



UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Background Guide 2025

Written by Tobias Willms and Kiera Brown



NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS



Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2025 National Model United Nations Conference in Banff, Canada (NMUN • Canada)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This year's staff members are Director Tobias Willms and Assistant Director Kiera Brown. Tobias completed the First Legal Examination in Germany and thereby obtained a Magister's degree from the University of Heidelberg. He also holds a Master of Laws from Trinity College Dublin and is currently in the final months of his legal clerkship in the district of the Higher Regional Court of Cologne, which included stints at the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations in New York as well as at an international law firm in London. Kiera graduated with distinction from MacEwan University in Edmonton, Canada with her Bachelor's Degree in Criminology, before attending law school in the United Kingdom where she graduated with Honours from the University of Birmingham. Kiera is currently back in Canada where she works at a law firm and will be called to the bar as a lawyer in September 2025.

The topics under discussion for UNESCO are:

1. Indigenous Knowledge and Climate Adaptation
2. The Protection of Cultural Heritage through Language Preservation

UNESCO is an organization that promotes peace and security through international cooperation in education, the sciences, culture, communication, and information. With 194 Member States, UNESCO works to build inclusive knowledge societies, protect cultural and natural heritage, and foster access to quality education for all. UNESCO adopts global standards, coordinates international programs, and supports Member States through policy guidance, research, and capacity-building.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to conduct additional research, explore your Member State's policies in-depth, and examine the policies of other Member States to improve your ability to negotiate and reach consensus. In preparation for the conference, each delegation will use their research to draft and submit a [position paper](#). Guidelines are available in the [NMUN Position Paper Guide](#).

The [NMUN website](#) has many additional resources, including two that are essential both in preparation for the conference and as a resource during the conference. They are:

1. The [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#), which explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not discuss the topics or agenda with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. The [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#), which includes the long and short form of the rules as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the conference itself, please contact the Deputy Secretary-General Ana Williamson at dsg.canada@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the conference!

Sincerely,
Tobias Willms, Director
Kiera Brown, Assistant Director

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Committee Overview

Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialized agency that coordinates with the United Nations through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹ Although it is financially and structurally independent from the United Nations, UNESCO works closely with several United Nations entities to promote common goals, including peace and security and social and economic development.² Per its mandate, UNESCO has coordinated and produced several international standards for the promotion of peace through collaboration in the fields of education, intercultural dialogue, and communication and information.³ Among these are the *Convention Against Discrimination in Education* (1960), the *Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice* (1978), the *ICT Competency Framework for Teachers* (2018), the *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education* (2019), and the *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence* (2022).⁴

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

UNESCO's mandate is derived from Article 1, paragraph 3 of the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945), and is fully defined by the *UNESCO Constitution* (1945).⁵ UNESCO is tasked to promote collaboration among Member States in the fields of education, science, and culture to develop and maintain peace, the rule of law, and mutual respect.⁶ Additionally, UNESCO is responsible for coordinating and supporting the development of knowledge and culture for “economic stability, political security, and general well-being of the peoples of the world.”⁷ UNESCO plays a significant role in coordinating international conventions and setting standards in the areas of education, culture, and science.⁸

Whilst the following list is not exhaustive, the mandate of UNESCO can be summarized as:

- UNESCO **will generally**: make policy recommendations to other bodies and Member States in the fields within its mandate; hold international conferences to deliberate issues and set standards; provide expert research and consultation to the primary organs of the United Nations system and synergize its work with other United Nations bodies through ECOSOC; work with other entities and organizations to implement

¹ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 2024-25*. 2024.

² United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. art. 63.

³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Basic Texts: 2016 edition*. 2016.

⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO (ERI/2010/WS/2)*. 2010. p. 37; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*. 2022; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Global Convention of Higher Education*. N.d.

⁵ United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. Art. 1; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. 1945. p. 5.

⁶ Ibid. Art. V, Art. I, para. 1.

⁷ Conference of Allied Ministers of Education. *Conference for the Establishment of UNESCO (ECO/CONF./29)*. 1945. p. 1.

⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Implementation of standard-setting instruments*. 2015.

programs in matters related to education, science, culture, communication, and information; maintain international standards and records of cultural, natural, and intangible heritage; provide support to Member States in protecting items of cultural significance, improving their education systems, and collaborating in scientific fields.⁹

- UNESCO **will not generally**: set norms and standards in fields other than education, science, and culture; demand action from Member States and other entities on policy development and implementation, typically encouraging and helping facilitate partnerships with organizations instead; request specific action from Member States and other entities on the promotion of access to education, cultural heritage, and scientific programs but instead provide frameworks and policy recommendations.¹⁰

Outlined in its *Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029*, UNESCO further serves as: an international forum for ideas, innovation, and policy advice in education, science, culture, and communication and information; a global center for policy analysis, monitoring, benchmarking, and the development and analysis of data and statistics; a standard-setter that supports their implementation; a facilitator and catalyst for international and regional cooperation.¹¹ UNESCO also plays a significant strategic oversight role with respect to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education) of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.¹²

Governance, Funding, and Structure

UNESCO is a legally independent agency that entered a relationship with the United Nations in 1945.¹³ UNESCO is governed by its own set of rules, membership independent from that of the United Nations, organizational structure, and budget.¹⁴ UNESCO currently has 194 Member States and 12 Associate Members.¹⁵ Two major bodies, the General Conference and Executive Board, govern the work of UNESCO.¹⁶

The General Conference, consisting of all UNESCO Member States, meets every two years.¹⁷ The General Conference is primarily responsible for: electing the 58 members of the Executive Board, who serve four-year terms; deliberating on and approving recommendations from the Executive Board; summoning international conferences; considering reports from Member States; and advising United Nations organizations on matters of education, science, and culture.¹⁸ The General Conference may also establish special and technical committees, create subsidiary organs, and invite observers on the

⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO (ERI/2010/WS/2)*. 2010. p. 32.

¹⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO in brief*. N.d.

¹¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029 (41 C/4)*. 2022.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Agreements with Specialized Agencies (A/RES/50(I))*. 1945.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Member States*. N.d.

¹⁶ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 2023-24*. 2023.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. 1945. Arts. III-VI.

recommendation of the Executive Board.¹⁹ Every two years, the Executive Board: prepares the biennial agenda for, submits policy recommendations to, and implements decisions adopted by the General Conference; recommends the admission of new Members; nominates the Director-General; and reviews the budget.²⁰ Additionally, the Executive Board may advise the primary organs of the United Nations on issues relevant to its mandate, consult with representatives of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and independent experts, and request advisory opinions from the International Court of Justice.²¹ At its 2021 session, UNESCO reaffirmed its commitment to addressing global issues in accordance with the 2030 Agenda by renewing its *Medium-Term Strategy* for the time period 2022-2029.²²

¹⁹ Ibid. Arts. III-VI.

²⁰ Ibid. 1945. Art. V; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Executive Board in Brief*. N.d.

²¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. 1945. Art. V.

²² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *General Conference: 41st Session - 9-24 November 2021*. 2021.

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United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO (ERI/2010/WS/2)*. 2010. Retrieved 20 October 2023 from: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001887/188700e.pdf>

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United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Member States*. N.d. Retrieved 20 October 2023 from: <https://www.unesco.org/en/countries>



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United Nations, General Assembly. *Agreements with Specialized Agencies (A/RES/50(I))*. 1945. Retrieved 20 October 2023 from: [https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/50\(I\)](https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/50(I))

1. Indigenous Knowledge and Climate Adaptation

“Indigenous Peoples have centuries, and in some cases millennia, of experience as stewards of the land. They have played a fundamental role in protecting biodiversity and their knowledge of the environment can play a vital role in the global effort to adapt to climate change.”²³

Introduction

The term “Indigenous” refers to communities that self-identify as Indigenous, maintain a connection to their ancestral lands and traditions, and preserve distinct cultural, social, political, or economic systems as non-dominant groups within society.²⁴ There are more than 476 million Indigenous people in over 90 countries and throughout every continent of the world, besides Antarctica.²⁵ Despite representing only around 6.2% of the world’s population, Indigenous communities play a vital role in safeguarding approximately 80% of global biodiversity.²⁶ Climate change poses existential threats to ecosystems and livelihoods, and particularly effects Indigenous communities regarding the exercise of their protected rights such as hunting, fishing, and partaking in traditional lifestyle practices and ceremonies.²⁷ Article 25 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) seeks to protect Indigenous Peoples’ rights to maintain and strengthen their spiritual relationship with traditionally owned lands, waters, and resources, and Articles 11, 12, and 20 affirm their rights to cultural practices and subsistence activities.²⁸

Climate change is often described as “the long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns [...] primarily due to [human activities like] the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas.”²⁹ The effects of climate change are evidenced by increasingly prevalent wildfires, floods, storms, and coral bleaching taking place throughout the world’s ecosystems.³⁰ In 2021, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) produced a report finding that 60% of the forests contained in UNESCO World Heritage sites are facing extensive threats from climate change-related events.³¹ The report also found that 15% of global blue carbon assets in marine sites are experiencing substantial risks of degradation.³² Blue carbon assets refer to coastal and marine ecosystems such as mangroves,

²³ United Nations Environment Programme. *As climate crisis alters their lands, Indigenous Peoples turn to the courts*. 2023.

