BURAIDAH
VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEW
2024

إمارة منطقة القصيم

وزارة البلديات والإسكان
Ministry of Municipalities and Housing

أمانة منطقة القصيم

UN-HABITAT

AFM CONSULTANTS
DR. AHMED FARID MUSTAFHA GROUP
ARCHITECTURAL, PLANNING & ENGINEERING
شركة الدكتور أحمد فريد مصطفى
استشارات في العمارة والتخطيط والهندسة

المرصد الحضري لمنطقة القصيم

UNITED NATIONS
الاسكوا
ESCWA

Shared Prosperity Dignified Life

BURAIDAH

VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEW

2024

IN THE NAME OF GOD

THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques

His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud

His Royal Highness Crown Prince

Mohammed Bin Salman Bin Abdelaziz Al Saud

Prime Minister

His Royal Highness Prince

Dr. Faisal bin Mishaal bin Saud bin Abdulaziz

Prince of Al-Qassim region - Chairman of the Urban Observatory Council

His Royal Highness Prince

Fahd bin Turki bin Faisal bin Turki bin Abdulaziz

Deputy Prince of Qassim

His Excellency

Majid bin Abdullah bin Hamad al-Hogail

Minister of Municipalities and Housing

Message from

The Mayor of Qassim Region and Secretary of the Urban Observatory Council

Buraidah stands at the forefront of sustainable urban development, deeply committed to the principles of resilience, inclusivity, and prosperity for all its residents. As the capital of Al Qassim Province, Buraidah continues to evolve as a dynamic city, balancing tradition with innovation to build a future that aligns with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Saudi Vision 2030.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 provides a transformative roadmap, ensuring that sustainable urbanization, economic diversification, and social well-being remain at the core of national development. In alignment with this vision, Buraidah has made significant strides in localizing the SDGs, integrating them into urban planning, governance, and policymaking. This Voluntary Local Review (VLR) reflects our commitment to measuring progress, identifying challenges, and strengthening our development pathways to create a city that is smart, inclusive, and future-ready.

Buraidah's history is deeply rooted in agriculture and trade, making it a vital economic hub within Al Qassim Province. Over the years, the city has embraced urban transformation while maintaining its rich cultural and environmental heritage. Today, we continue to build on our strengths by fostering innovation, sustainability, and participatory governance to enhance the quality of life for all.

Buraidah's approach to sustainable development is rooted in **evidence-based policymaking** and **collaborative governance**. Reliable data collection and analysis are crucial for tracking progress and designing effective interventions. The Qassim Urban Observatory plays a pivotal role in monitoring urban indicators, generating localized data, and providing policymakers with insights to drive informed decision-making.

Buraidah's progress is a collective effort. We recognize the vital contributions of academia, the private sector, civil society organizations, and local communities. Through participatory governance, we foster inclusivity, civic engagement, and co-creation of sustainable solutions.

As we continue our journey toward achieving the SDGs, Buraidah remains committed to ambitious and forward-looking policies that prioritize sustainability, social equity, and urban resilience. Buraidah's progress is driven by strong partnerships at the local, national, and international levels.

The 2024 Buraidah VLR serves as a reflection of our city's dedication to sustainable development and a roadmap for the future. However, our journey does not end here. Achieving the SDGs requires ongoing commitment, innovation, and collective action. I extend my deepest gratitude to all stakeholders, including **government institutions, the private sector, academia, and civil society, whose contributions have been instrumental in shaping this review**. I would also like to thank the **Qassim Urban Observatory, UN-Habitat, UNESCWA, and the AFM** for their support in advancing our efforts.

Together, we will continue to build a **resilient, inclusive, and sustainable Buraidah**—a city that thrives on innovation, collaboration, and shared prosperity for all.

His Excellency

Eng. Muhammad bin Mubarak Al-Majli

Mayor of Qassim Region and Secretary of the Urban Observatory Council

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Voluntary Local Review was prepared by the Qassim Municipality and the Qassim Urban Observatory, with technical support from the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA), in cooperation with Dr. Ahmed Farid Mustapha Consultants.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES

ABREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
G20	Group of 20
GASTAT	General Authority for Statistics
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GCED	Global Citizenship Education
GUO	The Global Urban Observatory
HDD	Horizontal Directional Drilling
HiAP	Health in All Policies
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ISTPs	Independent Sewage Treatment Plants SBR Sequencing Batch Reactors
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management)
JRC	EU Joint Research Centre
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
MBps	Megabits per second (MBps)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MGI	Middle East Green Initiative
MLG	Multi-level Governance
MoMRA	Saudi Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs
NCDs	Non-communicable diseases
NCWEC	National Center for Water Efficiency and Conservation
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
NQF-KSA	Saudi Arabia National Qualifications Framework
NSOs	National Statistical Offices
NTP	National Transformation Program
NWMs	**National Women's Machinery**
NWS	National Water Strategy
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIF	Public Invest Fund
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PM10	Particulate Matter with a diameter of 10 microns or less
PPPs	Public-Private Partnerships
QUO	Qassim Urban Observatory
QUO	Qassim Urban Observatory
REDFL	Real Estate Development Fund Loans
ROAS	UNDRR Regional Office for Arab States
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDSC	Sustainable Development Steering Committee
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network
SFDA	Saudi Food and Drug Authority
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
STEM	Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UMF	UN-Habitat's Urban Monitoring Framework
UN HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UN WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic Commission for Western Asia
VLR	Voluntary Local Reviews
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

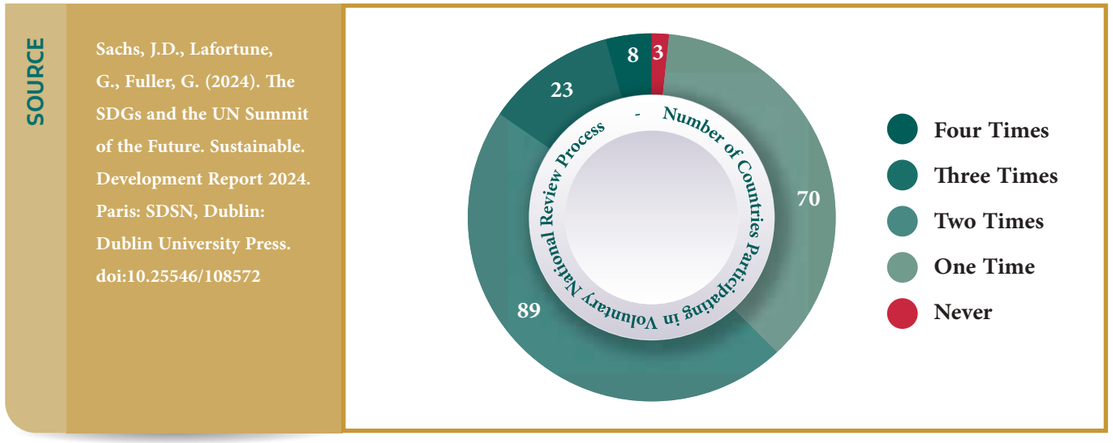
1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. CONTEXT

In the context of multiple global crises where environmental, social and economic challenges are prevalent around the globe, the **2030 Agenda**[1] and its **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**[2] provide a common framework for collaboration and shared objectives for progress towards sustainable development. Countries have been monitoring their progress towards the SDGs through **Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)**[3], where they address the main limitations, opportunities, and synergies for achieving the SDGs by 2030.

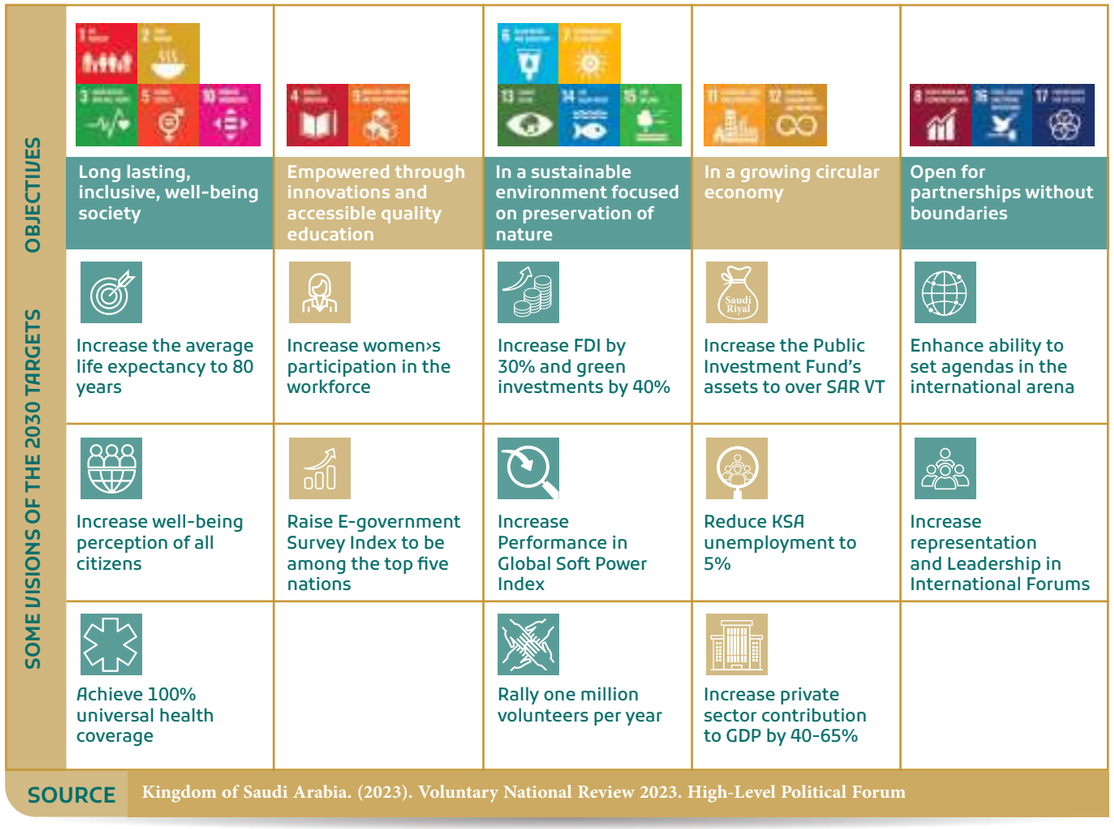
Figure 1. Number of countries participating in Voluntary National Review process, number of countries (2016 – 2024)



Saudi Arabia has demonstrated its commitment to the 2030 Agenda through its VNRs in 2018 and 2023[4], tracking its progress, assessing opportunities and identifying limitations to achieve the SDGs. As part of Saudi Arabia's **Vision 2030**[5]**,** the country has mainstreamed the SDGs into its national development strategies, aligning global goals with its long-term vision for economic diversification and social reform. This alignment indicates the importance of SDG integration in national planning and policy, directly impacting different sectors such as energy, education, and gender equality, where Vision 2030 goals overlap with SDG targets.

1- See more at: https://SDGs.un.org/2030agenda
2- See more at: https://SDGs.un.org/goals
3- See more at: https://hlpf.un.org/vnrs
4- See more at: https://hlpf.un.org/countries/saudi-arabia
5- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

Figure 2. SDG Mainstreaming into Vision 2030 Objectives



It has been globally accepted that in order to achieve the SDG by 2030, it is imperative to empower cities, since they disproportionately affect and are impacted by sustainable development[6]. **Localising the SDGs** is a critical step in turning global goals into actionable policies at the local level, ensuring that urban policies are tailored to the specific needs and challenges of each city. The localisation process is essential for fostering accountability and transparency in urban development, and it strengthens the capacity of local governments to contribute to the broader national and global sustainable development agendas.

The **Urban Monitoring Framework (UMF)**[7] plays a crucial role in promoting urban data collection approaches that are aligned with sustainable development in multiple dimensions. UMF indicators are central for cities identifying gaps and planning tailored responses. Additionally, the UMF provides a common language for cities all around the world, monitoring their performance, facilitating peer learning, knowledge exchange, and the dissemination of good practices (Figure 3).

6- See more at: https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21998.doc.htm
7- Developed by the UN-Habitat and adopted and endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission as a United Nations system-wide framework. See more at: https://data.unhabitat.org/pages/urban-monitoring-framework

Figure 3. Global UMF – SDG Cities Implementation (2022)

SOURCE UN-Habitat (2023). Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) play a crucial role in contextualizing multiple urban indicators and providing a clear picture of a city's progress towards the SDGs[8]. The alignment of VNRs and VLRs plays a key role in achieving the SDGs by fostering greater collaboration between national and local governments. Since 2018, more than 250 cities worldwide have published VLRs.

VLRs are particularly relevant in the Arab region due to the complex and unique challenges cities face, including environmental degradation, economic disparities, and political instability, as well as rapid urbanisation, water scarcity and pressures of youth unemployment. By providing local governments with a structured framework to report on their progress towards the SDGs, VLRs offer an opportunity to address these challenges with tailored, locally relevant solutions[9]. In the Arab region, cities like **Amman (Jordan)[10], Agadir (Morocco)[11], and Madinah (Saudi Arabia)[12]** have taken the lead in reporting their progress on the SDGs through VLRs.

8- See more at: https://unhabitat.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews

9- ESCWA, UN-Habitat, UCLG-MEWA. (2023). *Practical guidelines for voluntary local reviews in the Arab region*. United Nations.

10- See more at: https://jordan.un.org/en/202229-voluntary-local-review-city-amman-jordan

11- See more at: https://unhabitat.org/voluntary-local-review-municipality-of-agadir-morocco

12- See more at: https://SDGlocalaction.org/voluntary-local-review-al-madinah-saudi-arabia/#:~:text=Al%20Madinah's%20VLR%20aims%20to,(cities%20and%20sustainable%20communities).

1.2. BURAIDAH's 2024 VLR

1.2.1. Buraidah's Context

Buraidah, the capital of Al Qassim province, has been a pioneering city in engaging with the 2030 Agenda and localising the SDGs. **Buraidah's 2018 Voluntary Local Report[13]**, the first of its kind in the Middle East, marked a milestone in localising SDG 11 by focusing on making the city inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. This document provided a baseline for the city to monitor its progress towards urban sustainable development. Additionally, this document played a critical role in aligning Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 with Buraidah's local priorities (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Buraidah's 2018 Voluntary Local Report visuals

SOURCE Urban Observatory Council. (2018). Voluntary Local Report for the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 for the city of Buraidah – Goal No. 11: Buraidah attractive to live and work.

Buraidah approaches urban planning through the lenses of evidence-based decision-making, leveraging high-level data collection. This systematic approach to urban interventions is supported by the work done by the **Qassim Urban Observatory (QUO)[14]** in comprehensively monitoring and reporting urban indicators.

In the past years, Buraidah has shown **advancements in different dimensions of urban life.** It focused on improving urban infrastructure and public spaces, accelerated investments in more inclusive public spaces and in enhanced transportation networks, contributing to Buraidah's goal of becoming a more liveable and attractive city. Additionally, the city develops initiatives that promote sustainable land use and protect agricultural areas from unplanned urban expansion, reflecting its commitment to balancing development with the preservation of its natural resources[15].

13- Urban Observatory Council. (2018). Voluntary Local Report for the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 for the city of Buraidah – Goal No. 11: Buraidah attractive to live and work.

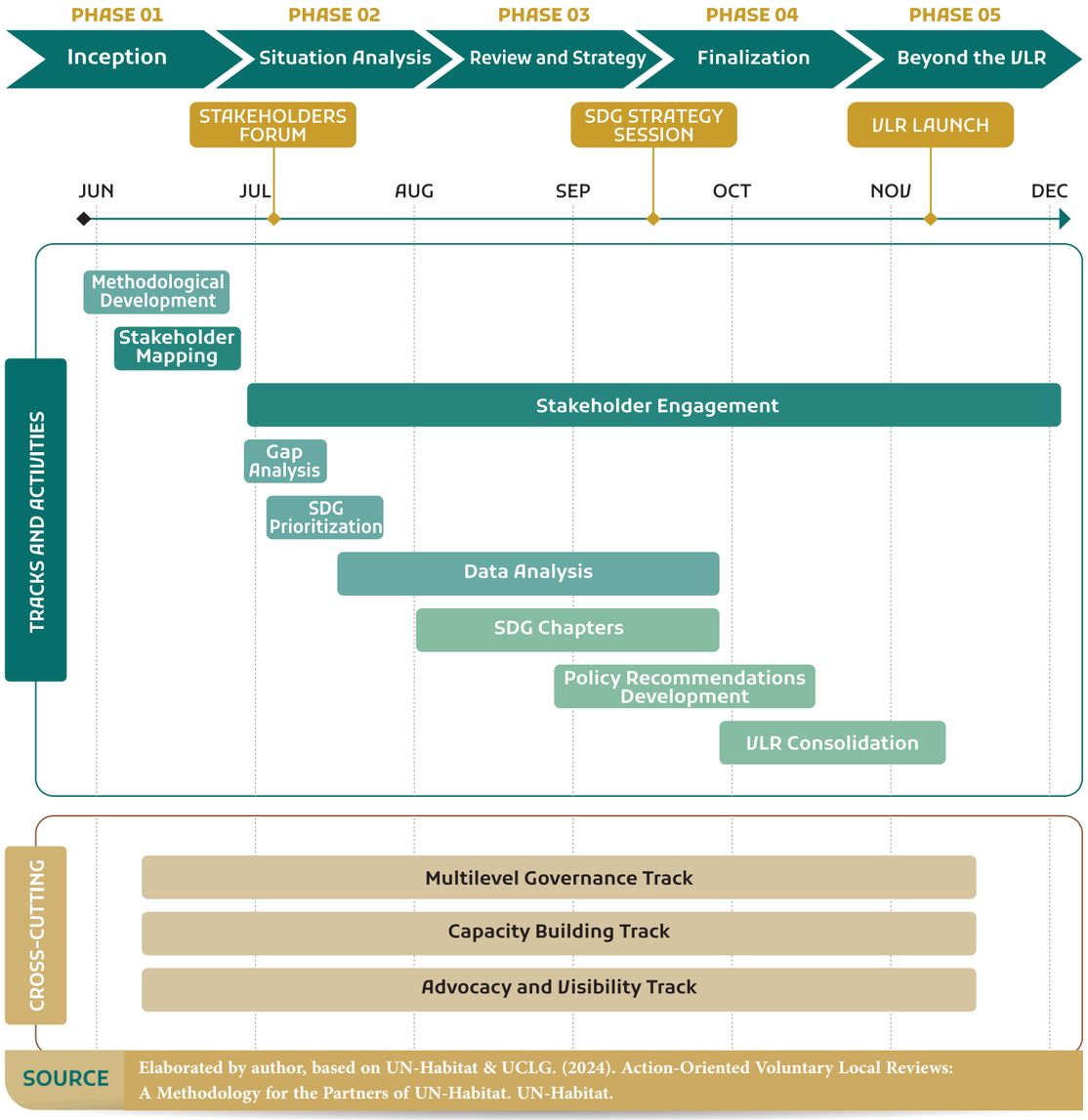
14- See more at: https://portal.marsad-buridah.com/Pages/2/101/Home

15- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim.

1.2.2. The VLR Structure

This VLR was developed based on the structure put forward by the "Practical Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews in the Arab Region"[16] and the "Action-Oriented Voluntary Local Reviews methodology document[17]". These documents provide an actionable and flexible approach for developing this VLR, grounded in stakeholder engagement, data-driven analysis, and strategic recommendations. This VLR follows strategically planned phases, tracks and cross-cutting elements (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Buraidah's VLR work plan summary



SOURCE Elaborated by author, based on UN-Habitat & UCLG. (2024). Action-Oriented Voluntary Local Reviews: A Methodology for the Partners of UN-Habitat. UN-Habitat.

16- ESCWA, UN-Habitat, UCLG-MEWA. (2023). Practical guidelines for voluntary local reviews in the Arab region. United Nations.

17- UN-Habitat & UCLG. (2024). Action-oriented voluntary local reviews: A methodology for the partners of UN-Habitat. UN-Habitat.

SDG Prioritisation was a central element in the development of this VLR, ensuring that resources were focused on providing relevant, contextualized, and actionable information about the SDGs its reporting on. The prioritisation process followed five steps[18]:

Alignment with local and national development priorities: Selecting SDGs that cover key areas for the city and the country, promoting policy coherence.

Potential for significant local impact: Focusing on SDGs, targets and indicators that can be impacted by local policymakers, making their analysis and discussion relevant for tangible action.

Reach across sectors and social segments: Picking SDGs with the potential to reach as many sectors and social segments as possible in the case of Buraidah.

Relevance to local stakeholders: Developing participatory activities with local stakeholders to identify local challenges and opportunities, and how they would connect them to the SDGs (see more details in the next section).

Data availability: Undertaking an in-depth review process of local urban data, identifying data gaps, and potential SDG indicators. This process supports the prioritisation of SDGs with more data-driven analytical potential.

This process resulted in the prioritisation of **SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 6, SDG 11, and SDG 17.** Consecutively, this VLR proceeds by developing focused **SDG chapters** that provide an in-depth discussion about the prioritised SDGs and selected indicators under them. In these sections, the reader can learn more about the relevance of each covered indicator and Buraidah's performance against them. This structure provides this VLR with a clear structure to report on advancements on each SDG, contextualizing Buraidah's advancements with global, regional, and national trends.

Following these individual SDG chapters, **policy recommendations** are put forward for each SDG, based on the quantitative data provided by the indicators covered, as well as the qualitative data collected in this VLR's stakeholders' engagement process. These policy recommendations are designed to be action-oriented, using the guidelines outlined in Figure 6.

18- ESCWA, UN-Habitat, UCLG-MEWA. (2023). Practical guidelines for voluntary local reviews in the Arab region. United Nations.

Figure 6. Action-oriented VLR recommendations

RELEVANCE:
The recommendation is closely aligned with the context, objectives, and needs of the situation or problem at hand. In other words, it addresses the most important gaps and challenges that have been highlighted in the VLR analysis.
KNOWLEDGE:
The recommendation suggests a solution or way forward that is informed by evidence and based on successful examples of implementation. If there are no suitable examples, it considers carefully which actions should be suitable fit for the challenge at hand.
SPECIFICITY:
The recommendation provides clear and precise guidance on what needs to be done, leaving no room for interpretation or confusion. Where possible it designates responsible parties or entities who will ensure its implementation and outcome, as well as as a timeline for the action to be initiated and completed.
FEASIBILITY:
The recommendation is realistically attainable within within the given constraints. It might refer to available resources and time it also considers synergies with current strategic objectives and existing plans. Necessary resources, such as financial human or technological, should be identified or made available to facilitate implementation.
STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT:
The recommendation considers the inputs stakeholders have shared throughout the VLR process to prioritize action items as well as develop suitable solutions. The "visioning" step can be a meaningful opportunity to get valuable insights and co-develop recommendations in line with stakeholders views. This also promotes their commitment to the proposed actions.
MEASURABILITY:
The recommendation includes criteria for success and performance metrics, allowing for a successful monitoring and evaluation of progress. Ideally, it should be specified who, and how often progress is evaluated.
FLEXIBILITY:
The recommendation allows for adjustments or revisions as circumstances, change or new information emerges.

SOURCE UN-Habitat & UCLG. (2024). Action-oriented voluntary local reviews: A methodology for the partners of UN-Habitat. UN-Habitat.

Other key aspects of this VLR are the **cross-cutting elements** being promoted throughout its development process. This document is more than a reporting tool; it promotes good practices related to **multi-level governance (MLG)**[19] based on the mainstreaming of the SDGs as a common language, it leverages its analytical approach to **build capacity** related to sustainable development and evidence-based decision-making, and it provides opportunities for empowering **advocacy and visibility** of local sustainable development in alignment with global agendas.

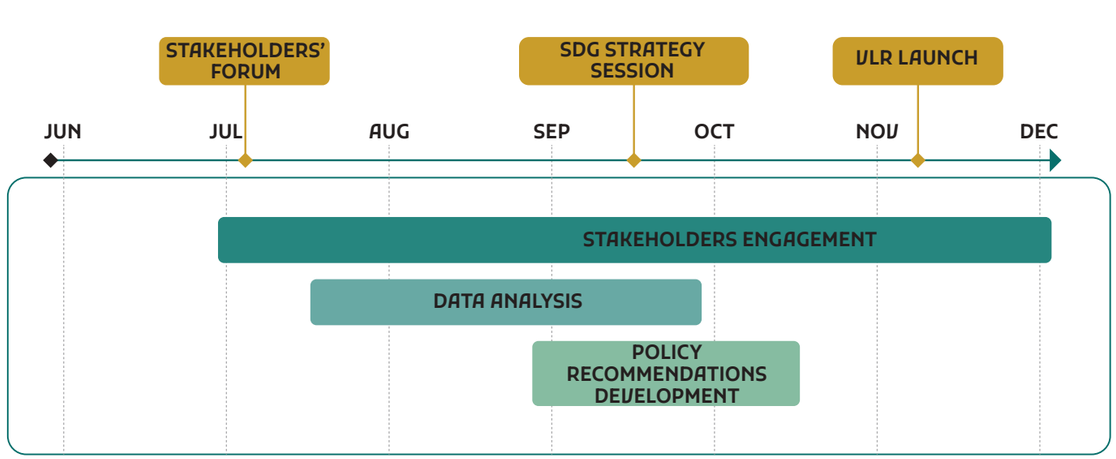
19- UN-Habitat. (2022). Multilevel governance for SDG localisation. United Nations.

1.2.3. Stakeholder Engagement

During the development of Buraidah's VLR, the stakeholder engagement process was designed as a substantive **technical and strategic exercise.** Technically, it enhances the VLR's comprehensiveness and accuracy by ensuring that solutions are reflective of diverse community needs. Strategically, it maximizes stakeholder buy-in and fosters a sense of ownership over the local development process.

From the inception of the VLR, a *stakeholder engagement strategy* was developed to establish an ongoing engagement with relevant stakeholders throughout the VLR process (Figure 7). This strategic approach involved different stakeholders (e.g. public sector, private sector, academia, and civil society) using various mechanisms (e.g. forums, workshops, bilateral meetings, focused sessions, surveys, etc.), with different goals (raise awareness, collect data, validate data, focus on strategic thinking, etc.), in different stages of the VLR process (inception, data analysis, strategic planning, etc.). Also, all the activities were designed to serve as a capacity development process for stakeholders, getting acquainted with central concepts of the 2030 Agenda and the localisation of the SDGs.

Figure 7. Ongoing stakeholder engagement, focused activities, and data analysis planning



SOURCE Author

The data collection approach used in this VLR (see below for more details) was developed in a way to ensure a transparent and traceable engagement with stakeholders. Diverse tools for data collection were used, such as stakeholders' assessment sheets, surveys, semi-structured questionnaires, and documented open discussions.

1.2.3.1. Stakeholders Forum

This event, held on the 2nd of July 2024 convened over **50 stakeholders representing more than 25 different sectors.** The event was attended by Buraidah's mayor and received extensive coverage on municipal social media platforms[20]. The primary goal of the forum was to unite diverse stakeholders to engage in meaningful discussions about local sustainable development priorities, allowing for data collection and validation that were central in the development of the VLR. Important additional goals of the forum were trust-building and peer-learning among stakeholders.

The event utilized **participatory activities** to foster collaboration among participants. These activities were designed to identify critical needs and prioritise actions that support both local and regional development goals. The forum facilitated a comprehensive dialogue among stakeholders, leading to the identification of key areas for development. Prioritisation of actions was achieved, ensuring alignment with the VLR development process.

1.2.3.2. Bilateral Meetings

20- See more at: https://x.com/qassimmun/status/1808069302987161966?s=46&t=n3TrPTf1DaXDGZ2YpwxM4A

In July 2024, several bilateral meetings were arranged with specific stakeholder groups to explore in-depth discussions on particular topics brought up by participants, connecting them to the SDGs and collecting insights on how to address them in the future. All meetings were documented for thematic data analysis aimed at identifying the main priorities of different groups in Buraidah.

These meetings covered topics related to accessible, efficient and sustainable public transportation; knowledge transfer to support local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), resources and support systems available for new businesses and start-ups; approaches to connecting universities' academic and research work with the SDGs; and women's access to the labour market, among others.

1.2.3.3. Site Visits

Visits to several key projects in Buraidah, related to the SDGs covered in this VLR, were undertaken. These visits provided valuable insights into the progress and impact of various initiatives within the Buraidah and the province. Additionally, the visits presented opportunities for focused discussions on topics related to local economic and cultural dynamics, open public spaces, industrial activities, water treatment processes, urban rehabilitation initiatives, public-private partnerships (PPPs) in different farm models, and public transportation infrastructure, among many others.

1.2.3.4. SDG Strategy Workshop

This **online workshop**, conducted in September 2024, was part of the ongoing effort to engage with stakeholders in Buraidah. Its main goals were to validate the findings and recommendations concerning the SDG chapters; strengthen stakeholder engagement and foster collaborative strategies to enhance the implementation of relevant policies; identify new opportunities and challenges in the localisation of the SDGs; and increase awareness and commitment to the VLR among local leaders and the broader community.

This online workshop was attended by around 16 participants from different areas and sectors in Buraidah. The meeting collected data on the **policy recommendations, priorities, and implementation suggestions** from participants, providing a roadmap for future action based on the VLR findings. These insights supported the creation of action-oriented and contextualized policy recommendations.

1.3.1. Data Sources

The Global Urban Observatory (GUO)[21] is a UN-Habitat initiative that is designed to support the collection, analysis and dissemination of urban data for sustainable development. The GUO works globally with cities and local authorities to strengthen urban monitoring systems, create reliable indicators, and support evidence-based policy decisions. In **Saudi Arabia,** this approach aligns closely with the national strategy for statistical analysis, which is led by the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). GASTAT provides comprehensive national data and supports the development of localised data systems through urban observatories across the country (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Urban Observatories in Saudi Arabia

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory. (2024). SDGs in QUO: Voluntary Report for the Sustainable Development Goals

The QUO[22] plays a significant role in supporting policymakers with an evidence-based approach to the SDGs. Since its establishment in 2009, QUO has worked alongside the GUO to align local urban indicators with global standards. Through specialized surveys and data collection efforts, QUO has been instrumental in addressing key urban issues, such as housing, public spaces, and quality of life, ensuring that the city's progress towards the SDGs is well-documented and data driven.

QUO's efforts are also marked by their commitment to knowledge sharing and stakeholder involvement. The observatory collaborates with local government departments, community institutions, and international organizations, contributing to the production of urban indicators that track progress across multiple sectors. **These indicators were used as the main data sources in this VLR**[23]**.**

21- See more at: https://unhabitat.org/initiative/global-urban-observatories

22- See more at: https://portal.marsad-buridah.com/Pages/2/101/Home

23- Qassim Urban Observatory (2024). The SDGs in QUO. May 2024 Update.

1.3.2. Methodological Framework

1.3.2.1. Rationale

The methodology employed in this VLR is drawn from the framework established by Lafortune et al. (2018)[24], a peer-reviewed study that underwent a statistical audit by Papadimitriou et al. (2019)[25] on behalf of the European Union Joint Research Centre (JRC)[26]. This approach has since been refined and widely applied by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) in its Sustainable Development Reports[27]. This approach quantifies indicators in a scale from 0 to 100, and calculate its variation in time, indicating scores (i.e., "SDG achievement", "Challenges remain", Significant challenges remain", and "Major challenges remain) and trends (i.e., "On track", "Moderately increasing", "Stagnating", and "Decreasing"), and is visualized through SDG indexes and dashboards (Figure 10).

By adopting this transparent, traceable, and well-tested methodology, this VLR ensures alignment with a globally recognized framework. This is central since it enhances comparability across different regions, cities, and contexts, and facilitates knowledge transfer and peer learning, vital for Buraidah's progress towards achieving its targets by 2030.

1.3.2.2. Buraidah's Indicators Creation

The city's performance on various SDG-relevant indicators is presented on a scale from 0 to 100, where 100 signifies full achievement of the indicator. Any score below 100 indicates that the city still needs to make progress to reach the target by 2030. Three key steps were essential to developing the indicators: First, it was necessary to establish maximum and minimum thresholds that represent the two extreme performance values for each indicator. Second, the data was normalized on a scale from 0 to 100, allowing for a consistent comparison across different metrics. Finally, when longitudinal data was available, a projection of performance was conducted to estimate the city's progress by 2030, providing insight into potential future outcomes (see more details in the Methodological Annex).

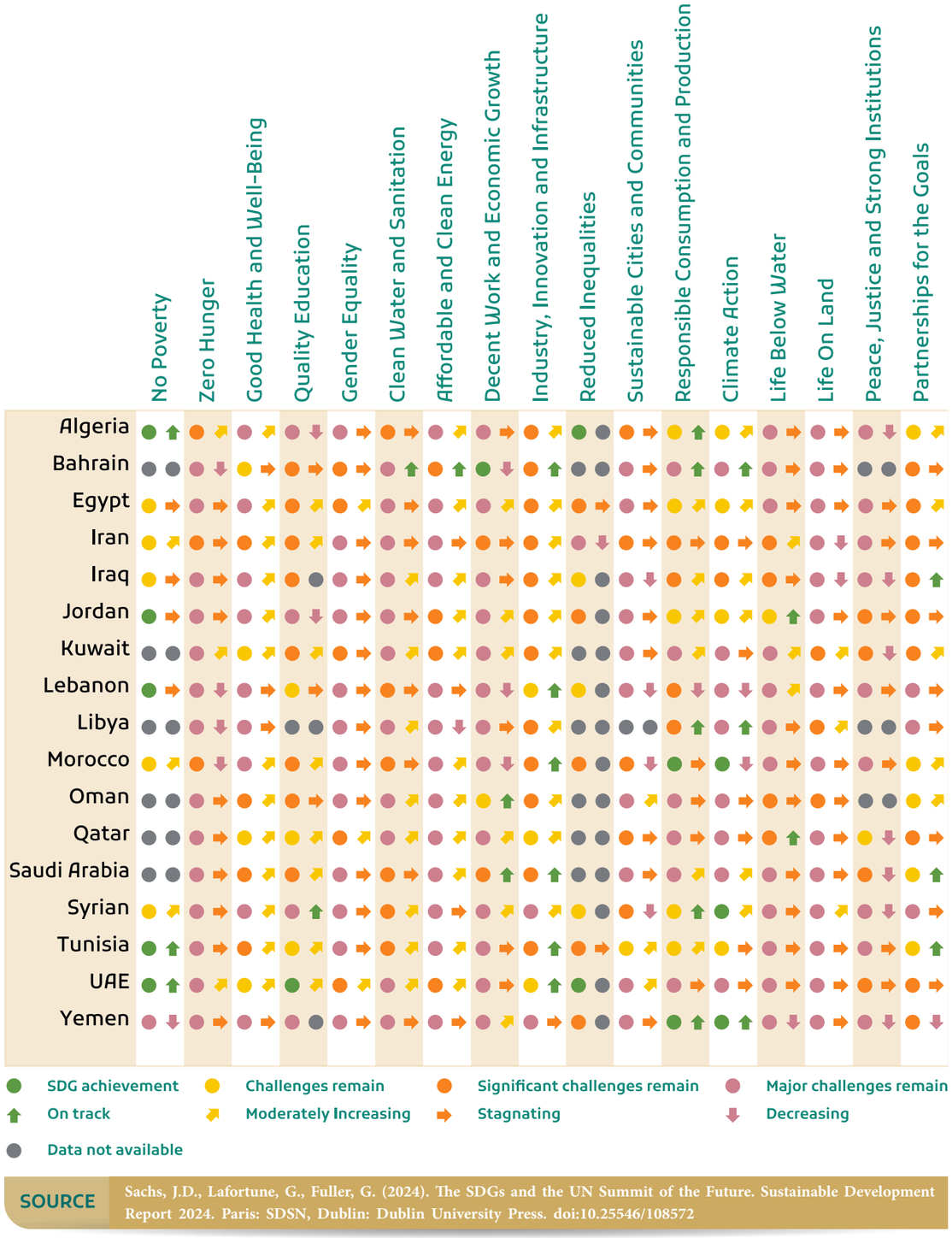
24- Lafortune, Guillaume, Grayson Fuller, Jorge Moreno, Guido Schmidt-Traub, and Christian Kroll. 2018. SDG Index and Dashboards. Detailed Methodological Paper. Paris: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network. https://raw.githubusercontent.com/sdsna/2018GlobalIndex/master/2018GlobalIndexMethodology.pdf.https://deploy-preview-222--sdr-data-viz.netlify.app/

25- Papadimitriou, Eleni, Ana Fragoso Neves, and William Becker. 2019. JRC Statistical Audit of the Sustainable Development Goals Index and Dashboards. European Commission, Joint Research Centre. doi:10.2760/723763, JRC116857.

26- See more at: https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/departments-and-executive-agencies/joint-research-centre_en

27- Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2024). The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press. doi:10.25546/108572

Figure 9. 2024 SDG dashboards for the Middle East and North Africa (scores and trends)



SOURCE Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2024). The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press. doi:10.25546/108572

1.3.2.3. Indicator Scores

The city's performance is colour-coded to facilitate a clear understanding of the indicators' results: green signifies strong performance, while yellow, orange, and red indicate increasing levels of challenge (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Indicator scores

	**SDG achievement** **Score 98%-100%:** The city has achieved or nearly achieved the SDG targets.
	**Challenges remain** **Score 90%-97%:** The city is close to achieving the targets but still faces some challenges.
	**Significant challenges remain** **Score 80%-89%:** The city has made progress but still faces significant hurdles.
	**Major challenges remain** **Score <80%:** The city is far from achieving the targets and faces major challenges.

SOURCE: Adapted by author, in Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2024). The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press. doi:10.25546/108572

1.3.2.4. Indicator Trends

By examining longitudinal data, the city's projected score for 2030 is calculated, providing a "trend score" that highlights the expected trajectory of progress towards each indicator. This estimation is created in two steps. Firstly, the annual rate of improvement is calculated, and then the 2030 projected value is established (see calculation details in the Methodological Annex). The results are interpreted based on the potential for the city to reach its goals by 2030 (Figure 11).

Figure 11. The Four-arrow system for denoting SDG trends

	**Decreasing** Decreasing score, i.e. country moves in the wrong direction.
	**Stagnating** Score remains stagnant or increases at a rate below 50% of the growth rate needed to achieve the SDG by 2030. Also denotes scores that currently exceed the target but have decreased since 2015.
	**Moderately improving** Score increases at a rate above 50% of the required growth rate but below the rate needed to achieve the SDG by 2030.
	**On track or Maintaining SDG achievement** Score increases at the rate needed to achieve the SDG by 2030 or performance has already exceeded SDG achievement threshold.

SOURCE: Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2024). The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press. doi:10.25546/108572

1.3.3. SDG Aggregate Score

By aggregating the scores from all indicators and Targets in one SDG Score, we are able to establish the performance across multiple indicators into a single, comprehensive result, offering a clearer picture of the city's overall progress on each SDG. To get to this result, each indicator in this VLR receives a final score and an assigned weight. By applying these weights, we calculate a new score for each indicator, which is used solely for the purpose of aggregating the overall SDG score. This ensures that targets with several indicators, categorical indicators, or non-localised indicators, do not disproportionately impact the aggregated score (see more on weight calculations and different types of indicators in the Methodological Annex).

Once the weighted scores for all relevant indicators under a specific SDG are calculated, we proceed with aggregation. The final SDG score is derived by simply finding the **average of the weighted indicators (Sum of all the values/Total number of values).** The final aggregated score is then assigned a rating to denote the level of achievement: "Achieved," "Challenges remain", "Significant challenges remain," or "Major challenges remain" (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Example of an Aggregate Value

SOURCE: Author

This is the city's first VLR, so a **trend** score is not provided. However, in future editions, we will be able to compare aggregate scores over time, enabling us to track progress and assign trend scores that will give deeper insights into the city's trajectory toward achieving the SDGs.

1.3.4. VLR Aggregate Score

Once the aggregated values for each SDG have been calculated and finalized, we are able to derive the overall aggregate score for this VLR. This process involves compiling the individual results from each SDG report included in the review.

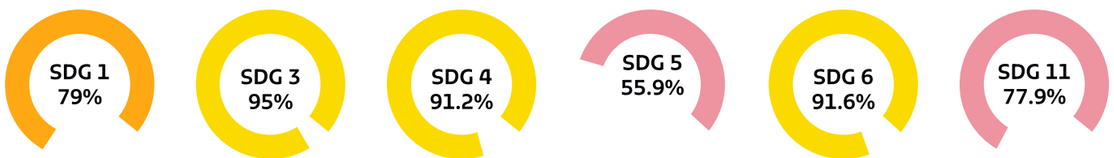
In this VLR, all SDGs are weighted equally, meaning that no single goal carries more influence than the others in determining the final score. As such, the overall aggregation process is straightforward – by averaging the sum of all SDG aggregate results, we obtain a simple and balanced representation of the city's VLR aggregate score.

The final aggregate score for the VLR is presented on a scale from 0 to 100, with 100 representing full achievement across all reported SDGs. This score offers a comprehensive view of the city's progress towards sustainable development and provides a foundation for future comparisons and performance evaluations in subsequent VLR editions.

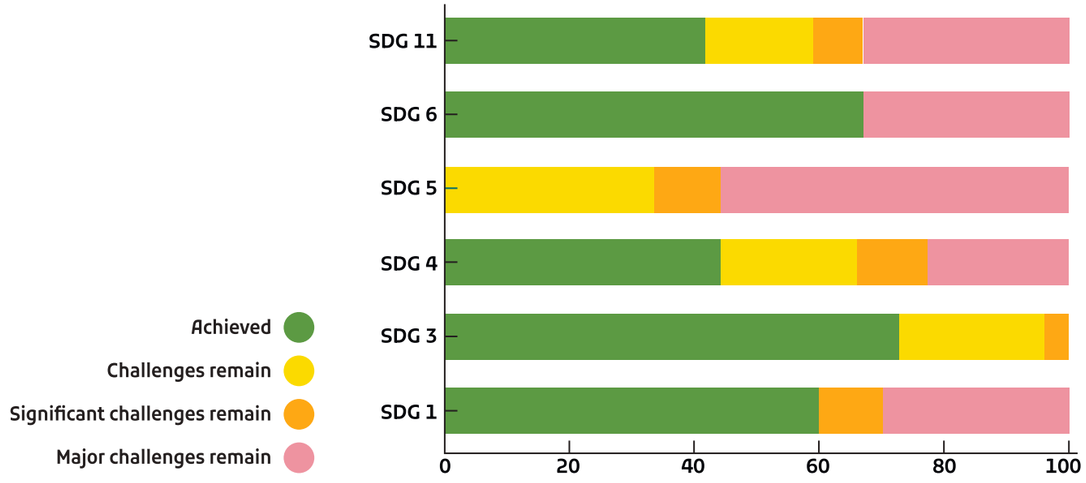
1.4. RESULTS OVERVIEW

Based on the data analysis methodology, Buraidah's aggregate results in the SDG level are as follows[28]:

• SDG completion towards 2030 goals:



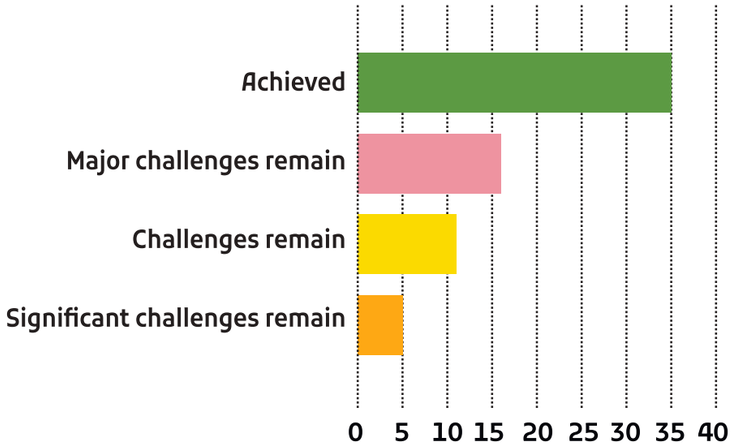
• Proportion of indicators scores per SDG.



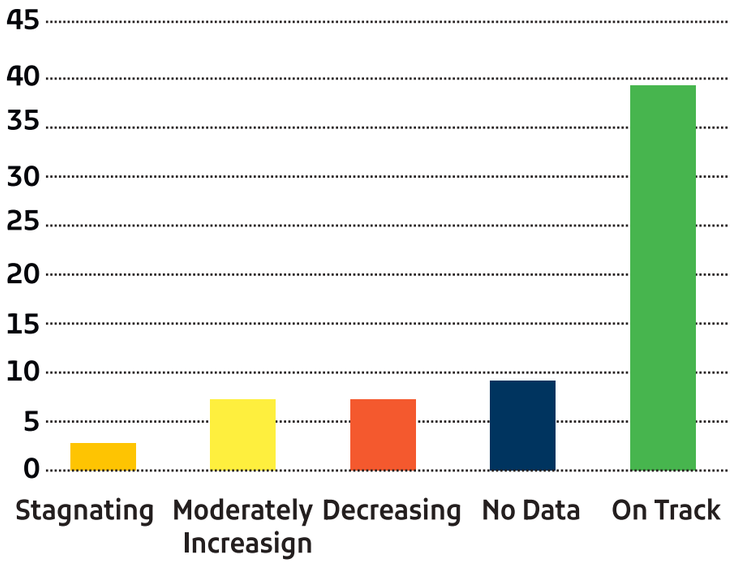
28- SDG 17 is not analysed in the SDG or VLR level for the lack of quantitative data. Check SDG 17 Chapter for the in-depth discussion on Buraidah's related initiatives.

The following, are the aggregate results in the VLR level:

• Total number of indicators, by score



• Total number of indicators, by trend



The SDG chapters in the following sections provide an in-depth discussion of each of the indicators analysed in this VLR, providing Buraidah's performance in each. They will also explore several discussions about global, regional, national, and local initiatives to achieve the SDGs in all their dimensions.

2

SDG 1 CHAPTER

2.1. INTRODUCTION

SDG 1 focuses on the global effort to eradicate poverty in all its forms by 2030. Ending poverty is often related to the analysis of income and purchasing power. That being said, SDG 1 approaches poverty in all its dimensions, including social protection, rights to economic resources, access to essential services, and resilience to shocks and disasters. SDG 1 calls for the appropriate resource mobilization and consolidation of policy frameworks related to the eradication of poverty[29].

Despite progress in SDG 1, significant challenges persist at the **global level.** The COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing conflicts, and climate change have exacerbated poverty levels, particularly in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, which remain "very far from target" in reducing poverty levels[30].

The Arab region faces multiple intersecting challenges impacting progress towards achieving SDG 1. Persistent poverty is exacerbated by conflict, economic instability, and the socio-economic impacts of climate change across the region. Countries such as Syria, Yemen, and Libya, which are significantly impacted by conflict, demonstrate the greatest lag in achieving poverty reduction targets (Figure 13). In many Arab states, data gaps, especially related to income and wealth distribution, make it difficult to assess the full extent of poverty effectively [31].

No Poverty		
Country	Rating	Trend
Algeria	●	↑
Bahrain	●	●
Comoros	●	→
Djibouti	●	↗
Egypt	●	↓
Iraq	●	●
Jordan	●	↑
Kuwait	●	●
Lebanon	●	→
Libya	●	●
Mauritania	●	→
Morocco	●	→
Oman	●	●
Palestine	●	→
Qatar	●	●
Saudi Arabia	●	↑
Somalia	●	↓
Sudan	●	↓
Syrian	●	●
Tunisia	●	↑
UAE	●	↑
Yemen	●	↓

● SDG achievement
↑ On track
● Challenges remain
↗ Moderately Increasing
● Significant challenges remain
→ Stagnating
● Major challenges remain
↓ Decreasing
● Data not available

SOURCE Adapted from The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2023-2024

Figure 13. Arab region SDG 1 status and trends dashboard

29- See more at: https://SDGs.un.org/goals/goal1

30- Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2024). The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press. doi:10.25546/108572

31- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

Saudi Arabia is one of the top scorers for SDG 1 and showcases a positive trend towards 2030[32]. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030[33] proposes a strategic framework that mainstreams SDGs, such as SDG 1. In relation to eradicating poverty, Vision 2030, through initiatives such as the National Transformation Program (NTP), drives the country's effort towards economic diversification (reducing oil dependency) and empowering the labour market (resulting in better employment rates). Vision 2030 proposes critical programmes related to social protection and access to basic services. It also indicates the importance of improving financial services and support for SMEs, such as leveraging microfinancing loans.

The 2023 VNR[34] indicates critical steps to eradicating poverty, which is in line with Vision 2030. The VNR analysis on SDG 1 showcases the country's progress in eradicating extreme poverty, with nearly 0 per cent of the people falling under the international poverty line. Additionally, it calls attention to Saudi Arabia's laws, regulations, and programmes that reduce poverty and provide social protection. The VNR also visualizes the increasing public spending on basic services and the overall reduction of deaths and injuries due to disasters across the country. The SDG Indicators Report[35] concurs with the progress Saudi Arabia has made about SDG 1, achieving near-universal access to basic services.

Box 1: National Initiatives

Social Safety Net Program[36]: Provides financial and social support to low-income families, orphans, the elderly, and those unable to work, ensuring essential services and financial assistance. The Social Safety Net program provides a framework for targeted interventions (see next bullet points).

