

**Bruxelles, 4-5/12/2025**

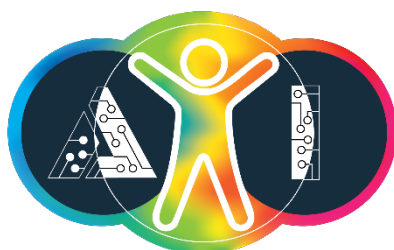
**El Global Conference on Artificial Intelligence  
Conférence mondiale de l'IE sur l'intelligence artificielle  
Conferencia Mundial de la IE sobre Inteligencia Artificial**



***Shaping our future:  
Education unions leading for a human-centred AI***

**Report on Education International's Global  
Conference on Artificial Intelligence**





Education International brought together more than 200 union leaders, educators and experts from every region for its first Global Conference on Artificial Intelligence “Shaping our Future: Education Unions Leading for a Human-Centred AI”, moderated by Phil McRae (ATA/CTF-FCE), held in Brussels on 4–5 December. In addition to the on-site participation, around 200 participants followed the conference remotely. Over these two days, participants examined how artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping education and work, and how unions can ensure that these tools strengthen, rather than undermine, the teaching profession as well as public education and democracy. Building on Education International’s previous work on AI, this timely conference advanced the goals set out in the most recent EI World Congress resolutions ([here](#) and [here](#)). These call for a human-centred, ethical, and rights-based approach to AI - one that demands transparency, safeguards equity and quality, and supports - not replaces - the essential role of educators.

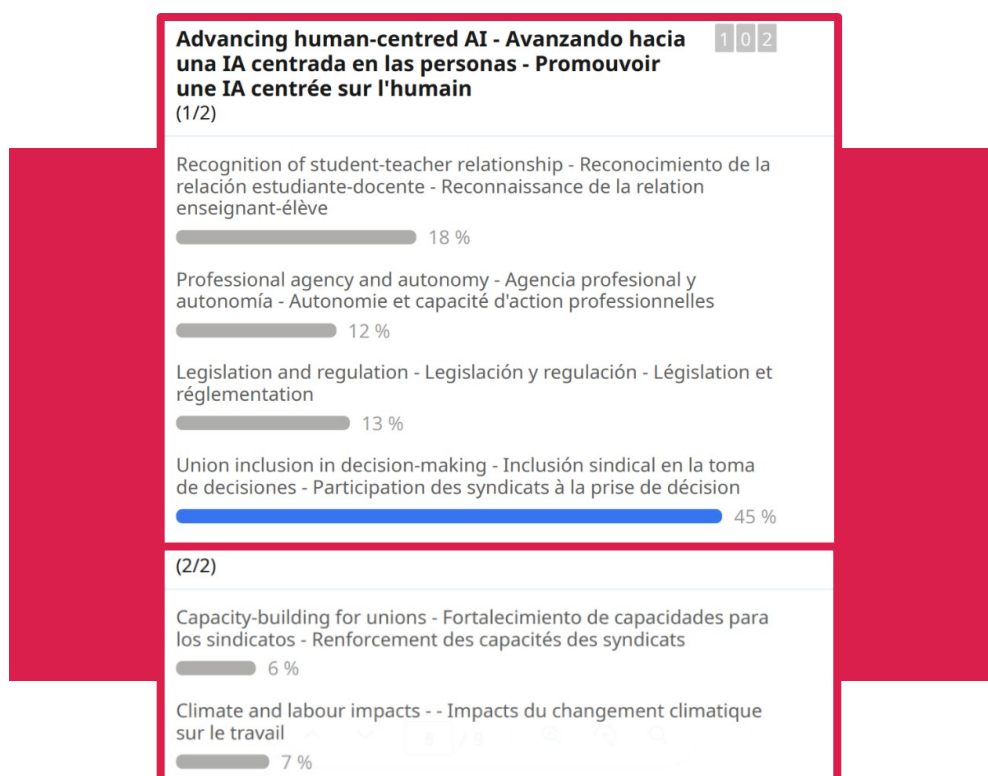
The first day of the conference focused on setting the scene and expanding our knowledge base. Day two shifted toward organizing and taking action to shape the future of AI through an education union-driven and human-centered approach. This report provides a brief overview of the two days and includes links to further resources, video materials and guidance for EI member organisations to advance their work on AI at the regional and national level.