²⁴ United Nations, Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. *Factsheet – Who are indigenous peoples?*. 2015.

²⁵ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Indigenous Peoples*. N.d.; World Economic Forum. *Land, loss and liberation: Indigenous struggles amid the climate crisis*. 2024.

²⁶ Ibid.; Broom et al. World Economic Forum. *5 ways Indigenous people are protecting the planet*. 2023. N.d.

²⁷ Indigenous Climate Hub. *The Impacts of Climate Change on Indigenous Communities*. N.d.

²⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*. 2007. p. 11-12, 16, 19.

²⁹ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *What is Climate Change?*. N.d.

³⁰ World Heritage Centre. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Climate Change*. 2021.

³¹ Ibid.; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *World Heritage forests: Carbon sinks under pressure*. 2021. p. 5-6.

³² World Heritage Centre. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Climate Change*. 2021.

seagrasses, and tidal marshes that are essential in mitigating climate change as they significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions.³³

Over generations of close interaction with ecosystems, Indigenous Peoples have developed Indigenous knowledge; a rich and evolving set of understandings about their environment, passed down through experience, observation, and storytelling.³⁴ This knowledge helps communities manage land, water, and wildlife in sustainable ways.³⁵ Indigenous knowledge is increasingly being recognized as an important guide for climate adaptation, which involves strategies aimed at combatting climate change.³⁶ This recognition comes from a growing number of international bodies and researchers, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).³⁷

Indigenous peoples serve as leaders in the preservation of diversity of life in all aspects, including biological, cultural, linguistic, and spiritual diversity, but despite their contributions, they often face structural barriers to participation in climate decision-making processes.³⁸ These barriers include limited access to political representation at national and international levels, a lack of formal recognition or legal protection of land rights, and insufficient funding for Indigenous-led research and environmental programs.³⁹ However, growing international recognition of the value of Indigenous knowledge systems has led to greater efforts to incorporate them into climate adaptation policy and practice.⁴⁰ UNESCO promotes the preservation of biodiversity and the strengthening of education, science, communication, and cultural heritage, which includes utilizing Indigenous knowledge and experience to tackle global issues such as climate change.⁴¹

³³ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO Marine World Heritage: Custodians of the globe's blue carbon assets*. 2021; World Bank Group. *What You Need to Know About Blue Carbon*. 2023.

³⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS): Mission*. 2024.

³⁵ United Nations, Development Programme. *Indigenous knowledge is crucial in the fight against climate change – here's why*. 2024; Climate Atlas of Canada. Prairie Climate Centre. *Indigenous Knowledges and Climate Change*. N.d.

³⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization et al. *The North American Regional Declaration on Biocultural Diversity, The Atateken Declaration*. 2019; Indigenous Climate Hub. *Climate Change Adaptation and How it Relates to Indigenous Communities*. N.d.

³⁷ Hurlbert et al. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Risk management and decision-making in relation to sustainable development: Chapter 7.7 Indigenous and local knowledge (ILK)*. 2019. p. 755; United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*. 2007; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Climate Change: Summary*. 2025.

³⁸ United Nations, Development Programme. *Indigenous knowledge is crucial in the fight against climate change – here's why*. 2024; Canada Council for the Arts, Canadian Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Reuniting Nature and Culture: The North American Declaration on Biocultural Diversity*. 2019.

³⁹ Kan et al. Ivey Business Journal. *Aligning CSR and Climate Justice for Indigenous Peoples*. 2024; Shute et al. Canadian Climate Institute. *Indigenous Housing and Climate Resilience Report*. 2024. p. 3-4; United Nations, Development Programme. *Indigenous knowledge is crucial in the fight against climate change – here's why*. 2024.

⁴⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Change Assessment and Adaptation*. 2018. pp. 3, 6, 11, 15, 23, 25 84, 104-105, 154.

⁴¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO in brief*. N.d.

International and Regional Framework

A number of international instruments highlight the role of Indigenous Peoples in climate adaptation and support the inclusion of their knowledge globally.⁴² UNFCCC established a global framework for cooperation, setting out principles for climate action based on common but differentiated responsibilities, and created a process for negotiation and review through annual Conferences of the Parties (COPs).⁴³ The *Kyoto Protocol* (1997) and *Paris Agreement* (2015) emphasized mitigation and recognized adaptation as a key pillar.⁴⁴ Article 10(e) of the *Kyoto Protocol* encourages State Parties to cooperate in climate adaptation, while article 7 of the *Paris Agreement* focuses on strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability through adaptation, with Article 7(5) acknowledging that adaptation actions should follow a “country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach.”⁴⁵ Although these frameworks historically lacked direct mechanisms for Indigenous knowledge integration, the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP), established in 2017 under the UNFCCC, provides a structure for Indigenous engagement.⁴⁶ LCIPP was created through COP21’s decision 1/CP.21, as part of the *Paris Agreement* outcomes, and is supported by a Facilitative Working Group composed equally of Indigenous and State Party representatives, serving as a precedent for how Indigenous communities can meaningfully participate in global climate policy without requiring a new treaty.⁴⁷

One of the earliest international instruments to recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the preservation of their cultural and environmental heritage is the International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (1989).⁴⁸ The Convention affirms Indigenous Peoples’ rights to land, resources, culture, and self-governance, and calls on states to engage in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous communities in decision-making processes.⁴⁹ In the context of climate change, decisions about land use, resource extraction, conservation, and relocation can have lasting impacts on Indigenous communities.⁵⁰ Articles 6 and 7 of the Convention require governments to

⁴² United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Climate Change*. 2025.

⁴³ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Secretariat. *What is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change?*. N.d; United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. 1992; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Secretariat. *Conference of the Parties (COP)*. N.d.

⁴⁴ Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. 1997; Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Paris Agreement*. 2015.

⁴⁵ Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. 1997. p. 10; Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Paris Agreement*. 2015. p. 9-11.

⁴⁶ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Secretariat. *Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform*. N.d.

⁴⁷ Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Adoption of the Paris Agreement (1/CP.21)*. 2015; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Secretariat. *The Facilitative Working Group*. N.d.

⁴⁸ International Labour Organization. *C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989*. 1989; International Labour Organization. *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples*. N.d.

⁴⁹ International Labour Organization. *C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989*. 1989. pp. 9-10.

⁵⁰ International Labour Organization. *C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989*. 1989; International Labour Organization. *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples*. N.d.

consult with Indigenous Peoples in good faith and support their participation in environmental and economic planning.⁵¹ Specific instruments focusing on Indigenous rights also include UNDRIP (2007), which affirms Indigenous Peoples' rights to maintain their cultural traditions and manage their environments.⁵² UNESCO's *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (World Heritage Convention) (1972) also emphasizes the protection of cultural and natural sites of outstanding universal value.⁵³ Many sites are located on or near Indigenous territories and have been safeguarded for generations through traditional knowledge systems.⁵⁴ The World Heritage Convention recognizes that cultural landscapes and Indigenous land-use practices are often inseparable, and encourages actors to include Indigenous perspectives in the nomination and management of heritage sites.⁵⁵ This reinforces aspects of UNESCO's mandate to safeguard cultural diversity and integrate Indigenous heritage into global frameworks for sustainable development.⁵⁶

Several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in General Assembly resolution 70/1 entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" are directly relevant to the role of Indigenous knowledge in climate adaptation and reflect areas where UNESCO and its Member States can take meaningful action.⁵⁷ SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) focuses on reducing inequalities and emphasizes the need to empower marginalized groups.⁵⁸ Sustainable cities and communities are recognized in SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), which calls for inclusive and resilient development.⁵⁹ SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) seeks to advance sustainable consumption and production practices, and SDG 13 (climate action) addresses climate action and underscores the urgency of addressing climate change.⁶⁰ Target 13.1 of SDG 13 calls for strengthened resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards, while 13.2 urges the integration of climate change measures into national policies and planning.⁶¹ Target 13.3 promotes education and institutional capacity on adaptation, aligning with UNESCO's work, and 13.b emphasizes the need to support effective climate planning in least developed countries and Small Island Developing States, including local and marginalized communities such as Indigenous Peoples.⁶²

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*. 2007.

⁵³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*. 1972.

⁵⁴ Ibid. pp. 1-2.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 2.

⁵⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO in brief*. N.d.

⁵⁷ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The 17 Goals*. 2015; United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

⁵⁸ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries*. 2015.

⁵⁹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*. 2015.

