

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

STUDY GUIDE

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TOPIC:

**Strengthening International Cooperation
for the Ethical Use of Artificial
Intelligence in the Protection of Cultural
Heritage and Indigenous Languages**



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Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations established in 1945 to promote peace and sustainable development through international cooperation in education, science, culture, communication, and information. Officially entering into force on 4 November 1946, UNESCO works to strengthen mutual understanding among nations by protecting cultural diversity, advancing scientific collaboration, and ensuring equitable access to knowledge (UNESCO, n.d.).

One of UNESCO's principal responsibilities is the protection of the world's cultural and natural heritage. Through landmark international instruments such as the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the organization has established the global legal framework for preserving monuments, archaeological sites, traditional knowledge, oral traditions, performing arts, and other forms of tangible and intangible heritage. These conventions recognize that cultural heritage is not only a record of the past but also an essential foundation for identity, social cohesion, and sustainable development (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.; UNESCO, 2003).

In recent years, UNESCO has expanded its work to address the opportunities and challenges created by rapid technological change. As digital technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI) become increasingly influential in documenting, preserving, and disseminating cultural heritage, UNESCO has taken a leading role in promoting their ethical and responsible use. The adoption of the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021) established the first global normative framework for the ethical governance of AI, emphasizing transparency, human rights, cultural diversity, and the protection of Indigenous knowledge systems (UNESCO, 2021).

UNESCO also coordinates the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032), proclaimed by the United Nations to promote the preservation, revitalization, and transmission of Indigenous languages worldwide. Through this initiative, the organization works with governments, Indigenous communities, academic institutions, and civil society to ensure that technological innovation—including Artificial Intelligence—supports linguistic diversity while respecting community ownership, cultural rights, and data sovereignty (UNESCO, 2022).

As emerging technologies continue to reshape the way societies preserve and share knowledge, UNESCO serves as the primary international forum for developing cooperative policies that balance technological innovation with ethical responsibility. Delegates in this committee will examine how international cooperation can ensure that Artificial Intelligence strengthens, rather than threatens, the protection of cultural heritage and Indigenous languages, while promoting inclusion, cultural diversity, and respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Background to the Topic

Key Terminology

Term	Definition
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	Computer systems capable of performing tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, language processing, pattern recognition, and decision-making.
Cultural Heritage	The legacy of tangible and intangible cultural assets inherited from previous generations, including monuments, archaeological sites, traditions, languages, rituals, and artistic expressions that communities recognize as part of their cultural identity.
Indigenous Languages	Languages spoken by Indigenous peoples that embody traditional knowledge, cultural identity, history, and unique worldviews. Many are endangered due to globalization, language shift, and historical assimilation policies.
Intangible Cultural Heritage	Cultural practices, oral traditions, performing arts, social customs, traditional craftsmanship, and knowledge recognized by communities as part of their cultural heritage and transmitted from generation to generation.
Data Sovereignty	The principle that Indigenous peoples have the right to control the collection, ownership, access, use, and management of data related to their languages, cultural heritage, and traditional knowledge.
Ethical Artificial Intelligence	The development and use of AI in ways that respect human rights, transparency, fairness, accountability, privacy, cultural diversity, and the rights of Indigenous peoples, consistent with UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021).

Background

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an increasingly important tool for protecting cultural heritage and Indigenous languages by improving the documentation, preservation, restoration, and dissemination of cultural knowledge. Advances in machine learning, natural language processing, and digital imaging have expanded the ability of governments, researchers, museums, and Indigenous communities to safeguard both tangible and intangible heritage more efficiently than ever before (UNESCO, 2024).

Cultural heritage includes both tangible heritage, such as monuments, archaeological sites, artifacts, manuscripts, and historic buildings, and intangible cultural heritage, including oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, traditional craftsmanship, and Indigenous languages. Indigenous languages are particularly significant because they preserve collective memory, cultural identity, traditional ecological knowledge, and unique ways of understanding the world. When an Indigenous language disappears, valuable cultural knowledge accumulated over generations may also be lost (Sanusi, 2023; Othon Viannis, 2024).

Throughout history, Indigenous languages and cultural heritage have been threatened by colonization, forced assimilation, armed conflict, migration, urbanization, and globalization. In many regions, Indigenous communities were prohibited from speaking their native languages in schools or public institutions, while cultural artifacts and traditional knowledge were frequently documented, removed, or displayed without the free, prior, and informed consent of the communities concerned (UNESCO, 2024; Martin, 2024). Before the emergence of digital technologies, preservation relied primarily on oral transmission, community elders, handwritten records, and local archives. Although these methods remain essential, they are vulnerable to displacement, natural disasters, conflict, and the gradual loss of intergenerational knowledge (Cunningham & Lin, 2024).

Recent technological advances have transformed cultural preservation. Artificial Intelligence can now assist in the transcription, translation, classification, and digitization of historical records, automate the organization of digital archives, monitor the conservation of heritage sites, and support the virtual reconstruction of damaged monuments. For Indigenous languages, AI can facilitate speech recognition, language-learning applications, digital dictionaries, and the preservation of oral histories, creating new opportunities for language revitalization and wider public access (Ibrahim, 2024; Paolanti et al., 2026).

