



**BROKEN  
CHALK**

Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the United  
Nations Human Rights Council 4<sup>th</sup> Cycle – 47<sup>th</sup> Session

## **Right to Education**



## **Country Review: Qatar**

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**Submitting Organization: BROKEN CHALK**

**March 2024  
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**Broken Chalk** is an NGO committed to addressing human rights violations in the **education sector**. A **multinational team** of dedicated human rights advocates collaborates extensively on researching violations in **every corner of the world**.

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## I. Introduction

1. Broken Chalk compiled the report that follows. This is a stakeholder contribution to the Fourth Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for the state of Qatar. This report will focus on education within Qatar, as Broken Chalk's primary goal is to combat human rights violations in the educational field.
2. This report uses international statistics, studies, and academic papers. Still, it also highlights the contributions of interviewees, local academics, and national studies as indispensable windows into the Qatari education system's workings, challenges, and areas for improvement.
3. Though relying on its wealth of oil and gas resources and large expatriate population, Qatar aims to build a local, highly skilled workforce to maintain its economy eventually. To this end, Qatar focuses extensively on educational policy changes. [i]
4. As expatriate residents constitute 88% of the country's population, many children seek an English-taught education. This has led to a bifurcated education system in Qatar, with most Qatari citizens and some Arabic-speaking immigrants attending public schools. In contrast, most students (immigrants and some Qatari citizens) attend private schools. [ii]
5. The presence of expatriate workers makes private schools fundamental for educating a tremendous and increasing number of students: 200,241 in 2020-21 compared to the 126,256 attending public schools. [iii]
6. Qatar's Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) administers the public education system, which is compulsory for all Qatari citizens. This schooling is divided into four stages: preschool/kindergarten, primary (6 years), preparatory (3 years) and secondary (3 years). The public education system has grown to exceed 209 public schools in 2020/2021, catering to 126,256 students.[iv]
7. Focus on progress in education has been consistent since the early 2000s, starting with commissioning the US-based think tank RAND to assess the education system in 2001 and initiatives such as Education City being started by and expanded by members of the ruling family. Most recently, policies have been geared to encourage the teaching of Qatari history and Arabic. [v]
8. Qatar Foundation, founded in 1995, is a non-profit organisation that foregrounds education, innovation, and sustainable development. Qatar Foundation's impact on education in Qatar is profound, as it operates a network of schools, universities, and research institutions (under the initiative 'Education City') that provide education and research opportunities to students and scholars from Qatar and around the globe. [vi]
9. In line with the findings of the UN's Special Rapporteur on the right to education on her visit to Qatar in 2019, Broken Chalk is delighted to find a dedication amongst stakeholders in Qatar to reaching the National Vision for 2030. In particular, the goal is to "build a modern world-class educational system that provides students with a first-rate education, comparable to that offered anywhere in the world." [vii]
10. Further in line with the Rapporteur's findings, however, Broken Chalk stresses concern about the over-reliance on the private sector for the education of most of the population. A key issue with this is the high cost incurred through private education, which is far from the free education mandated by international human rights law provisions. [viii]

## II. Brief overview of the last UN-UPR cycle

11. In the National Report the State of Qatar prepared for the 2019 periodic review, the state draws attention to its progress towards the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Second National Development Strategy 2018-2022. Qatar declared its aim to boost enrolment in preschools by 15%. Furthermore, the state outlined its efforts to provide educational services for persons with disabilities with the goal of full integration into society. [ix]
12. Quality education was amongst the top five recommendations received by Qatar during the previous cycle, clearly indicating that this is an important point of possible development for the state.[x]
13. Of the 23 recommendations Qatar received on education, ten were regarding gender equality. Recommending states focused on raising awareness of gender equality and domestic violence through education, adopting strategies to promote women's access to higher education and careers, and providing more vocational education opportunities for women. [xi]
14. Another critical focus of the recommendations regarding the right to education was providing quality education to persons with disabilities. Recommending states encouraged Qatar to ensure inclusive and equal education for those with disabilities. [xii] This, however, is a significant area of growth for the state of Qatar: schools are being equipped to be accessible and specialised institutions are being opened. Progress on this issue is ongoing and exponential. [xiii]
15. Further recommendations focused on objectives such as increasing enrolment rates, increasing education funding and ratifying the Convention Against Discrimination in Education. [xiv]
16. Broken Chalk is happy to note that Qatar supported 22 out of the 23 recommendations. [xv]