⁶⁰ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*. 2015; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*. 2015.

⁶¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts – Targets and Indicators*. 2015.

⁶² Ibid.

Member States such as Canada and Australia have initiated frameworks recognizing Indigenous stewardship.⁶³ For example, Canada's climate policies have integrated Indigenous perspectives through co-developed adaptation programs such as the Inuit-Canada Table on Clean Growth and Climate Change (ICT) and the Goose Moon Table, both created in 2017.⁶⁴ The ICT brings together Inuit organizations with the Canadian federal government to implement the National Inuit Climate Change Strategy and regional strategies.⁶⁵ Australia has also engaged in integrating Indigenous knowledge into projects, including embarking on a partnership with other Member States and Indigenous communities to establish a regional coral reef monitoring framework that combines traditional ecological knowledge with modern science and technology.⁶⁶

Role of the International System

The General Conference, UNESCO's supreme policy-making assembly, determines the Organization's programs and budget.⁶⁷ For example, the 39th Conference (2017) adopted a Declaration of Ethical Principles in Relation to Climate Change to guide climate action.⁶⁸ Several of the principles in this declaration are applicable to the recognition and integration of Indigenous knowledge, including article 2 (prevention of harm), article 6 (solidarity), and article 7 (scientific knowledge and integrity in decision-making).⁶⁹ Article 2 emphasizes that climate change, and the policies designed to respond to it, must not cause further harm to people, ecosystems, or cultural systems.⁷⁰ This includes the need to anticipate and avoid unintended negative effects of adaptation and mitigation strategies.⁷¹ Article 6 highlights the responsibility of all actors to support communities that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.⁷² Indigenous communities are often among those most affected, despite contributing least to global emissions.⁷³ This article affirms that efforts to strengthen resilience must be grounded in solidarity and interdependence, acknowledging the connections between cultural diversity, ecological systems, and intergenerational justice.⁷⁴ It also emphasizes equitable sharing of knowledge and resources, particularly for developing countries and marginalized groups, including Indigenous Peoples.⁷⁵ Article 7 explicitly calls for the inclusion of local, traditional, and Indigenous knowledge alongside scientific research in policy-making processes.⁷⁶ It affirms that knowledge systems must meet high standards of integrity and

⁶³ Indigenous Leadership Initiative. *Indigenous-Led Conservation from Australia to Canada*. N.d.

⁶⁴ Government of Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada. *Canada's Partnership with Indigenous Peoples on Climate*. 2025; Government of Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada. *Climate Change and Health Adaptation Program*. 2025.

⁶⁵ Government of Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada. *Canada's Partnership with Indigenous Peoples on Climate*. 2025.

⁶⁶ Australian Institute of Marine Science. *Traditional Knowledge Exchange to Create a Framework for Pacific Reef Monitoring*. 2023.

⁶⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Governing Bodies*. N.d.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Declaration of Ethical Principles in Relation to Climate Change (39 C/22 REV)*. 2017.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

transparency, but also that decision-makers should draw from diverse ways of understanding the climate system, including those rooted in land-based and cultural observations.⁷⁷

The Executive Board (elected by the Conference) ensures the overall management of UNESCO and sees that Conference decisions, including on Indigenous peoples and climate, are carried out.⁷⁸ A relevant Executive Board decision includes 221 EX/11 (2025), which promotes cooperation with Indigenous Peoples in achieving the SDGs and addressing climate change.⁷⁹ Executive Board decision 219 EX/31 (2024) further underscores the need for systemic change to address persistent inequalities, particularly in education, land rights, and political participation, and calls for the full integration of Indigenous perspectives across UNESCO's work in science, culture, and education to strengthen climate resilience and social equity.⁸⁰

The Secretariat, led by the Director-General of UNESCO and supported by roughly 700 staff in field offices worldwide, executes UNESCO's programs in education, science and culture.⁸¹ Together, these bodies provide the mandate and machinery through which UNESCO supports Indigenous knowledge in climate resilience, such as funding projects and coordinating partnerships in Member States.⁸²

UNESCO-specific contributions in the fight against climate change include the Strategy for Action on Climate Change (2017), the Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change (2017), and the Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples (2018), all of which underscore the organization's commitment to equity, resilience, and biocultural diversity.⁸³ The Strategy for Action on Climate Change outlines how UNESCO will contribute to climate adaptation by strengthening climate education, integrating Indigenous knowledge into natural science and heritage safeguarding, and supporting regional implementation in vulnerable areas.⁸⁴ The Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples guides all sectors of UNESCO in working respectfully and collaboratively with Indigenous communities.⁸⁵ It outlines safeguards for participation, free, prior, and informed consent, and the protection of Indigenous knowledge.⁸⁶ Additionally, the 2022 MONDIACULT Declaration and the 2025 UNESCO Executive Board Decision 221 EX/11 reaffirm Indigenous leadership and knowledge as central to cultural and

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Governing Bodies*. N.d.

⁷⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO's action for Indigenous Peoples (221 EX/11)*. 2025.

⁸⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO's action for Indigenous Peoples (219 EX/31)*. 2024.

⁸¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Governing Bodies*. N.d.

⁸² Ibid.; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Declaration of Ethical Principles in Relation to Climate Change*. N.d.

⁸³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO Strategy for Action on Climate Change (39 C/46)*. 2017; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Records of the General Conference, 39th session*. 2017; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO policy on engaging with indigenous peoples*. 2018; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Declaration of Ethical Principles in Relation to Climate Change (39 C/22 REV)*. 2017; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO policy on engaging with indigenous peoples*. 2018.

⁸⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO Strategy for Action on Climate Change (39 C/46)*. 2017.

⁸⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO policy on engaging with indigenous peoples*. 2018.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

environmental sustainability.⁸⁷ MONDIACULT 2022 calls for cultural diversity and Indigenous rights to be central in global sustainable development frameworks, emphasizing the value of Indigenous cultural expressions in strengthening environmental resilience.⁸⁸

Initiatives such as UNESCO's *Education for Sustainable Development* (ESD) promote valuing community-led actions and Indigenous knowledge as core to sustainable lifestyles and climate awareness.⁸⁹ Similarly, the UNESCO Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) program focuses on helping Indigenous communities study and articulate their knowledge within holistic systems of livelihoods, culture and environment.⁹⁰ The LINKS program supports field projects, regional knowledge exchanges, and curriculum development that respects local knowledge while fostering dialogue with scientific systems.⁹¹

UNESCO also partners with international science and policy bodies such as the IPCC. Collaborations such as these seek to establish a mutual understanding that Indigenous knowledge can formulate relationships between scientists and local communities in an effort to build resilience to climate change.⁹² UNESCO likewise supports the World Meteorological Organization's efforts, and collaborated with the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization to help produce case studies that blend Indigenous knowledge with climate science in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and livestock management.⁹³ One example of a case study comes from the 6-year long *Knowing our Changing Climate in Africa* project initiated by LINKS, which produced research from Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania, examining Indigenous pastoralist knowledge of rainfall patterns, which contributed to early warning systems for droughts.⁹⁴

Guidelines such as UNFCCC's National Adaptation Plan require adaptation to be based on and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional and Indigenous knowledge.⁹⁵ These guidelines are primarily addressed to the national governments of Member States of the UNFCCC, and they encourage Member States to develop inclusive, country-driven strategies for responding to climate impacts.⁹⁶ The Paris Agreement also created the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) to help amplify Indigenous Peoples' and local community voices in climate policy, building

⁸⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022*. 2023; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO's action for Indigenous Peoples (221 EX/11)*. 2025.

⁸⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022*. 2023.

⁸⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Education for Sustainable Development*. N.d.

⁹⁰ Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Mission*. N.d.

⁹¹ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Secretariat. *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS)*. N.d.; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Evaluation of the UNESCO's Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) programme*. 2022.

⁹² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) Products*. 2016.

⁹³ World Meteorological Organization. *Blending Climate Science and Indigenous and Local Knowledge*. 2023.

⁹⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge in the Sahel: A Case Study on the Mbororo Fulani of Chad*. 2024.

⁹⁵ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Secretariat. *National Adaptation Plans*. N.d.