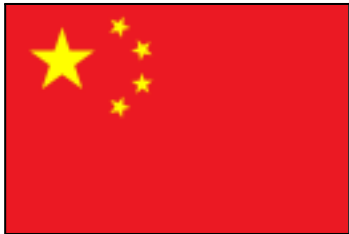
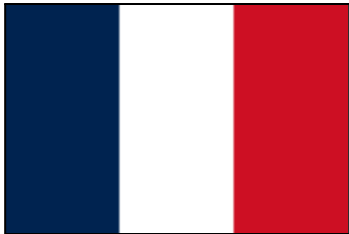
Despite these benefits, the use of AI also raises important ethical and legal concerns. AI systems trained on incomplete or biased datasets may misrepresent Indigenous cultures, reinforce stereotypes, or reproduce historical inequalities. Likewise, the collection and use of cultural data without community authorization may undermine Indigenous peoples' rights over their traditional knowledge. These concerns have intensified international discussions regarding Indigenous participation in AI governance, data sovereignty, intellectual property rights, and the need for free, prior, and informed consent when developing technologies based on Indigenous cultural resources (Martin, 2024).

Recognizing both the opportunities and the risks of emerging technologies, UNESCO has developed international frameworks to promote the ethical governance of Artificial Intelligence. The Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021) establishes global principles of human rights, transparency, fairness, accountability, inclusion, and respect for cultural diversity. Complementing this framework, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) affirms the rights of Indigenous peoples to maintain, control, protect, and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, languages, and intellectual property. UNESCO also leads the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032), promoting international cooperation to revitalize endangered languages and ensure their presence in the digital age. Together, these initiatives emphasize that Artificial Intelligence should serve as a tool for cultural preservation only when developed through ethical governance, meaningful participation by Indigenous communities, and sustained international cooperation (UNESCO, 2021; UNESCO, 2022; Martin, 2024).



Key Stakeholders and Positions

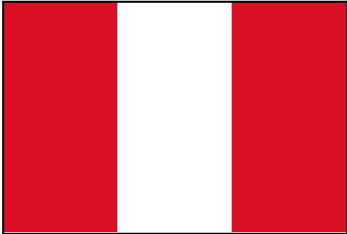
COUNTRY	POSITION
United States of America 	The United States recognizes Artificial Intelligence as a strategic technology with significant potential to preserve cultural heritage through digitization, advanced documentation, language technologies, and digital archiving. Federal agencies, universities, museums, and private technology companies actively develop AI applications for heritage conservation and the revitalization of Indigenous languages. At the same time, the United States emphasizes innovation, public-private partnerships, and responsible AI governance while supporting the protection of intellectual property rights and Indigenous cultural resources. Although it has traditionally favored flexible regulatory approaches over comprehensive international regulation, the United States increasingly supports international cooperation to promote trustworthy AI, safeguard cultural diversity, and ensure that technological innovation respects human rights and the interests of Indigenous communities (U.S. Department of State, 2025; National Artificial Intelligence Initiative Office, 2025).
Russian Federation 	The Russian Federation supports the use of Artificial Intelligence to preserve cultural heritage, historical archives, and the linguistic diversity of its many Indigenous peoples. Russia has promoted digital preservation initiatives involving museums, libraries, and historical collections while recognizing AI as an important tool for scientific and cultural development. In international discussions, Russia advocates for ethical AI governance that respects State sovereignty, cultural diversity, and national legislation. The country supports international cooperation in scientific research and cultural preservation but maintains that AI regulation should preserve the flexibility of individual States to establish domestic policies consistent with their national priorities and legal systems (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).

People's Republic of China 	China considers Artificial Intelligence a strategic priority for national development and has invested extensively in AI applications for cultural preservation, digital museums, archaeological research, and language technologies. Through initiatives such as the Digital Silk Road, China promotes the use of advanced technologies to document and preserve cultural heritage both domestically and internationally. While supporting UNESCO's efforts to establish ethical principles for AI, China emphasizes respect for national sovereignty, technological development, and international cooperation based on mutual benefit. It also supports expanding access to AI technologies for developing countries while maintaining that each State should determine how AI is governed within its own legal framework (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
French Republic 	France is a strong advocate for protecting cultural heritage and promoting ethical Artificial Intelligence through multilateral cooperation. As UNESCO's host country, it has consistently supported international frameworks that ensure AI serves the public good while respecting cultural diversity, human rights, and democratic values. France has invested significantly in the digital preservation of museums, historical archives, and cultural institutions, while promoting European initiatives on trustworthy AI. The country also supports stronger international standards to protect Indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage from misuse, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and international governance as essential components of AI development (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland 	The United Kingdom supports the responsible use of AI to protect cultural heritage through digital conservation, heritage monitoring, and archival preservation. British universities, museums, and research institutions have become global leaders in applying AI to archaeology, historical preservation, and digital humanities. The UK advocates an innovation-friendly regulatory approach that promotes transparency, safety, and accountability while encouraging collaboration among governments, academia, cultural institutions, and the private sector. It also recognizes the importance of protecting Indigenous knowledge and cultural diversity within ethical AI governance frameworks, particularly through international partnerships and UNESCO initiatives (UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 2025; Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, 2025).

