- In particular, ZATCA is proposing to lower the minimum average quantities of Excise goods that need to be held in a place where no Excise goods are being produced, over the course of 12 months, for this to be eligible as a location for a Tax warehouse license.

E-invoicing

ZATCA has introduced an E-invoicing regime for the taxpayers operating in KSA. The E-Invoicing regime is a by-product and example of the economic renaissance and digital transformation that KSA is witnessing and is a continuation of a success story that began with the first phase of the application of E-Invoicing.

The E-invoicing regime entails a comprehensive review of ERP systems to ensure generation of E-invoices and a smooth integration with the ZATCA system.

This regime has been implemented in two phases:

- **Generation phase** - Went live on 4 December 2021
- **Integration phase** - Started Rolling out in waves from 1 January 2023 for the first batch taxpayers has a taxable revenue of 3 Bn (FY21) and above and Wave 2 from 1st July 2023 for taxpayers has a taxable revenue for 500M SAR(FY21) and above. And Subsequent waves will follow.

Real Estate transaction tax

Effective 4 October 2020, a new Real Estate Transaction Tax (RETT) at 5% has been imposed on all real estate disposal transactions, including transfer of shares in real estate companies at the Fair Market Value.

Real estate includes residential, commercial, mixed, agricultural, developed, under-construction, off-plan, bare land etc.

Certain disposal transactions have also been excluded from the scope of RETT imposition.

Municipal or property tax

Currently, there are no municipal levied in KSA. However, the KSA tax authority recently introduced a new legislation imposing certain Zakat charges on KSA nationals owning land property that is not used (so called “white land”). It should be noted that the application of this new regime is not yet clear in practice.

Stamp taxes

Currently, there are no separate stamp taxes/duties levied in KSA.

Personal income tax

KSA does not have a personal income tax regime.

However, social security contributions apply. This contribution is paid monthly based on the monthly basic salary plus housing with an upper limit of SAR 45,000 and is computed at 2% for non-Saudi employees and paid only by the employer. For Saudi employees, the rate is 22% and is paid by both the employees (10%) and the employer (12%).



Key Considerations

Foreign investors are subject to corporate income tax at the rate of 20% on their share of the net income of a capital company. KSA or GCC investor's share is subject to Zakat at the rate of 2.5%.

Non-resident foreign investors providing services to resident KSA companies are subject to WHT at rates of either 5%, 15%, or 20% (depending upon the nature of service and relationship with the KSA payor). Reduction of the WHT rate or total relief can be achieved under the provisions of certain double tax treaties, however certain conditions as well as administrative procedures apply.

A non-resident shareholder selling shares in a private KSA resident company will generally be subject to tax at the rate of 20% on the capital gains realised from the sale of shares. Noting that capital gains realised from sale of securities listed on the Saudi Stock Exchange (Tadawul) should be exempt from tax.

Accounting and Statutory Financial Reporting

Audit requirements

Companies are required to have annual independent audits. Joint stock companies and limited liability partnerships must appoint at least one independent auditor, and banks are required to have two independent joint auditors. The appointed auditor must be a certified public accountant member of the Saudi Organization for Certified Public Accountants (SOCPA) and licensed within KSA from MOC. Such licences are only given to KSA nationals.

Accounts have to be prepared under IFRS Standards, that are endorsed in KSA and other standards and pronouncements issued by the SOCPA, in Arabic.

Accounting books and records

MOC requires that all companies and establishments (with capital that exceeds SAR 100,000) keep the following books of account locally in Arabic, in KSA:

- Daily journal;
- General ledger; and
- Inventory book - this is a comprehensive trial balance of all assets, liabilities and results of the year, which should be comparable to a detailed balance sheet and income statement.

These requirements were enforced by Royal Decree in July 1989. Tax payers must maintain Arabic accounting records within KSA.

Computerised accounting systems are allowed, provided that they comply with the requirements of the MOC and that Arabic printouts of the accounts are generated on a regular basis.