Citizen Account Program[37]: Offers direct cash transfers to low- and middle-income households, protecting them from the financial impact of economic reforms, particularly in energy and fuel sectors. This initiative plays a pivotal role in promoting financial stability for families facing economic challenges.

The Wage Protection Program[38]: Encourages the employment of Saudi nationals in various sectors, particularly the industrial sector, promoting job creation and reducing unemployment. This initiative supports national workforce development goals, aligning with Vision 2030's objectives of economic diversification and enhanced private-sector engagement.

Unemployment Assistance Scheme[39]: Provides financial assistance to individuals who have lost their jobs, helping them to meet their basic needs while they search for new employment.

Disability Support Programmes[40]: Supports individuals with disabilities, ensuring they can improve their quality of life and participate fully in society. From financial aid for health-care and mobility assistance to programmes aimed at fostering social inclusion, these initiatives ensure that individuals with disabilities are supported in achieving their full potential.

Al Qassim and **Buraidah,** aligned with the national priorities related to SDG 1, also published important reports and plans showcasing its advancements and next steps. Al Qassim State of Urban Development[41] and Buraidah's Liveability Ranking[42] highlight social protection programmes and access to basic services and how they are successfully implemented locally. Buraidah's Urban Environment report[43] stresses the economic problems families face due to the pandemic (in line with a national increase in poverty in 2020). It highlights various governmental measures to mitigate the economic impacts of the pandemic, including financial support programmes, extensions of social insurance, and economic relief initiatives, among others.

The following sections provide detailed insights into specific targets, such as eradicating extreme poverty, reducing poverty levels, enhancing social protection systems, ensuring access to basic services, building resilience to economic shocks, and monitoring household income trends. By examining these indicators, we can better comprehend the impact of Buraidah's initiatives and identify areas for further improvement in eradicating poverty in all its dimensions.

32- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.
33- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). Vision 2030. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/
34- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). Voluntary National Review 2023. High-Level Political Forum. Retrieved from https://hlpf.un.org/countries/saudi-arabia
35- General Authority for Statistics. (2020.). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicators Report.
36- See more at: https://www.my.gov.sa/wps/portal/snp/aboutksa/SocialProtection/
37- See more at: https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/en/ministry-services/services/1154073
38- See more at: https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/en/knowledge-centre/initiatives/national-transformation-initiatives-bank/108808
39- See more at: https://www.socialprotection-toolbox.org/practice/saudi-arabias-national-unemployment-assistance-scheme
40- See more at: https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/en/ministry-services/services/143898
41- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim.
42- Buraidah's Municipality. (2020). Livability Ranking for Buraidah.
43- Buraidah's Municipality. (2021). Urban Environment: Transformations in light of the COVID-19 pandemic for Bureaidah city. Current effects and future directions.

2.2. SDG 1 OVERVIEW

			Rating	Trend
1.1	1.1.1	Proportion of the population living below the international poverty line by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural)	●	↑
1.2	1.2.1	Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age	●	→
	1.2.2	Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions	●	–
1.3	1.3.1	Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems	●	↓
1.4	1.4.1	Proportion of population living in households with access to basic services	●	↑
1.5	1.5.1	Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters	●	↑
	1.5.2	Direct economic loss attributed to disasters	●	↑
	1.5.3	Number of countries that adopt and implement national disaster risk reduction strategies	●	↑
	1.5.4	Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies	●	↗
UMF	39	Mean household income	●	↑

80% COMPLETION

This VLR collected data for **10 indicators for SDG 1**, allowing for nuanced data analysis in the SDG, target and indicator levels. In Buraidah, data gaps in SDG 1 are minimal, showcasing substantial data collection at the local level.

Buraidah's overall completion score is 80%, with 6 "Achieved" indicators. Another additional indicator is not yet achieved but "On track" to being achieved 2030. Only one indicator showcases a "Declining" trend, suggesting the importance of local policymakers shifting this trend in relation to social protection.

The data shows high scores related to extreme poverty, social protection, access to basic services, exposure to disasters, and developing policy frameworks to eradicate poverty. It is also important to take into consideration that, for this VLR, an extra indicator developed by the UN-Habitat UMF [44] was included, considering the mean household income in Buraidah (see Annex 2 for the full indicator's statistics).

44- UN-Habitat. (2022). Global Urban Monitoring Framework: A Guide for Urban Monitoring of SDGs and NUA and Other Urban-Related Thematic or Local, National and Global Frameworks.

2.3. BURAIDAH'S PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN SDG 1 INDICATORS

2.3.1. Eradicating Extreme Poverty

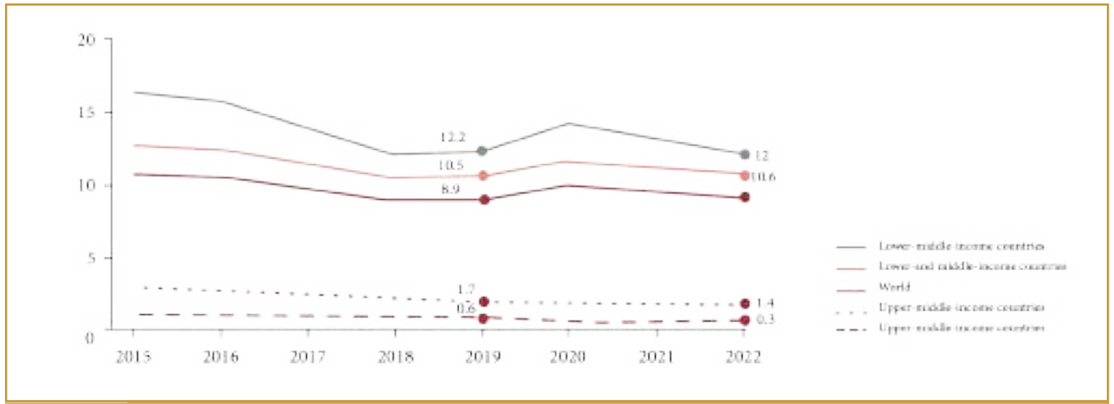
		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
1.1.1	Proportion of the population living below the international poverty line by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural)	●	↑	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	0.6%	0.2%	0%	0%	0%

2023 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

Figure 14. Proportion of the population living below $2.15/day, Global (2015 – 2022)



SOURCE United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

SDG target 1.1 focuses on the eradication of extreme poverty and uses **indicator 1.1.1** to track the proportion of the population living below the international poverty line ($2.15 per day[45]). This measure is critical for assessing the most extreme forms of economic deprivation and ensuring that those furthest behind are prioritised.

At the global level, there is mixed progress, with a general decline in extreme poverty over the past few decades, but progress has slowed in recent years due to several global challenges (Figure 14). The COVID-19 pandemic, financial crisis, and the impacts of armed conflicts, among others, have contributed to an increase in the number of people living below the international poverty line, especially in developing regions[46]. Although some countries have managed to keep poverty reduction on track through robust social protection systems and economic reforms, many are struggling to recover from the pandemic's aftermath[47].

45- World Bank. March 2024 Update to the Poverty and Inequality Platform (PIP) : What's New (English). Global Poverty Monitoring Technical Note; no. 36 Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099839303252425642/IDU1d671646616eef14 b31a2ba10 042c40ae3c

46- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

47- Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2024). The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press. doi:10.25546/108572

In the **Arab region**, significant disparities persist in the fight against extreme poverty, with conflict-affected countries and least developed nations facing the most severe challenges. Additionally, rural areas and marginalized communities continue to experience higher rates of extreme poverty due to limited access to social protection systems, health-care, and education[48].

Saudi Arabia showcases excellent numbers related to indicator 1.1.1, with extreme poverty virtually eradicated. This success is largely attributed to the comprehensive social protection systems and economic reforms the country has implemented[49]. While Saudi Arabia enjoys a high-income status the government continues to focus on preventing poverty through targeted subsidies, employment programmes, and social safety nets designed to support vulnerable populations (Box 1). These efforts align with Vision 2030, which emphasizes reducing inequality and ensuring that all citizens have access to basic services, education, and employment opportunities[50].

Al Qassim has shown resilience in addressing extreme poverty, although the region faces its own set of challenges. Despite the Kingdom's national success in virtually eradicating extreme poverty, Al Qassim still requires a localised approach to ensure that all segments of the population, particularly in rural areas, benefit from poverty alleviation initiatives. With agriculture as the region's primary economic driver, there is a focus on maintaining agricultural productivity and providing social protection programmes to safeguard low-income households[51].

Buraidah has successfully achieved a significant milestone, eradicating extreme poverty using the international poverty line. As of 2021, the city reached a remarkable 100 per cent mark, with no reported individual within its population living below the international poverty line. This achievement has been consistent, with the latest data in 2023 indicating the continuation of this trend.

2.3.2. Multidimensional Poverty

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
1.2.1	Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age			100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	14.3%	12.9%	16%	17.5%	14.1%

2023 COMPLETION: 86%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
1.2.2	Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions			100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	-	-	-	98%

2023 COMPLETION: 98%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

48- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

49- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). Voluntary National Review 2023. High-Level Political Forum. Retrieved from https://hlpf.un.org/countries/saudi-arabia

50- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

51- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). *State of Urban Development in Al Qassim*.

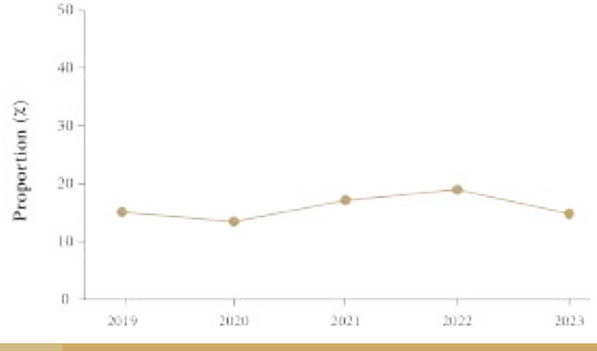
SDG target 1.2 explores the prevalence of poverty in all its dimensions, with indicators tracking the proportion of the population living below the national poverty line **(Indicator 1.2.1)**, and the proportion of the population living in poverty in all its dimensions **(Indicator 1.2.2).** These indicators provide ways to monitor local economic conditions, cost of living, and social norms. This is crucial because national poverty lines are more reflective of the realities within a given country than global benchmarks, allowing for more tailored policy interventions. Additionally, poverty goes beyond income and includes access to essential services such as education, health-care, and adequate housing. This multidimensional approach is essential for understanding the full scope of deprivation.

Global trends related to these indicators reflect both progress and emerging challenges. On a positive note, several countries have succeeded in reducing the share of their populations living below national poverty lines, often through robust social protection programmes and targeted economic reforms. However, as discussed before, we can observe a slowing pace in poverty reduction, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Multidimensional poverty remains a critical issue, as millions of individuals continue to face deprivations in education, health-care, and living standards despite being above the income poverty line[52].

In the Arab region, while some countries have managed to stabilize poverty levels, others, particularly in the least developed countries (LDCs) and conflict zones, have seen increased poverty rates. Multidimensional poverty is especially prevalent, with limited access to education, health-care, and basic services exacerbating the situation[53].

Buraidah's performance in these indicators provide important insights for local policymakers. In the city, the proportion of the population living below the national poverty line[54], shows stagnating tendencies from 2019 to 2023, with the numbers floating around 14% (Figure 15). The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on life standards across the country, and the same trend materializes in Buraidah's scores in 2021 and 2022. Despite these challenges, Buraidah has demonstrated notable improvement, reducing the proportion from 17.5 per cent in 2022 to 14.1 per cent in 2023.

Figure 15. Buraidah's proportion of population living below the national poverty line (2019 – 2023)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory, adapter by author

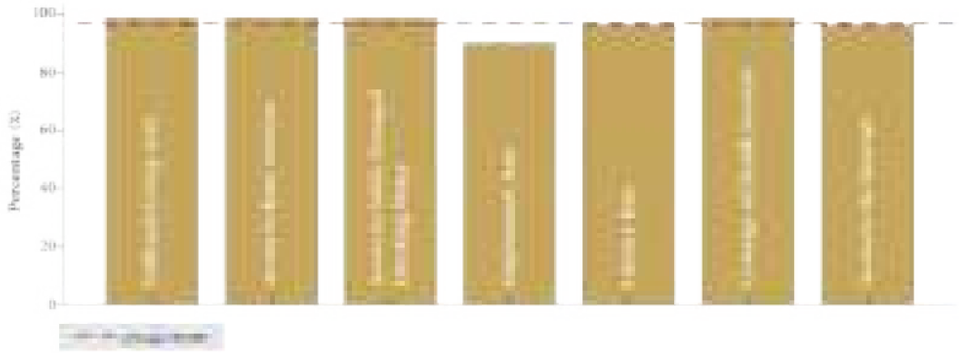
52- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

53- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

54- The national poverty line in Saudi Arabia is set as "below half of the average monthly income."

Concerning multidimensional poverty, Buraidah also reports an excellent score in indicator 1.2.2. Multiple elements were taken into consideration to calculate this composite indicator, such as access to sufficient living areas, basic services, water, health services, Internet connectivity, and literacy rate (Figure 16). Overall, high access to all these elements is crucial to predicting improved life standards and higher income potential.

Figure 16. Buraidah's performance in multiple indicators related to multidimensional poverty (2023)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory, adapter by author

The indicators discussed highlight Buraidah's impressive performance in key areas. However, while these numbers reflect substantial progress, they also underscore the importance of sustained efforts to ensure an accelerated reduction of the proportion of people living under the national poverty line.

2.3.3. Social Protection

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
1.3.1	Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems	●	↑	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
21.4%	20.7%	21.8%	11.2%	13.7%	-

2023 COMPLETION: 13.7%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 1.3 addresses the implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems through **indicator 1.3.1**, which monitors the proportion of the population covered by social protection floors and systems. Social protection is usually referred to as a set of policies and programmes to reduce poverty and vulnerability, such as social insurance, social assistance, and access to essential services. Monitoring this issue is crucial for safeguarding vulnerable populations against life's uncertainties, such as illness, unemployment, and old age. Social protection systems, including pensions, health insurance, and unemployment benefits, act as a safety net that reduces poverty and promotes social stability and economic resilience.

Globally, the coverage of social protection systems has seen progress but needs to be more balanced across regions. Despite increased efforts, significant gaps persist, particularly in low-income countries where vast populations still need to be included on social protection floors. In 2023, approximately 1.4 billion children were still left uncovered by any form of social protection (Figure 17). The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated these gaps, especially for informal workers, who represent a significant portion of the workforce in many developing countries. While high-income nations have achieved near-universal coverage in many areas, such as health and unemployment benefits, poorer regions struggle to finance and implement comprehensive social protection systems.

Figure 17. Proportion of children covered by social protection cash benefits, per centage, Global (2015 – 2023)

SOURCE United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations

In the **Arab region**, social protection systems remain uneven, with significant gaps in coverage, particularly in low-income and conflict-affected countries. Many countries in the region are struggling to extend comprehensive social protection floors to vulnerable groups, including informal workers, children, and older adults. The gaps are particularly stark in areas such as health-care coverage and unemployment benefits, where access remains limited for large segments of the population[55].

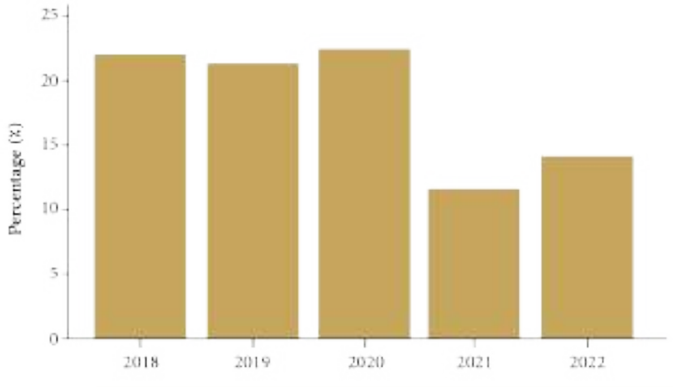
In Saudi Arabia, the social protection system has experienced significant advancements, particularly in the coverage of vulnerable groups. The country's comprehensive approach includes initiatives like the Citizen Account Program and Social Safety Net Program, providing financial support to low- and middle-income households, helping to alleviate the impacts of economic reforms (Box 1). Additionally, pension services and unemployment insurance offer essential protection for older individuals and those affected by job loss. However, data shows some disparities in coverage, with groups such as the unemployed and individuals unable to work experiencing fluctuations[56].

55- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

56- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum. Retrieved from https://hlpf.un.org/countries/saudi-arabia

In **Buraidah**, only around 14 per cent of households were covered by social security in 2022. This indicator's decreasing tendency (Figure 18) shows that it is crucial that local policymakers implement changes to shift this trend and get the city on track to achieving this indicator by 2030.

Figure 18. Per centage of households covered by social security in Buraidah (2018 – 2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

This indicator underscores the critical role of social protection systems in safeguarding vulnerable populations from the challenges of poverty, unemployment, illness, and old age. In Saudi Arabia, the advancements in social protection programmes indicate renewed efforts to tackle the challenge of providing near universal access to social protection. Locally in Buraidah, the declining coverage of households by social security is a cause for concern, highlighting the need for targeted policy interventions to reverse this trend and align the city with the broader national goals of achieving comprehensive social protection by 2030. Local policymakers must prioritise expanding and refining social protection frameworks to ensure that all residents benefit from these essential safety nets.

2.3.4. Access to Basic Services

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
1.4.1	Proportion of population living in households with access to basic services	●	↑	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	100%	100%	100%	100%	-

2023 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

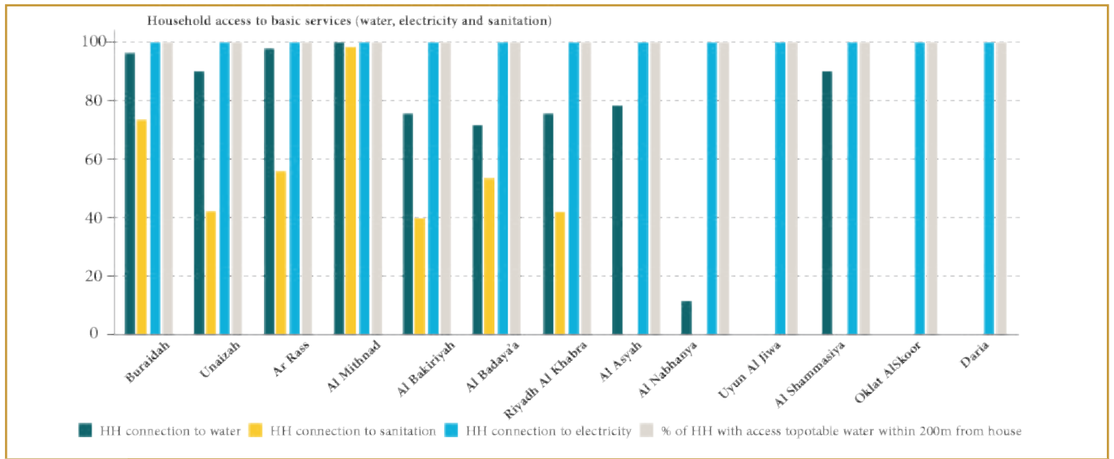
SDG target 1.4, through **indicator 1.4.1** focuses on ensuring access to basic services. This indicator is central for tracking the extent to which individuals have access to essential services such as clean water, sanitation, and electricity. Monitoring this data is crucial because access to basic services is a fundamental component of human well-being and dignity. It directly impacts health outcomes, education opportunities, and economic participation, serving as a foundation for reducing poverty and inequality.

Globally, access to clean water and sanitation is a challenge, especially in rural areas and among the poorest populations. Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia face the most significant challenges, with millions still needing consistent access to essential services[57]. In the **Arab region,** high-income nations, particularly those in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), have made significant progress in ensuring universal access to essential services such as clean water, electricity, and health-care. That being said, low-income and conflict-affected countries face persistent challenges in providing these basic services due to ongoing conflicts and economic instability[58].

Saudi Arabia demonstrates remarkable progress in indicator 1.4.1. The country has achieved near-universal access to essential services such as education, safe drinking water, electricity, and sanitation. The government's investments under Vision 2030 and the NTP have been crucial in extending these services to low-income and vulnerable households. Additionally, programmes focusing on housing and disability support have ensured that even marginalized groups have access to basic necessities[59].

Al Qassim's access to basic services has significantly improved, particularly in urban centres. However, rural areas and smaller urban centres still need help ensuring consistent access to these services (Figure 19). The disparities in service provision between urban and rural areas highlight the need for targeted investments and policies to bridge these gaps.

Figure 19. Household access to water, electricity, and sanitation. Al Qassim's cities (2019)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim

In recent years, significant progress has been made in **Buraidah**, with the most recent data[60] reporting that 100% of households are connected to water, sanitation, and electricity. Therefore, Buraidah has a perfect score for its population's access to basic services. This indicator and the data reviewed so far show Buraidah's multidimensional commitment to providing essential infrastructure and services to its residents.

57- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

58- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

59- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum. Retrieved from https://hlpf.un.org/countries/saudi-arabia

60- Qassim Urban Observatory (2024). The SDGs in QUO. May 2024 Update.

2.3.5. Building Resilience

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
1.5.1	Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters	●	↑	0

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
-	0	0	0	0.1	-	2023 COMPLETION: 99.9%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
1.5.2	Direct economic loss attributed to disasters	●	↑	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
-	0	0	0	0	0	2023 COMPLETION: 100%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
1.5.3	Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age	●	↑	COMPLETELY ADDRESSES

2018 - 2023 COMPLETELY ADDRESSES	2023 COMPLETION: 100%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
1.5.4	Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies	●	↗	COMPLETELY ADDRESSES

2018 - 2023 STRONGLY ADDRESSES	2023 COMPLETION: 75%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

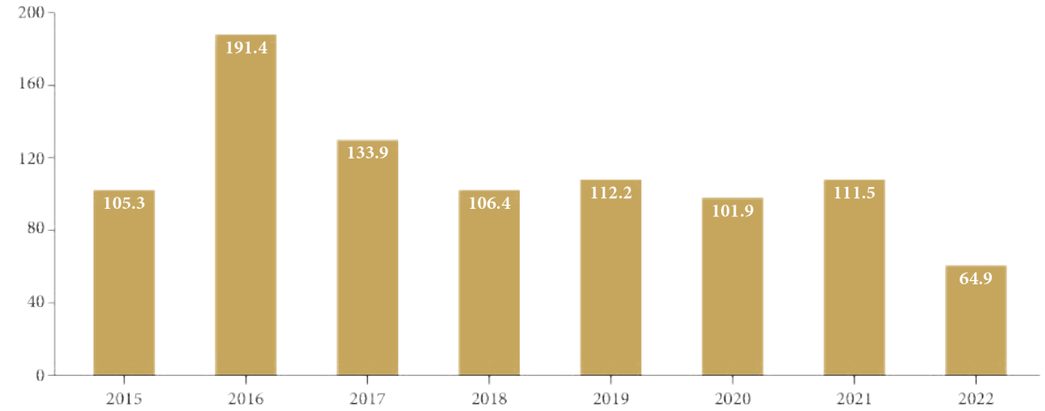
SDG target 1.5 promotes the reduction of direct deaths, missing people, direct impact **(Indicator 1.5.1)**, and economic loss **(Indicator 1.5.2)** caused by disasters. Also, it promotes the implementation of policies related to adaptation to climate change, and resilience to disasters in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, in the national **(Indicator 1.5.3)** and local levels **(Indicator 1.5.4).**

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is a global blueprint adopted in 2015, aimed at reducing disaster risks and losses in lives, livelihoods, and health. Urban areas are increasingly vulnerable to natural and human-made disasters due to factors like climate change, rapid urbanisation, and population density. By focusing on disaster risk reduction (DRR), cities can enhance their resilience, protect vulnerable populations, and reduce disasters' economic and social impacts[61].

61- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). (2015). *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.* United Nations.

At the **global level**, the number of countries reporting on national and local government DRR strategies more than doubled from 2015 to 2022[62]. In relation to direct economic loss, despite these advancements, average annual direct economic losses surpassed $115 billion globally, amounting to 0.3% of the GDP of reporting countries (Figure 20). This impact is felt more acutely in LDCs and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), where disaster-related mortality rates are higher than the global average[63].

Figure 20. Global direct economic losses from disasters, billions of dollars (2015 – 2022)



SOURCE United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations. https://unstats.un.org/SDGs/report/2024/

The Arab region faces important challenges in relation to DRR since economic losses are particularly pronounced in conflict-affected and LDCs, where the financial impact of disasters is magnified due to limited resources and resilience capacity. Countries affected by multiple crisis (e.g. related to health, conflict, migration, and urbanisation trends, among others) often experience higher proportions of GDP losses, exacerbating existing socio-economic inequalities[64].

The **UNDRR Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS)**[65] plays a pivotal role in enhancing DRR across the Arab region. It works closely with governments, regional organizations, and other partners to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. In coordination with UNDRR, **Saudi Arabia** has developed several key DRR documents for implementing the Sendai Framework in several dimensions (Figure 21).

62- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat

63- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations. https://unstats.un.org/SDGs/report/2024/

64- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

65- See more at: https://www.undrr.org/about-undrr/where-we-work/arab-states

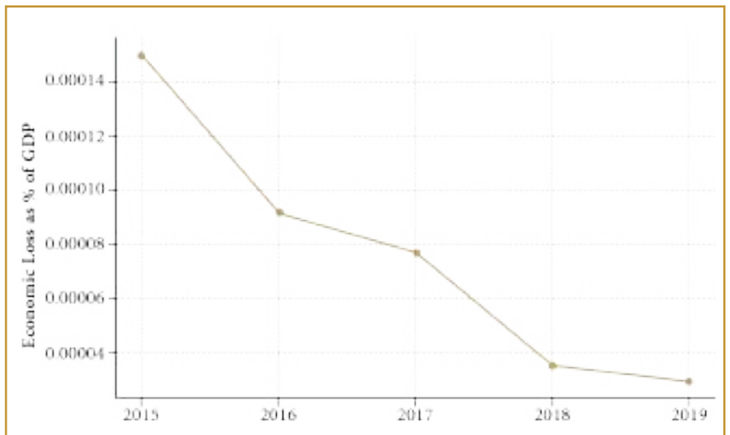
Figure 21. Saudi Arabia DRR documents (not exhaustive list)

DATE	DOCUMENT
March 2024	Quantifying the energy impact of heat mitigation technologies at the urban scale
October 2023	Saudi Arabia seismic risk profile
August 2023	Association of ambient temperature with mortality in resident and multiethnic transient populations in a desert climate, 2006–2014
December 2021	The Belt and Road Ministerial Forum for International Cooperation in Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management 2021
November 2021	G20 Climate Risk Atlas: Saudi Arabia
November 2021	Impact of virtual disaster collaboration exercises on disaster leadership at hospitals in Saudi Arabia
March 2021	How the lessons of previous epidemics helped successful countries fight covid-19
January 2021	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Updated nationally determined contribution 2021
August 2019	Future heat stress during Muslim pilgrimage (Hajj) projected to exceed “extreme danger” levels
July 2018	Climate change adaptation in the Arab states
June 2018	Drought characteristics and management in North Africa and the Near East
July 2017	Saudi Arabia: Sendai Framework data readiness review report (Preliminary report)
February 2016	Resilience insight: 12 cities assessment
August 2015	Arab sustainable development report: prototype edition - technical summary 2015

SOURCE https://www.preventionweb.net/countries-regions/asia/saudi-arabia, adapted by author.

Saudi Arabia has implemented a variety of strategies for DRR, aligning with the broader goals of Vision 2030[66]. These strategies emphasize strengthening institutional frameworks, enhancing early warning systems, and promoting sustainable development practices. The country is actively engaged in regional and international initiatives, such as the Middle East Green Initiative (MGI)[67], which aims to combat climate change and its associated risks. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has invested in infrastructure and technological solutions to improve resilience against natural disasters, ensuring a proactive approach to mitigating and managing disaster impacts[68]. The country also showcases a significant decrease in economic loss due to disasters (Figure 22).

Figure 22. Saudi Arabia’s direct economic loss attributed to disasters (GDP) (%) (2015 – 2019)



SOURCE General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2020). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicators Report. Saudi Arabia, adapted by author

This trend reflects the effectiveness of the national strategies and measures implemented to reduce vulnerability and enhance disaster preparedness, contributing to a more resilient economy[69]. Therefore, for the related categorical indicator (11.b.1), **Saudi Arabia scores 100% - “Completely addresses the criteria for this indicator”** (see the Methodology section for more details on the construction of categorical indicators).

As discussed in this VLR, local authorities actively engage in urban development initiatives that incorporate resilience and disaster reduction considerations in relation to **Al Qassim and Buraidah**. These efforts materialize in very high scores, such as no registered deaths, missing persons, or directly affected individuals attributed to disasters.

66- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

67- See more at: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/explore/projects/middle-east-green-initiative

68- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

69- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2020). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicators Report. Saudi Arabia.

However, public sources do not extensively document specific details on local DRR strategies. Therefore, for this categorical indicator (11.b.2), given that the planning efforts related to urban resilience result in excellent disaster risk related indicators, but the city lacks specific details on local DRR strategies, **Buraidah scores 75% - "Strongly addresses the criteria for this indicator"** (see the Methodology section for more details on the construction of categorical indicators).

Incorporating DRR into sustainable development is key to reducing disaster mortality and economic losses. Saudi Arabia's demonstrate great alignment with the Sendai Framework, especially with targeted projects under Vision 2030. Buraidah's DRR related indicators show progress, but more detailed local DRR documentation is needed. Therefore, local policymakers must engage with focused DRR strategies for the city.

2.3.6. Mean Household Income

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
39	Mean household income (SAR)		↑	SAR 44773,0

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	30974,0	28058,4	33252,8	36089,6	-

2022 COMPLETION: 77.4%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

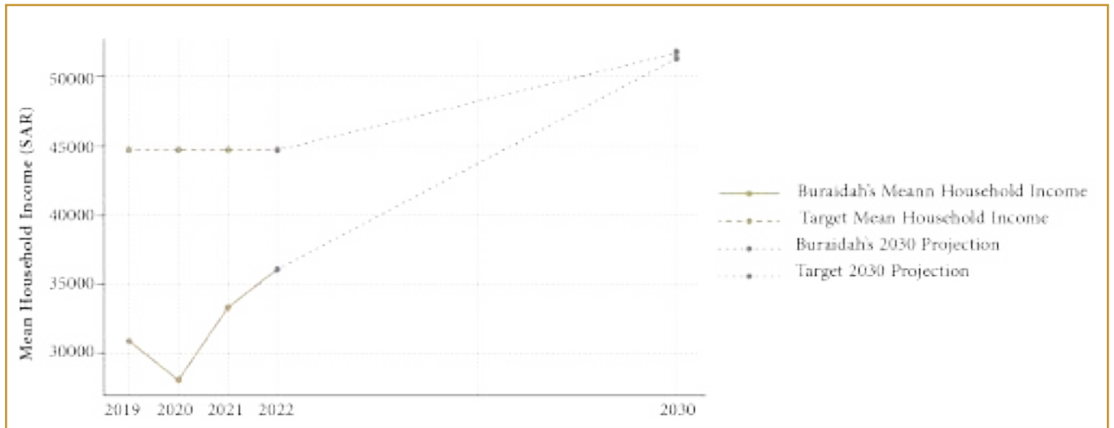
UMF's Domain 2, focused on economy, puts forward **indicator 2.4.2 "mean household income".** Tracking mean household income is critical as it provides a clear reflection of economic well-being at the household level. This indicator is closely connected to SDG 1 since it serves as a key measure for understanding living standards, identifying income disparities, and monitoring economic resilience in urban populations.

Globally, trends in mean household income have demonstrated significant variations across regions. During the pandemic, labour income decreased sharply while income from capital increased, leading to growing inequalities. While some high-income countries experienced relatively stable incomes due to robust social protection programmes, many low-income nations saw a decline in household earnings. In Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, inflation between late 2021 and 2022 eroded household income gains, with inflation growing at higher rates than nominal income growth[70].

Saudi Arabia has seen notable improvements in mean household income, particularly supported by its economic diversification efforts under Vision 2030. In 2023, per capita disposable income increased, driven by non-oil sector growth and a decrease in unemployment rates. However, income distribution remains uneven, with wealth concentrated in urban centres like Riyadh and Jeddah[71].

Buraidah's local data on mean household income showcases important insights (Figure 23). Firstly, longitudinal data highlights the impact of the pandemic on household incomes, with a stark decrease from 2019 to 2020. However, the city is back on track, demonstrating significant improvements each year since 2020. Additionally, the 2022 household income (36089,6 SAR) remains approximately 23 per cent more than the indicator's completion goal. Nonetheless, Buraidah's consistent rate of improvement suggests a positive outlook towards 2030. By projecting Buraidah's performance in 2030, based on current improving rates, the city is "On track" to achieve the mean household income target, accounting for inflation[72] (Figure 23).

Figure 23. Buraidah's mean household income, SAR (2019-2022, projected 2030)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

This chapter has explored Buraidah's performance and improvements towards achieving SDG 1, with high scores in eradicating extreme poverty, expanding access to basic services, and developing robust social protection frameworks. However, challenges remain, particularly in reducing the proportion of the population living below the national poverty line and increasing social security coverage for vulnerable populations. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has posed additional difficulties, yet the city's consistent improvements showcase its resilience and commitment to sustainable development.

70- OECD (2024), "Household income", in Society at a Glance 2024: OECD Social Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/c8568e7f-en

71- See more at: https://www.euromonitor.com/income-and-expenditure-saudi-arabia/report

72- Inflation is expected to stay around 2.2% in the medium term due to substantial government subsidies on fuel and food, as well as lower costs for imported goods. World Bank (2023), Macro Poverty Outlook for Saudi Arabia.

3

SDG 3 CHAPTER

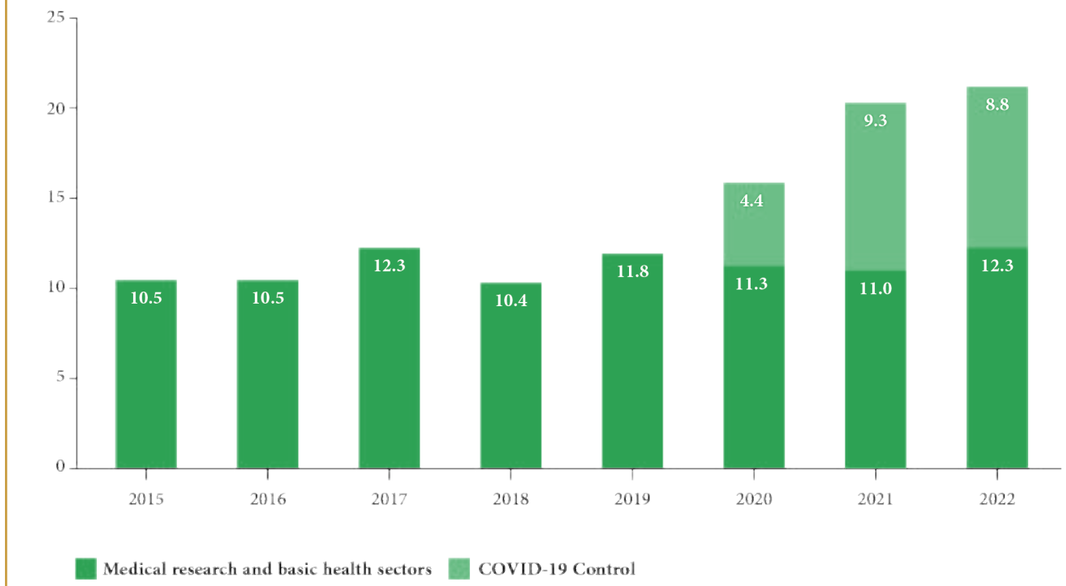
3.1. INTRODUCTION

SDG 3 focuses on "ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages", with targets ranging from maternal mortality rates, child mortality rates, and communicable and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) prevention, to substance abuse, road traffic accidents, and access to health-care services, among others[73]. **Globally,** the COVID-19 pandemic has substantially impacted health indicators, which are currently not on track for completion by 2030.[74] Consequently, the pandemic has also triggered a rise in Official Development Assistance (ODA) for medical research, which has the potential to promote long-term improvements in the sector (Figure 24).

73- See more at: https://SDGs.un.org/goals/goal3#targets_and_indicators

74- World Health Organization. (2024). Aligning for country impact: 2024 progress report on the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All. World Health Organization.

Figure 24. Global total ODS to medical research and basic health sectors, billions of constant 2022 U.S dollars (2015–2022)



SOURCE United Nations (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024

Important global challenges emerge in relation to maternal mortality (showcasing stagnating tendencies with little to no improvement), under-5 deaths (which has decreased by 2022 but still needs improvement to reach the goal for 2030), and access to essential health services (with more than half of the global population not covered)[75].

The Arab region showcases an overall low performance in SDG 3, with all the countries scoring either "major challenges" or "significant challenges" remaining, showcasing substantive gaps in health coverage, prevalence of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, and high numbers of traffic injuries[76]. In relation to Arab countries' performance, most countries are "stagnating", and no country is "on track" for 2030 (Figure 25). Additionally, insufficient data is still challenging, especially in countries dealing with armed conflicts.

75- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations. https://unstats.un.org/SDGs/report/2024/

76- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

Good Health and Well-Being		
Country	Rating	Trend
Algeria	●	➡
Bahrain	●	➡
Comoros	●	➡
Djibouti	●	➡
Egypt	●	↗
Iraq	●	↗
Jordan	●	➡
Kuwait	●	➡
Lebanon	●	↗
Libya	●	↗
Mauritania	●	➡
Morocco	●	↗
Oman	●	↗
Palestine	●	↗
Qatar	●	↗
Saudi Arabia	●	↗
Somalia	●	➡
Sudan	●	➡
Syrian	●	↗
Tunisia	●	↗
UAE	●	↗
Yemen	●	↓

Figure 25. Arab region SDG 3 status and trend dashboard

- SDG achievement
- On track
- Challenges remain
- Moderately Increasing
- Significant challenges remain
- Stagnating
- Major challenges remain
- Decreasing
- Data not available

SOURCE Adapted from The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2023-2024

At the national level, Saudi Arabia has prioritised health in its national agenda through the Health Care Law and the National Health Strategy (Box 2), resulting in notable improvements in key health indicators and increased funding for the sector[77]. Efforts have particularly focused on enhancing universal health coverage, reducing maternal and neonatal mortality, and tackling NDCs like diabetes, which remain a significant challenge. Additionally, the country has seen progress in reducing child mortality through high vaccination rates and ensuring skilled health personnel are present during births. Despite these advancements, road safety and traffic-related injuries still require targeted interventions to further align with the goals of SDG 3[78].

77- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

78- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

Vision 2030 has played a transformative role in Saudi Arabia's health-care sector by reshaping it to align with the broader national goals of economic diversification, social development, and sustainability. Important efforts under Vision 2030 focus on the improvement of health-care systems, preventive care, PPPs, technological integration, workforce development, and universal health coverage, among others,[79]

Box 2: National initiatives

The Health Law[80] ensures that comprehensive and accessible health-care services are available to the entire population.

The National Health Strategy[81] advances the vision, goals and objectives for the development of the health sector, with key focuses on establishing a national health information system, enhancing primary health care, increasing PPPs, and promoting healthy lifestyles.

The National "E-Health" Strategy[82] aims to improve the digital health system in Saudi Arabia, advancing on the implementation of electronic health records, improving Hospital Information Systems (HIS), developing digital health applications, and standardizing digital health platforms.

In 2017, the **Health in All Policies (HiAP**[83]**) initiative** was introduced to integrate health considerations into all policies and regulations, promoting collaboration between sectors.

The **Health Sector Transformation Program,**[84] launched as part of Vision 2030, aims to restructure the health system into an integrated, effective model focused on both individual and community health.

The **localisation of SDG 3** is crucial for an enhanced understanding of the contextualized impact of health-related policies and initiatives at the local level. By assessing the SDG at the city level, it is possible to identify the main drivers to building resilient health-care systems, promoting well-being, and ensuring equitable access to health resources across communities. Cities play a leading role in monitoring and implementing health-care interventions, addressing local health disparities, and scaling up innovative public health solutions. Through local engagement, cities like Buraidah contribute to national and global health agendas, providing tailored strategies to enhance public health outcomes.

79- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

80- See more at: https://www.moh.gov.sa/en/Ministry/Rules/Documents/002.pdf

81- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum. Retrieved from https://hlpf.un.org/countries/saudi-arabia

82- See more at: https://www.moh.gov.sa/en/Ministry/nehs/Pages/default.aspx

83- See more at: https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/mca-documents/rmncah/health-in-all-policies-key-messages-en.pdf?sfvrsn=a4982d1_

84- See more at: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/explore/programmes/health-sector-transformation-program

3.2. SDG 3 OVERVIEW

			Rating	Trend
3.1	3.1.1	Maternal mortality ratio	●	↑
	3.1.2	Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel	●	↑
3.2	3.2.1	Under - 5 mortality rate	●	↓
	3.2.2	Neonatal mortality rate	●	↓
3.3	3.3.1	Number of new HIV infections	●	↑
	3.3.2	Tuberculosis incidence	●	↑
	3.3.3	Malaria incidence	●	↑
	3.3.4	Hepatitis B incidence	●	↑
3.4	3.4.1	Mortality rate attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes or respiratory disease	●	↑
	3.4.2	Suicide mortality rate	●	↑
3.5	3.5.1	Coverage of treatment interventions for substance use disorders	●	↑
	3.5.2	Alcohol per capita consumption	●	↑
3.6	3.6.1	Death rate due to road traffic injuries	●	↑
3.7	3.7.2	Adolescent birth rate	●	↑
3.8	3.8.1	Coverage of essential health services	●	↑
	3.8.2	Population with large household expenditures on health	●	↑
3.9	3.9.2	Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene	●	↑
UMF	42	Air quality	●	↓
3.b	3.b.1	Proportion of vaccinated children	●	↗
	3.b.3	Health facilities that have a core set of relevant essential medicines available and affordable	●	↑
3.c	3.c.1	Health worker density and distribution	●	↑
UMF	17	Life expectancy at birth	●	↑

95% COMPLETION

For SDG 3 progress in Buraidah, this VLR assessed **22 indicators,** which showcase a very high overall completion score (95 per cent) and the best results compared to the other SDGs reviewed in the VLR. Out of the 22 indicators, 16 are already "achieved", and two additional indicators (death rate due to road traffic injuries, and life expectancy at birth) are "On track". Three indicators (under-5 mortality, neonatal mortality, and air quality) show that "challenges remain" in this area. At the same time, they show a "decreasing" trend, stressing the need to assess challenges and opportunities to upturn their 2030 projections. In general, Buraidah has **slight data gaps for SDG 3**, suggesting strong potential for local evidence-based policymaking in the health sector.

3.3. BURAIDAH'S PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN SDG 3 INDICATORS

3.3.1. Maternal Mortality Rate

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.1.1	Maternal mortality (deaths per 100,000 live births)	●	↑	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	-	5.9%	0%	-

2021 COMPLETION: 100%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.1.2	Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel	●	↑	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
100%	100%	99.8%	99.8%	100%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

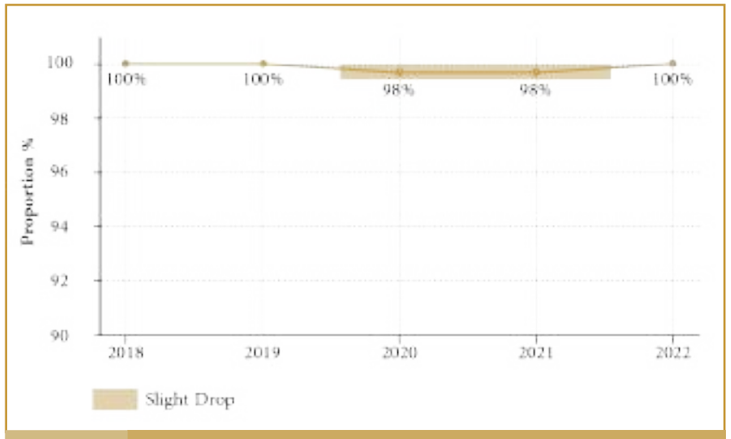
The first target in SDG 3 aims to **reduce maternal mortality rate** (MMR) globally. It tracks advancements regarding the MMR indicator **(3.1.1)** and the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel indicator **(3.1.2).** A high MMR often indicates inefficiencies in the health-care system, and its improvement is central to providing women with safety during pregnancy and childbirth. Moreover, the proportion of births attended by skilled health professionals (doctors, nurses and/or midwives) is indicative of maternal care, prevention of complications, and safety to mother and child.

As discussed previously, **at the global level,** there has been little improvement in reducing the overall MMR since 2015. Global challenges, such as pandemics, climate change, environmental degradation, food insecurity, human displacement and armed conflicts partly explain the persistent challenges in access to maternal care.[85] The Arab region showcases diversity in progress between countries in different sub-regions, with major challenges faced by countries in conflict-affected areas.[86]

Saudi Arabia's performance is above the global average, with low MMR (about 9.42 deaths per 100,000 live births), and around 98.7 per cent of births attended by skilled health personnel. Both results suggest a health-care system that is conducive for safe and healthy maternal care and births.[87] Important national targeted initiatives include "The Mother and Child Health[88]" initiative, which focuses on enhancing health services through ensuring trained personnel attend deliveries, promoting family planning, and implementing comprehensive early childhood development policies, including early detection of developmental delays and support for caretakers.

Buraidah's localised data collection showcases excellent performance in both indicators, with completion achieved by 2022 in both cases. Buraidah also provides localised data for indicator 3.1.2 on the "Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel" since 2018, showcasing a stable high performance, with a minor drop in 2020 and 2021 (Figure 26).

Figure 26. Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel in Buraidah (2018–2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory, adapted by the author

Several factors might be contributing to such performance, ranging from the health-care infrastructure; skilled doctors, nurses and midwives; effective local implementation of health policies; and community health awareness. Additionally, Buraidah's local data collection plays a central role in assessing and monitoring SDG 3 indicators, promoting policymakers with the tools to maintaining momentum towards 2030.

85- World Health Organization. (2024). Aligning for country impact: 2024 progress report on the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All. World Health Organization.

86- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

87- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2022). Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2022. Saudi Arabia

88- See more at: https://www.moh.gov.sa/en/Ministry/Information-and-services/Pages/Women-Health.aspx

3.3.2. Children's Mortality Rate

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.2.1	Under-5 mortality (deaths per 1,000 live births)	●	↓	2.2%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
14.7%	14.7%	14.8%	12.4%	18.2%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 91%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.2.2	Neonatal mortality (deaths per 1,000 live births)	●	↓	2.2%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
12.2%	12.2%	12.5%	10.7%	15.4%	-

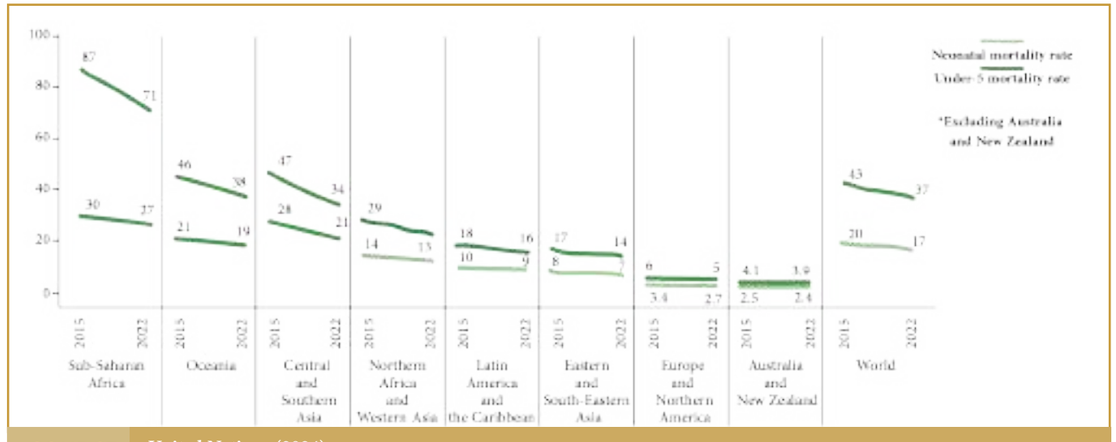
2022 COMPLETION: 93%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 3.2 tracks **preventable under-5 children's deaths (indicator 3.2.1)** and newborn deaths **(indicator 3.2.2).** These rates reflect the overall strength of prenatal and postnatal care. These indicators are also cross-cutting with other SDGs, since high children mortality rate often correlates with systemic issues, such as poverty, malnutrition, lack of education, etc.

Both indicators have seen important improvements at the **global level.** Nonetheless, regional disparities are prominent, with Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia showing important challenges towards 2030 (Figure 27). Additionally, on average, the rate of reduction of children's mortality has slowed down, suggesting the importance of accelerating progress to achieve the relevant SDG target[89].