## III. Socio-Economic Divides and the Public/Private School Dichotomy

17. Qatar has a very significant private/public school divide. Although this can be mainly attributed to the large proportion of immigrant students who require education in English, the dichotomy highlights existing economic disparities and further differences in students' performance and academic results.[xvi]
18. Public schools are inaccessible, and some families find it challenging to meet even these fees. For some migrant families, this results in being divided: the mother and child(ren) remain in their country of origin while the father works in Qatar. This profoundly impacts the family unit and goes against the right to family life. [xvii]
19. Private institutions charge unaffordable fees for many and often exclude necessary expenses such as uniforms, books, and transportation. Some international schools charge over QR 80,000 (about US\$ 22,000) annually. As these schools tend to reach better overall results, a very stark socio-economic divide is established. [xviii]
20. According to the MOEHE, enrolments in private and public schools have increased (from 2011 to 2021) but at starkly different rates. Additionally, the number of graduates from private schools has more than doubled while it has decreased for public schools. Though this

may be owed mainly to an increasing immigrant population, it highlights significant socioeconomic differences between the growing portion of students able to attend private schools and those only able to afford public institutions. [xix]

21. In 2022, the proportion of immigrant students rose to 59%. As with previous increases, this led to a growth of enrolment in private schools as the immigrant families that can afford these institutions prefer them (as well as for language requirements) due to the perceived advantages in opportunities and performance. [xx] This may result in differences in performance found by the 2022 PISA study. This finds that immigrant students, on average, significantly outperform their non-immigrant peers in reading and mathematics. [xxi]
22. These patterns and results are critical indicators of a significant socioeconomic divide across the population of Qatar. Those who can attend private schools benefit from their facilities and staff expertise and face advantages inherent to their economic status. Therefore, those unable to attend private institutions lose out on the benefits of such institutions but, perhaps more importantly, experience disadvantages in their broader living situation, which also impact their educational opportunities. [xxii]

#### IV. Students' Achievement, Transparency and Independence

23. Despite the Qatari government's lack of education reforms and initiatives, according to the PISA test, students score less than the OECD average across subjects. The study finds that 44% of students attained proficiency in maths, 53% in reading and 56% in science, all of which are significantly below average. While 36% of students in Qatar were in the top international quintile of the socioeconomic scale, their average scores were significantly lower than students of similar socioeconomic backgrounds in other countries. Overall, a smaller proportion of students in Qatar were top performers than in OECD averages. Though the root cause is not singular nor easily traced, some structural issues should be addressed. [xxiii]
24. Attendance in pre-primary education can lead to higher future proficiencies. According to the PISA study, 85% of participants in Qatar participated in pre-primary education; this is significantly lower than OECD averages (94%). [xxiv]
25. Moreover, principal and teacher independence also affects overall performance: schools that entrust principals and teachers with critical responsibilities (hiring teachers, choosing learning materials, etc.) perform better overall. In Qatar, however, only 21% of students attended a school where principals were independent (compared to a 60% OECD average), and 24% of students were enrolled in a school where teachers had some independence over teaching materials (compared to a 76% OECD average). [xxv]
26. There are significant regulations in place in public schools in Qatar: teachers are limited to using one approved textbook for each subject, this selection goes through an annual review, and while teachers have the option of incorporating supplementary materials, these too must be approved by a subject coordinator to ensure alignment with religious and cultural values. [xxvi]
27. Organizing activities are also subject to strict regulation: schools must select external events from a list of approximately ten social, cultural, or scientific events endorsed by the Ministry of Education, all intricately tied to the curriculum. When school personnel seek to attend events not enumerated on the prescribed list, formal authorisation must be sought from the Ministry of Education. [xxvii]



28. Regarding private schools, the government scrutinises these institutions, supervising programs, admission criteria, textbooks, and changes in tuition fees. Although MoEHE involvement is often seen as fair and supportive, a more significant deal of independence for school management and teaching staff may improve overall performance. [xxviii]
29. Alongside ministry intervention, the working attitudes in private institutions also significantly impact teaching and performance. Operating with tuition fees, private schools function similarly to businesses: teachers find that schools focus far more on finances than public institutions, which enforces a top-down approach to decisions regarding the school. This also impacts the independence of teachers and students' performance. [xxix]
30. Transparency within schools, across them and with the ministry is also a crucial area for development. Firstly, transparency from the ministry itself is lacking: despite the wealth of initiatives Qatar is working towards implementing and the hands-on approach to many schools, their actions are rarely outlined in easily accessible documents, webpages, or communications. This leaves students and parents/guardians in the dark as to the actions of the ministry in schools, as well as possible opportunities available via them. [xxx]
31. Moreover, schools lack transparency in their inner workings - both within their staff and with parents/guardians of students. Coordination may be lacking across departments and with school management to ensure the assessment and addressing of challenges. In addition, communication with and involvement of parents is often scarce. In situations where students often attend schools that have a different system and curriculum to that which their parents are accustomed to, informing parents of the working of the school is crucial, as lack of information leads to a lack of involvement and, overall, is a detriment to the children's education. Finally, private institutions that request hefty fees often do not outline what the money contributes to and how the school utilises it (this is especially important when fees are regularly raised without justification). [xxxi]
32. Though these issues pertain to public and private institutions differently and are seen more so on the micro-level, some broader policies and practices may be adopted to improve the workings of educational institutions across the board.

