

AI in EDU: Interim survey findings on advocacy

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1. Purpose, context and scope

The purpose of this interim report is to provide an overview of European education trade unions' current engagement in advocacy on AI and education as reported in the survey that is part of ETUCE's EU-funded project Balancing AI in EDU.

In this context, advocacy refers to trade unions' efforts to influence public policy, legislation, and broad strategies regarding AI in education beyond negotiations and collective bargaining and is primarily understood as involvement in policies and regulations on AI and education.

The survey was distributed to ETUCE's member organisations and was answered by 236 education trade union representatives from 40 of ETUCE's 51 member countries, covering all the geographical regions within ETUCE's network of members. Of the 236 respondents who started the survey, 177 (75 %) reached the final question.

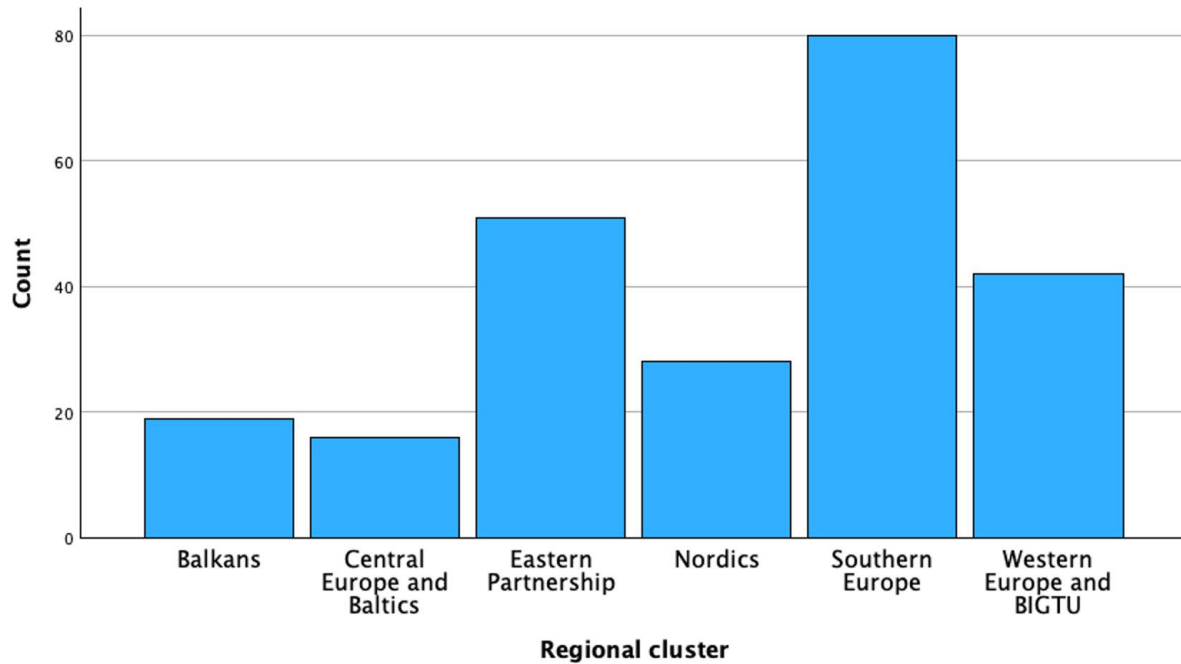


Figure 1: Survey responses grouped in regional clusters.

The survey respondents provided more than 800 comments. As a result, the dataset comprises both quantitative and qualitative material, which is analysed accordingly. Furthermore, written contributions from union representatives' collaborative group work at *The ETUCE European Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Education 2025* are included in the analysis. In all strands of the analysis, the focus is on identifying patterns and variations.

2. Overall level of policy engagement

Survey respondents were asked whether they were aware of any national or regional policies on AI in education in their countries, and how – if at all – their unions had contributed to these policies. Based on their answers, the respondents can be grouped into three distinct groups:

- Group 1 is involved in the development of policies and regulations concerning the use of AI in their area at a national and/or subnational level.
- Group 2 is aware of policies and regulations concerning the use of AI in their area at a national and/or subnational level, but have not been involved in the development of these policies.
- Group 3 is neither aware of nor involved in the development of policies and regulations concerning the use of AI in their area.

