



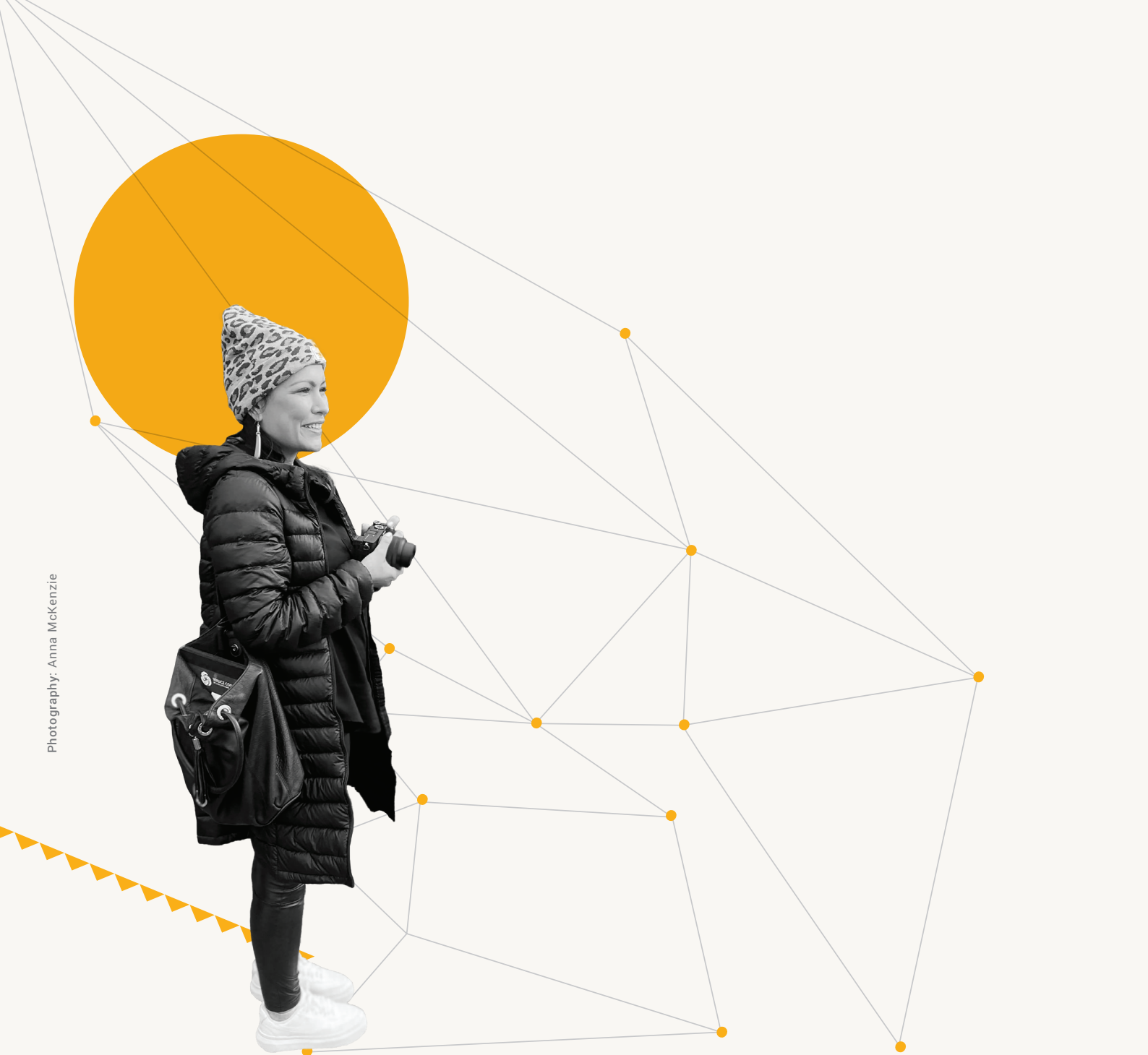
**INDIGENOUS  
MEDIA**

# Indigenous Peoples and the Media



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## FOREWORD

In a world increasingly influenced by media narratives, the representation of Indigenous Peoples in the media has far-reaching implications for their rights, cultural and linguistic preservation, economic empowerment, well-being and inclusion in society. Access to information and media content that is tailored to Indigenous audiences enables them to make informed decisions and fully participate in society. At the core of this is the right to freedom of expression, which allows Indigenous Peoples not only to share their experiences, perspectives and aspirations on their own terms, but also to contribute to mutual understanding. This underscores the importance of creating an environment conducive to the development of a free and independent media. In this context, media outlets, including those established and managed by Indigenous Peoples, can offer an open platform for pluralistic discourse in society and the introduction of the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples.





# 1. INTRODUCTION



## 1.1 BACKGROUND

The recommendation E/2023/43-E/C.19/2023/7, adopted at the 22<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), recommended UNESCO to conduct a study concerning Indigenous Peoples and the Media in partnership with relevant UN entities and Indigenous Peoples. The UNPFII invited UNESCO to present the findings of the study at the 24<sup>th</sup> session of the Permanent Forum (E/2024/43-E/C.19/2024/8).

## 1.2 OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

This publication examines national policies, practices and funding programmes related to Indigenous Peoples and media. It supports implementing Article 16 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), emphasizing Indigenous Peoples' rights to establish their own media in their languages and access non-Indigenous media without discrimination. The publication also highlights States' responsibilities to reflect Indigenous cultural and linguistic diversity in media platforms. Furthermore, aligned with UNESCO's Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples and the Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL2022–2032), an analysis of areas of improvement to media access, policy-making, representation, programming, operations and management practices is offered, as well as recommendations for the development of Indigenous and non-Indigenous media to promote inclusion and fair portrayal in the broader media landscape.

## 1.3 METHODOLOGY

The publication applies a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) and gender equality principles, reflecting Indigenous Peoples worldviews and practices. By addressing regional disparities and challenges in media access, it ensures the research is grounded in Indigenous perspectives, which are often underrepresented in mainstream media studies.

The collaboration with Indigenous researchers and media professionals, both from Indigenous and non-Indigenous media, further ensures that the research is participatory, representative and culturally appropriate, making it methodologically robust and aligned with the values and realities of Indigenous communities. The publication is aligned with Article 16 of UNDRIP and draws inspiration from the concepts and terminology rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the [UNESCO Media Development Indicators Framework](#), the [UNESCO Policy Series on Community Media Sustainability](#), and other documents, as well as the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (1989, No 169), and in academic literature and policy texts.

