ON THE MOVE

Cultural Mobility Flows Report

The International Circulation of Indigenous Creatives

Co-funded by the European Union

On the Move is the international information network dedicated to artistic and cultural mobility, gathering 86 members from 32 countries. Since 2002, On the Move provides regular, up-to-date and free information on mobility opportunities, conditions and funding, and advocates for the value of cross-border cultural mobility. Co-funded by the European Union and the French Ministry of Culture, On the Move is implementing an ambitious multi-annual programme to build the capacities of local, regional, national, European and international stakeholders for the sustainable development of our cultural ecosystems.

On the Move regularly commissions researchers to investigate different themes closely related to the network's activities and the work carried out by its members. Reflecting on transversal concerns and key areas of artistic and cultural mobility, the network tries to establish a clearer picture of the current movements and trends while formulating policy recommendations.

http://on-the-move.org

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Acknowledgments to Cultural Mobility Webinar panellists and interviewees (including by email):
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Lazarina Matuta, visual artist (Zambia)
Letícia Stallone, curator and researcher (Brazil & Denmark)
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Martha Hincapié Charry, dance artist & curator (Colombia & Germany)
Mayunkiki, Ainu singer and artist (Japan) - For this report, she was interviewed with the assistance and interpretation of Kanoko Tamura who regularly works with Mayunkiki.
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This publication uses the font Atkinson Hyperlegible – a typeface developed explicitly for visually impaired people.
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Suggested citation format: Floch, Y., Wilson, C.R. and Yeluri, M., *Cultural Mobility Flows Report – The International Circulation of Indigenous Creatives*, On the Move, 2025, available at **on-the-move.org/resources**.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

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Foreword

We are delighted to present this new Cultural Mobility Flows Report, which focuses on the international circulation of Indigenous arts workers and provides a collective consideration of several key areas. This comprehensive report aims to offer a thorough understanding of the essential aspects of Indigenous arts professionals' circumstances. We extend our heartfelt thanks to our contributors and supporters, who generously shared their expertise, lived experiences, and key resources. It is clear that there is a pressing need to enhance knowledge regarding the contemporary practices of Indigenous artists and to analyse the routes and destinations of their international mobility.

The first chapter presents an in-depth analysis of calls for cultural mobility opportunities posted on the On the Move website since January 2020. The data focuses on funded programmes, generally one-off calls or calls related to temporary or shifting programmes rather than permanent ones, which are separately listed in On the Move's mobility funding guides. This section helps identify the few bilateral and multilateral cultural exchange programmes and opportunities for international exploration, creation, learning, and connection.

The second chapter builds upon the contributions provided by key experts during the Cultural Mobility Webinar and in additional interviews. It aims to better identify the challenges faced by artists and cultural professionals while presenting existing practical guidance and local initiatives. This chapter investigates the nature of cultural exchanges and collaborations between Indigenous artists and their international counterparts. Interviewees were invited to share their lived experiences and assess the impact of these exchanges on artistic practices and cultural preservation. Additionally, the report explores how Indigenous artists maintain and express their cultural identity in international contexts and raises concerns in relation to the representation of Indigenous cultures in global art scenes, including the potential for misrepresentation or appropriation.

The third chapter summarises evidence from recent literature, placing particular emphasis on the factors influencing destination choices. The desk research offers valuable insights into the dynamics of international circulation and mobility of Indigenous artists, contributing to a better understanding of their experiences and the broader implications for cultural exchange and preservation.

Ultimately, the publication provides recommendations to all cultural stakeholders, including the European Union and international institutions, as well as local, regional, and national authorities. These recommendations are derived from the sources analysed above and reinforce observations and suggestions appearing in relevant policy documents addressing the needs and challenges of Indigenous creatives. The report suggests policy changes, funding initiatives, and collaborative projects to enhance global opportunities for Indigenous arts professionals.

We wish you an inspiring read!

Yohann Floch

Data Analysis: Focus on Indigenous Communities in Open Calls for Participation

by Claire Rosslyn Wilson

This chapter presents an analysis of calls for cultural mobility opportunities posted on the On the Move website from 1 January 2020 to 31 May 2025, with a focus on those that are connected to Indigenous participants or themes. The data reflects the website's editorial policy and focus, which is on funded programmes that cover at least some of the costs of travel (or that offer remuneration in the case of online/remote programmes). In line with On the Move's editorial policy, there are no calls that have application fees. The calls that are posted to the website are generally one-off calls or calls that relate to temporary programmes rather than permanent ones (which are listed separately in the cultural mobility funding guides).

The term Indigenous is not listed as a separate category or theme on the website. Therefore, to identify which calls were relevant, this research principally relied on key term searches. As different regions and countries use different terminology, the search for open calls was wide, using key terms such as First Nations, Indigenous, BIPOC, traditional knowledge holders, Sámi, or Aboriginal. There were also searches conducted in specific regions or countries (such as the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Japan, various Nordic countries and Latin America), however, this approach was too general and it did not identify relevant open calls.

These approaches give an indication of the relevant open calls on the website, however it is possible that a number of open calls were not captured in this process. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to provide an insight into some relevant case studies, rather than being a comprehensive overview of all the funded opportunities for the international mobility of Indigenous arts workers. Although what is described below represents a relatively small number of open calls, it of course does not mean that these are the only opportunities open to Indigenous people or organisations. For example, in some cases the details of the

call might particularly encourage applications from BIPOC people but that this detail might not always have been carried over into the text that was published on On the Move.

As a further note on terminology, this chapter will use the term Indigenous when referring to First Nations people, Indigenous people, traditional knowledge holders, Sámi people, Native American people, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (some of which are the terms used in the open calls cited here).

How Indigenous people, communities and themes are represented in opportunities

There are a total of 53 calls related to Indigenous applicants, communities or themes, published between 1 January 2020 and 31 May 2025 (from a total of over 3,000 open calls published in that period). Of these there are **33 that specifically mention they encourage applications from Indigenous people**, **14 that mention Indigenous knowledge as a theme**, and **eight that mention working with Indigenous communities** (some mention two of these categories).

It is worth highlighting that the majority of the 33 calls that encourage applications from Indigenous people do so **within the context of encouraging applications from under-represented groups more generally**. For example, they might call for 'applications from disabled, queer, non-binary and Black and Indigenous' artists or 'encourage submissions from BIPOC artists, artists with disabilities, and artists identifying as trans and/or non-binary'; they are not exclusively targeting Indigenous people, but rather are trying to encourage more applications from under-represented communities more generally.

There were some calls that called for Indigenous applicants only or that were Indigenous led or co-created, including Momus & Forge's international Indigenous art criticism residency (USA/online), Aejlies and Riksteatern's residency for Indigenous choreography and movement artists (Sweden), the Fluid Boundaries International Residency Programme 2025 (South Africa, Brazil, Switzerland, online), TBA21's Ocean Fellowship (Italy), Morgan Conservatory's Artist in Residence Programme 2025 (USA), Goethe-Institut Finland's training programme for emerging BIPOC illustrators and authors in children's literature (online), and Independent Curators International's Curatorial Research Fellowships (online).

In some of these six cases, there was an additional part of the call that was open only to Indigenous applicants—for example the Morgan Conservatory partnered with ATNSC to offer housing for BIPOC applicants only in addition to the standard residency benefits—while in others the call was exclusively for Indigenous applicants. Additionally, in this group of six opportunities, there are some interesting examples of Indigenous-led programme design. For example, the Fluid Boundaries project brings together participants from the arts and sciences, and from different types of knowing and knowledge production in order to critically examine and engage with the role that water plays in different disciplinary practices. The organisers for this open call are Indigenous and/or ancient knowledge convenors, scientists, and curators from South Africa, Brazil and Switzerland. TBA21's Ocean Fellowship is another example, which was organised as a

collaboration between TBA21, the Sámi Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale commissioned by the Office for Contemporary Art Norway, the Indigenous arts collective aabaakwad, and Artis. The residency centred Indigenous marine governance and leadership, exploring non-binarism as a philosophy, equality, social justice, jurisprudence, and justice strategies that protect the water. This process included bringing attention to storytelling as a methodology, as an action that portrays and conveys a territory, a mindset, and a substance, encouraging intergenerational exchange and building resilience in communities.

In addition to encouraging Indigenous applicants, **there were also calls that had Indigenous knowledge as a theme**, without specifying that applicants should be Indigenous people. There were 14 such calls, many of which were related to the planet and nature. For example there were calls focused on 'questions around planetary precarity and those most affected by the climate catastrophe, such as formerly colonised and Indigenous peoples', 'centring [I]ndigenous forms of knowledge and ways of living to envision alternative models of climate justice in the world', '[I]ndigenous land rights', the 'role of Indigenous, migrant, and other communities that have been separated from land' or 'Indigenous Knowledge'.

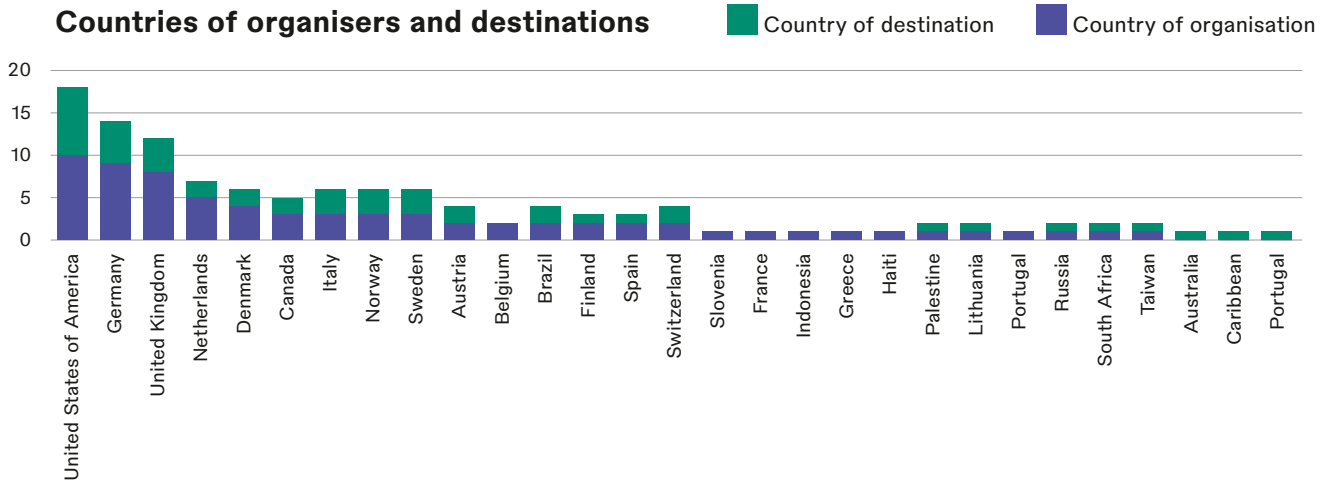
Some drew from Indigenous thinking, either by referencing '[I]ndigenous ways of being and knowing' or specific thinkers, such as Indigenous feminist scholar and Red River Métis citizen from Winnipeg Michelle Murphy's concept of the state of 'alterlife'.

The third group of open calls had elements of engaging with Indigenous communities, either through engaging with communities through research (such as with the Tate and Delfina Foundation Brooks International Fellowship Programme 2025) or through spending time with communities (such as at the artist residency in Jokkmokk in Sweden, the Kvitbrakka artist in residence in Norway, or the Digital Forest project in the UK).