The distribution of respondents across the three groups is shown in the figure below.

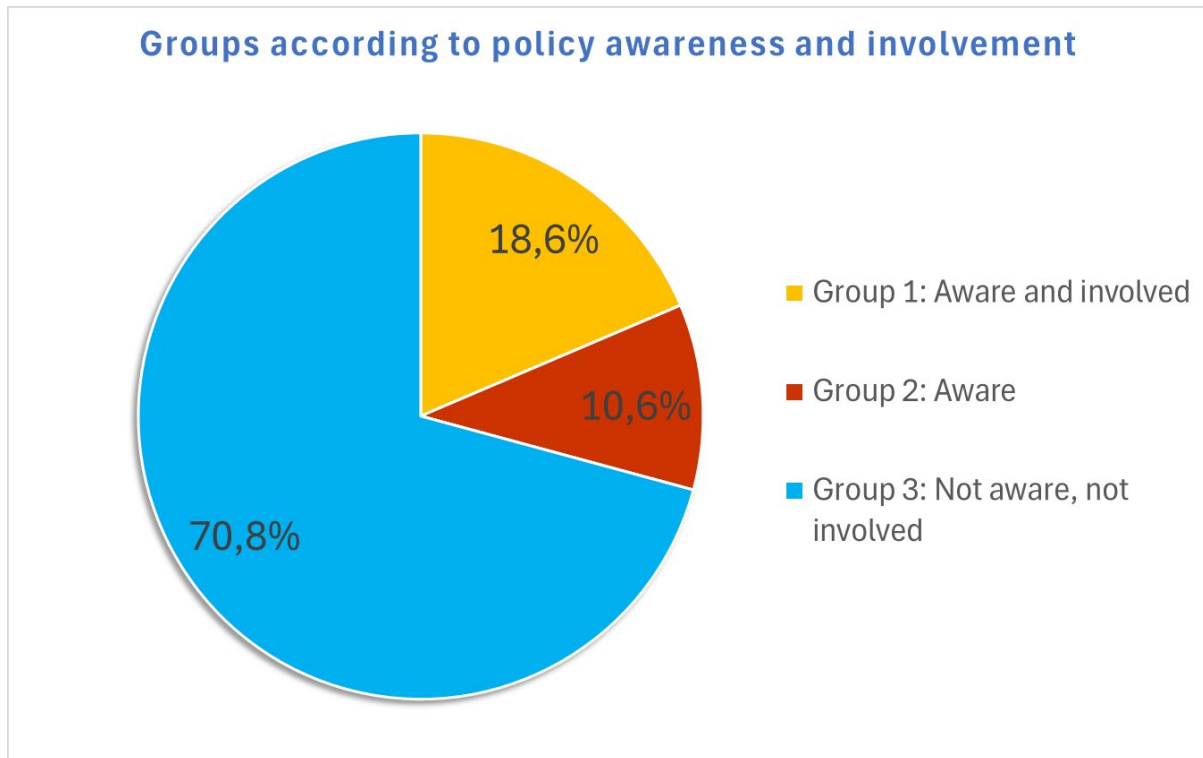


Figure 2: Groups according to policy awareness and involvement.

According to the survey responses, when unions in Group 1 engage in advocacy, they primarily consult during the development of policies or regulations. They rarely initiate the policy development process, they contribute to drafting the policy to some degree, and they seldom implement or monitor the policy. Their position is, in other words, mainly reactive.

3. Characteristics of the reported policy activity

Survey respondents were asked to provide information about existing policies and regulations on AI in their context. A further examination of this information shows that unions that contribute to the development of policies and regulations (Group 1) mainly exercise advocacy on AI in education at a national level and are less involved in policies at subnational levels.

Among the policies and regulations that Group 1 contributes to, non-binding guidance and programme frameworks dominate. These types of policies can be characterised as soft governance tools. In comparison, harder regulatory tools (such as strategic policy documents, binding legal instruments, and administratively enforceable frameworks) only comprise a smaller part of the policies that Group 1 is involved in.