⁹⁶ United Nations Development Programme. *What are National Adaptation Plans and why do they matter?*. 2025.

capacity for inclusive adaptation.⁹⁷ The LCIPP's Facilitative Working Group regularly reports on progress and recommends implementation pathways to the UNFCCC COP, offering opportunities for UNESCO and Member States to align educational or cultural programming with LCIPP outcomes.⁹⁸ The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) similarly recognizes that Indigenous communities apply creative solutions to climate change by drawing on Indigenous knowledge.⁹⁹

Accredited NGOs such as Cultural Survival, a UNESCO-linked Indigenous-led NGO, also play a key advocacy role.¹⁰⁰ Cultural Survival works to advance Indigenous self-determination and centers Indigenous knowledge to support sustainable land stewardship, biodiversity protection, and environmental resilience.¹⁰¹ Likewise, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) fights alongside Indigenous Peoples for their rights globally and documents the challenges they face, including climate impacts.¹⁰² Both organizations have consultative status and bring Indigenous perspectives into policy discussions, ensuring that local knowledge and climate justice remain central to UNESCO's international work.¹⁰³

Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer in the Face of Climate Change

Indigenous knowledge systems rely on the transmission of cultural and ecological wisdom from elders to younger generations.¹⁰⁴ UNESCO highlights that many Indigenous youth now attain higher levels of formal education and are able to document their communities' knowledge under the elders' guidance.¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, UNESCO stresses that the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledge should serve as a complement to mainstream education.¹⁰⁶ For example, Canadian Indigenous land-based education programs provide culturally relevant curricula that promote opportunities for intergenerational Indigenous knowledge transfer by combining traditional teachings with formal instruction.¹⁰⁷ These programs create safe learning spaces and reinforce cultural values, helping to sustain Indigenous languages, ceremonies and ecological stewardship across generations.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁷ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Secretariat. *How Indigenous Peoples Enrich Climate Action*. 2022.

⁹⁸ Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform. *Existing policies and practices for the participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in climate change related bodies and processes under and outside the Convention*. 2021.

⁹⁹ Bixcul et al. Cultural Survival. *Indigenous Women and the Climate Crisis*. 2021.

¹⁰⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Request by a Non-Governmental Organization to be Accredited to Provide Advisory Services to the Committee*. 2020.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.; Cultural Survival. *Strategic Framework 2022-2026*. N.d.

¹⁰² Cultural Survival. *IWGIA - The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs*. 2010.

¹⁰³ Ibid.; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Request by a Non-Governmental Organization to be Accredited to Provide Advisory Services to the Committee*. 2020.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Knowledge Transmission*. 2023.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Canada Council for the Arts, Canadian Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Land as teacher: understanding Indigenous land-based education*. 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Climate change is already disrupting the environmental cues, seasonal cycles, and ceremonies that underlie Indigenous ways of life.¹⁰⁹ A 2024 Canadian government report documents that rising temperatures, altered rainfall, and extreme weather are impacting First Nations, Inuit and Métis (Indigenous communities) livelihoods, culture, food security, health, and well-being.¹¹⁰ UNESCO similarly observes that Indigenous communities are on the front lines of climate change, noting that biodiversity loss and climate variability have a devastating impact on their way of life.¹¹¹ When climate disruption shifts the timing of plant blooms, animal migrations, or ice formation, traditional calendars and ceremonies can be misaligned or lost, threatening cultural continuity and the very basis of land-based education.¹¹²

UNESCO coordinated research in East Africa to document traditional ecological knowledge, publishing case studies showing how 'living heritage' holds detailed knowledge of local plants, animals, and ecosystems that is passed down through community practices and stories.¹¹³ In Australia, the Butchulla people of K'gari (Fraser Island) developed the country's first Indigenous-led climate adaptation plan, explicitly blending traditional knowledge and western science to address climate risks on their World Heritage-listed lands.¹¹⁴ In Canada, the national "For Our Future: Indigenous Resilience" climate report, the first Indigenous-led climate assessment in the country, emphasizes that Indigenous Knowledge Systems must be considered at all levels of climate action.¹¹⁵ In the Sámi regions within Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia, Indigenous communities are documenting and passing on traditional reindeer herding knowledge to younger generations in response to unpredictable snow and ice conditions.¹¹⁶ Sámi educational and cultural institutions work to combine scientific data with Indigenous seasonal indicators, promoting youth involvement in land-based practices and climate governance.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁹ Natural Resources Canada. Government of Canada. *Government of Canada Releases New Report Showing the Impacts of Climate Change and Necessity of Indigenous-Led Climate Change Adaptation*. 2024; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Knowledge Transmission*. 2023.

¹¹⁰ Natural Resources Canada. Government of Canada. *Government of Canada Releases New Report Showing the Impacts of Climate Change and Necessity of Indigenous-Led Climate Change Adaptation*. 2024.

¹¹¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Knowledge Transmission*. 2023.

¹¹² Ibid.; Natural Resources Canada. Government of Canada. *Government of Canada Releases New Report Showing the Impacts of Climate Change and Necessity of Indigenous-Led Climate Change Adaptation*. 2024.

¹¹³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO publishes case studies on living heritage and climate change in East Africa*. 2022.

¹¹⁴ Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Climate Systems Hub. *Celebration of the Indigenous-led climate adaptation plan for K'gari*. 2024.

¹¹⁵ Natural Resources Canada. Government of Canada. *Government of Canada Releases New Report Showing the Impacts of Climate Change and Necessity of Indigenous-Led Climate Change Adaptation*. 2024.

¹¹⁶ International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs. *Indigenous Peoples in Sápmi*. N.d.; Saami Council. Arctic Council. *Co-Production of Knowledge in the Arctic: Bridging Indigenous and Scientific Perspectives*. 2025; Eira et al. Springer. *Sámi Traditional Reindeer Herding Knowledge Throughout a Year: Herding Periods on Snow-Covered Ground*. 2022; Arctic Council. *Reindeer Herding, Traditional Knowledge and Adaptation to Climate Change and Loss of Grazing Land*. 2009.

¹¹⁷ Saami Council. Arctic Council. *Co-Production of Knowledge in the Arctic: Bridging Indigenous and Scientific Perspectives*. 2025; Eira, I. Research Gate. *Sámi Traditional Reindeer Herding Knowledge Throughout a Year: Herding Periods on Snow-Covered Ground*. 2022; Arctic Council. *Reindeer Herding, Traditional Knowledge and Adaptation to Climate Change and Loss of Grazing Land*. 2009.

Through its cross-sectoral programs, UNESCO affirms its ability to support the transmission, revitalization, safeguarding, and protection of traditional knowledge.¹¹⁸ Its education sector actively works to integrate Indigenous content into formal curricula, and initiatives like the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032) mobilize stakeholders and resources to preserve endangered languages and knowledge systems.¹¹⁹ The UNESCO Man and Biosphere (MAB) Youth Forum has similarly called for support in sharing and transmitting Indigenous knowledge.¹²⁰ UNESCO advocates for intergenerational learning and Indigenous knowledge transfer as critical to cultural continuity and climate resilience.¹²¹ UNESCO recognizes that intergenerational learning is not only a cultural necessity but a key resilience strategy, ensuring that environmental stewardship practices, languages, and beliefs can evolve and be sustained even in the face of climate change.¹²²

Barriers to Integrating Indigenous Knowledge

Despite growing recognition of its importance, Indigenous knowledge often remains marginalized in climate policy frameworks.¹²³ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlights that Indigenous Peoples are frequently excluded from decision-making processes on climate issues and that their land and resource rights are not always respected.¹²⁴ This exclusion is rooted in colonial legacies, lack of legal recognition of Indigenous land tenure, and limited political representation in national climate governance systems.¹²⁵ In many countries, planning processes rely on technocratic or top-down models and tend not to offer culturally appropriate mechanisms for Indigenous participation.¹²⁶ Structural barriers such as language, geographic remoteness, and underfunding of Indigenous institutions further limit their ability to contribute to climate policy in meaningful ways.¹²⁷ This systemic exclusion impedes adaptation, especially since the 2015 Paris Agreement calls for climate action to be guided by the vast knowledge of

¹¹⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Knowledge Transmission*. 2023.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO sites as partners for education for sustainable development: an implementation guide*. 2025.

¹²² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Global Education Meeting: Background document*. 2024; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO sites as partners for education for sustainable development: an implementation guide*. 2025.

¹²³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Cutting Edge | Indigenous languages: Gateways to the world's cultural diversity*. 2023; United Nations Development Programme. *Indigenous knowledge is crucial in the fight against climate change – here's why*. 2024.

¹²⁴ United Nations Development Programme. *Indigenous knowledge is crucial in the fight against climate change – here's why*. 2024.

¹²⁵ Sustainability Directory. *Why Are Indigenous Land Rights Often Overlooked in Policy?*. 2025; Reed et al. Ecology & Society. *Pathways to healing: Indigenous revitalization through family-based land management in the Klamath Basin*. 2023; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Secretariat. *Recognition of Indigenous Peoples in Nationally Determined Contributions*. 2022.

¹²⁶ Larsen et al. Earth System Governance. *Finding the cracks: How do frontline officials maneuver state institutions to advance Indigenous rights to land and environment?*. 2025; Porter et al. Planning Theory & Practice. *Indigenous Planning*. 2017.

¹²⁷ Ford et al. One Earth. *The Resilience of Indigenous Peoples to Environmental Change*. 2020; Malik et al. Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability. *Barriers and limits to adaptation in the Arctic*. 2025; MacKinnon et al. Global Citizen. *Why Funding Indigenous-led Conservation Is Essential for Our Planet's Future*. 2025.