Figure 27. Global under-5 and neonatal mortality rate, 2015–2022 (deaths per 1,000 live births)



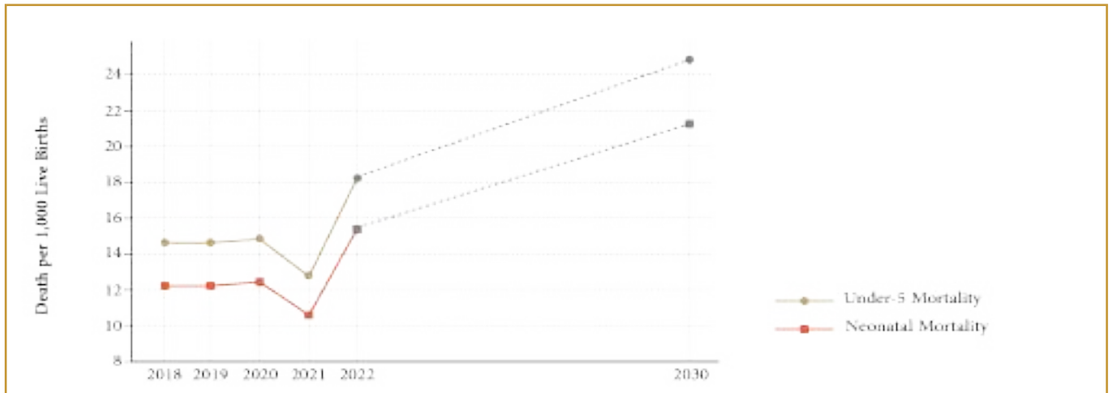
SOURCE United Nations (2024)

89- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024. United Nations.

In **Saudi Arabia**, both indicators perform well in relation to the global average, with around 10.05 under-5 deaths per 1,000 live births and around neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births in 2018.[90] Once again, "The Mother and Child Health" initiative plays an important role in enhancing health services through immunization programmes and reducing communicable diseases among children[91].

Buraidah has high completion scores in these indicators (91 per cent and 93 per cent, respectively). Even though these are high scores, the trend since 2018 showcases a declining tendency in both cases (Figure 28), suggesting that challenges remain to achieve the relevant targets by 2030.

Figure 28. Buraidah's scores in SDG indicators 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 (2018 – 2022, and 2030 projection)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

From 2018 to 2020, Buraidah has shown stable results for both indicators. In 2021 and 2022, there appeared spikes downwards and upwards, which could be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, when health-care systems around the world were affected, with increased strains on health facilities, reduced access to services during the pandemic restrictions, and socioeconomic factors caused by the pandemic that directly affected families' capacity to access high-quality food and essential services.

The availability of local data related to these indicators in Buraidah can play a crucial role in empowering evidence-based policymaking to shift the current tendency and get Buraidah on track to achieve both indicators by 2030.

90- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2022). Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2022. Saudi Arabia

91- See more at: https://www.moh.gov.sa/en/Ministry/Information-and-services/Pages/Women-Health.aspx

3.3.3. Communicable Diseases

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.3.1	Number of new HIV infections (per 1,000 capita)	●	↑	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	0.28%	0.04%	0.0004	-

2023 COMPLETION: 100%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.3.2	Tuberculosis incidence (infection per 1,000 capita)	●	↑	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	3.9%	7.2%	5.31%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 99.5%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.3.3	Malaria incidence (infection per 1,000 capita)	●	↑	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	26.7%	0.02%	0.03%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 100%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.3.4	Hepatitis B incidence (infection per 1,000 capita)	●	↑	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1.68%	1.61%	-	15.73%	0.41%	-

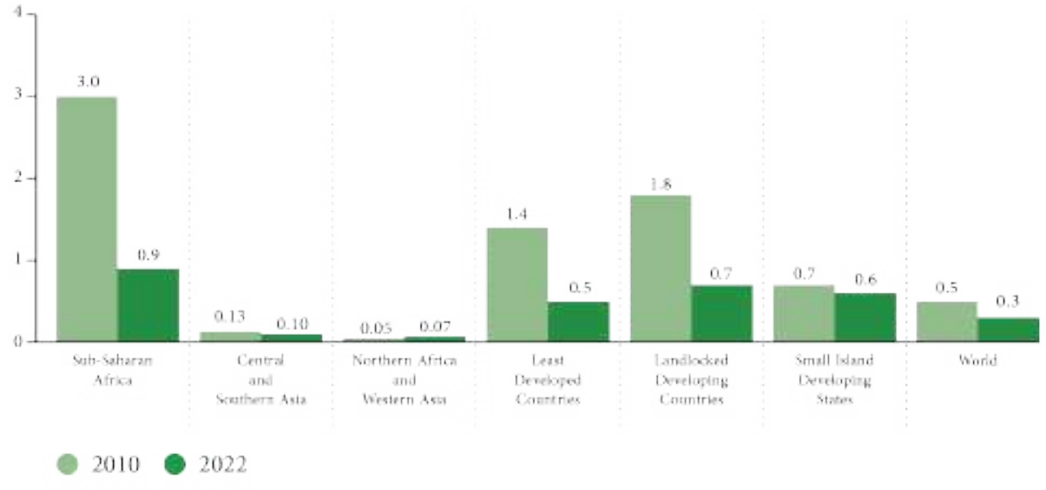
2022 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 3.3 focuses on the epidemics of AIDS **(indicator 3.3.1)**, tuberculosis **(indicator 3.3.2),** malaria **(indicator 3.3.3)**, neglected tropical diseases, Hepatitis B **(indicator 3.3.4)**, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases. Tracking these indicators is central for tackling epidemics of infectious diseases, which strongly impacts public health, as well as socioeconomic dynamics around the world. HIV, tuberculosis and malaria disproportionately affect vulnerable groups and pose a threat to global health due to their rapidly spreading rates.

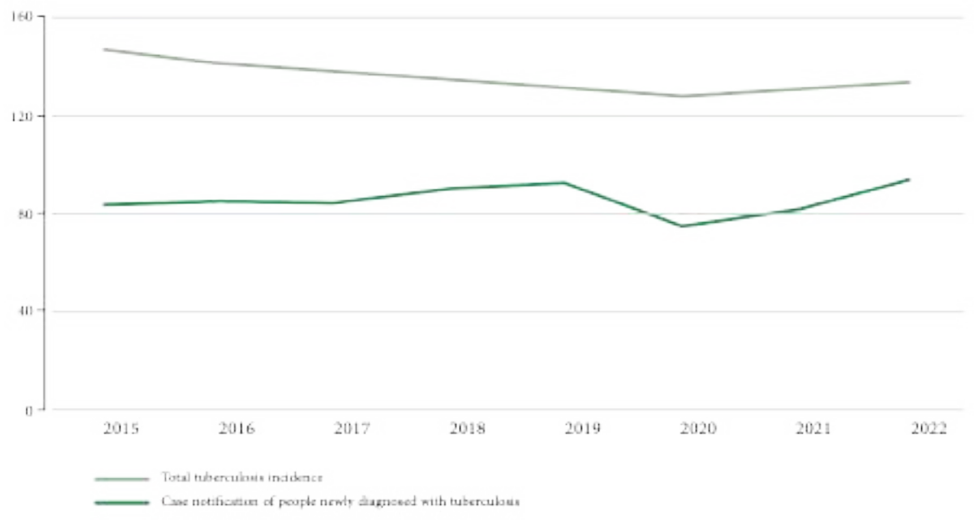
The world has seen progress in reducing new HIV infections, especially in Africa, which is the most affected continent (Figure 29). In the case of tuberculosis, from 2010 to 2022 the world's performance has shown relative stagnation and a persistent discrepancy between the estimated incidence and reported cases (Figure 30). Similarly, global efforts to reduce malaria's incidence are currently off-track in relation to the World Health Organization (WHO) milestones (Figure 31).

Figure 29. Global HIV incidence per 1,000 uninfected adults (2010–2022)



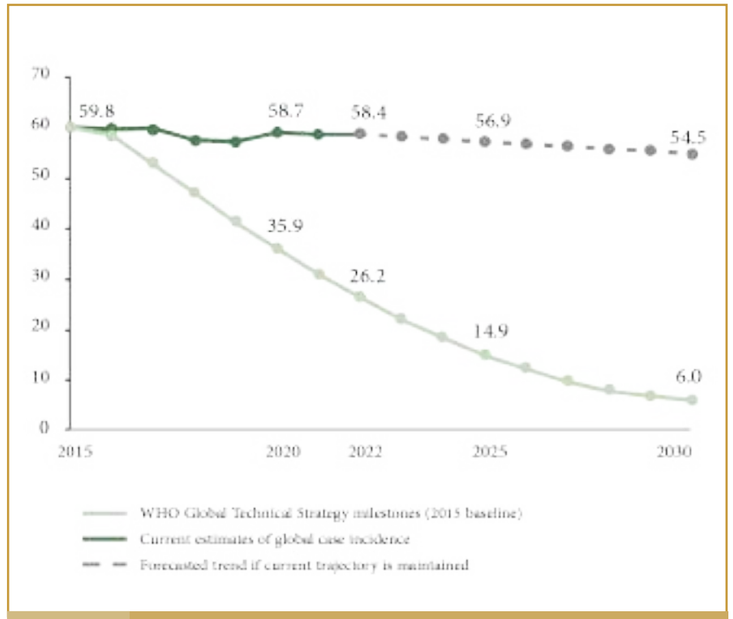
SOURCE United Nations (2024)

Figure 30. Global tuberculosis estimated incidence rate and case notification rate per 100,000 people (2015–2022)



SOURCE United Nations (2024)

Figure 31. Global malaria incidence per 1,000 people (2015–2030 projection)



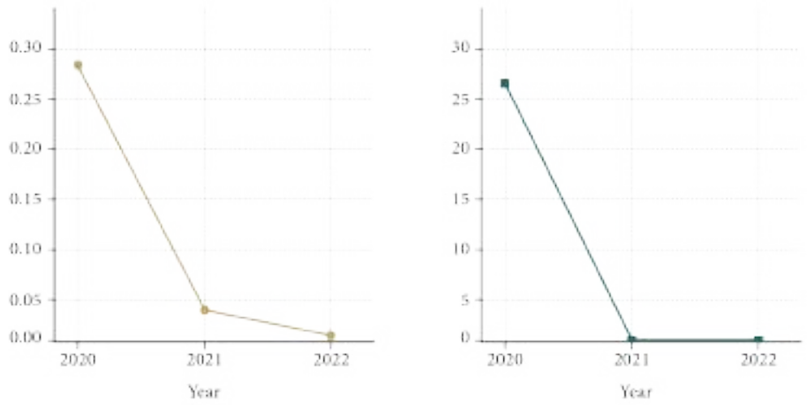
SOURCE United Nations (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024

Saudi Arabia is actively working to combat communicable diseases by aiming to end tuberculosis by 2035 and eliminate hepatitis C by 2030. The Ministry of Health has enhanced tuberculosis detection and treatment for high-risk groups and implemented nationwide hepatitis C screening, identifying and treating thousands of cases.[92] Saudi Arabia shows excellent performance in SDG target 3.3 indicators, with low rates of HIV, tuberculosis, malaria and hepatitis B..

Buraidah has an excellent performance in these indicators, having all of them already "achieved". In both indicator 3.3.1 (HIV infections) and indicator 3.3.3 (malaria incidence), a substantive improvement is observable between 2020 and 2022, with sharp declines from one year to the other (Figure 32). Even if in different magnitudes, this improvement can also be observed (Figure 33) in the data related to indicator 3.3.2 (tuberculosis incidence) and 3.3.4 (hepatitis B incidence) for the same period (Figure 33).

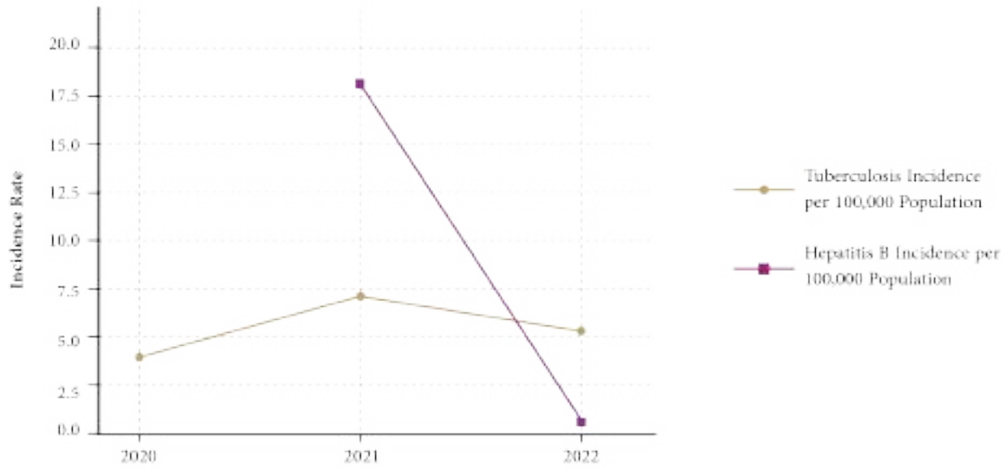
92- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

Figure 32. Buraidah's HIV infections and malaria incidence per 1,000 people (2020 – 2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

Figure 33. Buraidah's tuberculosis and hepatitis B incidence per 100,000 people (2020–2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

Buraidah's data reveals a notable decline in all assessed communicable diseases from 2020 to 2022. These findings underscore the importance of continuing robust health interventions to sustain progress and address emerging challenges.

3.3.4. Non-Communicable Diseases

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.4.1	Mortality rate attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease (deaths per 1,000 capita)	●	↑	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
-	-	-	0.43%	0.14%	-	2022 COMPLETION: 100%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.4.2	Suicide mortality rate (cases per 100,000 capita	●	↑	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
1.6%	1.3%	0.3%	0%	0%	-	2022 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 3.4 aims to reduce **premature mortality from NCDs and mental health** and tracks indicators of cardiovascular disease, cancer, or diabetes **(3.4.1)** and suicide mortality rate **(3.4.2).** Both indicators assess significant contributors to worldwide mortality, providing important insights into improving quality of life and well-being.

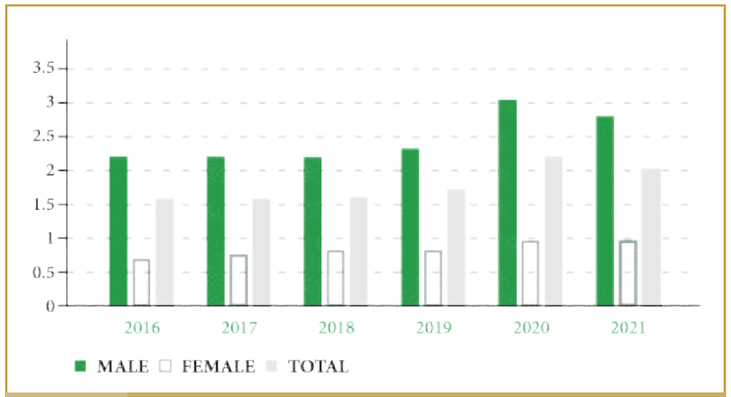
A reduction in NCD mortality (including cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases) is noticeable **around the globe**. Important factors affecting this positive trend are related to improved health-care access and awareness campaigns.[93] However, lifestyle factors are still important contributors to significant global challenges related to NCDs, such as sedentary routines, tobacco use, and unhealthy diets. In relation to suicide rates, it is noticeable that, despite improvements in the integration of mental health into health-care systems and policies, suicide remains slowly rising globally.[94]

In the **Arab region**, important challenges are related to diabetes and suicide, with varying availability of mental health services depending on sub-regions and countries. Data gaps in relation to mental health are also a concern in the region[95].

In **Saudi Arabia**, major efforts have been put forward to tackle the challenges related to NCDs, implementing targeted health initiatives focused on early detection, health-care access, and healthier lifestyles. Additionally, essential improvements are underway in relation to training health-care professionals and upgrading medical facilities. However, NCDs are expected to rise in Saudi Arabia due to its ageing population.[96] In 2022, the suicide mortality rates in Saudi Arabia stayed at around 2.28 suicides per 100,000 people[97]. (Figure 34)

93- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024. United Nations.
94- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024. United Nations.
95- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.
96- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.
97- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2022). Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2022. Saudi Arabia

Figure 34. Buraidah's suicide mortality rate per 100,000 people (2018–2022)

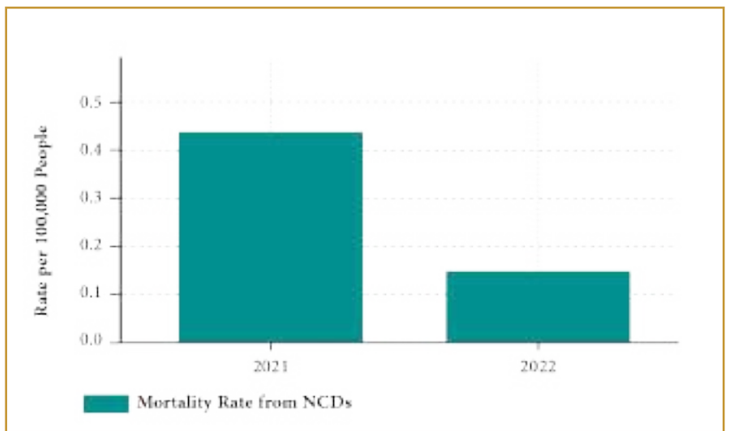


SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

The Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA) launched a healthy food strategy in 2018 to promote better lifestyle choices, focusing on reducing the consumption of salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats.[98] Additionally, the Quality of Life Program's Lively Community initiative[99] actively encourages physical activity by supporting sports groups and federations, while also promoting increased participation in community sports, especially among women.

In **Buraidah**, both indicators (NCDs and suicide mortality rates) show improvement and high scores (figures 35 and 36). The city's performance in relation to mortality due to NCDs especially, with very low numbers of cases, showcases important efforts at the local level (Figure 35).

Figure 35. Buraidah's mortality rate attributed to NCDs per 1,000 people (2021–2022)



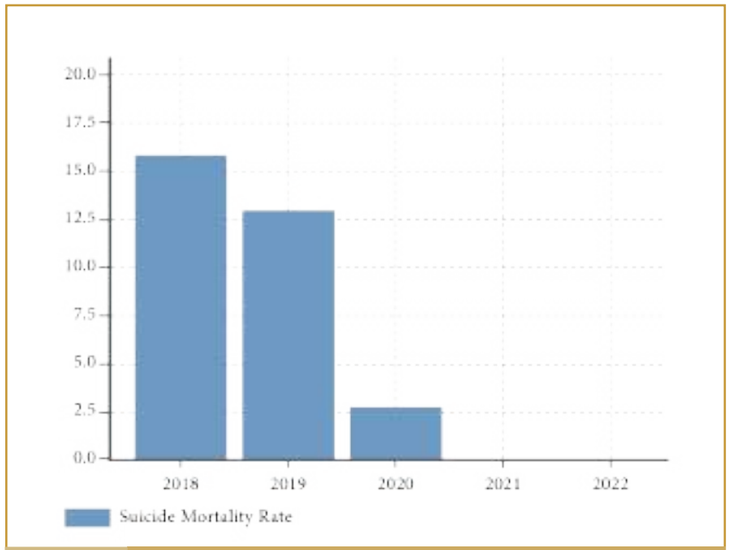
SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

98- See more at: https://sfda.gov.sa/en/news/1941

99- See more at: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/explore/programmes/quality-of-life-program

Similarly, Buraidah's suicide mortality rate showcases very low numbers since 2018, reaching around 0 cases per year by 2021, which was maintained in 2022 (Figure 36). If local policymakers are able to leverage momentum, this indicates a great trend towards 2030.

Figure 36. Buraidah's suicide mortality rate per 100,000 people (2018–2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

Buraidah's performance in reducing NCD and suicide mortality rates has been impressive, showing a steady decline in both areas. This success can be attributed to comprehensive public health strategies, improved health-care access, and strong community support. These efforts highlight the city's commitment to addressing NCDs and mental health issues effectively. Nonetheless, additional data on endemic diseases shows very high incidence of respiratory system infections.[100]

3.3.5. Treatment for Substance Use Disorders

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.5.1	Coverage of treatment interventions for substance use disorders	●	↑	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	100%	99.5%	100%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 3.5 focuses on **strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse,** with indicators tracking the coverage of interventions **(indicator 3.5.1)** and alcohol consumption. Monitoring this target is critical for improving public health, reducing related social issues caused by substance abuse, and fostering safer communities.

100- Qassim Urban Observatory (2024). The SDGs in QUO. May 2024 Update.

Globally, substance abuse remains a significant challenge, contributing to a range of health and social problems. Substance use disorders are linked to an increase in morbidity and mortality, and they can lead to various social and economic consequences. Additionally, substance abuse is linked to mental health, usually correlated to depression, and anxiety, among other disorders. Multifaceted efforts to combat this issue involve prevention strategies, treatment programmes, educational measures and public awareness campaigns[101]. 2022 data shows that less than 10 per cent of people with drug abuse-related disorders received treatment[102].

The **Arab region** faces challenges related to substance abuse, with significant gaps in intervention-related policies, and a pressing need for more contextualized data and research.[103] In **Saudi Arabia**, a comprehensive approach is put forward, tackling the challenges around substance abuse both related to prevention (i.e. through enforcement of strict regulations) and treatment (i.e. rehabilitation services)[104]. **Al Qassim and Buraidah** follow the national trend for indicator 3.5.1, with 100 per cent coverage of treatment interventions for substance use disorders.

SDG indicator 3.5.2 focuses on the harmful use of alcohol, measured through per capita consumption, which is a crucial aspect of addressing substance abuse. However, in Saudi Arabia, data on this indicator is not available due to the country's strict regulations prohibiting the production, sale and consumption of alcohol since 1952. These regulations are enforced at both national and local levels, making it reasonable to assume that alcohol consumption levels are extremely low across the country, including in regions like Buraidah. The cultural, legal and religious context of Saudi Arabia plays a significant role in minimizing alcohol use, aligning with the nation's broader efforts to prevent substance abuse and promote public health.

3.3.6. Death Rate Due to Road Traffic Injuries

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.6.1	Death rate due to road traffic injuries (deaths per 100,000 capita)	●	↑	1.7%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
14.4%	13.7%	7.6%	13%	10%	10%

2023 COMPLETION: 87%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 3.6 aims to reduce **the number of deaths due to road traffic injuries (indicator 3.6.1)**. This phenomenon is a significant public health concern due to the pervasive associated high mortality rate worldwide. Therefore, road safety, regulatory measures, infrastructure improvement, and public awareness campaigns are essential to improving this target towards 2030.

101- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024. United Nations.
102- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024. United Nations.
103- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.
104- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2020). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicators Report. Saudi Arabia.

Globally, road traffic injuries remain a leading cause of death and disability, particularly among young people. According to WHO, every year, around 1.2 million people die in road traffic accidents, being the lead cause of death for people between 5–29 years, and disproportionally affecting low- and middle-income countries.[105]

In the **Arab region**, road traffic injuries are responsible for high mortality rates, with Arab countries among the ones with the highest rates worldwide. The main factors associated with this issue include unsafe driving, poor infrastructure, inefficient emergency platforms, and lacking traffic laws enforcement (e.g. seatbelt use, speed limits, among others).[106] Additionally, the region's numbers related to road traffic injuries indicate that it also ranks among the worst performers globally in terms of per centage of GDP lost to these incidents.[107]

In **Saudi Arabia**, the number of deaths due to road traffic injuries shows a substantial decrease from 2015 to 2022.[108] Additionally, given the recent changes in providing women with the capacity to drive in 2018, men are disproportionately affected by road traffic accidents.

Saudi Arabia's improving results year by year and severe efforts on road safety are illustrated by its many related initiatives. In 2017, it established the Ministerial Committee of Traffic Safety (MCTS) to oversee national road safety initiatives and coordinate efforts with key stakeholders.

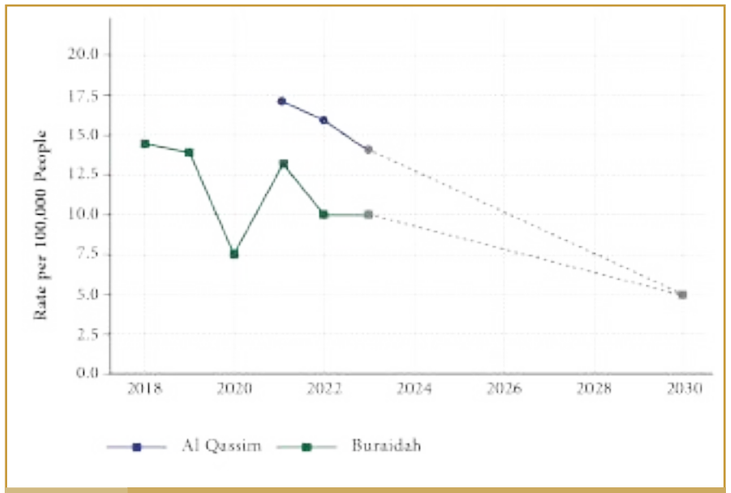
This was followed by the creation of the National Centre for Road Safety in 2018,[109] advancing on traffic safety through research, policy implementation, and public awareness initiatives. The Ministry of Interior's implementation of the Saher Automated System[110] played a crucial role in monitoring and enforcing traffic regulations. Additionally, the National Transport & Logistics Strategy[111] was developed to match the highest international standards. Complementing these efforts is the upcoming Saudi Road Code,[112] spearheaded by the Ministry of Transport and Logistics Services, set to be launched by 2024, aiming to enhance safety, quality and sustainability in the country's road infrastructure.

Collectively, these initiatives underscore Saudi Arabia's comprehensive and proactive approach to tackling road traffic injuries, contributing to a marked decline in fatalities over the past five years.[113]

Localised data collection related to road accident deaths per 100,000 people provides insights for **Al Qassim and Buraidah**'s performances in this indicator (Figure 39). Al Qassim results showcase that "major challenges remain", while Buraidah's results showcase that "significant challenges remain". That being said, trends show that both Al Qassim and Buraidah are "on track" to the main goal of this target, which is halving the number of deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents.

105- See more at: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/road-traffic-injuries
106- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.
107- World Bank. (2014). Road Traffic Injuries in the Middle East and North Africa: A Cause for Concern. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
108- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2022). Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2022. Saudi Arabia.
109- See more at: https://nrsc.gov.sa/5951-2/
110- See more here.
111- See more at: https://www.arabnews.com/node/1885636/saudi-arabia
112- See more at: https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/N2155456
113- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

Figure 37. Road traffic deaths per 100,000 people, in Al Qassim and Buraidah (2018–2023, 2030 projection)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

Buraidah's performance in reducing road traffic injuries demonstrates significant progress; yet, challenges remain. To continue this positive trajectory and achieve 2030 targets, local policymakers should focus on promoting multimodal transport and land-use planning, emphasizing the development of public transport and pedestrian-friendly environments.[114]

3.3.7. Adolescent Birth Rate

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.7.2	Adolescent birth rate (per 1.000 women)	●	↑	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	-	0.4%	0%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 100%

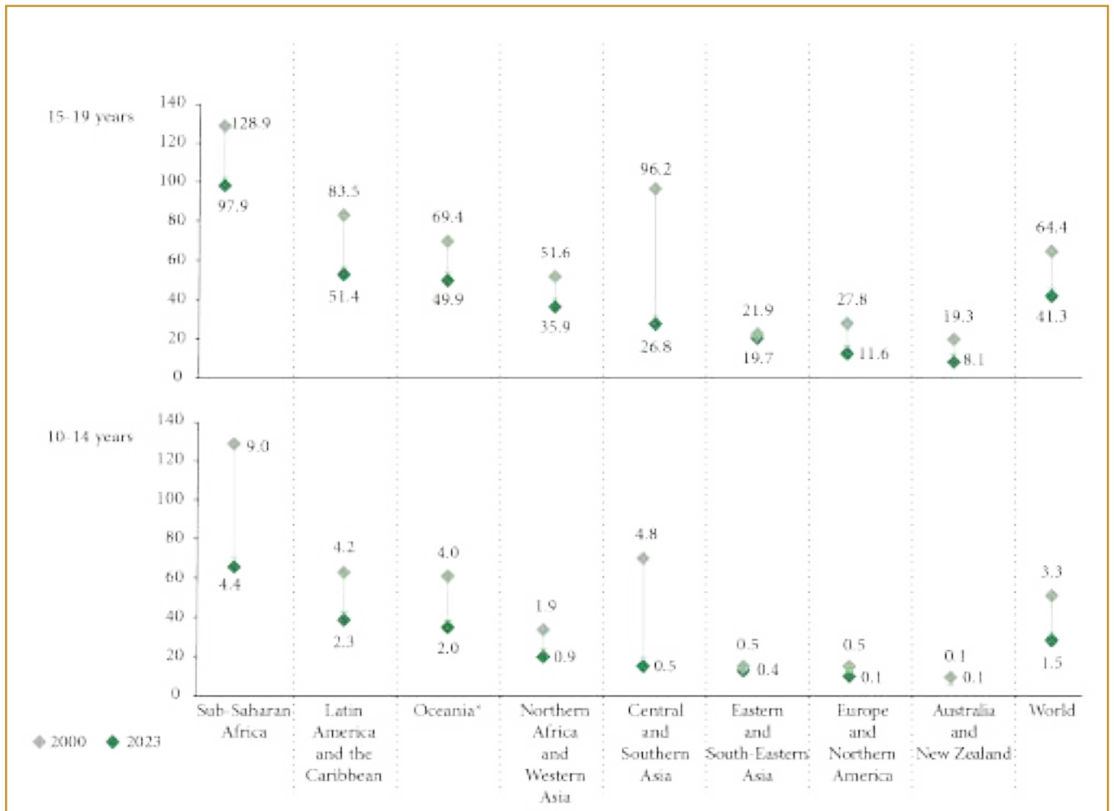
SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 3.7 focuses on **universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes. Indicator 3.7.2,** adolescent birth rate, tracks the number of births per 1,000 women aged 15–19 years and is essential to identify trends related to reproductive health, and associated social, economic and health challenges faced by young women. High rates suggest limited access to reproductive services and low reproductive awareness. Therefore, this indicator is cross-cutting, since its improvement promotes gender equality, health outcomes, and the overall development of young women.

114- World Health Organization & United Nations Regional Commissions. (2021). Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030.

Substantial improvement can be seen **around the world** in the past decades regarding adolescent birth rates for both 10–14 and 15–19 age groups. While regional disparities persist (Sub-Saharan Africa still has the highest rates globally), the global average has been reduced significantly since 2000 (Figure 40). Despite these declines, 13.1 million babies were born to adolescent mothers in 2023, representing about 10 per cent of the total births [115].

Figure 38. Global adolescent birth rate by age group, per 1,000 women (2000–2023)



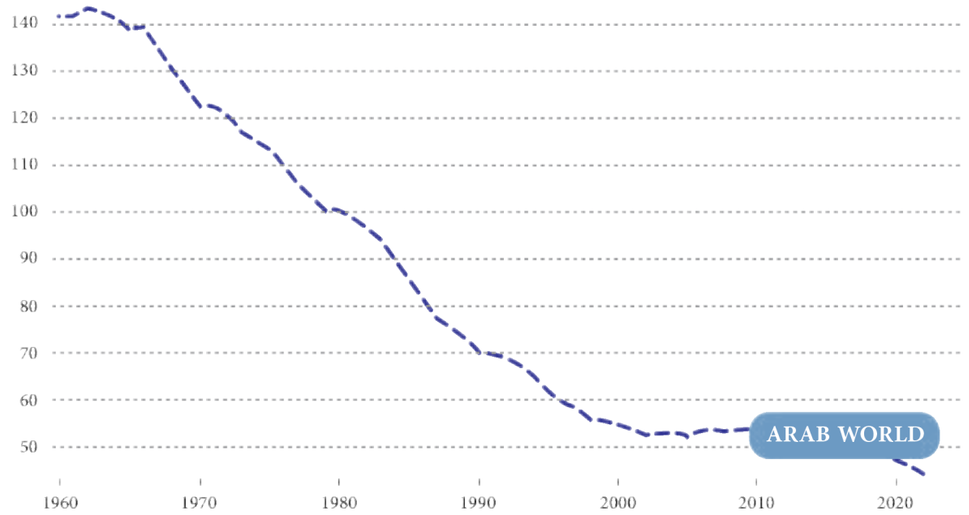
SOURCE United Nations (2024)

The **Arab region** shows improvement in this indicator, reaching a record low by 2022 (Figure 41). However, major interregional disparities still exist, with Tunisia reaching a record low of 7 adolescent births per 1,000 and Sudan reporting 102 adolescent births per 1,000 in 2015.[116]

115- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024. United Nations.

116- Middle East and North Africa Health Policy Forum & UNFPA Arab States Regional Office. (2016). Regional Report: Sexual and Reproductive Health Laws and Policies in Selected Arab Countries.

Figure 39. Births per 1,000 women ages 15–19 in the Arab world (1960–2022)



SOURCE United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects. Retrieved from: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.ADO.TFRT?locations=1A

At the national level, Saudi Arabia shows a leading performance in the region, with only 7.4 adolescent births per 1,000 in 2018.[117] Following the national trend, Buraidah reports zero adolescent births in 2022, both for women aged 10–14 and 15–19. Therefore, Buraidah has an "achieved" score in this indicator.

3.3.8. Health Coverage and Affordable Access to Health-Care

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.8.1	Coverage of essential health services	●	↑	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	100%	100%	100%	100%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 100%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.8.2	Population with large household expenditures on health (%)	●	↑	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	-	-	2.3%	1.65%

2023 COMPLETION: 98.35%

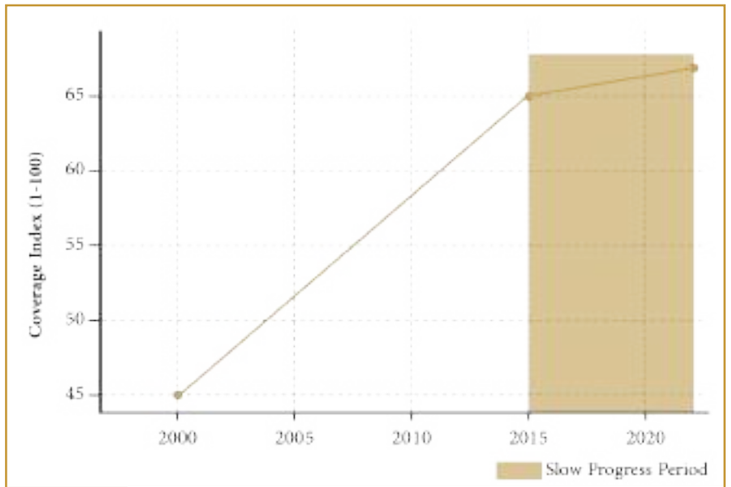
SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

117- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2022). Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2022. Saudi Arabia.

SDG target 3.8 focuses on **health coverage (indicator 3.8.1)** and affordable access to health care **(indicator 3.8.2)**. Both indicators are essential to track universal health coverage (UHC) through the availability of health-care services and financial protection related to health spending. Monitoring these indicators is central to inform policy and planning in the health sector, aiming at achieving global health goals and improving quality of life.

Between 2000 and 2021, a substantial improvement has occurred in the UHC Service Coverage Index's118 global average. Nonetheless, important challenges remain, for 2000-2022 data shows an important slow down since 2015, indicating a need to accelerate progress towards 2030 (Figure 40).

Figure 40. Global score of UHC Service Coverage Index (2000–2022)



SOURCE United Nations (2024)

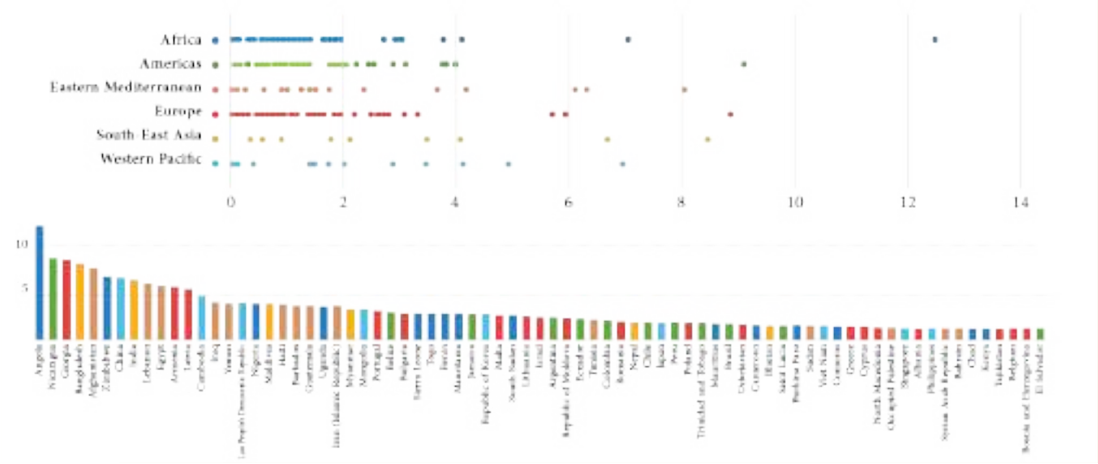
In relation to household spending on health, since 2015, people's overall financial capacity related to health care has declined. In 2019, 2 billion people were faced with increased financial hardship, and 1 billion people were affected by health expenditures.119 While most countries can report less than 4 per cent of their population spending more than 25 per cent of their budget on health, it is possible to observe countries in all regions with alarming scores from 6 per cent. Angola has the worst performance for most recently reported data.[120]

118- See more at: https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/topics/service-coverage

119- Catastrophic health expenditures are defined as instances where individuals or families allocate over 10% of their household income to health-care costs. This high level of spending can cause significant financial stress.

120- See more at: https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/population-with-household-expenditures-on-health-greater-than-25-of-total-household-expenditure-or-income-(-SDG-indicator-3-8-2)-(-)

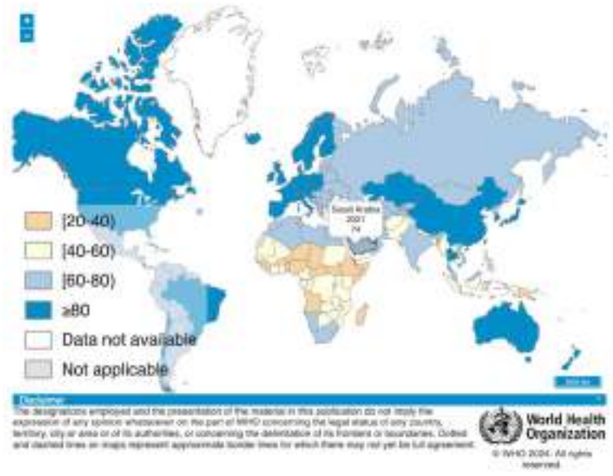
Figure 41. Population with household spending on health greater than 25% of household budget, by continents (%)



SOURCE World Health Organization (n.d.)

Saudi Arabia shows an above-average performance in relation to global averages. In relation the UHC Service Coverage Index, the country scored 74 out of 100 in 2021 (Figure 42). Concerning household spending, the country's scores are similar to the top-scoring countries in the world (Figure 43), mainly due to its universal free health-care services.[121]

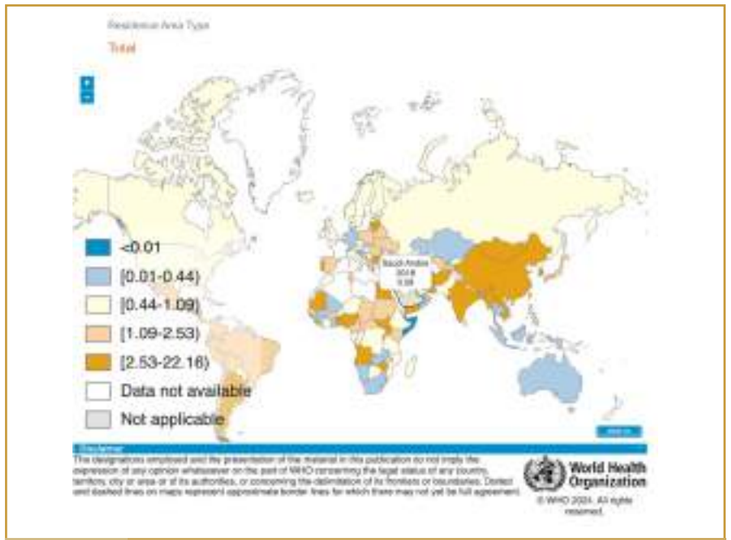
Figure 42. Saudi Arabia's score of UHC Service Coverage Index (2021)



SOURCE World Health Organization (n.d.)

121- Gurajala S. Health-care System in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: An Expat Doctor's Perspective. Cureus. 2023 May 9;15(5):e38806. doi: 10.7759/cureus.38806. PMID: 37303448; PMCID: PMC10250784.

Figure 43. Saudi Arabia's population with household spending on health greater than 25% of household budget (2018)



SOURCE World Health Organization (n.d.)

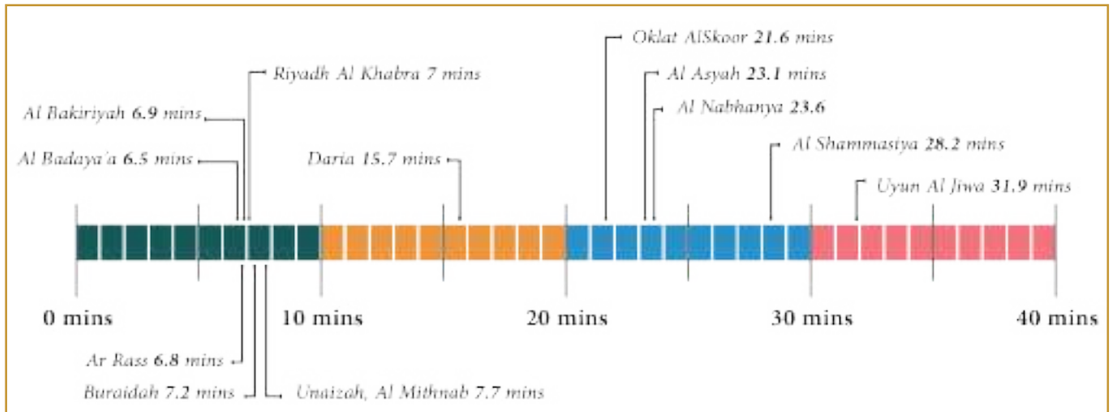
Saudi Arabia has implemented various initiatives to enhance the well-being of the elderly, ensuring they have better access to health-care and social support services. The country has also made strides in improving health-care services for individuals with disabilities by setting up dedicated facilities and developing assistive technologies to enhance their health-care experience. Additionally, the adoption of telemedicine and digital health solutions has greatly expanded access to health care in remote and rural regions, ensuring more people can receive necessary medical attention.[122]

In **Al Qassim**, access to health care and the cost of health show good scores in different dimensions. Most cities have an average travel time to health-care facilities under 8 minutes, though Uyun Al Jiwa sees a longer travel time of over 30 minutes (Figure 44). While the number of hospital beds per 10,000 people varies, from 17 in Al Badaya'a to 62 in Oklat AlSkoor, most cities meet the WHO's standard of one doctor per 1,000 residents, indicating a strong health-care workforce. Health care remains affordable, with costs comprising less than 4 per cent of household income, and emergency services are efficient, with patients receiving care within the recommended four-hour window and access to specialists within four weeks[123].

122- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

123- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim.

Figure 44. Average travel time to health services, Al Qassim cities (2020)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2020)

Buraidah demonstrates positive results, with both indicators (3.8.1 and 3.8.2) "achieved", and with strong increasing trends in the past years. Buraidah's coverage of essential health services has reached and maintained a 100 per cent score since 2019. In relation to the city's population with large health expenditures, it went from 2.3 per cent in 2022 to 1.65 per cent in 2023, which indicates that Buraidah has a positive tendency towards 2030.

3.3.9. Effects of Hazardous Chemicals in Air, Water and Soil Pollution and Contamination

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.9.2	Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene	●	↑	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	0	0	0	-

2022 COMPLETION: 100%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
42	Air Quality (PM10)	●	↓	15 µg/m3

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
13%	13%	13%	19%	19%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 93%

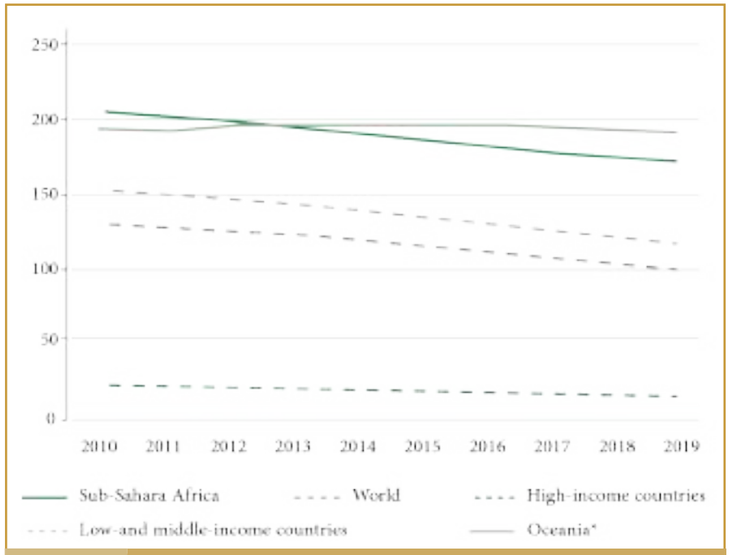
SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 3.9 focuses on **reducing the effects of hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination**. It does so through indicators tracking ambient air pollution; mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation, and lack of hygiene **(indicator 3.9.2);** and unintentional poisoning. Some of this data is not available at the local level, but for this target, this VLR is also examining an extra indicator from the UMF on air quality **(indicator 42)**. Since indicator 3.9.2 will also be covered in detail in the **SDG 6 chapter**, in this section, the discussion will focus on air pollution.

SDG target 3.9 is of global concern, given the impacts of environmental factors to health and well-being.[124] Its indicators are cross-cutting with other dimensions of health, given that pollution directly impacts NCDs (such as lung cancer, respiratory infections, heart disease, etc.), and unsafe water, sanitation, and lack of hygiene are often related to under-5 mortality.[125] It is also connected to other SDGs assessing clean water (SDG 6), clean energy (SDG 7), sustainable cities (SDG 11), and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12). Additionally, it touches upon the central discussion of environmental justice, since often vulnerable and marginalized groups are disproportionately affected by pollution.[126]

Globally, we can observe a slow but steady improvement in deaths attributed to household and ambient air pollution between 2010 and 2019, but important regional disparities persist (Figure 45). Around 90 per cent of air pollution-related deaths take place in lower- and middle-income countries, indicating a higher burden on poorer countries.[127] That being said, exposure to ambient air pollution is a ubiquitous phenomenon, with 99 per cent of the global population exposed to air pollution rates above the WHO guidelines.[128]

Figure 45. Global age-standardized mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution per 100,000 people (2010–2019)



SOURCE United Nations (2024)

124- See more at: https://www.who.int/health-topics/environmental-health#tab=tab_1

125- UNICEF. (2023). Triple Threat: How disease, climate risks, and unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene create a deadly combination for children. United Nations Children's Fund.

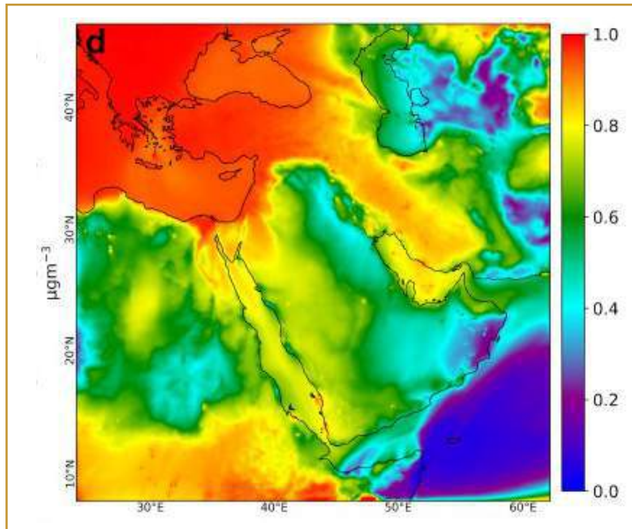
126- Gochfeld M, Burger J. Disproportionate exposures in environmental justice and other populations: the importance of outliers. Am J Public Health. 2011 Dec;101 Suppl 1(Suppl 1):S53-63. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2011.300121. Epub 2011 May 6. PMID: 21551384; PMCID: PMC3222496.

127- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024. United Nations.

128- See more at: https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/air-pollution

Air pollution is also a major cause of concern in the **Arab region**, causing health problems and economic loss.[129] While the region faces challenges related to natural air pollution, especially from desert dust, recent studies have shown that more than 90 per cent of harmful particulate matter (PM) in the air (Figure 46) is from anthropogenic sources[130] (i.e., industrial emissions, and fossil fuel combustion).

