

Saudi Arabia



REGION: MENA

Also included in this region: Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Morocco, Turkey

PART I: ENROLMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

The Saudi HE system corresponds to a mix of the unitary and North American models. Over 85% of all HE students were enrolled in comprehensive universities in 2018, with most of the rest in short-cycle HEIs. Total enrolments in Saudi Arabia rose by a bit over 160% between 2006 and 2017 before dropping back slightly in 2018. Saudi Arabia's enrolment growth rate between 2006 and 2018 outpaced averages in for the rest of the MENA and the Global South. The number of HEIs actually fell over this period, mainly due to a huge wave of mergers and reclassifications of specialised universities in 2006, making Saudi HEIs substantially larger on average in 2018 than they were in 2006. Roughly 95% of students attended public providers in 2018, which was above the average across the rest of the MENA region.

TABLE 1 – Types of higher education providers

CATEGORY	INSTITUTIONS	INSTITUTIONS COUNT IN 2018		
		PUB.	PRIV.	TOTAL
Comprehensive universities	Universities, private universities	28	9	37
Specialised Universities	Teachers Colleges (2006); Girls Colleges; Prince Sultan Military Faculty for Health Science Dhahran; private colleges (unaffiliated with universities)	1	21	22
University Colleges	Private colleges affiliated with universities; the Arab Open University	0	4	4
Short-cycle HEIs	Technical and vocational institutions (Colleges of Technology); Health faculties and institutes (2006 and 2007); Community colleges (often associated with universities)	124	0	124
Semi-HE	Al Jubail and Yanbu Industrial Faculties; Institute of Public Administration	NA	NA	NA

FIGURE 1 – Numbers of institutions by type, 2006-2018

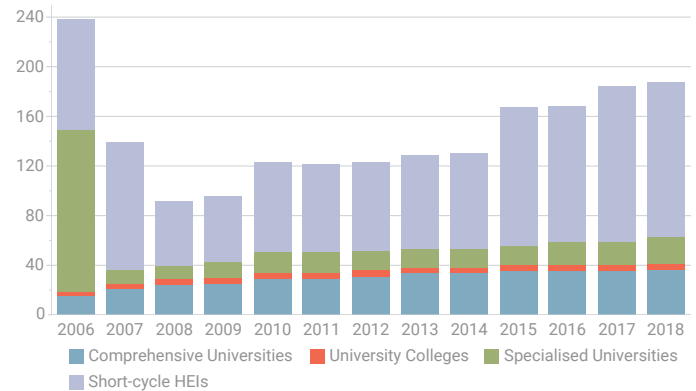


FIGURE 2 – Total enrolments with public and private higher education providers, 2006-2018 (Millions)

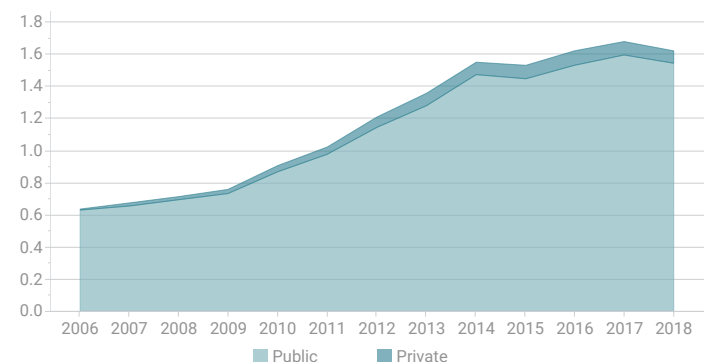


FIGURE 3 – Changes in enrolment, in Saudi Arabia, the rest of MENA and the rest of the Global South, 2006-2018

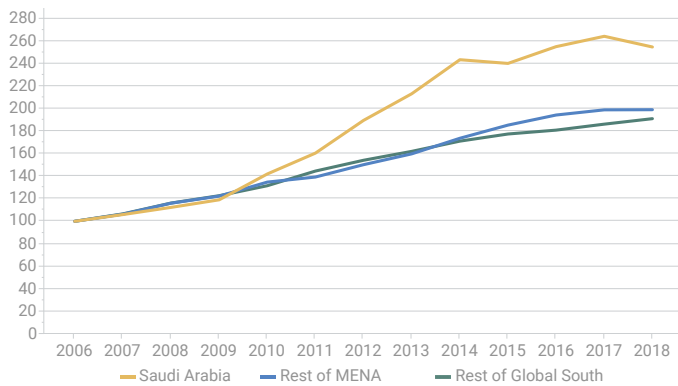


FIGURE 4 – Share of enrolments by institution type in Saudi Arabia and the rest of MENA, 2006 and 2018 (2006=100)