Some key characteristics of the opportunities

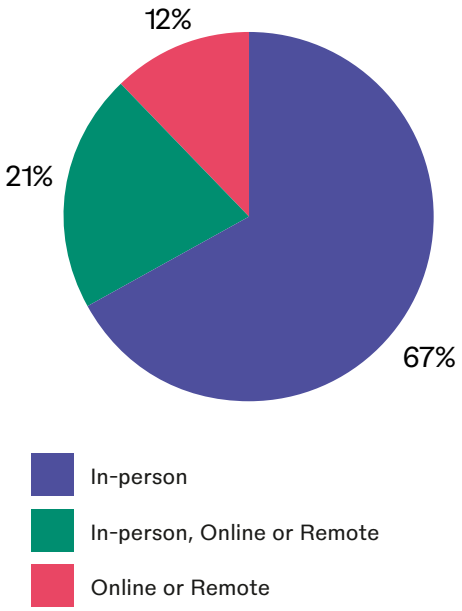
When analysing all the 53 open calls, there are some characteristics that can be identified. In terms of countries that were organisers of these calls, the top five countries were the United States of America, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Denmark. With regards to the destination of these calls, the top three countries were the same (the United States of America, Germany, and the United Kingdom), followed by Italy, Norway, and Sweden, each with the same number of calls.

Countries of organisers and destinations



For the mode of delivery, the majority of the mobility experiences outlined in the calls were in person (67%), although there was a relatively high number of mixed (21%) or online only (12%) calls. For context, in 2024 in the overall calls published on On the Move, 14.8% were mixed mode while 4.3% were online only, although the small sample size in the case of Indigenous open calls should be taken into consideration.

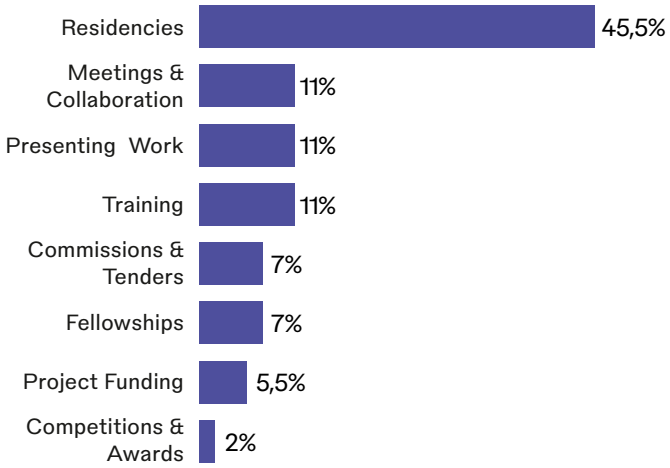
Mode of delivery



Two of the hybrid opportunities use the mixed mode to explore a specific land while connecting with other locally embedded practices. The Canadian Centre for Architecture **'In the Hurricane, On the Land' Research Programme** called for 'research and design projects that are site-specific, climate-dependent, historically attuned, and collaborative'. They began with an online workshop after which eight selected researchers participated in in-person workshops over a period of 18 months. Another example is the **Fluid Boundaries International Residency Programme** mentioned above, which critically examined and engaged with the role that water plays in different disciplinary practices. It held residencies simultaneously in the three partner regions—Zürich, Johannesburg and Cape Town, and Rio de Janeiro—over a three-month period, followed by a two-week, in-person residency in Lugano, Switzerland. In each programme the online component emphasised the importance of specific localities, while at the same time provided space to share this knowledge internationally.

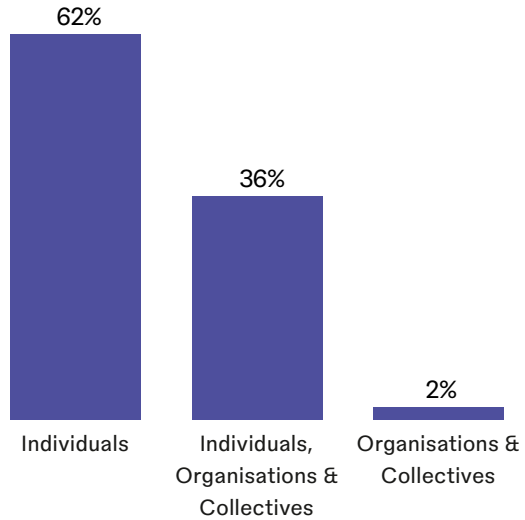
In terms of type of opportunities, the majority of the open calls were by far for residencies (45.5%), with the rest of the opportunities representing no more than 11% each. These figures are not dissimilar to the general open calls for 2024.

Type of opportunity



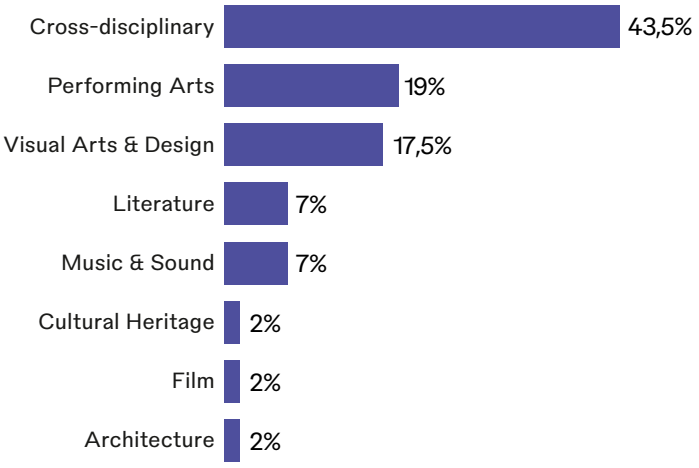
With regards to who the opportunities were for, there were more opportunities only for individuals (62%) compared with organisations and/or collectives only (2%) or for both (36%). This is similar to the trends in the overall calls published on On the Move. The calls also showed a preference for artists (at 71%) more than curators, researchers and critics, or producers and managers.

Applicant type



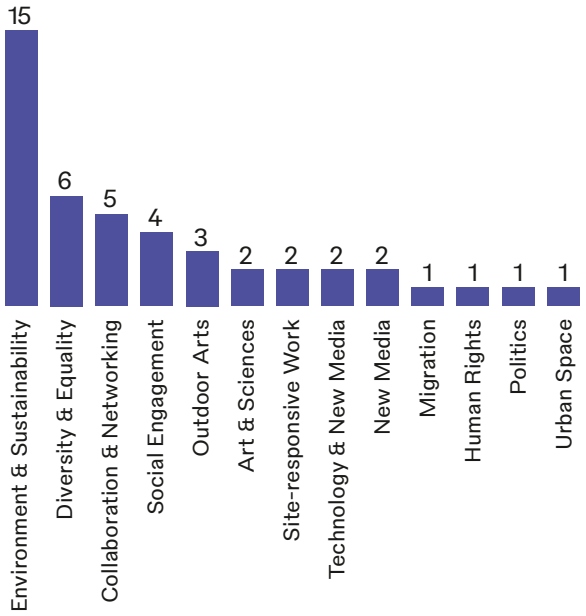
As with the overall calls, cross-disciplinary was the most common artistic field (at 43.5% in the case of Indigenous-related calls), followed by performing arts and visual arts and design, both with a similar number of calls. In the overall calls visual arts and design is more similar in percentage to cross-disciplinary calls.

Artistic field



Where the open calls listed a theme, the most common theme was environment and sustainability, followed by diversity and equality and collaboration and networking. When looking at the trends in the themes of the overall calls published on On the Move, the most common theme is by far collaboration and networking, followed by the environment and sustainability, while diversity and equality is the eighth most common theme. It is perhaps not a surprise to see that both the environment and diversity and equality play a more prominent role in the case of open calls directed at Indigenous applicants (or applicants from minority groups) or those with Indigenous themes.

Themes



In terms of the costs that were covered, two calls covered access costs (which include additional funding for those with caring responsibilities, those with disabilities or those who otherwise had obstacles to their participation) while three calls covered visa costs (with destinations to Europe, the USA and the UK).

A total of five calls were identified as receiving funding from the European Union (through Erasmus+, Horizon 2020, and Creative Europe Networks and Cooperation Projects). Two of these were open to Indigenous applicants while three of them had Indigenous knowledge as a theme. These European Union-funded open calls were a mix of creative fields and types of opportunities and the destination countries were Europe, Austria (on two separate calls), Spain, the Netherlands, and Lithuania. All of them were in-person while two of them also had online elements.

Beyond the database of open calls

The open calls described here represent a small sample of opportunities. In many countries there are also arts funding streams, particularly in national or local government funding bodies, that are designed for Indigenous populations or that particularly encourage applications from Indigenous individuals, groups or organisations. These are not reflected here, as these schemes are more often ongoing and long term, whereas the open calls published on On the Move's news section of the website are for once-off or short term funding opportunities. Therefore, those interested in international mobility funding for Indigenous people could also explore initiatives at a national or local level. For example, the **Cultural Mobility Funding guide for Australia** (updated in 2025 by On the Move member **Asia-Europe Foundation**) highlights several funding streams that are open for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at a national and State or Territory funding level. These funds also include streams that are for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or those who are d/Deaf and/or disabled, addressing some key intersectional challenges. In addition, funding bodies such as Creative Australia have **Protocols for using First Nations cultural and intellectual property** in the arts, which all artists and creative workers who work with Indigenous artists or engage with Indigenous cultural heritage in projects that are funded by Creative Australia's assessment panels are required to comply with as a condition of funding. Tools such as the Protocols used by Creative Australia can help to encourage meaningful collaborations with Indigenous artists and creators and help to safeguard against tokenism or superficial engagement with Indigenous communities, culture and heritage. Meaningful engagement during the design and implementation of either projects with Indigenous artists or projects that engage with Indigenous knowledge or themes are vital.

When open calls mention they encourage applications from under-represented groups, it is important to understand how these applications provide support for diverse groups, whether that is through additional support in the application process (for example, through translation support or the ability to write applications in different languages, funding descriptions written in different formats such as simplified language or sign language, or being open to auspicing arrangements), additional funds to address inequity (such as in the case of the Morgan Conservatory Artist in Residence Programme mentioned above), or adhering to protocols that protect the rights and/or cultural heritage of certain groups. This could involve partnerships with organisations who have expertise in specific areas (such as the Morgan Conservatory partnership with **ATNSC**), extensive and ongoing consultation with relevant communities, adopting established protocols, or developing a project that is led by members of the targeted under-represented group. Addressing the under-representation of certain groups within open calls is vital, but it also needs to be accompanied with a targeted approach that ensures that people in these groups feel able to apply and that they are not being included in a tokenistic way. Such considered approaches could also guard against cultural appropriation in open calls that have a theme related to Indigenous knowledge.

Several of the open calls listed in this chapter have rigorous methodologies to address these issues, while others could well have targeted approaches in place (it was outside the scope of this data analysis to examine each open call in depth); however, more could be done to increase the number of open calls for the international mobility of Indigenous artists and culture professionals.

