



**BROKEN
CHALK**

Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the United
Nations Human Rights Council 4th Cycle – 50th Session

Right to Education

Country Review: Belarus

Submitting Organization: BROKEN CHALK

April 2025

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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.

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I. Introduction

1. Broken Chalk has drafted this report as a stakeholder contribution to the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for Belarus. As Broken Chalk's focus is on combating human rights violations within the educational sphere, the contents of this report and the following recommendations will primarily focus on the Right to Education.
2. The country's education system is organized into three schooling structures: preschool, general secondary education, vocational training, and higher education. Preschool is not required, and only 70% of children attend it. General secondary education is mandatory beginning at the age of six. All students must complete a basic education curriculum through ninth grade. After completing basic education, students have the option of attending a professional technical institution (also known as vocational training) to work towards their professional certificate. However, the majority of students decide to stay in high school, which is a total of 11 years. Completion of high school and passing final exams, or holding a professional certificate from a technical institution, allows students to apply to university. There are two official languages in the education system: Belarusian and Russian.ⁱ
3. As of the 2023/2024 academic year, Belarus had over 8,000 educational institutions that provided education for more than 3 million children and students, supported by approximately 430,000 education staff members. Belarus has one of the highest literacy rates globally, with a rate of more than 99.8% among individuals aged 15 and above. This achievement underscores the state's commitment to prioritizing education as a fundamental human right and a vital catalyst for economic and social development.ⁱⁱ
4. Although Belarus enshrines the right to free preschool and secondary education in its constitution, some economic disparities hinder access to quality education with adequate facilities. Rural areas face challenges in ensuring sufficient coverage for preschool-aged children. While preschool coverage for children aged 3–6 years increased nationally from 94.7% in 2015 to 98.3% in 2019, rural areas continue to lag, with a rise from 66.2% to 69% during the same period.ⁱⁱⁱ
5. Belarus emphasises a humanistic approach and universal values in its education policies, but there are some concerns about aligning the education system with global standards. The vocational education sector struggles to meet labour market demands, which affects the quality and relevance of education for many students.^{iv}
6. Belarus has taken several steps to enhance the quality of education. Efforts include modernising the vocational education system by incorporating digital skills and entrepreneurship into the curriculum. The government plans to increase investments in teacher training and infrastructure to enhance the overall learning environment for students from more disadvantaged economic backgrounds. According to the 2018 PISA assessment, socioeconomically advantaged students outperformed their disadvantaged peers in reading by 102 points. This exceeds the average difference of 89 points between these groups across OECD countries. Continued measures of investment in more underprivileged communities reflect Belarus's commitment to ensuring its education system meets the evolving needs of both students and the labour market.^v

II. Brief overview of the last UN-UPR cycle

7. Belarus was last reviewed in May 2020. The country received 284 recommendations, of which 143 were supported and 141 noted. Regarding the Right to Education, 11 recommendations were made, all of which were supported by the state.^{vi}
8. Among the topics of remarks were to continue efforts to ensure equal access to education, including primary one, which is free of charge, to strengthen the rights of people with disabilities, to improve school attendance among Roma children, and to verify that the rights of women and children are protected.^{vii}
9. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern over the significant percentage of Roma children not attending school, despite the country's high literacy rate. The Human Rights Committee recommended that Belarus strengthen its efforts to guarantee equal access to education and adequate standards for all children in the country.^{viii}
10. The Committee on the Rights of the Child and UNESCO encouraged Belarus to continue strengthening its policies for people with disabilities to ensure inclusive education and integration for everyone, particularly in higher education.^{ix}
11. Following these recommendations, Belarus implemented a 5-year education modernisation project, aiming to improve the teaching and learning environment and the information on labor market relevance of higher education. This plan aimed to improve learning conditions for children with disabilities and foster a more inclusive environment.^x
12. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women raised concerns about certain state institutions of higher education, including the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which impose higher admission score requirements for female students and limit the number of women who can be admitted to the institution.^{xi}
13. Belarus introduced policies emphasizing equal access to education for both genders, with a focus on increasing women's participation in higher education. There is an increasing trend of women enrolling in tertiary and secondary education compared to men, constituting 56% of all students.^{xii}
14. The Special Rapporteur stated that around 48% of the Belarusian state consider the Belarusian language as their native language. However, the number of institutions offering education in this language remains limited.^{xiii}
15. Belarus' national UN-UPR report emphasizes the state's commitment to the right to education as a fundamental human right, which is preserved in its Constitution and Education Code, and ensures equal access for all citizens. The country guarantees free preschool education in public institutions. The Ministry of Education has developed a conceptual plan for advancing Belarus' education system, outlining a strategy for progress from 2020 to 2030.^{xiv}
16. As of the 2019/20 academic year, the country had established 2,490 preschools, serving over 436,000 children. In rural areas, 886 preschools provided education for 58,833 children. The action plan implemented in 2019, which involved constructing new preschools, establishing short-stay groups, and engaging private educational