Figure 46. Middle East anthropogenic fraction of fine PM (2017)



SOURCE Osipov, S., Chowdhury, S., Crowley, J.N. et al. (2022)

Saudi Arabia is actively working to lower air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions through various initiatives. Among these is the Saudi Green Initiative,[131] which seeks to generate half of the country's power from renewable sources by 2030. Additionally, the Circular Carbon Economy[132] approach aims to achieve net-zero emissions by 2060. On the environmental front, efforts are being made to expand vegetation cover, fight desertification, and protect marine and terrestrial habitats. The plan includes planting 18 million trees, restoring degraded lands, and utilizing clean energy technologies to minimize the effects of fossil fuel emissions on air quality.[133]

129- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

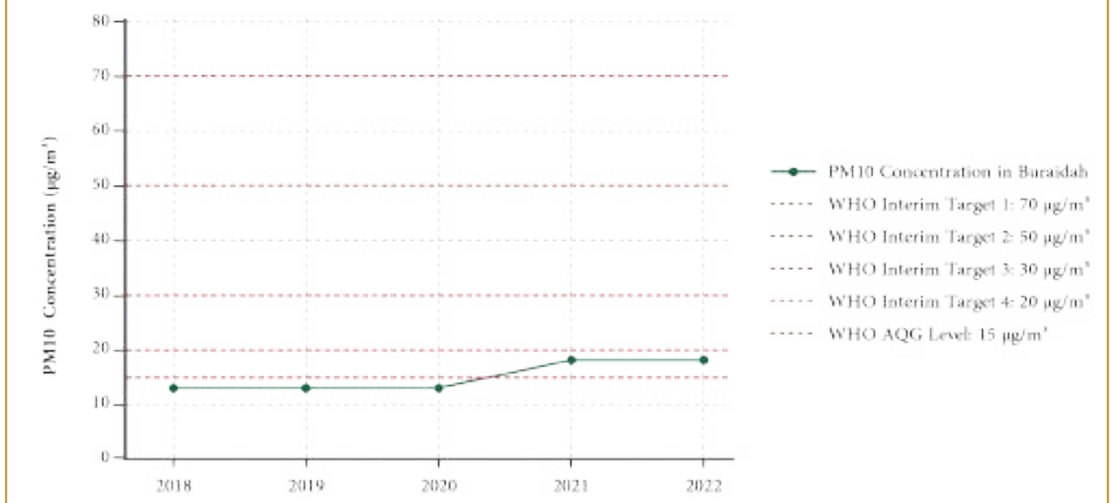
130- Osipov, S., Chowdhury, S., Crowley, J.N. et al. Severe atmospheric pollution in the Middle East is attributable to anthropogenic sources. Commun Earth Environ **3**, 203 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-022-00514-6

131- See more here: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/explore/projects/saudi-green-initiative

132- See more here: https://www.cce.org.sa/Pages/Home.aspx

133- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

Figure 47. Buraidah's Particulate Matter with a diameter of 10 microns or less(PM10) concentration (2018–2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author, added WHO guidelines from World Health Organization (2021)

At the local level, the available data is on PM10, which can be indicative of the overall air quality in a city.[134] **Buraidah** demonstrates a high score in the air quality indicator, with a 93 per cent completion, suggesting that "challenges remain". Despite the good score, the "decreasing" trend must be addressed to get the city back "on track" to achieving this indicator by 2030 (Figure 47) and reaching WHO interim targets[135] and the Air Quality Guidelines (AQG) level.[136]

134- PM10 particles include a mix of dust, pollen, mold and other particulates, which are often byproducts of the same sources that produce PM2.5, such as traffic, industrial activities, and construction. Since PM2.5 is a subset of PM10, high levels of PM10 often imply that PM2.5 concentrations might also be elevated.

135- The Interim Target 1 (70 μg/m³) represents a high level of air pollution, but still a step towards reducing health risks; the Interim Target 2 (50 μg/m³) represents a more stringent level, providing moderate health benefits; the Interim Target 3 (30 μg/m³) gets to the AQG level, offering significant health benefits; Interim Target 4 (20 μg/m³) almost reaches the AQG level, offering substantial health protection.

136- World Health Organization. (2021). WHO global air quality guidelines: Particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10), ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide.

3.3.10. Access to Vaccines and Essential Medicines

	Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.b.1 Proportion of vaccinated children	●	↗	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
96%	94.4%	96.3%	99.4%	96.4%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 96%

	Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.b.3 Health facilities that have a core set of relevant essential medicines available and affordable	●	↑	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
100%	100%	-	100%	100%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 3.b emphasizes the importance of **ensuring universal access to vaccines (indicator 3.b.1) and health facilities with essential medicines (indicator 3.b.3)**, crucial components for achieving overall health and well-being. Tracking these indicators is central to the prevention of diseases, control of epidemics and pandemics, reduction in mortality rates, and the promotion of herd immunity. Additionally, promoting access to vaccines and essential medicines ensures social benefits, such as contributing to health equity, and economic benefits by reducing health-care costs.

The **global coverage of vaccines** for children has seen positive changes over the years, with the DTP3 (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis) vaccine coverage rising from 72 per cent in 2000 to 86 per cent in 2019, falling during the COVID-19 pandemic, and recovering to 84 per cent in 2022. However, in 2022, more than 14 million children have never received any type of vaccine.[137] Additionally, around 50 per cent of people worldwide, mostly in vulnerable groups, do not have access to essential health care.[138]

137- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024. United Nations.

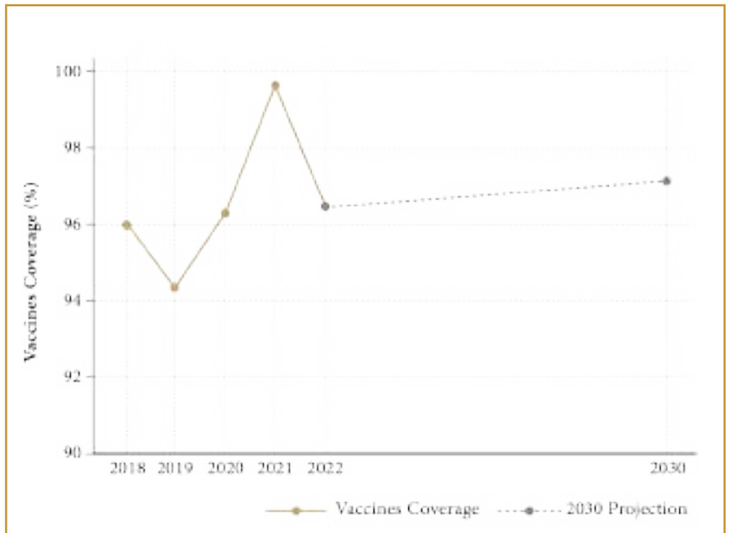
138- UniteSee more at: https://www.who.int/news/item/13-12-2017-world-bank-and-who-half-the-world-lacks-access-to-essential-health-services-100-million-still-pushed-into-extreme-poverty-because-of-health-expenses

Major challenges remain in the **Arab region** regarding equitable access to vaccines and essential medicines, with important disparities across countries.[139] Another important concern is the lack of data in the region, which creates roadblocks to the development of coordinated efforts and targeted policies to tackle these issues.

Saudi Arabia reports that all vaccines cover a high per centage of the population. This highlights the critical role of the various national initiatives discussed in this chapter, which significantly enhance access to quality health care across multiple dimensions[140].

Buraidah reports high scores for both indicators (3.b.1 and 3.b.3). In the city, from 2018 until the latest data in 2022, 100 per cent of health facilities were licensed, meaning that they meet the minimum thresholds for the core set of relevant essential medicines. In relation to vaccines, the city demonstrates a near-universal coverage for the same period, with slight fluctuations (Figure 48). However, if the current improvement rate continues, Buraidah would not reach full coverage by 2030, suggesting the importance of committing to reaching the missing vulnerable groups that are still not covered by vaccines. In 2021, the city almost reached full coverage of vaccines, which can provide insights for local policymakers on the next steps to keep improving this indicator.

Figure 48. Buraidah's vaccine coverage and 2030 projection (2018–2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

The city's impressive performance in providing essential medicines and maintaining high vaccination rates suggest a positive outlook towards 2030. However, there is still room for improvement to ensure every individual has access to vaccination, which requires strategic efforts to identify and reach vulnerable groups who have yet to receive vaccinations.

139- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

140- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT) (2020)

3.3.11. Health Worker Density and Distribution

	Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
3.c.1 Health worker density and distribution (per 1.000 capita)	●	↑	4.45%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	-	6.1%	6.3%	-

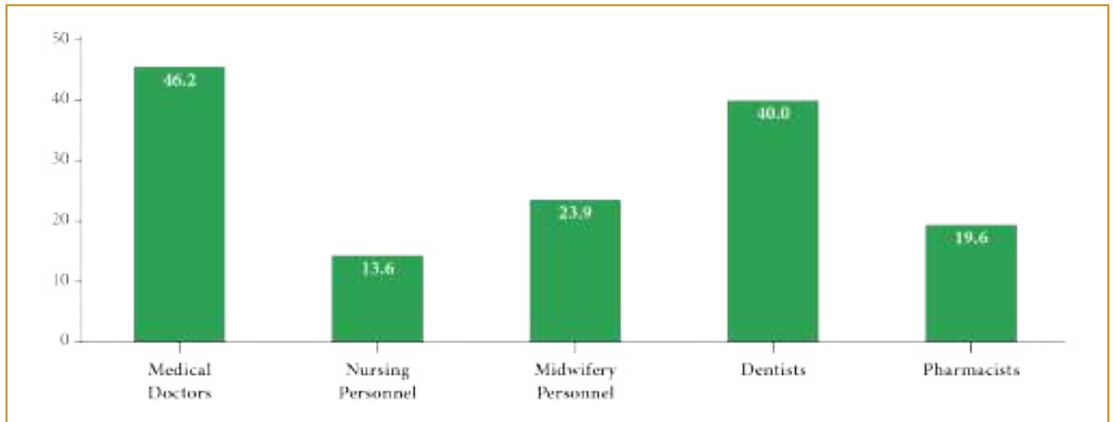
2022 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 3.c focuses on **increasing health financing and recruitment of health workers. Indicator 3.c.1** tracks health worker density and distribution per 1,000 capita. A well-distributed and adequately staffed health workforce is essential for delivering effective health-care services, responding to public health emergencies, and providing routine care.

Globally, there is a significant disparity in the density of health workers, with many low- and middle-income countries facing shortages of qualified professionals. An important trend that poses a challenge to this indicator is the ageing[141] of health professionals, together with the simultaneous increasing needs of an overall ageing population (Figure 49).[142] This affects the delivery of basic health services but also obstructs progress in other health-related targets, including maternal and child health, infectious disease control, and NCD management.

Figure 49. Global share of countries with an ageing workforce, by health occupation (%) (2017–2022)



SOURCE United Nations (2024)

In the **Arab region**, the distribution of health workers remains uneven, with rural areas often experiencing a lack of access to qualified health-care professionals. This imbalance contributes to disparities in health outcomes between different regions and populations.[143]

141- When health professionals aged 55 years or more surpass the number of health professionals aged 35 or less, the workforce is considered 'ageing'.

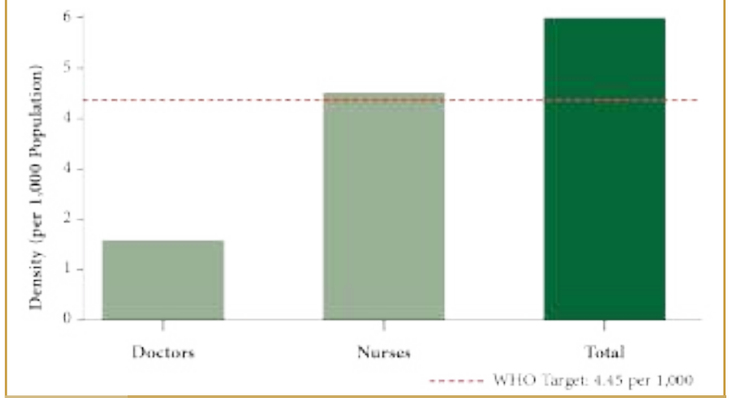
142- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024. United Nations.

143- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

Saudi Arabia reports very high numbers on this indicator, surpassing WHO guidelines set for 4.45 health workers per 1,000 people.[144] This showcases the country's efforts in training and education of health-care professionals and strategic distribution in the territory ensuring high densitynumbers.[145]

Following national achievements, **Buraidah** also showcases high numbers, and a 100 per cent completion score in this indicator. In 2022, Buraidah's worker density surpassed WHO's target by around 41 per cent (Figure 50).

Figure 50. Buraidah's health worker density (2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

Buraidah's impressive performance in health worker density not only meets but significantly exceeds global benchmarks, underscoring the city's dedication to building a robust health-care workforce. This achievement is particularly notable given the challenges of ensuring an equitable distribution of health-care professionals across regions.

3.3.12. Life Expectancy at Birth

	Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
17 Life expectancy at birth (years)	●	↑	80%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
74.4%	74.4%	73.1%	74.5%	77.9%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 93%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

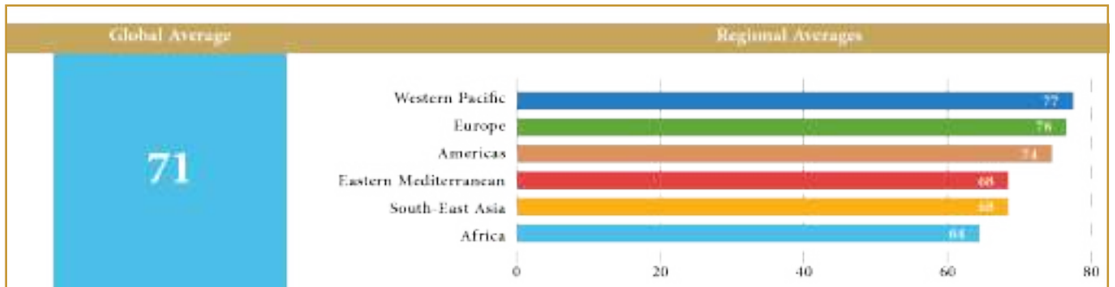
144- World Health Organization. (2016). Health workforce requirements for universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals (Human Resources for Health Observer Series No 17).

145- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2022). Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2022. Saudi Arabia.

The **UMF indicator 17, life expectancy at birth**, is an insightful way of tracking overall global health. Life expectancy reflects the overall dynamics among multiple factors, such as health-care quality, access to medical services, socioeconomic conditions, nutrition, and mental health, among many others. It indicates the pervasiveness of diseases and healthy lifestyles.[146]

Global life expectancy currently stands at 71.4 years, reflecting a recent drop due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over recent years, there had been a steady increase from 66.8 years in 2000 to 73.1 years in 2019.[147] This situation raises concerns, especially since it underscores the vulnerability of health systems worldwide. Furthermore, there are noticeable regional disparities (Figure 51), with lower-income countries experiencing more pronounced effects, highlighting the need for stronger global health equity initiatives.[148]

Figure 51. Life expectancy at birth, global and regional averages (latest available year)



SOURCE: World Health Organization. Life expectancy at birth. Retrieved at: https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/life-expectancy-at-birth-(years)

In the **Arab region**, following global trends, a sharp decrease after COVID-19 is noticeable. From 2021 onwards, an upward trend suggests initial recovery after the global pandemic (Figure 52). Similar to other indicators, there are significant disparities among countries in the region, with some countries performing below the global average.[149] Critical challenges in the region are related to armed conflicts and access to health-care services.

146- UN-Habitat. (2022). Global Urban Monitoring Framework: A Guide for Urban Monitoring of SDGs and NUA and Other Urban-Related Thematic or Local, National and Global Frameworks.

147- World Health Organization. Life expectancy at birth. Retrieved at: https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/life-expectancy-at-birth-(years)

148- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024. United Nations

149- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

Figure 52. Arab world life expectancy at birth (2010 – 2022)

SOURCE: United Nations Population Division. World Population Prospects: 2022 Revision. Retrieved at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?locations=1A

At the national level, **Saudi Arabia** shows a stable high life expectancy at birth of 74 years in 2020.[150] As discussed before, such performance is explained by the comprehensive approach to improving the health sector in the country, where the significant public investments in health care, low maternal and child mortality rates, improved access to health care, and universal health coverage play an important role.[151] Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 sets a target to increase the average life expectancy from 74 to 80 years. The vision emphasizes the importance of a robust health-care system, focusing on reducing the burden of diseases and ensuring that individuals can live longer, healthier lives.[152]

Similar to the national average, **Al Qassim** has a life expectancy at birth of 74.4 years in 2020.[153] **Buraidah** showcases a high score in this indicator, reaching an accumulated life expectancy at birth of 77.9 years in 2022, where women are expected to live slightly more[154]. The city's trends put it "on track" to achieve this indicator by 2030, reaching 80 years as life expectancy as targeted by Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

Buraidah has made significant progress in life expectancy, driven by a comprehensive health-care approach. Notably, the city's health-care efficiency, as well as its near-universal vaccination coverage, have played a central role in this achievement. With life expectancy above global averages and a well-maintained health-care system, Buraidah made important progress in reducing smoking and obesity rates, although there is room for improvement in promoting sports and physical activity.[155]

150- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2020). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicators Report. Saudi Arabia.

151- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

152- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

153- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim.

154- Qassim Urban Observatory (2024). The SDGs in QUO. May 2024 Update.

155- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). Livability Ranking For Buraidah 2020.

4

SDG 4 CHAPTER

4.1. INTRODUCTION

SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education while promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Education serves as a fundamental pillar for individual empowerment, societal progress, and economic growth. Achieving SDG 4 requires a multidimensional approach to education, including access, quality, equity, and infrastructure.

Global trends in SDG 4 reveal both progress and persistent challenges across regions. Nordic countries consistently lead in education indicators, but significant disparities remain when comparing global regions, particularly between high-income and low-income countries. In BRICS nations and East Asia, there have been substantial strides in educational access and quality, yet the poorest and most vulnerable nations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, continue to lag behind, struggling with

resource limitations and infrastructure challenges[156]. COVID-19 further exacerbated learning disparities, leading to declines in math and reading proficiency across the globe, especially in lower-secondary education[157].

In regional benchmarking, such as "The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards Report[158]", **Saudi Arabia** shows important improvement in achieving SDG 4, positioning itself among the higher-performing countries in the Arab region (Figure 53).

Quality Education		
Country	Rating	Trend
Algeria	●	↗
Bahrain	●	→
Comoros	●	→
Djibouti	●	→
Egypt	●	↗
Iraq	●	→
Jordan	●	→
Kuwait	●	→
Lebanon	●	●
Libya	●	●
Mauritania	●	→
Morocco	●	↗
Oman	●	↗
Palestine	●	→
Qatar	●	↗
Saudi Arabia	●	→
Somalia	●	●
Sudan	●	↓
Syrian	●	→
Tunisia	●	↗
UAE	●	↗
Yemen	●	→

● SDG achievement
↑ On track
● Challenges remain
↗ Moderately Increasing
● Significant challenges remain
→ Stagnating
● Major challenges remain
↓ Decreasing
● Data not available

SOURCE: SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States. Adapted by author

Figure 53. Arab Region SDG 4 status and trends dashboard

156- Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2024). The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press. doi:10.25546/108572

157- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

158- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

Saudi Arabia is currently implementing a range of initiatives under Vision 2030 to modernize its education system, improve access to early childhood education, expand vocational training, and eliminate gender disparities in education (Box 3). Guided by the National Education and Training Strategy[159], these initiatives are strategically aligned with international standards and are designed to address the evolving needs of the labour market.

Box 3: National initiatives

Saudi Arabia's education sector is undergoing significant transformation guided by the **National Education and Training Strategy**, which outlines a comprehensive vision for the educational system.

Central to this strategy is the **Human Capability Development Program**[160], a nationwide initiative aimed at enhancing the global competitiveness of Saudi human capital.

The **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)**[161] and **Global Citizenship Education** (GCED)[162], alongside the establishment of a **National Qualifications Framework (NQF-KSA)**[163], promote the transformation of the educational system, emphasizing university autonomy, professionalizing teaching, and developing specialized academies.

The government's focus on talent development is exemplified by the **Mawhiba Program**[164], which nurtures gifted students and supports e-learning through platforms like the **Virtual School (Madrasati)**[165].

Early childhood development has been prioritised through initiatives like the **Virtual Kindergarten Platform (Rawdati)**[166] and the **Mother and Child Education Program**[167], aiming to enhance learning environments and developmental outcomes from an early age.

159- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum. Retrieved from https://hlpf.un.org/countries/saudi-arabia

160- See more here: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/explore/programmes/human-capacity-development-program

161- See more here: https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education

162- See more here: https://www.unesco.org/en/global-citizenship-peace-education/need-know

163- Education and Training Evaluation Commission. (2023). National Qualifications Framework in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (NQF - KSA) (2nd ed.). Education and Training Evaluation Commission. Available at www.etec.gov.sa.

164- See more here: https://www.mawhiba.org/en/Pages/default.aspx

165- See more here: https://www.saudigazette.com.sa/article/636846/SAUDI-ARABIA/Madrasati-platform-includes-10-video-episodes-of-Eastern-Maqamat-program-as-part-of-educational-activity

166- See more here: https://moe.gov.sa/en/mediacentre/MOEnews/Pages/e-learning.aspx

167- See more here: https://childcare.org.sa/en/product/mother-and-child-education-program/

In addressing the needs of children with special needs, **the Ministry of Education** has established early intervention centres, developed tailored curricula, and promoted inclusive education through specialized cities and support centres[168].

The emphasis on science and technology education is furthered by the **National Study Plan** and the establishment of over 100 Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) centres[169].

The **Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC)**[170] aligns technical education with market needs, expanding programmes and establishing colleges for women to ensure gender equality in educational opportunities.

Investment in teacher development is also a priority in initiatives like the **professional teacher's license**[171] and digital training platforms aimed at enhancing the quality and professionalism of educators.

Lifelong learning is promoted through vocational training partnerships and initiatives like the **"A Society Without Illiteracy Program"**[172] which targets remote areas and illiterate women, reinforcing the Kingdom's commitment to inclusive education.

Additionally, the **Quality of Life Program**[173] seeks to promote well-being through diverse educational and vocational opportunities, further enhancing the cultural and recreational landscape of Saudi Arabia.

Education is crucial at the local level for building resilient communities, fostering innovation, and preparing future generations for a rapidly changing landscape, especially in the labour market. Effective education systems at the local level contribute to social cohesion, economic prosperity, and the well-being of citizens.

Al Qassim education indicators showcase significant progress in the education sector (Figure 54). The region performs well across various educational indicators, with substantial investments in educational infrastructure.

168- See more here: https://www.taibahu.edu.sa/Pages/EN/Sector/SectorPage.aspx?ID=24&PageId=1537

169- See more here: https://www.arabnews.com/node/2552846/saudi-arabia

170- See more here: https://tvtc.gov.sa/En/Pages/default.aspx

171- See more here: https://serrarigroup.com/education-teacher-2/#:~:text=A%20Teaching%20License%20from%20the,the%20Saudi%20Ministry%20of%20Education.

172- See more here: https://moe.gov.sa/en/education/generaleducation/pages/literacy.aspx

173- See more here: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/explore/programmes/quality-of-life-program

Figure 54. Education indicators in Al Qassim's cities

	Primary School Enrollment Rate	Secondary School Enrollment Rate	Higher Education Enrollment Rate Total	Students Per Teacher in Primary School	Students Per Teacher in Secondary School	Mean Years of Schooling	School Children per Class Room in Primary School	School Children per Class Room inSecondary School
Buraidah	95.8	94.1	46.3	11.1	9.2	11.3	21.0	24.9
Unaizah	95.1	100.0	46.2	13.7	12.8	12.5	20.5	26.4
Ar Rass	100.0	100.0	95.6	9.0	8.1	12.4	15.7	24.1
Al Mithnab	83.6	89.1	56.4	8.8	7.5	12.7	19.2	21.8
Al Bakiriyah	100.0	100.0	58.5	5.9	6.1	12.4	15.7	27.3
Al Badaya'a	86.8	89.1	600.3	8.3	7.7	11.6	17.9	-
Riyadh Al Khabra	89.9	88.1	60.4	8.0	10.0	12.3	23.6	27.4
Al Asyah	-	90.7	44.4	7.4	6.6	11.9	13.6	21.6
Al Nabhanya	73.3	94.1	49.6	8.0	9.6	10.7	17.6	27.4
Uyun Al Jiwa	100.0	100.0	42.9	10.0	10.9	12.1	22.1	30.8
Al Shammasiya	-	-	49.5	6.2	6.9	11.7	16.4	16.5
Oklat AlSkoor	-	-	46.7	9.7	9.5	10.2	11.7	19.6
Daria	81.4	100.0	43.2	5.9	7.9	10.5	13.9	27.5
KSA (2018 data)	94.6	96.4		13.8	11.5	10.2 (2017)		

SOURCE UN-Habitat, Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). *State of Urban Development in Al Qassim*

However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring equitable access to education for all segments of the population, including those in more remote areas. Cities like **Buraidah** are working to translate national goals into tangible outcomes. Buraidah has made progress in ensuring access to education and improving literacy rates but faces challenges in tertiary education and achieving international reading and mathematics proficiency standards. The city's experience underscores the importance of localised strategies that address specific community needs while aligning with broader national and international objectives.

The following sections will explore the state of education in Buraidah, examining the city's achievements, challenges, and ongoing efforts to fulfil the targets of SDG 4. This analysis provides critical insights for policymakers and stakeholders as they work to enhance educational opportunities and outcomes for all residents of Buraidah.

4.2. SDG 4 OVERVIEW

			Rating	Trend
4.1	4.1.1	Minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics	●	–
	4.1.2	Education completion rate	●	↓
4.2	4.2.2	Participation rate in organized learning	●	↑
4.3	4.3.1	Participation rate in formal and non - formal education and training	●	–
UMF	33	Adult population with a qualification from a recognized tertiary education institution	●	–
4.5	4.5.1	Parity indices for all education indicators	●	↑
4.6	4.6.1	Proportion of population achieving proficiency in functional literacy and numeracy skills	●	↑
4.a	4.a.1	Proportion of schools offering basic services	●	↑
UMF	28	Youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET)	●	–

91% COMPLETION

This VLR collected data about **nine SDG 4 indicators, with an overall score of 91 per cent**, with four "Achieved" indicators, and one additional indicator "On track" for being achieved by 2030. Three indicators show "Challenges remaining", one indicator shows "Significant challenges remaining", and two indicators show "Major challenges remaining". This data indicates a high score when compared to other cities and regions in the country, as well as the national averages.

The **data analysis** for SDG 4 indicates high levels of participation in organized, formal and non-formal education and training and high levels of literacy. It also shows strong improvement in parity indicators, schools offering basic services, and the proportion of youth being included in either education, employment, or training. Nevertheless, important challenges remain related to proficiency in reading and mathematics due to low national scores and lack of local proficiency exams, as well as topics related to tertiary education. Finally, even if the education completion rates are currently high, urgent attention is required since it shows a decreasing tendency towards 2030.

Missing data on indicators such as 4.4.1, which measures the proportion of youth and adults with Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills, underscores the need to address this blind spot in our understanding of the readiness of the local population to meet the demands of a technology-driven economy. Data is also lacking to cover UMF-16 indicator on Multilingual Education, stressing the need to refine data collection on this topic. However, in Buraidah, most schools (public and private) teach foreign languages, foreshadowing a potentially average to high score when future measurements are done.

4.3. BURAIDAH'S PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN SDG 4 INDICATORS

4.3.1. Proficiency and Education Completion Rates

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
4.1.1	Minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics	●	—	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	-	-	-	30%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 30%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
4.1.2	Education completion rate	●	↓	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	100%	97.7%	100%	95.4%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 95%

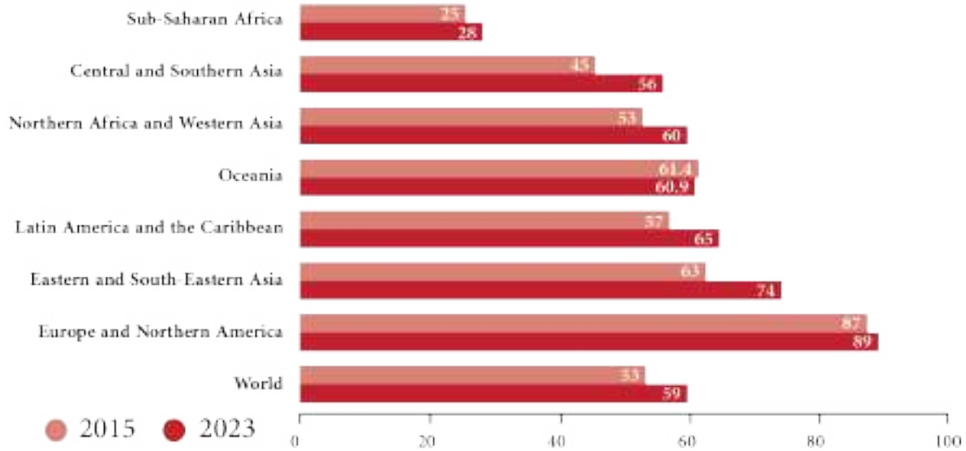
SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 4.1 aims to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education. **Indicators 4.1.1** (proficiency levels in reading and mathematics) and **4.1.2** (education completion rates) are critical measures for tracking global progress toward this goal. Monitoring proficiency levels provides insight into the quality of education systems, ensuring that students attend school and gain the skills necessary for future success. On the other hand, tracking completion rates highlights whether students are progressing through their education without significant barriers.

Globally, as of 2023, 88 per cent of children completed primary school, with lower secondary completion rates at 78 per cent and upper secondary rates at 59 per cent. However, the progress in upper secondary completion has slowed to an annual growth rate of 0.9 per cent. Regional disparities remain evident, with sub-Saharan Africa experiencing significantly lower completion rates (Figure 55), and girls consistently outperforming boys in mostregions[174]

174- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

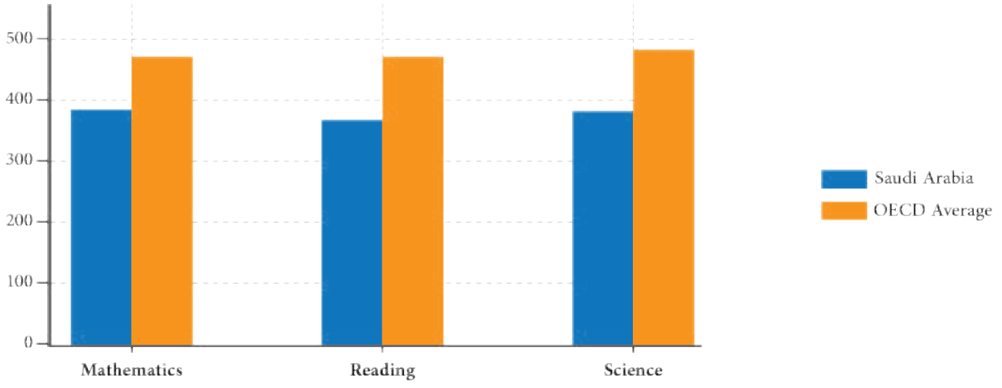
Figure 55. Upper secondary school completion rate, by continent (2015 and 2023)



SOURCE United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)[175], a global study conducted by the OECD, provides valuable insights into the state of education in **Saudi Arabia**. PISA assesses the knowledge and skills of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics, and science, offering a benchmark for educational performance across countries. In the 2022 PISA exam, Saudi Arabian students demonstrated performance levels below the OECD average in mathematics, reading and science[176] (Figure 56). The 2022 results reflected an upward trend in mathematics scores compared to 2018, while reading scores declined, and science scores remained relatively stable.

Figure 56. Saudi Arabia's PISA performance compared to OECD average (2022)



SOURCE Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2022). PISA 2022 results, adapted by author

175- See more here: https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/pisa.html

176- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2022). PISA 2022 results

In terms of proficiency, only 30 per cent of Saudi students reached at least Level 2 in mathematics, in contrast with the OECD average of 69 per cent. Furthermore, almost no Saudi students reached the top proficiency levels (Level 5 or 6) in mathematics, where students are expected to handle complex mathematical situations and select appropriate problem-solving strategies[177].

Gender differences in performance were also observed. In mathematics, boys and girls in Saudi Arabia performed similarly on average. However, in reading, girls outperformed boys by 33 points. This trend aligns with global patterns where girls generally score higher than boys in reading, though in mathematics, performance differences between genders vary across countries[178].

The performance of Saudi Arabia in the PISA 2022 indicates central challenges for meeting its Vision 2030 goals. Firstly, these challenges reflect important disparities between urban and rural areas and imbalanced school networks (e.g. overcrowded urban schools and rural schools that lack resources). Additionally, there is a lack of standardized education assessment processes in Saudi Arabia, limiting effective monitoring and improvement of student outcomes[179].

Moreover, the 2022 PISA scores can also be attributed to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The shift to remote learning and limited access to technology and support at home, contributed to learning losses, particularly in foundational subjects like mathematics and reading. It is fair to assume that some students struggled to adapt to the new learning environment, with 31 per cent of students reporting difficulty in understanding school assignments at least once a week, and 29 per cent struggled to find help with schoolwork[180].

While **Buraidah** currently lacks localised data for reading and mathematics proficiency levels **(indicator 4.1.2)**, the national performance on this indicator can provide important insights. Saudi Arabia's results highlight the critical importance of focusing on the quality of education in shaping public policies.

177- See more here: https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?plotter=h5&primaryCountry=SAU&treshold=5&topic=PI

178- See more here: https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?plotter=h5&primaryCountry=SAU&treshold=5&topic=PI

179- OECD. (2020). Education in Saudi Arabia. Reviews of National Policies for Education, OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/76df15a2-en

180 See more here: https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?plotter=h5&primaryCountry=SAU&treshold=5&topic=PI

Concerning completion rates across primary, lower and upper secondary education **(indicator 4.1.2)**, Buraidah has achieved high scores, with figures approaching universal levels[181], even during the COVID-10 crisis. The pandemic caused challenges such as interruptions in learning, shifts to remote education, and difficulties in maintaining student engagement, nonetheless, in Saudi Arabia in general and Buraidah in particular, different initiatives were rolled out to address remote education. These include enhanced support for remote learning platforms, targeted interventions for at-risk students, and efforts to improve the resilience of the education system against future disruptions[182].

A field survey by QUO[183], collected information about the populations satisfaction with remote education in 2022. The survey results reveal a generally positive response, with 81 per cent of respondents expressing satisfaction. Specifically, 29.3 per cent reported being very satisfied, and 51.7 per cent indicated they were satisfied with the remote education services provided during the pandemic. Meanwhile, 16.2 per cent were neutral, and a small minority, 2.9 per cent, expressed dissatisfaction. These findings show that the majority of the population in Buraidah adapted well to remote education, recognizing its effectiveness during the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.3.2. Early Childhood Education

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
4.2.2	Participation rate in organized learning	●	↑	40%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
37.2%	46.7%	33.8%	27.1%	40.2%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 4.2. focuses on early childhood education (ECE), through indicator **4.2.2** monitoring the participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age). High participation rates are often linked to better cognitive and social development, laying the foundation for future educational success. Moreover, organized learning during the early years promotes essential skills such as literacy and numeracy, which are critical for breaking the cycles of poverty.

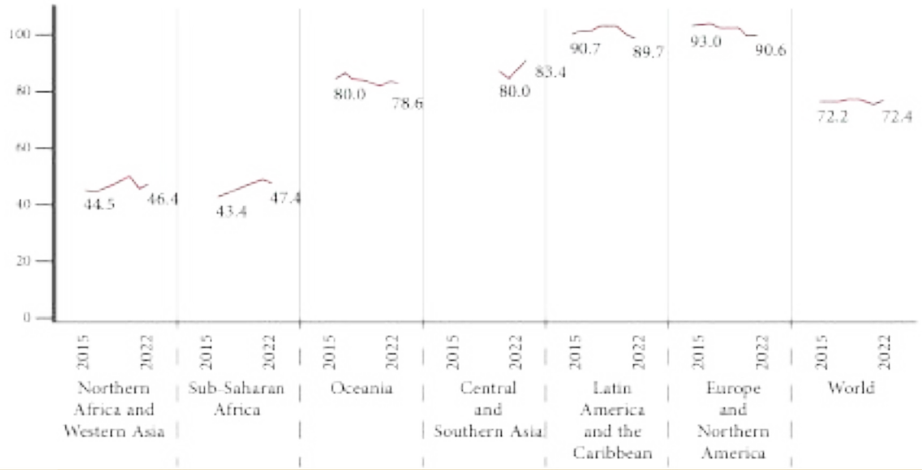
181- Al Qassim Urban Observatory 2019 - 2022

182- Source: Qassim Urban Observatory. (2021). Urban environment transformations in Buraidah in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

183- Qassim Urban Observatory (2024). The SDGs in QUO. May 2024 Update.

Globally, data from 2015 to 2022 indicates that progress has stagnated, with participation rates remaining at around 70 per cent during this period. Regions such as sub-Saharan Africa and Northern Africa continue to face substantial challenges, with less than half of children attending pre-primary education (Figure 57). Legal frameworks for free and compulsory pre-primary education are also insufficient, with only a quarter of countries making pre-primary education mandatory, highlighting a need for more robust policies and investments to close the access gap and ensure equal educational opportunities[184].

Figure 57. Participation rate in organized learning, by continent (2015 – 2022)



SOURCE United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations

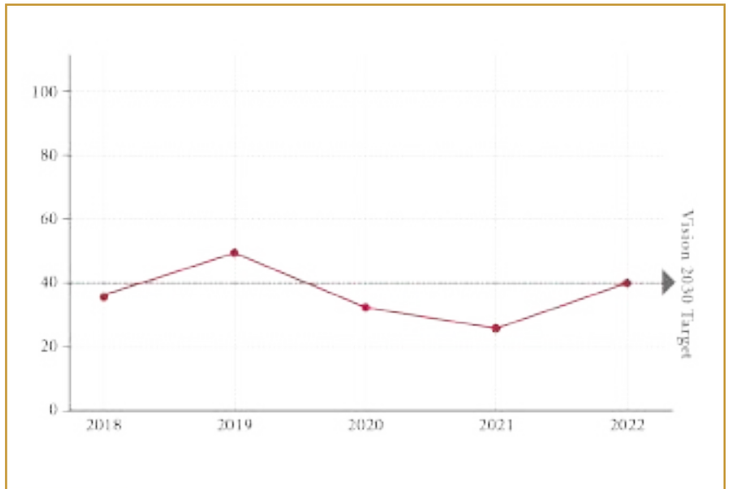
Saudi Arabia has expanded early childhood education as part of Vision 2030, recognizing its crucial role in shaping children's future learning and development. The government has introduced the Saudi Early Learning Standards (SELS) and invested in building new facilities and extending early education to include the first three grades of primary school. Despite these efforts, challenges such as the need for a centralized strategy, better quality assurance, and enhanced teacher training persist[185].

By 2022, Buraidah has made significant progress in expanding access to early childhood development **(indicator 4.2.2)**, care, and pre-primary education. Under the Human Capability Development Program of Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has set the target of having 40 per cent of children enrolled in kindergarten by 2025. Buraidah has already met this goal ahead of schedule, reflecting the city's commitment to fostering early childhood education.

184- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

185- OECD. (2020). *Education in Saudi Arabia*. Reviews of National Policies for Education, OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/76df15a2-en

Figure 58. Kindergarten enrolment and improvement rate in Buraidah (2018 – 2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory, adapted by author

Between 2018 and 2019, Buraidah saw a promising increase in kindergarten enrolment rates, rising from 37.2 to 46.7 per cent. This upward trend reflected the city's successful efforts to expand access to early childhood education. However, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 had a significant impact, leading to a sharp decline in enrolment to 33.8 per cent as schools faced closures and families dealt with uncertainties. The downward trend continued into 2021, with enrolment dropping further to 27.1 per cent. Despite these challenges, Buraidah has demonstrated remarkable resilience and commitment to education. By 2022, the city managed to rebound, with kindergarten enrolment climbing back to 40.2 per cent.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics, advocates for near-universal access to pre-primary education, since it represents the foundation for lifelong learning[186]. Therefore, Buraidah's scores robust improvement rate showcases critical local efforts to achieve international standards of early childhood enrolment.

186- UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2017). More than one-half of children and adolescents are not learning worldwide. UIS Fact Sheet No. 46, UNESCO. Retrieved from http://uis.unesco.org

4.3.3. Quality Technical, Vocational and Tertiary Education

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
4.3.1	Participation rate in formal and non-formal education and training			59.53%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	-	-	-	78%

2023 COMPLETION: 100%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
33	Adult population with a qualification from a recognized tertiary education institution			70%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	-	-	41.9%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 59%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 4.3 aims to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university. The UMF[187] proposes tracking participation rate in formal and non-formal education and training **(Indicator 4.3.1)** and the adult population with a qualification from a recognized tertiary education institution **(Indicator 33)**.

Indicator 4.3.1 monitors the inclusiveness of education systems, especially in fostering skills development beyond traditional schooling. It is crucial for understanding how adults engage in education to enhance their employability and resilience in dynamic labour markets. Moreover, UMF indicator 33 is a direct reflection of a country's ability to foster a highly skilled workforce, crucial for economic growth and innovation.

Globally, both indicators face significant challenges and slow progress. Participation rates in both formal and informal education remain lower in developing countries, particularly among women and marginalized groups. This reflects persistent barriers such as affordability, access to institutions, and socio-cultural factors that limit educational opportunities. On the other hand, higher-income countries continue to show more robust participation rates and a more significant proportion of adults with tertiary qualifications, thanks to additional investment in education infrastructure and accessible learning pathways. However, even in these regions, there is still a need to address gaps in access for underrepresented communities[188].

In the **Arab region**, countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Qatar show more positive trends in tertiary education enrolment, reflecting stronger institutional frameworks and investment in higher education. However, in conflict-affected regions like Yemen and Syria, the educational infrastructure has been severely impacted, causing a decline in both formal participation and attainment of tertiary qualifications[189].

Saudi Arabia has shown significant progress in ensuring educational access for a broad demographic, including adults. Data reveals a balanced participation rate, with a slight gender gap favouring women across most education levels. This progress aligns with the government's ongoing efforts to modernize curricula and promote lifelong learning as part of its Vision 2030 initiatives. Additionally, the country has made noteworthy investments in tertiary education infrastructure and increased access to higher education. Saudi Arabia's continued focus on improving educational outcomes and qualifications is directly tied to its economic diversification and human capital development goals[190].

For **Buraidah,** it is possible to localise this indicator through a new survey launched in 2022 by the QUO[191]. The survey results revealed that approximately 78 per cent of respondents had engaged in some form of study in the previous 12 months, surpassing the Urban Monitoring Framework's goal of 60 per cent. Although longitudinal data is not available to assess trends over time, this survey represents a crucial baseline for future comparative studies. These insights will be invaluable in guiding local policymaking and ensuring that educational programmes continue to meet the needs of Buraidah's residents.

Figure 59. Buraidah's occupation survey results

	15-24 Years Old	Proportion
Work	100	4.4%
He doesn't work and he has the desire	316	14.1%
Student	1760	78.3%
Housewife	46	2.0%
Retired	0	0.0%
Unable to work	4	0.2%
He doesnt work and he has the desire	11	0.5%
Training	5	0.2%
Blank	6	0.3%
Total	2248	

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory, adapted by author

187- UN-Habitat. (2022). Global Urban Monitoring Framework: A Guide for Urban Monitoring of SDGs and NUA and Other Urban-Related Thematic or Local, National and Global Frameworks.

188- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

189- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

190- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

191- Qassim Urban Observatory (2024). The SDGs in QUO. May 2024 Update.

The participation rate in formal and non-formal education and training is a critical indicator of the education system and its alignment with the needs of the local economy. A high participation rate, like the 78 per cent observed in Buraidah, is essential because it suggests the community's potential learning and skills development. This is particularly important in a rapidly changing job market, where ongoing education and training are key to maintaining a competitive workforce[192].

In relation to UMF's indicator on the adult population with a qualification from a tertiary education institution **(indicator 33)**, Buraidah faces significant challenges, with a completion rate of around 60 per cent. Although this data, collected in 2022, reflects only a specific age group (24-35 years), it provides valuable insights into the city's current state of higher education. These results indicate considerable work to be done to meet the targets set for 2030.

It is crucial to maintain and expand data collection efforts to enable longitudinal assessments, which will be key in refining public policies over time. Such data will allow for a better understanding of the trends and factors affecting tertiary education completion rates in Buraidah.

The impacts of low participation rates in tertiary education are significant for Buraidah. A lower proportion of adults with higher education qualifications can limit the city's ability to attract and develop high-skilled industries, potentially stifling economic growth and innovation. Also, it can affect the quality of life, as higher education is often linked to better employment opportunities, higher incomes, and improved social outcomes.

4.3.4. Gender Disparities in Education

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
4.5.1	Parity indices for all education indicators	●	↑	1

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	0.90	1.00	0.94	0.84	0.97

2023 COMPLETION: 97%

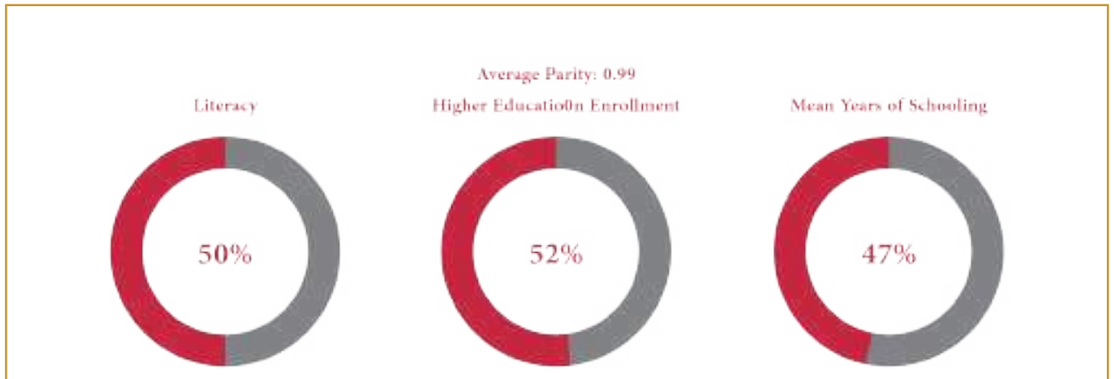
SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 4.5 focuses on eliminating gender disparities in education, through **indicator 4.5.1** which monitors all parity indices for education indicators. Gender parity indicators are important for tracking equal access to quality education, which is key in the achievement of all SDGs, as gender equality is interlinked with the success of every goal within the 2030 Agenda[193].

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 has been a driving force behind efforts to eliminate gender disparities in education. Vision 2030 emphasizes the importance of empowering women through education, recognizing that gender equality is essential for the country's economic and social development. Initiatives such as the establishment of university cities for women, the expansion of educational programmes specifically targeted at female students, and policies promoting female participation in STEM fields have been crucial in improving gender parity.

Buraidah's progress in achieving gender parity in education is reflected in its composite indicator **(indicator 4.5.1)**, which shows a near 1:1 parity ratio across multiple dimensions, including literacy, years of schooling and higher education enrolment. This strong result highlights improvement in gender equality within the education system, placing this indicator on track to meet its targets.

Figure 60. Parity rates in literacy, higher education enrolment, and mean years of schooling, in Buraidah (2023)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

For Buraidah, the impact of achieving gender parity in education is profound. It can lead to a more balanced and diverse workforce, driving innovation and economic growth in the city. With equal access to education, women are more likely to enter higher-skilled professions, which can reduce gender wage gaps and enhance the city's economic resilience. Moreover, gender parity in education promotes social cohesion and stability, empowering all citizens to participate fully in the community's development.

192- OECD. (2023). Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en

193- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). (2023). Handbook on the Arab Gender Indicator Framework 2023. United Nations. https://www.unescwa.org/publications/handbook-arab-gender-indicator-framework-2023

4.3.5. Literacy Rates

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
4.6.1	Proportion of population achieving proficiency in functional literacy and numeracy skills	●	↑	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	97.9%	98.1%	99.1%	98.5%	99.1%

2023 COMPLETION: 99%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 4.6 focuses on promoting high literacy rates. **Indicator 4.6.1** tracks the proportion of the population achieving proficiency in functional literacy and numeracy skills. Literacy is a fundamental skill that empowers individuals to access information, participate fully in society, and improve their economic opportunities. Monitoring literacy rates helps identify gaps in education systems, particularly among marginalized groups, such as women and rural populations, who often face barriers to learning.

Global trends show a gradual increase in overall literacy levels across many regions. Developed regions have achieved near-universal literacy, while developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia, continue to struggle with lower literacy rates, especially among women and marginalized communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted literacy progress by limiting access to education, particularly in remote and underdeveloped areas[194].

Saudi Arabia has made significant strides in improving literacy rates, particularly through comprehensive educational reforms. The nation's literacy rate among the youth (ages 15-24) continues to progress positively, benefiting from various government initiatives focused on modernizing education and ensuring inclusive learning environments. This is reflected in high literacy rates, attributed to investments in the education sector, curriculum improvements, and enhanced access to learning resources[195].

