

# 'RIGHT TO EDUCATION'

Submission to the Universal Periodic  
Review of the United Nations Human  
Rights Council

4<sup>th</sup> Cycle – 43<sup>rd</sup> Session

## Country Review: Israel

October 2022  
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**Broken Chalk** is an Amsterdam-based NGO established in 2020 which focuses on monitoring and minimizing human rights violations in education all around the world. Our goal is to contribute to promoting 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 polarization, and tackling inequalities in the field of education.

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## I. Introduction

### The Israeli education system

1. The 1949 Compulsory Education Act was the first official legal action taken in Israel to enforce compulsory education, ensuring free school attendance for children, for 9 years, from age 5.<sup>1</sup> In 2009, compulsory education was extended until grade 12, and in 2016 compulsory school enrolment was lowered to age 3.<sup>2</sup>
2. State-funded Israeli general education works along a four-stream system, which provides secular, religious, and ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) educational institutions for Jewish Israelis. There are Arabic schools for the Arab, Bedouin, Christian Arab, and Druze Israeli minorities.<sup>3</sup>
3. Hebrew-speaking schools are managed by Jewish principals while schools teaching in Arabic are coordinated by Arab principals. However, all principals are subjugated to a centralised Israeli administration, funding, and curriculum which ensures similar requirements and teacher-salaries.<sup>4</sup>
4. Despite compulsory education starting at age 3, 47% of children are already enrolled in an educational institution before age 2.<sup>5</sup> 99% of children between 3 and 5 was enrolled in an educational institution in 2019.<sup>6</sup>
5. It is commendable that more than half of the population, between 25 and 64 years-old, held tertiary attainment in 2019.<sup>7</sup>
6. Broken Chalk is pleased to note that Israel spends 6.7% of its GDP on education which is above the 4.9% OECD average.<sup>8</sup>
7. Between 2003 and 2017 dropout rates have fallen from 9.9% to 7.6% which is particularly remarkable since it 'occurred primarily among the weakest students in the system'.<sup>9</sup>
8. Despite all the investments and successes, the Israeli educational sector does show severe issues. Problems in the system are often related to the inequalities of the four-stream educational system, socioeconomic inequalities, and discrimination based on ethnicity.
9. For instance, Israel has one of the highest gaps in achievement, based on the best and worst performing students in PISA, among OECD countries.<sup>10</sup>
10. Furthermore, enrolment numbers decline as studies proceed: enrolment amounted to 96.5% between age 6 to 14, while it was of 66.1% between age 15 to 19, in 2019.<sup>11</sup>
11. As Israel has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC] in 2005, the state must commit to carry out its duties and obligations which include the insurance of free compulsory education and equal opportunity for all children. Thus, Broken Chalk urges Israel to address all issues which prevent the realisation of the rights enshrined in the CRC.

### Overview of the previous UN UPR cycle

12. In its national report prepared for the 2018 UN UPR, Israel particularly emphasized its efforts to ensure human rights in its territories, including access to education. Israel promised to work for closing educational gaps, and for the integration of minorities into the Israeli society, also through education.<sup>12</sup> Efforts are reflected in the *Resolution* project from 2014-2017 targeting Druze communities to improve their education, and in the efforts to provide state funded higher education for the Arab communities through the CHE academic colleges.
13. Israel took further steps in expanding the number of years spent in education by lowering the obligatory school entrance age to age 3 and expanding after-school day-care services in 2017.<sup>13</sup>

14. In the previous UPR cycle, Israel received 5 recommendations regarding the right to education, focusing on narrowing the inequality gap among different ethnicities. Israel supported 3 of these recommendations, however it rejected 2 which regarded the issues existing in Area C of the occupied territories in West Bank (see section IV.).