Two key concepts are delineated herewith for further introduction:

- **Media Development** encompasses both traditional and digital platforms that promote diversity, pluralism and access to information. Journalism stands distinct from advocacy, intercultural communication, community engagement and Communication for Development in that it offers a critical lens through which media operate. Journalism is grounded in principles of truth, impartiality, accuracy and accountability, ensuring that information provided to the public is verified and factual. At its best, media should empower audiences to form their own conclusions and engage in democratic processes.
- **Indigenous Media** is created and managed by Indigenous Peoples. It provides an open platform for storytelling and representation, while often adopting an editorial stance, seeking to introduce a broader range of perspectives on Indigenous Peoples worldviews, cultures, languages and traditional knowledge

The main findings are based on data collected through a comprehensive literature review (394 sources), global scale surveys (data from 436 responses, including 308 Indigenous respondents from 74 countries and 128 non-Indigenous media from 41 countries—the statistics used in the document refer exclusively to the responses of participants in the global survey), five multistakeholder consultations including focus groups and expert interviews, as well as media monitoring methods that track and analyse sentiments and trends in Indigenous coverage in English-language media (covering the period between 2023 and 2025). To analyse expressions in their emotional and social context, a detailed data model with enriched metadata schemas was created. This model tagged expressions (larger phrase units, also called keywords or expressions) with varying degrees of sensitivity, from neutral to harmful. Multistakeholder consultations helped define the research parameters and methods, and supported the identification of case studies worldwide. Collaborative research with Indigenous Peoples and media organizations, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, was deemed crucial for ensuring cultural sensitivity and accuracy, as well as the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

## 2. KEY FINDINGS: STATUS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 16 OF UNDRIP



### 2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review revealed significant limitations in global research on Indigenous Peoples and media, with a decline in studies after 2019. This leaves policy-makers without the critical evidence to make informed decisions. Most academic research is small-scale, focusing on specific communities and legacy media, with limited data and audience engagement. The review underscores the need for improved methodologies to support Indigenous media representation and impact in the digital age. Updated approaches such as netnography, cross-platform studies and quantitative analysis, as well as respect for Indigenous data sovereignty<sup>1</sup>, are essential. Although qualitative research dominates, there is a limited amount of research on audience demographics and engagement. Most research comes predominantly from English-speaking countries, with some from Spanish-speaking countries and a few from French-speaking ones. These are less integrated into the global research landscape due to linguistic barriers. This gap hinders our understanding of how Indigenous Peoples interact with and value media, which could be crucial for developing relevant content strategies and reinforce cultural identity. The results of the literature review are presented throughout the document, and the full list of references can be consulted in annex B.

### 2.2 SUPPORTIVE NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK

#### MEDIA POLICY AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

Article 16 of UNDRIP calls upon countries to ensure freedom of expression and access to information for Indigenous Peoples through legal frameworks and policies in the media domain. These frameworks and policies are designed to promote democratic values, protect the rights and freedom of the press, and foster pluralism in media. The legal recognition of Indigenous media is of particular importance for the realization of Indigenous Peoples' rights and the preservation of their identities and cultures. However, this can be challenging due to the complexity of national media landscapes. Both States and regulatory bodies devise media policies that are conducive to democratic values, safeguard human rights and foster a vibrant media landscape. This requires the elaboration of national legal frameworks that integrate Indigenous-specific policies. Indigenous media fulfill this mandate by serving as platforms for presenting those issues that directly affect Indigenous Peoples.

<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), in accordance with Articles 3, 4, 5, 15(i), 18, 19, 20(i), 23, 31, 32, 33, 38, and 42, which reaffirm the rights of Indigenous Peoples to control data regarding their peoples, lands, and resources. Indigenous data governance enacts those rights through mechanisms grounded in Indigenous rights and interests that promote Indigenous values and equity, while providing a framework for addressing deeper historical issues associated with barriers for underrepresented communities and knowledge systems.

#### NATIONAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

National governance plays a key role in shaping both Indigenous and non-Indigenous media, with supportive policies and frameworks—such as dedicated funding, accessible broadcasting licenses and legislative assistance—allowing Indigenous Peoples to maintain ownership and editorial control of their media. Countries with separate Indigenous media sectors often see higher levels of Indigenous media ownership. Long-term support through policy frameworks should have a focus on the importance of regulation and spectrum allocation for media independence and sustainability. However, inconsistent policies, such as the lack of legal status and recognition for community media, hamper Indigenous Peoples' access to media, especially radio frequencies, while licensing costs in some countries present further barriers. Legal recognition and formal status for community media would contribute to media pluralism and ensure diverse representation. Despite meeting legal criteria, Indigenous media often face challenges related to transparency and accountability.

- ▶ 61% of Indigenous media organizations were founded by Indigenous Peoples or communities.
- ▶ 14% of publicly owned media rely on some public support.

 Annex A | See Figures 1 to 3

#### INDIGENOUS LEGAL SYSTEMS IN SUPPORT OF FREE AND INDEPENDENT MEDIA

Indigenous legal systems are comprised of traditional laws, customs and practices that have been developed and followed by Indigenous Peoples for centuries. These systems coexist with formal state legal systems. The right to freedom of expression and press ensures that Indigenous Peoples can share their views and opinions, making it essential for media managed by Indigenous communities to maintain editorial independence. Free and independent Indigenous media would provide diverse and critical perspectives, with effective leadership and financial sustainability being essential to their success. Furthermore, free and independent Indigenous community and public service media can address the misrepresentations and stereotypes, particularly concerning Indigenous girls and women, and help to include Indigenous perspectives in media.

 Annex A | See Figures 4 and 5



## INSTITUTIONAL POLICY AND DECISION-MAKING IN EDITORIAL AND PROGRAMMING

Clear regulatory frameworks and equitable media policies are essential to protect the media from interference and ensure that editorial decisions remain independent. Regulatory and self-regulatory bodies monitor practices and enforce professional standards in journalism, but the voluntary nature and application of guidelines reduces their effectiveness. The global survey highlights the inconsistent adoption of editorial strategies and policies on Indigenous Peoples' issues.

- ▶ 8% of non-Indigenous media have a dedicated strategy, compared to 28% of Indigenous media.