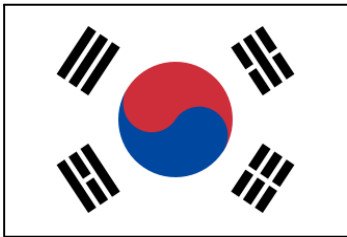


Canada 	Canada strongly supports the ethical development of Artificial Intelligence while recognizing the importance of protecting Indigenous languages, cultures, and knowledge systems. The country has adopted legislation and national strategies to revitalize Indigenous languages and increasingly incorporates Indigenous communities into discussions on digital governance and AI ethics. Canada advocates for Indigenous data sovereignty, meaningful consultation, and the application of the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in projects involving Indigenous cultural heritage. Internationally, it promotes multilateral cooperation through UNESCO and other organizations to ensure that AI contributes to reconciliation, cultural preservation, and the protection of Indigenous rights (Government of Canada, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
United Mexican States 	Mexico recognizes Artificial Intelligence as an important tool for preserving its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, particularly its 68 recognized Indigenous languages and extensive cultural heritage. Through institutions such as the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) and the National Institute of Indigenous Languages (INALI), the country promotes the digitization of cultural archives and language documentation. Internationally, Mexico supports UNESCO's ethical AI framework, emphasizing Indigenous participation, cultural rights, and the protection of traditional knowledge. It also advocates international cooperation and capacity-building to ensure that AI contributes to cultural preservation while respecting Indigenous communities' rights and cultural identity (Government of Mexico, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
Republic of Guatemala 	Guatemala recognizes the importance of Artificial Intelligence as a potential tool for preserving the cultural heritage and linguistic diversity of its Indigenous peoples, particularly the Maya, Garifuna, and Xinka communities. As a country with significant cultural and archaeological heritage, Guatemala supports the digitization of historical records, language documentation, and heritage conservation projects while emphasizing that Indigenous communities should participate actively in decisions concerning the use of their cultural knowledge. Guatemala advocates greater international cooperation, technical assistance, and financial support to help developing countries apply AI ethically in heritage preservation and Indigenous language revitalization (Government of Guatemala, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).

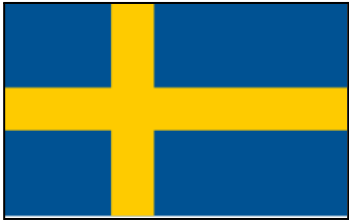
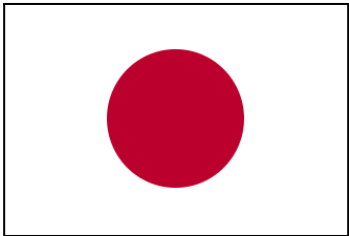


Republic of Peru 	Peru considers the preservation of its archaeological heritage and Indigenous languages a national priority. Home to numerous Indigenous communities and globally significant cultural sites, Peru has promoted the digitization of archaeological collections, historical archives, and linguistic resources while encouraging technological innovation in cultural conservation. Peru supports UNESCO's ethical framework for Artificial Intelligence and emphasizes that AI should contribute to safeguarding Indigenous knowledge, respecting community participation, cultural ownership, and traditional rights. The country also advocates international cooperation to improve technological capacity and preserve endangered Indigenous languages throughout Latin America (Ministry of Culture of Peru, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
Plurinational State of Bolivia 	Bolivia strongly supports the protection of Indigenous cultures, languages, and traditional knowledge as fundamental components of its plurinational identity. The country maintains that Artificial Intelligence should strengthen, rather than replace, community-led preservation efforts. Bolivia advocates for Indigenous data sovereignty, collective intellectual property rights, and respect for Indigenous authority over cultural resources. Internationally, it supports UNESCO's ethical AI principles while promoting equity, intercultural dialogue, and technology transfer for developing countries (Government of Bolivia, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
Republic of Finland 	Finland is internationally recognized as a leader in ethical Artificial Intelligence and digital governance. The country supports the use of AI to preserve cultural heritage through the digitization of archives, libraries, museums, and historical records while promoting open access to knowledge and innovation. Finland considers cultural diversity and linguistic inclusion essential components of sustainable technological development and actively supports UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. It also advocates international cooperation to ensure that AI systems are transparent, human-centered, and respectful of cultural rights, emphasizing that technological progress should strengthen rather than undermine cultural diversity and minority languages (Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).



Federative Republic of Brazil 	Brazil recognizes Artificial Intelligence as an important instrument for preserving its extensive cultural and linguistic diversity, including the heritage and traditional knowledge of hundreds of Indigenous communities. The country supports AI applications for documenting endangered Indigenous languages, digitizing cultural archives, and expanding access to cultural education while emphasizing the protection of Indigenous rights and community participation. Brazil advocates international cooperation to reduce technological inequalities and supports UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, highlighting the importance of Indigenous data sovereignty, cultural diversity, and the ethical governance of AI. It maintains that technological innovation should contribute to sustainable development while respecting the cultural autonomy and intellectual heritage of Indigenous peoples (Ministry of Culture of Brazil, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
Federal Republic of Germany 	Germany promotes the responsible development of Artificial Intelligence based on human rights, democratic values, and international cooperation. The country supports AI applications for digital heritage preservation, restoration, documentation, and historical research through museums, libraries, and research institutions. Germany emphasizes that ethical AI governance should protect cultural diversity, intellectual property, and Indigenous knowledge while ensuring transparency and accountability. As a strong supporter of UNESCO's ethical AI framework, it advocates multilateral cooperation to establish common international standards for emerging technologies (Federal Foreign Office of Germany, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
Republic of Korea 	The Republic of Korea considers Artificial Intelligence a strategic driver of innovation and applies AI to cultural heritage preservation through digital archiving, virtual museums, heritage monitoring, and language technologies. Internationally, it supports UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and advocates international cooperation to promote trustworthy AI based on transparency, human rights, and cultural diversity. The country also supports partnerships that help developing nations benefit from emerging technologies while protecting their cultural heritage and linguistic diversity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).