Indigenous Peoples and local knowledge systems.¹²⁸ In practice, however, UNESCO notes that Indigenous knowledge has not been used consistently in adaptation planning.¹²⁹

UNESCO stresses the need for personalized intellectual property frameworks to protect Indigenous knowledge, observing that conventional intellectual property (IP) systems focus on individual ownership and do not align with Indigenous customary laws.¹³⁰ This misalignment has enabled the exploitation of Indigenous knowledge and resources without the consent or benefit of the knowledge holders.¹³¹ A UNESCO-supported analysis argues that planning should favor public participation and bottom-up governance over narrowly targeted top-down measures.¹³² It highlights locally designed processes (for example, Nepal's Local Adaptation Plans of Action) as effective examples that empower communities and incorporate diverse knowledge sources.¹³³ United Nations forums echo this view as delegates have called for the meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples in climate policymaking, noting that including Indigenous communities is critical for enacting laws on customary lands, forests and resources.¹³⁴ Specific bodies such as the UNPFII, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Human Rights Council have all issued statements urging the ethical integration of Indigenous knowledge.¹³⁵ One example of ethical practice is the collaborative drafting of the Butchulla climate adaptation plan in Australia, which was guided by the principles of co-ownership of knowledge and respect for sacred ecological sites.¹³⁶

UNESCO's LINKS programme works to facilitate dialogue among Indigenous knowledge holders, scientists and policymakers.¹³⁷ Similarly, UNDP's Climate Promise initiative urges governments to recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples, ensure free, prior and informed consent, provide access to climate finance and capacity-building, and integrate Indigenous knowledge into climate strategies.¹³⁸

¹²⁸ Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Paris Agreement*. 2015.

¹²⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Climate Change*. 2025.

¹³⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Cutting Edge | Indigenous languages: Gateways to the world's cultural diversity*. 2023.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Klinkly et al. World Resources Institute. *Building Climate Equity; Creating a New Approach from the Ground Up*. 2015.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Indigenous Peoples Still Suffer from Poverty, Climate Change and Loss of Ancestral Lands, Delegates Highlight in Third Committee*. 2022.

¹³⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Follow up to the UNPFII recommendations: Indigenous Peoples and the Media*. 2024; Human Rights Council. United Nations, General Assembly. *Constitutions, laws, legislation, policies, judicial decisions and other mechanisms through which States have taken measures to achieve the ends of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in accordance with article 38 of the Declaration (A/HRC/EMRIP/2024/2)*. 2024; United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. *Human Rights Council Discusses Issues Concerning Indigenous Peoples with the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2023.

¹³⁶ Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Climate Systems Hub. *Celebration of the Indigenous-led climate adaptation plan for K'gari*. 2024; K'gari World Heritage Advisory Committee. *K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage Advisory Committee*. 2024.

¹³⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Climate Change*. 2025.

¹³⁸ United Nations Development Programme. *Indigenous knowledge is crucial in the fight against climate change – here's why*. 2024.

Experts agree that climate resilience is strengthened by co-designing adaptation with Indigenous communities and honoring their self-determination.¹³⁹ UNESCO frames this approach within its cross-sector mandate: it affirms its role to support the transmission, revitalization, safeguarding and protection of traditional knowledge across education, culture and science programs and has supported the launch of initiatives such as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages to strengthen the foundations of Indigenous knowledge systems.¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

Indigenous knowledge offers holistic and adaptive approaches to climate resilience that are increasingly recognized by the international community.¹⁴¹ UNESCO and its partners play a pivotal role in ensuring these systems are supported, protected, and integrated into broader climate governance frameworks.¹⁴² Addressing barriers such as legal recognition, knowledge misappropriation, and the disruption of intergenerational learning is essential for empowering Indigenous Peoples as climate leaders.¹⁴³

Further Research

As delegates conduct further research and consider how to address this topic, they should consider: What are the best practices for co-designing climate adaptation programs with Indigenous communities? What role can UNESCO's science and culture sectors play in promoting Indigenous-led research and climate adaptation initiatives? How can Member States ensure that Indigenous perspectives are integrated into UNESCO's global programs without compromising the autonomy or intellectual property of Indigenous communities? What are the ethical considerations when facilitating the documentation and use of Indigenous knowledge for climate adaptation? What mechanisms could strengthen or establish better protections for biocultural diversity in the face of climate change? How can Member States use their role within UNESCO to elevate successful regional or national models of Indigenous-led climate adaptation to the international level?

¹³⁹ Ibid.; United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Indigenous Peoples Still Suffer from Poverty, Climate Change and Loss of Ancestral Lands, Delegates Highlight in Third Committee*. 2022.

¹⁴⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Knowledge Transmission*. 2023.

¹⁴¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Change Assessment and Adaptation*. 2018. pp. 3, 6, 11, 15, 23, 25 84, 104-105, 154; Dorji et al. Environmental Management. *Understanding How Indigenous Knowledge Contributes to Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience: A Systematic Literature Review*. 2024. pp. 1112-1120.

¹⁴² United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS)*. N.d.

¹⁴³ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Recognizing Need to Bolster Indigenous Peoples' Rights, Third Committee Underscores Importance of Respecting Traditional Lands, Valuable Conservation Knowledge (GA/SHC/4379)*. 2023.

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<https://www.canada.ca/en/natural-resources-canada/news/2024/05/government-of-canada-releases-new-report-showing-the-impacts-of-climate-change-and-necessity-of-indigenous-led-climate-change-adaptation.html>

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2. The Protection of Cultural Heritage through Language Preservation

“Language represents the dialogue of cultures and the culture of dialogue that the United Nations was founded to embody.”¹⁴⁴

Introduction

Of the 8,324 languages that have been documented in the World Atlas of Languages of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), only approximately 7,000 are still being actively used and their number is steadily decreasing.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, 96% of these languages are only spoken by 3% of the world’s population, and mostly by Indigenous Peoples.¹⁴⁶ According to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the term “Indigenous” has not been officially defined within the United Nations system because it is typically used to refer to many diverse groups of people.¹⁴⁷ Instead, the international community has developed a common understanding of the term, which is largely based on a loose set of criteria, namely: self-identification as an Indigenous group, belonging to a minority that has continuously existed since before settlers or colonial powers arrived in the respective state, a distinct culture, a strong link to the group’s respective ancestral territories, and the intent to remain an independent and distinct community.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, the framework used to identify Indigenous Peoples is predominantly based on their self-conception.¹⁴⁹

Indigenous societies typically possess unique social, political, and economic structures as well as distinct belief systems, and their strong connection to their ancestral territories allows them to sustainably manage the natural resources surrounding them.¹⁵⁰ Languages play an important role in preserving these traditions.¹⁵¹ Rather than just facilitating communication within a society, they are shaped by the worldviews and knowledge of the people using them and therefore enable the transfer of culture across generations.¹⁵² However, H.E. Csaba Kőrösi, former President of the General Assembly, stressed that “every two weeks, an Indigenous language dies.”¹⁵³ It is therefore estimated that between 50% and 95% of the languages spoken today will become extinct by the end of the century.¹⁵⁴ This trend corresponds

¹⁴⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *PGA remarks to the launch of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages*. 2022.

¹⁴⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The World Atlas of Languages*. 2021; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Languages*. 2016.

¹⁴⁶ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Languages*. 2016.

¹⁴⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Glossary – Indigenous peoples*. 2025; United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. *Factsheet – Who are indigenous peoples?*. 2015. p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. *Factsheet – Who are indigenous peoples?*. 2015. p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. pp. 1 et seq.

¹⁵¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Teaching and learning indigenous languages: inspiring practices from the UNESCO Associated Schools Network*. 2022. p. 3.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *UN launches 10-year survival plan for endangered indigenous languages*. 2022.

¹⁵⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022 – 2032*. N.d.

with the overall decrease in the number of Indigenous Peoples, and is partially caused by discriminatory policies of colonial powers that have forced Indigenous societies to abandon their ancestral lands and traditions.¹⁵⁵ Unless it is interrupted, the number of languages spoken around the world may decrease from approximately 7,000 to just 300 to 600 by 2100.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, the increasing prevalence of the comparatively small number of dominant languages further marginalizes those that are only spoken by small communities.¹⁵⁷

As the United Nations' specialized agency for education, science, and culture, UNESCO is mandated to promote peace and security through the preservation of cultural heritage.¹⁵⁸ It defines cultural heritage as "artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance."¹⁵⁹ The term "intangible cultural heritage" (ICH), on the other hand, refers to traditions, rituals, and practices of cultural relevance as well as to the physical objects associated with them.¹⁶⁰ Due to the intrinsic connection between languages, communication and cultural heritage, UNESCO aims to preserve and promote linguistic diversity.¹⁶¹

International and Regional Framework

Although there is only one legally binding instrument that specifically protects the rights of Indigenous Peoples, the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity is enshrined in several international treaties.¹⁶² In 1957, the General Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted the *Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention* to promote the integration of Indigenous Peoples into their respective national societies and to guarantee their full enjoyment of human rights.¹⁶³ By 1989, however, ILO's General Conference determined that the fundamental freedoms of Indigenous Peoples also encompass the right to maintain their own social and political structures, and consequently abandoned the goal of assimilating them into national societies by adopting a new version of the convention.¹⁶⁴ Article 28 para. 3 of the *Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention*, in particular, requires Member States

¹⁵⁵ United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. *Indigenous Languages*. 2018. p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022 – 2032*. N.d.; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The World Atlas of Languages*. 2021.