## Common themes across the event

Across plenary and breakout sessions, several common themes emerged:

- **AI must serve teachers, not control them:** Participants welcomed tools that reduce administrative work but warned against those that undermine professional agency and judgment, increase surveillance, or worsen workload. Teachers' right to opt in, opt out, or refuse unethical systems was considered central.
- **Critical AI literacy:** Unions stressed that teaching with and about AI requires strong teacher training, grounded in human rights, democracy and sound pedagogy.
- **Equity and data colonialism:** AI is largely developed in powerful corporate and geopolitical centres, using data that can exclude or misrepresent communities. This fuels bias, discrimination and new forms of digital colonialism.
- **Inclusion and disability:** Assistive AI tools can support diverse learners, but must be evaluated through equity, rights and meaningful participation.
- **Digital divides:** Unequal infrastructure, commercial models and licensing regimes are creating new divides within and between countries. Unions called for public investment and resistance to dependency on private platforms.

When participants were asked what their priority would be to advance a human-centred approach to AI they answered the following:



## Keynotes to inspire

### ***Setting the scene: the real AI and its impacts, Wayne Holmes & Kyungmee Lee*** ([links to recordings of Wayne Holmes & Kyungmee Lee](#))

Professor **Wayne Holmes**, UCL Institute of Education, [emphasised that many current claims about AI in education focus on efficiency and “personalisation” yet often ignore the hidden costs](#) for teachers and learners. He showed how AI frequently shifts, rather than reduces teachers' workload.

Professor **Kyungmee Lee**, Seoul National University, [drew on research into South Korea's AI Digital Textbook \(AIDT\) reforms](#) to illustrate the politics of large-scale, top-down digitalisation. Concerns ranged from excessive costs, data protection and commercialisation, to digital overuse, inequalities and a lack of meaningful consultation with the teaching profession.

### ***From chalkboards to chatbots: learning from the past to design the future, Punya Mishra*** ([link to recording](#))

Professor **Punya Mishra**, Director of Innovative Learning Futures at Arizona State University, closed the first day with a thought-provoking address. He urged participants to look beyond the *hype* and recognise AI for what it is: a probabilistic system that produces plausible text without true understanding. “AI can create content, but not context,” he noted. Mishra cautioned that education is entering an unregulated global experiment in data colonialism, one that risks reinforcing echo chambers and diminishing spaces for authentic human dialogue. His core message was clear: educators must engage with AI realistically, not with blind trust in corporate promises.



## Education union leader panels

Several plenary panels brought together education union leaders from across the globe and provided the conference participants with important examples of how unions are responding to AI-driven reforms, from bargaining over data protection and workload to contesting privatisation and defending public funding.

### ***Navigating AI in diverse contexts: Europe and the US*** ([link to recording](#))

In this panel union leaders Randi Weingarten, AFT President, and John MacGabhann, ETUCE President, reflected on the realities in their contexts, from the highly deregulated digital markets in the US to settings like Europe where social dialogue and regulation play a stronger role.

### ***Insights, highlights and union action: AI in the service of equity and the profession in the UK, Namibia, Canada and Costa Rica*** ([link to recording](#))

This union leader panel came together after the breakout sessions of the day with a focus on the profession and equity. Daniel Kebede, NEU (UK), Loide Shaanika Amushila, NANTU (Namibia), Eric Gingras, CSQ (Canada) and Yorgina Alvarado, SEC (Costa Rica) provided insights into how their unions from quite diverse settings are addressing those issues through union organising, social dialogue and training.

### ***Union organising for a human-centered approach to education in Denmark, Zimbabwe and Australia*** ([link to recording](#))

This union panel on day 2 offered another opportunity to hear inspiring examples from across the globe with a focus on action and organising. Jasper Holm, GL (Denmark), Sifiso Ndlovu, ZIMTA (Zimbabwe) and Correna Haythorpe, EU (Australia) shared their lessons learned around organising for public policy on AI and IT infrastructure, the introduction of AI tools into schools, and the development of teacher policy.

## International organisations panel

Representatives of UNESCO, the OECD, UNICEF and the GPE were invited to share their perspectives in a plenary debate. They cautioned against a widening policy vacuum, with AI advancing far faster than regulation or evidence. Stressing the need for precision rather than hype, they noted that many tools entering classrooms were

designed for business, not for learning, and too often rely on training data drawn almost entirely from the Global North. This leaves many countries, languages and school realities effectively invisible in system design.



## Breakout sessions: outcomes, guidance and inspiration

The breakout sessions provided an important opportunity for member organisations to connect in smaller settings on the highly complex issues at stake. Strands A and B focused on increasing our knowledge base. Strand C built on what we learned before and turned this into action.