Kingdom of Sweden 	Sweden supports the development of Artificial Intelligence as a tool for sustainable development, innovation, and cultural preservation. The country promotes open digital access to cultural collections, responsible AI research, and policies that prioritize human rights, inclusion, and equality. Sweden considers cultural diversity an essential component of democratic societies and supports UNESCO's efforts to establish global ethical standards for AI. It also advocates international cooperation to ensure that digital technologies contribute to safeguarding Indigenous languages, protecting minority cultures, and expanding equitable access to cultural knowledge while respecting privacy and community participation (Government Offices of Sweden, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
Kingdom of Norway 	Norway has consistently promoted the protection of Indigenous rights, particularly those of the Sámi people, and recognizes Artificial Intelligence as an opportunity to strengthen Indigenous language revitalization and cultural preservation. The country supports AI applications for language documentation, digital archives, and educational resources while emphasizing Indigenous participation in decision-making processes and the protection of traditional knowledge. Norway advocates ethical AI governance based on human rights, transparency, and Indigenous data sovereignty, encouraging international cooperation through UNESCO to ensure that technological innovation respects cultural diversity and the rights of Indigenous peoples (Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Equality, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
Japan 	Japan considers Artificial Intelligence a key driver of innovation and applies AI to the preservation of cultural heritage through digital archives, museums, archaeological research, and heritage conservation. Internationally, Japan promotes human-centered AI governance based on international cooperation, transparency, and respect for cultural diversity. It also supports UNESCO's initiatives to safeguard intangible cultural heritage, emphasizing that technological innovation should complement, rather than replace, the knowledge and traditions of local and Indigenous communities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).



Kingdom of Spain 	Spain is internationally recognized for its commitment to protecting cultural heritage and promoting linguistic diversity. Home to numerous UNESCO World Heritage Sites and several co-official languages, it supports the use of Artificial Intelligence to enhance heritage conservation, digital archiving, and language preservation. Spain endorses UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and the European Union's framework for trustworthy AI, advocating international cooperation to safeguard cultural heritage and minority and Indigenous languages while respecting cultural identity, fundamental rights, and community participation (Ministry of Culture of Spain, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
Italian Republic 	Italy, home to one of the world's largest concentrations of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, strongly supports the application of Artificial Intelligence to cultural heritage conservation. Italian institutions increasingly employ AI technologies for archaeological research, monument conservation, digital restoration, museum management, and the preservation of historical archives. Italy advocates international cooperation through UNESCO to develop ethical standards that balance technological innovation with the protection of cultural identity and authenticity. The country also supports the responsible use of AI to improve access to cultural heritage while preventing the commercialization or misuse of historical and cultural assets (Ministry of Culture of Italy, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
South Africa 	South Africa supports the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence to preserve its multicultural heritage, Indigenous languages, and historical memory. The country views AI as an opportunity to expand digital access to museums, archives, and educational resources while documenting and revitalizing Indigenous languages that form part of its constitutional commitment to cultural diversity. South Africa advocates international cooperation to reduce the global digital divide and ensure that developing countries have equitable access to AI technologies. It also supports ethical AI governance that protects Indigenous knowledge, promotes cultural inclusion, and contributes to sustainable development across Africa (Department of Sport, Arts and Culture of South Africa, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).



Kenya 	Kenya recognizes Artificial Intelligence as a valuable tool for preserving cultural heritage and documenting the country's linguistic diversity. The country promotes the digitization of historical archives, museums, and Indigenous languages while supporting technological innovation for cultural preservation. Kenya advocates international cooperation, technology transfer, and capacity-building to help African countries benefit from AI applications. It also supports UNESCO's ethical principles for Artificial Intelligence, emphasizing the protection of cultural identity, community participation, and Indigenous knowledge systems (Ministry of Gender, Culture, the Arts and Heritage of Kenya, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
Federal Republic of Nigeria 	Nigeria recognizes Artificial Intelligence as an important opportunity to preserve its rich cultural diversity, which includes hundreds of languages and ethnic traditions. The country supports the application of AI for language documentation, digital archiving, museum preservation, and cultural education while acknowledging the challenges posed by limited digital infrastructure and unequal technological access. Nigeria advocates international cooperation to strengthen technological capacity, expand access to AI resources, and support African countries in protecting both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. It also emphasizes that AI governance should promote cultural inclusion, protect traditional knowledge, and ensure that technological innovation contributes to sustainable development rather than widening global inequalities (Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy of Nigeria, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).
Arab Republic of Egypt 	Egypt considers the protection of its cultural heritage a national priority and has increasingly incorporated Artificial Intelligence into archaeological research, museum management, monument conservation, and the digitization of historical collections. Home to one of the world's oldest civilizations and numerous UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Egypt supports international cooperation to combat illicit trafficking of cultural property and improve heritage conservation through technological innovation. The country endorses UNESCO's ethical framework for AI while emphasizing that emerging technologies should preserve authenticity, respect cultural identity, and strengthen international efforts to safeguard humanity's shared heritage (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Egypt, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).



