



Submission to the Universal Periodic  
Review of the United Nations Human  
Rights Council  
4<sup>th</sup> Cycle – 41<sup>st</sup> Session  
**Country Review: Ecuador**

March 2022  
By Alejandra Latinez

**Broken Chalk** is an Amsterdam-based NGO established in 2020 and focused on raising awareness and minimizing human rights violations in the educational field.

Together with our international sponsors and partners, we encourage and support the following activities/projects: removing obstacles in education; contributing to the achievement of peace and tranquility in the society through adaptation studies in an environment of intercultural tolerance; preventing radicalism and polarization; and eliminating the opportunity gap in education for all. Our goal is to work together with global partners to remove barriers to access to education and to take concrete steps to ensure universal access to education.



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## 0. Introduction

1. This report was drafted by Broken Chalk to contribute to the fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Ecuador. Broken Chalk is an organization that fights against violations of Human Rights and improving the quality of education around the globe. This report will discuss the main challenges Ecuador faces in regards to Education, what are some issues that could be improved through Education, and finally Broken Chalk will offer some recommendations for Ecuador in the field of Education based on the raised issues.
2. In the 2017 review, Ecuador received 182 recommendations and supported 162 recommendations relating to 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<sup>1</sup>.
3. Ecuador has stated that efforts to guarantee the widest coverage and highest possible quality of education at all levels has been intensified<sup>2</sup>. In fact, between the years 2007 and 2017, net enrolment in basic education increased from 91.4% to 96.1%, and net enrolment rate in upper-secondary school increased from 51.2% to 70.8%<sup>3</sup>. Regarding the gender gap, education for women has risen much faster than for males, therefore the gender gap in schooling has almost been closed<sup>4</sup>. Despite this, there are still improvements to be made, especially in quality of education and accessibility.

## I. Main issues in Education

### Quality of Education

4. Despite the improvements made in education, the quality of education remains poor. Information on tests scores show that students are on average lacking in basic mathematical and language skills<sup>5</sup>. It is important to note that achievement tests have been discontinued, therefore the information for these test scores are limited. Amongst the rural and indigenous population, the completed years of education are four and three years lower than the national average<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council. (2017, May). *Universal Periodic Review - Ecuador*

<sup>2</sup> Ecuador. (2017, May 12). *National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21\* - Ecuador*

<sup>3</sup> Angel-Urdinola & Vera Jibaj. (2018). *Achievements and challenges of Ecuador's education sector in the 21st Century*

<sup>4</sup> Un.org. (2004). - *Education*

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

5. The drop-out rates for higher education remains high, despite the significant improvements in the gross enrolment rates for HE<sup>7</sup>. Throughout 2012-2017, only half of all the students enrolled in HE completed their degree. This could be because some students show low levels of academic readiness and because HE programs are usually long (5+ years), leading to higher levels of drop-out rates<sup>8</sup>. However, Broken Chalk wants to congratulate Ecuador for implementing reforms that have led to the significant improvement of graduation rates in 2012-2017 compared to the rates from 2007-2012<sup>9</sup>.
6. The enrolment rates in Ecuador have been higher, but despite the high enrolment rates, the education system still faces more challenges. Schools are often overcrowded and teachers overwhelmed<sup>10</sup>.
7. In order to lower illiteracy rates, Ecuador has implemented policies regarding the extension of specific literacy programs and campaigns<sup>11</sup>. Despite these policies, there is still a high level of illiteracy rates among the indigenous and African descent population compared to the level of illiteracy rates among the mestizo population<sup>12</sup>. The Survey of Adult Skills, which comes from the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, showed that less than 1 in 10 adults are proficient at Level 3 or higher in literacy in Ecuador<sup>13</sup>. This survey also showed that Ecuador is among the countries/economies with one of the largest proportions of adults (71.2%) who scored at Level 1 or lower in literacy<sup>14</sup>. This means that adults in this level have basic reading skills.
8. One issue that Broken Chalk is concerned with is that education may suffer due to inequalities in Ecuador. The expansion of educational provision is not equal, because rural areas, indigenous populations and the black community are often left behind<sup>15</sup>. However, Broken Chalk does congratulate Ecuador on the policies that have been implemented which has improved the quality of education significantly since the 1990's<sup>16</sup>.
9. Retention rates and quality of education in Ecuador could be affected by the high rate of teacher absenteeism and frequent teacher strikes<sup>17</sup>. Teacher strikes mainly affects both

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Children International. *Education in Children International communities – Ecuador*

<sup>11</sup> Castellano, J. M., Stefos, E., & Goodrich, L. G. W. (2017). *The educational and social profile of the indigenous People of Ecuador: A Multidimensional Analysis*

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> *Skills Matter: Additional Results From The Survey Of Adult Skills*

*Ecuador - OECD*. (2018, April).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Torres, Rosa María. (2005). *Real options for policy and practice in Ecuador*

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

primary and secondary schools. In 2003, an article stated that in poorer areas an average on nine school days per month is gone due to strikes and teacher absenteeism<sup>18</sup>. At the end of 2003, all public schools were closed for two months due to a teacher strike over a salary increase<sup>19</sup>. Although there are no current evaluations to verify the impact of these strikes, available information does suggest that it is an important issue<sup>20</sup>.