There are tax implications if no Arabic books are properly maintained. The Ministry of Finance controls the enforcement of these requirements by having the DZIT report to the MOC those cases where companies do not comply with Arabisation rules.

Accounting standards

Companies registered in KSA are required to comply with the accounting standards issued by the SOCPA. All companies are required to use IFRS Standards, that are endorsed in KSA and other standards and pronouncements issued by the SOCPA. The 'endorsed' standards are IFRS Standards as issued by the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) in addition to the accounting and disclosure requirements added to some standards by SOCPA. The 'other standards and pronouncements' are those standards and technical releases that are endorsed by SOCPA for matters not covered by IFRS Standards such as the subject of Zakat.

SAMA requires banks and insurance companies in Saudi Arabia to report under IFRS Standards.

The regulations require that financial statements should include the auditor's report, balance sheet, statements of income, cash flows, changes in the shareholder's equity and notes to the financial statements.

Auditors are required to be licensed by SOCPA in KSA, which functions under the auspices of the MOC. It has been vested with the responsibility of monitoring and guiding the auditing profession, issuing auditing standards and accounting principles and enforcing the rules and regulations relating to the licensing of auditors and reporting violations.

Filing with Ministry of Commerce (MOC)

All publicly-held and limited liability companies are required, on an annual basis, to file copies of the board of directors' report and audited financial statements with the MOC within six months after their financial year-end. In addition, manufacturing entities are required to file a performance report including financial and operational ratios.

Only publicly held joint stock companies' accounts are for publicly available. Other companies' accounts are only disclosed to the authorities and other concerned parties.

There are no filing fees required by the authorities. Appointed CPA or lawyers, however, will have their own professional fees to assist with the filing process.



Additional legal considerations

Immigration and visas

Business visit visas (BVV) are generally granted to consultants and other white collar professionals who are required to be in KSA on a short term basis. Such visas are issued for a duration ranging between six to twelve months (depending on the duration sought) and do not allow working activities.

A business visit visa can be applied for by providing the following:

- Drafting the BVV application through Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA);
- Attesting the draft BVV application through the Chamber of Commerce (CoC);
- File the attested application to secure the pre-approval from MOFA; and
- Consular filing of the application (home country).

Obtaining iqamas for expatriates can be a time consuming process which requires numerous documents and should be considered early in any business planning.

Saudisation

The KSA's Saudisation policy aims to encourage the employment of KSA nationals and limit the employment of foreign nationals. The policy is supported by the Nitaqat scheme, which applies to all private sector entities (including companies and branches) with nine or more employees. The scheme applies differing requirements depending on the size of the entity and the specific sector in which it operates.

Based on its size and activity, each entity is provided with a rating based on certain thresholds set by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (MHRSD) and on the proportion of KSA nationals versus foreign employees that it employs. Each company is ranked according to a colour-coded system that rewards (or penalises) companies for meeting (or not meeting) the Saudisation/Nitaqat targets.

The MHRSD announced a Nitaqat 2.0 with the aim to further boost KSA employment in the private sector. Key features include: a three (3) year plan to allow all private companies to adjust their recruitment strategies, reduced business activity categories, retention of Nitaqat's colour-coded tier classification system as well as usage of a formula to determine the Saudisation value for each company for the first three years and the following years.

Employment considerations

Pursuant to the KSA Labour Law (the Labour Law), a foreign national may only be employed on a fixed-term employment contract. If the employment contract of a foreign national fails to mention the expiry date, the employment contract will be deemed to be a fixed-term contract which will terminate on the expiry of the foreign national's work permit. Additionally, foreign nationals can only work for one employer and employers cannot let their foreign employees work for another employer.

Saudi nationals may be employed on fixed-term or unlimited term employment contracts.

Under the Labour Law, the following are considered "valid reasons" for terminating an employment contract:

- by mutual consent, provided that the employee's consent is obtained in writing;
- expiry of a fixed-term employment contract;
- by giving notice pursuant to the Labour Law (unlimited term employment contracts only);
- the employee attains the age of retirement, unless the two parties agree otherwise. If it is a fixed-term employment contract which extends beyond the retirement age, it shall terminate at the end of its term;
- force majeure event;
- closure of the business;
- the project that the employee has been working on has been completed; or
- any other reason permitted by law.