Annex A | See Figure 5

## 2.3 MEDIA PLURALISM

Media pluralism ensures access to diverse sources and platforms, ownership and content, promoting democracy and inclusiveness. Indigenous and non-Indigenous media differ due to national and tribal governance, which affects access and resources. The media sector includes diverse platforms, ownership types and revenue models, shaped by sociocultural and political factors. Plurality reflects economic growth, transparency and freedom of choice between public, private and community media. Equal access for Indigenous Peoples to diverse media is critical, and the publication emphasizes the importance of mixed media ownership modalities.

### MEDIA CONCENTRATION

Media concentration implies that States take positive measures to promote pluralistic media and ensure compliance with such measures. The literature review found that, in numerous regions, a significant degree of media concentration in some media outlets, such as commercial ones, can limit access to broader audiences for Indigenous media. These limitations are frequently attributable to the legal recognition of community media and the substantial licensing costs that impede the effective access of Indigenous media to platforms and channels.



Annex A | See Figures 6 to 8

### PLURALISM OF MEDIA PLATFORMS

Radio remains a vital platform for Indigenous audiences, particularly in rural areas, while hybrid media platforms offer broader coverage and more accessibility. In some countries, Indigenous radio stations are under state control, with community radio allowed only in limited capacities until recent years. Regulatory and taxation systems, particularly complex tax structures and high taxes on advertising, digital content production and dissemination in certain countries, further restrict the financial viability and independence of Indigenous media organizations.

Despite these challenges, Indigenous media organizations are finding innovative ways to collaborate across borders and with each other. This contributes to the increased production and distribution of content that is tailored to Indigenous audiences. Additionally, while digital media provides significant opportunities for outreach, it is important to note that the information shared on digital platforms can also perpetuate discrimination by underrepresenting Indigenous Peoples and serving as a platform for the spread of hate speech and harmful stereotypes. Print media faces financial difficulties and limited distribution. However, it remains an important tool for reaching underserved audiences. Similarly, Indigenous television plays a critical role in presenting cultural content, though its availability is highly dependent on financial resources and ownership models.

- ▶ 34% of Indigenous media are radio, the most widespread form.
- ▶ 74% are hybrid media combining radio, digital and other platforms.
- ▶ 87% reach audiences through digital platforms which are crucial for content distribution.
- ▶ 6% of Indigenous media are television.



Annex A | See Figures 9 to 11

### MEDIA OWNERSHIP THROUGH A VARIETY OF PUBLIC, PRIVATE AND COMMUNITY MEDIA

Community media, especially radio, is a powerful amplifier of Indigenous voices and a source of autonomy. Community media often counter the limitations of commercial broadcasting, but their success relies on sustained financial and structural support. Community radio, despite its importance, faces challenges like limited state support, limited funding, human capacity and operational instability that threaten its sustainability. In some countries, the state regulates the work of community radio, although there are examples of successful Indigenous-led media outlets.

Furthermore, Public Service Media contribute to providing information that aligns with the public interest, promoting democratic values, educational content and ensuring their participation in content production and industry representation. While some countries have enshrined the cultural and linguistic rights of Indigenous Peoples within their public service media frameworks, commercial media often lack adequate representation of Indigenous Peoples in their programming, despite having the advantage to afford spectrum allocations.

Founded by Indigenous Peoples or communities:

- ▶ 70% of Indigenous radio broadcastings.
- ▶ 66% of Indigenous digital media.
- ▶ 60% of Indigenous television broadcastings.
- ▶ 40% of Indigenous print media.

 Annex A | See Figure 12

media. These calls have arisen due to limited market reach, financial constraints, human resources limitations, geographical challenges and a lack of infrastructure. These factors, among others, contribute to difficulties in competing on equal footing with other media organizations. In addition, many Indigenous media lack legal status and formal recognition, which can be a factor in blocking access to support such as tax exemptions or grants.

- ▶ 2% of Indigenous media surveyed receive indirect funding, such as reduced taxes on equipment purchases.

 Annex A | See Figure 14

## LICENSING AND SPECTRUM ALLOCATION

Policies requiring airtime or allocation of space for Indigenous issues in non-Indigenous media are rare. Licensing and spectrum access for Indigenous media are often limited by high fees, commercial dominance and complex regulations. While some countries allocate radio spectrum to community media, many Indigenous broadcasters face financial and legal barriers that limit their access and sustainability. Licensing challenges, including navigating cross-border frequencies, further complicate their ability to broadcast. Despite these obstacles, Indigenous media have turned to digital platforms to bypass traditional licensing, although without affordable broadcasting access, their visibility and diversity of narratives remain limited.

- ▶ 61% of non-Indigenous media respondents said they have no requirements for allocations or quotas to broadcast specific programming on Indigenous issues.
- ▶ 60% of Indigenous media are required to broadcast such programming, while 40% are not.
- ▶ 51% of Indigenous media and 47% of non-Indigenous media allocate airtime/space for public information on Indigenous issues.

 Annex A | See Figures 8 and 13

## TAXATION AND BUSINESS REGULATION

Indigenous media also face challenges with complex business regulations and taxation systems due to limited resources and human expertise. Poorly aligned national frameworks create financial burdens, hindering growth and sustainability. There are calls for institutional reforms that advocate simplified taxation and registration tailored to the needs of Indigenous

## ADVERTISING

Indigenous media struggle to attract advertisers, which limits their revenue and sustainability compared to non-Indigenous media. While public broadcasters in some countries receive state support, they suffer from niche audiences and restrictive regulations that discourage private advertising. Many Indigenous media outlets indicated in the survey that they are turning to social media and digital platforms to attract advertisers, but challenges such as limited infrastructure and technical expertise remain. Global survey data shows that advertising is underutilized, and Indigenous media could benefit from developing specialized advertising services tailored to their communities to improve sustainability.

- ▶ 1% of Indigenous media surveyed are involved in content production and advertising related to Indigenous matters.

 Annex A | See Figure 9

## 2.4 MEDIA DIVERSITY

The promotion of diversity in the media is contingent upon the representation of a wide range of viewpoints, voices, cultures and identities in media content and platforms. It also entails the equitable representation of diverse social, ethnic, gender, political and cultural groups, reflecting their authentic diversity and ensuring equitable opportunities for engagement in the creation and consumption of media. The misrepresentation of diverse groups, particularly using stereotypes, has been demonstrated to reinforce harmful biases and have a detrimental effect on individuals' self-esteem and sense of identity. This assertion holds equal relevance for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous media entities.