establishments, enabled the addition of 6,631 new preschool places, including those located in rural areas.^{xv}

17. The report highlights the outcomes of the state's efforts, including preschool coverage for children aged 3 to 6 years, which increased from 94.7% in 2015 to 98.3%. Notably, there were improvements in rural areas, where coverage rose from 66.2% to 69% in 2019. The forward-looking plans for 2020 include building more pre-schools, including two private ones with additional available places, introducing alternative forms of pre-school education, and establishing short-stay groups.^{xvi}

III. Gender Inequality

18. While Belarus has achieved high literacy rates, a persisting problem of gender inequality, wage gaps, and underrepresentation of women in leadership roles and specific fields remains, ranking the country 30th out of 188 according to UNESCO.^{xvii}
19. According to the “National Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women)” of the Republic of Belarus, there is an ongoing problem of wage disparity between men and women, with female workers earning 27.3% less than their male counterparts.^{xviii}
20. Belarus should prioritise the digital inclusion of women in the IT sector. In 2017, only 23.2% of women graduated from specialised secondary school institutions in technology and engineering.^{xix}
21. The interviewee agreed with the statement that women are underrepresented figures in the IT community and constantly need to prove themselves as professionals in front of their male colleagues.^{xx}
22. The Belarus Constitution guarantees equal opportunity for women and men in education, work, social, political, and cultural activities, as well as safety and health. Belarusian citizens are given equal access to employment depending on their qualifications and training. However, the interviewee stated that some organisations prefer to hire men over women, due to her possible position as a caregiver in the future.^{xxi}
23. There is a gap in leadership inequality, even though it's slowly improving. Women occupy 32.5% of parliamentary seats and 48.2% of local councils, which are still considered underrepresented in senior decision-making roles. This limitation can restrict their influence on policies affecting gender equality.^{xxii}
24. In the Republic of Belarus, women face the issue of an unpaid labor burden. Employed women spend an average of 26 additional hours per week on unpaid domestic and caregiving tasks compared to men, which limits their professional growth.^{xxiii}

IV. Quality of Education:

25. According to World Bank research, Belarus needed to implement a 5-year plan starting in 2020 that improves the education environment and teaching methods.^{xxiv}

26. There is a need for reform in the educational sector's curriculum. It includes aligning higher education curricula with labor market demands and European Higher Education Area standards. Enhance academic and student mobility, and make Belarusian universities more attractive in global education settings to attract international students. ^{xxv}
27. The interviewee noted that the current education offered in the Belarusian higher institutions doesn't guarantee employment upon graduation, doesn't necessarily meet local labor market demands, and usually requires extra training. ^{xxvi}
28. As for 2018, more than 20% of employers in Belarus report skills gaps as a significant issue for business, particularly in high-growth sectors such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields), highlighting an urgent need to align education with local labor market demands. ^{xxvii}
29. Despite wage benefits for tertiary education, vocational school graduates face limited opportunities, with only a 13.9% wage increase compared to those with basic education, indicating an inability of vocational training to address workforce needs. ^{xxviii}
30. The educational system is still using outdated Soviet-era teaching techniques and its curriculum. Modern educational approaches and appropriate new technologies are not generally adopted in the institutions. ^{xxix}
31. The interviewee mentioned that, in her experience, only Belarusian language and literature were taught in the national language, while all other subjects were taught in Russian. At university, some professors used Belarusian by their own choice but switched to Russian if students struggled to understand or speak it. ^{xxx}
32. The Bologna Process insists on educational reforms, but the introduction of modernised Bachelor's and Master's programs remains incomplete. Key tools, such as the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and learning outcomes, are underdeveloped, making it challenging to align with European higher education standards and objectives. ^{xxxi}

