

REGIONAL
METHODOLOGY REPORT:

Principles and guidelines
for the formulation of
methodologies for the
**RECOGNITION OF
THE EXISTENCE OF
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
IN ISOLATION**
in South America

Executive Summary 2025



According to the International Working Group for the Protection of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact (GTI-PIACI)¹, in South America, there are 188 records of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation – PIA (acronym in Spanish). Of these, only 60 are officially “recognized registers”, leaving 128 registers that, for the States, do not exist. However, there are 31 records recognized by indigenous peoples and civil society organizations (NGOs) that are not included in the official lists of the States.

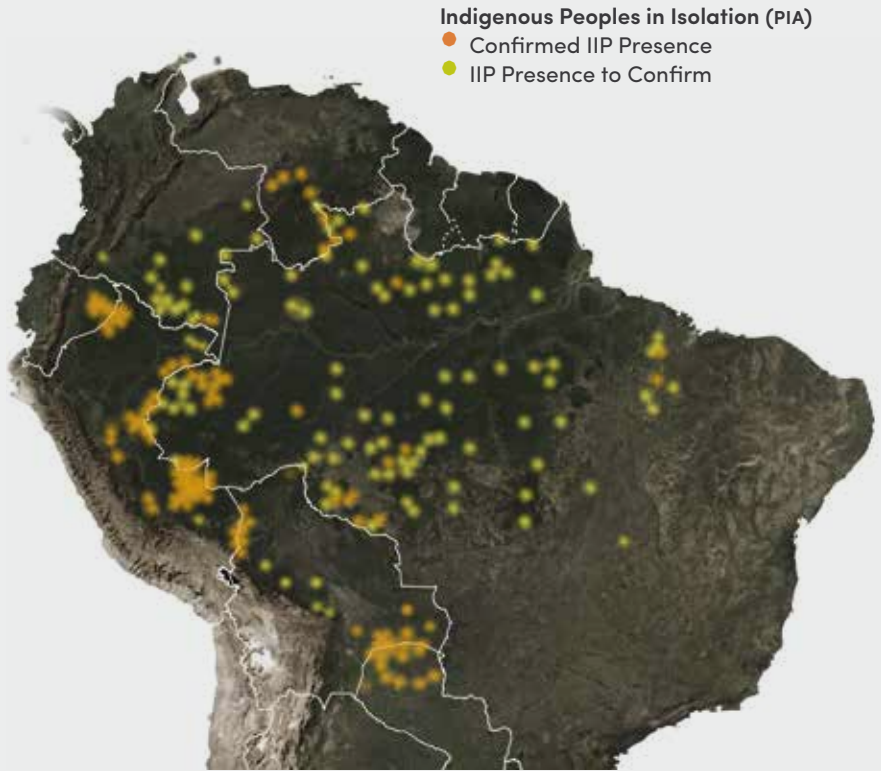
Table: Summary records PIA South America - 2024

	<u>Confirmed State</u>	<u>Confirmados NGOs</u>	<u>To be confirmed State:</u>
<u>Bolivia</u>	3	+6	6
<u>Brazil</u>	28	+5	88
<u>Colombia</u>	2	2	16
<u>Ecuador</u>	2	2	2
<u>Paraguay</u>	0	2	2
<u>Peru</u>	25	+10	10
<u>Venezuela</u>	0	4	4
<u>PIA</u>	60	+31	128
<u>Total, PIA South America PIA registrations:</u> 188			

Source: Elaborated by author (Vaz, 2024)

1 GTI PIACI is composed of 21 indigenous and civil society organizations from South America. See <https://www.pueblosaislados.org/miembros>

Map: PIA records in South America.
Indigenous Peoples in Isolation
of the Amazon and Gran Chaco



Source: GTI PIACI (2024).

Despite the importance of the OHCHR / UN Guidelines (2012) and the IACHR / OAS Report (2013), for the formulation of policies for the protection of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact - PIACI, both offer few details about methodologies for the recognition of PIA. The "Regional Methodology Report (IMR)" subject of this summary, complements these documents by providing specific principles and guidelines for the formulation of methodologies for the recognition of the existence of PIA.

This report plays an important role since, in order to guarantee the rights of PIA, the premise is the recognition of their existence. This recognition implies a set of methodological procedures based on guiding principles that guarantee, above all, respect for isolation as a clear expression of the exercise of the right to self-determination of these peoples and a guarantee for their physical and cultural survival.

The existence of PIA is recognized by proving evidence of these peoples and their relationship with the forest. The aim is to prove the evidence of their presence and not the indigenous people themselves.

The initiative of the GTI PIACI to develop this Regional Methodological Report is crucial because it points to solutions for the recognition of about 78% of the records of peoples in isolation not recognized by the States in the continent, a situation that denies their rights. It also seeks to strengthen existing international standards and generate spaces for technical discussion to consolidate protocols and methodological practices in the region.