Access to International Opportunities: Needs and Challenges of Indigenous Creatives

by Manojna Yeluri

This section is built on the contributions that have been graciously provided by the panellists in On the Move's Cultural Mobility Webinar on the International Circulation of Indigenous Creatives organised in June 2025, as well as additional interviews with Indigenous artists and creative practitioners. Through these conversations, we are reminded that improving transnational mobility and access to international opportunities for Indigenous creative practitioners is not a single-issue challenge, and thus requires a holistic approach when seeking actionable solutions and formulating policy recommendations. Through the insights shared, it becomes clear that it is impossible for us to understand and address the mobility challenges of Indigenous creatives without acknowledging larger structural barriers, tokenistic representation in the cultural landscape, tensions between Indigenous and national identity, the ecological cost of travel, the need to decolonise language, and more.

Mobility as a pathway to exploring Indigenous identity

Travel and cultural exchange as a catalyst for self discovery

Although there is no single official definition of 'Indigenous', the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) lists certain characteristics that are often attributed to Indigenous people and broadly considered as defining criteria. At the top of this list, is emphasis on self-identification—an important marker, which in turn helps derive other definitions and terms crucial to shaping Indigenous identity in our modern era. In this way, we begin to understand that Indigenous identities are layered and nuanced; shaped by socio-cultural context, they embody a fluidity that integrates ancestral knowledge, language, gender and local ecology, in a manner that culminates into an identity that feels personal, yet deeply rooted in community.

Travel and cultural exchange with members of other Indigenous communities can catalyse a deeper personal exploration of one's Indigenous identity, as noted by Anchi Lin (her Atayal tribe name being Ciwas Tahos)[1], a visual artist from Taiwan and currently based between Taipei, Taiwan and Naarm/Melbourne, Australia. Anchi Lin credits her experiences studying and living with a First Nations family host in Canada as being fundamental in helping her celebrate and solidify her own Indigenous identity. This deep awareness of her Indigenous identity was something that was erased during her mother's generation, and thus was something Anchi Lin could not explore while growing up in Taiwan.

Interestingly, Anchi Lin's experience living with other Indigenous people outside Taiwan was fundamental to her self-discovery journey, as it offered her the opportunity to celebrate her identity from an intersectional lens—as a queer and Indigenous person. She was able to engage with the local First Nation community in Canada, wherein it became easier and more contextually supportive to discuss gender and sexuality in the context of an Indigenous worldview, where these paradigms already existed and thus helped solidify her identity further. Eventually, the supportive environment she found herself in gave her the courage to advocate for her queer Indigenous self on her return to Taiwan.

> *'It's interesting how a physical journey can also reveal a part of yourself. I was reading about the term "urban Indigenous", which resonated with my own experience of growing up that way. Then, going back to Taiwan allowed me to explore my full Indigenous identity, learning the language and fully embracing that part of who I am.'*
>
> *Anchi Lin*

The transformative power of meeting other Indigenous artists, outside of one's own communities and countries, is something that also deeply resonates with Zambian Indigenous artist, Lazarina Matuta[2] who believes that travel and interaction with artists in neighbouring countries, can also provide powerful perspective shifts. She reflects that one does not need to

1 Anchi Lin is a visual artist from Taiwan, working across performance, moving image, cyberspace, ceramics, and kinetic installation, her body-centred practice interweaves Atayal worldviews to claim self-determined space and presence.

2 Lazarina Matuta is a self-taught multidisciplinary artist exploring Indigenous identity through storytelling, symbolism, and layered materials. Born and raised in Zambia, she draws deeply from her heritage to investigate themes of identity, belonging, and ancestral knowledge.

travel far—even participating in a residency in a neighbouring country can feel very valuable and enriching. Lazarina Matuta shares that while her experience with international mobility has only just begun, she finds that meeting artists from other parts of the world and participating in cultural exchange and residency programmes, can be very illuminating, offering respite for reflection and reconnection with one's culture.

> *'I had the time and space to reflect on my own cultural grounding. I was able to connect with artists from East, West, North, and Southern Africa, which was incredibly helpful. Sometimes that's really all it takes; you expect someone to say they travelled to many places and collected all these experiences, but for me, that one residency alone opened my mind to so many opportunities ... During the residency, conversations with other artists also raised questions: What defined me as Zambian? What defined me as Indigenous artist? What kind of label, if any, really applied to me?'*
>
> *Lazarina Matuta*

Samoan born, New Zealand-based writer, documentary film maker and arts manager, Makerita Urale[3] highlights that mobility is central to representation; 'our work and our stories travel through us.' However, she also notes that without equitable mobility, Indigenous voices risk remaining peripheral; with restricted influence in shaping global cultural discourse they risk becoming 'tokens of diversity'.

Martha Hincapié Charry,[4] a BIPoC Colombian artist and curator, also resonates with the transformative nature of travel and its ability to spark self exploration of one's Indigenous identity, even in circumstances where one's Indigenous heritage is rapidly disappearing. The loss of her grandmother, who she shares was her family's last connection to their Indigenous lineage, prompted Martha Hincapié Charry to leave her choreography career in Berlin and find ways to reconnect with the stories and heritage of the Quimbaya people. The challenge she faced though, was that the Quimbaya people and their language were officially considered nearly extinct in Colombia. This meant that she had no Indigenous community members or territories to return to, leaving her feeling disoriented and disconnected. However, this would be remedied through the generosity of Indigenous elders and people she met travelling to places like Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and even Long Island in the United States of America. She says: 'I start[ed] all this long path of remembering that is not learning but maybe more like unlearning and remembering what it means to be an Indigenous person also in an urban context.'

Remembering and unlearning, decolonising Indigenous experience and identity

Being an urban Indigenous person[5] brings its own experiences and challenges—amongst them the need to confront how colonialism shapes one's own experience of indigeneity. As referred to earlier, it alludes to a process of 'unlearning

3 Makerita Urale, Samoan-born writer, director, and arts leader, is the Senior Manager, Pacific Arts at Creative New Zealand. She has years of experience in professional theatre, festivals, television, and film, and is also a published writer and award-winning documentary filmmaker.

4 Martha Hincapié Charry is a BIPoC Colombian artist, decolonial curator, choreographer, performer, researcher. She facilitates a dialogue between continents with an ancestral wisdom perspective, embodying earth and water based native ontologies, while addressing topics such as climate chaos, ecocide, the human/more-than-human kinship, and the interplay between the visible and the invisible worlds, with an ecofeminist position.

5 That is an Indigenous person residing in urban areas, while still maintaining a cultural identity and ties to their origin community

and remembering'—a continuous journey of self-discovery, as Martha Hincapié Charry informs us. She shares that the process of decolonising begins with inner work, which in turn goes hand in hand with reconnecting with the roots, knowledge and beliefs of her Indigenous community.

The process is thus deeply personal and can be informed by international travel and cultural exchange. As Anchi Lin puts it, there is a transformative quality underlying the process of re-indigenising oneself—that is reconnecting with one's Indigenous roots, customs and heritage. This seems especially powerful from the perspective of an urban Indigenous person who might view this journey as a form of 'self-decolonisation', where it becomes imperative to let go of the colonial narrative, which might be imbued from socio-cultural conditioning and institutional education.

'I think the idea of re-indigenising myself as an urban Indigenous person has been really transformative. It feels like a kind of self-decolonisation, shifting my perspective from what I was taught in the mainstream education systems in Taiwan and in Canada. I went through the big universities, but when I engaged with local Indigenous people, I gained very different perspectives. So I constantly ask myself: what perspective am I learning from? That back-and-forth process has been so valuable, helping me develop a more critical worldview.'

Anchi Lin

The insights shared above remind us that transnational mobility and cultural exchange between Indigenous artists and their wider communities can serve as an impetus to address the damage and erasure caused by colonialism, while also fostering a broader and more expansive worldview. This aligns with a recurring principle found across many Indigenous knowledge systems: the value of adopting a holistic approach.

'As an artist, I think our role is to recreate dialogue, especially in contemporary times within colonial and globalised systems. For me, as an urban Indigenous person, questions of belonging and representation often come up—where do I fit, and how can I represent? I feel deeply inspired by my elders, who remind me that family is created through sharing: if we work together, if we eat together, we are family. That sense of community gives me grounding.'

Anchi Lin

For Indigenous persons, international and transnational cultural movement also serves as a means of recognising colonial structures and practices that require dismantling. For artists, curators, and creative practitioners, this awareness often translates into specific creative practices and guiding principles.

Hokkaidō-born Ainu artist and musician Mayunkiki[6] began learning Ainu only in adulthood. Though she is now a qualified Ainu language instructor, she does not use it in daily conversation, as fluency among the general population remains extremely limited. This scarcity of speakers stems directly from historical oppression: during Japan's colonisation of Hokkaido, the Ainu language was forcibly suppressed, accelerating its decline to the near-extinction levels seen today. Artistically, she performs exclusively in Ainu. In all other public or personal communication, however, she uses Japanese. Her decision to avoid English reflects a conscious rejection of adopting yet another colonial language—particularly when Japanese, itself a dominant tongue, is already her mother tongue.

Mayunkiki believes that her choice to sing only in the Ainu language serves as a powerful precedent for other Indigenous artists and communities, who are often denied the choice to communicate in their own language. This may be construed as a form of epistemic violence, wherein Indigenous languages are often undermined and arbitrarily deemed inferior to other forms of language and wisdom.

Mayunkiki's reasoning behind her practice of predominantly engaging with the world through the Ainu language also reminds us of the responsibilities carried by urban and mobile or nomadic Indigenous artists, who often serve as bridges between their communities and the rest of the world, entrusted with the enormous and honourable expectation of having to authentically represent the values, heritage and culture of their own communities, and sometimes even broader Indigenous identities from their countries and regions of origin.

Makerita reflects that colonial legacies still shape Pacific art's visibility and value: 'The Pacific is still seen through a Western ethnographic gaze,' she notes, sharing that Indigenous practices are often framed as cultural artifacts rather than contemporary, dynamic forms of expression. This colonial lens excludes Indigenous leadership from cultural diplomacy and global arts institutions. She reminds us that this is a structural barrier, not an incidental one, where institutions may embrace Indigenous aesthetics while sidelining Indigenous strategy, perpetuating a divide between presence and power: 'It's not about inclusion into a system that was never built for us, it's about reimagining that system altogether.'

Structural barriers to the international circulation of artists and artworks

Representation, misrepresentation and tokenism: the experience of Indigenous artists

It is widely acknowledged that a healthy creative ecosystem is one that embraces inclusivity and diversity in both the representation of artists and the programming of their work. In alignment with this belief, there is a growing emphasis on the need to bring greater visibility to Indigenous experiences, by way of encouraging more opportunities for Indigenous artists. However, an over-reliance on identity-based cultural curation can risk essentialism and superficial inclusion.

6 Mayunkiki is a singer and artist engaged with traditional Ainu song through groups like Marewrew and Apetunpe, as well as solo performances. Her work explores Ainu existence in contemporary society, drawing on her research into *sinuye*, the traditional tattooing practice of Ainu women, and weaving these discoveries into her artistic practice. For this report, she was interviewed with the assistance and interpretation of Kanoko Tamura who regularly works with Mayunkiki.

Lazarina Matuta shares that while opportunities that invite the work of Indigenous artists can feel very exciting, their limited nature can sometimes create an additional pressure on the artists to authentically represent their culture.

'I come from two different tribes; just one or two out of the 72 we have. When I'm given opportunities like the one I have now, I feel the pressure to represent our culture authentically. It goes beyond aesthetics, beyond how beautiful the work is or how lovely the symbolism might be. There's a deeper responsibility to communicate with people who have no idea where I come from, or even any understanding of my country at all.'