¹⁵⁷ United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. *Indigenous Languages*. 2018. p. 1.

¹⁵⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. 1945. art. 1 para. 1; cf. also United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Cultural heritage: 7 successes of UNESCO's preservation work*. N.d.

¹⁵⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Glossary – Cultural heritage*. 2025.

¹⁶⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Glossary – Intangible cultural heritage*. 2025; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?*. N.d.

¹⁶¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *About UNESCO WAL: Introduction*. 2021; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO in brief*. N.d.

¹⁶² International Labour Organization. *Germany ratifies ILO Convention, 1989 (No. 169) as a strong expression of solidarity for the protection of indigenous and tribal peoples' rights*. 2021; United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966. art. 27; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. 2003. art. 1.

¹⁶³ International Labour Organization, General Conference. *C107 – Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107)*. 1957. Preamble.

¹⁶⁴ International Labour Organization, General Conference. *C169 – Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169)*. 1989. Preamble.

ratifying the document to preserve Indigenous languages.¹⁶⁵ Since then, 24 Member States have acceded to the convention.¹⁶⁶ Other Member States, including Australia, China, Finland, the Russian Federation, South Africa, and the United States of America (USA), have not ratified the convention, frequently citing reasons such as a potential threat to their national sovereignty and the lack of a binding definition of the term “Indigenous”.¹⁶⁷ To this day, the *Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention* remains the only binding framework for the specific protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.¹⁶⁸

Additionally, Articles 1 and 55 of the *Charter of the United Nations* determine that the United Nations should promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms irrespective of language.¹⁶⁹ This commitment is reiterated in article 2 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR).¹⁷⁰ Whilst the UDHR itself is not legally binding, many of the rights contained therein have been enshrined in international treaties.¹⁷¹ Articles 1 para. 1 and 7 of the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (1965) require State Parties to take action in the fields of culture and education to prevent discrimination based on ethnic origin.¹⁷² Furthermore, articles 1 para. 1 and 2 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) guarantee the universal right to self-determination regardless of language or birth.¹⁷³ This specifically encompasses the ability of all humans to “freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”¹⁷⁴ The ICCPR further establishes the right of national minorities to maintain their own cultures, religions, and languages in its article 27.¹⁷⁵

In 1972, the General Conference of UNESCO further adopted the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (World Heritage Convention) at its seventeenth session in Paris, stressing that cultural and natural heritage are adversely affected by decay and rapid social and economic development.¹⁷⁶ For the purposes of the convention, the term “cultural heritage” refers to

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. art. 28 para. 3.

¹⁶⁶ International Labour Organization. *Ratifications of C169 – Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169)*. 2024.

¹⁶⁷ International Labour Organization. *C169 – Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169): Countries that have not ratified this Convention*. 2024; Minority Rights Group. *A Practitioner’s Perspective on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Since the Adoption of ILO Convention No. 169*. 2019.

¹⁶⁸ International Labour Organization. *Germany ratifies ILO Convention, 1989 (No. 169) as a strong expression of solidarity for the protection of indigenous and tribal peoples’ rights*. 2021.

¹⁶⁹ United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. Art. 1, 55.

¹⁷⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. 1948. art. 2.

¹⁷¹ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *The United Nations Human Rights Treaty System – Fact Sheet No. 30/Rev. 1*. 2012. pp. 5 et seqq.

¹⁷² United Nations, General Assembly. *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (A/RES/2106 (XX))*. 1965. art. 1 para. 1, 7.

¹⁷³ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966. art. 1 para. 1, 2 para. 2; United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966. art. 1 para. 1, 2 para. 2.

¹⁷⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966. art. 1 para. 1; United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966. art. 1 para. 1.

¹⁷⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966. art. 27.

¹⁷⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*. 1972. Preamble.

specific monuments, groups of buildings, and sites, while “natural heritage” was defined as outstanding natural features, geological and physiographical formations, and natural sites.¹⁷⁷ Over the following decades, UNESCO found that the common understanding of the concept of cultural heritage had evolved and was no longer limited to physical sites and objects.¹⁷⁸ Its General Conference therefore supplemented the World Heritage Convention with the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (ICICH) at its thirty-second session in 2003.¹⁷⁹

The preamble of the ICICH highlights that Indigenous Peoples are essential to “the production, safeguarding, maintenance and re-creation of the [ICH].”¹⁸⁰ The convention describes ICH as being rooted in the interaction of a community with its environment based on its shared history.¹⁸¹ By being passed on between generations, it becomes part of the group’s sense of identity.¹⁸² Article 2 para. 3 of the ICICH states that the safeguarding of ICH requires its “identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, [...] as well as [its] revitalization.”¹⁸³ The implementation of the ICICH is overseen by two treaty bodies, the General Assembly of the States Parties and the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the ICH.¹⁸⁴ The General Assembly makes decisions regarding the overall implementation of the convention and elects the members of the Committee.¹⁸⁵ The Committee issues recommendations regarding the goals of the convention, decides how to use the ICH fund, which was established by the convention and utilizes funds provided by States Parties, and fulfils other operational functions under the ICICH.¹⁸⁶ State Parties to the ICICH are required to identify and safeguard the ICH on their territories.¹⁸⁷

Furthermore, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) in its resolution 61/295 (2007).¹⁸⁸ Although UNDRIP itself is not legally binding, it is typically viewed as a comprehensive overview of the minimum standards for the protection and promotion of the existing rights of Indigenous Peoples.¹⁸⁹ Only Australia, Canada, New

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. art. 1 et seq.

¹⁷⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?*. N.d.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. 2003. Preamble.

¹⁸⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. 2003. Preamble.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. art. 2 para. 1.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid. art. 2 para. 3.

¹⁸⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Governing bodies of the 2003 Convention*. N.d.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. 2003. art. 4, 6.

¹⁸⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Governing bodies of the 2003 Convention*. N.d.; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. 2003. art. 7, 25 et seqq.

¹⁸⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. 2003. art. 11.

¹⁸⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*. 2007.

¹⁸⁹ United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. *Frequently Asked Questions: Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. N.d. pp. 1 et seq.; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Historical Overview*. N.d.

Zealand, and the USA originally voted against UNDRIP, but have since endorsed the declaration.¹⁹⁰ UNDRIP stresses that Indigenous Peoples are entitled to use and revitalize their languages, particularly in the context of education and media.¹⁹¹

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stresses that the goals of UNDRIP are also closely linked to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).¹⁹² For instance, the 2030 Agenda promises that “no one will be left behind” and “to reach the furthest behind first”, which includes the promotion of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.¹⁹³ Additionally, OHCHR notes that target 1.3 of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 (no poverty), which calls for the creation of social security systems at the national level, SDG 3 (good health and well-being), and SDG 4 (quality education) can only be achieved by respecting and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity.¹⁹⁴

At the regional level, article 3 para. 3 of the *Treaty on European Union* (2007) guarantees the preservation of the cultural and linguistic diversity of its Member States.¹⁹⁵ In this context, the European Union is currently funding the “RISE UP” project until 2026, which aims to revitalize several Indigenous languages on the continent, namely Aranese (France and Spain), Aromanian (Balkans), Burgenland Croatian (Austria, Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia), Cornish (United Kingdom), and Seto (Estonia and Russia).¹⁹⁶ Similarly, the *American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* of the Organization of American States specifically reaffirms that Indigenous communities have the right to use their own languages, particularly in the contexts of education and family.¹⁹⁷

Role of the International System

UNESCO is the only agency of the United Nations with a dedicated focus on culture and therefore frequently addresses the preservation of cultural heritage and diversity.¹⁹⁸ Its work is governed by the General Conference, which consists of all States Members of the organization, and the Executive Board,

¹⁹⁰ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Historical Overview*. N.d.

¹⁹¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*. 2007. art. 13 para. 1, 14 paras. 1, 3, 16 para. 1.

¹⁹² United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Briefing Note: Indigenous Peoples’ Rights and the 2030 Agenda*. 2017. p. 2; United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

¹⁹³ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Briefing Note: Indigenous Peoples’ Rights and the 2030 Agenda*. 2017. p. 2; United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. p. 3.