## V. Gender Equality

33. Though gender inequality was highlighted as the predominant issue within education in Qatar, Broken Chalk would like to recognise Qatar's efforts in encouraging the education of women and girls through sustained initiatives. Despite there remaining a few hurdles to the equal education of women, the challenge faced by Qatar is now the underperformance of boys and men compared to their female counterparts.
34. Girls perform better, on average, than boys across subjects. According to the PISA test findings, girls outperformed boys in mathematics and reading. Overall, there are also more female than male students completing secondary education. [xxxii]
35. Regarding higher education, women continue to be more present than men. In 2021, substantially more women than men were enrolled in university, with this rate increasing faster than male enrolment. Moreover, women (both Qatari and non-Qatari) comprised 68% of university graduates in 2021. [xxxiii]
36. Addressing recommendations that focus on vocational training and STEM education, Broken Chalk finds that women and girls are encouraged to pursue careers in these areas. MOEHE initiatives are present for both boys and girls to encourage participation in STEM, and though

the government only runs one (male-only) STEM-specialised school, Qatar Foundation offers a similar, mixed-gender program, and the government is looking to build a similar facility for girls. [xxxiv]

37. Regarding higher education, women may experience barriers in pursuing educational opportunities abroad. Thus, men constitute the vast majority of Qataris studying abroad. [xxxv] [xxxvi]
38. The results are easily misinterpreted. When assessing how participation in education is reflected in the workforce, women appear to make up far less of the workforce; however, when considering these statistics, the overall composition of the population must be taken into consideration: the population of Qatar consists of a vast number of migrant workers who can live in Qatar so long as they have a work contract, this is reflected in the unemployment rates of the country. [xxxvii] Men see only a 0.1 unemployment rate, while women see a slightly higher 0.5 rate. This can be attributed to the more significant proportion of non-working female spouses that are permitted to remain in Qatar as dependents of their spouses. Thus, despite men significantly outnumbering women in the construction and manufacturing sectors, there is a broadly even distribution of participation of sexes in each sector. [xxxviii]
39. Moreover, women constitute an almost equal proportion of legislators, senior officials, managers, technicians and associate professionals and outnumber male professionals overall. [xxxix]

## VI. Recommendations

40. Broken Chalk recommends the following measures to address the challenges that Qatar faces in its education system and to promote the right to education for all:
41. Broken Chalk calls on the state of Qatar to allocate more funding to education to reduce the socioeconomic gap in educational opportunities. Broken Chalk recommends that Qatar provide more (and better advertised) scholarships to lessen the financial burden on families; increase funding to public schools for the improvement of facilities and teaching staff; and partially subsidise or regulate private school fees to make them more accessible and less business-minded.
42. Broken Chalk recognises Qatar's effort devoted to enrichment activities and encourages the continuation of these programs via the MOEHE and Qatar Foundation to build skills outside the classroom.
43. Broken Chalk strongly recommends the establishment of public schools that administer education in English and offer diverse curricula, allowing non-Arabic-speaking immigrants to pursue free education, which is their right.
44. Broken Chalk sees the necessity for increased attendance in pre-primary education and recommends that the state of Qatar invest in and promote it, as increased attendance may improve the overall quality of education of its students.
45. Broken Chalk strongly encourages Qatar to promote transparency within schools through the establishment of an accessible medium for the MOEHE to publish their initiatives, opportunities and new directives.
46. Broken Chalk recommends that the state of Qatar further promote transparency by creating policies for schools to foster communication within departments and with parents. Policies

could encourage schools to develop and use parental boards and committees and increase mandatory professional development for school staff.

47. Broken Chalk commends the work of the MOEHE but encourages schools to be allowed greater independence regarding decision-making processes, including hiring, curriculum selection, and use of supplementary materials. This can enhance schools' overall performance.
48. Broken Chalk sees the necessity of improving the enrolment and performance of boys in education and, thus, recommends that Qatar set a quota for male teachers, establish mentorship programs and further enrichment activities, and consider some level of integration of sexes in segregated schools.
49. Broken Chalk also recommends that Qatar continue to build up STEM and vocational training for girls and women, beginning with the opening of a government technical facility for girls, as one exists for boys.
50. Broken Chalk calls on Qatar to encourage women's equal pursuit of educational opportunities abroad and enables the state to offer such opportunities via the MOEHE or Qatar Foundation.
51. Broken Chalk notes and commends Qatar's commitment to progress in education and is confident that sustained improvement will address the above-mentioned challenges.

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