## II. Ethnic discrimination in Education

15. Israel is a multi-ethnic, multinational, and multicultural state; 74% of the population is Jewish, 21% is Arab, 1.5% is Ethiopian, and the remaining 3.5% are identified as “others”. The composition of the Arabic-speaking population can be further categorised according to religious beliefs: 85% Muslim, 7.5% Christian, and 7.5% Druze.<sup>14</sup>
16. Issues related to ethnicity are prominent in Israel especially due to the historic clash between Jewish and Arabic groups. The Arabic-speaking minorities’ national identity rarely associate with Israel, whose political leadership stresses the state’s Jewish character, while refusing to recognise Arab or Palestinian national identities. Moreover, Israeli authorities frequently discriminate them in several fields, including education, since Arabs are often perceived as a security threat due to the historical conflict.<sup>15</sup>
17. Although the four-stream school system seemingly satisfies different types of cultural and religious demands, the curricula of Arab schools are largely organized by a Zionist narrative, omitting Arab historical, geographical, and cultural perspectives.<sup>16</sup>
18. Arabs are underrepresented in educational decision-making bodies, as well as in educational planning and supervision positions; this prevents the interests of the Arabic-community to be asserted both at national and local levels.<sup>17</sup>
19. Thus, leaders of Arab schools have little influence on decisions concerning their institutions, as most educational policies are top-down determined.<sup>18</sup>
20. Inequality is also prominent between Jewish and Arab schools when it comes to budget allocation, improvement of learning programmes, or providing programmes supporting pupils and students who have fallen behind or of students with disabilities.<sup>19</sup>
21. Israel allocates approximately a 30% smaller budget to the Arab school system in population ratio. Differences in school budgets lead to inequality of opportunity and quality issues, as Arab schools often have ‘fewer classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and qualified teachers’.<sup>20</sup> These factors also result in larger classes, which hinders the learning of students.
22. In addition, Arabic-speaking students are also required to learn Hebrew as an additional subject, yet schools do not receive extra funding to support their learning.<sup>21</sup>
23. These factors contribute to an average lower achievement of Arab pupils and students on both national and international exams.<sup>22</sup> Arab students are 30% less likely to receive a matriculation certificate (Bagrut) which is needed to enter higher education, certain courses or even jobs.<sup>23</sup>
24. The Israeli government did make some steps to tackle the educational gap between Arab and Jewish Israeli children. They implemented a 3-year intervention project (*Challenges*) to improve the historical, cultural, academic literacy language skills and knowledge of future teachers in Arabic schools as well as to increase their societal engagement.<sup>24</sup>
25. Although Broken Chalk recognises that this was an important step towards equality, Arab schools still face significant cultural and ethnic discrimination which issues are needed to be further addressed by the Israeli government.

26. Ethiopian students also experience significant discrimination. Although most Ethiopian students attend Jewish religious schools, the legitimacy of the minority's Jewish identity is often questioned, notably by Orthodox Jewish communities, due to their relatively recent presence in Israel (and their darker skin colour).<sup>25</sup>
27. Discrimination based on race, sometimes even by teachers, combined with low socioeconomic background widens the educational gap between Jewish and Ethiopian Israelis and results in a considerably large dropout rate (10.5% official dropout and 23% hidden dropout) among Ethiopian students.<sup>26</sup>
28. Furthermore, only '30% of twelfth-grade Ethiopian students earn the Bagrut at the level required for university entrance, compared to 65% of the general Jewish student population', further hindering their social mobility.<sup>27</sup>