Commonwealth of Australia 	Australia recognizes Artificial Intelligence as a valuable tool for preserving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and cultural heritage. The country supports digital preservation initiatives in partnership with Indigenous communities while emphasizing respect for Indigenous ownership of cultural knowledge and data sovereignty. Australia advocates ethical AI governance that balances innovation with human rights and supports international cooperation to develop global standards consistent with UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. It also emphasizes the importance of Indigenous participation in decisions regarding the use of AI for preserving their languages and cultural traditions (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, Australia, 2025; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2025).
New Zealand 	New Zealand places strong emphasis on protecting the language, culture, and traditional knowledge of the Māori as a central component of national identity. The country supports the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence provided that Indigenous peoples maintain meaningful control over their cultural data, languages, and knowledge systems. New Zealand has actively promoted principles of Indigenous data sovereignty and encourages the application of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in projects involving Māori cultural resources. Internationally, it supports UNESCO's initiatives on AI ethics and advocates for international cooperation that ensures emerging technologies strengthen cultural diversity while respecting Indigenous rights and self-determination (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2025; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2025).
India 	India possesses one of the world's richest cultural traditions and linguistic landscapes, with hundreds of languages and an extensive tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The country recognizes AI as a valuable tool for digitizing manuscripts, preserving historical monuments, documenting traditional knowledge, and revitalizing endangered languages. India supports UNESCO's efforts to promote ethical AI while emphasizing that technological innovation should respect cultural diversity, national sovereignty, and the rights of local communities. It also advocates greater international cooperation, technology transfer, and capacity-building to ensure equitable access to AI for heritage preservation, particularly among developing countries (Ministry of Culture of India, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).



Republic of Indonesia



Indonesia, one of the world's most culturally and linguistically diverse nations, recognizes AI as a valuable tool for preserving its cultural heritage and more than 700 living languages. The country promotes the digitization of museums, historical archives, and traditional knowledge while supporting innovation to safeguard endangered languages and intangible cultural heritage. Indonesia supports UNESCO's ethical framework for Artificial Intelligence and advocates international cooperation, technology transfer, and capacity-building to help developing countries harness AI responsibly. It also emphasizes that Indigenous and local communities should guide the use of cultural data, ensuring respect for cultural diversity, traditional knowledge, and community rights (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of Indonesia, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).

Previous United Nations Actions and Resolutions

The United Nations and UNESCO have developed a comprehensive international framework to protect cultural heritage, promote linguistic diversity, and guide the ethical use of emerging technologies. Although most of these instruments were adopted before Artificial Intelligence became widely available, they continue to provide the legal and ethical foundation for current international discussions on AI and cultural preservation.

1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage

Adopted by UNESCO in 1972, this Convention established the international framework for identifying, protecting, and preserving cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value. It created the World Heritage List and encouraged international cooperation to safeguard monuments, archaeological sites, historic cities, and natural landscapes. Today, Artificial Intelligence is increasingly used to monitor World Heritage Sites, assess conservation needs, and improve digital documentation, making the Convention highly relevant to current discussions on technological innovation and heritage protection (UNESCO, 1972).

2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

Recognizing that cultural heritage extends beyond physical monuments, UNESCO adopted this Convention to protect oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, traditional craftsmanship, and other forms of living heritage. The Convention emphasizes the central role of local and Indigenous communities in safeguarding their cultural practices and has become one of the principal international instruments supporting the preservation of endangered languages and traditional knowledge. AI technologies are increasingly being used to document, archive, and revitalize these forms of intangible heritage, highlighting the need for ethical safeguards and community participation (UNESCO, 2003).

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)

Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, the Declaration recognizes the collective rights of Indigenous peoples to maintain, control, protect, and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, languages, and intellectual property. It also affirms their right to participate in decisions affecting their communities. These principles have become increasingly important in discussions on Artificial Intelligence, particularly regarding Indigenous data sovereignty, free, prior and informed consent, and the ethical use of cultural information in AI systems (United Nations, 2007).

Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021)

In 2021, UNESCO adopted the world's first global normative framework dedicated to the ethical governance of Artificial Intelligence. The Recommendation establishes principles including respect for human rights, transparency, fairness, accountability, environmental sustainability, and cultural diversity. It also encourages Member States to ensure that AI systems protect Indigenous knowledge, reduce bias, promote inclusion, and support sustainable development. Today, it serves as the principal international reference for discussions on the ethical use of AI in cultural heritage preservation and Indigenous language revitalization (UNESCO, 2021).