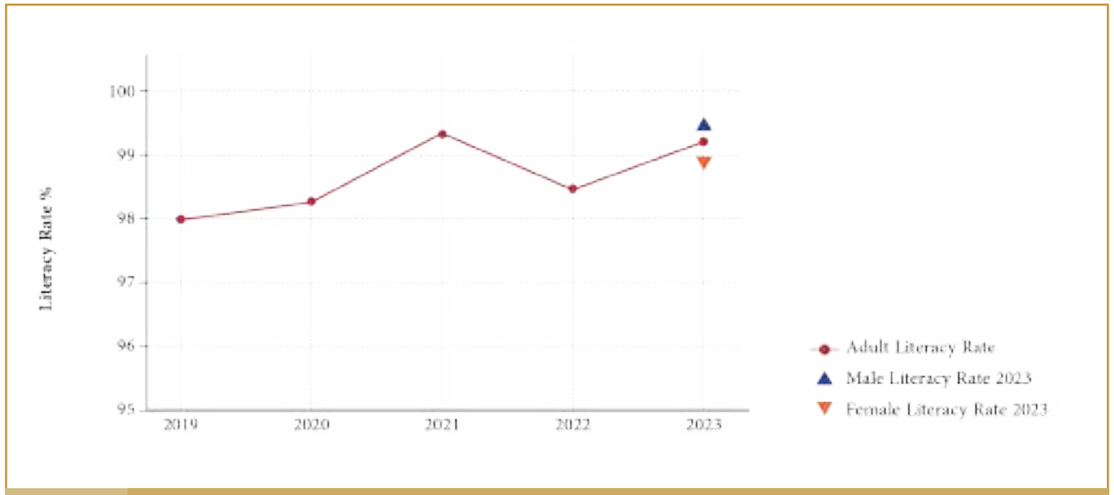
Buraidah has demonstrated important results in literacy, with a literacy rate of around 99 per cent (Figure 64). Data from 2019 to 2023 reflects a steady improvement in literacy levels, showcasing the effectiveness of local education initiatives.

194- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

195- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

Although there was a slight decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, the city has successfully regained momentum, putting literacy rates back on track.

Figure 61. Literacy Rates in Buraidah (2019 – 2023)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

While literacy rates are high across the board, there are slight variations between different demographics. The adult illiteracy rate stands at 1.7 per cent in 2023, which, although low, is still higher than the near-universal literacy rate among the youth, which is at 0.1 per cent. This indicates that younger generations have benefited from more robust educational opportunities and interventions, leading to almost complete literacy.

When examining the disaggregated data by gender, a clear difference emerges in the illiteracy rates among adults. The illiteracy rate among male adults is 0.7 per cent, while it is significantly higher among female adults at 2.6 per cent. This disparity highlights the ongoing need to address gender-specific barriers to education, particularly for older women who may not have had the same access to education as men during their formative years. Interestingly, among the youth, this gender gap closes dramatically, with young women achieving a 100 per cent literacy rate, slightly ahead of young men, who have a literacy rate of 99.7 per cent.

These findings underline the progress Buraidah has made in improving literacy rates across the population, while also pointing to areas where continued efforts are needed, particularly in supporting adult education and addressing the gender gap in literacy among adults. By focusing on these areas, Buraidah can continue to build on its successes and work towards achieving complete literacy for all its residents.

4.3.6. Education facilities

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
4.a.1	Proportion of schools offering basic services	●	↑	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
80.7%	89.1%	90.1%	90.5%	96.8%	-

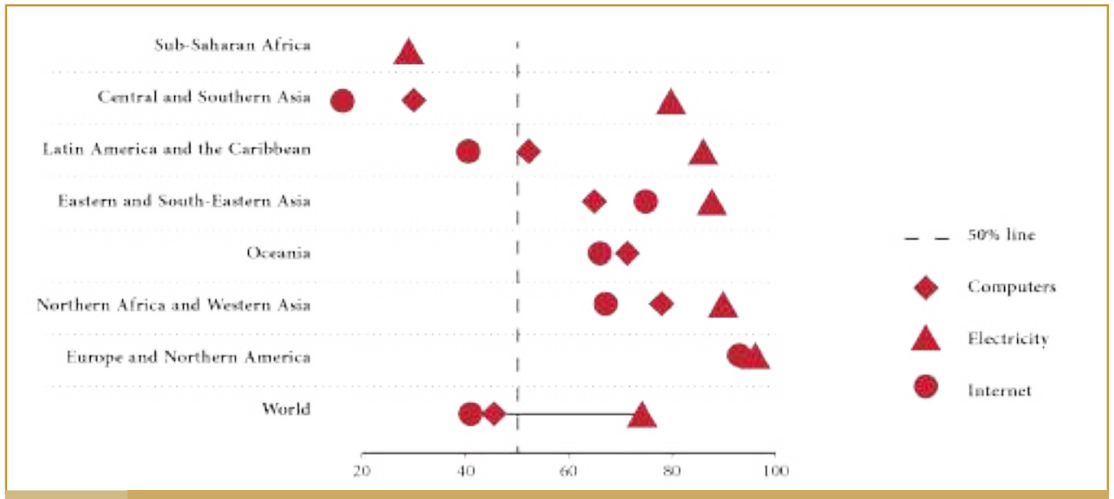
2022 COMPLETION: 86%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 4.a promotes the development and upgrade of education facilities that are child, disability, and gender sensitive, and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all. Indicator 4.a.1 focuses on the proportion of school offering basic services. Tracking this indicator ensures that schools are not only accessible but also equipped with the essential infrastructure to support a conducive learning environment. Basic services—such as electricity, clean drinking water, and sanitation—are fundamental to student well-being and performance.

Globally, access to electricity and Internet for pedagogical purposes has improved substantially, with global rates doubling and even tripling in some regions between 2021 and 2022. Meanwhile, schools globally still lack essential facilities for girls and students with disabilities (Figure 62). Over 20 per cent of primary schools lack separate sanitation facilities for girls, while only half of primary schools offer basic infrastructure for students with disabilities, further marginalizing these vulnerable groups[196].

Figure 62. Proportion of primary schools with access to basic services, by continent (2020 or most recent year)



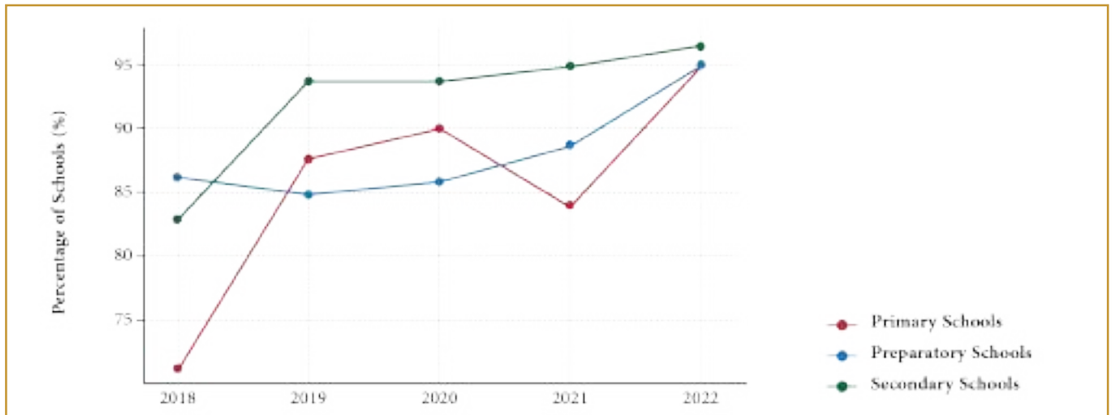
SOURCE United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations

196- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations

Saudi Arabia has made significant strides in ensuring that its schools offer essential services, as evidenced by data from GASTAT[197]. Between 2015 and 2021, the country consistently maintained a 100 per cent provision of basic services—such as clean water, electricity, and sanitation—in primary, preparatory, and secondary schools.

In addition to these basic services, **Buraidah** has made important progress in promoting educational facilities that fulfil requirements that cover access to electricity, drinking water, and sanitation, and include handwashing facilities, Internet connectivity, accessibility for all students, libraries, and adequate learning materials. The data shows a steady and significant improvement over the years, with the per centage of schools fulfilling these requirements rising from 80.7 per cent in 2018 to 96.8 per cent in 2022. This nearly 97 per cent completion rate indicates that Buraidah is well on track to meet its 2030 goals (Figure 66).

Figure 63. Schools that fulfil formal requirements in Buraidah (2018 – 2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

Access to basic services like clean drinking water, sanitation, and handwashing facilities is crucial for maintaining student health, reducing absenteeism, and preventing the spread of diseases. Reliable electricity and Internet access are essential for modern education, enabling the use of digital learning tools. Furthermore, accessibility is a key component of these formal requirements, ensuring that all students, including those with disabilities, can attend school.

For Buraidah, achieving such high levels of compliance with these requirements is a significant accomplishment that will positively impact the city's students. By providing well-equipped and adequately maintained educational facilities, Buraidah is laying a solid foundation for academic success, improving student outcomes, and preparing the next generation for future challenges.

197- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2020). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicators Report. Saudi Arabia.

4.3.7. Youth Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET)

	Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
28 Youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET)	●	—	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	-	-	12.2%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 80%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

The UMF[198] puts forward indicator 2.2.2 **(indicator 28)** to monitor youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET). This indicator provides an important measurement of how well a city is preparing its young population for the future. It provides insight into the effectiveness of educational systems, labour markets, and social support mechanisms. High NEET rates signal potential challenges in educational systems, labour markets, and social policies, often reflecting deeper issues like inequality, lack of opportunities, or mismatches between skills and labour demand.

Global trends in NEET reflect significant disparities across regions and gender. In 2023, approximately 20 per cent of the global youth population was categorized as NEET, with women disproportionately represented. This gender gap is particularly stark in low- and middle-income countries, where societal pressures and unpaid domestic responsibilities contribute to the high NEET rate among young women.[199]

In the Arab region, NEET remain critically high, particularly when compared to global averages. One in three youth across the Arab States are categorized as NEET, reflecting structural challenges within labour markets and educational systems (Figure 64). Despite some progress in reducing youth unemployment, the NEET rates in the Arab region continue to signal significant barriers to youth engagement and long-term economic development[200].

198- UN-Habitat. (2022). Global Urban Monitoring Framework: A Guide for Urban Monitoring of SDGs and NUA and Other Urban-Related Thematic or Local, National and Global Frameworks.

199- Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024. Decent work, brighter futures, Geneva: International Labour Office, 2024. © ILO.

200- Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024. Decent work, brighter futures, Geneva: International Labour Office, 2024. © ILO.

Figure 64. Projected youth NEET levels and rates, by subregion and country income group (2023 – 2025)

Subregion/Country Income Group	Youth NEET Rate %			Youth NEET (Millions)		
	2023	2024	2025	2023	2024	2025
World	20.4	20.4	20.4	256.3	259.1	261.9
Arab State	33.2	33.3	33.1	11.3	11.6	11.9
Central and Western Asia	18.6	18.6	18.5	5.3	5.3	5.3
East Asia	10.9	10.9	11.0	20.3	20.4	20.6
Eastern Europe	12.9	12.9	13.0	3.7	3.8	3.9
Latin America and the Caribbean	19.7	19.7	19.6	20.8	20.7	20.6
North Africa	31.2	31.1	31.0	14.3	14.4	14.7
North America	11.2	11.3	11.3	5.6	5.6	5.7
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	9.9	9.9	9.9	4.9	5.0	5.0
Soth Asia	26.4	26.5	26.6	98.0	98.4	98.8
South-East Asia and the Pacific	16.3	16.3	16.3	18.9	19.1	19.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	21.9	21.9	21.8	53.2	54.7	56.2
High-Income Countries	10.4	10.4	10.4	15.1	15.2	15.3
Upper-Middle-Income Countries	16.6	16.6	16.6	62.5	62.7	63.0
Lower-Middle-Income Countries	23.2	23.1	23.1	135.9	137.3	138.7
Low-Income Countries	28.7	28.6	28.5	42.9	43.9	44.9

SOURCE ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, August 2024

The latest data for Saudi Arabia for 2023 indicate an 18 per cent share of young NEETs[201], a score similar to other high-income countries around the globe. **Buraidah showed** excellent numbers in 2022 (the latest data available), with around 12.2 per cent of young NEETs.

The impact of COVID-19 on youth NEET is pervasive worldwide. The pandemic disrupted education and employment opportunities, leading to a temporary setback. However, Buraidah's above-average numbers indicate the city has done a good job at bouncing back from this global crisis. Having a low NEET number is highly beneficial for Buraidah, indicating that more young people are engaged in activities that contribute to their personal development and future employability. This helps reduce the risk of social exclusion and economic hardship among the youth and boosts the city's economic productivity[202].

The strong improvement in Buraidah's NEET indicator is a positive sign of the city's commitment to fostering youth development and ensuring that its young population is well-prepared for the future. Continued focus on education, training, and employment initiatives will be key to maintaining this progress and achieving the 2030 targets.

201- International Labour Organization. "Labour Force Statistics database (LFS)" ILOSTAT. Accessed June 18, 2024. https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/.

202- OECD. (2024). Society at a Glance 2024: OECD Social Indicators. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/918d8db3-en

5

SDG 5 CHAPTER

5.1. INTRODUCTION

SDG 5 focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. This SDG is composed of several targets related to ending discrimination, eliminating violence, stopping harmful practices such as forced marriages and female genital mutilation (FGM), recognizing unpaid care work, ensuring participation, facilitating access to health, and supporting economic empowerment, among others.

UN Women plays a vital role in driving global efforts toward SDG 5, supporting the development and implementation of policies, strategies, and frameworks that promote gender equality across various sectors. Their work includes providing technical support to governments, promoting data collection for gender-responsive policies, and fostering partnerships to accelerate progress on SDG 5 at national, regional, and global levels[203].

203- See more at: https://open.unwomen.org/en/global-results/overview

This SDG is a central nexus among all other goals due to its cross-cutting impact and transversal relevance to all targets and indicators in the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, it is crucial to the advancement of human rights, economic growth, and social stability.

The **Arab region** shows a weak performance in SDG 5, with all its countries indicating that "Major challenges remain", 19 out of 22 with a "stagnating" tendency, and only 3 out of 22 "moderately increasing" their scores[204] (Figure 65). At this moment, it is important to dive into specific areas covered by SDG 5 and identify opportunities for improvement.

Gender Equality		
Country	Rating	Trend
Algeria	●	→
Bahrain	●	→
Comoros	●	→
Djibouti	●	↗
Egypt	●	↗
Iraq	●	→
Jordan	●	→
Kuwait	●	→
Lebanon	●	→
Libya	●	→
Mauritania	●	→
Morocco	●	→
Oman	●	→
Palestine	●	→
Qatar	●	→
Saudi Arabia	●	→
Somalia	●	→
Sudan	●	→
Syrian	●	→
Tunisia	●	→
UAE	●	↗
Yemen	●	→

Figure 65. Arab region SDG 5 status and trends dashboard

- SDG achievement
- On track
- Challenges remain
- Moderately Increasing
- Significant challenges remain
- Stagnating
- Major challenges remain
- Decreasing
- Data not available

SOURCE: SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States. Adapted by author

204- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

At the national level, Saudi Arabia has demonstrated a growing commitment to achieving SDG 5, indicating the importance of gender equality in the Vision 2030 agenda[205]. In recent years, Saudi Arabia has improved women's participation in the workforce, access to education, and partially reforming laws that previously restricted women's rights. Notable reforms include lifting the ban on women driving, allowing women to travel without a male guardian[206], and promoting women's involvement in leadership roles across various sectors.

However, challenges remain, particularly related to cultural norms and traditional practices. As highlighted by Saudi Arabia's VNR[207], cultural, social, and legal barriers still limit women's full participation in decision-making processes at the local level. Under the framework of Vision 2030, continued focus on education, legal reform, and economic empowerment is essential to ensuring progress towards SDG 5 (Box 4).

Box 4: National Initiatives

As mentioned before, the **Quality of Life Program**[208] includes measures specifically targeting the empowerment of women and girls, such as improving physical activity for girls in schools and universities, and promoting cultural activities like theatre in higher education. The program is part of a broader effort to enhance the overall quality of life, with gender equality being a significant focus.

The **Wusool Initiative**[209] provides transportation support for working women, helping them overcome barriers related to commuting. By covering a significant portion of transportation costs, the program aims to increase the participation of women in the workforce, particularly in the private sector.

The **Qurrah Program**[210] is designed to support working mothers by providing access to nurseries and daycare centres. It aims to stabilize women's employment by ensuring that they have reliable childcare options, thus facilitating their continued participation in the workforce.

The **National Family Safety Program**[211] is focused on protecting families from violence, with a particular emphasis on monitoring and addressing cases of abuse. It also includes awareness-raising campaigns to highlight the harms of domestic violence.

The **Qiyadyat Platform**[212], an initiative by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, is an interactive national database designed to facilitate connection to women leaders across various sectors.

205- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

206- A woman is typically under the guardianship of her father from birth, and upon marriage, the guardian role shifts to her husband.

207- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum. Retrieved from https://hlpf.un.org/countries/saudi-arabia

208- See more at: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/explore/programmes/quality-of-life-program

209- See more at: https://www.hrdf.org.sa/en/programmes/individuals/enable/wusool/

210- See more at: https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/en/ministry-services/services/1170140

211- See more at: https://www.undp.org/saudi-arabia/blog/national-family-safety-program

212- See more at: https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/en/ministry-services/services/833110

SDG 5 plays a pivotal role for the localisation of all SDGs, since it focuses on eliminating gender-based violence and abusive gender practices, as well as enhancing local policy frameworks to foster education and economic opportunities. Additionally, SDG 5 provide the lenses to which assess the gender dynamics under urbanisation processes, promoting equity and engagement with diverse local stakeholders.

Cities have the opportunity to implement monitoring and assessment practices that are in tune with contextual challenges and opportunities, empowering community reporting mechanisms and excavating local solutions, aiming for immediate as well as mid- and long-term impact. Therefore, cities play a central role in engaging with national and global agendas, providing insights on good practices and promoting knowledge exchange to scale up innovative approaches to women's empowerment.

Urban centres like **Buraidah** are striving to turn national goals into real-world progress. Buraidah's pioneering initiatives in relation to the localisation of SDG 5 stress its effort to promote gender equality, including increasing women's participation in the workforce and enhancing legal protections. However, challenges remain in achieving full gender parity in leadership roles and combating gender-based violence. The city's experience highlights the need for localised strategies that address specific community issues while staying aligned with broader national and international objectives.

The following sections will explore the state of gender equality in Buraidah, examining the city's progress, challenges, and ongoing efforts to fulfil the targets of SDG 5. This analysis provides valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders as they strive to improve gender equality and empower all women and girls in Buraidah.

5.2. SDG 5 OVERVIEW

			Rating	Trend
5.1	5.1.1	Legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non - discrimination	●	↗
5.2	5.2.1	Intimate partner violencev	●	–
	5.2.2	Women and girls subjected to sexual violence	●	–
5.3	5.3.1	Women who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18	●	↓
5.4	5.4.1	Time spent on unpaid domestic and care work	●	–
5.5	5.5.1	Proportion of seats held by women in sub - national/local governments	●	↗
	5.5.2	Proportion of women in managerial positions	●	↗
	E.1	Proportion of women in the workforce	●	↗

56% COMPLETION

This VLR collected data from **8 indicators for SDG 5**, with an overall score of 56 per cent, suggesting that, overall, major challenges remain for this goal. Buraidah still has not achieved any indicator, and only one is on track for 2030. Just two indicators scored above 90 per cent, and one above 80 per cent. The other five indicators scored below 80 per cent, showcasing that "major challenges remain". Four indicators are moderately increasing, and one is decreasing, suggesting important challenges to getting on track for 2030. Additionally, three indicators do not have multi-year data, hindering longitudinal data analysis and future projections.

The **missing data** for SDG 5 stresses a common challenge for cities in localising indicators related to gender, which can, in some cases, be explained by governance structures (e.g. national mandates over most policies related to gender equality) or lack of disaggregated data (i.e., by sex). Buraidah shows important improvement with new data collection practices, through the QUO[213], focused on granular local level data, providing important insights for policymakers.

213- Qassim Urban Observatory (2024). The SDGs in QUO. May 2024 Update.

The overall results for SDG 5 in Buraidah show below-average scores compared to its performance in other SDGs. This trend is common across the Arab region, where cultural and social norms often contribute to similar outcomes in many cities. However, the general improvement in most indicators suggests that progress is being made. It is now crucial to examine each indicator closely and explore ways to accelerate progress, ensuring that Buraidah stays on track to meet the 2030 goals.

5.3. BURAIDAH'S PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN SDG 5 INDICATORS

5.3.1. Legal Frameworks Towards Equality and Non-Discrimination

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
5.1.1	Legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination	●	↗	COMPLETELY ADDRESSES

2018 - 2023 WEAKLY ADDRESSES

2023 COMPLETION: 25%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

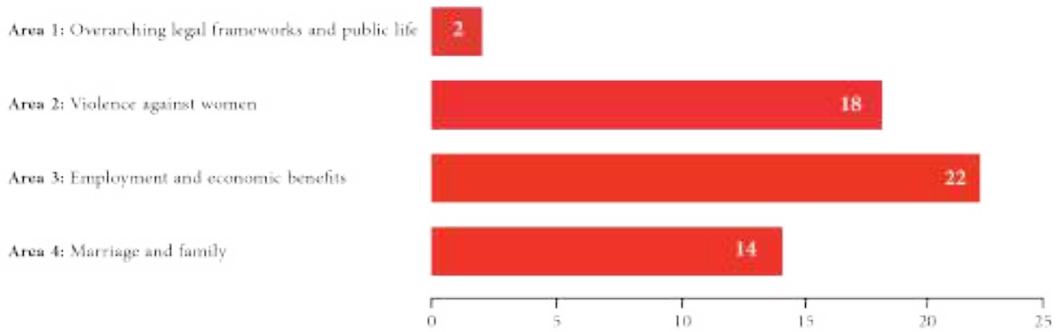
SDG 5 starts out with a crucial target related to ending all forms of discrimination against women, using **indicator 5.1** as its main measuring tool. This indicator focuses on legal frameworks related to equality and non-discrimination. It assesses all kinds of legal provisions, enforcement mechanisms, and monitoring and reporting platforms related to this topic. It also examines political participation, economic opportunities, social rights, access to justice and public awareness.

All these important legal frameworks are often established and implemented at the national level. Therefore, this indicator is analysed at the national level, and Buraidah's score is based on the general national performance of Saudi Arabia.

From 2019 to 2023, 120 countries **around the globe** implemented 56 positive legal reforms to remove discriminatory laws and establish legal frameworks for advancing gender equality (Figure 66). Notable reforms include ensuring equal employment rights, economic benefits, and protection from gender-based violence. Despite these advances, significant gaps remain, particularly in land rights and other areas affecting women's economic empowerment[214].

214- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

Figure 66. Positive legal reforms by area of law, global (2019 – 2023)



SOURCE United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations

Saudi Arabia has made important advancements in relation to women's rights[215]. In 2022, the GASTAT promoted a national assessment of the Kingdom's legal frameworks, disseminating questionnaires to national organizations such as the National Statistical Offices (NSOs), the National Women's Machinery (NWMs), and legal practitioners and researchers on gender equality, and concluded that 86% of legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce, and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of gender.[216]

In 2023, the Human Rights Council highlighted the crucial role of women in Vision 2030, emphasizing their involvement in the workforce, leadership roles, education, training, and participation in sports and entertainment[217]. Key laws, as part of its broader legal reforms under Vision 2030, include the Personal Status Law, the Civil Transactions Law, and the Law of Evidence[218]. These laws are intended to standardize legal processes and reduce ambiguities, which can indirectly support women's legal rights[219].

The Basic Law of Governance[220] in Saudi Arabia also impact women's rights by promoting general protections and rights to all citizens, such as social welfare. The Labour Law[221] further also plays a similar role in supporting equal pay, maternity leave, and workplace protections for women. Additionally, the Gender Balance Centre[222] was established under the Institute of Public Administration to coordinate efforts towards achieving gender balance (Figure 67).

215- Other important achievements are abolishment of the male guardian requirement for traveling, and that women are now allowed to drive.

216- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2022). Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2022. Saudi Arabia.

217- See more at: https://english.alarabiya.net/News/saudi-arabia/2023/07/08/Saudi-women-a-key-priority-of-Vision-2030-says-official-at-Human-Rights-Council

218- See more at: https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/online-reader?id=293623

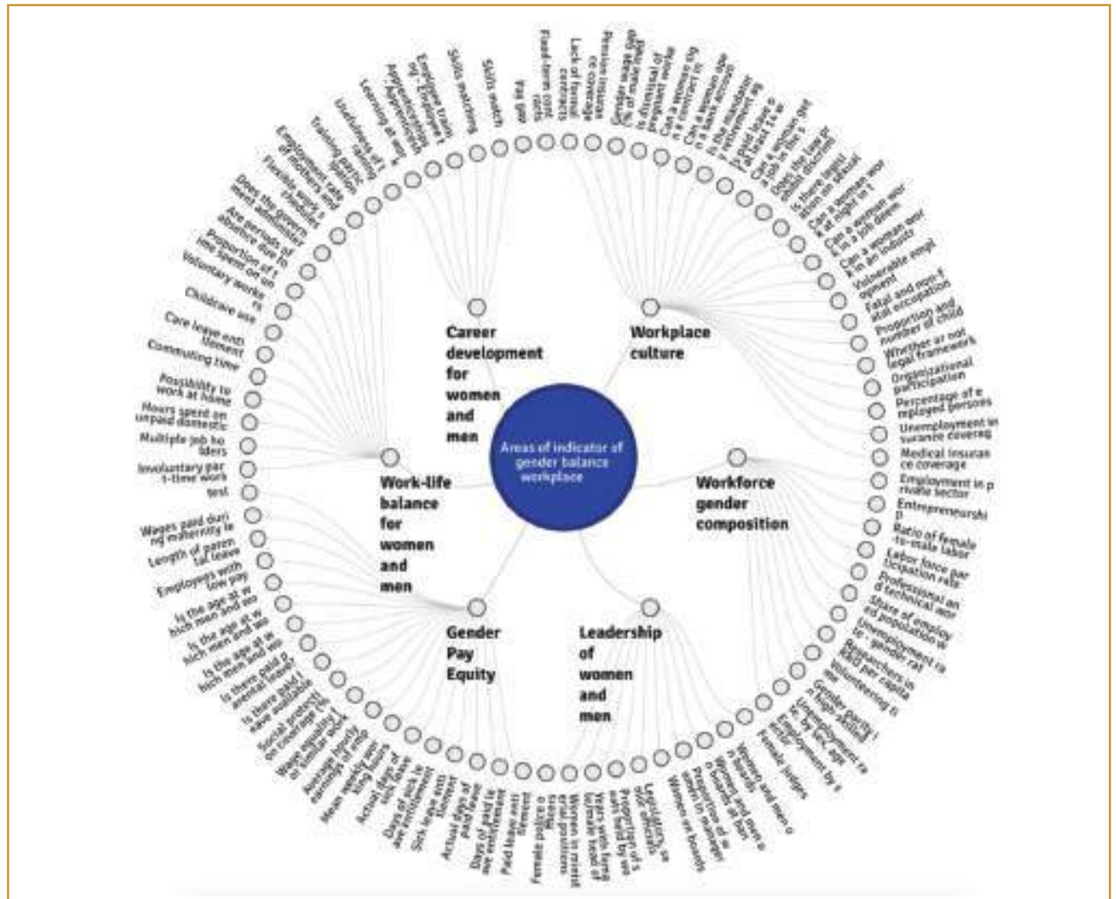
219- See more about the importance of the codification of women's rights laws here: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2024/05/womens-rights-and-the-new-personal-status-law-in-saudi-arabia/#:~:text=The%20PSL%20advances%20women's%20rights,(Articles%20109%2D111).

220- See more at: https://www.saudiembassy.net/basic-law-governance

221- See more at: https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/sites/default/files/2017-05/LABOUR%20LAW.pdf

222- See more at: https://www.ipa.edu.sa/en/centres/gbc#:~:text=It%20is%20a%20committee%20that,the%20concept%20of%20gender%20balance.

Figure 67. Saudi Arabia's Gender Indicator Circle



SOURCE Institute of Public Administration. Retrieved at: https://gbco.ipa.edu.sa/#/home

That being said, the persistence of discriminatory practices (such as the male guardianship system) suggest that full legal equality is still an ongoing challenge. The new Personal Status Law, for example – despite some positive reforms, such as setting a minimum age for marriage and introducing certain protections for women – supports the male guardianship system, and limits women's autonomy in family matters[223].

National legal frameworks heavily influence the performance of SDG 5 in **Buraidah**, as the indicator measuring progress is based on laws and regulations implemented at the national level. This underscores the importance of aligning local policies with national advancements and advocating for more robust implementation at the city level.

223- See more at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/08/saudi-arabia-law-enshrines-male-guardianship

5.3.2. Violence Against Women and Girls

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
5.2.1	Intimate partner violence			0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	-	-	-	-	8.8%

2023 COMPLETION: 91.2%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
5.2.2	Women and girls subjected to sexual violence			0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	-	-	-	-	12.9%

2023 COMPLETION: 87.1%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 5.2 is concerned with eliminating all forms of violence against women, with indicators focusing on partner violence **(indicator 5.2.1)** and sexual violence **(indicator 5.2.2)**. In relation to partner violence, indicator's 5.2.1 main goal is to assess the proportion of women who have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological violence. This indicator is central for quantifying the extent of such violence, and therefore to inform the creation and refinement of policies, programmes and legal frameworks. Indicator 5.2.2 focuses on sexual violence against women and girls. This assessment is important to capture information of different types of violence while also tracking non-partner violence.

A prevalent challenge for both indicators is related to data collection since it relies on official reporting and surveys. Reporting practices vary from place to place depending on the availability, awareness and accessibility of reporting platforms. Also, cultural and social norms, as well as the existence of support services such as counselling, legal assistance, and health-care for survivors, can impact underreporting trends[224].

Saudi Arabia has put forward initiatives that directly impact these indicators, such as the National Family Safety Program (NFSP) that aims to reduce domestic violence through conducting field research, monitoring and addressing cases of abuse, as well as raising awareness and providing support services for victims (e.g. hotlines, shelters and legal assistance[225]). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) plays a crucial role in supporting the NFSP through capacity building, policy development and advocacy, as well as in facilitating collaboration with national stakeholders and international agencies[226].

Other women's empowerment initiatives under Vision 2030 also impact these indicators due to their indirect effects on reducing violence against women. For example, women's economic and social empowerment have the potential to reduce their vulnerability to violence, promoting independence and awareness of legal protections.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Development conducts nationwide campaigns to raise awareness about domestic violence. A dedicated, 24/7 toll-free hotline (1919), staffed entirely by women, is available to receive reports of abuse. Other central initiatives are focused on raising awareness to women's violence. The Waeya Initiative[227], for example, focuses on educating women about legal rights, providing free consultations. It also offers training to female lawyers working on cases of violence.

In relation to legal reforms, the 2013 law against women violence is a key milestone in addressing violence against women. In Saudi Arabia, women's rights to equal pay for equal work are protected by law. Additionally, the country has laws in place to protect women from sexual harassment in the workplace, with provisions allowing for civil claims and remedies[228].

In face if the important challenge of collecting data at the local level, **Al Qassim** launched in 2023 a central initiative through the QUO to collect data related to women's violence through surveys[229]. This is an important ongoing practice to gain better insights through longitudinal data analysis in the upcoming years. Nonetheless, the data collected does not disaggregate between partner or non-partner violence.

While SDG 5.2.1 specifically focuses on violence perpetrated by intimate partners, **Buraidah's** collected data captures a broader scope of violence against women. This provides crucial insights, since it acknowledges that women can face violence from various sources, not just from intimate partners.

224- Gracia, E. (2004). Unreported cases of domestic violence against women: Towards an epidemiology of social silence, tolerance, and inhibition. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, 58*(7), 536-537. https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2003.019604

225 See more at: https://legal-guide.net/navigating-support-services-for-victims-of-domestic-violence-in-saudi-arabia/

226- See more at: https://www.undp.org/saudi-arabia/blog/national-family-safety-program

227- See more at: https://alwaleedphilanthropies.org/en/projects/Waeya-Initiative-Supports-Saudi-Women-to-Face-Domestic-Violence-in-Accordance-with-Womens-Rights

228- See more at: https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/stories/press-release/2023/02/new-un-country-reports-on-gender-justice-and-the-law

229- Qassim Urban Observatory (2024). The SDGs in QUO. May 2024 Update.

This broader perspective can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the prevalence of violence against women in the community. Given that many victims may not report violence due to fear, stigma, or lack of support, by capturing data on violence regardless of the perpetrator, this VLR's approach potentially includes cases that might otherwise go unreported if the focus were solely on intimate partner violence.

Similarly, collected data on indicator 5.2.2 at the local level has a broader scope, including any kind of perpetrators. This mismatch in the data properties offers an opportunity to develop a more ambitious indicator that includes more instances to be reported on, which can help balancing the underreporting phenomenon.

Buraidah's performance in indicator 5.2.1 with 8,8 per cent of women reporting being victims of violence, and in indicator 5.2.2 with 12,9 per cent of these women suffering sexual violence, showcase an above-average performance compared to national, regional, and global estimates[230]. While there are ongoing challenges in collecting accurate data on violence against women in Buraidah and other regions, the proactive steps taken through initiatives like the NFSP and other national and local awareness campaigns have shown promise in addressing these issues. The involvement of programmes aimed at empowering women socially and economically under Vision 2030, combined with the legal reforms protecting women from violence and discrimination, contribute significantly to this progress. Continued efforts in data collection, awareness, and legal support are essential in maintaining this momentum and further reducing violence against women in the coming years.

5.3.3. Harmful Practices Against Women

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
5.3.1	Marriage before the age of 18	●	↓	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	-	2.6%	3.1%	3.2%	3.5%

2023 COMPLETION: 96.5%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 5.3 aims to eliminate harmful practices such as child, early, and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM). **Indicator 5.3.1** specifically focuses on measuring the proportion of women who were married or in a union before the age of 15 and before the age of 18. The goal of this indicator is to assess the prevalence of early and forced marriage, which remains a significant barrier to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. By tracking this data, policymakers can better understand the scope of child marriage, facilitating the creation of laws, programmes, and interventions that work to prevent these practices and protect vulnerable girls.

230- See more at: https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures-0

Globally, about 21 per cent of young women (aged 20-24) were married or in a union before the age of 18, with significant regional variation[231]. In **the Arab region**, child marriage remains a concern, particularly in conflict-affected countries where rates are higher. For instance, in some areas of the Middle East and North Africa, child marriage rates reach higher numbers[232] (Figure 68).

Figure 68. Per centage of women who were married before age 18 in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region

SOURCE United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2022). *Child marriage in the Middle East and North Africa*. UNICEF.

Saudi Arabia has acceded to international conventions like the Convention on the Rights of the Child and CEDAW and has currently introduced reforms tackling this pervasive challenge in the region. In 2019, the Ministry of Justice mandated that marriages involving individuals under 18 must be approved by a special court to ensure the individual's well-being[233].

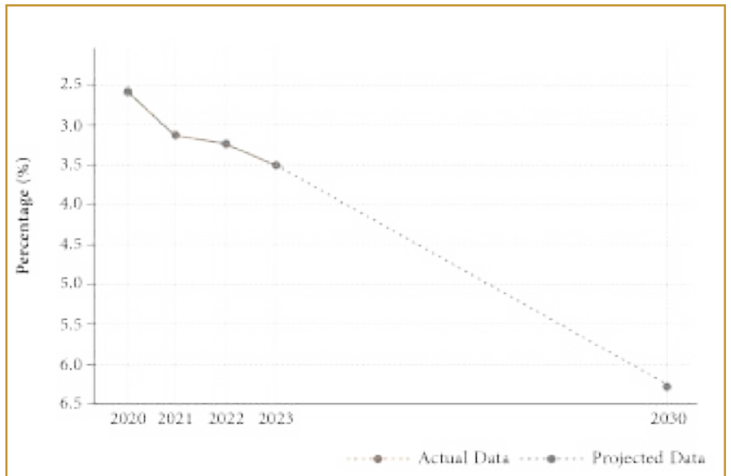
Al Qassim's local data collection provides important insights into **Buraidah's** performance in indicator 5.3.1. Recent data indicates low numbers of child marriage (3,5 per cent in 2023), a strong performance in the context of Saudi Arabia and the Arab region. However, longitudinal data shows a worsening trend, from 2,6 per cent in 2020 to 3,5 per cent in 2023, which could result in lower scores by 2030.

231- See more here: https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-country-profiles/

232- See more here: https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/facts-and-figures-child-marriage-middle-east-and-north-africa

233- See more at: https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/585608

Figure 69. Buraidah's performance in indicator 5.3.1 (2020 – 2023 and projection to 2030)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory, adapted by author

Given the trend in child marriages observed in Buraidah from 2020 to 2023, it is crucial for policymakers to take immediate action to reverse this pattern and align with national and international commitments. Strengthening the enforcement of existing laws, such as ensuring that the minimum legal age for marriage is strictly observed and that special court approvals are rigorously monitored, is essential.

5.3.4. Unpaid Domestic and Care Work

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
5.4.1	Time spent on unpaid domestic and care work (female/male ratio)	●	—	1

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	-	-	-	-	0.45

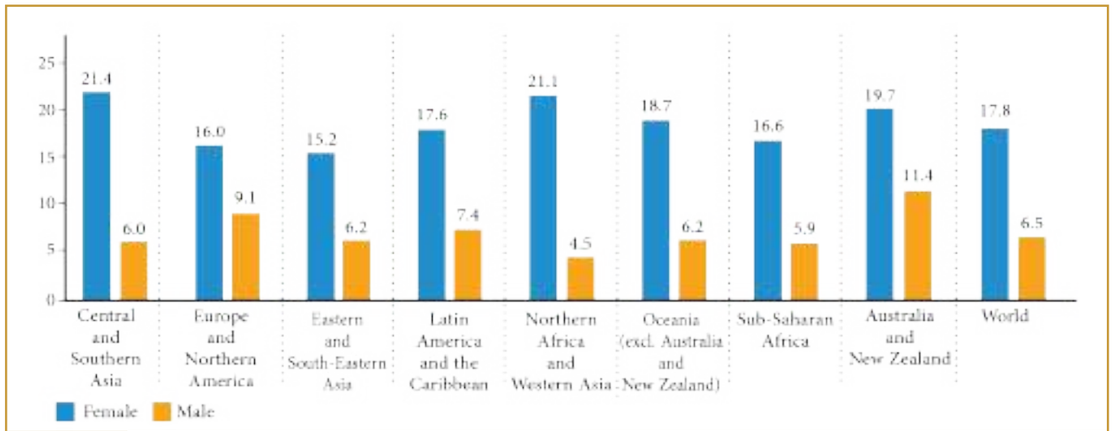
2023 COMPLETION: 55%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 5.4, through **indicator 5.4.1,** investigates gender inequalities in unpaid domestic and care work, stressing the importance of recognizing its value through public services and social protection. By identifying gender inequalities, this indicator seeks to raise awareness, promote more balanced dynamics, and inform policymaking.

Globally women and girls often hold a heavier burden related to unpaid domestic and care work, and the effects of this gender disparity can impact their potential for economic, social and cultural fulfilment. Women globally spend on average, 2.5 times more hours on unpaid care work than men, with this disparity being even greater in low- and middle-income countries (Figure 70).

Figure 70. Average time spent in unpaid care and domestic work, per cent of a 24-hour day, by continent (2023)



SOURCE UN Women and the Pardee Center for International Futures using Ifs v.7.97

In the **Arab region**, women continue to bear a significant burden of unpaid care and domestic work, which greatly exceeds that of men. In Northern Africa and Western Asia, women spend over 21 per cent of their day on unpaid care tasks, compared to just 4.5 per cent for men, resulting in one of the largest gender gaps globally.

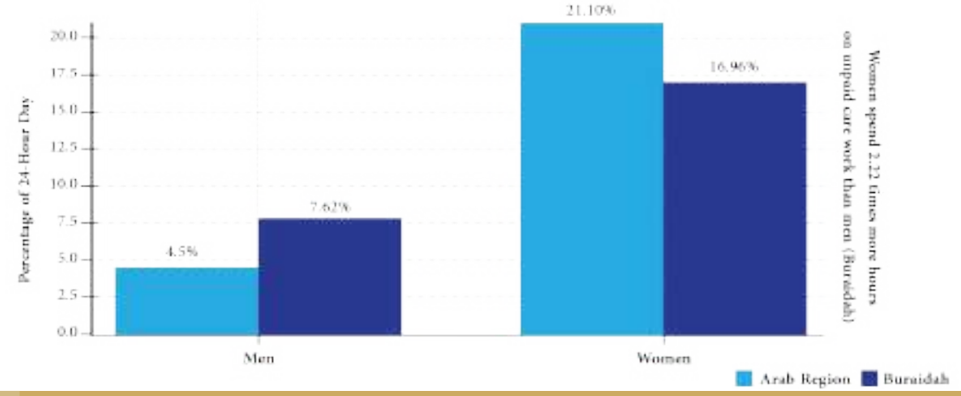
In **Saudi Arabia**, detailed data on unpaid care and domestic work is scarce, stressing the need of national time-use surveys[234] or regional reports focusing on gender roles and economic participation. However, it is fair to assume that leading national initiatives, often under the framework of Vision 2030, focusing on raising women's participation in the labour force and education opportunities, have the potential to positively impact this indicator.

The QUO has started collecting data on unpaid domestic and care work in 2023[235], providing important insights for cities like **Buraidah.** In Buraidah's case, the results are better than the regional average (Figure 74), with women spending around 4 hours (or around 17 per cent of their day), and men spending around 1,8 hours (or around 7,6 per cent of their day) in unpaid domestic and care work. In Buraidah men spend around half of the time women spend on unpaid work (0.45 ratio).

234- For a methodological approach example see: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/tus_esms.htm

235- Qassim Urban Observatory (2024). The SDGs in QUO. May 2024 Update.

Figure 71. Arab region and Buraidah's average time spent in unpaid work



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

Buraidah's performance indicates that around 55 per cent of this indicator is complete, showcasing that it is important to work on and implement impactful local policies to achieve the goal of eliminating inequalities and reaching a 1:1 ratio by 2030. Therefore, the municipality should prioritise conducting maintaining the current effort of collecting local data through time-use surveys. Longitudinal data will be central in supporting the creation of tailored policies to address the disparities highlighted by current indicators.

5.3.5. Opportunities for Women's Leadership

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
5.5.1	Proportion of seats held by women in sub-national/local governments	●	↗	50%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
0.6%	2.3%	2.2%	2.2%	1.7%	

2022 COMPLETION: 3.4%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
5.5.2	Proportion of women in managerial positions	●	↗	50%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
0.9%	0%	3.5%	6.4%	1.3%	

2022 COMPLETION: 2.7%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
E.1	Proportion of women in the workforce	●	↗	50%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	14.4%	13.9%	-	15%	16.6%

2023 COMPLETION: 33.2%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 5.5. focuses on tracking women's opportunities for leadership in political, economic and public life. It does so by providing an indicator that quantifies the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments **(indicator 5.5.1)** and the proportion of women in managerial positions **(indicator 5.5.2)**. These indicators are central in assessing the extent to which women are represented in decision-making positions, which is crucial for ensuring that women's perspectives and interests are considered in policymaking processes. Additionally, this target promotes women's career advancement and organizational diversity, which are central elements of just, equal and prosperous societies. Therefore, this VLR also analyses an extra indicator on the proportion of women in the workforce **(indicator E.1),** assessing the overall access of women to paid work.

Between 2022 and 2023, the **global gender gap in labour-force participation** saw a modest improvement, rising from 63 to 64 per cent. Despite this positive change, women's participation in the workforce is still at its lowest levels since the Global Gender Gap Index' inception in 2006[236]. The proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments has been improving in the last decades, from a **global average** of 11.7 in 1997 to 26,7 per cent in 2023[237].

In Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah issued a royal decree that allowed women to be appointed to the Shura Council for the first time in 2013, marking a historic step toward greater female participation in governance. In 2023, although there were no women as heads of state or government in Saudi Arabia, it reached around 20 per cent of seats held by women in the parliament. [238]

The percentage of seats held by women in national parliaments does not translate to a similar performance for **women's participation in the local government.** The **Arab Region** has the lowest score in this sense, with an average of 18 per cent in 2020, while the global average is 36 per cent[239]. Tunisia is a leading example of the impact potential of gender quotas. The country has one of the highest levels of women's representation globally with nearly 48 per cent of local government seats held by women[240].

236- World Economic Forum. (2023). *Global gender gap report 2023*. World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2023

237- See global trend data at: https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/sg-gen-parl-zs?view=trend&geos=WLD

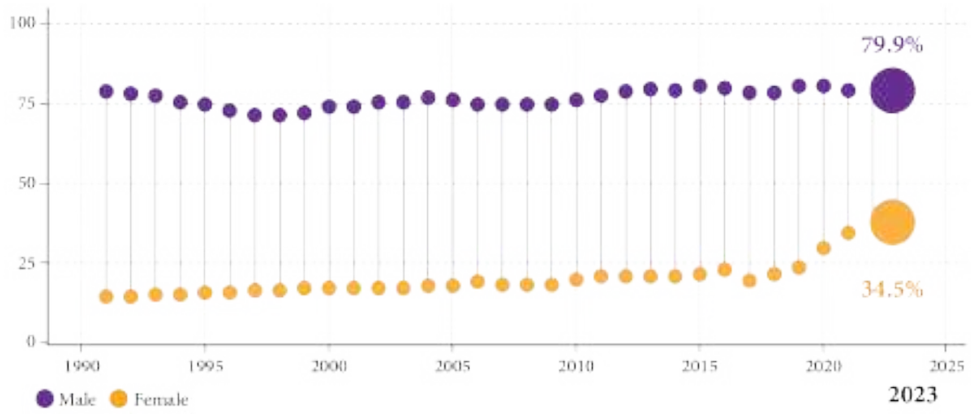
238- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2022). Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2022. Saudi Arabia

239- UN Women. (2021). *Women's representation in local government: A global analysis*. UN Women. https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/01/womens-representation-in-local-government

240- UN Women. (2021). *Women's representation in local government: A global analysis*. UN Women. https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/01/womens-representation-in-local-government

Even if major challenges remain (Figure 72), **Saudi Arabia** has launched a series of financial and labour market reforms aimed at increasing women's participation in the workforce, aligning with the ambitious goals of Vision 2030. These reforms have opened the financial sector to international finance and foreign capital, while specific labour market initiatives target increasing the role of women and youth. Key efforts include programmes to support women entrepreneurs, offering them skills development and training to ensure equal opportunities[241].

Figure 76. Saudi Arabia's labour force participation rate

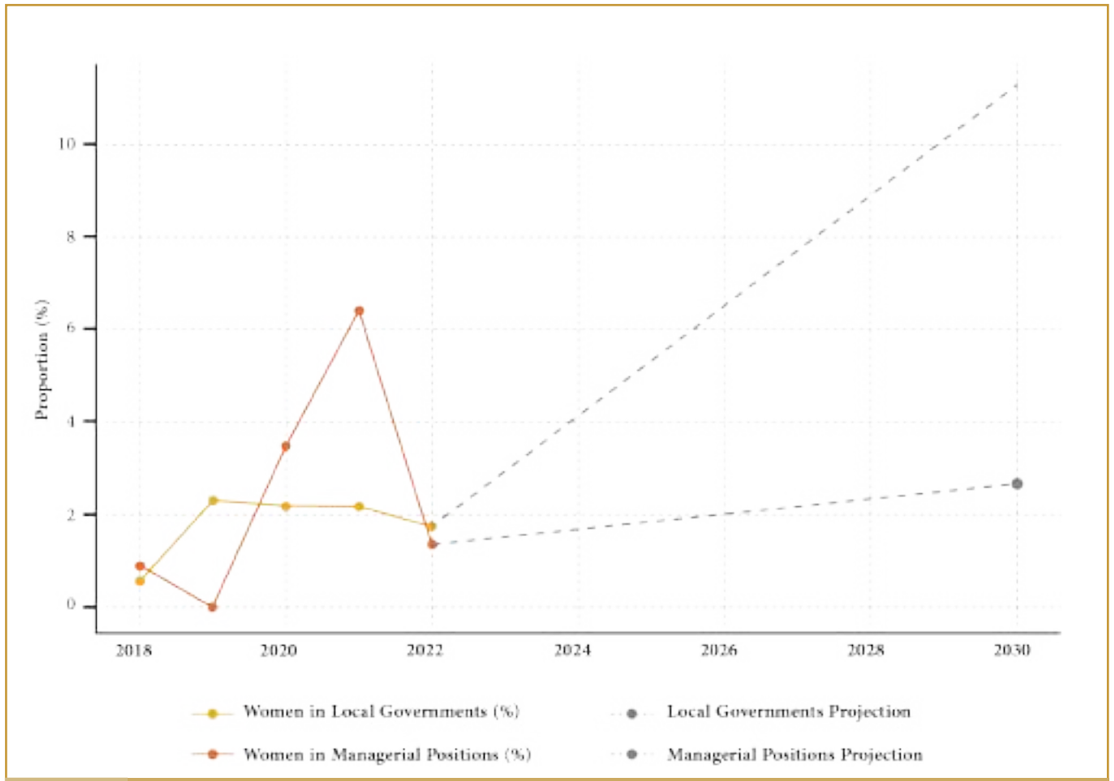


SOURCE Modelled ILO estimate

In **Buraidah,** women's participation in leadership roles remains significantly low, with only 1.7 per cent of local government seats occupied by women in 2022. Similarly, women held **just 1.3** per cent of managerial positions during the same period. Although the data from 2018 to 2022 show a modest upward trend, the pace of improvement is insufficient to meet SDG target 5.5 by 2030 (Figure 73).

