

# Recognition of Indigenous Peoples in Nationally Determined Contributions: An overview for the third cycle



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## 1. Introduction

Indigenous Peoples play a crucial role in safeguarding ecosystems, making biodiversity thrive, and enacting knowledge fundamental to addressing the climate crisis. Their self-determined governance, rights, and cultural and spiritual practices are essential components of effective and just climate action. Acknowledging this, the Paris Agreement preamble calls on Parties to respect, promote and consider their obligations on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and for adaptation action to be guided by their knowledge.

Parties communicate their climate commitments through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). In 2022, we published a report (scan QR code at bottom of page) that analysed the first two rounds of NDCs (also known as submission cycles), finding that whilst references were increasing, they often lacked depth and an effective rights-based approach. Currently, Parties are in the third cycle of NDCs, offering a critical opportunity to assess whether Parties have translated growing international recognition, reinforced by several UNFCCC decisions<sup>1</sup> and the work of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP), into substantive national climate policy.

This updated analysis reviews active NDCs submitted to the UNFCCC by 195 Parties as of August 2025, applying our established five-category framework to assess recognition of: 1. Indigenous Peoples as rights-holders; 2. Indigenous jurisdiction; 3. Indigenous knowledge systems; 4. Full and effective participation; and 5. The legacy of colonialism. We assessed both the scale of recognition and the depth of engagement.

The third NDC cycle provides a key opportunity to assess whether Parties are closing the implementation gap and moving from rhetoric to concrete action in a way that aligns with Indigenous Peoples' priorities, knowledge systems, and self-determined decision-making.

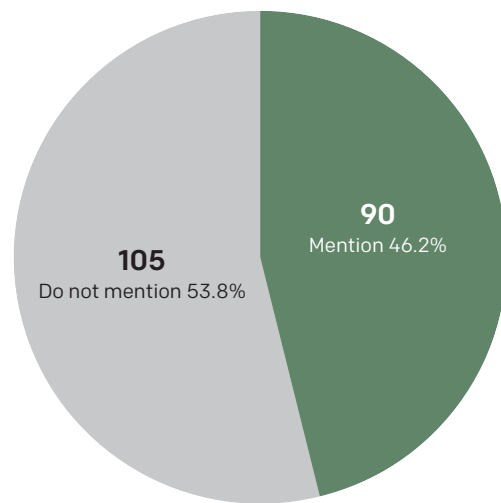
## 2. Recognition of Indigenous Peoples in active NDCs

### a. Global overview

Our analysis of 195 Parties reveals that recognition of Indigenous Peoples in the NDCs continues to increase: 90 now have references related to Indigenous Peoples in their pledges. This represents

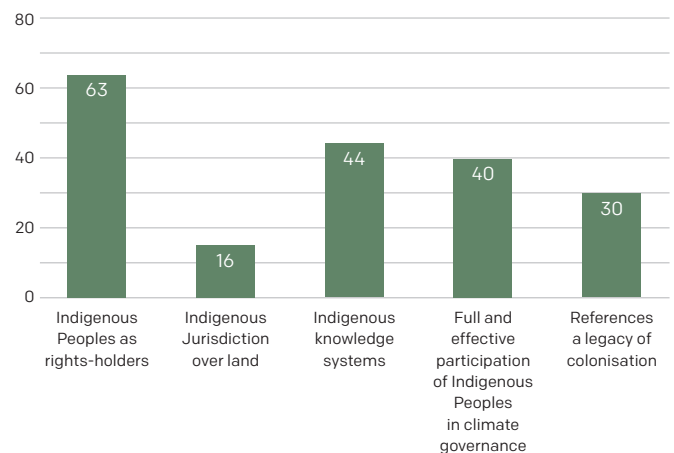
46.2% of all Parties (195). Figure 1 illustrates this global trend yet Map 1 shows that the quality and depth of this recognition remain highly uneven.