### ADDRESSING MISREPRESENTATION AND CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES IN THE MEDIA

Misrepresentation and stereotyping in the media harm Indigenous Peoples by reinforcing prejudices and limiting narratives about their



identity and achievements. Marginalized groups, such as Indigenous women and persons with disabilities, face further exclusion. The global survey shows that Indigenous media serve as primary sources for Indigenous Peoples, providing diverse content and amplifying voices, with a stronger focus on rural and cross-border issues. Guidelines promoting fair and balanced representation can improve accuracy and integrity of information, especially in sensitive reporting, but also promote the application of professional standards in media. Despite this, stereotypes persist, particularly in non-Indigenous media. Public service and community broadcasters are expected to offer more accurate portrayals. However, without self-regulatory mechanisms and regular monitoring practices, voluntary guidelines may not be enforced.

- ▶ **86%** of Indigenous and **75%** of non-Indigenous media surveyed apply editorial guidelines for reporting and programming on Indigenous Peoples and issues relevant to them.



Annex A | See Figures 5 and 48

## GENRES IN PROGRAMMING FOR INDIGENOUS AUDIENCES

The global survey highlights that programming genres vary in different areas such as news, speeches, cultural content, sports events, public debates and others. In addition, media audiences often offer public and private announcements aimed at Indigenous customers. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous media allocate airtime for specific topics like public information, environmental issues, natural hazards, and public health, with news being a dominant genre. However, the results of the focus groups indicate that commercial media often focuses on conflict-driven Indigenous stories that are broadcast live. These stories may misrepresent Indigenous heritage and achievements, thereby reinforcing stereotypes and social exclusion. Public service and community broadcasters provide more accurate, inclusive portrayals of Indigenous Peoples. However, they often remain a significantly underrepresented audience in the media. The global survey underscores challenges in media framing, including underrepresentation in editorial policies, gaps in diversity and limited inclusion of Indigenous media professionals, which hinders public understanding.

- ▶ **84%** of non-Indigenous media programming for Indigenous audiences is news.
- ▶ **46%** are speeches.
- ▶ **34%** are cultural content.
- ▶ **22%** are folklore.
- ▶ **18%** are sports events.
- ▶ **11%** are debates.
- ▶ **8%** are poetry.
- ▶ **2%** are oral instructions.



Annex A | See Figure 15

## PRESERVATION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, CULTURAL PRACTICES AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Indigenous media contribute to the preservation and promotion of Indigenous languages, cultural practices and traditional knowledge. The inclusion of Indigenous languages in the media helps foster a sense of belonging and recognition, supporting cultural identities. In line with the Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL) 2022–2032, 14 countries have developed national action plans to promote Indigenous languages in the media, raising awareness and encouraging the development of professional competencies. However, non-Indigenous media seldom produce content in Indigenous languages that reflects the diversity of issues affecting these communities.

The global survey revealed that many Indigenous media reported significant barriers impeding their ability to provide information and media services in Indigenous languages. Some other Indigenous media outlets shared information about successful integration of Indigenous languages into their content, while others face challenges such as a lack of fonts, keyboards and operating systems in these languages. Some community broadcasters have specific programming requirements, including quotas on local content or language use. It is also notable that financial and technical constraints limit the integration of Indigenous languages into media programming. Many efforts rely on voluntary initiatives that struggle to sustain long-term impact. The exclusion of Indigenous languages and narratives highlights structural inequities in media and deprives society of valuable perspectives. Digital tools and platforms like digital archives can help preserve indigenous languages, oral histories, music and other resources.

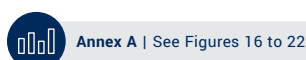
- ▶ **84%** of Indigenous media and **48%** of non-Indigenous media broadcast in Indigenous language(s).

- ▶ **84%** of Indigenous radio stations broadcast programmes in Indigenous languages, with **32%** airing daily and **24%** offering continuous programming.
- ▶ **81%** of Indigenous digital media provide content in Indigenous languages.
- ▶ **64%** of Indigenous print media use Indigenous languages.
- ▶ **63%** of Indigenous television channels use Indigenous languages.

- ▶ **56%** of Indigenous media use Indigenous languages for public information.
- ▶ **40%** use for music genres.
- ▶ **19%** do not use them.

- ▶ **62%** of Indigenous media and **84%** of non-Indigenous media had no specific quotas or targets for broadcasting in Indigenous languages.

- ▶ **82%** of Indigenous media use Indigenous languages online, with **47%** on social media, **34%** for public information, **29%** in blogs and **28%** for messaging. However, **19%** don't use them.



Annex A | See Figures 16 to 22

## MEDIA MONITORING: COVERAGE OF INDIGENOUS ISSUES UNDER A CONTEXT-SENSITIVE PERSPECTIVE

Using tracking methods to analyse sentiments and trends in the press and social media content, media monitoring was conducted to assess the level of representation of Indigenous Peoples in the media using advanced digital tools and linguistic expertise. An AI-based methodology incorporating Natural Language Processing (NLP) and knowledge graph approaches was developed to analyse

context-sensitive expressions, distinguishing self-identification from external viewpoints. This methodology identified harmful language and promoted inclusivity by tagging expressions with varying levels of sensitivity. A review of 95 documents and over 100 English-language sources identified 154 expressions and organized them into semantic clusters. Results showed a modest but persistent increase in articles with favorable sentiment toward Indigenous Peoples from November 2022 to December 2024.

- ▶ **1.4 million** media articles (**1,600** per day) on Indigenous Peoples or related issues.
- ▶ Reaching a cumulative audience of **3.3 billion** over the period (**115 million/month**).

Media monitoring in 2023 showed peaks in Indigenous mentions around major events, accounting for 67 per cent of observations, although full data analysis is needed. Articles on Indigenous issues decreased by 17 per cent in 2024 compared to 2023, with a slight increase in early 2025. Media monitoring showed weak correlations between international events and peaks in Indigenous media coverage, but a strong correlation with national events. The analysis showed an increase in positive sentiment articles and a decline in negative or neutral ones. However, automated sentiment classification may misinterpret context, and improvements through crowdsourcing, quality control and knowledge graphs are needed for better data accuracy and sustainability.