Terminating a fixed-term employment contract prior to its expiry may result in compensating the employee for the remaining term of the contract. With certain restrictions however, the parties can agree to limit the compensation for early termination. Unlimited term employment contracts, on the other hand, may be terminated for a justified reason, which is generally considered to be poor performance or misconduct.

Competition law

The Competition Law and its Implementing Regulations regulate competition and prohibit anti-competitive practices in KSA. The relevant authority is the General Authority for Competition (GAC).

The Competition Law has a broad application and prohibits a range of anti-competitive practices including:

- horizontal and vertical agreements between entities (such as agreements for the purposes of fixing or suggesting prices or terms of sale, obstructing entry for new competitors and allocation of geography or customers);
- concerted conduct among competitors; and
- dominant-firm conduct.

Furthermore, parties seeking to carry out a transaction leading to an "Economic Concentration" must consider whether they are required to obtain GAC's approval prior to completing the transaction. The definition of Economic Concentration is widely drafted under the Competition Law and includes mergers, acquisitions, and joint ventures (whether inside or outside of the KSA) that meet the conditions and thresholds set out in the Competition Law.

In the event of breaches of the Competition Law, GAC have broad investigative powers and the ability to initiate criminal proceedings against individuals and issue large fines against corporations operating in the KSA

NewLaw: Legal department transformation

With the backdrop of Vision 2030, it is now more important than ever for legal teams to rethink their workflows, use of technology and construct a legal department that is strategically aligned to the business they support. Building a fit for future legal function involves optimising ways of working and adopting new or existing technology. Getting this right results in legal functions being able to do more with less, a reduction in time spent on redundant tasks and the opportunity to focus on the intuitive and high-value matters driving the business.

There's no "one size fits all" approach to legal department transformation but, working alongside their CEOs and CFOs, today's GCs are looking towards cost-based transformation of their function by harnessing enterprise change programmes and focussing on the right level of business partnering, improving how the function operates, introducing legal technology and leveraging managed legal services, in addition to targeted use of outside counsel. Deployment of specific solutions for key costs areas, such as contract review, preparation and execution, external counsel spend management and legal automation, remain vital in delivering this transformation.

Anti-Bribery & Corruption

Anti-Bribery and Corruption (ABC) is actively enforced through legislation and other initiatives in KSA. Examples of KSA's commitment to international best practice include signing up to the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and creating an anti-corruption commission (the National Anti-Corruption Commission or 'Nazaha') to combat administrative and financial corruption. The KSA Anti-Money Laundering Law requires companies to implement internal controls, systems and policies.

Energy

KSA is an oil-based economy that is primarily dependent on revenues from the oil and gas sector. It is the world's largest oil exporter and possesses around twenty per cent (20%) of the world's total petroleum reserves. The KSA energy sector involves petroleum, natural gas, refining petrochemicals and electricity. Oil and Gas operations are controlled by Saudi Aramco, the world's largest integrated oil and gas company.

Previously, the Ministry of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources oversaw the energy sector in KSA. In August 2019, a royal decree was issued to divide the ministry into two ministries: the Ministry of Energy and Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources. The Ministry of Energy is primarily responsible for overseeing and issuing regulations in relation to the oil and gas industry in KSA. The Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources is responsible for industry and mineral resources operations in KSA and aims to diversify the economy of KSA away from the oil and gas.

Another major change to the energy sector in KSA is the Renewable Energy Project Development Office (REPDO) that was established in 2017 under the Ministry of Energy. It aims to deliver on the goals of the National Renewable Energy Program (introduced under Vision 2030) to maximise the potential of the renewable energy industry in KSA. It sets out a specific road map in order to diversify local energy sources as well as establishing the renewable energy industry.

