



# ***RIGHT TO EDUCATION***

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

4<sup>th</sup> Cycle – 44<sup>th</sup> Session

## **Country Review: Republic of Azerbaijan**

January 2023  
by Ruwaifa Al-Riyami



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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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## I. Introduction

1. Broken Chalk is an Amsterdam-based non-profit human rights organisation focusing on the global development of human rights and education. By submitting this report, Broken Chalk hopes to contribute to the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and further the efforts made by the Republic of Azerbaijan to structure its education sector continually and positively.
2. In its third UPR cycle, the Republic of Azerbaijan received 19 human rights and education recommendations from 15 reviewing countries. Azerbaijan had diligently received and responded to some suggestions in its follow-up mid-term report of the 2018 UPR.
3. Obstacles to education still exist in Azerbaijan with the surfacing of COVID-19 challenges worldwide. According to national statistics, education in Azerbaijan needs more inclusivity and non-discrimination policies.
4. Over the past five years, from 2015 to the present, the expenditure on Education varied between 8.1 to 9.1 AZN. As of 2021, state expenditure is at 8.29% of GDP.<sup>i</sup> This figure is higher than in 2013 and 2014, at 7.5% and 8.3%, respectively.<sup>ii</sup>

## II. Quality and Access to Education in the Azerbaijan System

5. Over the past 20 years, the government of Azerbaijan has persistently encountered issues regarding equitable access to quality education. This is mainly due to the collapse of the USSR, which prompted educational reform which neglected autonomy in education. The government has had strict control over higher education institutes (HEI). In 2009-2013, the State Program on Reforms in Higher Education allowed subsidies to private HEIs.<sup>iii</sup>
6. Restriction to access education in Azerbaijan is linked to two factors: inaccessibility to lower-level education in rural areas and socioeconomic and geographical limitations to higher education.<sup>iv</sup> The low public expenditure on education exacerbates this, as the wealthy in Azerbaijan spend 40% of their income on education compared to low-income families, who spend around 20%.<sup>v</sup>
7. In an attempt to increase access to education, the government of Azerbaijan extended educational protection to those who lost their parents or whose parents were deprived of parenting rights, with higher scores in university admission examinations, the following protection: free-of-charge education in municipal and private higher teaching, stipends, and accessible transportation.<sup>vi</sup>
8. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that Azerbaijan has the lowest isolation index between socio-economically disadvantaged and high-achieving students. This means that positively, high achieving and disadvantaged students are more likely to attend the same school.<sup>vii</sup>

9. Data collected by the OECD demonstrate that one of the main hindrances to schools' capacity to provide instruction was the lack of physical infrastructure, followed by the poor quality of existing infrastructure.<sup>viii</sup>
10. Assessment of curricula attempts to aid in improving the quality of education in Azerbaijan; in December 2018, the government provided new guidelines for the school-based assessment of student's knowledge and skills. However, this assessment does not extend to students with disabilities and health issues.<sup>ix</sup>

### III. Inclusivity in the education of the Disabled and the gender aspect.

11. Azerbaijan legislation promotes Gender equality as the government ratified the Convention on Discrimination against Women in 2006. Additionally, the government emphasised monitoring national-level education policies targeted towards women and children, accompanied by an electronic database monitoring information managed by the State Committee.<sup>x</sup>
12. Azerbaijan had attempted to introduce curriculum reform to introduce gender-sensitive curricula and textbooks.<sup>xi</sup> Yet, women are still stereotyped within their societal norms in books and learning materials, such as their roles as nurturing, caregivers, and homemakers. Women are also three times less represented in literature textbooks than men are.<sup>xii</sup>
13. Notably, 90% of textbook graphics depict men in higher achieving positions, such as in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). At the same time, women were still boxed into their stereotypical roles.<sup>xiii</sup>
14. The criterion implemented by the Textbook Approval Board in Azerbaijan appears to have placed insignificant emphasis on gender equality in textbooks, as a recent study in 2019 confirmed that such issues remain.<sup>xiv</sup>
15. The stereotypes of women are further supported by the fact that in the academic years of 2017-2018, 51.8 teachers were female. As for HEI administration and governing positions of 59 rectors of higher education, only eight women are reported, while the other 51 are male.<sup>xv</sup>
16. Inclusive education faces persistent obstacles in Azerbaijan. A core issue in inclusive education for children with disabilities is integration versus inclusivity. Azerbaijan has attempted to distinguish between the two starting with its definition of disabled rights and needs.<sup>xvi</sup>
17. The issue between inclusivity and integration is further fueled by the fact that disabled children are only taught in specialised schools and are not integrated into mainstream schools. This is also accompanied by the fact that teaching professionals for people with

disabilities are only available in technical institutions, further hindering access to education for people with disabilities.<sup>xvii</sup>

