



**BROKEN
CHALK**

Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the United
Nations Human Rights Council 4th Cycle – 45th Session

Right to Education

Country Review: Congo

Submitting Organization: BROKEN CHALK

July 2023

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

We encourage and support achieving societal peace with our international sponsors and partners by advocating for intercultural tolerance, preventing radicalism and polarisation, and tackling educational inequalities.

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Teenage pregnancy	3
Limited access to quality education	4
Equality and non-discrimination	4
Recommendations	5
References	5

Introduction

1. Broken Chalk is a non-profit organisation with one main goal - To protect human rights in education. The organisation started with a website and articles and is currently working on multiple projects, each aiming to fight human rights violations in the educational sphere. As the UPR is related to human rights violations, inequalities, human trafficking, and other violations, Broken Chalk prepares this article for the fourth Cycle and the specific country – the Congo.
2. During the last Cycle, the delegation put forward 194 recommendations. The Republic of Congo supported 188 recommendations, and the rest they noted. At the adoption of its UPR outcome at Human Rights Council 40 in March 2019 (an increase of 15% concerning the 2nd cycle). Supported recommendations related 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 personsⁱ.
3. The Republic of Congo (Congo) – not to be confused with the Democratic Republic of Congo – is sparsely populated, with over half its population concentrated in the two largest cities and almost half its population under 18 (World Bank, 2019). Child rights in Congo (also known as Congo-Brazzaville) are improving, with good access to education and many legal mechanisms to protect child rights. Significant concerns remain as children who labour, girls, and indigenous children continue to experience serious rights violations and often have difficulty meeting their basic needs.

Teenage pregnancy

4. The Republic of Congo continues to face high teenage pregnancy rates. According to UN Population Fund data, from 2004 to 2020, the adolescent birth rate was 111 per 1,000 teenage girls and women aged 15-19. Recent and clear public data about gender parity in school enrollment in Congo is unavailable. But as of May 2015, disparities in school enrollment between girls and boys had been reduced at the primary level. Yet, gender parity between lower and upper secondary education was far from achieved. Education for many girls suffers as a result of early marriage and pregnancy.
5. The Republic of Congo is among 23 countries in the African Union that lack a policy or law to protect pregnant girls' and adolescent mothers' right to education, based on research by Human Rights Watch. The country's 2016 Girls' Education Strategy recognises the need to protect pregnant students against educational exclusion. Still, it does not specify how the government intends to practically address the challenges faced by pregnant women or adolescent mothers.

Limited access to quality education

6. Some challenges the country faces in the education sector are the under-development of pre-primary opportunities, high repetition rates and large numbers of students per class in primary schools. Moreover, the quality of primary education needs to be improved.
7. Only 60% of children attend secondary school, and higher or vocational education must be enhanced to better respond to market needs. Moreover, significant inequalities remain based on geographical location or ethnicity.

Equality and non-discrimination

8. Children with autism are referred to as "wizards", "bewitched", or "lost" in Congo-Brazzaville, where a school has been set up to promote their "socialisation" and raise awareness of this neurodevelopmental disorder. Located in the heart of Poto-Poto, the most cosmopolitan of Brazzaville's neighbourhoods, the Case Dominique School, run by Catholic nuns, welcomes 350 autistic children and others who have Down's syndrome this year with the hope of giving them similar rights to education.

High cost of education

9. The Constitution of Congo's article 19 ensures the right to education, equal access to education and training, and compulsory universal education until the age 16 (Congolesse Constitution, 2015). The Congolese Observatory for Human Rights (OCDH) has, however, stated that "thousands of children are unable to benefit from this law". Notably, public education is free. Due to a lack of state funding, some schools are pushed to impose fees, and families must pay for books, uniforms, and health insurance.
10. Poverty is often to blame, with high costs of schooling (including indirect fees like transportation and school materials) and lack of social protections like health care putting a strain on families.
11. In all, 23 per cent of children in the first year of primary school attended a preschool, with almost no difference between boys (23 per cent) and girls (24 per cent). The proportion of children who start their schooling at the preschool level is 38 per cent for urban areas versus 7 per cent for rural areas. Household wealth is a significant driver of inequalities in school readiness: the proportion of children currently in the first primary school in a preschool education programme the previous year stands at 5 per cent for those from the poorest households versus 59 per cent for those from the wealthiest.

Recommendations

- 12.** Broken Chalk recognises the improvements in the educational sphere of the Republic of Congo but would like to recommend the following steps to improve their education:
- 13.** Protection of Education from attack.
- 14.** Higher investments should be made in the educational sector to maintain a high level of education
- 15.** Support the learners with lower social status with extra funding.
- 16.** Ensure that pregnant and married students can continue their education after giving birth without impediments or burdensome procedures.
- 17.** Aim towards absolute equality among learners.
- 18.** Fight segregation and treat all ethnicities the same.

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