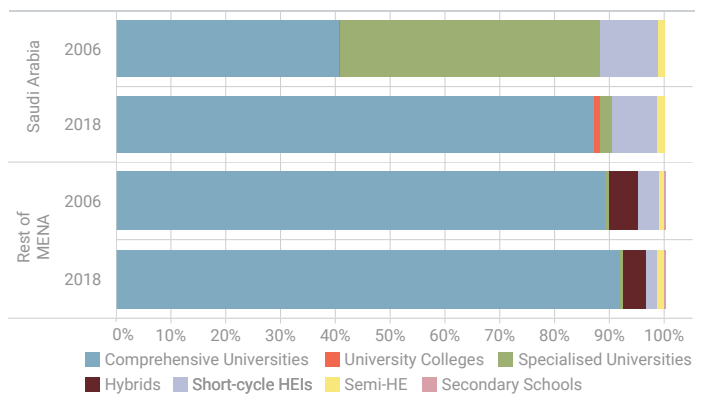


FIGURE 5 – Share of enrolments in public and private institutions, by institution type in Saudi Arabia and the rest of MENA, 2018

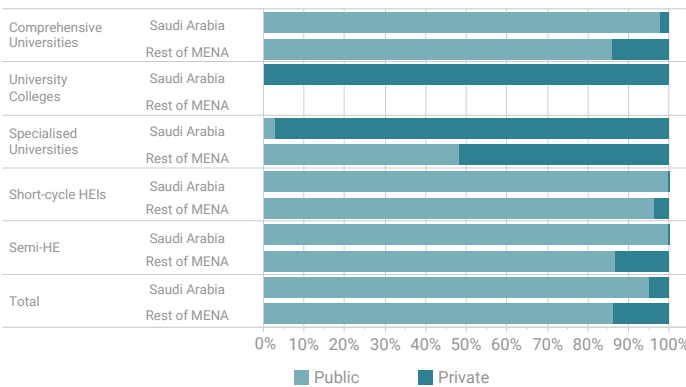
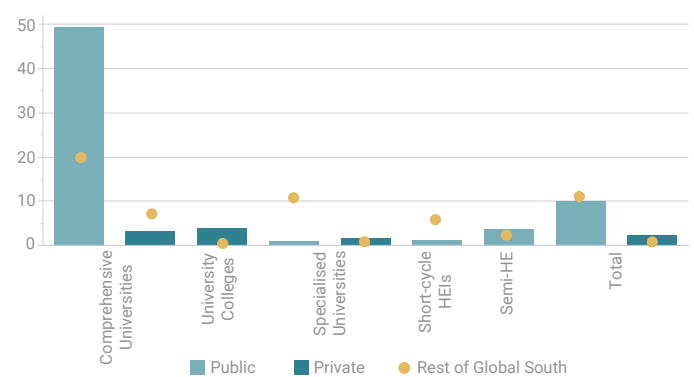


FIGURE 6 – Average institution-size by institution type in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Global South, 2018 (Thousands)



PART II: HIGHER EDUCATION FINANCING

Public HE spending in Saudi Arabia quadrupled between 2006 and 2015, at which point the decline in oil prices led to cuts. Still, public spending was 235% higher in 2018 than in 2006. Transfers to public HEIs also increased by a significant but somewhat less dramatic 150% over this period. Because funding and enrolment growth were more or less equal, transfers to public HEIs stayed roughly the same in per-student terms in 2018 as in 2006. Relative to GDP, Saudi public spending on HE more than tripled from roughly than 0.7% in 2006 to over 2.4% in 2015 before falling back to 2% in 2018. This 2018 level was well above the rest of the MENA and the Global South.