¹⁹⁴ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Briefing Note: Indigenous Peoples’ Rights and the 2030 Agenda*. 2017. p. 5; United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. pp. 15 et seqq.

¹⁹⁵ European Union. *Treaty on European Union*. 2007. art. 3 para. 3; European Union, European Parliamentary Research Service. *International Year of Indigenous Languages – Sami people and languages in the EU*. 2020. p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ Willmer. European Union, European Commission, Horizon. *Combining tech and tradition to revive Europe’s endangered languages*. 2024; European Union, European Commission. *CORDIS - EU research results: Revitalising Languages and Safeguarding Cultural Diversity*. 2022.

¹⁹⁷ Organization of American States. *American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. 2016. art. 6, 13 para. 3, 14, 15 paras. 3 et seqq., 17 para. 2.

¹⁹⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage – Sixth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage – 22-29 November 2011, Bali, Indonesia: Media Kit*. 2011. p. 4.

comprising 58 states that are elected by the General Conference.¹⁹⁹ The General Conference determines the overall program of UNESCO and is empowered to convene international conferences as well as to adopt conventions and recommendations within the mandate of the organization.²⁰⁰ The Executive Board, on the other hand, is responsible for monitoring and advancing the implementation of the program developed by the General Conference.²⁰¹ Lastly, the practical execution of the organization's work is undertaken by a Secretariat.²⁰²

The General Conference has addressed the preservation of cultural heritage and language diversity in several of its sessions.²⁰³ In 1976, it issued a “Recommendation on the development of adult education”, stressing that members of ethnic minorities should have access to education in their native languages.²⁰⁴ Additionally, the General Conference’s *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2001) calls for the preservation of all forms of cultural heritage and reiterates that each person has the right to use the language of their choice.²⁰⁵ Building on this declaration, the General Conference has since recommended that Member States aim to make educational and scientific content in cyberspace available in Indigenous languages.²⁰⁶

The protection and promotion of Indigenous rights is also supported by several of the principal organs of the United Nations.²⁰⁷ In its resolution 2000/22 (2000), the Economic and Social Council decided to establish the UNPFII with a mandate to advise the council on and generally advance awareness for Indigenous issues.²⁰⁸ During the latest of its sessions in 2025, UNPFII discussed the implementation of UNDRIP, noting that the lack of Indigenous Peoples’ involvement in decision-making processes is

¹⁹⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Legal Affairs*. N.d.; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. 1945. art. 4, 5.

²⁰⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Legal Affairs*. N.d.

²⁰¹ Ibid.; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO in brief*. N.d.

²⁰² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO in brief*. N.d.

²⁰³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, General Conference. *Recommendation on the development of adult education adopted by the General Conference at its nineteenth session – Nairobi, 26 November 1976*. 1976. p. 6; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, General Conference. *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*. 2001. art. 5, 7; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, General Conference. *Records of the General Conference: 32nd session – Paris, 29 September to 17 October 2003 – Volume 1: Resolutions*. 2003. pp. 70 et seq.

²⁰⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, General Conference. *Recommendation on the development of adult education adopted by the General Conference at its nineteenth session – Nairobi, 26 November 1976*. 1976. p. 6.

²⁰⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, General Conference. *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*. 2001. art. 5, 7.

²⁰⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, General Conference. *Records of the General Conference: 32nd session – Paris, 29 September to 17 October 2003 – Volume 1: Resolutions*. 2003. pp. 70 et seq.

²⁰⁷ United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Establishment of a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (E/RES/2000/22)*. 2000; United Nations, General Assembly. *Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/71/178)*. 2016; United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Main Bodies*. N.d.

²⁰⁸ United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Establishment of a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (E/RES/2000/22)*. 2000. p. 50.

hindering the achievement of the goals of the declaration.²⁰⁹ In this context, Secretary-General António Guterres called on Member States and institutions to recognize the leadership of Indigenous Peoples.²¹⁰

Furthermore, the General Assembly proclaimed 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL) in its resolution 71/178 (2016) in order to promote the rights of Indigenous Peoples as defined in UNDRIP.²¹¹ In summarizing the outcome of the IYIL, UNPFII noted the implementation of programs for the preservation of Indigenous languages at all levels, but also stressed that the rapid disappearance of linguistic diversity can only be halted through sustained efforts.²¹² It therefore recommended the proclamation of an International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL) to the General Assembly.²¹³ In its resolution 74/135 (2019), the General Assembly proclaimed the decade from 2022 to 2032 as IDIL, making reference to the goal of leaving no one behind as established by the 2030 Agenda.²¹⁴ The resolution further determines that UNESCO should oversee IDIL in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and invites Member States to implement IDIL at the national level.²¹⁵

The General Conference of UNESCO has since adopted a Global Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032).²¹⁶ This action plan calls on all Member States and other institutions to develop their own action plans and to form multi-stakeholder partnerships with a view to supporting Indigenous communities in developing the governance structures needed to preserve and revitalize their respective languages.²¹⁷ According to the General Conference, possible measures include inclusive education and digital resources, improved accessibility of justice and public services, and the facilitation of economic growth.²¹⁸

In addition, DESA supports UNESCO in the implementation of IDIL and has previously convened an international expert group meeting on the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages.²¹⁹ The expert group developed a set of recommendations for Indigenous Peoples, the international community,

²⁰⁹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)*. N.d.; United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues – Twenty-fourth session – New York, 21 April - 2 May 2025: Draft Report (E/C.19/2025/L.5/Rev.1)*. 2025. pp. 1 et seq.

²¹⁰ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Secretary-General's remarks at the Opening Ceremony of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues*. 2025.

²¹¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/71/178)*. 2016. pp. 2 et seq., 5.

²¹² United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues: Report on the eighteenth session (22 April–3 May 2019) (E/2019/43-E/C.19/2019/10)*. 2019. p. 8.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Rights of indigenous peoples (A/RES/74/135)*. 2019. pp. 2, 8; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)*. 2022.

²¹⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *Rights of indigenous peoples (A/RES/74/135)*. 2019. p. 8.

²¹⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, General Conference. *Global Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032) (41 C/INF.14)*. 2021.

²¹⁷ Ibid. pp. 8, 19.

²¹⁸ Ibid. p. 12.

²¹⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Rights of indigenous peoples (A/RES/74/135)*. 2019. p. 8; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Languages*. 2016.

and Member States, stating that all efforts should be led by members of the respective Indigenous groups and that the preservation of language diversity should be enshrined in national law.²²⁰

The Human Rights Council (HRC) has also contributed to the promotion of the rights of Indigenous Peoples through its Special Procedures by creating an Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as well as by appointing Special Rapporteurs on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and in the field of cultural rights.²²¹ In its most recent annual report, the Expert Mechanism reviewed the degree to which various Indigenous languages are now protected in national law, finding that, in some cases, the protections did not yet extend to all areas of the law, leading to the exclusion of their speakers from some areas of public life.²²² Consequently, HRC called on Member States to continue developing national action plans for the implementation of UNDRIP and to facilitate the use of Indigenous languages in consultations between governments and Indigenous Peoples.²²³

At the regional level, several Indigenous groups have formed the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact to jointly advocate for their rights.²²⁴ The European Network on Indigenous Peoples and the National Congress of American Indians fulfil similar roles in Europe and the Americas respectively.²²⁵ Likewise, the African Union has established a Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities and Minorities in Africa, the purpose of which is to raise funds and awareness for Indigenous issues and to propose possible ways to address them.²²⁶ Within the Australian government, the National Indigenous Australians Agency facilitates partnerships with Indigenous communities.²²⁷

Additionally, several international or regional non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work towards the preservation of language diversity.²²⁸ The NGO 7000 Languages, for example, creates online courses for Indigenous languages in collaboration with the respective communities.²²⁹ Indigenous Peoples in North America can also obtain training materials and technical assistance from The Language Conservancy.²³⁰

²²⁰ United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues: Report of the expert group meeting on the theme “Indigenous languages: preservation and revitalization (articles 13, 14 and 16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples)”* (E/C.19/2016/10). 2016. pp. 11 et seqq.

²²¹ United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Expert mechanism on the rights of indigenous peoples (A/HRC/RES/6/36)*. 2007. p. 1; United Nations, Commission on Human Rights. *Human rights and indigenous issues (E/CN.4/RES/2001/57)*. 2001. p. 2; United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Independent expert in the field of cultural rights (A/HRC/RES/10/23)*. 2009. p. 2.

²²² United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Constitutions, laws, legislation, policies, judicial decisions and other mechanisms through which States have taken measures to achieve the ends of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in accordance with article 38 of the Declaration: Study by the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/HRC/57/62)*. 2024. p. 7.

²²³ United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Human rights and Indigenous Peoples (A/HRC/RES/57/15)*. 2024. p. 8.

²²⁴ Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact. *About Us*. 2025.