Lazarina Matuta

Regarding misrepresentation, both Anchi Lin and Mayunkiki touch on the importance of language and accurate interpretation. The use of a language like English, while creating ease of communication and travel as Anchi Lin reflects, also comes at a heavy cost of being a language of displacement and colonisation, reminds Mayunkiki.

There is also the burden of perspective: are Indigenous artists expected and encouraged to create for a foreigner's gaze? Anchi Lin shares that she considers this question to be of fundamental importance when creating and performing shows overseas. There is a need to be responsible, she says, to what she represents including her people's worldview.

'In my work, I avoid using traditional patterns or motifs. Instead, I integrate our intangible worldview; that's how I approach representation. For me, our worldview itself is the representation.'

Anchi Lin

Makerita observes that issues of appropriation and intellectual property are not abstract legal debates but lived struggles. 'Our knowledge systems are communal, embodied, and intergenerational,' she explains, which makes them ill-suited to Western intellectual property frameworks that privilege individual authorship and ownership. As a result, Indigenous communities often find their symbols, songs, or motifs commodified without consent. 'Appropriation erases the responsibilities and protocols that come with using our cultural expressions.', she reminds us.

Reflecting on the challenges Indigenous artists face in representation and participation within cultural institutions, Martha Hincapié Charry highlights that Indigenous artists are often excluded from decision-making spaces and programming choices. Often, she finds that Indigenous artworks and pieces are not accompanied by their cultural customs such as ceremonies, greetings to the territory, or specific ritual needs. This lack of contextual mindfulness and honouring of Indigenous customs and practices, especially in spaces like festivals and programmes that invite Indigenous artists, feels very tokenistic and disconnected, with little space for genuine dialogue about where the artists come from or what they need.

Furthermore, Martha Hincapié Charry shares that audiences respond differently to Indigenous creative work depending on their context and background. While Indigenous artists and curators aim to create immersive experiences for audiences, where they are not passive spectators but actively engaged, these formats and concepts are not always met with enthusiasm by audiences who might sometimes misinterpret the work through a 'New Age' or spiritualist lens, risking spiritual extractivism and misunderstanding. For the most part, the immersive and engaging experiences curated by Indigenous artists, has helped dissolve barriers surrounding Indigenous art and issues, with most people empathising with the themes, she says.

She also notes that Indigenous art can sometimes bring up issues like bias, racism, and the racialisation of Indigenous bodies. These conversations can be difficult, requiring resilience, especially on the part of the artists. When faced with such situations, Martha Hincapié Charry approaches them with patience and a desire for mutual understanding, seeking to spark dialogue and viewing such situations as opportunities for critical exchange rather than as challenging. These conversations and experiences though, hint at multiple structural barriers inhibiting the circulation of Indigenous art and creatives.

Structural barriers and inequities

While questions of misrepresentation and tokenism in cultural spaces persist, entrenched systemic obstacles create further challenges for Indigenous artists and creative practitioners, inhibiting international mobility and travel. Many of these reinforce forms of colonial oppression and epistemic violence, perpetuating inequities and exclusionary practices. While existing laws and policies enshrined in international frameworks, like the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), have made strides in effecting advancement through various state and non-state actors, difficulties at the grassroots level continue to shape the ground realities of Indigenous artists and creatives.

When it comes to noting the challenges to international cultural mobility, there are some factors that adversely affect all artists and cultural workers from the Global Majority or Global South, the most prominent of which are immigration restrictions, complicated visa application processes, the lack of access to funding, and various administrative burdens. These challenges, though significant, are not necessarily uniquely experienced by Indigenous artists and creative practitioners, though they may exert a deeper impact.

For instance, Makerita shares that while mobility is often framed as an opportunity, it comes with exclusions and gatekeeping. ‘It is not just about being invited abroad,’ she reminds us, ‘it is about who gets to be mobile and under what terms.’ For many Indigenous artists, access to visas, funding, or recognition is conditional on aligning with Western institutional frameworks. This restricts agency and reinforces structural hierarchies.

Several structural barriers facing Indigenous creative practitioners are directly connected to Indigenous identity, language hierarchies, and institutional protocols that overlook Indigenous cultural needs. Language barriers, for instance, are often cited by Indigenous artists who find themselves having to navigate a global cultural and creative ecosystem that predominantly uses a colonial global minority or Global North languages such as English. The application forms for visas, as well as opportunities—artist residency and grant application forms for example—are often phrased in the English language. Familiarity, much less proficiency in languages like English, are not necessarily part of the repertoire of Indigenous artists and curators, particularly those working at the grassroots level, reminds Lazarina Matuta who believes that this must be remedied if Indigenous artists are to be encouraged.

The lack of language representation with respect to visa application forms, points to deeper structural barriers in immigration policies, where Indigenous identities, defined by language or region, are often undermined in favour of national identity.

‘In my case, language is the main barrier. With travel documents, I don’t face major issues since I have a Japanese passport, which is accepted in many countries. But that in itself is complicated; my passport identifies me only as Japanese and does not recognise my Ainu identity.’

Mayunkiki

The administrative burden of travel and immigration has always been disproportionately heavy for artists and cultural stakeholders from the Global Majority or Global South, but it is even more of a burden for Indigenous artists owing to the complexities of language, lack of state recognition of Indigeneity in some countries and a lack of funding that supports artist mobility.

Further exacerbating these challenges, are the lack of inclusive opportunities for Indigenous artists. Lazarina Matuto feels that more artist residency programmes must be mindful of the unique socio-cultural and economic context of Indigenous artists if they are to create more welcoming spaces for Indigenous artists and their art. Programme opportunities, she believes, need to be more economically accessible to artists from the Global Majority. Anchi Lin reflects that institutions and sponsors offering to take over the advance payment of the application fees for various opportunities, shows and administrative costs, would immediately ease the financial burden for many Indigenous artists. Opportunities must also relax limitations such as age restrictions, because the rediscovery and reconnection with one's Indigenous identity can be an arduous process that may come up later in life, reminds Mayunkiki.

Martha Hincapié Charry reflects on the value of an empathetic approach, emphasising that customs and beliefs must be carefully considered when curating artist residencies and performance experiences. She argues that a more inclusive and care-centred approach to Indigenous art curation and mobility can only be achieved through greater Indigenous representation in cultural power structures, including festival boards, curatorial panels, and advisory bodies. Representation in decision-making and governance, she reminds us, allows action to move beyond performative gestures. This point is echoed by Anchi Lin, who notes that the cultural exchange and dialogue enabled through the mobility and circulation of Indigenous art should ultimately serve to platform Indigenous issues, functioning as a vital form of cultural diplomacy.

Networks of care and solidarity

For Indigenous artists, mobility and participation in international cultural circuits are rarely individual undertakings—they are driven by and for the community, in line with the worldview and values of Indigenous cultures. Indigenous cultural representation and mobility issues are also embedded in systems of care, reciprocity, and networks of solidarity that extend across communities and geographies. These vital networks are often informal, invisible, and underfunded.

As Martha Hincapié Charry highlights, Indigenous ways of life are grounded in reciprocity. Contributions to the community are not always transactional or visible, nor reducible to financial exchange—they take the form of time, energy, ritual, and offerings; investments that may never be acknowledged by institutions but remain central to sustaining artistic practice, culture and community life. She notes that the work of Indigenous artists cannot be dismissed as a temporary 'trend' within European cultural ecosystems; it is cultural heritage tied to centuries of survival, resilience, and guardianship of land and ecology. Informal, affective networks or 'invisible networks', allow artists, curators, and cultural workers to sustain one another through exchange, emotional support, and shared practices of care, even without institutional backing. These bonds are foundational, enabling Indigenous artists to continue their work in hostile or indifferent frameworks.

Makerita reaffirms the importance of solidarity and networks of care. 'We cannot survive these structures alone,' she says, pointing to how Pacific artists support each other across geographies to build resilience. Care is not simply then about individual wellbeing but about collective survival—making sure that communities, stories, and cultural practices endure. This ethic of care, she tells us, is also a form of resistance. She describes how Indigenous artists practice solidarity in small but profound ways, by sharing resources, amplifying each other's voices, and holding space for grief and joy alike.

Care is also necessary when navigating cultural diplomacy and institutional interest in Indigenous art, notes Anchi Lin, who warns us that institutional support for Indigenous cultural engagement may not necessarily be out of genuine interest but may also be motivated by financial and tokenist interests, such as being eligible for state subsidies or peer recognition.

Networks of care and reciprocity are essential forms of decolonial practice that reimagine how art circulates, how communities are nurtured, and how resilience of Indigenous Culture is made possible across generations. To fortify these networks of care and solidarity, legal and policy frameworks must evolve to recognise and support them as essential infrastructures for Indigenous mobility, alongside the recognition of the intersectional nuance of Indigenous identity and the power of Indigenous-led governance structures, both within and outside of the realm of cultural policy.

Makerita gives us hope by reaffirming the significance of Indigenous Futurisms, where artists and creative practitioners are reimagining futures beyond colonial frameworks. 'We are not only responding to loss, we are creating new worlds', she asserts. This is also why she stresses the need for governance structures and policy bodies to be more Indigenous-led, as she shares that our goal should not be the assimilation of Indigenous knowledge into existing global structures but it should be one of transformation, giving us all a chance to reshape the terms of mobility, diplomacy, and cultural rights.

Conclusion

To summarise our learnings from the conversations in this section, we understand that mobility and international circulation of Indigenous creatives is more than just opportunities for travel; it becomes a profound pathway for Indigenous artists and cultural practitioners to rediscover, affirm, and reimagine their identities. Through encounters with other Indigenous communities, whether across borders or closer to home, individuals find resilience, solidarity, and frameworks that help unlearn colonial conditioning while embracing ancestral wisdom. These journeys bring visibility to the layered, intersectional nature of Indigenous identity, where language, queerness, spirituality, and ecology intertwine. Simultaneously, they also highlight the inequities and systemic barriers that continue to restrict access, representation, and agency, in turn calling for an urgent reassessment of our cultural policies. Many of the challenges shared in this section, reflect the broader needs of artists and stakeholders from all walks of life, however, when perceived through the lens of Indigeneity, it is obvious that these obstacles are only further compounded, leading to an uneven cultural mobility landscape for Indigenous artists.

Indigenous networks of care and solidarity persist, stretching across geographies, which reminds us that mobility is not a solitary act but a communal one and that there is urgency in recognising the conflicts between Indigenous territories and political borders. As Indigenous artists engage in cultural diplomacy and re-indigenisation, they carry the power to challenge exploitative structures and tokenistic inclusion, offering instead new visions of belonging, representation, and futures.

A Scoping Review of Recent Literature

by Manojna Yeluri

This section shares key findings from reviewing recent literature and other resources dedicated to the discussion of Indigenous peoples' rights, with a particular focus on the factors that determine the ease and extent of their international cultural mobility. For many Indigenous people, mobility and movement are not merely a right to be exercised, but also an essential part of their world view and living culture.

Understanding the challenges and opportunities for the international circulation of Indigenous artists and cultural workers then becomes more nuanced and underscores the need for a holistic approach when addressing and attempting to improve the same. This makes it essential to consider the different thematic dynamics at play between Indigenous peoples' rights and their relationships to cultural heritage, traditional knowledge systems, emerging technologies, human rights discourse, the contemporary creative economy, decolonisation, and cultural governance.