More information on each session including outcomes and related materials for union action can be accessed via the session links below. You can also access an overview compiling your insights - gathered across sessions and the conference survey - on how unions are using collective bargaining and regulation to promote a human-centered AI in education [here](#).

### **Strand A: Navigating opportunities and challenges for the**

Strand A on the teaching profession explored the challenges and opportunities AI presents for teachers in both basic and higher education, from a professional perspective, and examined what is needed to teach AI literacy.

#### **A1: [Teaching with AI](#)**

*Question for further reflection: "Teachers need access to AI and support in using it from their colleagues, but we also need to practice digital sobriety. Just*

*because it's there doesn't mean we need to use it. How can we ensure unions are leading the use of AI in the classroom and in the school?"*

**A2: Navigating AI in higher education and research**

*Question for further reflection: "Many unions have developed well thought out policies, recommendations and strategies for the proper educational use of AI in higher education and research. How can we better share these national experiences and strategies with international colleagues?"*

**A3: Teaching about AI**

*Question for further reflection: "How can we ensure teacher union's participation and voice in shaping AI policy and thereby ensure that AI policies are developed in a democratic process and through social dialogue?"*

## **Strand B: Navigating AI for diversity, equity and inclusion**

Strand B on equity provided an important opportunity to dive deeper into some of the core concerns in terms of bias and data collection, unequal access as well as challenges and opportunities for students and teachers with disabilities and diverse learning needs. The sessions also included perspectives of colleagues belonging to the Indigenous Peoples' and LGBTI+ communities.

**B1: Raising awareness of biases in AI development**

*Question for further reflection: "Facing the prejudices and biases in AI, what would be its use in the design and conception of school curricula and teacher training? How can we ensure that staff can maintain their control of AI for a better student-teacher relationship?"*

**B2: Teaching and supporting students with disabilities and diverse learning needs with AI**

*Question for further reflection: "How can we as educators focus on further exploration and training rather than just creating experiences for students?"*

**B3: Bridging the global AI Divide**

*Question for further reflection: "How do we compel governments and employers to work with unions to meaningfully tackle the issues of infrastructure, the commercialization and privatization of education, the protection of data, digital and AI divides, procurement or implementation of inclusive programmes that do not deculturize indigenous knowledge or prioritize western languages or knowledge, development of regulatory frameworks, and appropriate and timely training to ensure safe and equitable access for all students?"*

## Strand C: Navigating towards OUR future

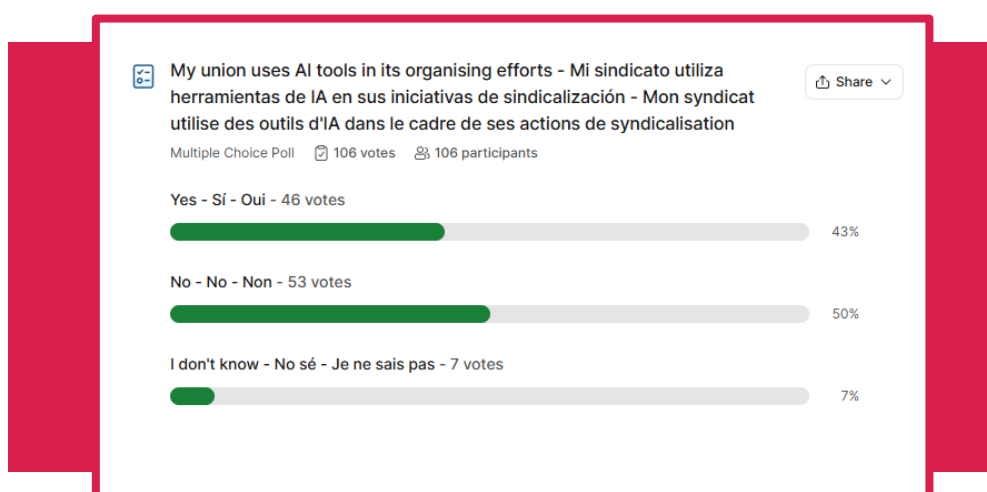
Strand C on day 2 provided an opportunity to strategise around and contribute to ongoing projects such as EI's upcoming project on collective bargaining or the development of global standards including the CEART revisions of the ILO/UNESCO Recommendations on the status of teachers (more information on the work of the EI CEART taskforce [here](#)).