There is clear regional variation in unions' advocacy activity. Among respondents reporting union involvement in policy development, activity levels are highest in the Eastern Partnership countries and the Nordics, somewhat lower in Western and Southern Europe, and lowest in Central Europe, the Baltics, and the Balkan cluster. The figure below shows the regional differences in reported advocacy activity and how it compares to the total number of responses to the survey.

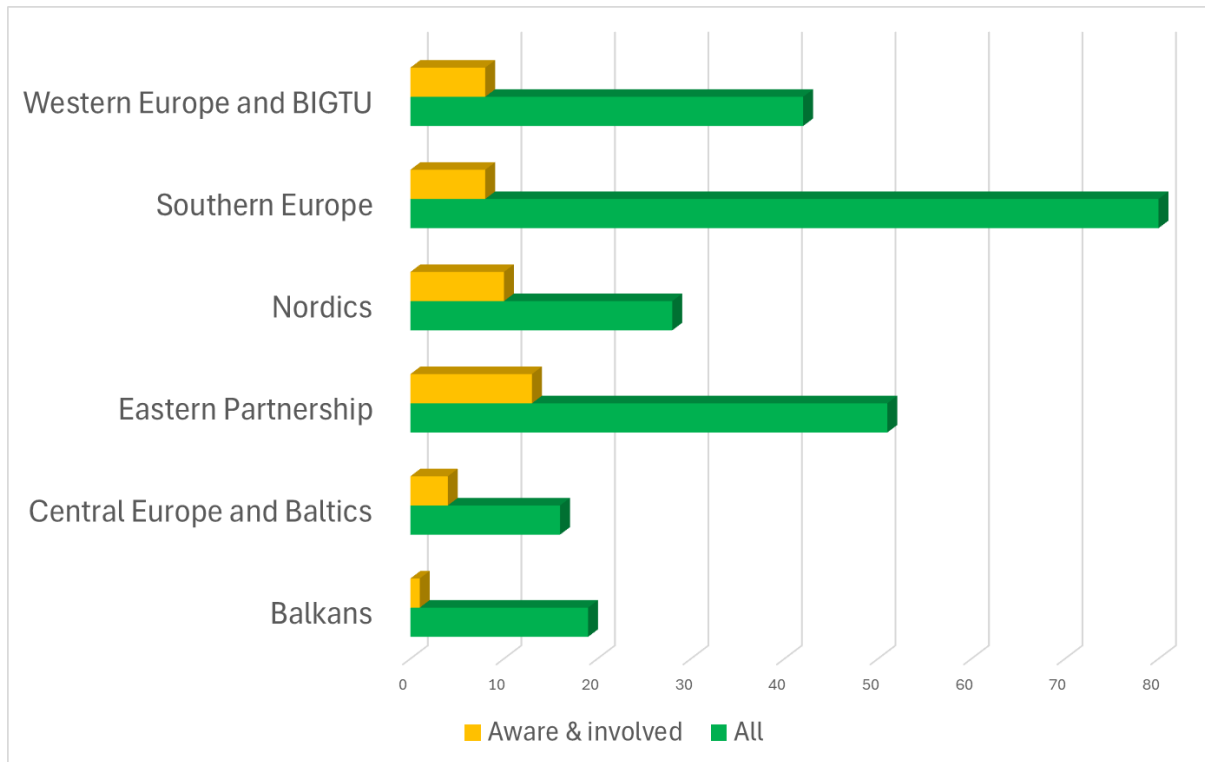


Figure 3: Reported advocacy activity compared to the total number of survey responses per region.

However, some respondents provided information about involvement in more than one policy, which is not taken into account in Figure 3. When considering all mentions of union involvement in policies and regulations by respondents in Groups 1 and grouping these by regional clusters, the distribution shifts. Western Europe and BIGTU and the Nordics emerge as the most active regions followed by the Eastern Partnership countries, as shown in Figure 4. The reason for this regional distribution of policy engagement cannot be determined from the data. It may be that more policies and regulations are being developed in these regions, that unions have greater access to policy processes, or that unions have more effective advocacy strategies – or a combination of these factors.