10. There has been a noticeable increase in increasing schools' physical infrastructure, number of laboratories, new educational equipment, acquisition of technological tools, installation of libraries, and construction of new spaces for physical practice, sports and recreation through the project "Schools of Millennium" (SOM)<sup>21</sup>. However, some argue that these public policies fail to be effective when teachers express that they do not feel qualified to work with students with physical or intellectual disabilities, and express this inability to do so despite all the inclusive education training they receive<sup>22</sup>. Teachers should be heard, and their trainings should be structured based on what they feel they are lacking. The better trainings teachers receive, the more they may feel prepared to provide high-quality education to students.
11. Schools of the Millennium (SOM) is one of the most important projects done by the government to help improve public education. Each classroom has a digital whiteboard, kitchens, recreational areas, eating areas, science labs, virtual libraries, and computer labs with broadband internet<sup>23</sup>. While this is a great achievement by the government in bettering public education, teachers feel that these resources are not utilized effectively due to the lack of teacher training and even lack of enough teachers in some cases<sup>24</sup>. In order for these resources to be fully effective, Ecuador should give more effective trainings to the teachers, in order for them to provide high-quality education to their students.

### Education for people with disabilities

12. The Government Advisor and Chair of the National Council for Disability Equality of Ecuador said that in Ecuador there were 38,446 children and adolescents with disabilities, of school age from three to eighteen years, who were included in the national education system<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Villafuerte, J., Perez, L., Boyes, E., Mena, L., Pinoargote, J., Riera, A. R., Soledispa, E., & Delgado, D. (2018). *Challenges of the basic education system in Ecuador; the voices of the future teachers*.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Fajardo-Dack M Tammy. (2016). *Teacher Disempowerment in the Education System of Ecuador*

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations. (30 August 2019). *Experts of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stress in dialogue with Ecuador that segregation in education does not work*

Experts were concerned about persons with intellectual disabilities attending special schools, emphasizing that segregation does not work<sup>26</sup>. This was mentioned because after special schools, there are no special jobs, special communities or a special society for persons with intellectual disabilities. They emphasized that the attention and focus should be put on inclusive education instead<sup>27</sup>.

13. People with disabilities can often feel excluded when attending school. Teachers may not always be equipped or trained to teach students with hearing, visual, or mental disabilities, and buildings may not have ramps or spaces for students who have physical disabilities. In Ecuador, these types of deficiencies have prevented 56% of children with disabilities from attending schools, according to data from the Ministry of education<sup>28</sup>. It is estimated that only 11.9% of those living with disabilities attend high school, and for those who do attend, the lack of specialized services reduces their likelihood of finishing their secondary education<sup>29</sup>.
14. With regards to the teachers, many believe that they are not ready to have students with disabilities in the classroom, due to a high number of barriers and insufficient academic training to cope with different disabilities<sup>30</sup>. They also believe that it is not just the teachers, but also the students and the schools that are not fully prepared to have students and classmates with disabilities<sup>31</sup>. The best way to help students, schools, and teachers to be better prepared to help students with disabilities is to focus on inclusive education, which enhances social and physical inclusion, and cultivates empathic values.

### Poverty and discrimination in Education

15. It is well established that poverty has a large effect on a student's ability to learn. Poverty affects factors such as students' health and well-being, literacy and language development, access to physical and material resources, and level of mobility<sup>32</sup>. Currently, there are regions in Ecuador, particularly rural areas, where 50% of children and adolescents live in poor households, without access to portable water, sanitation or health care facilities<sup>33</sup>. 35% of Ecuadorians living in rural areas live in overcrowded housing<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Plata, Gabriel. (2021). *Ecuador's bet on inclusion*

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Moreno-Rodriguez, Ricardo., Lopez Luis Jose., Carnicero David Jose., Garrote Inmaculada., Sanchez Sergio. (2017). *Teachers' Perception on the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in the Regular Education Classroom in Ecuador*

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Budge, Kathleen & Parrett William. (2016). *How Does Poverty Influence Learning?*

<sup>33</sup> Humanium. *Children of Ecuador – Realizing children's rights in Ecuador*

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

16. Broken Chalk congratulates Ecuador on their efforts to fight against illiteracy and child labor, since 97% of children between the ages 5 and 17 years old go to school<sup>35</sup>. However, school dropout rates are still a problem, with the two most vulnerable groups being pregnant teenagers and indigenous populations, which have the lowest completion rates in their secondary studies<sup>36</sup>. In regards to bullying and violence at school, almost a third of children and teenagers suffer violent treatment or disciplinary punishments. This rises alarmingly among mixed-race and indigenous children, of whom 42% suffer this form of violence<sup>37</sup>.
17. Afro-Ecuadorian children are often subject to discrimination in access to education<sup>38</sup>. In some cases, parents are illegally required to pay a sum of money to enrol their child at school, a school that in principle should be free of charge<sup>39</sup>. Many children coming from poor families, predominately Afro-Ecuadorian and Indigenous, leave school to provide financial support to their families<sup>40</sup>.
18. Public schools in urban zones often present conditions that hinder learning, such as large class size and shortage of teaching staff<sup>41</sup>. There is only one teacher for each level, which is composed of 50 to 60 students. Sometimes there are not enough number of classrooms for each grade level so children from two different grades are taught in the same classroom<sup>42</sup>.