International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)

Led by UNESCO, the International Decade of Indigenous Languages seeks to halt the disappearance of Indigenous languages by promoting revitalization, education, digital inclusion, and international cooperation. The initiative encourages governments, academic institutions, Indigenous communities, and technology developers to collaborate in creating digital resources and language technologies that strengthen linguistic diversity while respecting Indigenous rights. The Decade has also highlighted the growing role of Artificial Intelligence in language documentation, translation, and preservation, provided these technologies are developed ethically and with meaningful community participation (UNESCO, 2022).

Continuing International Efforts

Building on these frameworks, UNESCO continues to promote international cooperation through research, policy guidance, capacity-building, and partnerships among governments, Indigenous communities, universities, cultural institutions, and the private sector. These efforts seek to ensure that Artificial Intelligence contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage and Indigenous languages while respecting cultural diversity, human rights, and the ethical principles established by the international community.

Current Challenges and Debates

Artificial Intelligence is transforming the way cultural heritage and Indigenous languages are documented, preserved, and shared. While these technologies create unprecedented opportunities for conservation and education, they also introduce significant ethical, legal, and technological challenges. The international community continues to debate how AI can be used responsibly while respecting cultural diversity, Indigenous rights, and the principles established by international law (UNESCO, 2021; UNESCO, 2024).

Balancing technological innovation with ethical responsibility

One of the principal challenges is ensuring that technological innovation does not come at the expense of human rights or cultural integrity. Artificial Intelligence can rapidly process historical records, restore damaged cultural artifacts, and revitalize endangered languages, but its use must remain transparent, accountable, and subject to ethical oversight. Governments and international organizations continue to debate how to establish governance frameworks that encourage innovation while preventing discrimination, bias, and the misuse of cultural information (UNESCO, 2021).

Protecting Indigenous knowledge and data sovereignty

The growing use of AI has intensified concerns regarding the ownership and control of Indigenous cultural data. Many Indigenous communities argue that traditional knowledge, oral histories, sacred sites, and languages should not be collected, digitized, or incorporated into AI systems without their Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). This has generated international discussions on Indigenous data sovereignty, intellectual property rights, and the need to ensure that communities maintain authority over how their cultural heritage is accessed and used (United Nations, 2007; UNESCO, 2021).

Bias, representation, and cultural diversity

Artificial Intelligence systems depend on the quality and diversity of the data used to train them. When cultural or linguistic datasets are incomplete or dominated by majority populations, AI may reinforce stereotypes, exclude minority cultures, or inaccurately represent Indigenous knowledge. Many endangered languages also lack sufficient digital resources to support AI development, increasing the risk that technological progress benefits only widely spoken languages. Addressing these inequalities remains a central challenge for UNESCO and its Member States (UNESCO, 2024).

Unequal access to Artificial Intelligence

Significant disparities remain in countries' ability to develop and implement AI technologies for cultural preservation. While developed countries often possess advanced digital infrastructure and financial resources, many developing nations face limited technological capacity, inadequate funding, and

shortages of specialized expertise. This digital divide raises concerns that unequal access to AI could widen existing inequalities in cultural preservation and limit opportunities to protect endangered languages and heritage worldwide. International cooperation, technology transfer, and capacity-building have therefore become key priorities in global discussions (UNESCO, 2024).

Intellectual property and cultural ownership

The increasing ability of AI to generate images, translations, reconstructions, and other digital content based on cultural materials has raised complex legal questions regarding authorship, ownership, and cultural rights. Many governments and Indigenous organizations argue that existing intellectual property frameworks do not adequately protect traditional knowledge or prevent the unauthorized commercial use of cultural heritage. This has led to growing calls for international standards that recognize collective ownership, protect cultural expressions, and ensure that communities benefit from the responsible use of their cultural resources (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2024; UNESCO, 2021).

Looking ahead

As Artificial Intelligence continues to evolve, UNESCO and its Member States face the challenge of ensuring that technological innovation supports rather than threatens cultural diversity. Strengthening international cooperation, promoting ethical AI governance, expanding digital inclusion, and guaranteeing meaningful participation by Indigenous peoples will be essential to ensuring that emerging technologies contribute to preserving humanity's shared cultural heritage while respecting the rights and identities of all communities.

Case Studies

The following case studies illustrate both the opportunities and the challenges associated with using Artificial Intelligence to protect cultural heritage and Indigenous languages. Together, they demonstrate that technological innovation can significantly strengthen cultural preservation when accompanied by ethical governance, international cooperation, and meaningful participation by the communities whose heritage is being protected.

UNESCO Global Discussion on Artificial Intelligence and Intangible Cultural Heritage (2024)

In 2024, UNESCO convened international experts, policymakers, researchers, and representatives of Indigenous communities to examine the relationship between Artificial Intelligence and intangible cultural heritage. The discussions highlighted AI's potential to document endangered languages, preserve oral traditions, improve digital archives, and expand access to cultural knowledge. At the same time, participants warned that AI systems could misrepresent cultural practices or appropriate traditional knowledge if Indigenous peoples are excluded from decision-making processes. The meeting reinforced the principle that AI should support—not replace—community-led safeguarding efforts and should always operate within ethical frameworks that respect cultural rights and human dignity (UNESCO, 2024).