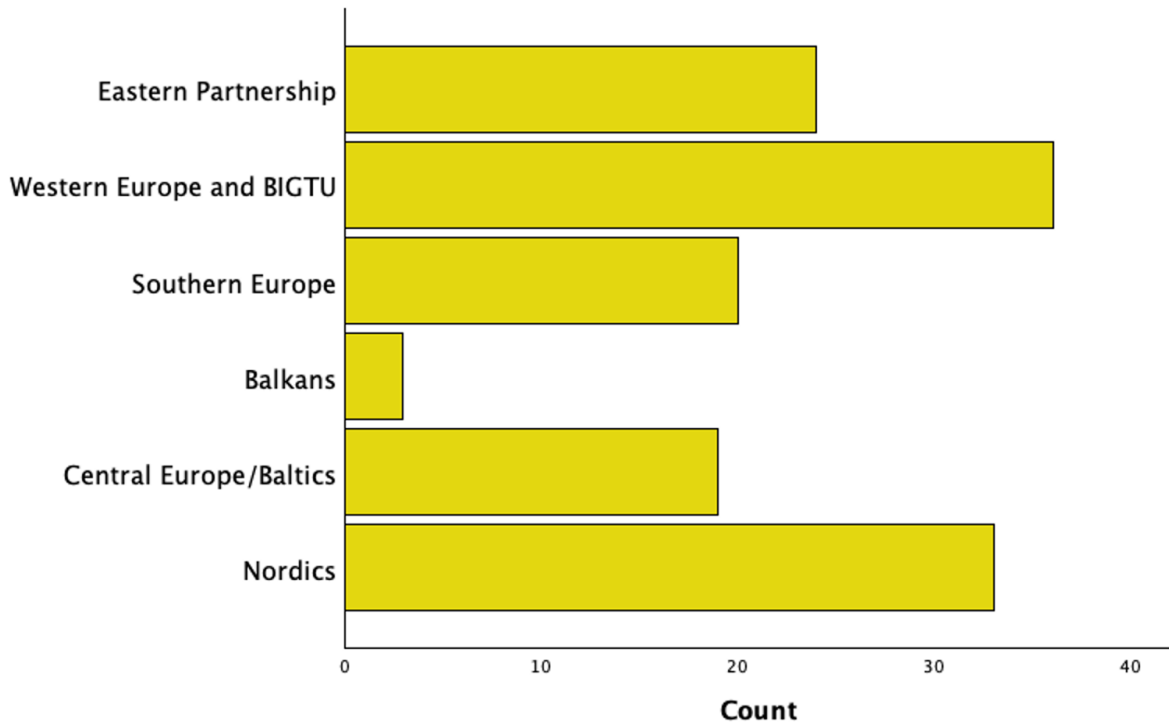


Figure 4: Regional distribution of policies and regulations with union involvement.

4. Characteristics of unions engaged in policy development

Respondents whose unions are engaged in advocacy activities (Group 1) tend to report higher perceived levels of AI use in education than those who are neither aware of nor involved in AI-related policy processes (Group 3). This pattern is visible in estimates of both teachers’ and students’ AI use. However, the estimates reported by Group 1 are broadly similar to those of respondents who are aware of AI-related policies but not directly involved in policy work (Group 2). Overall, the results suggest a connection between policy awareness – rather than advocacy engagement alone – and perceptions of more widespread AI use in education.

Group 1 stands out from the other groups through their knowledge practices. Respondents in Group 1 report more systematic gathering of knowledge about members’ needs in relation to AI and more active sharing of AI-related knowledge with members.

Examples of knowledge gathering practices mentioned in open text survey responses

- “Information about members' needs is collected via conversations and meetings organised locally, regionally and nationally.”

- “Our union systematically collects and analyses members’ perspectives on AI through surveys, such as the 2024 member study Teacher-led Digitalisation. We also monitor members’ concerns and discussions through communication channels and social media. In addition, we organise seminars, workshops, and debates where educators can share their experiences and needs regarding AI and digitalisation.”

As seen in the figure below, in Group 1 workshops and meetings are the most prominent sources of member information – a direct and participatory method of knowledge gathering.

