

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Submission to the Universal
Periodic

Review of the United Nations

Human Rights Council

4th Cycle – 44th Session

Country Review: Colombia

January 2023

By Laura García



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Broken Chalk is an Amsterdam-based NGO established in 2020 that focuses on monitoring and minimising human rights violations in education worldwide. We aim to promote universal and equal access to education for all.

Together with our international sponsors and partners, we encourage and support achieving societal peace by advocating for intercultural tolerance, preventing radicalism and polarisation, and tackling inequalities in education.

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0. Introduction

1. Broken Chalk drafted this report to contribute to Colombia's Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Broken Chalk is an organisation that fights against violations of Human Rights and improves the quality of Education around the globe. This report will discuss Colombia's main challenges regarding education and what issues could be improved. Finally, Broken Chalk will offer some recommendations for Colombia based on the matters raised.
2. In the 2018 review, Colombia received 211 recommendations and supported 183 proposals for adopting its UPR outcome. Those were related to the legal and general framework of implementation, universal and cross-cutting issues, civil and political rights, economic, social, and cultural rights, women's rights, and rights of other vulnerable groups and persons.
3. Regarding education, those recommendations focused on guaranteeing equal access to education, paying particular attention to children living in rural areas and minorities; implementing sexual education programs; enhancing literacy rates; and ensuring the enrolment of persons with disabilities at all levels of education.
4. In 2018, Colombia was reported to be the second most unequal country globally because of an unequal model, malnutrition, and lack of access to education and health.¹ Concerning education, Colombia rates below when compared to OECD countries and other partner countries in multiple indicators, such as, among others, the adults with tertiary qualification; children enrolled in early childhood education programs; spending on pre-primary educational institutions; the share of women among general upper secondary graduates; enrolment rates between 6 to 24 years old.²
5. As these indicators illustrate, there are evident efforts still to be made and improvements to be implemented to create a better education system which sits on the foundations of equality, inclusivity, and accessibility.

¹ UN General Assembly, 2018. Resumen de las Comunicaciones de las Partes Interesadas sobre Colombia, *Consejo de Derechos Humanos*. Retrieved from: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/061/12/PDF/G1806112.pdf?OpenElement>

² OECD, 2022. Colombia: Overview of the education system, *Education GPS*. Retrieved from: <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?plotter=h5&primaryCountry=COL&treshold=5&topic=EO>

I. Main challenges in Education

Venezuelan Migration

6. An estimated 1.7 million Venezuelans currently live in Colombia. About 460.000 of them are school-aged children. Of these 460.000 children, there are already over 198.000 enrolled in the educational system, most of the primary and secondary education (79%). However, around 260.000 Venezuelan children and youth in Colombia are still out of school.³
7. Enrolment is hindered by a lack of resources, difficult socio-economic situations, and a widespread lack of documentation. In this sense, it is possible to observe cases of children and teenagers who attend school only as listeners and cannot certify their grades.
8. Likewise, surveys conducted in Bogotá, Barranquilla, Medellín, Cucuta and Cali showed that the main reason why 89% of Venezuelan people do not practice their profession is that they do not have the permits to do so.⁴
9. Despite the enormous efforts made by the Colombian government, evidence shows that both Venezuelan and Colombian children in public schools need help to develop fundamental literacy and numeracy skills. Mainly, math skills for both Venezuelan and Colombian students could have been higher.

Low Learning Outcomes

10. Most students leave school with weak basic skills. PISA results suggest that students' reading skills have improved across assessment cycles but remain low compared with the OECD average and other Latin American countries.⁵
11. In mathematics, Colombian students are, on average, more than three years behind their peers in OECD countries.
12. The weak skills of many graduates and the enormous size of the informal economy hinder the access and development of labour market rewards. In turn, this may be fostered by gaps in the teacher workforce at the preschool and upper secondary levels and the level of teachers' qualifications.