241- **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023).** *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum. Retrieved from https://hlpf.un.org/countries/saudi-arabia

Figure 73. Proportion of seats in local governments and managerial positions held by women in Buraidah (2018 – 2022 and 2030 estimation)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

In 2023, women made up 16 per cent of **Buraidah's** workforce, meaning there were approximately five men for every woman employed. While this represents a moderate improvement from the 2019 figures, the current rate of progress suggests that the goal of gender parity in the workforce is unlikely to be met by 2030.

It is crucial for policymakers in Buraidah to implement a comprehensive strategy to address gender disparities in leadership to accelerate progress toward SDG target 5.5 and the indicators analysed in this section (5.5.1, 5.5.2, and E.1).

6

SDG 6 CHAPTER

6.1. INTRODUCTION

SDG 6 aims to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. It encompasses access to safe drinking water, adequate and equitable sanitation, and improved water quality and efficiency[242].

Global progress toward SDG 6 reveals a mixed picture, with significant advances but ongoing challenges. On the one hand, the proportion of the global population with access to safely managed drinking water and safely managed sanitation services increased. On the other hand, global water stress is on the rise. To meet SDG 6 targets by 2030, the world will need to accelerate progress, especially in developing countries[243].

The **Arab region** faces significant challenges in achieving SDG 6. Water scarcity remains one of the most critical issues, with 12 Arab countries among the most water-stressed in the world. Many countries in the region face extreme water stress, with indicators showing that several Arab states are in the "red zone" for water-related challenges (Figure 74). Furthermore, the region's growing population and economic development exacerbate pressure on already limited water resources[244].

242- See more at: https://SDGs.un.org/goals/goal6

243- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

244- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

Figure 74. Arab region SDG 6 status and trends dashboard

SOURCE Adapted from The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2023-2024

Saudi Arabia shows significant progress in achieving SDG 6, with nearly 100 per cent of the population having access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services[245]. The country is the world's largest producer of desalinated water, producing 5.9 million cubic meters per day across 32 plants as of 2020. Additionally, investments in wastewater management have led to significant improvements, focusing on reusing treated wastewater[246].

245- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum. Retrieved from https://hlpf.un.org/countries/saudi-arabia

246- General Authority for Statistics. (2020.). *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicators Report*.

Compared to other countries in the GCC, with which Saudi Arabia shares important geographical characteristics that impact sustainable water governance, Saudi Arabia showcases an above-average performance with positive trends towards 2030. By developing strategic projects related to infrastructure, regulation, partnerships, among others, Saudi Arabia showcases a comprehensive approach to achieving SDG 6 through sustainable and efficient water and sanitation practices[247] (Box 5).

Box 5: National Initiatives

The National Water Strategy (NWS)[248], launched in 2018, is a comprehensive plan aimed at ensuring the sustainable management of Saudi Arabia's water resources. It addresses growing water demands, reduces consumption, and protects resources from depletion and contamination. The NWS aligns closely with Vision 2030, focusing on enhancing water efficiency and promoting sustainable practices across all sectors to ensure safe and reliable water supplies for all citizens.

The Water Regulator[249], under the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture, plays a critical role in enforcing the NWS by monitoring service providers, setting standards, and ensuring water efficiency.

The National Centre for Water Efficiency and Conservation (NCWEC)[250] promotes water-saving practices across all sectors through awareness campaigns and technical programmes.

The Qathrah Program[251] targets water conservation, aiming to reduce per capita water use and increase the reuse of treated wastewater.

Vision 2030[252] focuses on constructing over 550 water dams and enhancing rainwater harvesting. These initiatives are vital for increasing water storage capacity, reducing reliance on non-renewable groundwater, and ensuring long-term water security and resilience.

These initiatives are central for **Buraidah**, providing a solid foundation to approach its water management. By aligning with the NWS and Vision 2030, Buraidah can refine its water-use efficiency, reduce water stress, ensure access to safe drinking water, and improve wastewater treatment. The following sections provide detailed insights into SDG 6 indicators, examining Buraidah's progress in areas such as access to water, sanitation, and hygiene, water quality, water-use efficiency, and water resource management. Given the importance of sustainable water management in Saudi Arabia and cities like Buraidah, assessing progress towards SDG 6 offers critical insights for informed policymaking.

247- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

248- Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture. (2018). National Water Strategy 2030: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

249- See more at: https://www.swa.gov.sa/ar/

250- See more at: https://maee.gov.sa/sites/ar/Pages/Home.aspx

251- See more at: https://www.nwc.com.sa/EN/NationalResponsibilityInitiatives/pages/default.aspx

252- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

6.2. SDG 6 OVERVIEW

This VLR collected data from **6 indicators for SDG 6**, with an overall score of 91,6 per cent, with 4 "Achieved" indicators, and 2 indicator showing "Major Challenges" ahead. One indicator shows a "Decreasing" tendency. This data suggests important achievements in Buraidah, and a central need to tackle challenges related to wastewater treatment. It is also important to take into consideration that **missing data** on the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation indicates the opportunity for improvement in this area (Annex 2 for the full indicator's Statistics).

The data analysis of SDG 6 indicators showcases Buraidah's achievement related to universal access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene, while also making significant strides in water-use efficiency, including faster service delivery and reduced interruptions. However, the city faces challenges in wastewater management, with only 70 per cent of wastewater safely treated, highlighting infrastructure pressures. To address water stress, Buraidah has increased its reliance on desalinated water, indicating an optimistic outlook for 2030. Infrastructure upgrades and alignment with national strategies like Vision 2030 support the city's commitment to integrated water resources management (IWRM).

6.3. BURAIDAH'S PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN SDG 6 INDICATORS

6.3.1. Achieving universal access to safe and affordable drinking water

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
6.1.1	Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services	●	↑	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

2023 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 6.1 focuses on the objective of achieving universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water by 2030, through **indicator 6.1.1** which tracks the proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services. Access to clean and safe drinking water is a fundamental human right and essential for health and well-being. Reliable access reduces the incidence of waterborne diseases, such as cholera and dysentery, and supports the achievement of other SDGs, including those related to health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4), by ensuring that children are healthy enough to attend school and communities can focus on development rather than illness. Given the increasing pressures of population growth, climate change, and water scarcity, ensuring that data for this indicator is robust and regularly updated is essential for achieving global water security and sustainable development.

Globally, access to safely managed drinking water services has improved, yet significant gaps remain. As of 2022, 73 per cent of the global population had access to safely managed drinking water services, an increase from previous years, but approximately 2.2 billion people still lack access to safe drinking water. The progress is uneven, with rural areas lagging behind urban areas, especially in developing countries[253].

Access to safely managed drinking water services in the **Arab region** remains a significant challenge, with water scarcity being a prominent issue[254]. In **Saudi Arabia,** access to safely managed drinking water services has reached nearly universal coverage in 2022 with a score of 99.91%.[255]. This success has been driven by significant government investments in desalination technology, which plays a crucial role in supplementing the country's water supply. The Kingdom has positioned itself as the largest producer of desalinated water globally, with a production capacity of 5.9 million cubic meters per day in 2020, spread across 32 desalination plants[256].

Access to safely managed drinking water services in **Al Qassim** reveals significant variations across its cities. While some cities, such as Al Mithnab, achieve universal connectivity to piped water services, others like Oklat AlSkoor and Daria rely heavily on alternative water sources, including storage tanks and rainwater harvesting. Despite these disparities, all households in Al Qassim have access to potable water within 200 meters of their homes, meeting globally recommended standards. However, the reliance on non-piped water sources highlights the need for further investment in water infrastructure to enhance service consistency and reduce the time spent accessing water supplies[257].

Buraidah showcase excellent numbers in the past years, with 100 per cent of its population using safely managed drinking water services[258]. Therefore, the city has an "Achieved" score for indicator 6.1.1, and great prospects towards 2030.

6.3.2. Adequate Sanitation and Hygiene

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
6.2.1	Safely managed sanitation services	●	↑	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

2023 COMPLETION: 100%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
04	Safely managed hand-washing facility with soap and water	●	↑	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	100%	100%	100%	100%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 6.2 monitors access to adequate sanitation and hygiene. Indicator 6.2.1 tracks the proportion of the population using safely managed sanitation **(6.E.1)** services and hand-washing facilities **(6.E.2)**. Proper sanitation is vital for preventing disease and maintaining public health. Additionally, hand hygiene is a critical line of defence against communicable diseases, particularly in the wake of global health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Globally, revigorated efforts are being put forward in relation to unsafe water, sanitation, and hygiene. The focus on developing climate-resilient water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)[259] services is intensifying, with innovative solutions such as solar-powered water systems and enhanced methods for water storage and purification at the forefront[260]. This approach is essential for maintaining reliable access to safe water amidst the growing challenges posed by climate change.

253- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

254- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

255- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2022). Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2022. Saudi Arabia

256- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

257- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). *State of Urban Development in Al Qassim*.

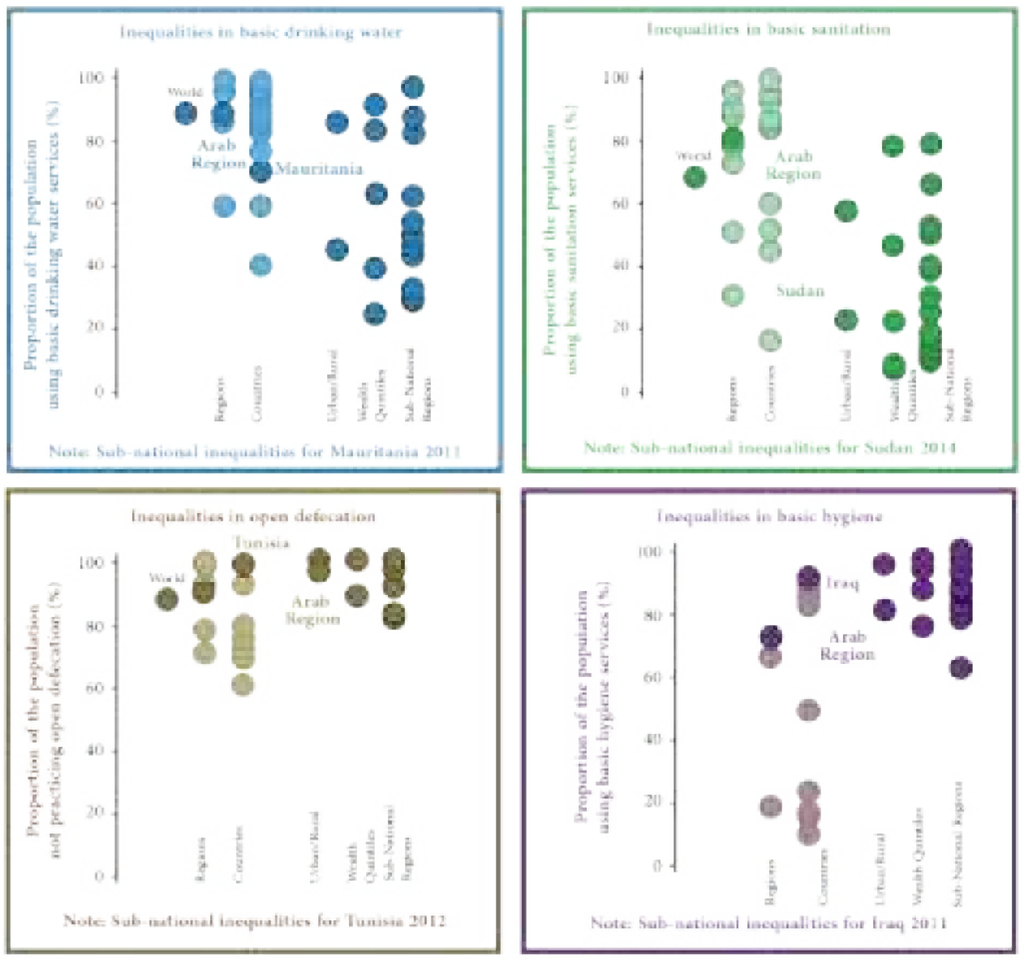
258- Qassim Urban Observatory (2024). The SDGs in QUO. May 2024 Update.

259- See more at: https://www.unicef.org/water-sanitation-and-hygiene-wash

260- UNICEF. (2023). *Triple Threat: How disease, climate risks, and unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene create a deadly combination for children*. United Nations Children's Fund.

In the **Arab region**, important challenges persist in relation to the lack of safely managed sanitation services, with low-income countries facing substantial hurdles. In 2015, 75 million people in the region lacked basic sanitation services, and 25 million people practiced open defecation. In 2015, 51 million people in the Arab region lacked basic drinking water services, and 106 million lacked a basic handwashing facility[261]. Important inequalities related to access to drinking water, basic sanitation, and basic hygiene, persist in the Arab region (Figure 75).

Figure 75. Inequalities in the Arab region (2015)

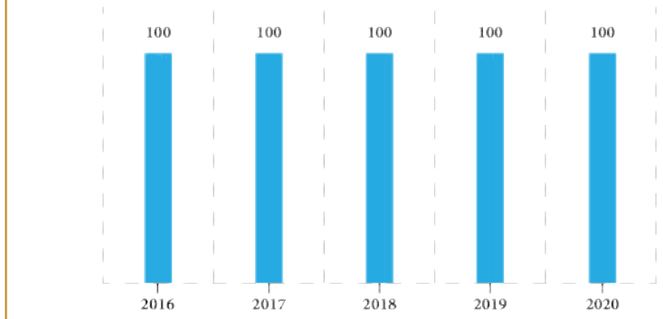


SOURCE WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene. (2018). A snapshot of Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in the Arab Region

261- WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene. (2018). *A snapshot of Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in the Arab Region*.

Access to sanitation and hygiene services in **Saudi Arabia** plays a critical role in improving public health outcomes and maintaining environmental sustainability. As indicated in the Saudi VNR 2023 report[262], nearly 100 per cent of the population has access to safely managed sanitation services (Figure 76). Significant investments have been made in upgrading sewage treatment plants to enhance wastewater management. This has resulted in the provision of tertiary treated water, repurposed for applications such as agriculture and urban activities.

Figure 76. Per centage of population using safely managed improved sanitation services, Saudi Arabia (2016 – 2020)



SOURCE Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). Voluntary National Review 2023. High-Level Political Forum

Buraidah's achievement of 100 per cent coverage in safely managed sanitation services and households with safely managed hand-washing facilities, underscores its success in providing a hygienic and sustainable living environment for all residents. Buraidah's strong performance in providing access to such basic yet central service can be attributed to several key factors. The city has benefited from significant investments in modern water infrastructure, supported by national initiatives like the NWS and Vision 2030, which prioritise water security and sustainable resource management.

6.3.3. Water Quality

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
6.3.1	Proportion of domestic and industrial wastewater flows safely treated	●	↓	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	94.6%	73.6%	69.6%	69.6%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 69.6%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

262- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum

SDG target 6.3 focuses on water quality, using **indicator 6.3.1** on the proportion of domestic and industrial wastewater flows safely treated. Tracking this indicator is crucial for safeguarding public health, environmental sustainability, and the effective management of water resources. Wastewater that is not adequately treated can contaminate water bodies, spread waterborne diseases and contribute to environmental degradation through pollution. Inadequate treatment also disrupts ecosystems, threatening biodiversity and reducing the quality of water for other uses, such as agriculture or drinking water.

Globally, in 2022, 76 per cent of total wastewater received some level of treatment, but only 60 per cent was safely treated to at least secondary levels in 42 reporting countries. The trends indicate that while progress is being made, it is insufficient to meet the 2030 target of halving the proportion of untreated wastewater. A significant challenge remains due to data gaps, particularly in low-income countries, where unsafe discharges are more common[263].

The **Arab region** faces significant water stress, and untreated wastewater exacerbates the pollution of scarce freshwater resources, impacting both human health and ecosystems. Many Arab countries struggle with inadequate wastewater treatment infrastructure, with major gaps in monitoring and reporting, particularly in countries facing conflict or limited resources[264].

In Saudi Arabia, the effective treatment and management of wastewater have become a cornerstone of the nation's strategy to meet its water security goals. As part of its Vision 2030, the country has made substantial investments in wastewater treatment infrastructure, including the establishment of independent sewage treatment plants (ISTPs), designed to process hundreds of thousands of cubic meters of wastewater daily. These facilities aim to treat wastewater for safe disposal and to produce treated water that can be reused for agricultural, industrial, and urban applications, contributing to the conservation of Saudi Arabia's scarce water resources. In 2020, the completion of major projects such as the Madinah-3 wastewater treatment plant, with a capacity of up to 375,000 m^3 per day, highlights Saudi Arabia's commitment to advancing sustainable water management[265].

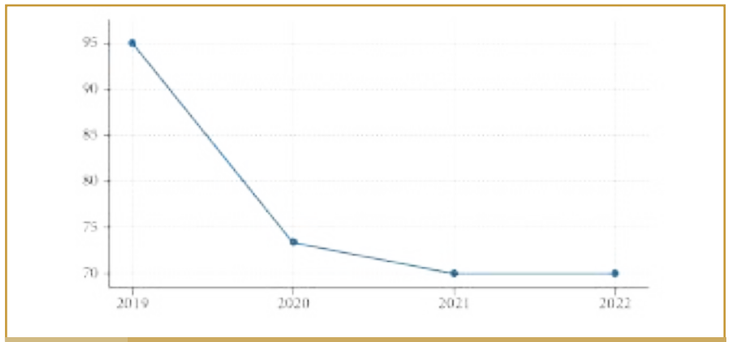
263- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

264- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

265- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum

Buraidah faces significant challenges in this area, with only 70 per cent of its wastewater flows being safely treated in 2022. Longitudinal data showcases a downward trend that particularly concerning, as it highlights the increasing pressure on the city's infrastructure and the growing risk of environmental degradation. If this trend continues, it could lead to severe consequences, including the pollution of water resources and increased health risks for the population (Figure 77).

Figure 77. Safely treated wastewater in Buraidah (2019 – 2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

Currently, the government has heavily invested in upgrading sewage treatment plants to enhance wastewater management, with a focus on repurposing treated water for agriculture, industry, and urban activities, and the establishment of ISTPs to encourage private sector involvement. The facility, known as the Buraydah-2 ISTP, has a treatment capacity of 150,000 cubic meters per day, and is designed to serve a population of approximately one million. The treatment processes include advanced technologies such as Sequencing Batch Reactors (SBR), continuous disc filters, and solar-powered sludge drying to ensure high-efficiency water treatment while minimizing environmental impact[266].

Buraidah's performance in this indicator can be attributed to several underlying factors. The city's rapid urban growth stresses the capacity of its existing wastewater infrastructure, leading to increased pressure on treatment facilities. Additionally, while there have been significant investments in upgrading sewage treatment plants and promoting the repurposing of treated water, these initiatives may still be in the early stages of implementation, preventing immediate improvements in the treatment rate. The downward trend suggests that existing infrastructure and management practices may have struggled to keep up with rising demand and evolving environmental standards. Moreover, the complexity of integrating new technologies and involving the private sector through ISTPs require time to yield measurable results.

266- https://www.swpc.sa/en/signing-an-agreement-for-the-buraidah-2-and-tabuk-2-projects/

6.3.4. Reducing Water Stress

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
6.4.2	Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources	●	↑	COMPLETELY ADDRESSES

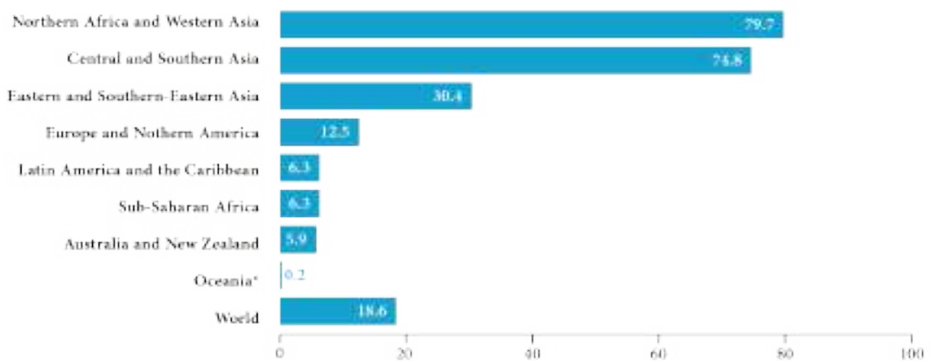
2018 - 2023 COMPLETELY ADDRESSES	2023 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 6.4 focuses on increasing water-use efficiency, using indicators related to change in water-use efficiency (**Indicator 6.4.1**) and level of water stress (**Indicator 6.4.2**). These are important metrics for promoting sustainable water management globally. By monitoring changes in water use efficiency, countries can assess whether they are optimizing water use and reducing waste, which is critical for ensuring that available resources can meet current and future demand. Measuring the level of water stress is essential in regions where water scarcity is a pressing issue, as it signals how close a country or area is to depleting its water resources.

From 2015 to 2021, **global water use efficiency** increased by 19 per cent, improving across all sectors – agriculture saw the highest rise at 36 per cent, followed by industry at 31 per cent and services at 6.3 per cent [267]. However, water stress levels have risen globally by 3 per cent, with Northern Africa and Western Asia showcasing alarming levels (Figure 78).

Figure 78. Level of water stress, by world region (2021)



SOURCE United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations

267- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

Many **Arab countries** exhibit low water use efficiency due to the reliance on inefficient agricultural practices and outdated irrigation systems. This is a particular concern for countries like Iraq, Yemen, and Syria, where water resources are under severe strain. Moreover, Arab countries, especially in the Gulf and North Africa, are among the most water-stressed globally[268].

In **Saudi Arabia**, significant advancements have been made to reduce water usage by 9.6 billion cubic meters since the implementation of Vision 2030. Saudi Arabia's emphasis on treated wastewater reuse and desalination technologies further contributes to improving water efficiency, crucial in a region with scarce freshwater resources. Additionally, the country faces extreme water stress, with water withdrawals exceeding renewable resources in several areas, prompting the government to implement robust policies that address water scarcity[269].

Water consumption rates in many of **Al Qassim's** cities are unsustainable, with over-reliance on groundwater resources, which exacerbates water stress levels. The absence of advanced water efficiency measures, particularly in agriculture, has led to inefficiencies, where substantial amounts of water are used without corresponding improvements in yield. Moreover, the region faces critical levels of water stress, where demand often exceeds available renewable water resources, putting further strain on the region's sustainability[270].

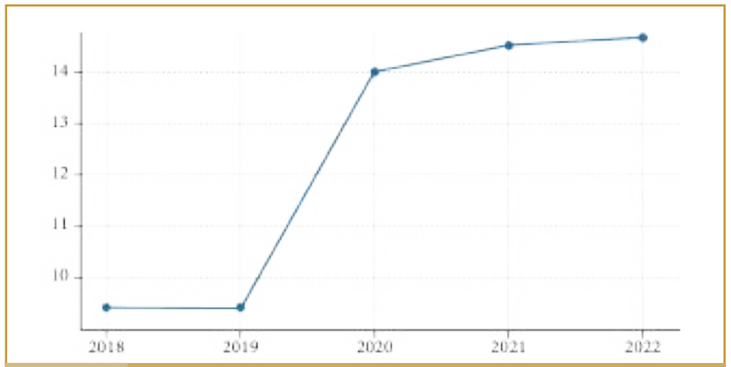
While there is no local data related to water-use efficiency, in relation to the level of water-stress, **Buraidah's** per centage of desalinated water provides critical insights to the discussion (Figure 84). This metric indicates how much the city relies on alternative water sources, such as desalinated water, instead of drawing from limited freshwater resources. The underlying assumption is that increasing the use of desalinated water reduces the pressure on freshwater supplies, thereby lowering water stress.

268- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

269- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum

270- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). *State of Urban Development in Al Qassim*.

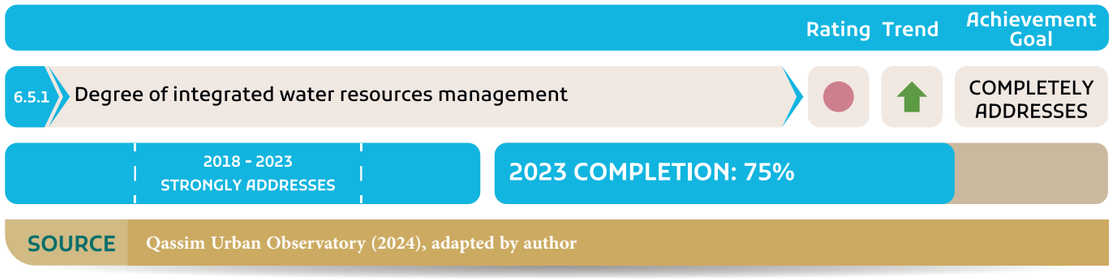
Figure 79. Water stress in Buraidah - Proxy using desalinated water usage (2018 – 2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

Buraidah's last five years cumulative improvement of around 54 per cent (more than 10 per cent improvement per year on average) demonstrates the city's successful efforts to reduce water stress by increasingly relying on desalinated water. A substantive improvement is observed between 2019 and 2020, followed by a consistent achievement in maintaining higher desalinated water usage in the following years. Buraidah's balanced level of freshwater withdrawal relative to available resources is indicative of effective water management practices that safeguard against over-extraction and ensure the sustainability of water supplies.

6.3.5. Implementing Integrated Water Resources Management

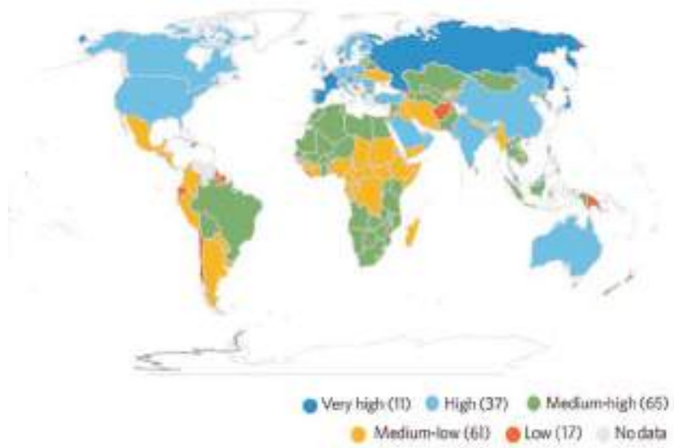


SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 6.5. promotes the implementation of IWRM, and **indicator 6.5.1** measures the degree of IWRM. This indicator reflects the extent to which countries are adopting a holistic approach to managing their water resources across sectors, balancing the competing demands of agriculture, industry, urban areas, and ecosystems. IWRM is essential because it promotes the efficient use of water, enhances water security, and mitigates conflicts over water access.

Globally, the implementation of IWRM has been progressing at a slow pace. While the score has improved from 49 in 2017 to 57 per cent in 2023, it remains far from the 2030 target of 91-100 per cent. This stagnation is particularly concerning in regions like Central and Southern Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa, where water stress is already a critical issue (Figure 80). Countries that have successfully advanced IWRM demonstrate that integrating water resources into broader climate, food, and energy planning not only builds resilience but also supports multiple development objectives. However, insufficient financial, institutional, and technical capacity remain significant barriers to further progress[271].

Figure 80. Global implementation levels of integrated water resources management (2023 or latest available year)



SOURCE United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations

Saudi Arabia's GASTAT[272], collected data at the national level related to water resources management, using a survey with 33 questions across four main components. The final indicator score is the unweighted average of these component scores, reflecting the degree of integrated water resources management, showcasing a result of 83 out of 100in 2022.i.

Notable progress in IWRM is observable in Saudi Arabia, underpinned by its NWS[273]. The strategy emphasizes the sustainable management and conservation of the country's water resources. Key efforts include reducing non-renewable groundwater use in agriculture by 10 billion cubic meters by 2030 and increasing the use of renewable water sources[274].

The Directorate of Water in **Al Qassim** Province has been proactive in upgrading **Buraidah's** water infrastructure to meet both current and future demands, extending planning and capacity until 2054. This includes advanced hydraulic analysis, infrastructure enhancements, and the construction of new pump stations and water treatment facilities[275].

271- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

272- General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). (2022). Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2022. Saudi Arabia

273- Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture. (2018). National Water Strategy 2030: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

274- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum

275- See more at: https://www.ecgsa.com/project/buraidah-water-network/

Projects such as the ISTP are part of a broader national effort to improve both water supply and wastewater management, ensuring that Buraidah effectively manages its water resources. These strategic initiatives demonstrate Buraidah's commitment to sustainable water management and explain its solid performance in integrated water resources management.

Box 6: Stormwater Project

SOURCE Prince Faisal bin Mishaal bin Saud bin Abdulaziz, the Governor of the Qassim Region, and other officials visit the Stormwater Drainage Project site. https://spa.gov.sa/N1992581

The Stormwater Drainage Project uses horizontal directional drilling (HDD)[276] to channel water from the Naga Lakes to the valley. The system connects rainwater networks across four neighbourhoods along the route of the Eastern Inner Ring Road. The project has a total cost of over 598 million Saudi Riyals and serves 14 neighbourhoods in Buraidah. The stormwater drainage project in Buraidah is vital for achieving SDG 6 as it enhances water quality by preventing contamination from runoff, improves water management efficiency, and strengthens the city's infrastructure for integrated water resource management.

276- This method focuses on building an underground tunnel and minimizes surface disruption, in an environmentally friendly and cost-effective compared way (compared to traditional open-cut trenching methods).

Additionally, it builds resilience against environmental changes, protecting water-related ecosystems from the adverse effects of flooding and excessive runoff, thereby supporting sustainable development and public health in the region.

Buraidah's alignment with national initiatives like the NWS, coupled with strong local governance and community engagement, plays a crucial role in achieving this high level of integration, setting a benchmark for other regions in the country. Given the national framework provided by the NWS and multiple other national initiatives (Box 5), alongside local efforts such as the new sewage treatment plants, but lack of specific details on local IWRM plans, **Buraidah scores 75 per cent - "Strongly addresses the criteria for this indicator"** (see the Methodological Annex 2 for more details on the construction of categorical indicators).

Overall, for SDG 6, Buraidah's accomplishments, reflected in its performance in the above-mentioned indicators, represent a significant milestone for the city. They demonstrate the city's ability to overcome common global challenges but also reinforce its position as a leader in sustainable water management. By securing universal access to essential water and sanitation services and optimizing water resource use, Buraidah is ensuring the health, well-being, and resilience of its population while setting a strong example for other cities to follow.

7

SDG 11 CHAPTER

7.1. INTRODUCTION

SDG 11[277], "Sustainable Cities and Communities," focuses on making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. SDG 11 is the result of the global recognition of the critical role of cities in sustainable development, including diverse targets such as improving access to adequate housing, providing affordable and sustainable transportation, ensuring access to safe and inclusive public spaces, and enhancing resilience to disasters. It reflects the understanding that well-managed urbanisation is key to improving quality of life and advancing the 2030 Agenda. Additionally, sustainable cities have the potential to empower all 17 SDGs[278] (Figure 81).

277- See more at: https://SDGs.un.org/goals/goal11

278- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat.

Figure 81. How sustainable cities can positively impact all SDG

1- ENDING POVERTY	Sustainable and inclusive cities and human settlements reduce poverty through the provision of job opportunities, affordable housing, and adequate basic services.
2- ZERO HUNGER	Sustainable urban-rural linkages drive food system transformation that increases access to food through improved transport systems, more diverse food markets, and greater economic opportunities for rural areas.
3- GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	Sustainable cities lead to better access to health care services and healthy living opportunities, through greater access to clean water, healthy air, quality sanitation, and green public spaces.
4- QUALITY EDUCATION	Sustainable urban development patterns offer easier access to educational resources and opportunities that are concentrated in cities.
5- GENDER EQUALITY	Sustainable urbanization offers women greater access to services and better opportunities for education, employment, and social and political participation. Inclusive cities and human settlements consequently lead to greater women›s empowerment.
6- CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION	Improving access to basic services and increasing participatory planning in sustainable cities leads to better water and sanitation outcomes.
7- AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY	Sustainable cities improve access to modern and cleaner energy sources, in cooking solutions and energy efficient technologies.
8- DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	Cities unlock opportunities for economic growth and employment by providing access to broad and diverse job markets.
9- INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE	Due to agglomeration economy effects, urban areas are the site of innovation and enhance industrialization and infrastructure development.
10- REDUCED INEQUALITIES	Sustainable urbanization patterns reduce inequalities through policies and legislation that address the needs of the private neighborhoods and the informal sector.
12- RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION	Well-planned,-managed and -governed cities foster the implementation of sustainable patterns of consumption and production through circular economy initiatives and policies to reduce waste streams.
13- CLIMATE ACTION	Sustainable cities are a main driver of climate action through the promotion of low carbon development patterns.
14- LIFE BELOW WATER	Nearly every city is situated in a watershed, presenting opportunities to safeguard life below water, particularly with proper waste management that prevents waterborne pollution and green infrastructure development that restores coastal habitat.
15- LIFE ON LAND	Compact development patterns facilitate land conservation for ecosystem preservation while integrating green spaces in urban areas promotes biodiversity.
16- PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS	Building peaceful and just cities can help tackle inequalities and strengthening institutions.
17- PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS	Cities are where diverse groups and stakeholders convene to bring partners together in the pursuit of sustainable development.

SOURCE: United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat.

Globally, progress towards SDG 1 is uneven, revealing stark regional disparities, with Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia lagging behind, while areas like Australia, New Zealand, Northern America, and Europe showcasing better scores. Important challenges around the globe are related to the housing crisis, adequate access to open spaces, rapid urban sprawl, and poor air quality[279].

In a similar fashion to other SDGs, **the Arab region** shows significant variation in SDG 11 (Figure 82), ranging from countries with low scores and declining tendencies (e.g. Algeria and Syria), to countries with relatively better scores and improving tendencies (e.g. United Arab Emirates and Kuwait). Some common challenges are related to inadequate urban infrastructure, rapid population growth, and insufficient public transport. The Arab region's urban sustainability challenges are reflected in the overall poor air quality and inefficient waste management[280].

Sustainable Cities and Communities		
Country	Rating	Trend
Algeria	●	↓
Bahrain	●	↓
Comoros	●	→
Djibouti	●	→
Egypt	●	↗
Iraq	●	→
Jordan	●	↓
Kuwait	●	↗
Lebanon	●	↓
Libya	●	↓
Mauritania	●	→
Morocco	●	→
Oman	●	↗
Palestine	●	↓
Qatar	●	→
Saudi Arabia	●	↗
Somalia	●	↗
Sudan	●	→
Syrian	●	↓
Tunisia	●	→
UAE	●	↗
Yemen	●	↗

● SDG achievement
↑ On track

● Challenges remain
↗ Moderately Increasing

● Significant challenges remain
→ Stagnating

● Major challenges remain
↓ Decreasing

● Data not available

SOURCE Adapted from The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2023-2024

Figure 82. Arab region SDG 11 status and trends dashboard

279- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.
280- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

At the national level, **Saudi Arabia** has made significant progress towards sustainable urban development, enhancing infrastructure, expanding green and open public spaces, improving air quality and waste management, and prioritizing access to adequate housing and basic services[281]. Another important indication of the country's efforts towards sustainability is its active work in localising the SDGs, mainly through VLRs such as Buraidah's and Madinah's[282].

Vision 2030 has significantly influenced urban development in Saudi Arabia, driving initiatives that aim to create sustainable, inclusive, and resilient cities. Through this strategic approach, the country is enhancing its urban infrastructure, promoting green building practices, expanding public transport systems, and increasing access to affordable housing. Programmes under Vision 2030 focus on integrating renewable energy in urban planning, fostering PPPs to boost housing supply, and implementing smart city technologies to improve the quality of life for residents[283].

Box 6: National Initiatives

Established in 2022, the **King Salman Charter for Architecture and Urbanism**[284] serves as a strategic blueprint for architectural designs that resonate with the country's rich historical and cultural heritage.

In partnership with UN-Habitat, the **Future Saudi Cities Program**[285] assesses urban prosperity and well-being in 17 major Saudi cities. The goal is to refine urban planning processes and strengthen the institutions involved.

The **Saudi Green Initiative**[286] and Green **Riyadh Initiative**[287] aim to improve city liveability by increasing green spaces, including parks, pedestrian pathways, and other recreational areas.

281- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023.* High-Level Political Forum.
282- Al Madinah Region Development Authority. (2023). Al Madinah City Voluntary Local Review: Localising the Sustainable Development Goals.
283- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030.* Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/
284- See more at: https://archdesign.moc.gov.sa/en/kscau
285- See more at: https://ourcityplans.org/planning-experiences/future-saudi-cities-programme
286- See more at: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/explore/projects/saudi-green-initiative
287- See more at: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/explore/projects/green-riyadh

The **Sakani Platform**[288] facilitates access to real estate, addressing the growing demand for housing. By streamlining the home-buying process, the platform makes it easier for citizens to find and acquire suitable housing options, thereby enhancing access to affordable homes.

Operating under the NTP, **the National Centre for Environmental Compliance**[289] is responsible for monitoring air quality across Saudi Arabia. With a network of 240 monitoring stations, it plays a critical role in advancing the country's capabilities in environmental analysis and forecasting.

Developments like **NEOM**[290], the **King Abdullah Economic City**[291] and the **Mohammad Bin Salman City**[292] are at the forefront of integrating advanced technologies into urban living. These projects focus on implementing innovative solutions in urban management and infrastructure development.

Designed as a bridge between municipalities and investors, the **FORAS Platform**[293] has registered over 23,000 investors. By significantly reducing the requirements for investor visits, it has streamlined investment processes and facilitated greater engagement in urban development projects.

Even though SDG 11 focuses on urban areas, the **localisation** of its indicators is crucial. By connecting the global scope of SDG 11 with Buraidah's context, we can develop tailored actions that are inclusive, leaving no one behind. This process is only possible through empowered multilevel governance structures, where local, regional, and national authorities work together.

The following sections will examine the state of urban development in Buraidah, discussing the main challenges, opportunities, and next steps to achieving the different indicators in SDG 11. This data analysis can be leveraged by local policymakers, identifying gaps, synergies, and prospects to enhance sustainability, resilience, and inclusivity in Buraidah.

288- See more at: https://sakani.sa/en

289- See more at: https://saudipedia.com/en/article/562/government-and-politics/centres/national-centre-for-environmental-compliance

290- See more at: https://www.neom.com/en-us

291- See more at: https://www.kaec.net/

292- https://miskcity.sa/

293- See more at: https://furas.momra.gov.sa/

7.2. SDG 11 OVERVIEW

			Rating	Trend
11.1	11.1.1	Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing	●	↑
11.2	11.2.1	Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport	●	↗
11.3	11.3.1	Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate	●	–
11.5	11.5.1	Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters	●	↑
11.6	11.6.1	Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed in controlled facilities	●	↑
	11.6.2	Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter	●	↓
11.7	11.7.1	Average share of the built - up area of cities that is open space for public use for all	●	↑
	11.7.2	Proportion of persons victim of physical or sexual harassment	●	→
UMF	47	Green area per capita	●	→
11.b	11.b.1	Countries that adopt and implement national disaster risk reduction	●	↑
	11.b.2	Local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies	●	↗
UMF	73	Financial autonomy	●	↑

77.9% COMPLETION

This VLR collected data from **12 indicators**[294] for SDG 11. By leveraging this data, we are able to zoom in on different dimensions related to the empowerment of Buraidah as a smart and sustainable city. At the aggregate level, Buraidah shows a high completion score of 77,9 per cent. Five indicators are "Achieved", showcasing important milestones related to housing, waste collection, and resilience. In addition, 2 more indicators are "On track" to being achieved in 2030. Important advancements are also noticeable in relation to access to public transport and open public spaces. The only "Decreasing" indicator is related to air quality, suggesting the importance of shifting this trend.

294- For the detailed discussion of Indicator 11.5.1 ("Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters"), Indicator 11.b.1 ("Countries that adopt and implement national disaster risk reduction"), and Indicator 11.b.2 ("Local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies"), **see SDG 1 Chapter**. For the detailed discussion of indicator 11.6.1 ("Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter") **see SDG 3 Chapter**.

In relation to **missing data**, Buraidah shows few blind spots, mostly related to indicators that are usually mandated at the national level. These results position Buraidah as a leading inclusive, safe, and resilient city in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, efforts such as localising the SDGs through this VLR showcase the city's commitment to sustainable development.

7.3.1. Access to Housing

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
11.1.1	Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing	●	↑	0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

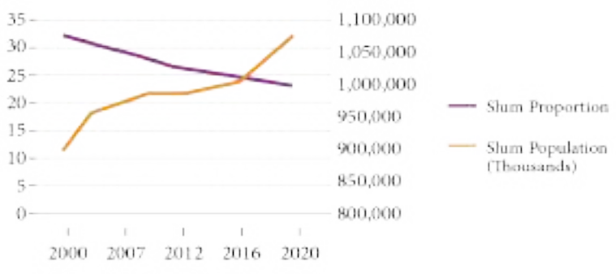
2023 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 11.1 focuses on ensuring adequate, safe, and affordable housing. **Indicator 11.1.1** tracks the proportion of the population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing. By monitoring living conditions and inequality in the access to adequate housing, this indicator provides invaluable insights for urban planning and policy. Additionally, by identifying trends related to inadequate housing, other associated factors emerge, such as health and safety implications, since problems with sanitation, overpopulation, violence, and scarce access to clean water are often associated with slums.

At the global level, most regions still struggle to meet this target, with Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia being "very far from target", where more than 90 per cent of the world's slum dwellers are located[295]. It is also important to notice that globally, at the same time that the proportion of slum dwellers decreases, their absolute numbers increase (Figure 83).

Figure 83. Trends in slum proportion and slum population. World (2000 - 2020)



SOURCE United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat

295- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat

The Arab region faces significant challenges in reducing slum populations, mainly triggered by prevalent urban inequalities[296]. In **Saudi Arabia**, essential urban planning, infrastructure, and quality-of-life initiatives directly impact progress in access to improved housing conditions[297].

The Vision 2030 Housing Program[22] aims to boost homeownership rates to 70 per cent by 2030, focusing on aiding vulnerable populations. By collaborating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the program provides developmental housing units, significantly broadening access to affordable homes.

Al Qassim showcases high levels of homeownership, and adequate living space (around 60m2 per person), and affordable rental prices (less than 20 per cent of the mean household income)[298]. **Buraidah** reports on excellent access to adequate housing, in relation to living space, room occupancy rate, housing production rate to household formation, rental value variation (negative), permanent structures, rent-to-income ratio, and vacant housing units (Figure 84)[299], and moderate levels of multi-family housing (32,3 per cent)[300].

Figure 84. Housing Indicators in Al Qassim (2018)

	Floor Area Per Person (m^2 per person)	Room Occupancy Rate (persons per room)	Housing Production Rate to Household Formation (new houses per new households)	Variation in Rental Value (2017 - 2018) %	% of Permanent Structures	House Rent to Income Ratio	% Vacant Housing Units (2018)
Buraidah	60.6	1.1	0.9	-3.9	99.9	13.2	3
Unaizah	65.4	0.8	0.7	-2.1	97.23	15.6	-
Ar Rass	49.4	0.7	0.6	-0.8	99.6	14.5	0.77
Al Mithnab	55.6	0.6	0.7	2.3	96.9	11.5	-
Al Bakiriyah	57.7	0.8	0.7	-2.0	97.1	11.8	2.81
Al Badaya'a	57.9	0.7	1.0	-2.2	99.6	12.3	2.99
Riyadh Al Khabra	56.2	0.7	1.9	-0.2	98.2	12.5	3.38
Al Asyah	65.8	0.7	0.3	-3.9	92.3	13.4	-
Al Nabhanya	65.6	0.8	-	-0.8	-	15.6	-
Uyun Al Jiwa	62.7	0.8	0.5	-1.2	-	17.4	-
Al Shammasiya	64.7	0.8	1.1	-1.1	-	14.6	-
Oklat AlSkoor	59.3	0.8	0.3	-1.2	99.4	15.0	-
Daria	58.7	0.8	-	-2.1	99.6	13.5	-

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim.

296- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

297- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). Voluntary National Review 2023. High-Level Political Forum.

298- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim.

299- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim.

300- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). Livability Ranking For Buraidah 2020.

It is important to call attention to the decreasing volumes of funding from Real Estate Development Fund Loans (REDFL) in the last five years (50 per cent decrease), which can directly impact the number of households benefiting from housing support[301]. Therefore, it is important that Buraidah monitors its housing market and how it could affect vulnerable groups, while maintaining and improving current policies that already target access to housing.

Buraidah is also characterized by the absence of slums, increasing homeownership rates, improved access to basic service and sharp reductions in poverty levels, all contributing factors to access to adequate housing[302]. Local data[303] shows that the slum population has remained inexistent in the past several years, implying a consolidated trend towards the completion of this indicator by 2030.

7.3.2. Access to Public Transport

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
11.2.1	Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport			100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	35%

2024 COMPLETION: 35%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 11.2 tracks access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems. **Indicator 11.2.1** provides insights into the proportion of the population with convenient access to public transport. Convenient access is often understood as a maximum walking distance of 500 meters to the closest public transport stop but can vary depending on the city's context[304]. This indicator is central to provide insights from inclusive and efficient planning of public transportation systems, making sure the transport network is inclusive.

In 2024, only half of **the global population** has convenient access to public transport, with significant regional variations (Figure 90). North American and European countries show leading scores related to public transportation, with important advancements in relation to multimodal public transportation systems[305]. Global challenges related to access to public transport directly affect people's economic empowerment, social inclusion, cultural access, and political participation potential.

301- Osman, T., Kenawy, E., Abdrabo, K. I., Shaw, D., Alshamndy, A., Elsharif, M., Salem, M., Alwetaishi, M., Aly, R. M., & Elboshy, B. (2021). Voluntary Local Review Framework to Monitor and Evaluate the Progress towards Achieving Sustainable Development Goals at a City Level: Buraidah City, KSA and SDG11 as A Case Study. Sustainability, 13(9555). https://doi.org/10.3390/su13179555

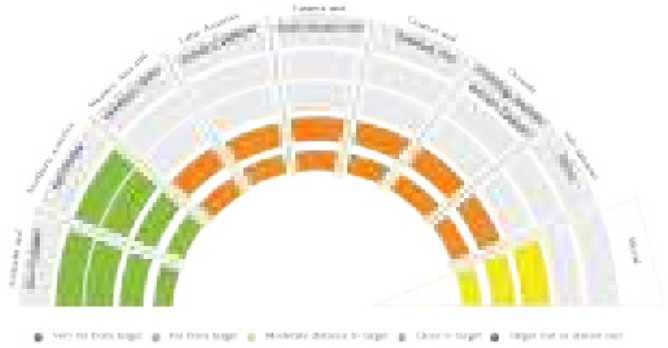
302- Urban Observatory Council. (2018). Voluntary Local Report for the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 for the city of Buraidah – Goal No. 11: Buraidah attractive to live and work.

303- Qassim Urban Observatory (2024). The SDGs in QUO. May 2024 Update.

304- UN-Habitat. (2022). Global Urban Monitoring Framework: A Guide for Urban Monitoring of SDGs and NUA and Other Urban-Related Thematic or Local, National and Global Frameworks.

305- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat.

Figure 85. Progress in indicator 11.2.1. Regions of the world (2023)



SOURCE United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat.

At the aggregate level, the **Arab region** scores under the global average, with only 30 per cent of the population having convenient access to public transport[306]. Given region's disparities, access to public transport varies from country to country. In some cases, inadequate infrastructure (such as in conflict-affected countries) and lack of investment in the sector (such as in least-developed countries), play an important role in low access to public transportation[307].

As discussed before, **Saudi Arabia**'s programmes related to quality of life[308] strongly impact the future of transportation in cities. The country's advancements towards sustainable and smart transportation, under Vision 2030, includes an empowered public transportation system[309]. Additionally, other national initiatives play a crucial role in developing Saudi Arabia's public transport system, such as the National Transport & Logistics Strategy[310] – promoting resilient transportation -, and Saudi Arabia's Public Invest Fund (PIF)[311] – with focused investments in transportation infrastructure support. The country's efforts to develop public transportation systems can already be observed in cities such as Riyadh[312], Al Madinah[313], Jeddah[314], and Dammam[315].

The cities in the province of **Al Qassim** showcase a predominant trend in transport mode used by its inhabitants, with the great majority relying on private cars to reach their destinations (Figure 86). This overreliance on private vehicles is a consequence of the absence of public transportation networks in Al Qassim cities until 2023[316]. These trends are problematic in cities with rapid urbanisation trends, where urban planning for accessible and effective public transportation is essential.

306- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat

307- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

308- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

309- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

310- See more at: https://www.arabnews.com/node/1885636/saudi-arabia

311- See more at: https://www.pif.gov.sa/en/

312- See more at: https://www.rcrc.gov.sa/en/projects/king-abdulaziz-project-for-riyadh-public-transport

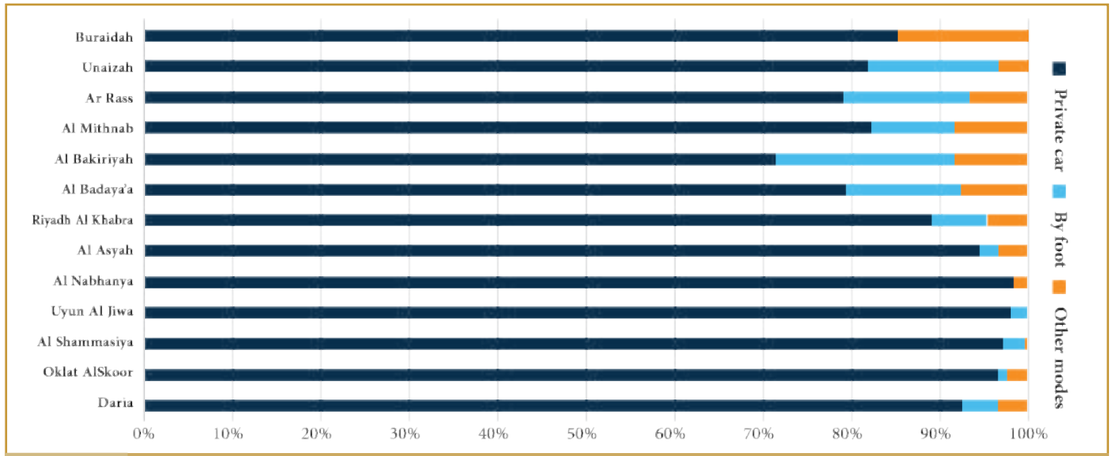
313- See more at: https://www.systra.com/en/projects/madinah-brt-saudi-arabia/

314- See more at: https://saptco.com.sa/en/qr-jeddah-bus

315- See more at: https://www.jedtc.com.sa/page/Current_Bus_Service

316- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim.

Figure 86. Transport mode to work by city in Al Qassim Region



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim

Despite the lack of public transportation until 2023, the city shows good scores in relation to its transport-related indicators in the 2019 Liveability Ranking for **Buraidah** report[317]. These trends suggest high-quality urban planning focused on low intersection density, short displacement time, and comprehensive road networks (Figure 87).

Figure 87. Buraidah's transport indicators (2019)

Main Indicators	Sub-Indicators	Indicators Value 2019	Standardised Value
Convenient Transportation Option	The Average Journey Time to Health Services	7.2 Minutes	100
Safe Streets	Accidents Rates	14 Accidents / 100.000	14.3
	Length of the Road Network per Capita	9.8 Km	100
	Road Density	19.85 Km / Km²	99.3
	Roads Intersection Density	115 Intersection / Km²	100

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). Livability Ranking for Buraidah 2020, adapted by author

The development of public transportation in Buraidah was indicated as the "first priority" for the city in 2018, suggesting that given the growing urban population, the overreliance on private cars must be tackled[318]. Since 2019, a shift towards a public transportation system was proposed, aiming to create better connections between Buraidah and Unaizah, and to develop a public transport network in both cities[319].

317- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). Livability Ranking For Buraidah 2020.

318- Urban Observatory Council. (2018). Voluntary Local Report for the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 for the city of Buraidah – Goal No. 11: Buraidah attractive to live and work. Urban Observatory, Al Qassim Province, Saudi Arabia.

319 Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). Livability Ranking For Buraidah 2020.

Buraidah's performance in indicator 11.2.1 shows that from 2018 to 2023, the city scored 0 per cent (i.e., no one is covered by public transportation), and in 2024, the score increased to 35 per cent. This stark improvement resulted from the inauguration of Buraidah's new bus lines in July 2024. The new bus lines are expected to reach 35 per cent of the population, providing convenient access to the bus lines[320]. Additionally, the bus fleet and bus stops take accessibility, comfort, safety, and affordability into consideration (Figure 87). The new buses are equipped with special-needs features (e.g. "kneeling"), bus stops count with seating spaces and screens with upcoming buses (some indoor bus stops also count with air conditioning). Moreover, bus tickets are affordable, and users can access an app to manage trips better (Figure 88).

Figure 88. Public Transportation Project overview

SOURCE Qassim Region Municipality. (2024). Public transportation project in Buraidah and Unayzah Governorate

320- Qassim Region Municipality. (2024). Public transportation project in Buraidah and Unayzah Governorate

Figure 89. Buraidah's new bus lines ticket prices

Track #		from	to	Price
Path 1		Inner Ring Road 1	Qassim University Girls Complex	3.45 riyals
Path 2		Train was running	Prince Nayef International Airport	3.45 riyals
Path 31		Sunrise Park	Omar bin Al-Khattab 10	3.45 riyals
Path 4		Prince Faisal bin Mishal 10	Sultana 5	3.45 riyals
Path 5		The Pigment	Passports	3.45 riyals
Path 6		Aisha bint Abi Bakr 3	Change 1	3.45 riyals
Path 7		Red	Al Habib Hospital	3.45 riyals
Path 8		Ibrahim Al-Qadi Street	King Khaled	3.45 riyals
Path 9		Prince Faisal Bin Bandar 1	Zamil Al Saleem Road 3	3.45 riyals
Path 10		Supervisor	Al-Fayhaa	3.45 riyals
Path 11		Jami bin Saadi 2	Dates Market	3.45 riyals
Path 12		Inner Road 1	The King Salman	3.45 riyals

SOURCE Qassim Region Municipality. (2024). Public transportation project in Buraidah and Unayzah Governorate

The introduction of the public transportation network in Buraidah marks a significant leap toward achieving the city's liveability and sustainability goals. This new system addresses the overreliance on private vehicles but also sets a precedent for inclusive and smart transportation in the region. The city's commitment to expanding and improving public transport is expected to enhance economic opportunities, social inclusion, and overall quality of life, paving the way for future developments in urban transport towards 2030.

7.3.3. Inclusive and Sustainable Urbanisation

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
11.3.1	Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate	●	—	<1

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	-	-	-	0.23

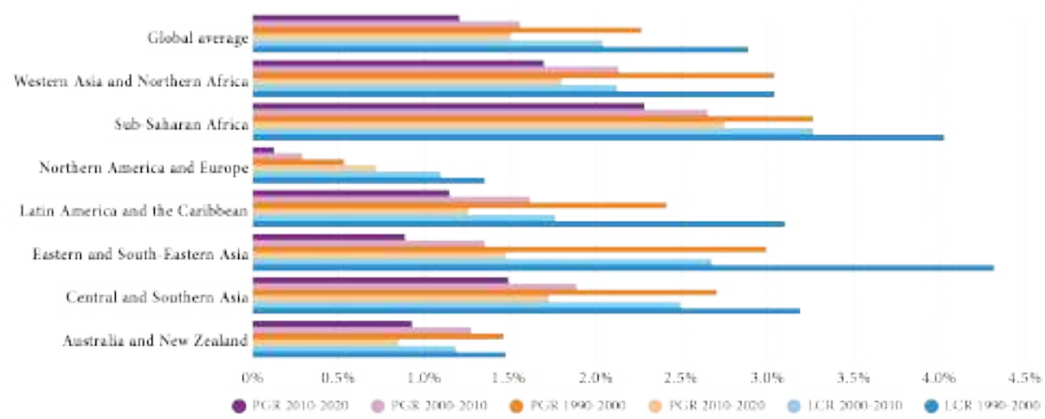
2023 COMPLETION: 100%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 11.3 covers inclusive and sustainable urbanisation using **indicator 11.3.1** to monitor the ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate. This ratio provides important insights on the dynamics between urban sprawl and resource efficiency. In other words, as the urban fabric expands, an imbalance between population growth and land consumption may indicate increased infrastructure costs, energy consumption, and multidimensional inefficiencies. Sustainable urban planning takes into account this balance, so cities can manage their resources efficiently, while promoting equity and adequate access to vulnerable groups.

Globally, cities have been expanding at a rate that often outpaces population growth, particularly in regions like East and South-Eastern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Although there's been a decline in this expansion rate over recent decades, the built-up area per person has still increased slightly, indicating a modest rise in urban sprawl[321]. This trend varies by region and context, with lower land consumption rates observed in places like Northern America, Europe, and Oceania (Figure 90). The balance between land consumption and population growth is crucial, as compact urban development can enhance sustainability by reducing energy use and infrastructure costs. However, rapid urban sprawl tends to have the opposite effect, highlighting the need for strategic urban planning to maintain sustainable growth.

Figure 90. Land consumption rate (LCR) and population growth rate (PGR), world average and by region (2023)



SOURCE United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat.

321- World Health Organization. (2024). Aligning for country impact: 2024 progress report on the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All. World Health Organization.

Similar to global trends, in the **Arab region**, cities are expanding at rates that often outpace population growth, leading to inefficient land use and increased pressure on infrastructure and resources. This unbalanced growth is more pronounced in lower-income countries, while wealthier nations tend to have better-managed urban development[322].

Saudi Arabia shows improvements in urban planning and urban infrastructure, building on Vision 2030 strategic framework and targeted programmes and projects to promote sustainable urbanisation[323]. The country's urban development plans often envision resilient, smart, and sustainable cities, with a balanced approach to population growth and urban sprawl[324].

Al Qassim has seen rapid urban expansion over the past few decades, with many cities experiencing significant growth in their built-up areas. This has led to the gradual conversion of fertile agricultural land into urban zones, raising concerns about future food security and the region's agricultural productivity[325]. Most cities in the region have substantial amounts of developable land, including both planned and unplanned areas, indicating potential for further growth (Figure 91).

Figure 91. Conversion of land use from non-urbanized to urbanized in Al Qassim's cities (2018)

	Total Urban Area (Km^2)*	Residential	Planned Vacant Land	Commertial	Parks, Roads & Spaces	Services & Public Utilities	Industrial	Unplanned Vacant Land	Agricultural Lands	Total
Buraidah	913.6	6.9	15.2	1.4	11.5	3.7	1.2	46.0	14.1	100.0
Unaizah	150	10.3	26.9	2.0	18.7	8.1	3.1	13.1	17.9	100.0
Ar Rass	111.5	12.6	15.5	3.6	47.8	3.5	1.3	15.5	0.3	100.0
Al Mithnab	53.2	11.9	24.2	2.4	18.5	2.2	0.9	26.2	13.6	100.0
Al Bakiriyah	48.5	8.3	31.2	2.0	22.3	2.5	0.9	27.7	5.2	100.0
Al Badaya'a	70.9	6.5	28.8	1.1	20.1	3.0	0.5	35.2	4.8	100.0
Riyadh Al Khabra	55.9	4.0	22.7	0.2	21.6	2.7	0.7	38.7	9.4	100.0
Al Asyah	45.3	4.6	24.0	0.3	17.5	-	0.0	53.0	0.6	100.0
Al Nabhanya	10.3	3.2	29.0	0.5	14.0	-	0.0	53.0	0.3	100.0
Uyun Al Jiwa	20.3	6.0	35.5	0.5	30.0	2.3	0.6	25.0	0.1	100.0
Al Shammasiya	20.7	8.4	4.0	0.8	11.0	2.3	0.1	68.0	5.4	100.0
Oklat AlSkoor	16.3	6.7	24.0	1.4	23.0	-	0.0	4.9	0.0	100.0
Daria	11.1	6.0	4.7	0.8	16.1	-	0.4	72.0	-	100.0

* Represents the physical city area within which the Qassim Urban Observatory collects data

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim

322- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

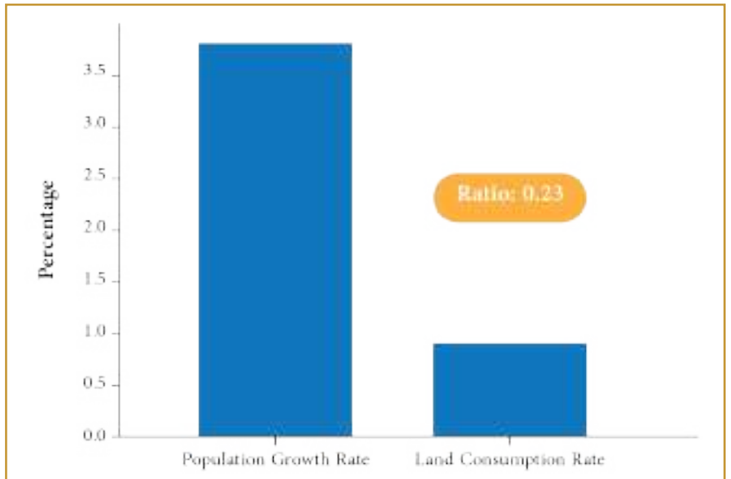
323- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030.* Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

324- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *(2023).* Voluntary National Review 2023. High-Level Political Forum.

325- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim.

Buraidah's urban landscape reveals great potential for future growth, with around 46 per cent of the city's total land currently set as "planned vacant land" in 2022 (six times the existing residential areas)[326]. This reserve of planned vacant land allows for strategic urban planning, ensuring balanced growth, improving infrastructure, and enhancing liveability. In relation to indicator 11.3.1, the ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate, Buraidah shows excellent results (Figure 92).

Figure 92. Buraidah's ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate (latest data)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

In the calculation of this indicator, a ratio of less than 1 indicates that land consumption is growing slower than the population, suggesting efficient use of land. On the other hand, a ratio of greater than 1 indicates that land consumption is growing faster than the population, suggesting potential over-expansion or inefficient land use. The 0,23 ratio indicates that Buraidah is using its land resources efficiently, accommodating more people without proportionately expanding the land area[327].

Buraidah's balanced approach is essential for maintaining sustainable urban growth and ensuring that infrastructure and resources are used effectively. The city's reserve of planned vacant land offers a strategic advantage for future development, providing the opportunity to carefully plan and expand urban areas without sacrificing agricultural productivity or increasing environmental pressures. To maintain this positive trend toward 2030, local policymakers must continue to promote compact urban development, integrate green spaces, and invest in sustainable infrastructure.

326- Qassim Urban Observatory (2024). The SDGs in QUO. May 2024 Update.

327- It is important to notice that this quantitative indicator must be taken into consideration with other dimensions of intra-city analysis, such as congestion levels, living environment standards, among others, that may impact the optimal balance between spatial growth and their populations.

7.3.4. Solid Waste Management

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
11.6.1	Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed in controlled facilities	●	↑	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	96.7%	97.7%	98.5%	99.2%	99.2%

2023 COMPLETION: 99%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 11.6 focuses on the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, tracking the municipal solid waste collection **(indicator 11.6.1)** and air quality **(indicator 11.6.2)**. Air quality data offers insights into pollution sources and their impact on residents' health, enabling targeted interventions to mitigate emissions (for the detailed discussion on the air quality indicator in Buraidah, please refer to SDG 3 chapter). Efficient waste collection includes managing waste as well as promoting resource recovery opportunities through recycling and composting, which can lessen the demand for raw materials. Monitoring municipal solid waste collection helps policymakers understand the efficiency and sustainability of waste management systems, highlighting areas for improvement in reducing landfill use and promoting recycling initiatives.

At the **global level, municipal solid waste generation** is on the rise, presenting challenges for waste management systems, especially in developing regions where collection rates lag behind those in developed countries (Figure 93). This disparity in collection rates has direct environmental consequences, contributing to land, water, and air pollution[328].

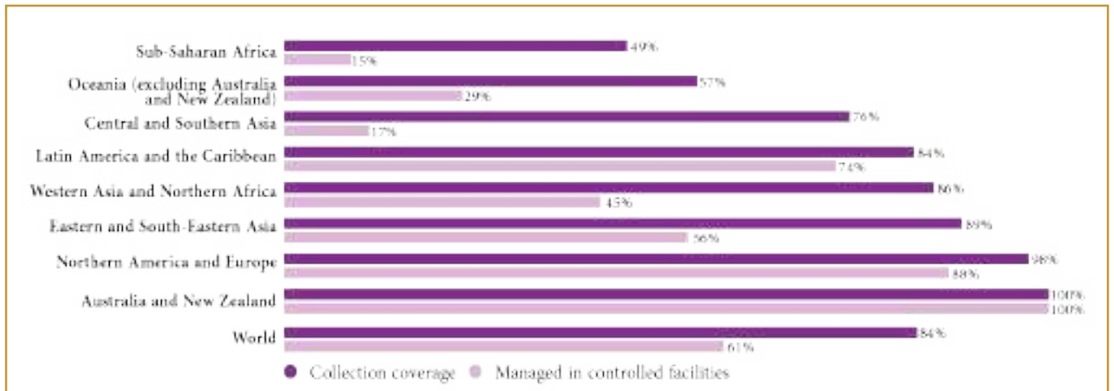
Figure 93. Current status in 11.6 based on municipal solid waste management subcomponent. Regions of the world (2023)

SOURCE United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat.

328- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat

Solid waste management in the **Arab region** shows significant challenges related to inefficient practices that contribute to environmental degradation, particularly land and water pollution, emphasizing the need for more effective management systems[329]. The region is witnessing a rise in waste generation, driven by urbanisation, population growth, and shifting consumption patterns, which puts additional strain on existing infrastructure (Figure 94).

Figure 94. Collection coverage and waste management status in controlled facilities, regions of the world (2023)



SOURCE United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat.

Saudi Arabia's Voluntary National Review[330], in 2023, highlights significant progress in solid waste management, especially under the strategic framework of Vision 2030[331]. Efforts such as the reuse program by the chemical company Sadara[332], which saved around SAR 22 million in disposal costs and generated revenue from recycling, demonstrate the country's commitment to refining its waste management systems.

Other critical initiatives include the establishment of the National Centre for Waste Management[333], which has developed a comprehensive strategic masterplan[334] that aims to upgrade waste management across the country. Key outcomes of this plan include the creation of a National Waste Management Strategy and a unified framework for correctly clustering waste management practices. It involves diagnosing and classifying all types of waste – from municipal solid to industrial and particular waste – while establishing an actual baseline for national and local waste generation.

329- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

330- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

331- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

332- See more at: https://www.sadara.com/

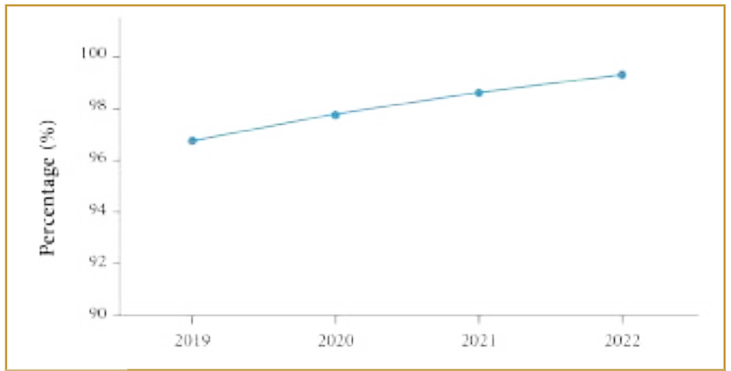
333- See more at: https://mwan.gov.sa/en

334- See more at: https://mwan.gov.sa/en/strategic-plan

In **Al Qassim**, waste management has seen significant developments, with efforts focused on improving collection and reducing environmental impact. The region has implemented various strategies to enhance waste collection efficiency, including expanding services to cover more areas and introducing modern waste collection technologies. Additionally, Al Qassim has been exploring waste-to-energy options and recycling initiatives to transform waste into valuable resources, aligning with broader SDGs and Vision 2030[335].

In **Buraidah**, waste management efficiency has shown excellent progress in the past years. In 2017, the regular collection of solid waste covered 95.8 per cent of the population, and recycling reached only 5.3 per cent of the total solid waste[336]. The most recent data shows that around 11 per cent of total solid waste is recycled, a crucial upward trend in solid waste management in controlled facilities in Buraidah (Figure 95).

Figure 95. Buraidah's Solid waste management in controlled facilities (2019 – 2023)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

Effective waste management is vital for reducing the environmental impact of cities, directly influencing public health and overall quality of life. Buraidah's recent progress in this area is critical, particularly the increase in solid waste recycling and the steady improvement in managing waste in controlled facilities.

7.3.5. Open and Green Public Space

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
11.7.1	Average share of the built-up area of cities that is open space for public use for all (accessibility %)			100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
13.4%	13.4%	13.4%	38.8%	39.9%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 40%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
11.7.2	Proportion of persons victim of physical or sexual harassment			0%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	1.6%	1.6%	1.9%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 96.3%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
47	Green area per capita (m2)			15m²

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
12.8	12.8	12.0	11.9	12.2	-

2022 COMPLETION: 81%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

SDG target 11.7 covers access to public spaces, monitoring the share of cities built-up area for public paces **(indicator 11.7.1)**, and the proportion of persons victims of physical or sexual harassment **(indicator 11.7.2)**. Additionally, the UMF suggests another indicator focused on green area per capita **(UMF indicator 47)**. Public spaces play a crucial role in the social, economic, and environmental fabric of cities, offering residents places for recreation, social interaction, and cultural activities, enhancing community cohesion and well-being. They also contribute to environmental sustainability by offering green spaces that improve air quality and reduce urban heat. It is central that these public spaces are inclusive and safe.

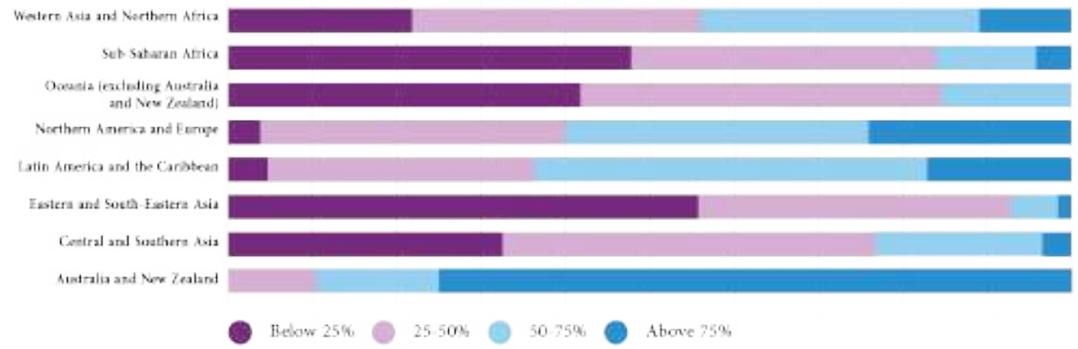
Globally, public spaces are facing increasing pressure due to rapid urbanisation, population growth, and changing land use patterns. Many cities struggle with providing adequate, accessible, and inclusive public spaces for their residents, leading to disparities in the availability and quality of these areas[337]. In many regions, particularly in developing countries (Figure 96), public spaces are often neglected and underfunded, limiting their potential to contribute to the well-being of urban populations.

335- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim.

336- Urban Observatory Council. (2018). *Voluntary Local Report for the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 for the city of Buraidah – Goal No. 11: Buraidah attractive to live and work*. Urban Observatory, Al Qassim Province, Saudi Arabia.

337- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat

Figure 96. Regional aggregates on proportion share of cities population with access to open public spaces within 400 m (five minutes) walk (2023)



SOURCE United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat.

Public spaces in the **Arab region** are crucial for enhancing the quality of urban life, offering health and social benefits while also promoting inclusivity. However, these spaces are scarce, with only about 2 per cent of Middle Eastern cities being dedicated to public areas[338]. This scarcity is often a result of rapid urbanisation, lack of planning, and prioritisation of private development over communal needs. Additionally, creating green spaces is particularly challenging in water-scarce areas like the Arabian Peninsula[339].

Saudi Arabia shows renewed effort in enhancing public spaces' quality and coverage, emphasizing their role in urban development and quality of life[340]. The "Future Saudi Cities Program[341]," in partnership with UN-Habitat, is transforming 17 cities, focusing on creating more green areas, pedestrian pathways, and recreational spots. Under Vision 2030[342], Saudi cities, such as Riyadh, are also leading important initiatives related to public spaces, such as "Green Riyadh", aiming to increase green space per capita, and planting over 7.5 million trees[343].

338- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). (2018). Disability and Sustainable Development Goal 11 in the Arab Region. Social Development Bulletin, Vol. 7 No. 1.

339- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). (2018). Disability and Sustainable Development Goal 11 in the Arab Region. Social Development Bulletin, Vol. 7 No. 1.

340- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

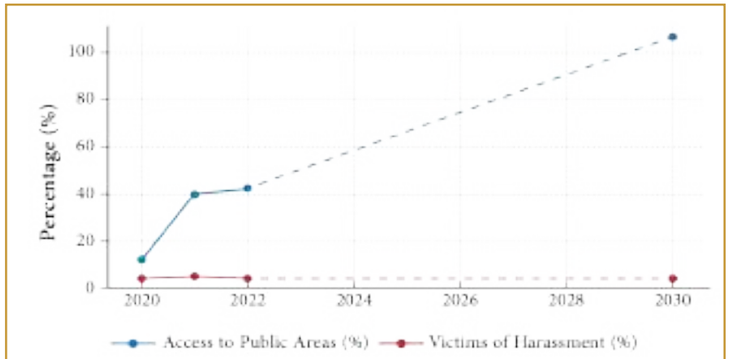
341- See more at: https://ourcityplans.org/planning-experiences/future-saudi-cities-programme

342- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

343- See more at: https://www.rcrc.gov.sa/en/projects/green-riyadh-project

Al Qassim has been focusing on integrating public areas into urban planning, recognizing their value in improving residents' quality of life. Many cities within Al Qassim have a rich history of developing green areas and parks[344]. **Buraidah** reports on moderate access to public spaces in 2022 (only around 40 per cent), but longitudinal data show excellent improvement, suggesting that if the city is able to maintain momentum and keep implementing related policies, it is "On track" for 2030 (Figure 97). It is important to stress the low numbers of victims of physical and sexual harassment in Buraidah, indicating the potential of public spaces for social cohesion and cultural activities.

Figure 97. Public areas access and victims of harassment in Buraidah (2020 – 2030 projection)



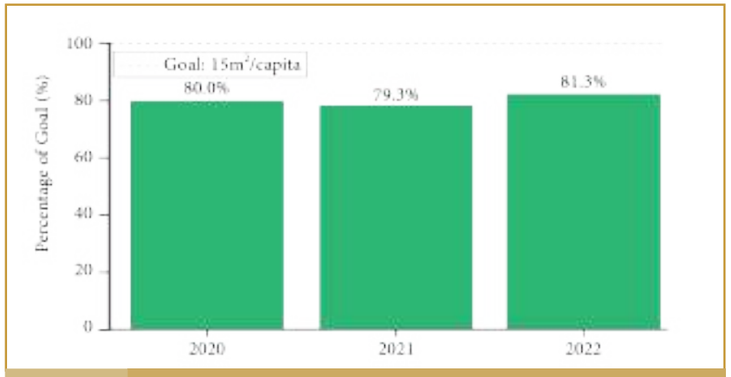
SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

Concerning access to green areas, when constructing this indicator for a city with the characteristics of Buraidah, it is essential to consider the unique environmental and climatic challenges. Buraidah has arid conditions and limited water resources, making establishing and maintaining green areas more challenging than temperate regions. That being said, the city reports reasonable rates of access to green areas (12,2 m2/ capita), about the thresholds proposed by the City Prosperity Initiative[345] (figure 98).

344- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim.

345- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2016). *City Prosperity Initiative: Methodology and Metadata*. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat.

Figure 98. Green area per capita in Buraidah (2020 – 2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

Public and green spaces are essential components of Buraidah's urban fabric, serving as areas for recreation and social interaction and as crucial elements for environmental sustainability. The city's progress in expanding access to public spaces and maintaining low levels of harassment indicates a strong potential for enhancing social cohesion and community well-being. Despite the challenges posed by its arid climate and limited water resources, Buraidah's efforts in increasing green areas per capita show a commitment to a more inclusive and environmentally resilient urban environment.

7.3.6. Financial Autonomy

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
73	Financial autonomy (proportion of local revenue/central revenue)		↑	50%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
4%	11.5%	12.6%	15.4%	28.8%	-

2022 COMPLETION: 58%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

In the UMF Domain 5 (Governance and Implementation), **indicator 73 (financial autonomy)** is depicted as central for resilient cities. This indicator is important because, in decentralized governance structures, cities must generate their source of revenue. While a balanced approach to revenue collection is essential, over-reliance on government transfers can lead to financial dependency and limit a city's fiscal autonomy[346]. In line with the New Urban Agenda, financial autonomy is further supported by implementing transparent and accountable financial management practices, ensuring that local investments are effectively managed and minimizes corruption[347].

346- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2022). *Global Urban Monitoring Framework: A guide for urban monitoring of SDGs and NUA and other urban-related thematic or local, national, and global frameworks.* UN-Habitat.

347- United Nations. (2017). *New Urban Agenda.* United Nations. https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/

At the global level, financial autonomy at the city level are major challenges. Urban areas, especially in developing regions, often face constraints in generating their own revenue, leading to heavy reliance on intergovernmental transfers[348]. This dependency limits cities' ability to finance essential services and infrastructure development.

In the Arab region, financial autonomy remains a critical challenge, as many cities rely heavily on centralized funding and government transfers. This dependence limits the ability of local governments to finance and execute development projects independently, ultimately hindering progress towards sustainable urban growth[349]. To address this, there is a pressing need to strengthen decentralization efforts, enabling cities to generate their own revenue and exercise greater control over their development agendas.

Saudi Arabia's Voluntary National Review highlights efforts to increase domestic tax revenue, signalling a move towards greater fiscal self-reliance[350]. Vision 2030 outlines a strategic framework that emphasizes decentralization, financial autonomy, and boosting own revenue collection at both national and local levels. This shift includes improving the efficiency of local revenue collection and reducing dependence on central government transfers[351].

Al Qassim[352] cities demonstrate an overreliance national budget revenues. Additional patterns in the cities' budget allocation, particularly the portion dedicated to capital expenditure – investments in infrastructure and development projects – may indicate different degrees of investments in long-term growth and sustainable development (Figure 99).

Moreover, high levels of dependency on central revenues may indicate challenges for local policymaking. In Al Qassim, most cities have little sources of local revenue and poor revenue collection efficiency (Figure 100).

348- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2023). SDG 11 Synthesis Report: Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat

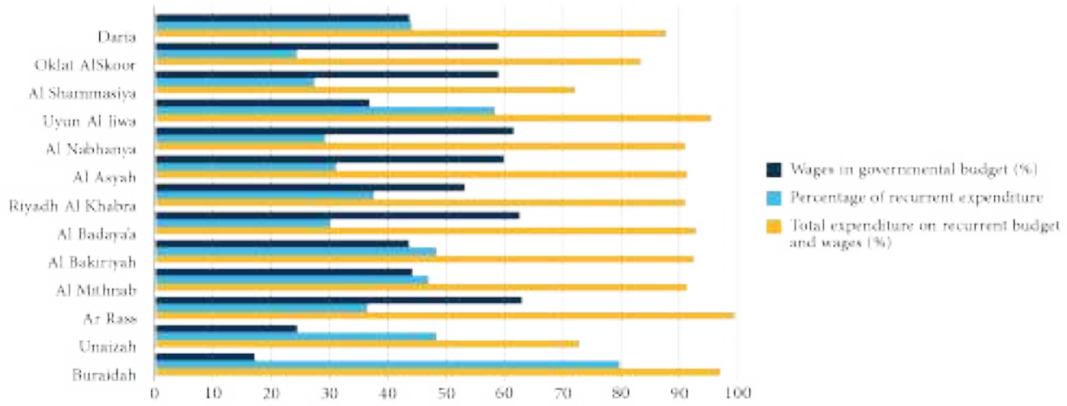
349- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

350- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023.* High-Level Political Forum.

351- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030.* Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

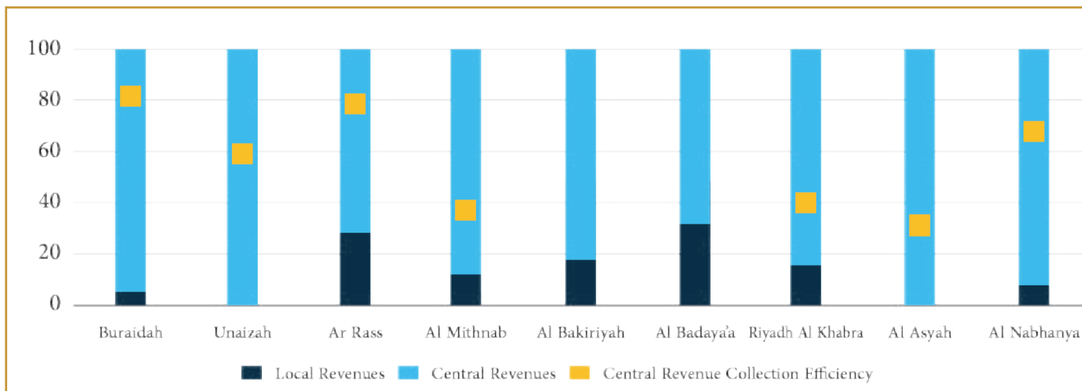
352- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim.

Figure 99. Expenditure on wages and recurrent expenditure in Al Qassim (2019)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim

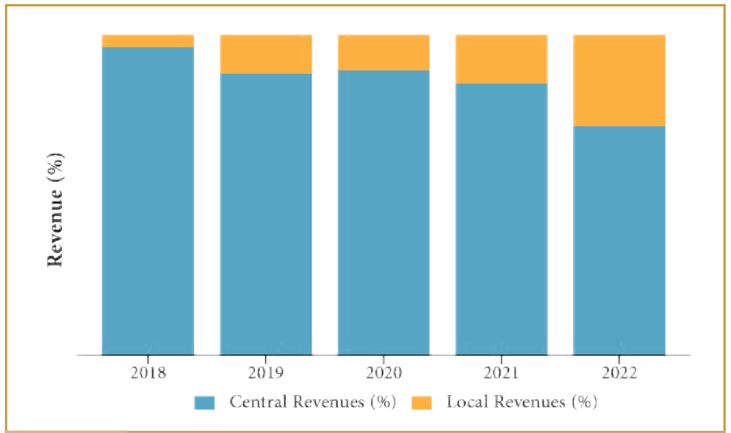
Figure 100. Source of revenue and revenue collection efficiency in Al Qassim's cities (2018)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim

In recent years, **Buraidah's** numbers related to financial autonomy have shown improvements, with the share of local revenue gaining space year after year (Figure 101). If on the one hand the current scores suggest that "Major challenges remain", on the other hand, the improvement rate indicates that Buraidah is "On track" to reach a more balanced relation between its local and central revenues.

Figure 101. Proportion of central and local revenue in Buraidah (2018 – 2022)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

A more balanced approach to revenue collection is crucial for Buraidah's long-term sustainability and resilience. As financial autonomy increases, the city will be better positioned to fund essential services and infrastructure without over-reliance on central transfers, allowing for more responsive and independent policymaking. This shift will enhance fiscal stability and promote greater local accountability and innovation in urban development.

8

SDG 17 CHAPTER

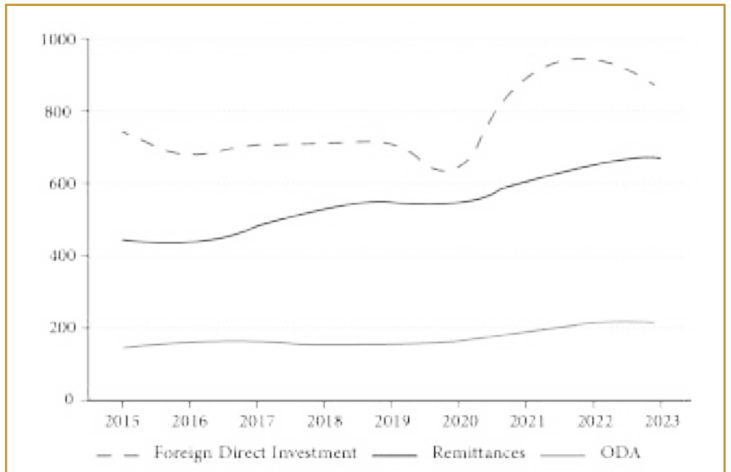
8.1. INTRODUCTION

SDG 17 is essential for driving progress across all other SDGs, as it emphasizes the need for global partnerships, financial cooperation, capacity-building, and technology sharing. Its targets are critical because they foster collaboration between countries, organizations and sectors, ensuring that efforts towards sustainable development are coordinated and amplified. By tracking indicators related to finance, technology, capacity-building, trade, and systemic issues, SDG 17 measures how well countries are cooperating to achieve the SDGs and identify gaps that require further action.[353]

353- See more at: https://SDGs.un.org/goals/goal17

Globally, progress on SDG 17 shows unequal development in different regions. While some advancements have been made in fostering partnerships and building capacity, the financing gap remains significant, especially for low-income countries. Strengthening multilateralism and ensuring that countries adhere to their commitments, particularly in terms of ODA, is crucial to accelerate global SDG 17 efforts.[354]

Figure 102. Global remittances, foreign direct investment and ODA flows to developing countries (2015–2023)



SOURCE United Nations (2024)

In the Arab region, progress towards SDG 17 has seen a mix of advancements and challenges, particularly concerning partnerships for sustainable development. Several countries have made strides in fostering regional and international collaborations, particularly through trade and investment agreements. However, significant gaps still need to be addressed, especially in mobilizing financial resources and building capacity in lower-income countries. Additionally, the region faces challenges related to data availability related to SDG. As a result, efforts to strengthen partnerships and ensure more inclusive and effective global engagement are crucial for the Arab region's sustainable development.[355]

354- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

355- SDSN (2024). The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards 2023/2024: Towards Just Transitions in the Arab States.

Figure 103. Arab region SDG 17 status and trends dashboard

Partnerships for the Goals		
Country	Rating	Trend
Algeria	●	↗
Bahrain	●	→
Comoros	●	→
Djibouti	●	→
Egypt	●	↓
Iraq	●	→
Jordan	●	→
Kuwait	●	↑
Lebanon	●	↗
Libya	●	↓
Mauritania	●	→
Morocco	●	↗
Oman	●	↑
Palestine	●	↑
Qatar	●	↗
Saudi Arabia	●	↑
Somalia	●	↗
Sudan	●	→
Syrian	●	↗
Tunisia	●	↗
UAE	●	↑
Yemen	●	↓

● SDG achievement
↑ On track

● Challenges remain
↗ Moderately Increasing

● Significant challenges remain
→ Stagnating

● Major challenges remain
↓ Decreasing

● Data not available

SOURCE Adapted from The Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2023-2024

At the national level, **Saudi Arabia** demonstrates significant progress towards achieving SDG 17, with partnerships and international cooperation playing a central role in the Kingdom's sustainable development agenda. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030[356] has integrated SDG 17 into its broader national strategies, emphasizing collaboration across sectors and borders. The country has established a robust institutional framework, including the Sustainable Development Steering Committee (SDSC),[357] which coordinates efforts across government agencies and international partners. Saudi Arabia's active participation in global platforms, such as the Group of 20 (G20); the Saudi Green Initiative;[358] and partnerships with multilateral organizations highlight its commitment to fostering international cooperation and supporting sustainable development both domestically and globally.[359]

356- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

357- See more at: https://www.spa.gov.sa/2326490

358- See more at: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/explore/projects/saudi-green-initiative

359- Al Madinah Region Development Authority. (2023). Al Madinah City Voluntary Local Review: Localising the Sustainable Development Goals.

For cities, SDG 17 is particularly relevant, as urban areas are hubs for innovation, economic growth, and social change. Cities play a pivotal role in driving partnerships between local governments, businesses, civil society, and international organizations. As more cities engage in VLRs, they contribute to the localisation of the SDGs, allowing the monitoring and tracking of their progress, the sharing of lessons learned, and the fostering of collaboration across borders. Localising SDG 17 involves tailoring its targets to the specific context of a city. This can include establishing city-level partnerships with universities, private sectors, and international entities, as well as building capacity within municipal governments to monitor and report on progress. By embedding the principles of SDG 17 into local governance structures, cities can ensure that their efforts align with global goals while addressing their unique challenges.

This chapter explores the main topics on which Buraidah has either quantitative data or plays an important role in advancing the SDG 17-related targets at the national level. The subsequent sections will start by exploring quantitative indicators (for which Buraidah has local-level data) and then be followed by sections that, although not covering specific indicators, explore crucial discussions for Buraidah in advancing SDG 17.

8.2. BURAIDAH'S PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN SDG 17 INDICATORS

8.2.1. Access to The Internet

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
17.6.1	Fixed Internet broadband subscriptions (per 100 inhabitants)	●	–	67.53

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	-	-	30.7	-	-

2021 COMPLETION: 45.46%

		Rating	Trend	Achievement Goal
17.8.1	Proportion of individuals using the Internet	●	↑	100%

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
-	88.0%	90.0%	96.8%	98.5%	97.8%

2023 COMPLETION: 97.8%

SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

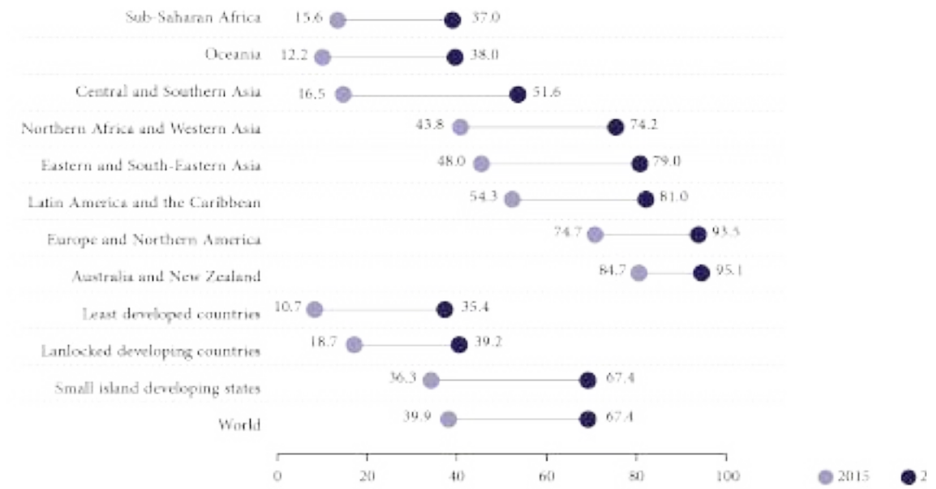
SDG indicator 17.6.1 focuses on enhancing infrastructure by tracking fixed broadband subscriptions, laying the groundwork for increased digital connectivity. Meanwhile, **SDG indicator 17.8.1** measures the proportion of individuals actively using the Internet, reflecting the tangible outcome of expanded access. Both indicators are interconnected; one quantifies the technological foundation, while the other captures the societal engagement with that infrastructure.

Significant progress in Internet access is observable **globally**, with 5.4 billion people (two-thirds of the world's population) now connected to the Internet.[360] Despite these gains, disparities persist, especially between high-income and low- to middle-income countries (Figure 104). Access in rural areas remains a challenge, and vulnerable populations, particularly in LDCs, face significant

360- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. United Nations.

barriers. Moreover, while mobile broadband continues to grow, fixed broadband infrastructure is crucial for fostering equitable, high-speed Internet access.

Figure 104. Proportion of individuals using the Internet, by regions of the world (2015 and 2023)



SOURCE United Nations (2024)

In **Saudi Arabia**, Internet access has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years, significantly aligning with the country's broader digital transformation goals under Vision 2030.[361] Saudi Arabia's VNR outlines a robust expansion of broadband infrastructure, contributing to high Internet penetration rates (Figure 105). As of 2023, over 98 per cent of the population had access to the Internet, with efforts focused on increasing rural connectivity and enhancing digital literacy across all sectors.[362]

Figure 105. Fixed Internet broadband subscriptions (left) and the proportion of people using the Internet (right), Saudi Arabia (2020)

SOURCE General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT) (2020)

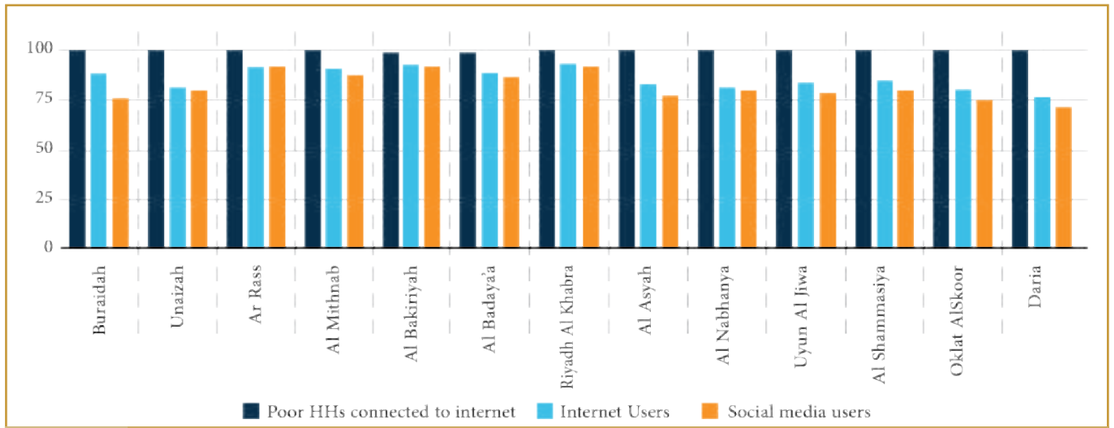
361- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/

362- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

These advancements are supported by government initiatives aimed at diversifying the economy and integrating digital technologies into various aspects of public life. The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT)[363] continues to play a pivotal role in expanding 5G networks and fostering digital inclusion, with a strong emphasis on reaching underserved communities.[364]

Al Qassim's urban centres are highly connected through a robust infrastructure of both physical and virtual networks. As highlighted in the Qassim Urban Observatory's data (Figure 106), Internet connectivity is pervasive. The integration of ICT infrastructure has opened new economic opportunities, linking local populations to global markets and enabling more efficient governmentservices.[365]

Figure 106. Internet connectivity and usage in Al Qassim's cities (2019)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2020)

Buraidah reports on only 30 out of every 100 people having access to fixed Internet broadband subscriptions in 2021[366]. This suggest that "major challenges remain" for SDG indicator 17.6.1. Additionally, with the latest data from 2021, data collection in Buraidah must cover this topic more thoroughly in the short term, tracking progress and identifying opportunities for targeted local policies. On the other hand, broadband speed in Buraidah has shown essential improvements since 2021 (Figure 107).

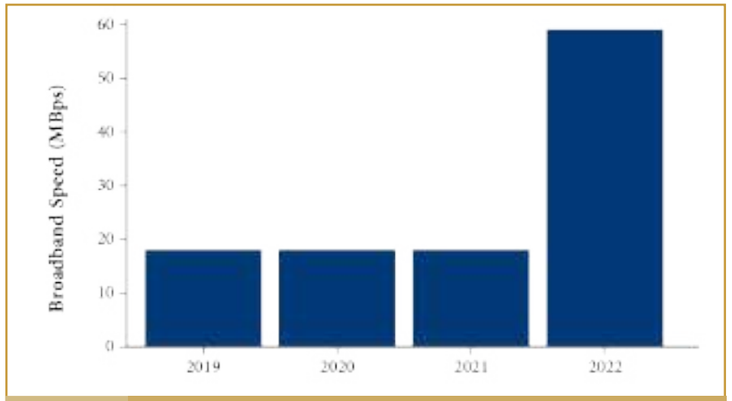
363- See more at: https://saudipedia.com/en/article/258/government-and-politics/ministries/ministry-of-communications-and-information-technology#:~:text=The%20Ministry%20of%20Communications%20and,the%20Kingdom%20of%20Saudi%20Arabia.

364- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.

365- Qassim Urban Observatory. (2020). State of Urban Development in Al Qassim.

366- Qassim Urban Observatory (2024). The SDGs in QUO. May 2024 Update.

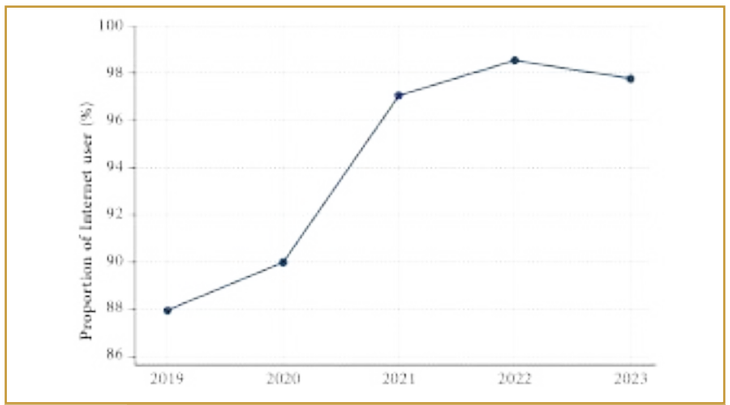
Figure 107. Broadband speed in Buraidah, in Megabits per second (MBps) (2019–2020)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

In relation to SDG indicator 17.8.1 on the proportion of Internet users, Buraidah showcases excellent numbers, with a mostly achieved score. It is possible to observe strong improvement rates since 2019, stabilizing in 2022 (Figure 108).