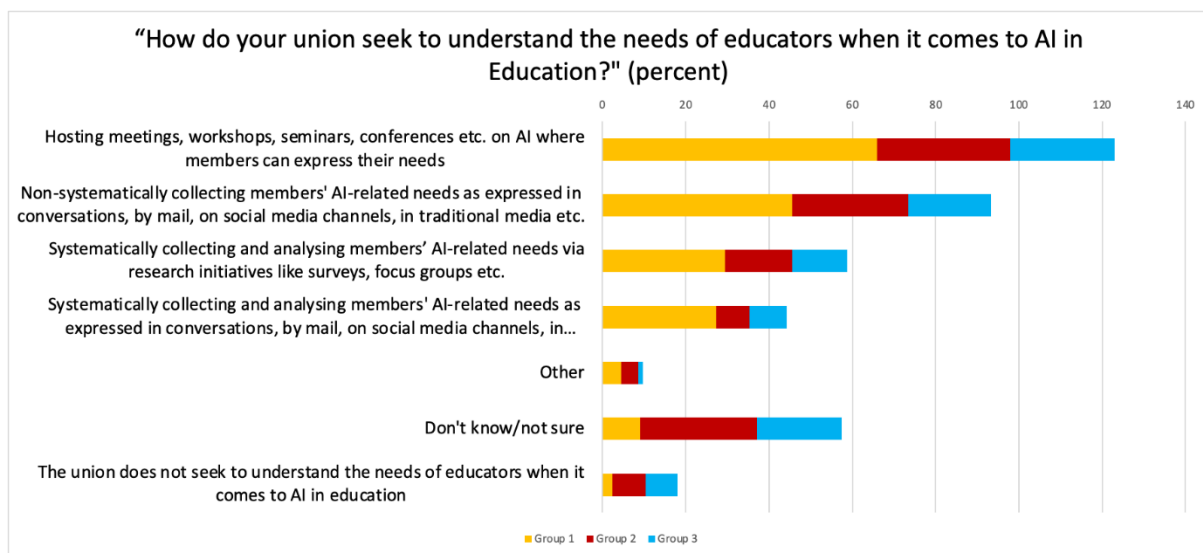


Figure 5: Grouped responses to “How do your union seek to understand the needs of educators when it comes to AI in Education?”.

When it comes to disseminating knowledge, newsletters and member magazines are used slightly more frequently than conferences, talks, and training on AI use, as shown in Figure 6.

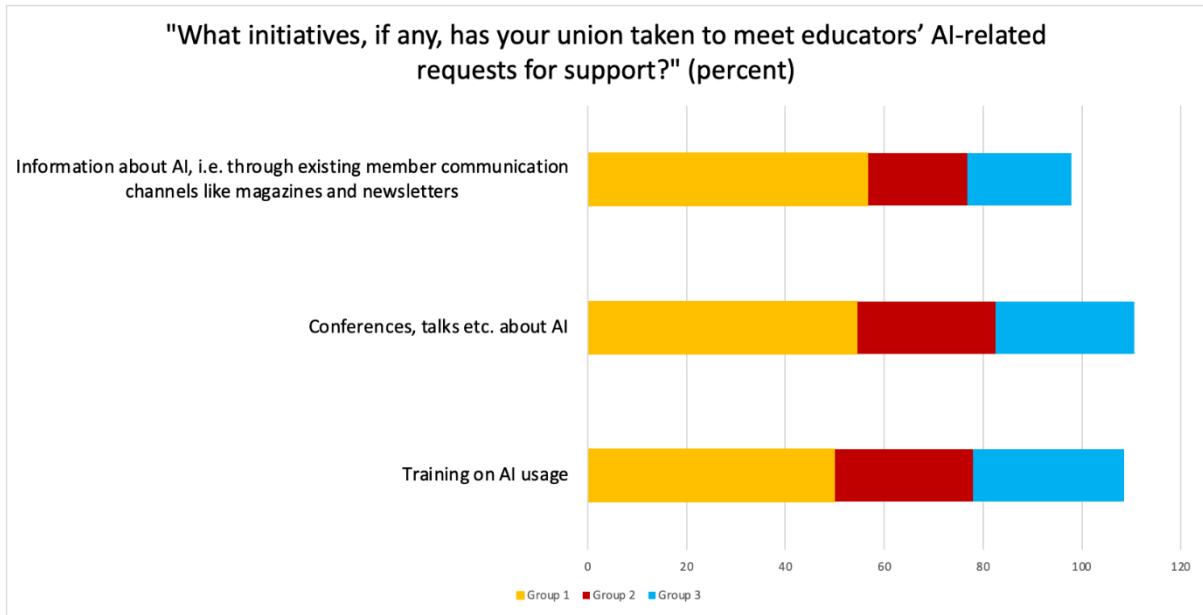


Figure 6: Grouped responses to “What initiatives, if any, has your union taken to meet educators’ AI-related requests for support?”. Only response options related to knowledge dissemination are included in the diagramme.