²²⁵ European Network on Indigenous Peoples. *European Network on Indigenous Peoples (ENIP)*. N.d.; National Congress of American Indians. *About NCAI*. 2025.

²²⁶ African Union, African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights. *Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities and Minorities in Africa*. 2025.

²²⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, National Indigenous Australians Agency. *Who we are*. N.d.

²²⁸ 7000 Languages. *About Us*. N.d.; The Language Conservancy. *The Story of a Movement: Language is the voice of a people and a culture*. 2025.

²²⁹ 7000 Languages. *About Us*. N.d.

²³⁰ The Language Conservancy. *The Story of a Movement: Language is the voice of a people and a culture*. 2025.

Revitalization and Promotion of Indigenous Languages

Both UNDRIP and IDIL call for the revitalization and promotion of Indigenous languages.²³¹ During the IYIL, UNESCO issued an open call for research papers on various topics surrounding these goals.²³² Its analysis of the papers on linguistic diversity and cultural heritage revealed that the revitalization of a language typically requires action in five distinct areas: providing bilingual education, creating comprehensive learning materials and documentation, enshrining the protection and promotion of language diversity in national law, facilitating access to social security mechanisms, and allowing the speakers of the language to restore their cultural identity.²³³ UNESCO's 2021 report on *The International Year of Indigenous Languages: Mobilizing the International Community to Preserve, Revitalize and Promote Indigenous Languages* further stresses the need to provide learners of a threatened language with adequate materials and access to modern communication technologies.²³⁴

UNESCO has recently supported three such projects in the Peruvian Amazon.²³⁵ For this purpose, the project team started by analyzing the sociolinguistic practices of the respective groups.²³⁶ One of the languages studied by UNESCO, the Taushiro language, is particularly threatened because it only has one known speaker.²³⁷ In order to prevent it from becoming irreplaceably extinct, the Peruvian Ministry of Culture, an international group of researchers and its only fluent speaker, Mr. Amadeo García, have collaborated to produce a book on the language and corresponding culture.²³⁸ UNESCO further supports these efforts by developing stop-motion animated videos intended to capture these Indigenous languages alongside the relationship between their speakers and their ancestral lands.²³⁹ The “RISE UP” project in the European Union follows a similar approach by connecting native speakers of endangered Indigenous languages with learners and researchers.²⁴⁰

These examples underline the findings of the international expert group convened by DESA, which stresses that any efforts to preserve an Indigenous language require the leadership of the respective communities as well as external support.²⁴¹

²³¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*. 2007; United Nations, General Assembly. *Rights of indigenous peoples (A/RES/74/135)*. 2019. p. 2.

²³² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *State of the Art of Indigenous Languages in Research: A collection of selected research papers*. 2022. p. 7.

²³³ Ibid. p. 85.

²³⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The International Year of Indigenous Languages: Mobilizing the International Community to Preserve, Revitalize and Promote Indigenous Languages*. 2021. p. 15.

²³⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Learn how UNESCO promotes the revitalization of three indigenous languages in the Peruvian Amazon*. 2024.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Willmer. European Union, European Commission, Horizon. *Combining tech and tradition to revive Europe's endangered languages*. 2024; European Union, European Commission. *CORDIS - EU research results: Revitalising Languages and Safeguarding Cultural Diversity*. 2022.

²⁴¹ United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues: Report of the expert group meeting on the theme “Indigenous languages: preservation and revitalization (articles 13, 14 and 16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples)” (E/C.19/2016/10)*. 2016.

With regard to language preservation in general, UNESCO's 2021 report underlines that a multi-stakeholder approach involving Indigenous communities, Member States, civil society, United Nations bodies, researchers, and other national, regional, or international organizations is generally needed in order to involve all relevant actors.²⁴² This approach has also been proposed in the Global Action Plan for IDIL.²⁴³ According to the action plan, the international community should use IDIL to develop financial mechanisms and strategic development frameworks aimed at sustainably preserving Indigenous languages beyond the scope of the 2030 Agenda.²⁴⁴

The Role of Education and Media in Language Transmission

UNESCO has found that approximately 40% of the world's population, and up to 90% of the populations of some lower-income states, are de facto excluded from education because it is not offered in their respective languages.²⁴⁵ Additionally, languages that are only spoken by a small number of people appear on fewer than 0.1% of all websites.²⁴⁶ This has an adverse effect on minority groups by making modern technologies inaccessible and excluding minority groups from the increasing number of services that are provided online.²⁴⁷

In its recent report entitled *Languages matter: global guidance on multilingual education* (2025), UNESCO therefore stresses that the 2030 Agenda cannot be achieved unless every group of people has equal access to education.²⁴⁸ The organization further highlights that education in more than one language promotes lifelong learning and plays a crucial role in preserving language diversity.²⁴⁹ In order to achieve this goal, UNESCO recommends that Member States analyze their sociolinguistic environments to develop culturally responsive frameworks for multilingual education.²⁵⁰

However, education is not the only way to transmit languages.²⁵¹ A recent study conducted by UNESCO revealed that including Indigenous Peoples and their languages in the media advances cultural diversity.²⁵² Yet, most Indigenous media organizations lack adequate funds to offer a wide range of coverage, whilst a quarter of traditional outlets does not have specific guidelines regarding the reporting

pp. 11 et seq.; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Best practices and lessons learned to preserve, revitalize and promote Indigenous Languages*. 2021.

²⁴² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *The International Year of Indigenous Languages: Mobilizing the International Community to Preserve, Revitalize and Promote Indigenous Languages*. 2021. p. 18.

²⁴³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, General Conference. *Global Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)* (41 C/INF.14). 2021. pp. 19 et seq.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 21 et seq.

²⁴⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Languages in education*. N.d.

²⁴⁶ United Nations Development Programme. *Every Language Matters: Building a More Inclusive Digital Future*. 2024.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Languages matter: global guidance on multilingual education*. 2025. p. 15.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Cf. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Strengthening media with indigenous voices*. 2025.

²⁵² Ibid.

on Indigenous issues.²⁵³ UNESCO therefore recommends that Member States implement policies to recognize the important role of Indigenous-led media outlets and combat any form of discrimination against individuals or media that do not use the dominant language of the respective Member State.²⁵⁴ For example, New Zealand has adopted the *Māori Language Act 2016*, which guarantees the status of the Māori language as an official language of the Member State and protects it in the context of broadcasting and television by creating a dedicated oversight body.²⁵⁵

These examples highlight that the transmission of Indigenous languages and the preservation of the right to self-determination can be achieved in a cost-effective manner and benefit all of society by introducing additional sources of knowledge and ways of thinking.²⁵⁶

Conclusion

According to H.E. Kőrösi, “[w]ith each lost language, we lose a culture, a civilisation, and a way of knowing.”²⁵⁷ This intrinsic connection between languages and the transmission of intangible cultural heritage has led to the development of several frameworks safeguarding the right to use one’s native language and aimed at the preservation of cultural heritage.²⁵⁸ Nonetheless, Indigenous languages are still disappearing rapidly.²⁵⁹ UNESCO therefore calls on Member States and other stakeholders to use the IDIL between 2022 and 2032 for the development of sustainable frameworks that preserve Indigenous languages and facilitate their revitalization.²⁶⁰ These efforts require Indigenous leadership as well as a commitment to preserve multilingualism and combat discrimination.²⁶¹

Further Research

When researching the topic further, delegates should also consider the following questions: Does the international community need a more widely accepted legally binding framework for the protection and

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ New Zealand Parliamentary Counsel Office/Te Tari Tohutohu Pāremata. *Te Ture mō Te Reo Māori 2016/Māori Language Act 2016*. 2023. Section 3.

²⁵⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Languages matter: global guidance on multilingual education*. 2025. p. 15; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Strengthening media with indigenous voices*. 2025.

²⁵⁷ United Nations, President of the General Assembly. *PGA77 Remarks at the Closing of the Launch of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages*. 2022. p. 2.

²⁵⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *About UNESCO WAL: Introduction*. 2021; International Labour Organization, General Conference. *C169 – Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169)*. 1989; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. 2003.

²⁵⁹ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *UN launches 10-year survival plan for endangered indigenous languages*. 2022.

²⁶⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, General Conference. *Global Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032) (41 C/INF.14)*. 2021. pp. 21 et seq.

²⁶¹ United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues: Report of the expert group meeting on the theme “Indigenous languages: preservation and revitalization (articles 13, 14 and 16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples)” (E/C.19/2016/10)*. 2016. pp. 11 et seq.; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Languages matter: global guidance on multilingual education*. 2025. p. 15; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Strengthening media with indigenous voices*. 2025.

promotion of the rights of Indigenous Peoples? How can the right to self-determination be reconciled with national sovereignty? Are there any existing programs promoting access to education as well as information and communication technologies that could be harnessed for language preservation? How can Member States ensure that their Indigenous populations can continue to use their languages without being left behind socially or economically?

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