Annex A | See Figures 23 to 29

## 2.5 PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND PARTICIPATION

In the context of Indigenous Peoples' engagement in public discourse, the media have the potential to facilitate civic participation, engage in decision-making and advocate for social change.

### MEDIA REFLECTS DIVERSITY IN SOCIETY

Ideally, the media should reflect the diversity of society. This includes serving the needs of all social groups. The literature review suggests that Indigenous media enable communities to participate in public discourse, yet the right to free expression may be affected by legal restrictions or financial constraints. For the media, it is essential to strengthen their capacity to ensure equality for all populations and to promote diversity in newsrooms through the inclusion of these groups. It is similarly crucial to enhance editorial policies and practices within newsrooms, including on portrayal, balanced representation and factual reporting, as well as address programming matters, such as the introduction of new programmes or segments aimed at diverse audiences. Furthermore, it is essential to guarantee the application of professional standards to ensure fair representation and portrayals of Indigenous Peoples in non-Indigenous media and their online services. This requires dialogue with media regulators and authorities



## RIGHT TO INFORMATION FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

A review of the literature on legal frameworks used at the tribal level, including constitutions, indicates that the protection of freedom of expression and the press varies. Some frameworks adopted by Indigenous Peoples exceed the protection afforded by national legislation. These legal provisions at tribal level often lack practical mechanisms equivalent to Right to Information Acts (RTI), which could ensure greater transparency and accountability within tribal governance structures. When asked how often Indigenous Peoples are used as sources in news stories classified as serving the public interest, a significant proportion (53 per cent) of non-Indigenous media answered nearly all, most, or more than half of their stories. However, 28 per cent indicated they use few or hardly any Indigenous Peoples as sources.

- ▶ **93%** of Indigenous media surveyed are subject to requirements related to legal status and or formal recognition.
- ▶ **25%** face requirements related to reporting to Indigenous Peoples and tribal councils.



Annex A | See Figures 30 and 31

## RECLAIMING INDIGENOUS NARRATIVES AND RAISING AWARENESS

Media offer a unique opportunity to reclaim Indigenous narratives by retelling their own stories in their own manner. However, the results of media monitoring and consultations with experts suggest that there is room for improvement in ensuring that the portrayals of Indigenous Peoples in the non-Indigenous media are more representative of their worldviews. Consequently, Indigenous media entities are uniquely positioned to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in public debates, particularly on matters where Indigenous knowledge can offer significant insights, such as environmental sustainability, healthcare and social justice. Partnerships with non-Indigenous media can further amplify these voices, promoting broader social understanding and fostering inclusivity. By making Indigenous perspectives accessible to wider audiences, Indigenous media also help to bridge cultural gaps, challenging stereotypes and reducing prejudice. Through informed and respectful reporting, Indigenous media contribute to a more accurate and nuanced understanding of Indigenous issues and help Indigenous audiences with disabilities to access media content. Indigenous media also raise awareness by sharing positive stories of Indigenous resilience, innovation and cultural identity.

### 2.6 MEDIA SELF-REGULATION

Regarding self-regulation in the media sector, the global survey data from Indigenous respondents suggest that Indigenous media may be handling complaints within resource constraints. Notable approaches include forming ethics committees and

utilizing culturally informed channels to validate and address complaints, while non-Indigenous media organizations show limited engagement in either area. However, the results also show that the influence of the tribal council is significant (21 per cent) and could be questionable in terms of the media's ability to provide independent and impartial reporting. Furthermore, Indigenous media organizations across diverse regions apply self-regulation practices tailored to their cultural and operational contexts, particularly in handling complaints related to Indigenous issues. Non-Indigenous media organizations employ diverse mechanisms for self-regulation, particularly in managing public complaints.

## COMPLAINTS HANDLING MECHANISMS

Complaint handling often involves establishing dedicated desks, holding staff meetings to address concerns, and utilizing direct communication methods like phone calls and in-person visits, with documentation playing a critical role. Self-censorship and monitoring are typically overseen by chief editors, with approaches varying based on the organization's size and resources. These mechanisms rely heavily on internal staff coordination and direct feedback systems. Complaint mechanisms in Indigenous media tend to emphasize structured resolution processes and cultural sensitivity. Non-Indigenous media organizations reported fewer targeted mechanisms for handling complaints related to Indigenous representation. Specific mentions of tailored complaint-handling frameworks are largely absent, indicating a gap in addressing systemic barriers or biases effectively.

Non-Indigenous media address complaints through different channels:

- ▶ **71%** at the editors-in-chief level.
- ▶ **19%** by boards, with community influence impacting impartiality.
- ▶ **11%** by a national self-regulatory body of media.
- ▶ **9%** by Indigenous community, city or national council.



Annex A | See Figures 32 and 33

## REQUIREMENTS FOR FAIRNESS AND IMPARTIALITY

Fair reporting within mainstream and Indigenous media involves including and/or centering Indigenous viewpoints without external biases and aiming to present balanced perspectives, especially in complex inter-community matters. This approach ensures that media can provide a nuanced and inclusive portrayal, fostering trust among Indigenous Peoples and broader audiences, and free from tribal councils. Additionally, maintaining impartiality is essential when covering issues where Indigenous and non-Indigenous interests intersect. Indigenous media are

expected to navigate these interactions by ensuring fairness, avoiding stereotypes and upholding the cultural integrity of their coverage. This stance supports Indigenous media in representing Indigenous Peoples' issues accurately while building credibility within Indigenous Peoples and society at large.

Global survey responses indicate that Indigenous media display a strong commitment to adhering to editorial guidelines that address Indigenous Peoples and relevant issues, reflecting their focus on cultural sensitivity, accuracy and professionalism. Non-Indigenous media often lack formal frameworks for reporting on Indigenous Peoples and issues related to them, with 25 per cent indicating the absence of specific editorial guidelines or being unaware of such frameworks. This is why national media regulation authorities are important in regions with weaker media governance, where such frameworks are more likely to be absent. These gaps highlight systemic issues, including the underrepresentation of Indigenous perspectives and insufficient advocacy for inclusive programming.