The sources reviewed in this scoping exercise include policy documents, reports and publications, which touch on different aspects of Indigenous cultural life, including but not limited to language, conservation, identity, and representation in global cultural policy and the creative economy. Recognising that a significant portion of Indigenous culture and experiences may be documented in knowledge systems articulated in Indigenous languages, this section's research faces limitations as it is restricted to resources available in English or in the public domain. This limitation highlights existing knowledge gaps, while reaffirming the need for more holistic studies and research on the international and transnational circulation of Indigenous artists, creative and cultural practitioners in our modern world.

Bridging cultural governance and Indigenous worldviews in an ever-changing world

At the heart of many Indigenous communities lies a worldview that is holistic, relational, and deeply interconnected. Unlike dominant Global North and colonial frameworks that often separate culture, economy, environment, and politics into distinct spheres, Indigenous

perspectives tend to weave these domains together into a single, living cultural and spiritual fabric, that in turn shapes their worldviews. Different Indigenous communities and peoples hold their own worldviews which, while sharing certain fundamental truths, also provide unique and distinct lenses through which their heritage, culture, and spiritual practices can be understood. As succinctly put by the comprehensive publication, *Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Review of Knowledge and Literature*,[7] Indigenous worldviews look at culture as more than mere artistic expression, but also as kinship, land, language, spirituality, development and ecological stewardship—an interconnectedness and symbiosis, grounded in principles of reciprocity, respect, and balance.[8]

This worldview approach or methodology of adopting a holistic understanding of culture and community life, can offer a powerful model for a 'whole-of-government' approach to arts, creativity, and wellbeing;[9] an approach that an increasing number of governments, policy-making and regulatory bodies are exploring, especially when it comes to designing policies, laws and mechanisms for cultural governance. The richness of Indigenous knowledge systems, and their vital significance in shaping cultural policy, has been the subject of several policy discussions and stakeholder gatherings, including the most recently held 10th World Summit on Art and Culture[10] where it was collectively acknowledged that global cultural policy making, would benefit greatly through the lessons and insights from Indigenous governance models, knowledge systems and heritage practices. There was also agreement that greater representation and participation of Indigenous voices in global governance was essential for building a fairer and sustainable global culture.[11]

The need for cultural governance models grounded in principles of care and reciprocity is felt even more deeply today, against the backdrop of a world being reshaped by simultaneously occurring socio-political, economic, and environmental instabilities. *The State of Artistic Freedom 2025* annual report published by Freemuse, notes a global uptick in censorship and self-censorship, motivated by the withdrawal of funding by cultural institutions for creative works that were deemed a deviation from dominant and mainstream values. The economic uncertainties for those working in arts and culture were further compounded by the escalating geopolitical tensions observed both internationally and internally within several countries.[12] International conflicts, wars, authoritarian occupation, civil unrest and acts of aggression across the globe, such as in Palestine, Lebanon, Ukraine, Myanmar, and Iran, have left artists and cultural actors vulnerable to severe risk, alongside the rampant destruction and erasure of cultural heritage. Several cultural organisations and residency programmes have also been forced to pause their operations, leading to a shrinking

7 Creighton-Kelly, C. and Trépanier, F., ***Understanding Aboriginal Arts in Canada Today: A Knowledge and Literature Review***, Canada Council for the Arts, 2011.

8 For example, this could include understanding Aboriginal arts as 'walking around the tree', which involves looking at culture from different perspectives and histories; each perspective can offer different nuanced meaning, which together lead to a holistic worldview.

9 Australia Council for the Arts, ***Connected Lives: Creative Solutions to the Mental Health Crisis***, Australia Council for the Arts, 2022.

10 In keeping with the key theme of the 10th World Summit on Art and Culture organised in Seoul in 2025, 'Charting the future of arts and culture', 406 delegates from 94 countries comprising artists, cultural practitioners, and stakeholders from the global arts and culture ecosystem came together to discuss the future of culture and governance in an evolving world susceptible to the impact of regional conflicts and rapid technological change. In the course of discussions spread over the summit, several conversations touched on the significance of Indigenous knowledge systems, as well as the critical contributions of Indigenous artists and cultural practitioners, and the need to award recognition to their impact in international cultural exchange. More details can be explored in Okell, M., ***Summit Report: 10th World Summit on Arts and Culture***, International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, 2025.

11 Ibid.

12 See cases of rejection or withdrawal of funding, for example in the chapter 'Censorship of Commentary on Palestine in Germany — Art in the Crossfire: Navigating Censorship in Turbulent Times' in Freemuse, ***The State of Artistic Freedom 2025***, Freemuse, 2025, p. 51 sqq.

of safe spaces for civic and creative engagement. Recent administration changes in countries like the United States of America, have had a brutal impact on arts and culture funding, leading to the arbitrary and abrupt shutting down of several cultural and conservation programmes, with the ripple effects of these decisions being felt far and wide across the globe.[13] The year 2024 also witnessed the most number of elections across the globe—close to 74 countries held their national elections—bringing a wave of administration and policy changes.

These changes, coupled with political volatility, created an increasingly tense context for issues related to immigration and international and domestic cultural mobility. The introduction of a fresh wave of mobility restrictions such as trade-related tariffs, border closures, and immigration and travel bans—along with long-standing systemic barriers such as prohibitively expensive costs for travel and cultural programme applications, the lack of welcoming spaces for cultural stakeholders from marginalised communities (including ethnic and gender-based marginalisation), and language barriers—continue to perpetuate challenges for artists, cultural workers and creatives, particularly from the Global South.

Complicating this already challenging socio-economic and political landscape for artists and cultural workers, is the rapid emergence of generative Artificial Intelligence, which continues to reshape our understanding of cultural labour by automating creativity which in turn is leading to job losses, unequal benefits, and diminished authorship. According to Hye-Kyung Lee, professor of cultural policy at King's College, this marks a new phase of cultural precarity and underscores the urgent need to rethink cultural policy to safeguard human creativity.[14]

It is no surprise that the current global socio-economic and political landscape is fraught with uncertainty, leaving cultural rights and sustainable development goals in dire conditions. However, arguably this is where Indigenous wisdom and worldviews offer us hope. Resilient, reciprocal and holistic in nature, Indigenous models of governance and conservation can offer sustainable solutions to existing global cultural policy frameworks, better addressing the needs and challenges facing artists and practitioners from all walks of life.

Movement and mobility as way of being

For many Indigenous peoples, movement is more than migration and physical relocation; instead, it can be an expression of cultural continuity and identity. Nomadism,[15] migration, walking, and seafaring have historically been central to Indigenous lifeways, embodying a relationship to land and waterscapes that transcends borders created by colonial states. Australian

13 US President Donald Trump's executive order terminating federal diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programmes continues to have significant effects across the arts and cultural sector, as museums and cultural institutions reduce initiatives or reassess their collaboration with projects that engage with issues such as diversity and discrimination. See for example Pontone, M. and Farfan, I., '**Museums Scramble to Grasp Impact of Trump's DEI Mandate**', Hyperallergic, 31 January 2025.

14 Lee, H.-K., '**Reflecting on cultural labour in the time of AI**' in *Media, Culture & Society*, 46(6), 1312-1323, 2024.

15 There is debate surrounding the usage of the term 'nomad', with certain researchers and policy makers choosing to adopt the terminology 'mobile' Indigenous Peoples over 'nomad', as mentioned in the Special Rapporteur's report on mobile Indigenous people. This report acknowledges that although 'nomad' is still used and is being reclaimed, it can carry negative associations implying such groups of people as being a rootless population with no fixed identity. See Calí Tzay, J. F., ***Mobile Indigenous Peoples – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples***, United Nations, A/79/160, 2024.

Aboriginal traditions, for instance, emphasise the 'songlines'[16] and walking cultures through which land, spirit, and people are cyclically recognised, remembered, and renewed. Similarly, Canadian First Nation communities uphold walking practices as spiritual repositories of memory, between the human body and the lands they inhabit. For the Sámi people of Northern Europe, reindeer herding and seasonal walking routes form an essential part of cultural survival and governance, reflecting a larger cosmological understanding of kinship with animals and territories. In the Pacific islands, the Moana peoples' mastery and practices of oceanic travel embodies another layer of Indigenous mobility, where canoe routes and celestial navigation technologies span across genealogies, oral traditions, and spiritual ties with the sea.

Safeguarding and operationalising Indigenous cultural rights through laws, policy and tools

From a reading of commentaries made by cultural and Indigenous policy experts, we broadly note that existing safeguards for Indigenous artists and art are embedded in policies and legislative instruments that recognise cultural rights as part of a broader human rights and sustainable development framework.[17] One of the key international instruments is the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)[18] which is considered to be one of the most authoritative global statements on Indigenous rights. This instrument serves to reaffirm and protect Indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination alongside the principle of free, prior, and informed consent in cultural matters,[19] to safeguard and develop cultural heritage and language,[20] to conserve and protect their ecology,[21] to determine strategies for the development of their identity in alignment with culture[22] and values such as gender equality.[23] A reading of the key provisions of the UNDRIP are best accompanied with an understanding of the 2018 UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples,[24] which sets out guidelines for UNESCO's engagement, emphasising the importance of Indigenous participation, respect for traditional knowledge systems, and the need to implement safeguards against cultural appropriation.

The UNDRIP is widely recognised for its principles, and continues to inform advocacy, policy-making, and legal reform on the issues of Indigenous

16 Wroth, D., ***Why Songlines Are Important In Aboriginal Art***, Japingka Gallery 2015.

17 Among binding international instruments, the 1989 International Labour Organization's Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples is the only legally enforceable treaty devoted to Indigenous rights, affirming Indigenous peoples' rights to sustain their cultural traditions and to participate in decision making processes that determine their cultural life.

18 UN, ***United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*** (UNDRIP), Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 13 September 2007.

19 This can be interpreted from a reading of Articles 3, 4, 19 and 41 of the UNDRIP.

20 Articles 11, 13 and 31 of the UNDRIP read together, support the rights of Indigenous people to develop, revitalise and protect their cultural traditions, knowledge and practices, including through intellectual property frameworks and alongside acknowledging their own languages and names as part of these knowledge systems.

21 UNDRIP Article 29 explicitly states that Indigenous persons have the 'right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources'. Read with Articles 25 and 10, this can be interpreted to extend to their right to engage in spiritual practices connected to their ecology and their right against forced displacement from their lands.

22 Enshrined in UNDRIP Articles 15 and 23, to be read together.

23 As interpreted from a reading of UNDRIP Article 21 and 22 together.

24 UNESCO, ***UNESCO policy on engaging with indigenous peoples***, UNESCO, 2018.

rights to this day, making it a foundational source for any study seeking a deeper engagement with Indigenous persons' socio-cultural and economic development. From the work of several Indigenous scholars, we note that the UNDRIP has been translated into concrete frameworks for justice and action. As Métis legal scholar and law professor Brenda L. Gunn[25] shares in a 2017 Special Report from the Canadian Centre for International Governance Innovation,[26] the UNDRIP is powerful in that it upholds the humanity of Indigenous people, acknowledging the adverse impact of colonisation on the rights and practices of Indigenous communities. Despite its non-binding legal nature, it sets itself apart from other legal instruments by articulating the rights and needs of Indigenous communities from the perspective of the Indigenous experience. The UNDRIP, she notes, also provides nation-states, like the Canadian government for instance, guidance on how to better incorporate Indigenous laws into existing legal frameworks, sharing that the way forward is one of reconciliation between existing legal and policy frameworks, and Indigenous laws.