Figure 1: NDCs with references related to Indigenous Peoples



A closer look at the categories reveals a distinct pattern: references to vulnerability, which were predominant in the initial submissions, no longer dominate the discourse (see Figure 2). Parties are increasingly recognising Indigenous Peoples' rights, knowledge systems, and participation. Nevertheless, recognition of jurisdiction remains critically overlooked

Figure 2: References by category in active NDCs from 105 Parties

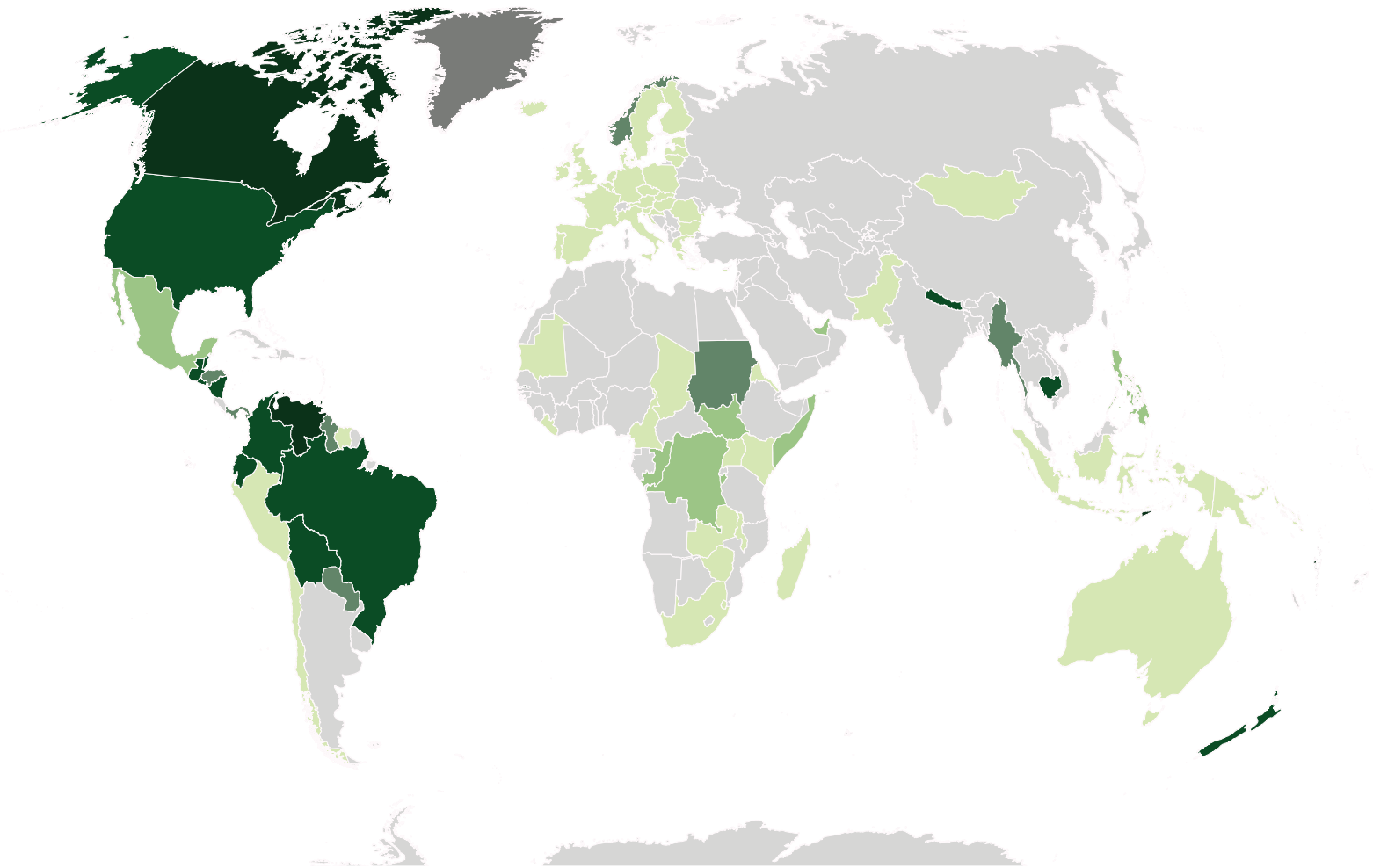


### 2022 REPORT



1. For example, decisions such as 1/CP.26 and 1/CMA.3 (Glasgow Climate Pact) emphasise the obligation to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and to actively involve them in the design and implementation of climate action.