Te Hiku Media and Te Reo Māori Speech Recognition (New Zealand)

Te Hiku Media, a Māori-led organization in Aotearoa New Zealand, developed one of the world's first Indigenous-owned speech recognition systems for the Māori language. Using thousands of community-contributed recordings collected through the **Kōrero Māori** campaign, the project demonstrated that Artificial Intelligence can successfully support language revitalization while respecting Indigenous ownership of linguistic data. The initiative has become an international example of ethical AI because the Māori community retains control over the collection, management, and use of its language resources, ensuring that technological innovation strengthens rather than exploits Indigenous cultural heritage (Lee, 2024).

Rekrei Project: Artificial Intelligence for the Digital Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage

The Rekrei Project uses Artificial Intelligence, photogrammetry, and crowdsourced photographs to digitally reconstruct cultural heritage that has been damaged or destroyed by conflict, natural disasters, or deliberate acts of destruction. By combining historical photographs with advanced digital technologies, the project has recreated monuments and artifacts that would otherwise have been permanently lost. This initiative demonstrates how AI can contribute to heritage conservation, education, and historical research

while raising important questions about authenticity, digital preservation, and the ethical responsibilities involved in reconstructing cultural heritage (Rekrei Project, 2024).

AI and the Preservation of Indigenous Languages through the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)

During the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, UNESCO has promoted numerous initiatives exploring how Artificial Intelligence can assist in documenting, translating, and revitalizing endangered languages. Several projects have demonstrated that AI-powered language technologies—including speech recognition, digital dictionaries, and machine translation—can improve language learning and preservation. However, UNESCO has consistently emphasized that these technologies must be developed through partnerships with Indigenous communities, ensuring free, prior and informed consent, respect for data sovereignty, and community ownership of traditional knowledge. This ongoing international initiative highlights both the opportunities and the ethical responsibilities associated with applying AI to linguistic preservation (UNESCO, 2022).

Lessons for the Debate

These case studies demonstrate that Artificial Intelligence is neither inherently beneficial nor inherently harmful to cultural heritage. Its impact depends on how technologies are designed, governed, and implemented. Successful initiatives share several common characteristics: meaningful participation by Indigenous and local communities, respect for cultural rights and data sovereignty, transparent governance, international cooperation, and strong ethical safeguards. As AI continues to evolve, delegates must consider how international frameworks can maximize its benefits for cultural preservation while preventing the misuse, commercialization, or misrepresentation of cultural heritage and Indigenous languages.

Possible Solutions and Future Perspectives

The ethical use of Artificial Intelligence in protecting cultural heritage and Indigenous languages requires coordinated international action that balances technological innovation with respect for human rights, cultural diversity, and community ownership. As AI continues to evolve, governments, international organizations, Indigenous peoples, academic institutions, and the private sector must work together to ensure that emerging technologies contribute to safeguarding humanity's shared cultural heritage while respecting the rights of those who create and preserve it.

Strengthening international cooperation

One of the most important priorities is expanding international cooperation through UNESCO and other multilateral organizations. Governments can strengthen partnerships by sharing expertise, financial resources, technological innovations, and best practices for using AI in cultural heritage preservation and language revitalization. Greater collaboration between developed and developing countries can also reduce technological disparities and improve access to digital preservation tools (UNESCO, 2021; UNESCO, 2024).

Promoting ethical AI governance

Developing clear ethical standards for Artificial Intelligence remains essential. UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence provides an international framework based on transparency, accountability, human rights, fairness, and respect for cultural diversity. Member States can strengthen national legislation and institutional policies while promoting international standards that ensure AI systems operate responsibly and protect cultural heritage from misuse or discrimination (UNESCO, 2021).

Protecting Indigenous rights and data sovereignty

Future AI initiatives should ensure the meaningful participation of Indigenous peoples in every stage of technological development involving their languages, cultural heritage, or traditional knowledge. Governments and technology developers should respect **Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)**, recognize Indigenous data sovereignty, and support community ownership of cultural information. These measures help ensure that AI strengthens Indigenous cultures rather than exploiting or misrepresenting them (United Nations, 2007; UNESCO, 2021).

Expanding digital inclusion and technological capacity

Many countries continue to face significant limitations in digital infrastructure, technical expertise, and financial resources. International cooperation should therefore prioritize capacity-building, technology transfer, professional training, and investment in digital preservation projects. Supporting

museums, libraries, archives, universities, and Indigenous organizations will enable a broader range of communities to benefit from Artificial Intelligence while preserving their cultural heritage and linguistic diversity (UNESCO, 2024).

Encouraging responsible public-private partnerships

Technology companies, universities, museums, and research institutions increasingly play an important role in developing AI applications for cultural preservation. Governments can encourage partnerships that combine innovation with ethical oversight, ensuring that AI systems are transparent, culturally sensitive, and developed in collaboration with local and Indigenous communities. Such partnerships can accelerate technological progress while maintaining public trust and protecting cultural rights (UNESCO, 2024).

Future Perspectives

Artificial Intelligence is expected to become an increasingly powerful tool for documenting, preserving, and revitalizing cultural heritage and Indigenous languages. Its long-term success, however, will depend not only on technological advances but also on international cooperation, ethical governance, and respect for cultural diversity. By strengthening global partnerships and ensuring that Indigenous communities remain active participants in decisions affecting their heritage, UNESCO and its Member States can help ensure that AI contributes to preserving humanity's cultural legacy for future generations.