It is important to note that in the United Nations framework, three bodies are mandated to provide technical support on Indigenous peoples' issues to the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council: the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII),[27] the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples[28] and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous People.[29] These three bodies take on advocacy, coordination, research and monitoring, and investigative roles, bringing visibility to critical issues of Indigenous people and their communities. The UNPFII works as a high-level advisory body that offers recommendations on matters ranging from culture and environment to human rights and development, including concerns about cross-border travel, recognition and status of identity, alongside participation in global cultural exchanges. The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provides research and practical guidance to member states, particularly on the implementation of the UNDRIP, highlighting systemic barriers such as visa restrictions. And finally, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (for the purposes of this report, hereafter to be referred to as the Special Rapporteur) assumes a more investigative role, monitoring violations, responding to complaints, and engaging directly with governments to address urgent concerns through country visits and on-ground engagement. In the context of movement and transnational mobility, the Special Rapporteur has increasingly been drawing attention to the cultural and socio-political implications of movement for Indigenous communities by ensuring that there are more studies on the same. For instance, in a report published in July 2024, the Special Rapporteur, José Francisco Calí Tzay, laid emphasis on the conditions of mobile Indigenous Peoples, drawing attention to the challenges facing these communities, such as their rights to transboundary movement and the impact of armed conflict and forced displacement, as well as giving due consideration to the unique situation of Indigenous Peoples living in voluntary isolation.[30]

25 Brenda L. Gunn is a Professor at the Robson Hall Faculty of Law, University of Manitoba as well as an Expert Member of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2026-28.

26 See International Law Research Program (ILRP), ***UNDRIP Implementation Braiding International, Domestic and Indigenous Laws – Special Report***, Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2017.

27 More information at the UN webpage '**United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)**', Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Social Inclusion.

28 More information at the UN webpage '**Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**', Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner.

29 More information at the UN webpage '**Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples**', Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner.

30 Calí Tzay, J. F., ***Mobile Indigenous Peoples – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples,*** United Nations, A/79/160, 2024.

Operationalising policy and guidelines under the UN Framework

Despite their non-binding status, the various UN instruments and policies serve as a powerful set of guidelines for the design and implementation of tools committed to upholding the rights of Indigenous peoples. Within the UN framework, there exists several mechanisms that offer support to Indigenous persons, seeking to initiate projects or increase their participation in various decision-making bodies. The UNPFII website provides a list of funding mechanisms specially intended for Indigenous persons; these funds range from supporting travel to financing small projects and initiatives.[31] Chief among these is the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples, which provides travel grants to Indigenous representatives, enabling their participation in bodies such as the UNPFII and the UN Human Rights Council. Another important funding mechanism is the UNPFII Small Grants of the Trust Fund for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples, often referred to in its shortened form, the UNPFII Small Grants programme. This fund supports Indigenous-led initiatives in areas like culture, education, human rights, and the environment, offering grants up to 10,000 USD (with possible repeat funding). Although significant, the funding mechanism has struggled to meet the growing demand from Indigenous-led project proposals, owing to limited resources.[32]

With respect to the protection and safeguarding of Indigenous cultural heritage, the UN framework also provides the UN Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund, which although not exclusively catering to the needs of Indigenous communities, addresses the need to provide State Parties with the means to further support local and community projects that safeguard intangible cultural heritage, including arts, rituals, and traditional practices.[33] Another impactful funding mechanism under the UN framework is the International Fund for Cultural Diversity or the IFCD, which was launched as part of the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The IFCD seeks to provide funding support to initiatives and capacity building programmes that focus on the development of diverse mediums of cultural expression.[34] Over the past few years, several projects related to Indigenous art and culture have received funding and support through both the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund and the IFCD, despite both funding mechanisms not designed explicitly for projects uplifting Indigenous cultural rights. It is very important to note that these two funds also carry a significant distinction, in that the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund can only be accessed through State actors, while the IFCD offers a funding pathway to cultural actors, cultural and civil society organisations.

Translating frameworks into local governance and actions

Several countries across the world have sought to embed safeguards for Indigenous persons and their cultural rights into their own national legal frameworks and policies, though with varying degrees of success and effectiveness. Although not always explicitly connected to cultural policy and mobility, there are efforts in different countries that point to integrating safeguards and funding for Indigenous cultural heritage and creative expression, albeit under policies related to other aspects of socio-economic and political life (such as constitutional freedoms, language, environmental justice and intellectual property).

In Canada, there have been efforts to operationalise provisions of the UNDRIP,

31 More information at the UN webpage '**United Nations Related Resources for Indigenous Peoples**', Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Trust Fund, Other opportunities for funding within UN System.

32 More information at the UN webpage '**Trust Fund**', Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

33 More information at the UN webpage '**The Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund**', UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage.

34 More information at the UNESCO webpage '**International Fund for Cultural Diversity**', UNESCO, Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

impacting cultural policy and mobility for Indigenous peoples, with interesting results. With respect to issues of mobility, these efforts have helped create space to address mobility barriers that have long constrained cultural exchange and ceremony. It is important to note that any discussion of modern Indigenous life must touch upon the adverse impact of colonisation in the context of international circulation and mobility of Indigenous persons; this relates to the introduction of international borders that create arbitrary restrictions of movement across territories and lands that have traditionally belonged to Indigenous communities. Issues of Indigenous mobility across Canada's international borders with USA and Greenland, alongside the right to remain in Canada, have long been expressed by Indigenous partners, with profound impacts on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, complicated by the unfulfilled promise of the 1974 Jay Treaty which included a provision for free passage by First Nations Peoples and their personal goods across what is now the Canada and US border. According to a 2024 report published by the Canadian government on Indigenous mobility and the Canadian border,[35] bodies such as the Canadian Border Services Agency are increasingly seeking collaborative discussions with members of various Indigenous community leadership in a bid to improve existing cultural and mobility regulations, alongside increased Indigenous participation in governance and in adherence to the provisions of the UNDRIP.

Canada does offer examples of several strong Indigenous-specific arts funding that also supports cultural mobility, ensuring that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis artists can share their work nationally and internationally while remaining rooted in cultural traditions. The Canada Council for the Arts leads with its 'Creating, Knowing and Sharing' programme,[36] which sustains creation, knowledge transmission, and public sharing, including support for travel and cross-border collaboration, alongside its 'Arts Abroad' programme,[37] which funds residencies, touring, and international presentation. At the community level, opportunities such as the now-closed Indigenous Curatorial Collective's 'Community Cares' micro-grant initiative[38] and the City of Toronto's 'Indigenous Arts & Culture Fund'[39] provide flexible support for capacity-building workshops, professional development, residencies, and collaborative projects. Provincial councils further reinforce this landscape: the First Peoples' Cultural Council in British Columbia[40] offers significant grants for individual Indigenous creators; the Ontario Arts Council[41] funds Indigenous arts projects across traditional and contemporary forms; and the Manitoba Arts Council's 'Indigenous 360' programme[42] provides tiered support for creation, mentorship, and workshops. Together, these initiatives not only nurture Indigenous-led artistic expression but also strengthen opportunities for Indigenous creative professionals to engage in cultural exchange, professional growth, and mobility across Canada and beyond.

Examples from the Canadian experience also point towards a broader concern that faces governments and Indigenous communities across the globe—the need to bridge the gap between existing legal and policy provisions with the actual implementation and spirit of Indigenous rights forward frameworks, such as

35 See Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), ***Indigenous Mobility and Canada's International Borders: Reflecting back and looking forward***, Government of Canada, 2024.

36 More information at the Canada Council for the Arts webpage '**Creating, Knowing and Sharing: The Arts and Cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples**', Funding, Grants.

37 More information at the Canada Council for the Arts archived webpage '**Arts Abroad**', Funding, Grants.

38 More information at ICCA-Indigenous Curatorial Collective webpage '**Community Cares**', Projects.

39 More information at Toronto municipality webpage '**Indigenous Arts & Culture Fund**', Grants, Incentives & Rebates, Arts & Culture Grants.

40 More information at FPCC-First People's Cultural Council webpage '**Apply For Grants**'.

41 More information at Ontario Arts Council webpage '**Indigenous Arts Projects**', Arts Grants.

42 More information at the Manitoba Arts Council webpage '**Indigenous 360**', Grants.

the UNDRIP. Métis legal scholar and UNPFII Expert member Brenda L. Gunn, who notably penned the handbook[43] on operationalising and implementing the obligations of the UNDRIP, notes that in the Canadian experience there is still a need to reconcile the principles of the UNDRIP with the existing obligations set forth in the Canadian Constitution, as well as those articulated in treaties with Aboriginal communities and peoples.[44]

We note similarities with the above-mentioned insight in Australia as well, where Indigenous scholars and institutions have engaged with the UNDRIP not just as an aspirational text but as a blueprint for governance reform. According to Indigenous constitutional lawyer and professor Megan Davis[45] from the Barunggam Nation, UNDRIP's principles of participation and self-determination can be operationalised through mechanisms like the 'Voice to Parliament', treaty processes, and statutory frameworks that ensure Indigenous peoples shape the laws and policies that affect them.[46] At the policy level, the government's adoption of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) guidelines[47] signals a shift toward embedding UNDRIP standards in environmental, cultural heritage, and planning regimes, while organisations such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (**AIATSIS**) are generating research to guide national strategies on protecting languages, heritage, and cultural practices. Parallel efforts by arts councils, museums, and science agencies, through the design and implementation of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property protocols, show how sectoral governance can operationalise UNDRIP in day-to-day operations, from curatorial decisions to research ethics. An example of this is Creative Australia's guide containing 'Protocols for using First Nations Intellectual and Cultural Property in the Arts', which is meant to highlight an ethical and respectful pathway for collaborations and creation of new Indigenous work.[48] First published by Dr Terri Janke and Company[49] in 2002, these protocols affirm First Nations peoples' rights to their cultural heritage, guide respectful and self-determined creative practice, and serve as a mandatory framework for Creative Australia-funded projects while also informing national and international collaborations. Together, these developments illustrate how Australia is cautiously but deliberately moving from rhetorical endorsement of UNDRIP toward a layered system of governance that recognises Indigenous cultural rights as living, enforceable obligations. This might be best understood in the context of Australia's new cultural policy, **Revive**, which came into force in January 2023 with the goal of renewing and reviving Australia's arts, entertainment and cultural sector over the next five years. At the core of the Revive cultural policy, is the intention to expand Australia's cultural ecosystem to be more inclusive and artist-first, with a heavy emphasis on adopting

43 This is a publication that continues to serve as a powerful resource guiding the government's policy and law-making on Indigenous issues. See Gunn, B., ***Understanding and Implementing the UN DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES – An Introductory Handbook***, Indigenous Bar Association, 2011.

44 See Gunn, B., 'Beyond *Van der Peet*: Bringing Together International, Indigenous and Constitutional Law' in International Law Research Program (ILRP), ***UNDRIP Implementation Braiding International, Domestic and Indigenous Laws – Special Report***, Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2017.

45 Professor Megan Davis is a renowned constitutional lawyer, Pro Vice-Chancellor Society at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Sydney and Co-Chair of the Uluru Dialogue, recognised globally for her leadership on the constitutional recognition of First Nations peoples. She has served on multiple national and UN bodies, including the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and is a leading voice on Indigenous rights, democracy, and public law.