- ▶ 86% of Indigenous and 75% of non-Indigenous media apply editorial guidelines for reporting and programming on Indigenous Peoples and relevant issues.
- ▶ 51% of Indigenous media apply professional and ethical standards.
- ▶ 49% of Indigenous media have broad policy frameworks on Indigenous issues.
- ▶ 32% of Indigenous media apply language guides.
- ▶ 42% of Indigenous media have gender-equitable guidelines.
- ▶ 27% of Indigenous media have data sovereignty guidelines.
- ▶ 10% of Indigenous media lack editorial documents, and 4% are unaware of guidelines.

 **Annex A** | See Figure 5

## 2.7 SAFETY OF MEDIA PRACTITIONERS

The safety of media practitioners working on Indigenous issues or in Indigenous media environments is a significant concern, especially in politically restrictive, economically challenging or culturally sensitive areas. Indigenous media practitioners often face risks such as surveillance, harassment, intimidation and physical threats, particularly when reporting on topics like land

rights, environmental exploitation and social injustice. In restrictive environments, these media practitioners may also experience persecution and censorship, hindering free reporting. As articulated in the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, ensuring safe and supportive conditions is essential for all journalists, and is vital for the sustainability and independence of Indigenous media globally, particularly addressing specific risks faced by Indigenous women professionals.

- ▶ 49% of Indigenous media staff surveyed reported facing threats or violence:
  - 36% of Indigenous media surveyed reported that their staff face psychological threats.
  - 22% face online harassment.
  - 19% face physical attacks.
  - 13% face legal threats.

- ▶ When covering Indigenous issues, 39% of non-Indigenous media staff surveyed reported facing threats or violence:
  - 25% experienced psychological pressure.
  - 17% online harassment.
  - 16% physical attacks.
  - 8% legal threats.

 **Annex A** | See Figures 34 and 35

## 2.8 INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND VIABILITY

Strengthening management and operations in media, building professional capacity, investing in infrastructure, and supporting institutions that uphold freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity are essential for fostering professional standards. Maintaining professional standards in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous media enhances credibility, builds public trust, and ensures that media outlets serve as reliable sources of information. For Indigenous media, these standards—along with adequate infrastructure—play a vital role in advocacy, civic engagement and public discourse, while also safeguarding the integrity of Indigenous perspectives and providing accurate, unbiased reporting on issues affecting both Indigenous Peoples and society at large.

### INCLUSIVE OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Inclusive practices in the media empower Indigenous professionals to ensure authentic representation, foster cultural sensitivity and take on leadership roles, enhancing media diversity and professional community engagement. Diverse teams can also contribute to a variety of viewpoints, knowledge and experiences, which may in



turn lead to more innovative and creative media productions. This not only enriches the media landscape by offering audiences a broader range of content but also promotes equal opportunities for career advancement and professional development. Such a strategy addresses historical inequalities and promotes fairness, as well as ensures sustainability in the media industry.

- ▶ 53% of Indigenous media have an entirely Indigenous staff.
- ▶ 26% have a majority of Indigenous staff.

- ▶ 29% of non-Indigenous media have no Indigenous staff.
- ▶ 24% have less than 10% Indigenous staff.
- ▶ 14% have an entirely Indigenous staff.
- ▶ 15% have a majority of Indigenous staff.

Staffing in Indigenous media organizations emerges as a significant area of progress, with 78 per cent of surveyed Indigenous organizations reporting that Indigenous Peoples comprise most of their staff. Nearly half have implemented policies to prioritize the hiring and management of Indigenous employees. However, the broader media ecosystem, including mainstream outlets, lacks similar levels of inclusion. This absence may have an impact on the opportunities for cross-cultural understanding and equitable policy development.

- ▶ 64% of Indigenous media and 56% of non-Indigenous media have hiring policies in place for Indigenous professionals or are in the process of developing them.



Annex A | See Figures 36 and 37

## CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To maintain professional standards, media organizations should offer access to training, education and networking opportunities. Over 50 per cent of Indigenous media respondents reported partnerships with other organizations for training and capacity building, including internships, mentorships and collaboration with media schools. The global survey also identified issues hindering the dissemination of Indigenous content, including unverified sources (43 per cent), inappropriate language (32 per cent) and concerns about alignment with Indigenous worldviews (32 per cent). These findings highlight the need for ethical training to improve Indigenous representation and

handling of Indigenous data sovereignty. Non-Indigenous media also engage in recruitment initiatives and cultural exchanges to support Indigenous practitioners and promote inclusive work environments.

- ▶ 60% of non-Indigenous media lack Indigenous-specific training.
- ▶ Offered training topics include cultural awareness (33%), gender equality (26%) and environmental management (24%), with lower priorities for tribal governance (13%) and data sovereignty (10%).



Annex A | See Figures 38 and 39

## INDIGENOUS JOURNALISM EDUCATION

Aligned with Article 16 of UNDRIP, media experts emphasize the importance of establishing journalism schools and ensuring access to media education for Indigenous Peoples. Developing academic courses tailored to Indigenous perspectives and media practices would help build a new generation of Indigenous media professionals trained in professional standards and cultural sensitivity. Intercultural communication courses should also be integrated into journalism curricula to foster a deeper understanding of Indigenous cultures, histories and worldviews. In addition, specialized training programmes for non-Indigenous media professionals on Indigenous issues are essential to promoting accurate representation.

## TRADE UNIONS AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Such institutions play a crucial role in supporting media practitioners by providing a network for knowledge sharing and cooperation, legal support and development of professional standards, as well as representing and advocating for their members. The literature review found that these bodies serve as a support system, protecting the rights of Indigenous media workers and helping to establish fair practices and professional standards within the industry. By engaging with these organizations, Indigenous media workers gain representation, access to resources and strengthened editorial independence, ensuring equitable journalism.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

The literature review and global survey highlight significant limitations in Indigenous media's access to crucial infrastructure, such as mobile networks, internet services and broadcasting facilities. Regulatory, technical and economic barriers limit their ability to operate and expand, with many lacking vital resources like satellites and broadcasting equipment. High licensing costs further hinder growth. Indigenous media face challenges such as inadequate funding, limited technical training and unreliable electricity, especially for community radio stations. Despite these obstacles, Indigenous youth are increasingly engaging with ICTs, fostering new forms of cultural expression and activism. Expanding

connectivity and strengthening infrastructure are essential to ensure Indigenous media's sustainability and cultural preservation.

- ▶ **53%** of Indigenous media face high equipment costs.
- ▶ **31%** lack skilled staff.
- ▶ **30%** have audience with no access to internet.
- ▶ **28%** rely on analogue signals.
- ▶ **19%** lack internet access.