Guiding Questions for Delegates

The following questions are intended to guide delegates' research, facilitate the analysis of national positions, and support the development of practical and innovative draft resolutions.

1. What are the principal threats facing cultural heritage and Indigenous languages in the digital age?
2. What ethical challenges arise when AI is used to collect, analyze, or reproduce cultural heritage and traditional knowledge?
3. How can governments ensure that AI systems respect cultural diversity, human rights, and Indigenous communities' rights?
4. What role should UNESCO and other international organizations play in promoting the ethical governance of Artificial Intelligence?
5. How can international cooperation strengthen efforts to document, preserve, and revitalize endangered languages and cultural heritage worldwide?
6. Should international standards or legally binding agreements be developed to regulate the use of AI in cultural heritage preservation? Why or why not?
7. How can Indigenous peoples participate meaningfully in decisions regarding the development and use of AI systems that involve their languages, cultural heritage, and traditional knowledge?
8. What measures should be adopted to protect Indigenous data sovereignty and ensure Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in AI-related projects?
9. How can developing countries and marginalized communities gain equitable access to AI technologies, digital infrastructure, and technical expertise?
10. What responsibilities should governments, technology companies, universities, museums, and cultural institutions assume in ensuring the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence?
11. How can AI contribute to preserving cultural heritage while preventing cultural appropriation, bias, misinformation, or the commercialization of traditional knowledge?
12. What mechanisms could encourage greater international collaboration in research, funding, technology transfer, and capacity-building for cultural preservation?
13. How should the international community balance technological innovation with the protection of cultural identity, intellectual property, and Indigenous rights?
14. What long-term strategies can UNESCO Member States adopt to ensure that Artificial Intelligence strengthens rather than threatens the preservation of humanity's cultural heritage and linguistic diversity?

Suggested Readings and Resources

Official United Nations Documents and Resources

UNESCO – Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021)

The first global normative framework on the ethical governance of Artificial Intelligence. It establishes principles such as human rights, transparency, fairness, accountability, and respect for cultural diversity, making it the primary reference document for this committee.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/artificial-intelligence/recommendation-ethics>

UNESCO – Culture and Artificial Intelligence

This UNESCO portal explores how Artificial Intelligence is transforming cultural heritage preservation, museums, archives, creative industries, and cultural policies while highlighting the importance of ethical governance and international cooperation.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/culture/artificial-intelligence>

UNESCO – International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)

Official information on UNESCO's global initiative to preserve, revitalize, and promote Indigenous languages through education, digital technologies, research, and international cooperation.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/decade-indigenous-languages>

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

The principal international instrument recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples to protect, preserve, and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, languages, and intellectual property.

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

Reports and Publications

UNESCO – Global AI Ethics and Governance Observatory

A resource providing information on national AI policies, ethical governance initiatives, and international developments related to Artificial Intelligence. It is useful for understanding how different countries approach AI regulation and implementation.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/artificial-intelligence/observatory>

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) – Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expressions

Explores international discussions on intellectual property, Indigenous knowledge, cultural ownership, and the legal protection of traditional cultural expressions in the digital age.

<https://www.wipo.int/tk/en/>

UNESCO - Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

Official information on the 2003 Convention, including international safeguarding mechanisms, representative lists, and best practices for protecting living cultural heritage.

<https://ich.unesco.org>

UNESCO - World Atlas of Languages

An interactive global platform documenting the status of the world's languages, language vitality, multilingualism, and language preservation initiatives. It is particularly valuable for understanding the challenges faced by endangered Indigenous languages.

<https://en.wal.unesco.org>

OECD - Artificial Intelligence Policy Observatory (OECD AI)

Provides comparative information on AI governance, public policy, ethical principles, and international cooperation in Artificial Intelligence. Although not a UN resource, it is widely recognized as one of the leading references on global AI policy.

<https://oecd.ai>

Videos

Colby Raley - AI for Cultural Heritage (NDF23)

This presentation explores how Artificial Intelligence is transforming the preservation of cultural heritage through digital documentation, restoration, and data analysis. It highlights both the opportunities and the ethical challenges associated with applying AI to museums, archives, and historical sites, making it an excellent introduction to the committee topic.

<https://youtu.be/yocJZrursrA>

The Guardian of Cultural Heritage - AI: The Guardian of Cultural Heritage

This video demonstrates practical applications of Artificial Intelligence in the protection of cultural heritage, including digital reconstruction, conservation, and heritage management. It provides real-world examples of how AI can contribute to safeguarding historical sites and cultural artifacts while emphasizing the importance of responsible implementation.

<https://youtu.be/npPhT01XDew>

The Take - Can AI Save Endangered Indigenous Languages?

This documentary examines how Artificial Intelligence is being used to document, preserve, and revitalize endangered Indigenous languages. It discusses the opportunities AI offers for language preservation alongside the ethical concerns surrounding Indigenous data sovereignty, community participation, and cultural ownership, directly reflecting many of the issues delegates will debate in this committee.

<https://youtu.be/HPy3I5kpYEg>

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