### C1: [EI Research Institute research: Collective bargaining on AI](#)

Question for further reflection: *“How do we move from policy to getting that picture of engaging and negotiating with governments in AI? How can unions develop a strategic approach?”*

### C2: [Union organising in the age of AI](#)

Question for further reflection: *“How can unions strengthen internal democratic governance while integrating AI tools, ensuring that technology supports—not replaces—member-driven organising and decision-making? As unions adopt AI for communication and organising, how can we build transparent and ethical practices that protect member data and reinforce trust?”*



### C3: [A better bargain: Updating the UNESCO/ILO Recommendations](#)

Question for further reflection: Should the CEART revision include the right to opt in or out of AI, giving educators and students the choice to have an AI-free education? Should the revision process explore the impact of AI on jobs, and the role education plays in preparing for work?

## What's next?

### ***Global: We are not passengers in the future, we are its architects ([link to recording](#))***

EI's General Secretary, David Edwards, outlined five strategic pillars agreed by the 71<sup>st</sup> Executive Board meeting, held just before the conference, which will guide EI's work on AI:

- convening a global network to connect unions;
- sharing cutting-edge research;
- driving advocacy at international and national levels;
- building union capacity through training and organising; and
- providing thought leadership to keep teachers and human-centred education at the core of policy and practice.

These pillars will shape EI's long-term strategy to ensure technology serves humanity and strengthens public education systems.

### ***Regional sessions: United in diversity***

Regional meetings towards the end of the conference allowed member organisations to connect, reflect and strategize on the future work on AI in education in their region. These ranged from planned regional campaigns to taskforces on AI, research agendas, and joint training programmes for union activists, and reflected the very diverse and yet oftentimes very similar challenges member organisations in different regions face. Education union leaders from all regions emphasized that AI must strengthen - not replace teachers - and that the human relationship is at the heart of education, calling for robust regulation, capacity-building, public infrastructure, and meaningful teacher involvement in shaping national and global AI policies. From Latin America's resistance to privatised ed-tech, to Asia-Pacific's focus on closing deep digital divides, the Arab region's call for inclusion and Arabic-language tools, Africa's Ubuntu-guided commitment to equity and collective empowerment, Europe's defense of democracy and professional autonomy, and North America & the Caribbean's prioritization of AI literacy and climate-aware tech governance, unions affirmed a shared vision: a human-centered AI built through solidarity, social dialogue, and the protection of public education.

If you are interested in finding out more about regional perspectives, strategies or recommendations you can:

- [watch here](#) the report back in plenary by Marième Sakho Dansokho (SYPROS, Senegal) EI Vice-President, Africa Manal Hdaife (PPSTLL, Lebanon), EI Executive Board, ACCRS, Correna Haythorpe (AEU, Australia), EI Executive Board, Asia-Pacific, John McGabhann (TUI, Ireland), President of ETUCE, Heleno Araújo (CNTE, Brazil), EI Vice President, Latin America and Nadine Molloy (JTU, Jamaica), EI Executive Board, North America and the Caribbean;
- read detailed reports from [Europe](#), [Africa](#), [North America and the Caribbean](#), [Latin America](#).

## **National-level action**

Alongside regional discussions, participants shared personal commitments and post-conference ideas for action. These will soon be returned to them via an online postcard, reminding them of their Brussels reflections and inspiring continued work in their own contexts.

Common themes and action points of the around 60 submissions across regions included: training and capacity development, policy development and regulation, curriculum development, structures and partnerships, protecting rights and equity, as well as monitoring and evaluation.

## **Closing and conference conclusions**

The conference closed with [conference conclusions](#) that member organisation can use for their own advocacy and work as well as a powerful call to action from EI President Mugwena Maluleke, who reminded delegates that education must remain a profoundly human endeavor ([link to recording](#)):

*“In an age of algorithms and automation, we are the light—the human wisdom that illuminates the path forward. AI may process data, but it cannot shine with insight, judgment, and humanity. That is our gift. That is our calling.”*

## Overview of key conference materials

- News item: [Trust cannot be automated: education unions shape the AI future](#)
- Conference related blogs:
  - [Education in the age of artificial intelligence: The need for deliberate design](#), Fien Depaepe & Jan Elen
  - [Keeping humanity at the center: Accessibility and artificial intelligence in education](#), Daaiyah Bilal-Threats & Brittany J. Patrick
- Conference [video](#)
- [Conference COMs toolkit](#)
- [Picture gallery](#)
- [Conference documents](#)
- [Conference Conclusions](#)
- [Key questions from breakout sessions by wise listeners](#)
- [Collective Bargaining and regulation examples from across the conference](#)
- [Spotlight](#) on EI's work on AI