The Regional Methodological Report is based on the systematization and analysis of Local Reports (LR), prepared by indigenous and allied organizations in seven South American countries with confirmed records of PIA (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela), gathering the work of 16 organizations and 47 experts, with the participation of more than 80 people interviewed. Policies, protocols and actions developed to recognize PIA in seven countries with records of PIA in South America are presented.

The general objective of this Regional Methodological Report is to propose to States, indigenous organizations and NGOs, principles and guidelines to contribute to the formulation of their own methodologies for the recognition of the existence of PIA, within their normative frameworks, respecting self-determination and the no-contact principle, focusing on evidence of their coexistence with forests.

The methodology for the recognition of the existence of PIA consists of standards and procedures for investigating and systematizing evidence that confirms or refutes their existence in a given context and

specific territory. The OHCHR Guidelines (2012) state that these investigations should respect the principle of ‘no contact’ and be carried out through “indirect actions” to minimize the risks of contact between researchers and peoples in isolation.

The Report is divided into two parts: a regional analysis of existing methodologies and principles and guidelines for the formulation of new methodologies.

1. **REGIONAL ANALYSIS OF EXISTING METHODOLOGIES**

Several key concepts for understanding existing methodologies are presented:

Direct methodology for the recognition of PIA:

Involves direct observation in the field, always respecting the no-contact principle, to confirm evidence of PIA, reported by third parties. These expeditions seek to find evidence of forest use by the PIA once they have seasonally withdrawn, for example: tracks, traces, abandoned camps, use of natural resources, vestiges of material culture, alterations to the forest, among others. It includes planned expeditions to verify reports and collect new evidence, differing from the indirect methodology in its active search for physical evidence. In addition, information is collected from bibliographic and oral sources, and images are analyzed to obtain evidence of the existence of PIA. The evidence obtained can also help to understand the territorial occupation and the identification of threats to these peoples.

Indirect methodology for the recognition of PIA:

It is based on the collection of information from bibliographic and oral sources and image analysis, complemented with direct field expeditions to confirm the presence of PIA. Unlike the direct methodology, expeditions to the forest to look for new evidence beyond that reported by third parties are not encouraged. “Indirect actions” include aerial photographs of campsites, accounts of contacts by nearby villages, testimonies of indigenous people who have left isolation, or historical series of geo-referenced information.

The Regional Methodological Report also presents a set of guiding principles for the protection of PIA that elaborate on the right to self-determination. First, the ‘principle of principles’, the no contact, defines all the others: territorial intangibility, *pro homine*, precaution, progressivity and non-regressivity, protection/prevention, vulnerability, action without harm, international cooperation.

2. PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE FORMULATION OF NEW METHODOLOGIES

Methodologies for recognizing PIA developed by the States:

1. Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru recognize isolation as a right of self-determination of PIA and adopt the no-contact principle.
2. Paraguay and Venezuela have no official legal recognition of PIA.
3. Only Bolivia and Ecuador specifically integrate PIA into their constitutions.
4. Bolivia and Peru have protocols for the recognition of PIACI established through laws and supreme decrees.

Methodologies for PIA recognition developed by NGOs:

1. All consulted NGOs working for the recognition and protection of PIAs adopt ‘no contact’ as a guiding principle.
2. Only Colombia (ACT) and Paraguay (Iniciativa Amotocodie) have systematized methodologies for the recognition of PIA.
3. Bolivia (CEJIS, CITRMD), Brazil (eapil/cimi) and Venezuela (WATANIBA) are in the process of developing and systematizing their PIA recognition methodologies.
4. In Peru, the NGOs follow the official State methodology to prepare “Preliminary Recognition Studies” (EPR, acronym in spanish) and “Additional Categorization Studies” (EAC, acronym in spanish).

Methodologies for the recognition of PIA developed by indigenous peoples and/or organizations:

The IMR presents some aspects of the procedures, techniques and protocols used by the contacted indigenous peoples in the relationship, “coexistence”, protection and recognition of the PIA. The great difficulty is that these protocols, despite being thousands of years old, are not systematized in written form. These ‘protocols’ / ‘methodologies’ do not fit into a western methodological systematization, which constitutes a challenge to consider these indigenous methodologies in the field of academia, the State and Civil Society Organizations. It also implies the acceptance and inclusion of these peoples in their professional staff, not only as a support role, but also as creators of evidence verification procedures and co-managers of protection policies.

1. All civil society organizations consulted recognize the existence of indigenous protocols based on ancestral wisdom.
2. Only in Peru, indigenous organizations have systematized methodologies for the recognition of PIA. FENAMAD has documented processes for the identification and recognition of PIA.
3. States with legislation for the recognition of PIA (Peru and Bolivia) do not recognize indigenous protocols, although they allow the participation of indigenous organizations with non-equal participation.
4. Relations between contacted and uncontacted indigenous peoples are structured on the basis of ancestral practices and coexistence protocols, based on mutual respect and protection.
5. The connection with spirituality, nature and territory is key to the protection of peoples in isolation.