 **Annex A | See Figures 40**

## DIGITAL TRANSITION

The rise of digital media has brought both opportunities and challenges for Indigenous Peoples. Digital platforms have the potential to play a positive role in preserving languages and cultural heritage. However, it's important to acknowledge that these platforms can also be a public space that facilitates the spread of disinformation and misinformation. Despite these challenges, Indigenous Peoples are using digital platforms to challenge stereotypes and assert their identities, with young activists leveraging social media to share knowledge.

- ▶ Nearly **70%** of Indigenous respondents adapt well to the digital environment, with fewer than **10%** struggling.

Those respondents who referenced the challenges such as financial constraints, a shortage of skilled personnel, infrastructure gaps, limited internet access and low digital literacy levels. It was also noted that regulatory inequities and high operational costs could be contributing to their limited digital engagement. The global survey pointed to the fact that regulatory frameworks and infrastructure challenges can sometimes impede the transition of Indigenous media to the digital market.

- ▶ **28%** of Indigenous media surveyed lack subsidies from other broadcasters, distributors or state.
- ▶ **17%** referred to the poorly tailored regulatory approaches or policies related to the digital transition.
- ▶ **15%** mentioned no equitable access to frequency spectrum.

While AI presents opportunities for language preservation, Indigenous media professionals need the technical skills to use these tools while maintaining editorial independence and control over Indigenous data.

 **Annex A | See Figures 40 to 42**

## SUSTAINABILITY AND FINANCIAL VIABILITY OF MEDIA

Secure and diversified funding is crucial for the survival and growth of Indigenous media, ensuring that they can preserve and promote Indigenous voices, languages and cultures.

- ▶ **73%** of Indigenous media organizations cite a lack of financial resources, limiting their digital expansion and engagement with younger audiences.
- ▶ **51%** face challenges that are related to high equipment costs.
- ▶ **19%** have no internet access.
- ▶ **23%** referred to the expensive distribution costs.


However, financial sustainability remains a significant challenge for many Indigenous media outlets, especially in regions where financial constraints limit operational capacity. Indigenous media often rely on a mix of public funding, community donations, international aid and government grants, but these sources of income tend to be unstable and unpredictable. Strengthening ties with political, legal and community organizations is crucial in advocating for policies that support the financial viability of Indigenous media and ensure that funding for Indigenous-focused projects is consistent and sustainable.

- ▶ **82%** of non-Indigenous media lack funding for Indigenous issues.
- ▶ **8%** receive public funds that are intended to support non-Indigenous media in promoting Indigenous issues in their reporting.
- ▶ **5%** rely on donations in general.

Indigenous media organizations are not alone in facing financial struggles. Non-Indigenous media also encounter challenges when it comes to covering Indigenous issues, with many of them reporting a lack of dedicated funding for covering this topic. The high production costs, combined with competing organizational

priorities, often result in underrepresentation of Indigenous perspectives in non-Indigenous media.

- ▶ **24%** of Indigenous media have 1–5 paid staff, highlighting volunteerism’s vital role.
- ▶ **23%** rely entirely on volunteers.

 **Annex A** | See Figures 40 and 43 to 45

## PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TO EMERGENCY AND CRISIS SITUATIONS

Indigenous media, especially community media, are essential in emergency situations, delivering timely information during health crises, conflicts and natural disasters, but disaster preparedness remains a key concern due to limited resources, poor infrastructure and inadequate training. These challenges are compounded by a lack of political support and funding, although collaboration with other indigenous groups helps to alleviate some of these problems. Respondents suggest strengthening partnerships with Indigenous organizations, offering crisis communication training for media practitioners, upgrading outdated broadcasting tools, and improving internet connectivity and access to digital platforms. They also emphasize the need for supportive regulatory frameworks and the integration of Indigenous languages and traditional knowledge into emergency response systems.

 **Annex A** | See Figure 13

## 2.9 COOPERATION, PARTNERSHIPS AND CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

### COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration is crucial for advancing Indigenous media, as highlighted in the multistakeholder consultations and global surveys. Most Indigenous media organizations actively engage in partnerships, with content sharing being the primary form, followed by training, capacity building and digital platform exchanges. However, these partnerships face challenges such as linguistic diversity, limited financial and human resources and poor infrastructure, which hinder long-term collaboration. Despite these obstacles, successful partnerships with public and non-governmental organizations can amplify Indigenous voices without undermining editorial independence. Meanwhile, non-Indigenous media organizations report fewer collaborative efforts, with 26 per cent unaware of any initiatives focused on Indigenous issues.

- ▶ **77%** of Indigenous media organizations collaborate with other media organizations for sharing content, and **53%** for training and capacity building.

 **Annex A** | See Figures 46 and 47

## GENDER EQUALITY

According to the survey, Indigenous media have made significant progress in applying gender equality principles in their editorial and programming practices. Many prioritize gender-sensitive approaches, such as balanced representation and breaking traditional gender stereotypes. However, efforts to monitor and assess gender equality in media coverage remain in the early stages, with only 31 per cent of organizations having formal accountability structures.

- ▶ **42%** of Indigenous media organizations apply gender equality guidelines for reporting and programming on Indigenous Peoples.
- ▶ **55%** prioritize gender equality when identifying sources.
- ▶ **55%** consider diversity of social roles and multidimensional context in coverage.
- ▶ **46%** have adopted gender-sensitive guidelines in coverage.
- ▶ **40%** emphasize framing stories in non-stereotypical ways.
- ▶ **27%** have mainstreamed gender equality in advertising, revealing a lag in commercial content compared to editorial practices.
- ▶ **9%** of organizations reported not applying gender equality principles at all.



While 90 per cent of Indigenous media organizations employ Indigenous women, their representation in leadership roles varies. Around 14 per cent of organizations have entirely Indigenous women staff, and nearly 49 per cent have a majority or all women in paid positions, with medium-sized organizations showing the highest representation. Smaller organizations tend to have fewer women in paid roles, and larger ones often have a minority of women. Non-Indigenous media also show gender gaps, with 64 per cent employing Indigenous women but only 10 per cent having more than half of their staff as Indigenous women. Additionally, 26 per cent of mainstream organizations offer training on gender equality.