### Sexual Violence in Education

19. Between 2015 and 2017, there were 4,584 reports of sexual abuse in Ecuadorian schools, with teachers registered as the main aggressors<sup>43</sup>. Three out of 10 adolescents in Latin America have suffered from sexual harassment in schools, and 1.1 million girls within the region have suffered some form of sexual violence<sup>44</sup>.
20. Although Ecuador has taken important steps to handle the issue and expedite justice since 2017, the policies and protocols are not adequately carried out by many schools<sup>45</sup>. Human Rights Watch found that teachers, school staff, janitors, and school bus drivers have committed sexual violence against children of all ages, including children with disabilities, in public or private schools<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Universal Periodic Review 13<sup>th</sup> session. (2012). *Situation on the Rights of the Child in Ecuador*

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Coral, Martinez Catalina & Martinez, Cecilia Carmen. (2021). *Sexual Violence against girls in schools as a public health issue*

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2020). *Ecuador: High Levels of Sexual Violence in Schools*

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

21. Ecuador declared a zero-tolerance policy requiring teachers, school counsellors, and other staff to report allegations of sexual violence within 24 hours. Human Rights Watch found severe gaps in the carrying out of this policy and ensuring adherence to its binding protocol<sup>47</sup>.

## II. Recommendations for the use of Education to improve current challenges

### Sexual health and education

22. Sex Education is an important method of preventing adolescent pregnancies, STIs, and being victims of gender-based violence. In Ecuador, 20% of all women aged 15 to 19 become pregnant before the age of 20, and the leading cause of death among young women in developing countries are complications associated with pregnancy<sup>48</sup>. An informed and robust Sex Education program can help prevent unsafe abortions, complications and deaths in young women from unplanned pregnancies, reducing the risk of STIs, while also promoting the correct use of birth control contraception such as condoms, or birth control pills.
23. Sex Education is also a good tool to reduce machismo and prevent possible cases of violence and sexual abuse against children and adolescents<sup>49</sup>. Teachers add that unfortunately, these subjects are still considered taboo in many households, despite the fact that there are minors that have been sexually active from as young as 13 years of age<sup>50</sup>.
24. Broken Chalk recommends that Sex Education programs include information about safe contraceptive use, possible complications of unplanned pregnancies, and the importance of consent. It is also important to create an environment within the classroom where students can feel comfortable to ask questions, and attempt to reduce the taboo and stigma surrounding sex and sexuality.

### Inclusive education for people with disabilities

25. Broken Chalk recommends that Ecuador continue to focus on implementing inclusive education in schools, both public and private. Inclusive education is very important because it can help teachers feel more prepared to have students with intellectual disabilities in the classroom, and it promotes feelings of empathy from their fellow classmates.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Persson, Evelina & Englund, Linnea. (2017). *Young women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Ecuador*

<sup>49</sup> ArchyWorldys. (2021). *Teachers find it difficult to talk about sex education in the classroom*

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

26. Broken Chalk also recommends that the infrastructure of schools be better equipped for students with physical disabilities as well. Ramps and larger spaces should be installed for students who use wheelchairs, for example.
27. Better training programs for teachers must be provided, as teachers previously expressed their concern over their ability to teach students with various disabilities. Trainings should include information on the different forms of disabilities, both physical and intellectual, and how to structure the curriculum so that these students are included. Trainings should be given by professionals who have experience with teaching students with disabilities, as they could share best practices.
28. Extra help in schools if possible, would also be helpful not just for the teachers but for students with disabilities as well. Extra help such as a centre for tutoring, or extra help outside the classroom.

### Discrimination in Education

29. Broken Chalk recommends that school curriculums should include information about the history of indigenous population and Afro-Ecuadorian communities. Their history should be accurately taught in the classroom, and their culture should be discussed with the class. By doing so, it is possible that children can learn about their own history, and ideally reduce the perception that indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian communities are below them.
30. Violence against Afro-Ecuadorian children is an urgent matter that needs to be addressed adequately. There needs to be a zero-tolerance policy for these acts of violence, and fellow classmates and teachers alike should be encouraged to report any cases of violence or discrimination.
31. Schools in rural areas should be staffed with more teachers, and teachers need more support in order to provide high quality education. Teachers need better trainings on how to use new technologies that are provided by SOM for example, and in rural areas, they need less students per classroom. One teacher cannot be in charge of multiple classes that have 50 or 60 students per class, otherwise students will fall behind and the teacher will burn out. If possible, there needs to be more classrooms, so that students can be spread out more easily.



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