## Map of the levels of recognition of Indigenous Peoples



### Level of recognition

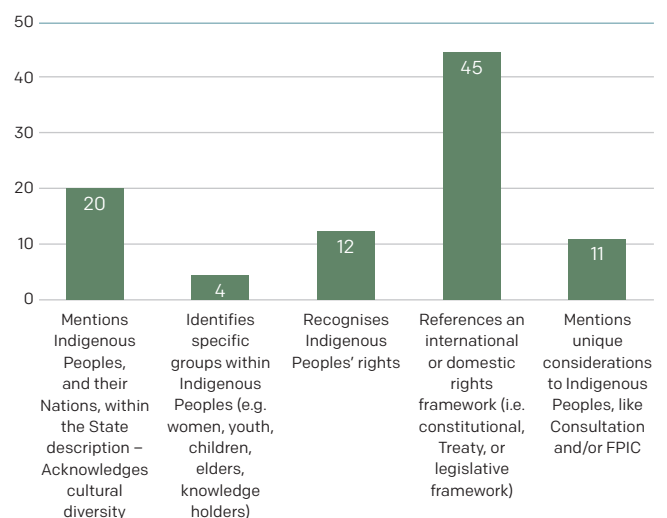


**Map 1:** The map shows the level of recognition of Indigenous Peoples in the active Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of all countries. References to Indigenous Peoples were scored across five analytical categories, and the total scores were ranked into five levels of recognition. Each level corresponds to a distinct colour, so the colour of each country reflects its overall degree of recognition. Note that Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) is currently in the process of developing its first NDC.

## b. Indigenous Peoples as rights-holders

Recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights has become more specific. As shown in Figure 3, 33% of Parties now acknowledge these rights to some degree, with 28.2% doing so explicitly. This is an improvement on previous cycles, where references were often vague and unspecified. We can see more frequent mentions of specific national or international legal frameworks. However, crucial implementation mechanisms like free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) are still rarely mentioned, indicating that recognition of rights has not yet translated into clear commitments to uphold them in climate action. Five Parties refer to the right of Indigenous Peoples to be consulted on measures that affect them, whilst six explicitly mention FPIC in the context of climate action (Belize, Cambodia, El Salvador, Guyana, Nepal, and Paraguay). Although Canada does not reference FPIC in its NDC itself, the annexed submissions from National Indigenous Organisations explicitly highlight this right, underscoring its importance from the perspective of rights-holders.

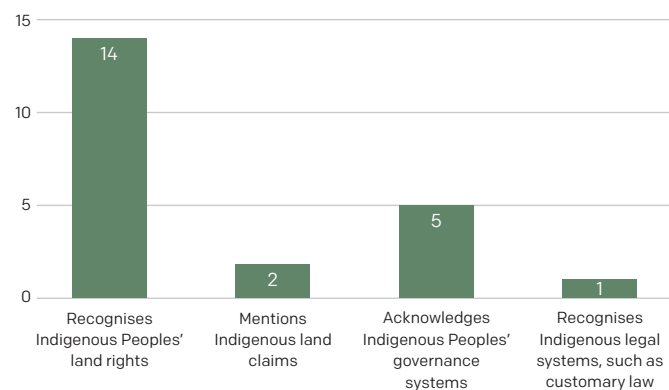
Figure 3: NDCs recognising Indigenous Peoples as rights-holders (recognised by 63 Parties)



### c. Indigenous jurisdiction over land

Indigenous jurisdiction remains the most neglected category. As detailed in Figure 4, a mere 8.2% of Parties recognise Indigenous jurisdiction. Only five Parties explicitly acknowledge Indigenous governance systems, and just one recognises an Indigenous legal system: Timor-Leste, which refers to Lisan – a complex system of customary law and ancestral traditions that guide daily life.

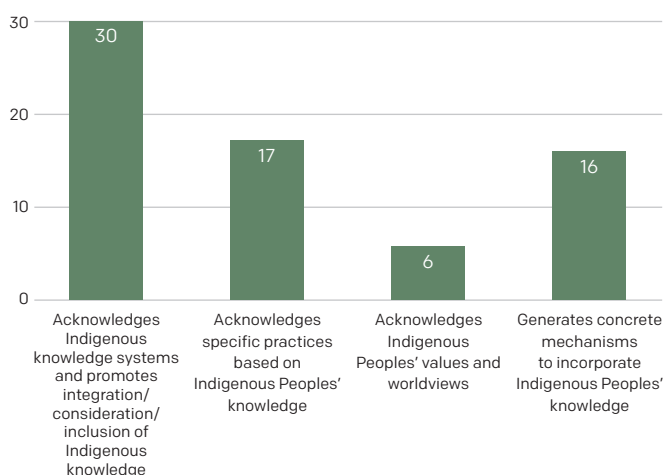
Figure 4: NDCs with references to Indigenous jurisdiction over land (recognised by 16 Parties)



### d. Indigenous knowledge systems

Recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems continues to improve in specificity. As Figure 5 shows, 22.7% of Parties now include references to Indigenous knowledge, with NDCs increasingly citing specific traditional practices—particularly in the context of conservation—and proposing mechanisms for their engagement in climate action. This marks a positive shift from the superficial acknowledgements common in earlier cycles. Very few Parties (six in total) recognise Indigenous values, however: Canada emphasises the need to adopt a holistic approach to address the root causes of climate change, including the imbalance between human and natural systems.