Examples of practices for disseminating knowledge in open survey text responses

- “SBASHK organizes 7-day training sessions with its members on the use of computer programs in teaching, including training on the use of artificial intelligence programs.”
- “We have produced a policy position and broad guidance on our website”
- “We're planning to design an AI course for union delegates.”
- “In September, we are planning to hold a large conference/workshop dedicated to AI in education.”
- “Training is offered at regional level depending on activity and expertise of regional level. Some regions offer more training than others.”
- “We provide information to members through articles, newsletters, and debates, and we have organised seminars and discussions about AI.”

Even though the analysis does seem to suggest a link between policy involvement and strong practices for gathering and sharing knowledge, one should be cautious about drawing causal conclusions in this regard. The level of activity in both fields might for instance reflect

underlying organisational structures and resources available. However, it is plausible that unions with stronger knowledge infrastructures are better equipped to engage in policy processes – an interpretation that is supported by the barriers to advocacy mentioned by union representatives as described in the following section of the report.

5. Barriers to advocacy according to union representatives

Union representatives present at *The Balancing AI in EDU conference* in Copenhagen, November 2025, had group discussions about why not more unions are involved in advocacy, and why consulting is the most frequent activity. This resulted in a number of written reflections.

These written reflections were organised inductively into thematic categories. Most themes addressed both guiding questions, suggesting that the fundamental barriers to involvement are the same factors that keep trade unions in a reactive position, where they are consulted rather than able to shape policy direction.

Overall, participants pointed to a combination of structural constraints, such as top-down policy-making processes, and internal limitations, including limited expertise and resources. The table below shows how four of the themes from the analysis relate to internal factors, while three are linked to external factors.

Theme	Q: Why are so few unions involved?	Q: Why is "consultation" dominant over "initiating"?
Resources and priorities	Unions are overwhelmed by immediate priorities like salaries, workload, staffing shortages, and bureaucratic demands.	Unions have limited capacity to work on every issue and must focus on their biggest priorities. Initiating requires long-term vision and alliances that are still being developed.
Perception of AI	AI is often perceived as a technical, academic, or governmental matter rather than a workers' rights issue.	This perception limits the confidence and institutional leverage of unions to take a lead in the conversation.

Technical expertise and knowledge	AI is a new, complex, and technical topic, making it difficult to connect directly to labor or pedagogical issues. There is a general lack of understanding of AI within unions.	Moving toward initiation is far more difficult and requires high levels of technical expertise and research capacity that many unions lack. Consultation is perceived as a "simple process".
Internal consensus and agreement	Internal diversity of opinions and a "generational divide" (ageing workforce) can slow down collective action and the willingness to adapt.	Initiating requires a coherent and unified union position, which often does not exist because members are divided or hesitant.
Institutional structures and exclusion	Policy-making is often a top-down process where governments do not view unions as relevant partners on this issue.	Strategies are typically designed by authorities first—often influenced by Edtech lobbying—leaving unions to react to already prepared drafts.
External pressure and industry	There is strong pressure from "Big Tech" against regulation, and a lack of nuance among parents who view Edtech solutions uncritically.	
Legal and cultural barriers		In some regions, unions lack the formal legal authority to initiate policies, or are restricted by a "bureaucratic culture".

Table 1: Internal (green) and external factors (grey) identified by union representatives present at the Copenhagen project conference.

The barriers identified here can be interpreted in light of the knowledge practices described in Section 4. Limited technical expertise and fragmented internal consensus may be linked to less developed knowledge infrastructures within unions, whereas more systematic knowledge practices may provide a foundation for stronger internal alignment and a more informed basis for proactive engagement in policy processes.

How to reference this paper:

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