**Annex A** | See Figures 5, 49 and 50

Despite these challenges, digital tools offer new pathways for youth engagement, allowing them to use platforms for storytelling, activism and advocacy. These tools enable intergenerational knowledge transfer and provide opportunities for content creation and cultural exchange. Non-Indigenous media organizations have also implemented programmes to support Indigenous youth, including recruitment targets, cultural training and paid internships. However, financial constraints and external threats, such as online harassment, remain significant obstacles, making it crucial to address these issues to ensure Indigenous youth can thrive in the media industry.

## YOUTH

Indigenous media organizations are increasingly focused on creating opportunities for youth to preserve and advance Indigenous voices, but systemic challenges persist, particularly in rural or remote areas. Financial instability is the primary barrier, as many media outlets lack resources for sustained initiatives or to support recruitment and retention. The need for young people fluent in Indigenous languages further complicates the issue, as language is crucial for creating culturally relevant content. Political and legal constraints in some regions also limit youth participation in the media sector.



### 3. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION



#### 1. ENSURING RIGHTS, FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ACCESS TO MEDIA

Indigenous Peoples have the right to establish their own media and access non-Indigenous media platforms—radio, television, print and digital—without discrimination. Yet, this right is not fully realized, threatening pluralism, diversity, reconciliation and peaceful co-existence. Ensuring freedom of expression and access to information and media development is essential for well-being, education and full participation of Indigenous Peoples in society. All parties—duty bearers, rights enablers and rights holders—shall ensure compliance with UNDRIP Article 16 on media to uphold human rights and accountability.

#### 2. ADVANCING MEDIA RESEARCH AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Media research generates essential knowledge for informed policy, decision-making and innovation. It should be evidence-based, grounded in a human rights-based approach and gender equality principles, and include Indigenous perspectives. Ethical, respectful and meaningful research practices, including Indigenous data sovereignty, intersectional gender analysis and disaggregated data, are crucial for effective data collection, planning and monitoring.

#### 3. STRENGTHENING LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

There is an urgent need to revise or develop new media laws and policies to support both Indigenous and non-Indigenous media. Equitable allocation of broadcast spectrum for Indigenous media, especially community radio, shall be mandated and supported by national legislation. The participation of Indigenous media professionals in policy and decision-making processes is imperative. Some countries provide legal frameworks for Indigenous media, yet global disparities remain significant and should be urgently addressed.

#### 4. PROMOTING EQUITABLE EDITORIAL POLICIES

Adopting equitable editorial policies ensures that Indigenous and non-Indigenous media serve diverse, often underrepresented audiences. Indigenous Peoples remain underrepresented in non-Indigenous media organizations and decision-making bodies, leading to marginalization and stereotyping. Ensuring independent and impartial Indigenous media and preventing interference—including from tribal councils—upholds freedom of expression and access to reliable information and media.

#### 5. ENSURING FAIR REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA CONTENT

A balanced portrayal of Indigenous Peoples in media shall be underpinned by a human rights-based and gender equality

framework. Recognizing Indigenous Peoples as information sources fosters their accountability in the media. Editorial independence shall be strengthened to prevent harmful stereotypes and unfair representation in content, as well as the illicit trafficking of Indigenous cultural goods.

#### 6. IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS FOR INDIGENOUS MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

Indigenous media professionals, particularly women, shall have access to employment in the media industry under fair and non-discriminatory working conditions. All media professionals shall be ensured safety and non-violence, as well as equal access to management positions, training, capacity-building programmes, and career advancement opportunities. Non-Indigenous media professionals reporting on Indigenous affairs shall also be protected from threats and persecution.

#### 7. OVERCOMING FINANCIAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

Indigenous media organizations face challenges including limited human resources, infrastructure and technical support. High licensing fees, insufficient public funding and restrictive advertising regulations hinder their operational sustainability. In accordance with the UNDRIP, governments shall take measures to ensure that state-owned media adequately reflect Indigenous cultural diversity.

#### 8. ADDRESSING DIGITAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Digital platforms and AI-based tools present both opportunities and challenges. While digital tools enhance audience engagement, their adoption is hindered by limited internet access, bias in AI-based solutions, underrepresentation of Indigenous languages online, gender-based violence and digital literacy gaps. Investing in infrastructure and developing guidelines and digital tools helps to bridge these gaps and support Indigenous media in the digital space.

#### 9. STRENGTHENING MEDIA AS A PLATFORM FOR PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Media foster public discourse and participation among Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous media serve as platforms for sharing experiences, mobilizing action and shaping narratives. Ensuring Indigenous Peoples' participation in non-Indigenous media programming and content production contribute to inclusive dialogue in society.

#### 10. PROMOTING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN MEDIA

Language profoundly shapes how information is perceived and conveyed. Ensuring access to media content in Indigenous

languages is vital for cultural and linguistic preservation, education and broader social inclusion. Developing language tools and resources will strengthen Indigenous language use in media, education, science and technology. Public service and community media shall be supported in fulfilling this mandate.

## **11. INTEGRATING GENDER, DISABILITY AND YOUTH APPROACHES, AND CRISIS PREPAREDNESS IN MEDIA**

Intersectional approaches addressing gender equality, disability inclusion and youth participation in media shall be prioritized. Efforts should be taken to ensure inclusive coverage of all social groups, support Indigenous women in the media, promote safety of media professionals and address gender-based and disability-related discrimination in media. Developing content and programming relevant to young people would encourage their participation and public engagement. Furthermore, emergency and crisis preparedness for Indigenous media are also essential. Structural barriers shall be dismantled to enable Indigenous media to implement sustainable and impactful initiatives in these areas.

## **12. STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS**

New multistakeholder partnerships and professional associations are needed to enhance collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous media. Ensuring that Indigenous media workers, particularly women, have meaningful participation in global journalism will legitimize their role in the media landscape. Knowledge transfer, ethical guidelines, mentorship programmes and advocacy networks should be promoted to support media sustainability and fair working conditions, especially for Indigenous women in the media industry.







## About

The recommendation E/2023/43-E/C.19/2023/7, adopted at the 22<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), recommended UNESCO to conduct a study concerning Indigenous Peoples and the Media in partnership with relevant UN entities and Indigenous Peoples. The UNPFII invited UNESCO to present the findings of the study at the 24<sup>th</sup> session of the Permanent Forum (E/2024/43/-E/C.19/2024/8).

CI/MDE/2025/ICM/5