### III. Socioeconomic differences affecting Education

29. Low socioeconomic background tends to be correlated with higher dropout rates. Furthermore, the parents' level of education can be determinant, the higher the number of years the parents attended school, the lower their children's chances to drop out.<sup>28</sup>
30. Funding for general education institutions is allocated by local governments, thus schools with lower population-density areas are frequently underfunded.
31. In Israel, socioeconomic inequalities majorly exist along ethnic lines.
32. Due to historical and contemporary factors, the Arab population is generally poorer and undereducated than Jewish Israelis.<sup>29</sup> Thus, fundings for Arab schools in Arab neighbourhoods can be 10 or even 20 times lower than in wealthier areas.<sup>30</sup>
33. The population of Arab areas is increasing, which means a significant rise in pupil numbers in Arab schools. In light of this, the redistribution of funding is becoming urgent to ensure quality education to all students in these areas.<sup>31</sup>
34. Financial issues affect the quality of Arab schools negatively, which can have a demotivating effect on Arabic-speaking students to continue their studies. It is promising, however, that dropout rates have significantly declined since 2003 among Arabic-speaking students, falling from 15.8% to 8.1%.<sup>32</sup>
35. Furthermore, their lower chances to gain a matriculation certificate hinder Arabic-speaking students' social mobility by preventing their admission into higher education institutions which could lead to higher wages. This sustains their low socioeconomic status, resulting in a vicious circle of status immobility for generations.
36. Due to their strict rules and lifestyle, the ultra-Orthodox Haredi Jewish community also tends to have lower socioeconomic status and to live in segregation.<sup>33</sup> Haredi boys, from age 14, often transfer to *yeshiva* schools which are not supervised by the Israeli Ministry of Education. These schools follow a specific curriculum focused on religious studies and giving little space to regular school subjects.
37. Hence, Haredi students usually underperform, compared to other Jewish Israelis, in international exams. Neither do they attain the Bagrut, preventing them from entering higher education.<sup>34</sup>
38. Broken Chalk welcomes the Israeli government's efforts to cover 100% of the funding with an additional stipend for each student at each *yeshiva* school which adopts core subjects in its curriculum, like mathematics or English.<sup>35</sup> These efforts can significantly improve the social mobility of Haredi students and give them better chances to pursue higher education and higher paying jobs.

#### IV. Educational challenges in Area C

39. Area C of the occupied West Bank territories hosts approximately 325 thousand Jewish Israeli, 180 thousand Palestinian, and 20 thousand Bedouin and other shepherding Israelis.<sup>36</sup>
40. The area is majorly controlled by Israeli authorities [IA], while the Palestinian Authority [PA] has restricted roles, such as overseeing the coordination of healthcare and education for the non-Israeli population. Nevertheless, Israel still has responsibilities in the education sector in Area C as international humanitarian law requires occupying states to ensure human rights and dignified living conditions for people subjected to the occupation.<sup>37</sup>
41. Israeli control limits non-Israeli settlement and certain activities, such as construction, in Area C. These measures often leave non-Jewish villages without basic utilities and services, such as water, electricity, healthcare, education, or appropriate public transportation and roads.<sup>38</sup>
42. Demolition of settlements or relocation of population has largely affected both the Palestinian and Bedouin populations.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Bedouin villages are often not acknowledged as official settlements, hindering their access to basic utilities and services.<sup>40</sup>
43. Despite the Israeli government's lack of direct influence on non-Jewish education in the region, several factors that fall under the responsibility of Israel, such as infrastructural matters, prevent Palestinian and Bedouin children from attending school in appropriate conditions, or from attending at all.
44. The demolition of settlements endangers educational institutions as well, while new schools can rarely be built due to the restriction of non-Jewish construction. This leaves entire villages without any form of educational services. In 2012 alone, 37 schools were facing demolition because they were built without a permit from Israeli authorities.<sup>41</sup>
45. These circumstances negatively influence the quality of education which results in common disinterest in education among children in Area C.<sup>42</sup>
46. Furthermore, the lack of infrastructure induces unemployment, widening the socioeconomic gap between Jewish and non-Jewish Israelis in the area.<sup>43</sup> Although education is free, some poorer families cannot afford school equipment, basic needs, such as shoes, or public transportation.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, children often need to help their parents at work or at home, preventing them from attending school.<sup>45</sup>
47. It is challenging for non-Jewish Israeli children to physically get to school, as public transportation and school buses are limited in the area.<sup>46</sup> 189 out of 532 settlements do not even have primary schools at all.<sup>47</sup> This means that many children have to walk up to two hours each way to get to school,<sup>48</sup> which often becomes impossible when weather conditions are hostile.<sup>49</sup>
48. Furthermore, it is often unsafe for small children to travel alone to school due to frequent atrocities targeting Palestinian and Bedouin children, some of which are committed at military checkpoints which children often need to cross to get to school.<sup>50</sup>
49. During school raids, the Israeli military often arrests students and confiscates school equipment; which is unacceptable.
50. These dangers discourage parents to send their children to school, especially their daughters.<sup>51</sup>
51. Girls' education is particularly endangered as some traditional societal norms prohibit them to travel alone, hence when no male-family member can accompany them they

