Issue 21 | Welcome to The Executive Brief – AEI's curated update for businesses looking to grow, invest, and thrive in Saudi Arabia

AEI Saudi
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Welcome back to the AEI Executive Brief

The early summer months confirmed the themes AEI has tracked all year, namely strategic financial discipline at home and steadily widening access for foreign investors to Saudi. In June and July, the Kingdom operationalised its landmark foreign real estate ownership law, modernised customs and bonded zone rules, tightened Saudization and visa quotas once again, and simplified travel for UK business visitors and other tourist nationalities. Meanwhile, the IMF confirmed the economy's resilience despite regional conflict disrupting Gulf shipping, forecasting a strong rebound in 2027. For AEI's international clients, the message is unchanged: opportunity is expanding, but compliance expectations are rising with it.

Foreign real estate ownership becomes operational reality

The stand-out development of the last two months came on 23rd June, when the Council of Ministers approved the Implementing Regulations to the Law of Real Estate Ownership by Non-Saudis, together with the designated geographic zones in which foreign individuals and entities may own property.[1] The regulations replace the old case-by-case approval system with a transparent, rules-based framework administered through a single electronic platform run by the Real Estate General Authority (REGA), covering registration, payment, and title issuance. Foreign companies may acquire real estate for business activities and employee housing. Regular readers will recall we flagged improving ownership guidance in May; this is the practical unlock. AEI can advise on eligibility, zones, and registration – just reach out to one of our team.

New regulations make foreign real estate ownership in Saudi Arabia more transparent and accessible for eligible investors and businesses

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Economic resilience confirmed despite regional headwinds

Following its June Article IV mission, the IMF observed that "The Saudi economy entered 2026 with strong momentum" [2], crediting rapid rerouting of oil through the East-West pipeline and Red Sea ports for limiting the impact of disrupted Strait of Hormuz shipping. In July, the Fund trimmed its 2026 growth forecast to 1.7% on conflict-related disruption, but raised its 2027 projection to a striking 5.5%, citing the Kingdom's diversified export routes, low debt, ample reserves, and sovereign wealth buffers. [3] As we wrote in March, the $1T market is demonstrating characteristic resilience, and long-term investors are looking through the volatility. Reasons to be cheerful!

Diversified infrastructure and strong fundamentals continue to underpin Saud Arabia's strong economic resilience

Saudization and visa quotas tighten again

Another period, another labour market recalibration in the Kingdom. From 30th June, engineering roles must reach a 30% Saudization rate, with a minimum salary of SAR 8,000 for Saudi nationals counted toward the quota. Separately, the Qiwa platform reduced instant visas for companies under two years old to a maximum of five, while restricting business activity changes that would breach nationality diversity limits.[4] Building on the 100% Saudization of 69 roles reported in our April edition, these measures reinforce that workforce planning is now a first-order market entry consideration. The AEI 6P's start with "Planning" for good reason.

Workplace planning and compliance remain central to successful market entry and growth in Saudi Arabia

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Customs and bonded zone rules modernised

On 18th June, the Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority (ZATCA) approved amendments to the Controls Regulating Customs Procedures and the Rules of Bonded Zones, updating declarations, clearance, inspection, and release procedures, alongside goods admission, storage, transfer, and re-export in licensed zones. [5] For clients in logistics, manufacturing, and trade, particularly those eyeing the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) we have covered since 2023, this signals continuing modernisation of the trade framework in line with evolving supply chain models. Look out for our SEZ webinar in the Autumn, which will provide clarity on whether an SEZ is for you.

Travel facilitation extends beyond the UK

Effective 1st July, UK citizens can enter the Kingdom under a new Electronic Travel Authorization permitting multiple entries and stays of up to 180 days per year for tourism, business visits, and short-term study. [6] It does not cover employment or residence, but for British executives it materially simplifies mobility. Access is widening for other nationalities too. In July the Ministry of Tourism launched its Visa Package programme, issuing an electronic visa automatically within a single bundled booking of flights and licensed hotels, initially for travellers from Jordan, Egypt, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Mexico, with more nationalities to follow. [7] These measures complement the established e-visa scheme covering more than 60 nationalities and holders of valid US, UK, or Schengen visas.

New visa reforms continue to make business travel and international mobility easier across Saudi Arabia

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If you would like to discuss any of this month's stories, contact the team at info@aeisaudi.com

> **Trust AEI – experts in Saudi success. We support foreign businesses to enter the Kingdom, establish operations, and succeed long term.**