Figure 5: NDCs recognising Indigenous knowledge systems (recognised by 44 parties)



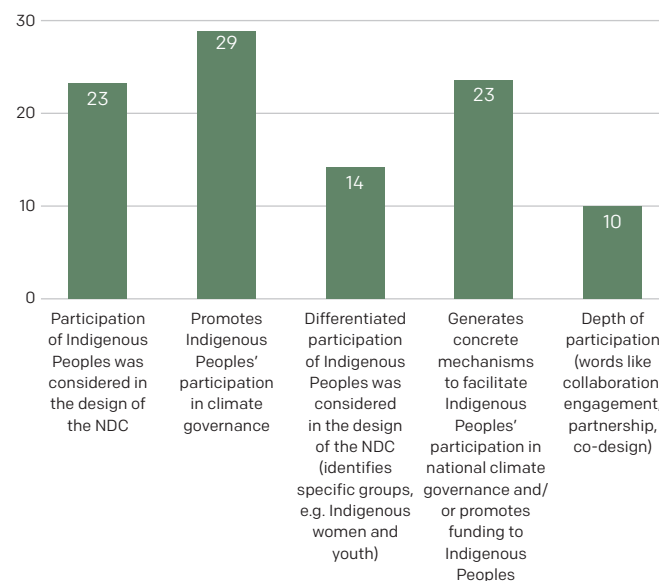
### e. Full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in climate governance

Mentions of participation are increasing, with 20.6% of Parties now promoting it in their NDCs (Figure 6). Yet these commitments remain weak. Participation is often framed within general stakeholder consultations rather than through 'nation-to-nation' engagement and distinct, self-determined processes. Only 14 Parties (7.17% of the total) describe how Indigenous Peoples were involved in their design, despite Decision 4/CMA.1 encouraging Parties to provide information on the participation and engagement of Indigenous Peoples.

Twenty-three Parties propose concrete mechanisms for the engagement of Indigenous Peoples in implementation and monitoring, and 22 Parties mention some form of funding for Indigenous Peoples. For example, Cambodia highlights the need for dedicated climate awareness and outreach activities tailored to Indigenous communities—using media in Indigenous languages, sign language, and audio formats—as well as capacity-building and improved access to information, which are seen as essential for closing resource gaps and mobilising investments to achieve NDC targets.

These commitments remain insufficient and lack the concrete, systematic mechanisms needed for effective delivery and direct access. Critically, references to Indigenous women, youth, and persons with disabilities are exceptionally rare, overlooking their unique roles and perspectives.

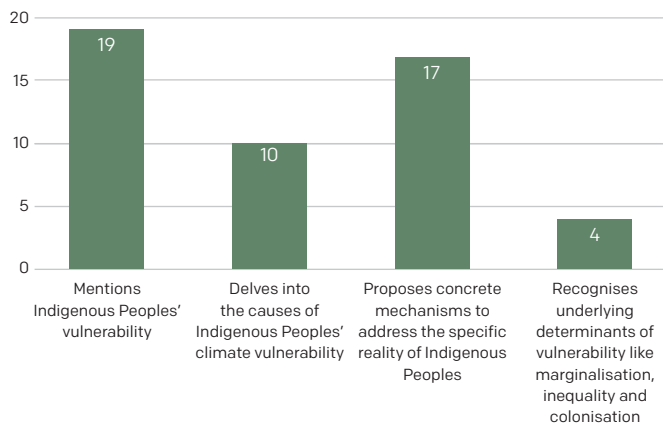
Figure 6: NDCs recognising the rights of Indigenous Peoples' participation (recognised by 40 Parties)



### f. References to the legacy of colonisation

Fifteen per cent of NDCs refer to the disproportionate impacts of climate change on Indigenous Peoples (Figure 7). Most of these references frame Indigenous Peoples primarily in terms of vulnerability, without engaging with their underlying causes. As in our previous study, explicit recognition of the structural drivers of vulnerability—such as colonialism, marginalisation, and land dispossession—remains almost absent. Only four Parties (Canada, Dominica, Panama, and Venezuela) establish this critical connection; for instance, Canada links climate impacts to colonial legacies, socio-economic disparities, and unequal access to clean technologies, emphasising how these interconnected factors continue to shape Indigenous Peoples' wellbeing.