Figure 108. Proportion of Internet users in Buraidah (2019–2023)



SOURCE Qassim Urban Observatory (2024), adapted by author

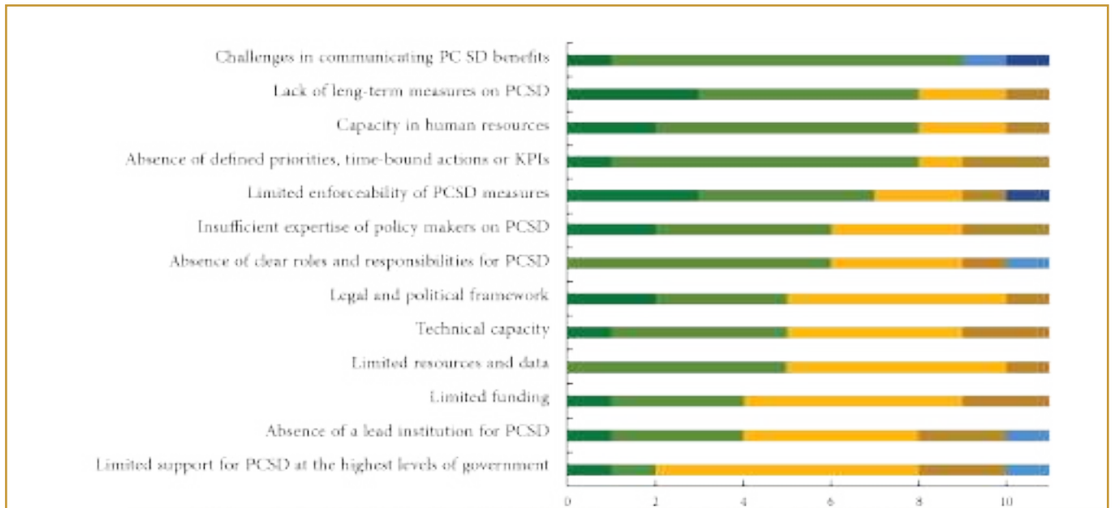
As Internet usage continues to rise in Buraidah, it plays a pivotal role in unlocking opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship, empowering residents to engage more actively in socioeconomic activities. This connectivity also positions Buraidah as a competitive, forward-looking city that can attract investments, enhance service delivery, and ultimately contribute to achieving other SDGs across multiple sectors.

8.2.2. Policy coherence for the SDGs

Policy coherence, monitoring of the SDGs, and international cooperation are fundamental pillars for **achieving SDG 17**, which focuses on strengthening global partnerships for sustainable development. Policy coherence ensures that local, national and international policies are aligned, minimizing conflicts and maximizing synergies in achieving the 2030 Agenda.[367] Monitoring the SDGs provides the necessary data to track progress, adjust strategies, and ensure accountability. International cooperation allows cities and countries to exchange best practices, share knowledge, and pool resources, driving collective progress towards the achievement of the SDGs globally.

Increasing emphasis on integrating policies across multiple levels of governance is crucial to localise the SDGs effectively. Countries worldwide are adopting structured mechanisms for vertical and horizontal integration, aiming to break down policy silos and foster cross-sectoral cooperation. However, **challenges remain** around the world (Figure 109), particularly in ensuring that local governments have the necessary resources, capacities and mandates to fully mainstream policy coherence.[368]

Figure 109. Global obstacles to implementing policy coherence for sustainable development (2022)



SOURCE The 2022 Survey on Institutional Capacities and Tools to Enhance Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) is an unpublished internal document, in OECD (2023), Driving Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development: Accelerating Progress on the SDGs, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/a6cb4aa1-en

367- UN-Habitat. (2022). *Multilevel governance for SDG localisation*. United Nations.

368- OECD (2023), Driving Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development: Accelerating Progress on the SDGs, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/a6cb4aa1-en.

Policy coherence is crucial for sustainable development in the **Arab region** due to the complex interplay of social, economic and environmental factors across various governance levels. Policy coherence ensures that national, subnational and local strategies are integrated and mutually reinforcing in a region marked by acute inequalities, fragile governance, and the enduring impacts of conflict. By aligning actions with the 2030 Agenda, Arab countries can foster more resilient communities capable of addressing the unique challenges facing the region.[369]

VNRs are pivotal in promoting policy coherence, by providing a structured framework for countries to assess and report on their progress towards achieving the SDGs. In the Arab region, VNRs facilitate the integration of national priorities with global commitments, ensuring that national development plans align with the SDGs.

VLRs are emerging as powerful tools for enhancing policy coherence at the local level. VLRs allow cities and municipalities to align their local strategies with national and global SDG frameworks, ensuring local actions are consistent with broader development goals. By fostering multilevel governance and encouraging the participation of local stakeholders, VLRs create opportunities for more inclusive and context-specific policymaking.[370]

Aligning VNRs and VLRs is essential for achieving policy coherence across governance levels. This alignment ensures that local actions, documented through VLRs, are integrated into national strategies, as reflected in VNRs, allowing for a more coordinated approach to SDG implementation. This alignment also enhances the flow of data and knowledge between governance levels, ensuring that local initiatives contribute meaningfully to national and global SDG targets.[371]

Saudi Arabia actively fosters policy coherence by embedding sustainability into its national policy framework through Vision 2030.[372] The establishment of the SDSC, which brings together 20 key government entities, has been central to this effort, ensuring that policies across sectors are aligned with the SDGs. This coordination mechanism enables the government to streamline efforts, minimize policy conflicts, and integrate sustainability into its decision-making processes. By promoting a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, Saudi Arabia is enhancing collaboration across various sectors, ensuring that economic, social and environmental dimensions are integrated into all facets of policy planning and execution.[373]

Saudi Arabia has demonstrated a strong commitment to **aligning its VNRs with VLRs**, recognizing the critical role that local actions play in achieving national and global sustainable development targets. The government's support for local initiatives, such as the VLR conducted in Al Madinah[374] and this VLR in Buraidah, reflects its intention to bridge the gap between national strategies and local realities. This alignment ensures that local data and insights feed into national reporting mechanisms, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of SDG implementation across all levels.

369- ESCWA, UN-Habitat, UCLG-MEWA. (2023). *Practical guidelines for voluntary local reviews in the Arab region*. United Nations.
370- ESCWA, UN-Habitat, UCLG-MEWA. (2023). *Practical guidelines for voluntary local reviews in the Arab region*. United Nations.
371- ESCWA (2024). *SDG localisation in the Arab region: VLRs and policy coherence* (Policy brief 12). In UNDESA. (2024). *Inter-agency policy briefs on accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda from local to global levels*. United Nations.
372- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2016). *Vision 2030*. Retrieved from https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/
373- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.
374- See more at: https://SDGlocalaction.org/voluntary-local-review-al-madinah-saudi-arabia/

The collaborative nature of VLR processes enables local governments and stakeholders to directly contribute to Saudi Arabia's broader development agenda, reinforcing the country's focus on policycoherence.[375]

Buraidah plays a vital role in promoting policy coherence through its alignment with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. Buraidah's development of the 2024 VLR highlights its dedication to data-driven approaches, aligning local and national policies, and contributing to the broader development agenda of Saudi Arabia.

Buraidah's participation in **international collaborations** and adherence to global standards, such as those promoted by UN-Habitat and the OECD, further reinforce policy coherence by incorporating international best practices into local planning. As a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network,[376] recognized for its contributions to gastronomy, Buraidah leverages its rich cultural heritage to drive economic development, integrating global creative standards into its local economic and social policies. Also, Buraidah is actively involved in the Future Saudi Cities Programme,[377] a collaboration between the Saudi Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (MoMRA) and UN-Habitat. This programme provides a critical platform for Buraidah to implement international urban development principles at the local level, focusing on sustainable growth, liveability, and resilient infrastructure.

On a regional level, Buraidah's cooperation with Al Qassim on transport infrastructure improvements and public services enhancements fosters regional cohesion and strengthens shared growth strategies. These regional collaborations improve connectivity and services and create a unified approach to sustainable development, reinforcing policy coherence from the local to the national level.

By **aligning local data collection and analysis with national priorities**, Buraidah ensures that its sustainable development strategies are contextually relevant and contribute to broader national goals. This alignment fosters multilevel governance, streamlining decision-making processes, and improving the city's ability to address local and national challenges.

By integrating high-quality urban data to **monitor the SDGs** and following evidence-based practices, Buraidah strengthens its capacity for informed decision-making, enhancing the city's overall development impact while contributing to Saudi Arabia's long-term Vision 2030 framework.

375- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2023). *Voluntary National Review 2023*. High-Level Political Forum.
376- See more at: https://www.unesco.org/en/creative-cities/buraidah
377- See more at: https://ourcityplans.org/planning-experiences/future-saudi-cities-programme

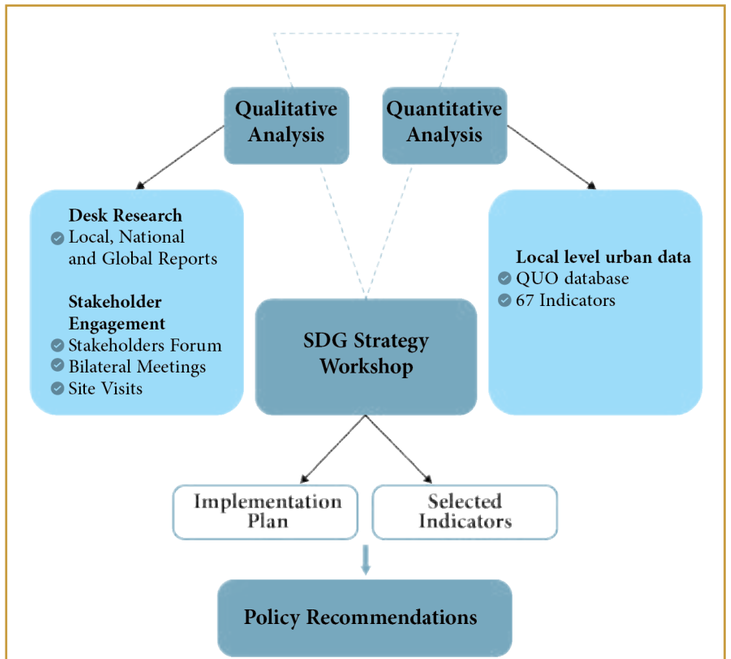
9

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

POLICY RECOMMEN-DATIONS

The following policy recommendations result from the **triangulation** of quantitative and qualitative data, analysed as part of this VLR (Figure 110). Each recommendation, designed with stakeholder involvement at its core, adheres to the principles of relevance, knowledge, specificity, feasibility, stakeholder involvement, measurability, and flexibility, as outlined in the methodological guidelines document used to produce this VLR[378].

Figure 110. Triangulation approach to select and develop policy recommendations



SOURCE Elaborated by author

The **quantitative analysis** of Buraidah 2024 VLR is based on reviewing localised urban data and constructing SDG and UMF local indicators. By leveraging quantitative insights, this VLR is able to identify Buraidah's pressing issues. The **qualitative approach** of this VLR has promoted desk research – reviewing relevant local, national, and global reports – and an ongoing engagement with diverse stakeholders, facilitated through the Stakeholder Forum, bilateral meetings, site visits and workshops. This participatory process has ensured that the data collected is reflective of local needs and priorities, allowing for more grounded and actionable recommendations.

378- UN-Habitat & UCLG. (2024). Action-oriented Voluntary Local Reviews: A Methodology for the Partners of UN-Habitat. UN-Habitat.

The **SDG Strategy Workshop**, which brought together local leaders and technical experts to validate the findings from prior stakeholder engagement stages (i.e., Stakeholder Forum, bilateral meetings, and woorkshops), was a key element in shaping the policy recommendations (for more details about these activites, see the "Introduction" chapter). The process included prioritisation and implementation activities to ensure that the recommendations are feasible, actionable, and aligned with Buraidah's needs. The following are policy recommendations for selected indicators identified (through quantitative and qualitative analysis and prioritisation activities) as central drivers of change in Buraidah.

9.1. SDG 1

Policy recommendation 1: Conducting ongoing monitoring and assessment of poverty in all its dimensions

In Buraidah, efforts should be undertaken to promote collaboration between local government agencies and NGOs to create a centralized database identifying areas and households at risk of poverty, regularly updated using national systems and local surveys for accuracy, ensuring support programmes reach those most in need. Progress can be tracked by measuring the number of households identified and supported, with periodic reviews to adjust strategies as needed. Stakeholders, including community groups, NGOs, and local agencies, should be actively involved in developing and coordinating these efforts.

Policy recommendation 2: Enhancing social protection systems

In Buraidah, more efforts should be undertaken to strengthen its social protection systems by developing community outreach programmes to ensure vulnerable populations are aware of and can access available resources. This can be achieved by engaging local leaders to disseminate information directly to those in need, while leveraging social media and targeted digital campaigns to reach broader audiences. Mobile outreach units or in-person sessions at community hubs can provide information and assistance for areas with limited Internet access. In addition, increasing the municipal budget for existing social protection programmes is central to expand coverage to more beneficiaries and simplify the application process by introducing digital platforms and reducing bureaucratic hurdles, making it easier for eligible individuals to apply and receive assistance promptly. The progress of such programmes can be measured by tracking the number of vulnerable households accessing services and by monitoring the reach of social media campaigns.

Policy recommendation 3: Promoting higher wages through job creation

In Buraidah, it is central to promote the attraction of high-wage industries such as technology, finance, and renewable energy by offering tax breaks, subsidies, and streamlined regulatory processes to encourage investment. To further enhance its appeal, the city can develop dedicated business zones with improved infrastructure, including transportation, utilities, and communication systems, making it an attractive hub for long-term investment. Local government agencies should lead these efforts in collaboration with national economic bodies and international investors. Progress can be measured by tracking the number of high-wage businesses entering the city, job creation, and changes in mean household income. Involving local businesses and industry experts will ensure the right incentives are developed. Flexibility in adjusting higher wages promotion initiatives should be based on business feedback to ensure they remain competitive.

9.2. SDG 3

Policy recommendation 4: Reducing child mortality

Buraidah can enhance neonatal and child health outcomes by expanding access to quality prenatal and postnatal care services, particularly in regions with higher under-5 and neonatal mortality rates. This can be achieved by establishing more health clinics in underserved areas and deploying mobile health units in remote regions to ensure comprehensive coverage. Targeted outreach programmes should be launched to educate vulnerable populations on the importance of early childhood care and encourage using these services. In collaboration with NGOs, community leaders, and the private sector, local health authorities should oversee the expansion and manage outreach efforts, ensuring proper supervision and quality control of health services, with emergency plans ready for activation. Progress can be measured by tracking reductions in mortality rates and regularly reviewing the quality of care provided. Additionally, engaging private sector partners and addressing resistance from health-care providers to system changes will be crucial, as will adapting strategies based on community feedback and health-care trends.

Policy recommendation 5: Reducing death rate due to road traffic injuries

Buraidah's authorities should pursue funding increase opportunities for road safety initiatives to reduce traffic fatalities by investing in safer infrastructure, such as improved lighting, pedestrian crossings, and well-maintained roads while launching public education campaigns to raise awareness of traffic laws and safe driving practices for drivers and pedestrians. Investing in emergency health services is also crucial to ensure timely care for accident victims, and promoting volunteer programmes for emergency aid can support this effort. Local authorities should lead infrastructure improvements, while health authorities should manage emergency services. Progress can be measured by tracking reductions in traffic fatalities and injuries.

Policy recommendation 6: Increasing children vaccination rates

In Buraidah, it is central to expand overall vaccination outreach programmes to address stagnation in immunization coverage by leveraging local health-care centres and schools to organize community-based vaccination initiatives, ensuring vaccines are accessible, particularly in underserved areas. Targeted awareness campaigns should support these efforts focused on educating parents and caregivers about the importance of immunization, especially in communities with lower vaccination rates. Additionally, logistical challenges should be addressed by ensuring health-care centres are well-supplied and staff are trained to administer vaccines effectively. Health and local government authorities should lead these efforts, collaborating with schools, health-care centres, and community leaders. Progress can be measured by tracking increases in vaccination rates and the effectiveness of outreach campaigns.

9.3. SDG 4

Policy recommendation 7: Improving proficiency in reading and mathematics

In Buraidah, efforts should be put forward to implement regular localised assessments based on the PISA exams and align them with the national curriculum to monitor students' proficiency in reading and mathematics by partnering with local schools and educational institutions. These assessments will provide actionable data for improving student performance, and teachers should be trained to use this information to identify learning gaps and implement targeted interventions. To support this, the city should invest in educational infrastructure, exploring if the alleviation of overcrowded schools can positively impact performance. Local education authorities should oversee the development of assessments and teacher training, with support from local government and businesses, to fund these initiatives. Progress can be measured by tracking improvements in student proficiency over time.

Policy recommendation 8: Increasing higher education completion rates

Buraidah's authorities should seek opportunities to increase education completion rates by offering scholarships, grants, and financial aid to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, thus removing or reducing financial barriers to higher education. Additionally, the city can collaborate with local businesses and industries to create internships and apprenticeship programmes that provide practical experience, aligning students' skills with labour market demands. Building on the success of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, Buraidah should expand its digital learning infrastructure by improving Internet connectivity and providing digital devices to students and teachers, ensuring widespread access to online education platforms. These efforts will build a resilient education system capable of withstanding potential future disruptions. Local government and educational authorities should lead these initiatives, with support from businesses and regional authorities, aiming to implement financial aid programmes and industry partnerships. Progress can be measured by tracking education completion rates, particularly for disadvantaged students, and monitoring the effectiveness of digital learning and industry partnerships.

Policy recommendation 9: Increasing adult tertiary education qualifications

Buraidah's municipality should develop adult education and lifelong learning programmes to target individuals who still need to complete formal education or need reskilling due to changing job market demands. This can be achieved through partnerships with vocational training centres and local businesses to create tailored re-skilling programmes while expanding existing programmes to offer more flexible learning options, such as evening and online courses, ensuring access for adults who want to balance work and personal commitments. Local government and educational authorities should lead these efforts, collaborating with vocational centres, businesses, and academic institutions to implement the programmes. Progress can be measured by tracking the number of adults enrolling in and completing education programmes and improvements in employment rates and workforce readiness. Stakeholder engagement, including input from local businesses and adult learners, will be key to developing practical and relevant programmes, with the flexibility to adapt based on job market trends and participant feedback.

9.4. SDG 5

Policy recommendation 10: Addressing gender-related data gaps and enhancing policymaking

In Buraidah, it is crucial for local authorities to strengthen gender data collection by expanding the role of the QUO to regularly gather and analyse key relevant indicators, such as workforce participation, unpaid domestic work, and violence against women. This data will help refine policies and track progress on gender equality initiatives over time. Additionally, gender analysis should be integrated into the municipal budgeting process to ensure that public funds are allocated to address education, health, and employment disparities. Transparency should be promoted through the publication of detailed reports on how these funds are used, fostering accountability and allowing the public to monitor the impact of gender-focused initiatives. The QUO should lead data collection, with the local government authorities ensuring the inclusion of gender analysis in the municipal budgeting process. Measurable progress can be tracked through improvements in gender-related indicators. Collaboration with local NGOs, community organizations, and gender experts will be critical, and flexibility in data collection and analysis will ensure that strategies can evolve to address emerging challenges.

Policy recommendation 11: Tackling all forms of violence against women

Buraidah's municipality should enhance local reporting mechanisms for domestic and sexual violence by establishing confidential hotlines and community outreach programmes to make it easier for victims to seek help. The city should also increase access to shelters and legal support services by partnering with health-care providers, schools, and civil society organizations, creating a comprehensive support network for survivors. More specifically, legal support services offering free consultations and representation should be strengthened, particularly for cases involving violence, discrimination, and family law, with partnerships formed with national legal entities to raise awareness about and taking action on women's rights. These efforts should begin with establishing reporting mechanisms and shelters, followed by legal support services and public awareness campaigns. Progress can be measured by tracking reported cases, shelter access, legal aid usage, and public awareness, with the flexibility to adjust based on survivor feedback and evolving needs.

Policy recommendation 12: Reducing time spent by women on unpaid domestic and care work

Buraidah's municipality should launch public education campaigns aimed at challenging traditional gender roles and promoting shared domestic responsibilities to reduce the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and care work on women. These campaigns can utilize local media, social platforms, and community events to raise awareness about the importance of equitable household task sharing and care work while also reducing stigma around gender roles. Featuring stories of successful women role models from Buraidah and the broader region can further inspire change and demonstrate the benefits of breaking gender norms. Local government authorities and media outlets should collaborate to design and implement these campaigns, engaging community leaders and role models to ensure the message resonates with a diverse audience. Progress can be measured by tracking public attitudes toward gender roles through surveys and monitoring changes in household task-sharing.

Policy recommendation 13: Enhancing women's leadership opportunities in political, economic and public life

Buraidah's local authorities should strengthen programmes that encourage girls to pursue education in STEM by providing scholarships and mentorship programmes, as well as by showcasing successful female role models, aligning with the gender equality targets of SDG 4 and Saudi Arabia Vision 2030. City authorities should also implement gender quotas in local government and leadership positions to ensure better representation of women in decision-making roles. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives should be developed to provide women with leadership skills, political engagement training, and mentorship opportunities, particularly in male-dominated sectors like business and governance. Expanding funding and training programmes for female entrepreneurs and partnerships with local banks to offer microfinance and low-interest loans will further empower women financially. Digital literacy programmes and access to affordable technology should also be provided to enable women to work remotely or engage in e-commerce, balancing their economic participation with domestic responsibilities. Progress can be tracked through increased women's representation in leadership roles, STEM participation, and female entrepreneurship.

9.5. SDG 6

Policy recommendation 14: Improving the safe treatment of domestic and industrial wastewater

Buraidah's local authorities should allocate resources to expand sewage networks in urban and rural areas, prioritizing underserved regions that lack adequate infrastructure to ensure wastewater is collected and treated safely. The city can collaborate with local contractors and engineers to complete these projects promptly while adhering to environmental and safety standards. Additionally, Buraidah should invest in upgrading existing wastewater treatment plants and constructing new facilities where needed, ensuring that both domestic and industrial wastewater are treated according to modern environmental safety standards before discharge. By working closely with industrial sectors and investing in advanced technologies, the city can enhance the efficiency of wastewater treatment and reduce environmental harm. The local government should lead these efforts, collaborating with contractors, engineers, and industrial stakeholders, and environmental authorities should ensure compliance with safety regulations. Progress can be tracked through the proportion of wastewater treated to safe standards and the completion of sewage network expansions.

Policy recommendation 15: Enhancing IWRM

Buraidah's municipality should encourage PPPs to fund and manage water supply projects, leveraging the expertise and resources of private entities to accelerate infrastructure development and ensure high service standards. The city should establish clear guidelines to maintain quality while delivering reliable water services efficiently. Additionally, Buraidah should form a multi-stakeholder committee composed of representatives from the local government, the private sector, and civil society to oversee the development and implementation of an IWRM framework, ensuring sustainable water management strategies across all industries. Local communities should also be actively involved in the planning and implementing water and sanitation projects through consultations and forums, ensuring that their inputs are reflected in project designs to foster ownership and long-term sustainability. The local government should lead the formation of partnerships and the multi-stakeholder committee, with community engagement incorporated early in project planning. Progress can be measured by tracking service quality, IWRM implementation, and community participation.

Policy recommendation 16: Improving water efficiency and reducing water stress

Buraidah's municipality should promote the adoption of water-efficient technologies in households, industries, and agriculture by offering financial incentives such as subsidies or tax breaks for technologies like drip irrigation systems, water-saving appliances, and greywater recycling systems. Public education campaigns should raise awareness about the benefits of water conservation technologies to encourage widespread adoption. Additionally, the city should establish regulations that set clear water use efficiency standards across sectors, including agriculture, industry and households, and implement a monitoring system to track water usage, conduct periodic inspections, and enforce penalties for non-compliance. The local government should lead the development of these financial incentive programmes, regulatory frameworks, and monitoring systems in collaboration with relevant sector actors. Progress can be measured by tracking the uptake of water-efficient technologies and reductions in water usage.

9.6. SDG 11

Policy recommendation 17: Expanding access to public transport

Buraidah's municipality should develop and expand an integrated public transportation system, including bus and tram lines, to reduce reliance on private cars and decrease accident rates. The city should explore various funding options, such as government grants, PPPs, and investments from local businesses, while launching awareness campaigns to inform residents about the benefits of public transport, including its convenience, eco-friendliness, and cost-effectiveness. Key routes and stations should be prioritised in densely populated areas, and efforts should be made to adopt affordable ticket prices, increase the number of stations and bus lines, and provide reliable service with clearly communicated schedules available via a mobile app. The system should integrate smart technologies and sustainable transport solutions, encouraging the use of green technologies. The local government should lead these initiatives, coordinating with the private sector for funding and service management. Progress should be tracked by monitoring public transport usage, reductions in private car dependency, and accident rates, with the flexibility to adjust routes, pricing, and services based on feedback and funding opportunities.

Policy recommendation 18: Improving air quality

Buraidah's municipality should implement stricter industrial and vehicle emissions regulations while promoting cleaner energy solutions to address declining air quality, focusing on monitoring and reducing PM levels. This can be achieved by enforcing stricter emission limits on industries and vehicles, activating periodic inspection stations during vehicle license renewals, and tightening regulations on industrial emissions. The city should also invest in renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power and encourage using clean energy for domestic purposes. Additionally, Buraidah should establish air quality monitoring stations to track pollution levels and ban waste burning, especially agricultural waste, which contributes significantly to air pollution. Monitoring factory emissions through high-quality filters and promoting public environmental conservation initiatives, including sustainable transportation solutions (see recommendation 17 above), will further support these efforts. In collaboration with environmental agencies, the local government should lead these initiatives, with progress measured by tracking air quality improvements, emissions reductions, and increased adoption of clean energy.

Policy recommendation 19: Enhancing open and green public spaces

Buraidah's municipality should prioritise urban planning policies that expand the availability of parks and recreational areas, particularly in underserved neighbourhoods, by ensuring green spaces are well-distributed and accessible throughout the city. While every neighbourhood may not need its own park, clustered and strategically located green spaces should be accessible through convenient transportation options or pedestrian pathways. The city should conduct urban surveys to assess the need for green spaces, allocate public lands accordingly, and incorporate these areas into new developments while encouraging PPPs for funding and maintenance. The local community members should be involved in planning through surveys, workshops, and public meetings to gather input on their preferences, fostering ownership and ensuring the spaces meet local needs. In collaboration with urban planners, businesses, and residents, the local government should lead these initiatives, with progress tracked by creating and improving green spaces, community engagement, and accessibility.

Policy recommendation 20: Advancing smart city technologies

Buraidah's municipality should implement smart city technologies by integrating digital infrastructure, such as IoT sensors and data analytics, to enhance urban services, including traffic management, energy efficiency, and waste collection. By deploying IoT sensors across key city areas, real-time data on traffic patterns, energy usage, and waste levels can be collected to enable more efficient management of resources and services. Data analytics platforms can then process this information, allowing authorities to make informed decisions that improve service delivery and optimize resource consumption. Smart traffic management systems can reduce congestion and improve road safety, while energy-efficient technologies can lower the city's energy usage. Smart waste management solutions will optimize waste collection routes and schedules for greater efficiency. Collaboration with the private sector and academic institutions will support developing and implementing these smart technologies, ensuring the city remains technologically advanced. The local government should lead these efforts, and progress can be measured through improvements in traffic flow, energy consumption, and waste management. Flexibility in deployment should allow for adjustments based on data insights, technological advancements, and community feedback.

9.7. SDG 17

Policy recommendation 21: Expanding Internet broadband coverage

In Buraidah, efforts should be undertaken to expand broadband infrastructure, improving access to reliable, affordable, high-speed Internet, which is central to linking local residents to global markets and enhancing government services. The city should target underserved areas by investing in ICT infrastructure and collaborating with telecom providers. A comprehensive data collection framework should be established to track broadband subscriptions and usage, enabling real-time monitoring and targeted local policies. Additionally, initiatives promoting digital literacy and inclusion should be launched to ensure all residents equitably benefit from expanded connectivity. The local government, telecom providers, and the QUO should lead these efforts. Progress will be tracked through increases in broadband subscriptions and digital inclusion, with policies and investments adjusted based on data insights and community feedback to ensure continuous improvement in connectivity.

Policy recommendation 22: Promoting policy coherence

Buraidah's municipality should invest in expanding ongoing initiatives that enhance policy coherence, aligning its local strategies with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the broader 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ongoing initiatives, such as this VLR. Such initiatives have the potential to foster synergies between local, national and global priorities; promote vertical and horizontal integration of policies across governance levels and sectors; break down silos and promote cross-sectoral collaboration; and ensure that Buraidah's sustainable development efforts contribute to national goals. Addressing resource constraints and building local governance capacities will be crucial for effectively mainstreaming policy coherence. Engaging local stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector, in policy development and implementation will ensure inclusivity and context-specific strategies. Using VLRs will provide a structured framework for assessing and reporting progress at the local level towards the SDGs, enhancing coordination across governance levels. The local government should collaborate with other government layers and relevant stakeholders on these efforts, with progress monitored through aligning local policies with national frameworks and the effectiveness of stakeholder collaboration while maintaining flexibility to adjust strategies based on feedback and data insights.

Policy recommendation 23: Strengthening international collaboration

Buraidah's municipality should continue participating actively in international collaborations and adhere to global standards, such as those promoted by UN-Habitat and the OECD, to incorporate international best practices into local planning and strengthen policy coherence. Through its involvement in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, recognized for its contributions to gastronomy, Buraidah integrates global creative standards into its local economic and social policies. Additionally, its participation in the Future Saudi Cities Programme, a collaboration with the MoMRA and UN-Habitat, enables the adoption of international urban development principles focused on sustainable growth, liveability, and resilient infrastructure. Regionally, Buraidah's cooperation within the Qassim region on transport infrastructure and public services fosters regional cohesion and unified growth strategies, improving connectivity and services. The local government should continue leading these efforts, engaging with international organizations and regional authorities to ensure international best practices are effectively implemented, contributing to policy coherence and sustainable development. Progress can be measured by the integration of international standards into local policies and improvements in infrastructure and services.

10

ANNEX 1:

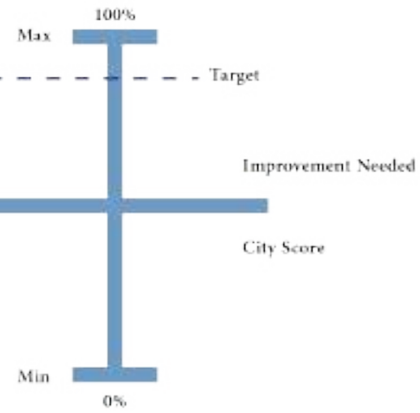
METHODOLOGICAL ANNEX

ANNEX 1: Methodological Annex

1. Thresholds

To ensure comparability across indicators, each variable was rescaled from 0 to 100, with 0 representing the lowest performance and 100 reflecting the highest. The rescaling process was influenced by the selection of upper and lower limits, which may unintentionally introduce variability if extreme values were not carefully managed (Figure 111).

Figure 111. Example of maximum and minimum thresholds.



SOURCE ESCWA, UN-Habitat, UCLG-MEWA. (2023). Practical guidelines for voluntary local reviews in the Arab region. United Nations.

In the case of this VLR, the thresholds were set according to the following criteria:

Explicit SDG targets: for the cases in which absolute directions are given in the context of the SDG and/or target (e.g. zero poverty, universal school completion, full access to basic services, etc.)

The "Leave-No-One-Behind" principle: when there is not explicit direction given in the SDG and/or target, this principle is used to set thresholds related to universal access or elimination of deprivation.

Science-based targets: Where updated scientific targets are available for the case of Buraidah, this criterion is used to ensure the indicator is contextualized and relevant.

For this VLR, an additional option for the thresholds is also used:

UN-Habitat Urban Monitoring Framework (UMF) Thresholds: The UMF[379] work with cities all around the globe provides performance aggregate averages for several indicators, providing refined thresholds for VLRs, reflecting the urban context.

2. Normalization

In the normalization process, data is transformed into a score ranging from 0 to 100. This ensures that the data remains comparable across all indicators. Importantly, the direction of each indicator is considered: for positive indicators, a higher score reflects better performance (direct normalization), while for negative indicators, such as "reducing poverty," the scores are inverted (reverse normalization), so that a higher normalized score (0-100) always represents better outcomes.

Direct Normalization

$$X^1 = \frac{x - \min(x)}{\max(x) - \min(x)} \times 100$$

Reverse Normalization

$$X^1 = 1 - \frac{x - \min(x)}{\max(x) - \min(x)} \times 100$$

3. Indicator Trends

By examining longitudinal data, the city's projected score for 2030 is calculated, providing a "trend score" that highlights the expected trajectory of progress towards each indicator. This estimation is created in two steps. Firstly, the annual rate of improvement is calculated, and then 2030 projected value is established.

Annual Improvement Rate

$$X^{\square} = \left(\frac{\text{Final Value}^{\square}}{\text{Initial Value}^{\square}}\right) \wedge \left(\frac{1}{n-1}\right)$$

Final value: latest data in the indicator
Initial value: oldest data in the indicator
n = number of years between the final and initial values

Projected Value for 2030

$$X^{\square} = \text{Final value} * (1 + \text{annual improvement rate}) \wedge n$$

n = number of years until 2030

The results are interpreted based on the potential for the city to reach its goals by 2030 (Figure 112).

379- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2022). *Global Urban Monitoring Framework: A guide for urban monitoring of SDGs and NUA and other urban-related thematic or local, national, and global frameworks.* UN-Habitat.

Figure 112. The Four-arrow system for denoting SDG trends

	**Decreasing** Decreasing score, i.e. country moves in the wrong direction.
	**Stagnating** Score remains stagnant or increases at a rate below 50% of the growth rate needed to achieve the SDG by 2030. Also denotes scores that currently exceed the target but have decreased since 2015.
	**Moderately improving** Score increases at a rate above 50% of the required growth rate but below the rate needed to achieve the SDG by 2030.
	**On track or Maintaining SDG achievement** Score increases at the rate needed to achieve the SDG by 2030 or performance has already exceeded SDG achievement threshold.

SOURCE Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2024). The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press. doi:10.25546/108572

4. Categorical Indicators

In this VLR, when direct data was not available, categorical indicators were constructed. These indicators are typically based on qualitative data or documentary analysis rather than quantitative measurements. While they may not offer the same level of precision as numerical indicators, they provide valuable insights into areas where qualitative assessment is necessary for a fuller understanding of progress. Categorical indicators in this VLR reflect a scale of progress based on the following criteria:

Does not address the criteria (0%):
The city fails to meet or consider the specified criteria at all.

Weakly addresses the criteria (25%):
The city makes minimal or inadequate efforts to meet the criteria, with significant gaps or shortcomings.

Moderately Addresses the criteria (50%):
The city makes some effort to meet the criteria but still falls short in several areas.

Strongly addresses the criteria (75%):
The city addresses basic requirements, showing substantial and effective efforts in meeting the criteria.

Completely addresses the criteria (100%):
The city fully meets or exceeds the criteria, demonstrating exemplary performance and good practices.

5. Indicator's Weights

Some SDG Targets have multiple indicators, and to obtain a single value per SDG Target, these indicators must be weighted, though there is currently no established consensus within the field regarding the methodology for such weighting[380]. As a result, this VLR adopts the following parameters to ensure clarity and consistency:

A full weight of 1 is applied to indicators that directly address the SDG target using high-quality data.

A weight of 0.5 is assigned when the indicator is supported by one additional indicator to achieve the target.

A weight of 0.33 is used when two other indicators contribute to addressing the same target.

For cases where three supporting indicators are involved, **a weight of 0.25 is applied**.

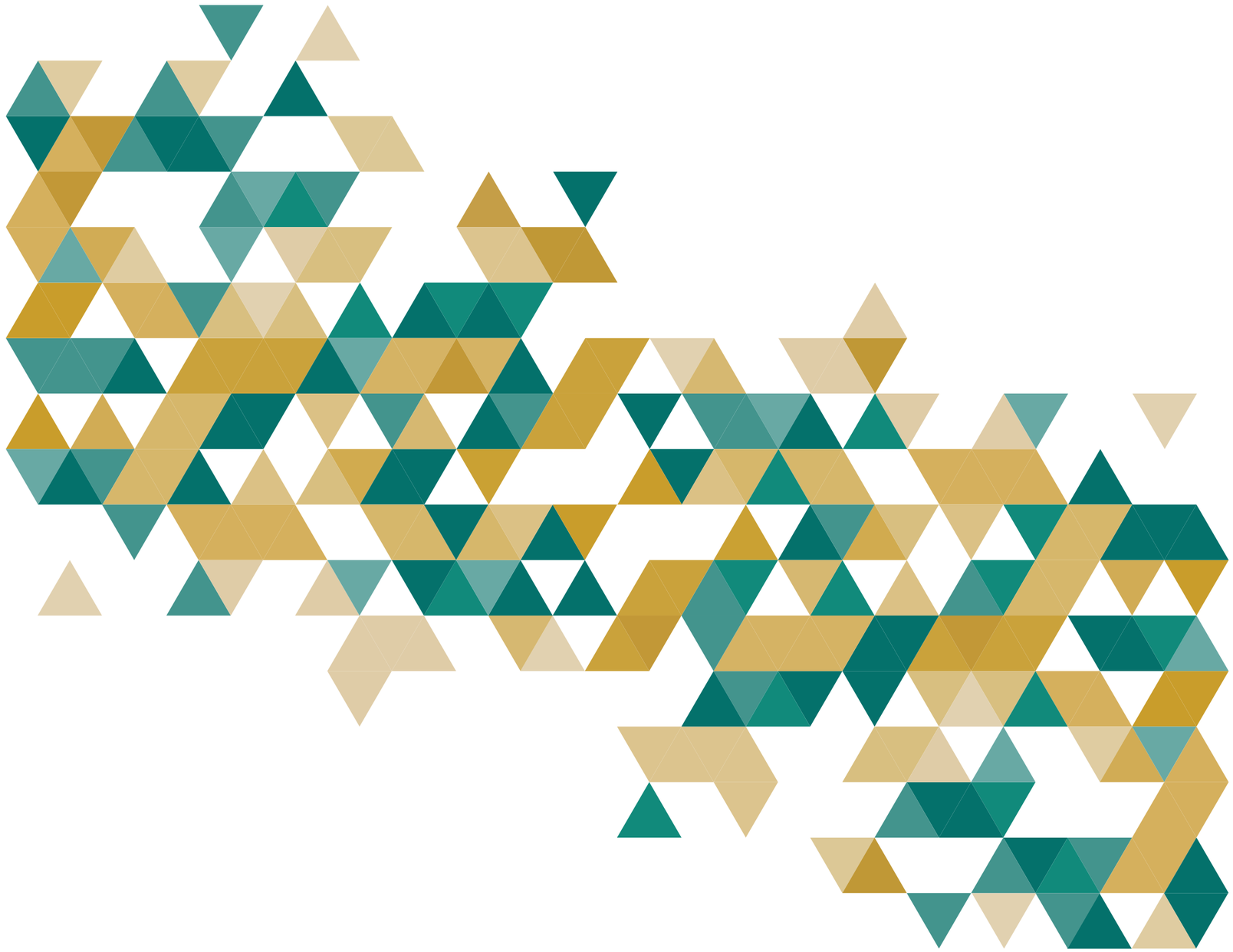
Lastly, **a weight of 0.2** is given to indicators that either rely on national-level data or are categorical in nature, often constructed through documentary analysis or indirect data sources.

Figure 113. Example of different weights being applied depending on the target's structure

6.1	By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.	6.1.1 Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services.	1.00
6.2	By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable, sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situation.	6.1.2 Proportion of population, using (a) safely managed, sanitation services	0.50
		and (b) a hand-washing facility with soap and water.	0.50

SOURCE Author

380- Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2024). The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press. doi:10.25546/108572



11

ANNEX 2:

SDG INDICATORS STATISTICS

SDG I

Sustainable Development Goal I No Poverty		
#	SDG Target	SDG Indicator Description
1.1	By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than $1.25 a day	1.1.1 Proportion of the population living below the international poverty line by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural)
1.2	By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions	1.2.1 Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age
		1.2.2 Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions
1.3	Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable	1.3.1 Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable
1.4	By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance	1.4.1 Proportion of population living in households with access to basic services
1.5	By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters	1.5.1 Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population

SDG 1 Aggregated Score: 79%				
Results				
Score	Rating	Trend	Weight	Weighted Score
100.0%	Achieved	On Track	1.00	100%
85.9%	Significant Challenges Remain	Stagnating	0.50	43%
97.6%	Achieved	-	0.50	49%
13.7%	Major Challenges Remain	Decreasing	1.00	14%
100.0%	Achieved	On Track	1.00	100%
99.9%	Achieved	On Track	0.20	20%

Sustainable Development Goal I No Poverty		
#	SDG Target	SDG Indicator Description
		1.5.2 Direct economic loss attributed to disasters in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP)
		1.5.3 Number of countries that adopt and implement national disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030
		1.5.4 Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies
	UMF	2.4.2 (UMF-39) Mean household income

SDG 1 Aggregated Score: 79%				
Results				
Score	Rating	Trend	Weight	Weighted Score
100.0%	Achieved	On Track	0.20	20%
100.0%	Achieved	On Track	0.20	20%
75.0%	Major Challenges Remain	Moderately Increasing	0.20	15%
77.4%	Major Challenges Remain	On Track	1.00	77%

SDG 3

Sustainable Development Goal 3 Good Health and Well-Being		
#	SDG Target	SDG Indicator Description
3.1	By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births	3.1.1 Maternal mortality ratio
		3.1.2 Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel
3.2	By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births	3.2.1 Under-five mortality rate
		3.2.2 Neonatal mortality rate
3.3	By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases	3.3.1 Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population, by sex, age and key populations
		3.3.2 Tuberculosis incidence per 100,000 population
		3.3.3 Malaria incidence per 1,000 population
		3.3.4 Hepatitis B incidence per 100,000 population
3.4	By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being	3.4.1 Mortality rate attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease
		3.4.2 Suicide mortality rate
3.5	Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol	3.5.1 Coverage of treatment interventions (pharmacological, psychosocial and rehabilitation and aftercare services) for substance use disorders
		3.5.2 Alcohol per capita consumption (aged 15 years and older) within a calendar year in litres of pure alcohol
3.6	By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents	3.6.1 Death rate due to road traffic injuries

SDG 3 Aggregated Score: 95%				
Results				
Score	Rating	Trend	Weight	Weighted Score
100.0%	Achieved	On Track	0.50	50%
100.0%	Achieved	On Track	0.50	50%
91%	Challenges Remain	Decreasing	0.50	46%
93%	Challenges Remain	Decreasing	0.50	46%
100%	Achieved	On Track	0.25	25%
99.5%	Achieved	On Track	0.25	25%
100%	Achieved	On Track	0.25	25%
100%	Achieved	On Track	0.25	25%
100%	Achieved	On Track	0.50	50%
100%	Achieved	On Track	0.50	50%
100%	Achieved	On Track	0.50	50%
100%	Achieved	On Track	0.50	50%
87%	Significant Challenges Remain	On Track	1.00	87%

Sustainable Development Goal 3 Good Health and Well-Being		
#	SDG Target	SDG Indicator Description
	By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes	3.7.2 Adolescent birth rate (aged 10-14 years; aged 15-19 years) per 1,000 women in that age group
3.8	Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all	3.8.1 Coverage of essential health services
		3.8.2 Proportion of population with large household expenditures on health as a share of total household expenditure or income
	By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination	3.9.2 Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene (exposure to unsafe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH) services)
	UMF	3.1.3 (UMF-42) Air quality
3.b	Support the research and development of vaccines and medicines for the communicable and non-communicable diseases that primarily affect developing countries, provide access to affordable essential medicines and vaccines, in accordance with the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, which affirms the right of developing countries to use to the full the provisions in the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights regarding flexibilities to protect public health, and, in particular, provide access to medicines for all	3.b.1 Proportion of the target population covered by all vaccines included in their national programme
		3.b.3 Proportion of health facilities that have a core set of relevant essential medicines available and affordable on a sustainable basis
3.c	Substantially increase health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in least developed countries and small island developing States	3.c.1 Health worker density and distribution
	UMF	1.3.1 (UMF-17) Life expectancy at birth

SDG 3 Aggregated Score: 95%				
Results				
Score	Rating	Trend	Weight	Weighted Score
100%	Achieved	On Track	1.00	100%
100%	Achieved	On Track	0.50	50%
98.3%	Achieved	On Track	0.50	49%
100%	Achieved	On Track	1.00	100%
93%	Challenges Remain	Decreasing	1.00	93%
96%	Challenges Remain	Moderately Increasing	0.50	20%
100%	Achieved	On Track	0.50	50%
100%	Achieved	On Track	1.00	100%
93%	Challenges Remain	On Track	1.00	93%

SDG 4

Sustainable Development Goal 4 Quality Education		
#	SDG Target	SDG Indicator Description
4.1	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes	4.1.1 4.1.1 Proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex
		4.1.2 Completion rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education)
	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education	4.2.2 Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex
4.3	By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university	4.3.1 Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex
		2.3.3 (UMF-33) Adult population with a qualification from a recognized tertiary education institution
4.5	By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations	4.5.1 Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated
4.6	By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy	4.6.1 Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex
4.a	Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all	4.a.1 Proportion of schools offering basic services, by type of service
	UMF	2.2.2 (UMF-28) Youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET)

SDG 4 Aggregated Score: 91,2%				
Results				
Score	Rating	Trend	Weight	Weighted Score
30.30%	Major Challenges Remain	-	0.20	6%
95.42%	Challenges Remain	Decreasing	1.00	96%
100.0%	Achieved	On Track	1.00	95%
100.0%	Achieved	-	0.50	50%
59.20%	Major Challenges Remain	-	0.50	30%
99.40%	Achieved	On Track	1.00	99%
99.10%	Achieved	On Track	1.00	99%
96.77%	Challenges Remain	On Track	1.00	97%
80.37%	Significant Challenges Remain	-	1.00	80%

SDG 5

Sustainable Development Goal 5 Gender Equality		
#	SDG Target	SDG Indicator Description
5.1	End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere	5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex
5.2	Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation	5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age
		5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence
5.3	Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation	5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18
5.4	Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life	5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location
5.5	Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life	5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments
		5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions
	Extra indicator	E.1 Proportion of women in the labor force

SDG 5 Aggregated Score: 55,9%				
Results				
Score	Rating	Trend	Weight	Weighted Score
25.00%	Major Challenges Remain	Moderately Increasing	1.00	25.0%
91.20%	Challenges Remain	-	0.50	45.6%
87.10%	Significant Challenges Remain	-	0.50	43.6%
96.51%	Challenges Remain	Decreasing	1.00	96.5%
55.04%	Major Challenges Remain	-	1.00	55.0%
3.49%	Major Challenges Remain	Moderately Increasing	0.33	1.2%
2.68%	Major Challenges Remain	Moderately Increasing	0.33	0.9%
33.24%	Major Challenges Remain	Moderately Increasing	0.33	11.0%

SDG 6

Sustainable Development Goal 6 Clean Water and Sanitation		
#	SDG Target	SDG Indicator Description
6.1	By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all	6.1.1 Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services
6.2	By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations	6.2.1 Proportion of population using (a) safely managed sanitation services and (b) a hand-washing facility with soap and water
		1.1.4 (UMF-04) Safely managed hand-washing facility with soap and water
6.3	By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity	6.3.1 Proportion of domestic and industrial wastewater flows safely treated
6.4	By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity	6.4.2 Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources
6.5	By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate	6.5.1 Degree of integrated water resources management

SDG 6 Aggregated Score: 91,6%				
Results				
Score	Rating	Trend	Weight	Weighted Score
100.0%	Achieved	On Track	1.00	100%
100.0%	Achieved	On Track	0.50	50%
100.0%	Achieved	On Track	0.50	50.0%
69.63%	Major Challenges Remain	Decreasing	1.00	69.6%
100.0%	Achieved	On Track	1.00	100%
75.00%	Major Challenges Remain	On Track	0.20	15.0%

SDG 11

Sustainable Development Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities		
#	SDG Target	SDG Indicator Description
11.1	By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums	11.1.1 Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing
11.2	By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons	11.2.1 Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities
11.3	By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries	11.3.1 Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate
11.5	By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations	11.5.1 Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population
11.6	By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management	11.6.1 Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed in controlled facilities out of total municipal waste generated, by cities
		11.6.2 Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g. PM2.5 and PM10) in cities (population weighted)

SDG 11 Aggregated Score: 77.9%				
Results				
Score	Rating	Trend	Weight	Weighted Score
100.0%	Achieved	On Track	1.00	100%
35.00%	Major Challenges Remain	Moderately Increasing	1.00	35%
100.0%	Achieved	-	1.00	100%
99.85%	Achieved	On Track	0.20	20%
99.22%	Achieved	On Track	0.50	50%
93%	Challenges Remain	Decreasing	0.50	46%

Sustainable Development Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities		
#	SDG Target	SDG Indicator Description
11.7	By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities	11.7.1 Average share of the built-up area of cities that is open space for public use for all, by sex, age and persons with disabilities
		11.7.2 Proportion of persons victim of physical or sexual harassment, by sex, age, disability status and place of occurrence, in the previous 12 months
		3.3.2 (UMF-47) Green area per capita
11.b	By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels	11.b.1 Number of countries that adopt and implement national disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030
		11.b.2 Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies
	UMF	5.3.2 (UMF-73) Financial autonomy

SDG 11 Aggregated Score: 77.9%				
Results				
Score	Rating	Trend	Weight	Weighted Score
40%	Major Challenges Remain	On Track	0.33	13%
96%	Challenges Remain	Stagnating	0.33	13%
81%	Significant Challenges Remain	Stagnating	0.33	27%
100%	Achieved	On Track	0.2	20%
75%	Major Challenges Remain	Moderately Increasing	0.8	60%
58%	Major Challenges Remain	On Track	1.00	58%