V. Learning Environment and Infrastructure:

33. According to World Bank research, many universities in Belarus lack modern teaching and research facilities. The existing infrastructure does not adequately support the practical training of students. This problem persists in the regions, making it extremely difficult to maintain a typical learning environment for the students. ^{xxxii}
34. Many educational institutions require significant investments to modernize their laboratories and research facilities for enhanced energy efficiency. Outdated energy systems in schools lead to high energy consumption and associated costs, highlighting the need for energy-efficient upgrades. ^{xxxiii}
35. The interviewee stated that the physical infrastructure inside some classrooms can be outdated and potentially hazardous for students, such as malfunctioning ventilation systems or heating issues during the winter season. ^{xxxiv}
36. Many schools in rural Belarus struggle with outdated facilities and insufficient laboratory equipment. It is necessary to provide advanced science technology, enabling children

from small towns and villages to access quality education and a collaborative science learning environment. ^{xxxv}

VI. Recommendations

- 37.** Broken Chalk recommends that the Belarusian government enforce stricter labour regulations, requiring organisations to disclose salary structures and justify pay differences based on qualifications and experience, rather than gender. Public awareness campaigns can educate employees and employers about the importance of equal pay and the benefits of diverse workplaces.
- 38.** Broken Chalk recommends that the government and educational institutions provide mentorship programs and specialized workshops for female students. Collaboration with tech companies to create inclusive opportunities and promote role models in the field will encourage more young women to pursue careers in these areas. Additionally, launching nationwide initiatives such as coding competitions and technology boot camps exclusively for women can boost their skills and confidence. Schools should also integrate technology-focused programs early in education to spark interest among girls and dispel the myth that the STEM field is only suitable for boys.
- 39.** Broken Chalk encourages the government to implement family-friendly workplace policies, such as flexible work hours, remote work options, and affordable childcare services, to help women balance professional and domestic responsibilities. The workplace should ensure adequate maternity leave and provide benefits for multiple-child families, single mothers, and other similar groups. Public campaigns should promote shared household duties, targeting men to take a more active role in caregiving.
- 40.** Broken Chalk emphasises that media campaigns should play a more significant role in challenging harmful gender stereotypes and promoting the image of women as capable leaders and professionals. The introduction of quotas for female representation in senior positions within government and private organisations can accelerate the progress of ensuring gender equality in the state of Belarus. Showcasing success stories of women in various fields can help shift cultural perceptions and encourage young girls to pursue their ambitions.
- 41.** Broken Chalk encourages Belarus to fully implement its 5-year education plan by modernising teacher training programs, adopting innovative pedagogical techniques, and increasing funding for educational infrastructure. Partnering with international organisations such as UNESCO and the World Bank can provide expertise and resources for implementing sustainable reforms.
- 42.** Broken Chalk recommends that Belarusian universities establish career centers that provide job placement services, skills development workshops, and employer networking events to enhance employment outcomes for graduates. These centers can offer students career counseling and direct engagement with local and international companies. Additionally, introducing modernised courses, internships, and training programs that suit industry requirements.

- 43.** Broken Chalk recommends that the Belarusian government reform vocational education to align with market needs by updating programs to include modern technologies and industry-relevant skills. Increasing public awareness about the value of vocational training and its potential for career growth can attract more students to these pathways. Expanding partnerships between vocational schools and businesses will also create possibilities for employment.
- 44.** Broken Chalk encourages the government to prioritise full implementation of the Bologna Process by introducing modernised Bachelor's and master's programs, developing the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), and defining clear learning outcomes for each program. Encouraging mobility through exchange programs and mutual recognition of qualifications with European universities will help Belarus integrate with international education standards.
- 45.** Broken Chalk recommends that the government of Belarus prioritise funding for universities to upgrade teaching spaces, research laboratories, and practical training areas, ensuring they meet modern educational and research standards. Additionally, regional development programs should prioritize improving facilities in underserved areas, thereby ensuring equitable access to quality education nationwide.
- 46.** Broken Chalk recommends that schools and universities undergo energy assessments to identify inefficiencies and implement upgrades that can help save money, such as installing better insulation, upgrading to modern heating systems, and utilising energy-efficient LED lighting. These improvements can be funded through grants or low-interest loans from international organisations, helping to lower energy bills and promote sustainability.

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