FIGURE 7 – Change in real total public spending on higher education in Saudi Arabia, the rest of MENA and the rest of the Global South, 2006-2018 (2006=100)

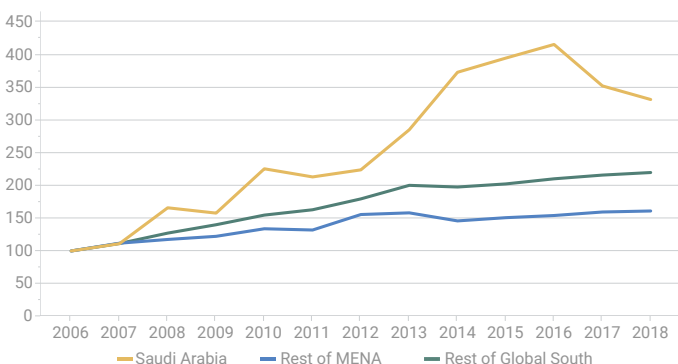


FIGURE 8 – Total public spending on higher education relative to GDP in Saudi Arabia, the rest of MENA and the rest of the Global South, 2006-2018

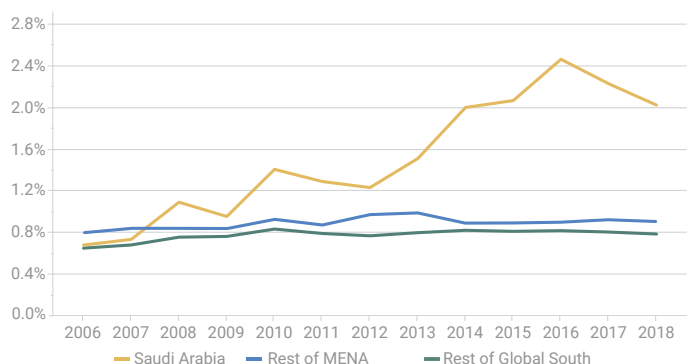


FIGURE 9 – Change in real government transfers to public institutions by institution-type in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Global South, 2006-2018 (2006=100)

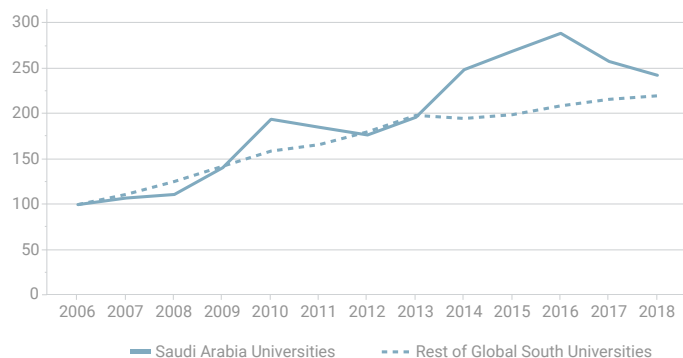
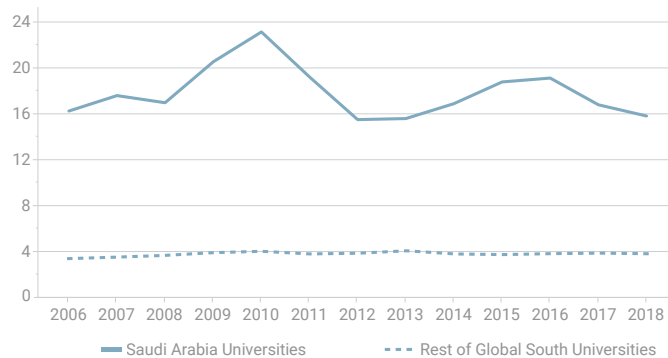


FIGURE 10 – Per-student government transfers to public institutions by institution-type in real PPP, in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Global South, 2006-2018



PART III: STUDENT FEES

To our knowledge, there are no compulsory fees for public HE in Saudi Arabia. We were unable to obtain data on student fees to further reinforce this view.

PART IV: STUDENT FINANCIAL AID

Saudi Arabia operates one of the most extensive student financial aid regimes in the world. At the least, all students in university-level programs at public HEIs receive grants, as do some students in university-level programs at private HEIs. There is insufficient data to analyze student financial aid further unfortunately.

TABLE 2 – Student financial aid regime, including recipients and amounts disbursed in 2018

CATEGORY	PROGRAMS	BASIS OF ALLOCATION	RECIPIENTS	AMOUNTS DISBURSED (USD)
Grants	Various programs - no detail available and estimated	Simple enrolment	1,368,675	ND

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, Saudi Arabia



***Note:** For more on methodology and data quality please see [Appendices A and B](#).