³ UNESCO, n.d. Significant efforts by Colombia ensure that nearly 200,000 Venezuelan children and youth have access to the educational system. Retrieved from: https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/significant-efforts-colombia-ensure-nearly-200000-venezuelan-children-and-youth-have-access?TSPD_101_RO=080713870fab20004018c47d62b20ea89321eeff15f9e2c8c747ab9cd0cfb1ab1faacca59aaf7ade08d3f3149f1430007a1041e42e4f73a5b634765307a8da13c6da7ca6e8b44763d8606227da879a3c79713b4ca02eea39e956d1c43820647c

⁴ OECD, 2016. Reviews of National Policies for Education, Education in Colombia. Retrieved from: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-in-colombia_9789264250604-en

⁵ OECD, 2018. Programme For International Student Assessment (PISA): *Results from PISA 2018*. Retrieved from: https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_COL.pdf

Low Attendance

13. Low attendance may be related to the fact that, despite public education, many indirect costs, such as transportation, clothing, food, and materials, may inhibit their access to education.
14. Several factors contribute to low attendance rates, including poor transitions between levels, high dropout rates and many children who never enter the education system. Persistent dropout rates and weak changes mean Colombia has one of the highest shares of 15–19-year-olds not in education.⁶
15. Obstacles to access to education include lack of opportunities, poverty, pressure to work, conflict and, in some cases, violence. Evidence suggests that inadequate educational infrastructure and materials hinder access and achievement. This is a problem at the entry-level.

Disparities in Education

16. Social inequality is the main factor contributing to the disparities in Colombia's access to education and achievement. Students from the poorest-socio economic level have a school life expectancy of six years, compared to the twelve years that individuals from the wealthiest-socio-economic groups stay.
17. Furthermore, individuals in rural areas tend to have less access to educational opportunities and lower academic achievement than students living in urban areas. They face multiple disadvantages, such as higher poverty rates, malnutrition, teenage pregnancy, violence, and insufficient infrastructure.

Inclusiveness

18. Students with special educational needs have lower participation rates. In 2014, only 119.060 out of the 426.425 children with educational needs were enrolled in primary education.⁷

Gender Equality

19. Young women are also more likely to be excluded from education, employment, and training than their counterparts in other OECD countries. In that line, the share of female students entering doctoral or equivalent programs is one of the most minor compared to other OECD countries and partner economies.

⁶ [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/9789264250604-4-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/9789264250604-4-en#:~:text=Persistent%20dropout%20rates%20and%20weak,%25\)%20\(OECD%2C%202015b\).](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/9789264250604-4-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/9789264250604-4-en#:~:text=Persistent%20dropout%20rates%20and%20weak,%25)%20(OECD%2C%202015b).)

⁷ <https://www.yumpu.com/es/document/read/55468098/nacionales>

II. Recommendations

- 20.** After briefly presenting the main challenges that Colombia is facing nowadays in the field of Education, Broken Chalk has reflected on the following recommendations.
- 21.** On the one hand, Broken Chalk recommends that the Colombian Government strengthen their educational access and monitor progress to ensure access to education and learning. Learning cannot be measured simply by enrollment but by attendance and performance. Therefore, it is necessary to keep a tight track of it.
- 22.** It is critical to address the need for more documentation to track enrollment and attendance better and facilitate the right to education and the social benefits that come together.
- 23.** Colombia continues to struggle with a high poverty level and many internally displaced people. It is vital to address this issue and put a particular focus on the most vulnerable socio-economic sectors, rural areas, and minorities.
- 24.** On the other hand, regarding low outcomes and quality of education, it is vital to understand kids' needs regarding foundational skills. Supporting students at all levels during the transition from primary to secondary education is fundamental to ensure that students acquire the minimum knowledge and skills. Tools and systems must be developed to implement programs tracking kids' development.
- 25.** Guidelines must be developed and implemented to support students with special needs better. It is critical to improving data collection and analysis to improve the efficiency and control of enrolment.
- 26.** Lastly, Broken Chalk recommends improving school infrastructure and teaching quality. School systems need the tools to support programs which make a significant impact. Broken Chalk suggests the development of educational programs which align with OECD average levels.
- 27.** Regarding quality, Broken Chalk recommends enforced training to teachers so that the quality of education can be improved, and they can also adapt better to the different needs of students. It is necessary to keep better track of kids' evolution and needs. A monthly evaluation should be implemented to see if there is a positive evolution. In case it is needed, special reinforcing courses should be created.



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