It should be noted that exploration, excavation and production of petroleum products activities (excluding mining-related services) are included in the Negative List and so are completely closed to foreign investment.

In Kingdom Total Value Add (IKTVA)

In 2015, Saudi Aramco implemented the IKTVA program which created a score for each contractor or supplier who submits a tender for a Saudi Aramco project to measure their local value creation.

The key objective of the program is to promote "localisation" within KSA, and it produces a calculation based on various factors including:

- The total amount of local products and/or services used;
- Salaries paid to KSA nationals;
- Use of local suppliers; and
- Total expenditure on the training and development of KSA nationals.

IKTVA scores are calculated on an annual basis and companies are required to obtain a survey covering all their KSA operations and revenue. Foreign companies with two or more subsidiaries in KSA can undertake a consolidated IKTVA survey.



Key Considerations

The registration process in KSA is still relatively lengthy, due in part to the need to notarise and legalise documents coming from overseas and translate them into Arabic. However, both MISA and MoC (as well as the relevant KSA government entities) have introduced online Portals that now expedite the licencing and registration processes.

Key Tax Indicators in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Tax Indicators	Resident	Non-Resident *
Fiscal year end	Calendar year, unless approval for alternate year end is obtained.	N/A.
Companies		
Income Tax	20% corporate tax on profits attributable to the non-GCC shareholders in a Saudi company. Income from natural gas investments and from oil and hydrocarbon production is taxed at 30% - 85%. Zakat at 2,5% is levied on the higher of adjusted net profits or adjusted net asset value attributable to the company's Saudi or GCC shareholders.	Not applicable, unless the foreign company has a permanent establishment in Saudi (refer to comments opposite).
Tax on Capital Gains	Gains on non-listed shares are subject to Zakat or 20% corporate tax. Gains on listed shares are exempt from corporate tax but are subject to Zakat.	20%, unless the shares are traded on the Saudi stock exchange (subject to certain conditions).
General Sales Tax (GST)	Not applicable	Not applicable
Value-Added Tax (VAT)	As a general principle, the supply of goods or services in the KSA are subject to VAT at the standard rate of 15% unless it is specifically zero-rated or exempt for VAT purposes as per the local VAT legislation.	The VAT treatment will vary depending on the nature of supplies (goods/services) and location of the recipient.
Real Estate Transaction Tax (RETT)	RETT at 5% is applicable on real estate disposal transactions (with few exceptions) including transfer of shares in real estate companies at Fair Market Value	Same implications like a resident person where real estate property/ shares of real estate companies are located in KSA
Individuals		
Individual Marginal Tax Rate (Max)	No personal income tax. Saudi individuals pay Zakat in their personal capacity, at their own discretion.	Not applicable
Basis of Taxation	Not applicable	Not applicable
Withholding Tax		
Dividends	Not applicable	5%
Interest	Not applicable	5%
Royalties	Not applicable	15%
Management Service Fees	Not applicable	20%
Customs	Standard rate is 5%. Other rates (0%, 50%, and 100%) apply depending on the nature of the goods imported.	
Exchange Controls	No	No
Thin Capitalisation	There are no specific thin capitalisation rules. Arm's length interest is tax deductible, subject to the lower of (i) the actual interest expense or (ii) 50% of EBIT. The By-Laws in KSA are largely aligned to the OECD TP Guidelines.	
Transfer Pricing	In addition to the 3-tier documentation requirements, taxpayers (including Permanent Establishments) are also required to file an annual information return along with an Affidavit from a Licensed Accountant confirming whether the controlled (i.e Related Party) transactions undertaken by the taxpayer are in line with the Group's transfer pricing policy. Entities liable only for Zakat, are required to comply with the Country by Country Reporting requirements only.	
Double tax treaties	Austria, Albania, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Gabon, Georgia, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Macedonia (Republic of), Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Syria, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam	

About PwC Middle East

Established in the region more than 40 years, PwC has more than 7,500 people in 12 countries across the region: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, the Palestinian territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.





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