The guidelines for the recognition of the existence of PIA guide outsiders, public and private entities, to respect preventive, protective and recognition provisions in territories occupied or presumed occupied by PIA. It recommends the creation of competent sectors for the recognition and monitoring of PIA, with adequate human and financial resources, and the equal participation of indigenous and civil organizations. It also urges States to adopt specific legislation to protect the rights of PIA, including their right to life, integrity, isolation, and their territories. This report guides recognition actions within the territories of PIA in South America, according to the international and national normative framework.

The PIACI enjoy the rights that are specially recognized for them.

In general:

- ★ Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization - ILO (1989).
- ★ American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - OAS (2016)
- ★ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - UN (2007)

Specific to PIACI

- ★ The 'Guidelines for the Protection of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and in Initial Contact of the Amazon Region, the Gran Chaco and the Eastern Region of Paraguay', OHCHR / UN (2012).
- ★ The 'Report 'Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation and Initial Contact in the Americas: recommendations for the full respect of their rights' IACHR / OAS (2013).
- ★ Report on the Human Rights Situation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Pan-Amazonian Region - OAS (2019).

- ★ OTCA (2011-2023). Between 2011 and 2023, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (OTCA) implemented three projects to protect indigenous peoples in isolation and initial contact in the Amazon region. These projects were:
 1. "Strategic Framework Program for the Development of a Regional Agenda for the Protection of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact (PIACI)" (2011-2014),
 2. "Indigenous Peoples in ACTO Border Regions" (2016-2019),
 3. "Contingency Plan for Health Protection of Highly Vulnerable Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact" (2020-2023).

The Convention on Biological Diversity establishes, in its Article 8 paragraph 'j', that the parties must respect and preserve the knowledge and practices of indigenous communities. Also, the decisions of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention (CBD/COP/VIII/5, CBD/COP/COP/IX/13...) have urged States to respect the rights of these communities.

In 2004, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) highlighted, in Recommendation 3056 on indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation, immediate actions at the national, regional and

international levels to develop programs that promote a closer articulation between nature conservation in the Amazon region and the Chaco and the protection of the lives and territories of indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation.

Finally, in 2023, the Belém Declaration, signed by ACTO countries, highlights the responsibility of States in the protection of the rights of PIACI.

Methodology proposal:

The governing body in charge of protecting the rights of the PIACI must have directive and operational bodies to define and implement public policies for protection. These bodies, with adequate human and financial resources, should coordinate multidisciplinary and multicultural teams, integrating indigenous peoples, their organizations, and civil society. Their functions should include:

1. Legal advice with lawyers with expertise in Indigenous Peoples, PIACI and environment.
2. Social assistance with anthropologists, social workers and sociologists and others with expertise in PIACI.
3. Health advice with doctors, nurses and specialists in intercultural and public health from PIACI.
4. Operational technical assistance in the field with experts in PIACI reconnaissance, map management, georeferencing, vehicle driving and jungle survival.
5. Ethnocultural assistance with indigenous experts and shamans for an adequate cultural understanding of PIACI evidence.

The following table shows the steps in the process of recognizing the existence of a given indigenous group in isolation:

Table: Steps to recognition

Office work	
1. Previous evidence gathering:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Systematization of evidence;b. Bibliographic survey;c. Creation of a database;d. Database feeding;e. Planning of field actions;f. Definition of the field work methodology;g. Identify and obtain copies of maps and satellite images of the region.
Field work	
2. Verification of evidence:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. It is recommended that before initiating field work, meetings be held with the indigenous and/or regional communities to consult them and socialize the work agenda. Also inform them about the existence of legal and penal regulations in case of provoked contact, in order to avoid any intention of 'capturing' people in isolation;b. Conducting interviews with primary and secondary sources;c. Field visits to verify the evidence (when it was verified that the PIA are not in the region);d. Field visits in the region to obtain more evidence;e. Plan overflights and satellite photographs based on data bank records;f. Record all actions developed in the field.

Office work

3.

Systematization of field information

- a. Prepare a report that systematizes all the information from the field work;
- b. Draw a map with all the information gathered in the field;
- c. Attach to the report all the records obtained in the field work;
- d. Update the database.

Office work

4.

Measures to be taken upon recognition of evidence of PIA

- a. Officialize the findings of the field work before the competent authority;
- b. The intervention of the State is sought to take appropriate administrative and legal measures to promote the effective protection of the PIA, especially for the prevention of contact;
- c. The State should develop precautionary measures to halt activities that may affect the integrity of PIA in its territory;
- d. Initiate the process of identification of PIA that have validated their recognition process.



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