46 Davis, M., '**Overview of UNDRIP and critical analysis of Voice and UNDRIP Bill**' in *Indigenous Constitutional Law*, 5 May 2025.

47 Australian Government, ***First Nations Engagement: the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent: Better practice engagement with First Nations communities and people***, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 2025.

48 More information on Creative Australia webpage at '**Protocols for using First Nations cultural and intellectual property in the arts**', First Nations, Protocols.

49 Terri Janke is a Wuthathi, Yadhaigana and Meriam woman, solicitor director of 'Terri Janke and Company', and an international authority on Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), with experience designing and writing protocols and guides for cultural organisations, detailing how to approach ethical collaborations using Indigenous knowledge and cultural expression.

an approach of First Nations First—where there is due recognition and respect for the crucial place of First Nations stories in Australia's arts and culture, while also ensuring that all First Nation arts and culture initiatives, are First nation led.

With respect to tools and resources that encourage engagement with Indigenous art and cultural mobility, several capacity-building programmes and grant opportunities made available by Creative Australia through their emphasis on First Nations Arts is notable, providing sustained support for creation, preservation, and presentation across visual arts, music, performance, and language revitalisation.[50] Mobility and exchange are encouraged through initiatives like Creative Australia's 'Playing Australia', which offers support for touring within the country, including to and from remote communities,[51] and Creative Australia's **International Engagement Fund**, which enables creative professionals (including First Nations artists) to take their work to global stages through reciprocal cultural exchange with international partners. State-level bodies such as **Create South Australia**, **Arts Queensland**, and **Western Australia's Department of Creative Industries, Tourism and Sport** (to name a few) also run programmes that provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with funds that cover travel, residencies, and cultural leadership development. Beyond government, Indigenous-led organisations like **BlakDance** and the First Nations Emerging Curators Program, delivered by **Ku Arts**, create further pathways for touring and exchange. Together, these opportunities and tools integrate cultural mobility into the support framework of Indigenous arts practice, ensuring that artists can move, share, and connect both across the country and internationally.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the UNDRIP may be interpreted as a foundation for efforts to elevate Māori self determination through governance, cultural integrity, and treaty partnership. Reflecting this Professor Claire Charters,[52] a leader in Indigenous rights and member of the Human Rights Commission, has advanced the argument, albeit with cautious optimism, that the UNDRIP should not stand apart but instead bolster Te Tiriti o Waitangi,[53] serving as a key lever for constitutional transformation and co-governance mechanisms.[54] Building on this cautious optimism, the UNDRIP in Aotearoa functions less as an external imposition and more as a reinforcement of Te Tiriti-based commitments, gradually shaping governance and cultural policy. Within this framework, New Zealand has simultaneously invested in cultural and mobility incentives for artists, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creative and cultural practitioners can not only sustain their practices in their homes, but also represent their communities internationally.

For instance, cultural mobility of Indigenous artists is strongly championed through Creative New Zealand's investment programmes,[55] which offers various forms of support including travel and mobility funding. The recently adopted Creative New Zealand cultural policy for the period between 2025 and 2030, titled *Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025-2030* with the vision of fortifying New Zealand as a creative powerhouse with

50 More information at Creative Australia webpage '**Investments and opportunities**', First Nations.

51 More information at Creative Australia webpage '**Playing Australia Project Investment**', Playing Australia Project Investment.

52 Claire Charter is a Professor of law at the Waipapa Taumata Rau University of Auckland and is from Ngati Whakaue, Tuwharetoa, Nga Puhi and Tainui. Her research focuses on Indigenous peoples' rights in international and constitutional law, with a comparative lens on the UNDRIP, tikanga Māori, human rights, and the legitimacy of Indigenous rights under international law.

53 Te Tiriti o Waitangi or the Treaty of New Zealand refers to a document, signed in 1840 between the British Crown and Māori chiefs, and is deemed New Zealand's founding document, guaranteeing Māori authority (*tino rangatiratanga*) over their lands, resources, and cultural heritage.

54 Charter, C., 'The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in New Zealand Courts: A Case for Cautious Optimism' in ***UNDRIP Implementation Comparative Approaches, Indigenous Voices from CANZUS***, Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2020.

55 More information at Creative New Zealand webpage '**All Opportunities**', Funding and support.

global reach,[56] seemingly places a great deal of emphasis on capacity building and international cultural exchange, in an effort to expand and share the cultural impact of New Zealand (the impact of which will be better noted with time).

Elsewhere in the world, it is to be noted that there is a slow but growing recognition that Indigenous leadership and representation in governance and decision-making structures can be incredibly valuable towards the creation of development policies and legal frameworks for all of humanity. Bolivia and Ecuador, for instance, have recognised Indigenous rights and the concept of plurinationalism, which is the approach of having diverse nations and peoples within a single national border, recognising collective cultural rights and autonomy. Taiwan provides a notable example outside the UN system, where their 2005 Indigenous Peoples Basic Law[57] enshrines protections for cultural and linguistic rights, representation in governance and measures to support Indigenous cultural revitalisation, despite not being a member or signatory to any of the UN instruments.

It must be noted, however, that considerable advocacy is still urgently needed to secure the recognition of Indigenous rights in many countries. Observations noted from recent Universal Periodic Review (UPR) submissions, offer us insights into the current state of Indigenous rights alongside recommendations for areas and issues that need immediate reform.

In Japan, advocacy groups submitted a UPR stakeholder report ahead of the 42nd session of the Human Rights Council in 2023 highlighting ongoing violations of Ainu and Ryukyuan cultural rights, emphasising infringements on ancestral lands, subsistence practices, and the proper treatment of Indigenous remains.[58] In India, civil society coalitions raised Indigenous concerns at the 41st session of the Human Rights Council in 2022, urging the recognition and protection of Adivasi rights amid increasing militarisation and corporate encroachment on tribal lands and cultural autonomy.[59] Meanwhile, in Russia, a joint UPR submission by Indigenous organisations and partners during the 44th session of the Human Rights Council spotlighted the government's restrictive definitions of recognition, environmental degradation, and lack of free, prior, and informed consent, urging reforms including ratification of ILO Convention 169.[60] Taken together, these UPR submissions underscore how Indigenous cultural rights, ranging from land rights and heritage protection to mobility and self-determination, still remain deeply contested within national frameworks.

Thus, while there has been and continues to be progress in embedding Indigenous cultural rights in law and cultural policy, gaps remain in ensuring the implementation of these rights into lived protections, particularly around mobility, representation, and freedom from cultural appropriation.

56 Creative New Zealand, '**Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand**', 28 August 2025.

57 See more at Council of Indigenous People's webpage '**The Indigenous Peoples Basic Law**'.

58 Cultural Survival, ACSILs, AOCHR and Nirai Kanai nu Kai, '**Observations on the State of Indigenous Rights in Japan**', prepared for United Nations Human Rights Council: 4th Cycle of Universal Periodic Review of Japan 42nd Session of the Human Rights Council.

59 Cultural Survival, Jharkhand Indigenous and Tribal Peoples for Action, and KAT News Channel, '**Observations on the State of Indigenous Human Rights in India**', prepared for United Nations Human Rights Council: March 2022 4th Cycle of Universal Periodic Review of India 41st Session of the Human Rights Council.

60 Cultural Survival, IWGIA, ICIPR, and STP, '**Observations on the State of Indigenous Rights in the Russian Federation**' prepared for the 44th Session of the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council Submitted on April 4, 2023.

Tensions and challenges for Indigenous artists: the tug between aesthetics, heritage and representation

The 2018 UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples, notes that Indigenous persons are considered 'living manifestations of cultural diversity, repositories of thousands of rare languages, and essential partners in building knowledge societies and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'.[61] As eloquently shared by Sônia Guajajara, the first Indigenous minister of Brazil, 'Indigenous knowledges are more than an expansive repertoire of the ways of life of the human species, which include strategies and techniques for living in and dealing with the different biomes of the planet. They are also ways of perceiving, understanding and feeling the world, which open up countless possibilities for expanding and improving the very fabric of life—beauty, art, respect, love, and the notion of being part of a constellation of universes.'[62] Indigenous identity is thus inextricably connected with aspects of heritage, ecology, history and mobility, as can be gathered from the UNPFII's modern understanding of 'Indigenous' which reflects the following criteria: self-identification as Indigenous peoples at the individual and community levels; historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; strong connections to territories and surrounding natural resources; having distinct social, economic or political systems, distinct language, culture and beliefs; typically forming non-dominant groups of society, alongside resolving to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.[63]

Indigenous artists and creative practitioners often carry the responsibility of representing their community's heritage, knowledge and worldview through their creative practice. This often lends itself to several kinds of anxieties, requiring Indigenous artists to straddle various conflicting perspectives while navigating the global cultural ecosystem. As noted in an IETM report on identity in the performing arts, Kuluk Helms (an Inuk/Danish performing artist who has lived between Greenland and Denmark) shared the constant struggle between having to mask and hide her Indigenous identity, alongside navigating micro-aggressions and the internalised negativity of dominant colonial narratives that portray Indigenous culture as either 'inhumanly good or bad but always simple.'[64] Kuluk Helms also shared how her experiences living in Taiwan and the UK felt freeing, as she was able to explore herself and worldview in an environment that allowed her to escape, albeit temporarily, from the internalised colonialist and racist structures of thinking. We then understand that, while cultural mobility can empower Indigenous peoples to assert their identities and histories in transnational spaces, it can also constrain them within colonial frameworks of recognition. Decolonisation in this context demands more than inclusion; it requires rethinking the governance of heritage and mobility altogether. Shifting from extractive and assimilationist models toward Indigenous-led frameworks is thus urgently needed, to imagine just, resilient, and self-determined futures for Indigenous persons.

61 UNESCO, ***2018 UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples***, UNESCO, 2018.

62 UNESCO, ***Celebrating the Living Heritage of Indigenous Peoples***, UNESCO, 2024.

63 Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, ***Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Voices - factsheet 'who are indigenous peoples?'***, UN, undated.

64 Handelman-Smith, J., ***Performing Identity: Navigating Cultural Identities through the Arts – Report from the IETM Aarhus Plenary Meeting***, IETM, 2023.