cannot attend school.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, early marriage, or the need for them to stay home to help take care of their grandparents or siblings with disabilities, results in many girls never attending or failing to finish their education.<sup>53</sup>

52. These factors all play into the high dropout rates in the Area, while the ones who can continue with their studies often do this in poor-equipped educational institutions.<sup>54</sup> Dropout rates are particularly high among Bedouin children: only 32% of them get a matriculation certificate compared to 68% of the rest of the population.<sup>55</sup>
53. Education in Area C lacks the adequate financial resources. Most financial support arrives from international organisations, such as the USAID, UNRWA and the Middle East Quartet.<sup>56</sup> However, these organisations and the PA need to complete prolonged bureaucratic procedures to finance projects and receive permit from IA. These difficulties frequently result in organisations abandoning their projects or to significant delays in project implementation.<sup>57</sup>

## V. Educational challenges and the COVID-19 pandemic

54. Israel closed its educational institutions due to the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 and continued to provide education through remote teaching.
55. Although there is no accurate data on dropout numbers resulting from the pandemic, remote teaching made education inaccessible for thousands of children, particularly those with lower socioeconomic background.<sup>58</sup> These households often lacked the basic facilities needed for online education (computers, internet access, or even electricity).
56. Students with low socioeconomic status are more likely to need assistance or extra attention from teachers. Thus, the education of these children was at particular risk during the pandemic.<sup>59</sup>
57. Arab and Haredi families often bare lower socioeconomic status, while they also tend to have larger families with multiple children. The pandemic particularly affected these families, since even if they had the necessary facilities for online education, they rarely had enough computers for all children in their families.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, internet usage is forbidden for Haredi children for religious reasons, thus online education was particularly problematic for them, and some schools simply refused to stop in-person teaching.<sup>61</sup>
58. Bedouin children frequently live in tents without any electricity, internet access, and computers.<sup>62</sup> Around 100,000 Bedouin students and around 2,000 Bedouin college students from the Negev had severe difficulties attending school at the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>63</sup>
59. The pandemic thus deepened the existing educational gap in Israeli society.

## VI. Recommendations

Broken Chalk recommends Israel to:

60. tackle the achievement equality gap by ensuring equal funds, equipment, and circumstances to all schools regardless of ethnicity;
61. continue with its efforts started with the project *Challenges*, to ensure that state education for Israel's Arabic-speaking communities fulfils the students cultural, social, and educational needs;
62. increase the influence of Arab schools' leadership over decision-making that concerns their institutions so they can work for greater equality in satisfying Arabic children's needs in educational, cultural, and religious terms;

63. focus on preventing discrimination towards the Ethiopian community especially in its educational institutions and set up programmes which help them catch-up with the national average of educational achievements as well as facilitate their integration into society;
64. allocate extra funds towards encouraging and financially supporting students from lower socioeconomic background to prevent potential dropouts and facilitate their social mobility;
65. immediately focus on fulfilling its obligations of ensuring the human rights of the population in the occupied West Bank territories by taking legislative and financial steps which ensure infrastructural necessities for the Arab population, both in terms of public spaces with particular attention to educational institutions and private homes. The demolition of schools, settlements, and other infrastructural elements and services in Area C must stop;
66. ease its bureaucratic procedures for organisations providing financial aid for communities in Area C;
67. provide a computer for each child from the lowest income households and to ensure adequate infrastructure for digital learning.