Figure 7: **NDCs recognising the legacy of colonialism (recognised by 30 Parties)**



### 3. Conclusion and recommendations for Parties

This analysis confirms a consistent upward trend in NDCs referencing Indigenous Peoples. This quantitative progress reflects sustained Indigenous advocacy and the growing visibility of Indigenous knowledge systems in global climate governance.

However, recognition remains largely superficial with gaps in implementation. Rights recognition lacks enforcement mechanisms: more NDCs reference rights frameworks; however, very few operationalise these commitments with clear procedures, legal safeguards, or adherence to FPIC. As the Facilitative Working Group (FWG) of the LCIPP highlights in its *Recommendations for the Global Stocktake*, engagement with Indigenous Peoples is often conceptualised as a “one-off” activity or knowledge extraction rather than a sustained partnership. References to Indigenous knowledge systems frequently overlook their integrity, values, and governance protocols, rarely being based on co-production or partnership models.

The most significant failure remains the near-total absence of recognition for Indigenous jurisdiction, governance systems, and land rights. This omission systematically ignores the fundamental link between effective climate action and Indigenous Peoples’ rights to their lands, territories, and resources, undermining both self-determination and Paris Agreement goals. Participation is too often framed as generic stakeholder engagement rather than that of rights-holder through self-determined processes, risking dilution of Indigenous voices.



Moreover, key groups such as Indigenous women, youth, elders, and persons with disabilities remain largely invisible in most NDCs, despite being vital knowledge holders. Serious efforts to address colonial legacies and the structural causes of Indigenous Peoples’ vulnerability are also lacking, and financing and capacity-building provisions remain minimal, often limited to short-term, project-based initiatives rather than long-term structural support. Regional analyses echo these findings, such as the report led by the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact Foundation (AIPP) and Forest Peoples Programme (FPP) on Indigenous Peoples and Nationally Determined Contributions in Asia (scan QR code), which documents similar patterns of weak rights integration and tokenistic participation across Asian NDCs.

For NDCs to become truly effective and just, Parties must move from acknowledgement to partnership. Effective climate action depends on engaging diverse knowledge systems, upholding Indigenous governance and rights, and fostering genuine collaboration. The third NDC cycle presents a crucial opportunity to close the gap between rhetoric and practice. We call on all Parties to ensure that the third cycle of NDCs is not only more ambitious in emissions reductions but also more ambitious in justice, equity, and partnership with Indigenous Peoples.

As urged by the FWG and the International Indigenous Peoples’ Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC), Parties must integrate the following recommendations to ensure that national climate policies are not only ambitious but also equitable, adequately resourced, and consistent with their international human rights obligations, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

- 1. Uphold rights and self-determination.** NDCs must move beyond vague statements to fully operationalise commitments to Indigenous Peoples’ rights. They must explicitly respect, promote, and uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples as articulated in the UNDRIP and ILO Convention 169.
- 2. Recognise Indigenous jurisdiction.** Effective climate action requires recognising Indigenous Peoples not merely as stakeholders but as rights-holders with their own governance systems. NDCs must explicitly acknowledge and respect Indigenous Peoples’ rights to their lands, territories, waters and resources, including customary tenure systems.
- 3. Engage Indigenous knowledge systems meaningfully.** Parties must promote genuine co-production of knowledge. NDCs should outline commitments to embed respectful, ethical, and equitable collaboration with Indigenous knowledge holders. To make this sustainable, NDCs should support the establishment of permanent, directly funded mechanisms for Indigenous-led research, monitoring, and adaptation planning, safeguarding the integrity and enactment of their knowledge.
- 4. Ensure full, effective, and resourced participation.** NDCs must guarantee the formal, ongoing, and adequately resourced participation of Indigenous Peoples through their own self-determined and representative processes across all phases of the NDC cycle. Crucially, Parties must commit to dedicated, predictable, and directly accessible funding for Indigenous-led climate action and capacity-building. These approaches must be inclusive, explicitly recognising and supporting the vital roles of Indigenous women, youth, elders, and persons with disabilities in climate action.
- 5. Address colonial legacies.** NDCs must address the root causes of vulnerability. It is imperative that Parties explicitly recognise the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism, dispossession, and marginalisation as the structural drivers of Indigenous Peoples’ disproportionate vulnerability to climate change.

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