The extractive impulse is also noted as a central tension that exists in the uneasy relationship between heritage and aesthetics. Indigenous cultural and artistic expressions, when circulated internationally, are often reduced to their aesthetic value for audiences who might consume them as spectacle or exoticised design. This process risks severing cultural expression from the community-based, ancestral, and spiritual meanings that give it life and a place in Indigenous worldviews. The aestheticisation of heritage can thus reinforce extractive logics, stripping the deeper epistemologies and responsibilities embedded in Indigenous creativity. As noted in an interview with Colombian-born artist Martha Hincapié Charry, colonial narratives encourage a 'disconnection' with the invisible or the unseen, which forms a critical part of several Indigenous worldviews, demonising and then replacing Indigenous ancient wisdom, with 'a system of political, mental, and spiritual control.'[65]

The tensions between heritage and contemporary aesthetics finds itself mirrored in discussions on traditional knowledge (TK), traditional cultural heritage (TCH) and intellectual property, where existing global frameworks rarely accommodate collective authorship, oral transmission, or sacred knowledge. Instead, existing Intellectual property rights frameworks, privilege individual ownership and commodification, leaving Indigenous communities with little legal recourse when their cultural material is adapted, copied, or commercialised without consent. The mobility of cultural practices across borders intensifies this gap: while international exposure can strengthen recognition, it also exposes heritage to heightened risks of misappropriation and market-driven exploitation. Emerging technologies introduce a further layer of complexity. Artificial intelligence (AI), with its reliance on mass data scraping and algorithmic reproduction, has already begun absorbing Indigenous images, sounds, and symbols into training datasets. Without community control or culturally sensitive governance, AI threatens to replicate and distort heritage in ways that undermine Indigenous authority and perpetuate cultural erasure. At the same time, AI is being promoted as a tool for preservation and dissemination, reflecting the dual-edged potential of new technologies for Indigenous expressions' mobility and visibility. As Indigenous technologists like Michael Running Wolf argue, Indigenous languages, many of which are endangered, are at risk of being excluded from AI large language models (LLMs), thereby perpetuating their marginalisation.[66] In the digital era, language intersects with emerging challenges around data, AI, and cultural sovereignty. Language also ties in with Indigenous rights advocacy in a profound way, owing to its role as socio-political identity, particularly against the backdrop of migration. As one of the responses in an IETM report on identity in the performing arts notes, 'Being Indigenous in an occupied country we are inherently political. Everyday actions like going to school, the post office and the bank are all a product of colonisation'.[67] In countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, language revival programmes are not simply cultural projects but are often considered akin to political acts of self-determination, reclaiming what colonisation has sought to erase.

Environmental conservation and climate justice are intertwined with several Indigenous knowledge systems and heritage, where land, rivers, mountains, and animals are regarded as kin rather than resources. For example, the Māori of Aotearoa (New Zealand) recognise rivers as ancestors or the Whanganui, an approach that has influenced legal frameworks granting personhood

65 Singh Parihar, P., '**Renewal of the World: Movement & Rituals for Decolonisation | Martha Hincapié Charry**' in *Planted Journal*, 12 December 2024.

66 An introduction into some of the key points made by Michael Running Wolf, can be understood from his TEDxBoston talk titled '**Why First Languages AI Can Be a Reality**', 28 June 2023.

67 Handelman-Smith, J., ***Performing Identity: Navigating Cultural Identities through the Arts – Report from the IETM Aarhus Plenary Meeting 2023***, IETM, 2023.

to rivers.[68] Indigenous Arctic communities such as the Sámi, Inuit, and Kalaallit have long sustained ecological practices making them particularly strong advocates for climate justice.[69] According to an IETM Report on Indigenous Ecological Knowledge,[70] 476 million Indigenous Peoples worldwide account for only about 6% of the world's population, yet their territories host 80% of the world's biodiversity. The climate crisis compounds these threats by eroding this foundational and reciprocal relationship, threatening not only the material basis of cultural practices, but also their spiritual landscapes. Displacement from ancestral territories disrupts intergenerational transmission of knowledge and limits the ability of communities to sustain rituals, ceremonies, and practices tied to specific lands. Spiritual dimensions of heritage, central to many Indigenous worldviews, further clash with dominant frameworks of cultural policy and mobility. Secular heritage regimes often categorise sacred practices or objects as cultural 'assets,' stripping them of their sacredness and embedding them into bureaucratic regimes of preservation and display, using these as a means to further secure long-term funding and international support for projects that may not necessarily involve Indigenous participation or decision making.

Media and representation also play an ambivalent role. On the one hand, digital platforms enable Indigenous artists to circulate their work more widely, connect across geographies, and counter colonial erasures. On the other hand, global media systems frequently mediate Indigenous narratives through outsider perspectives, reducing complex lived realities into digestible stereotypes. According to the 2025 UNESCO Report on Indigenous Peoples and the Media,[71] Indigenous media holds profound significance as both a right and a necessity, serving as a cornerstone for freedom of expression, cultural preservation, and inclusive public discourse. Yet, systemic barriers, ranging from inequitable access to platforms and funding to discriminatory laws, restrictive editorial policies, and harmful stereotypes, continue to undermine Indigenous Peoples' voices and representation. The report recommends strengthening Indigenous media through legal and institutional reforms, investment in infrastructure and digital tools, fair working conditions, ethical research, and equitable editorial practices that recognise Indigenous Peoples as knowledge-holders and rights-bearers.

The Indigenous experience is also deeply gendered. Notably, several Indigenous worldviews offer an integrated understanding of gender with Indigenous identity, reciprocity and care. Despite being crucial custodians of heritage, leading resistance movements, and sustaining intergenerational knowledge, Indigenous women, queer, and Two-Spirit people often face greater risks in cultural mobility, including violence, exclusion from leadership spaces, or marginalisation in funding and recognition. Without a gender-sensitive approach, policies and programmes risk reproducing hierarchies that silence some of the most important voices within Indigenous cultural work. The urgency of this gendered dimension has been underscored at the UN level, most notably in the 2022 report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, in which the report highlights the compounded vulnerabilities of Indigenous women.[72] The report recommends that States strengthen legal and policy frameworks in line with the UNDRIP and 1981 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms

68 O'Donnell, E. L., and Talbot-Jones, J., '**Creating legal rights for rivers: lessons from Australia, New Zealand, and India**' in *Ecology and Society* 23(1):7, 2018.

69 Weichenrieder, S., '**Leveraging Indigenous Knowledge for Effective Nature-Based Solutions in the Arctic**', The Arctic Institute, 27 August 2024.

70 Tenke, M., ***Indigenous Ecological Knowledge I: Insights from Outside the Arts – Report from the IETM Aarhus Plenary Meeting***, IETM, 2023.

71 UNESCO, ***Indigenous Peoples and the Media***, UNESCO, 2025.

72 Alsalem, R., ***Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls – Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences***. Human Rights Council, UN General Assembly 2022.

of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to ensure access to justice and culturally appropriate services and to protect Indigenous women in their roles as land defenders, knowledge keepers, and cultural leaders. It also calls for accountability in cases of violence, alongside the meaningful participation of Indigenous women in decision-making processes that shape their rights, lands, and heritage.

Conclusion

The relationship between Indigenous heritage and creative expression remains contentious especially in contemporary socio-political and economic contexts, and cannot be understood without the adoption of a holistic and intersectional approach.

For Indigenous peoples, the recognition of culture as a stand-alone goal in the post-2030 agenda carries particular urgency. Cultural mobility is not only about circulation but also about safeguarding ancestral knowledge, spiritual practices, and heritage that are increasingly threatened by climate change, exploitative economies, and technological misappropriation. Ensuring that Indigenous rights are embedded in cultural policies requires legal frameworks that respect collective ownership, gender-sensitive approaches that amplify the voices of women, queer, and Two-Spirit custodians, and intercultural dialogue that resists reductive aesthetics in favour of lived traditions. As AI, digital platforms, and global policy frameworks reshape cultural sectors, it is critical that Indigenous peoples lead in defining ethical standards and strategies that protect their knowledge systems and identities. Embedding these principles into national and international cultural strategies will help ensure that Indigenous cultural mobility is not only preserved but strengthened as a cornerstone of inclusive, sustainable futures.

Policy recommendations

by Yohann Floch

The international circulation of Indigenous artists and cultural professionals represents both an extraordinary opportunity and a profound responsibility. As the findings of this report have shown, mobility is not simply a matter of access to funding or visas; it is inseparable from questions of cultural rights, ecological sustainability, decolonisation, and the recognition of Indigenous worldviews. The recommendations below are addressed to different levels of governance and the cultural ecosystem, with the shared aim of creating conditions where Indigenous creatives can thrive, connect, and contribute on equitable terms.

Recommendations to all arts and culture stakeholders

- Adopt **care-centred curatorial approaches** that respect Indigenous customs, values, and epistemologies (ensuring that artistic presentation is accompanied by cultural context) and involve Indigenous curators, cultural mediators, and elders in the design of festivals, residencies, and exhibitions (ensuring practices are not tokenised or misrepresented).

- Strengthen **solidarity networks** by recognising and supporting informal, community-based infrastructures that sustain Indigenous artistic practice across borders, and partner with Indigenous-led organisations locally and internationally to co-design cultural events and ensure accountability in **representation**.

- **Challenge extractive practices** by ensuring informed consent, reciprocity, and transparency in collaborations, residencies, and commissions.

- **Support Indigenous creative futures**, enabling artists to imagine and create beyond colonial frameworks, thus reshaping the terms of cultural mobility and exchange for generations to come.

- **Recognise and respect Indigenous protocols** in hosting and programming, including rituals, ceremonies, and forms of address that are central to Indigenous cultural expression.

- **Invest in language support** such as interpretation and translation, acknowledging that English and other dominant languages should not be prerequisites for international cultural engagement.

Recommendations to European Union institutions

- **Embed Indigenous rights in cultural policy frameworks** by aligning EU initiatives with international instruments such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples.
- Make sure **mobility funding and opportunities** reach out to Indigenous artists and culture professionals, ensuring that schemes account for structural barriers such as language, recognition of identity, and administrative burdens.
- Support Indigenous-led networks and governance structures at the European level, ensuring that **Indigenous voices** shape the design and implementation of programmes, rather than merely including their participation.
- Facilitate intercultural dialogue, recognising **Indigenous arts as living and contemporary practices** rather than as ethnographic heritage; this requires dismantling tokenistic approaches and encouraging meaningful, long-term collaborations.
- **Integrate environmental justice** into cultural mobility policies, acknowledging the ecological costs of travel and investing in sustainable models of circulation that respect Indigenous ecological knowledge.

Recommendations to local, regional and national authorities

- **Adapt visa and residency procedures** to better accommodate Indigenous artists, including multilingual application materials, simplified requirements, and recognition of Indigenous identities beyond narrow national frameworks.
- **Increase access to public funding** for mobility and cultural cooperation programmes and ensure fair hosting conditions in cultural institutions by allocating resources for accommodation, translation, interpretation, and community liaison staff who can support Indigenous guests in navigating local contexts.
- **Ensure Indigenous representation in decision-making bodies** within ministries of culture and funding agencies. This includes juries, selection committees and advisory boards that can assess proposals with sensitivity to Indigenous values and practices.
- **Protect intellectual and cultural property** by supporting frameworks that move beyond Western models of individual authorship, acknowledging communal, intergenerational, and non-material forms of knowledge.
- **Mainstream Indigenous perspectives** across cultural, educational, and diplomatic policies, recognising that culture is inseparable from land, language, identity, and ecology.
- **Strengthen mobility infrastructures** by creating residency programmes, travel grants, and exchange opportunities that are accessible to Indigenous artists, including those from outside Europe.

- **Facilitate partnerships between local actors and Indigenous-led organisations abroad**, leveraging municipal and regional twinning, cooperation, or cultural exchange agreements to include Indigenous creatives explicitly.

- **Invest in cultural education and mediation** at the community level, so that audiences are equipped to engage with Indigenous artistic practices beyond exoticisation or stereotypes.

- **Invest in intercultural competence training** for staff in regional cultural agencies and local authorities, raising awareness of Indigenous histories, rights, and contemporary practices.

We collectively carry the responsibility of representing not only their individual practices but also the worldviews, values, and resilience of Indigenous communities. Ensuring equitable conditions for their mobility is therefore not an act of generosity, but one of justice. By acting on these recommendations, European institutions, Member States, local authorities, and cultural actors can help dismantle barriers, foster genuine reciprocity, and create spaces where citizens engage with Indigenous artistic expressions.

About the authors

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Co-funded by
the European Union