- <sup>1</sup> Krief, Tomer. "The Compulsory Education Law in Israel and Liquidity Constrains." *Israel Economic Review* 7, no. 1 (2009), 79.
- <sup>2</sup> Center for Israel Education. "Compulsory Education Law Is Implemented." CIE, September 18, 2022. <https://israeled.org/compulsory-education-law/#:~:text=The%20Compulsory%20Education%20Law%20which>. (Accessed 19 September 2022).
- <sup>3</sup> OECD. "Education GPS - Israel - Overview of the Education System (EAG 2019)." [gpseducation.oecd.org](https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=ISR&treshold=10&topic=EO), 2021. <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=ISR&treshold=10&topic=EO> (Accessed 20 September 2022).
- <sup>4</sup> Da'as, Rima'a and Alexander Zibenberg. "Conflict, control and culture: implications for implicit followership and leadership theories." *Educational Review* 73, no.2 (2021), 199.
- <sup>5</sup> OECD. "Education Policy Outlook: Israel." OECD, 2016. <https://www.oecd.org/israel/Education-Policy-Outlook-Country-Profile-Israel.pdf>. (Accessed 19 September 2022), 4.
- <sup>6</sup> OECD. "Education GPS - Israel - Overview of the Education System (EAG 2019)." [gpseducation.oecd.org](https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=ISR&treshold=10&topic=EO), 2021. <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=ISR&treshold=10&topic=EO> (Accessed 20 September 2022).
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- <sup>8</sup> OECD. "Education Policy Outlook: Israel." OECD, 2016. <https://www.oecd.org/israel/Education-Policy-Outlook-Country-Profile-Israel.pdf>. (Accessed 19 September 2022), 4.
- <sup>9</sup> Yanay, Guy, Hadas Fuchs, and Nachum Blass. "Staying in School Longer, Dropping out Less: Trends in the High School Dropout Phenomenon." Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel, 2019.
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- <sup>12</sup> Israel. "National Report Submitted in Accordance with Paragraph 5 of the Annex to Human Rights Council Resolution 16/21\* - Israel." Israel, January 2018, 7-8.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, 14.
- <sup>14</sup> Amasha, Marcel, Ainat Guberman, and Ruth Zuzovsky. "Citizenship education to promote civic engagement among Arabic speaking student teachers in Israel." *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*. (2022), 4.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid, 189.
- <sup>16</sup> Reingold, Roni, and Lea Baratz. "Arab School Principals in Israel – between Conformity and Moral Courage." *Intercultural Education* 31, no. 1 (November 20, 2019), 88.
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- <sup>19</sup> Da'as, Rima'a and Alexander Zibenberg. "Conflict, control and culture: implications for implicit followership and leadership theories." *Educational Review* 73, no.2 (2021), 199.
- <sup>20</sup> Zeedan, Rami, and Rachel Elizabeth Hogan. "The Correlation between Budgets and Matriculation Exams: The Case of Jewish and Arab Schools in Israel." *Education Sciences*, 12, no.554 (2022), 2.
- <sup>21</sup> Resh, Nura, and Nachum Blass. "Israel: Gaps in Educational Outcomes in a Changing Multi- Ethnic Society." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Race and Ethnic Inequalities in Education*, edited by Peter A. J. Dworkin and A. Gary Stevens, 631–94. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 671.
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- <sup>26</sup> Ibid, 658

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- <sup>38</sup> Ibid, 5.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid, 20, 44.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid, 11.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid, 22.
- <sup>42</sup> UNICEF. "State of Palestine: Country Report on Out-of-School Children." UNICEF, July 2018, 3.
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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>50</sup> OHCHR. "United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory | Access to Education in Area c of the West Bank." United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory, July 4, 2017. <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/access-education-area-c-west-bank>. (Accessed 20 September 2022).

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