18. Additionally, teachers in mainstream schools are not afforded the capacity to handle the workload and responsibility for care for disabled school children. The education curriculum future teaching professionals reiterate this receive, as it does not holistically approach special needs education and inclusivity.<sup>xviii</sup>
19. Furthermore, some teachers reported that they find teaching assistants responsible for educating a disabled child. This reflects the inadequacy of teachers' training in inclusive education and their ability to assess the needs of disabled students.<sup>xix</sup>

#### IV. Azerbaijan's educational system and COVID-19

20. The educational situation in Azerbaijan gradually adapted to the continuity of the pandemic (COVID-19). There were stages by which remote learning was introduced across all levels of education.
21. The effect of the pandemic on schools was financial in nature, as Schools had to invest in the reconstruction of classrooms and pupil distribution. The pandemic meant fewer students could be taught to have a reasonable student-teacher ratio. The schools, therefore, would need to have allocated more teachers and infrastructure simultaneously, and schools did not have the necessary financial resources hence their shutting down.<sup>xx</sup>
22. The pandemic has globally affected students' attendance in schools, whether face-to-face or remote learning; it can be concluded that a significant number of students were unable to access education.<sup>xxi</sup>
23. In Azerbaijan, this is highlighted by the fact that villages and rural areas could not attain a stable internet connection; this is prominent as there has been a significant shift to remote learning during the pandemic.
24. Another issue was the need for more resources such as computers and smartphones in rural areas and the inability to use such devices by some percentage of the population in rural areas. This dramatically affects students' attendance in schools, whether virtual or in-person. Transportation to Baku and other cities had been limited during the shift to remote learning.

## V. Recommendations

25. Broken Chalk recommends that Azerbaijan implement a robust gender criterion for its curricula to ensure gender inclusivity and promote diverse gender roles in its textbooks, school curriculum and extra-curricular activities.
26. It is recommended to review the curriculum pedagogues receive during their learning and teaching training to reinforce a comprehensive and cohesive disability and particular education inclusivity scheme.
27. Azerbaijan should continue to work and coordinate with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the Ministry of Health, and the State Examination Centre State Program on Inclusion to develop inclusive and integrative education for children with disabilities and special needs.
28. Azerbaijan should move to integrate special education into its mainstream education system to enable a smoother transition for people with disabilities in the labour market and all other aspects of the day-to-day life of abled people.
29. Broken Chalk reiterates Azerbaijan's third reviewing cycle recommendation to encourage Azerbaijan to continue funding educational infrastructure and learning materials to ensure that infrastructural limitations do not hinder quality and access to education.
30. Azerbaijan must integrate CEDAW goals in its education and awareness campaigns, such as discouraging violence against women and promoting education to women and girls of all ages.
31. Broken Chalk commends Azerbaijan's investment in technological infrastructure such as computers, laptops, and other devices in its education system; however, accessibility must be further investigated in rural areas and villages with poor networks and limited transportation or physical infrastructure.

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<sup>i</sup> Gubad Ibadoghlu, Higher Education System of Azerbaijan: Country Report, (2021)

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid*

<sup>iii</sup> Rashad Aliyev, Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 'Azerbaijan: How Equitable is access to Higher Education?'

<sup>iv</sup> *ibid*

<sup>v</sup> Gubad Ibadoghlu

<sup>vi</sup> Profile commissioned by NEPC for the Global Education Monitoring Report 2021 - Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia - Inclusion and education: All means all".

<sup>vii</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Education in Eastern Europe and Asia, PISA (2021)

<sup>viii</sup> *ibid*

<sup>ix</sup> *ibid*

<sup>x</sup> *ibid*

<sup>xi</sup> Profile commissioned by NEPC for the Global Education Monitoring Report 2021 - Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia - Inclusion and education: All means all".

<sup>xii</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Education in Eastern Europe and Asia, PISA (2021)

xiii *ibid*

xiv *ibid*

xv Gubad Ibadoghlu

xvi Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

xvii *ibid*

xviii *ibid*

xix *ibid*

xx Zinyat Amirova, Institute of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, PIRLS

xxi *ibid*



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