RESOLUTION

Artificial Intelligence in the Education Sector

Adopted by the ETUCE Conference, the Regional Conference of
Education International, on 5-6 July 2021

Further to and consistent with the Resolutions adopted by the 8th EI Congress in Bangkok in 2019 and the Resolutions adopted by the ETUCE Conference in 2020, this ETUCE Conference,

Acknowledges that:

1. The digital transformation is set to change the world of work and wider societal landscape. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence are increasingly woven into the professional, social and personal lives of individuals. As such, the impact of Artificial Intelligence is a matter of growing importance for the education sector and its professionals. Along with the spread of Artificial Intelligence technologies in everyday lives, arises the pressing need for individuals to be trained to understand the basics of these technologies, as well as their potential risks;

2. The growing reliance on Artificial Intelligence for a multitude of purposes, further exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the multiplication of activities previously undertaken physically being transitioned online, therefore undoubtedly invites to a wider reflection on the role of these powerful technologies in the daily lives of citizens across Europe and its impact on democratic, sustainable societies;

3. Artificial Intelligence, whilst being increasingly hailed by decision-makers and tech giants as an innovative technology leading to the vast improvement of the life of people, presents opportunities but also real threats to individuals. From an ethics perspective, in particular, the ability of machines to influence the choices of human beings risks hindering humankind's independence, free will and creativity;

4.   Crucially, Artificial Intelligence technologies present ethical concerns when it comes to transparency, accountability, data protection, privacy of users, cyber-safety, democracy, freedom of action and choice and discriminatory practices. A common understanding of their optimal use is therefore essential for all, in order to engage with them in a critical, safe, inclusive, participative and confident approach as early as possible. In such a context, social partners in education have a key role in providing their members with the basic skills needed to understand the functioning and safest use of Artificial Intelligence. Therefore, in all respects, the use and impact of Artificial Intelligence in the education sector is a matter of interest for social partners in education and a legitimate subject of a meaningful and effective social dialogue. Therefore education trade unions must be closely involved in the design, development, and monitoring of AI technologies introduced in the education sector;

5.   The preconditioning of online research by algorithms and the collection, storing and analysing of personal information by users of digital devices are applications of Artificial Intelligence that have far-ranging implications for the education sector and its personnel. These uses of Artificial Intelligence in the education sector, at all levels, involve a wide range of areas including employment, pedagogy, assessment, research and administration. Significantly, the potential risks from the use of Artificial Intelligence should be addressed;

6.   Artificial Intelligence in the education sector must be handled sensibly and carefully, as a high-risk factor giving rise to a need for robust and binding ethical guidelines and legislative frameworks, with teachers, trainers, academics and other education personnel at the centre of establishing these. This equally supports calls for deeper discussions on the role of digital technologies in education.

Notes that:

7.   Recently, Artificial Intelligence has been the subject of several European and International policy positions and studies, including the European Commission [Communication](#) on 'Building Trust in Human-Centric Artificial Intelligence' (April 2019), the [White Paper on Artificial Intelligence](#) 'A European approach to excellence and trust' (February 2020), the OECD [Recommendation](#) on Artificial Intelligence (May 2019) and [Working paper](#) 'Trustworthy Artificial intelligence (AI) in education: Promises and challenges' (April 2020), the UNESCO [Preliminary report](#) on the first draft of the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (December 2020), the Council of Europe [Recommendation](#) on developing and promoting digital citizenship education (November 2019) and the draft of the UNICEF report: Policy Guidance on AI for Children (September 2020). In addition to this, data protection mechanisms and principles common to all European Union Member States have been laid out in the [2016 General Data Protection Regulation](#) (GDPR);

8.   Artificial Intelligence, as a technology built by human beings with their preconceptions, is fundamentally set to replicate conscious or unconscious human bias. While the STEM and IT community remains widely unrepresentative of many categories of society, such as women, ethnic minorities, people from a migrant background and people with disabilities, there is a pressing need for transparency in algorithmic decision-making, with a view to identifying, addressing and tackling discriminatory practices in Artificial Intelligence-powered technologies;

9.   Building Artificial Intelligence for educational purposes, should be done by a multi-disciplinary team that also consists of academics and researchers from the human sciences to assure that philosophical and ethical concerns can be tackled from the beginning;

10.   Artificial Intelligence used for educational purposes can never replicate nor replace the social and emotional engagement of the teaching professional. The role of teachers, trainers, academics and other education personnel goes far beyond merely providing instruction. Their ability to engage with students according to their specific needs and individuality is a core aspect of inclusive quality education, that must be protected. The act of learning is inherently a collective process which is difficult to provide in distance education;

11. Teachers, trainers, academics and other education personnel must be trained from the onset and throughout their professional career in Artificial Intelligence, its underlying risks, including from their perspective as workers, and its possible applications in the educational context. Such training should be available free of charge and developed in accordance with education professionals' needs;

12. Artificial Intelligence in the educational context is a matter of concern for education personnel, in terms of teaching and as workers. Indeed, Artificial Intelligence in the workplace gives rise to a set of issues regarding the working conditions of education personnel, for instance when it comes to privacy issues and the right to disconnect. It is of utmost importance that the use of Artificial Intelligence in education institutions does in no way hinder or lessen the protection of teaching professional's rights and equal opportunities, and their professional autonomy. Equally importantly, the conditions of Artificial Intelligence tools used in the workplace must be designed in consultation with education trade unions;

13. The bias inherent in Artificial Intelligence's analysis and sorting of data presents concerning implications on the working conditions of education personnel, and in particular, the recruitment, assessment, and career progression of teachers, trainers, academics and other education personnel. This risk calls for absolute transparency in data collection and usage, clear accountability processes, as well as for robust protection of workers' rights. Crucially, at a time when many education systems are at least partially resorting to digital education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also looking beyond, the implications of using Artificial Intelligence on education personnel's' working conditions must be included in collective bargaining agreements;

14. Artificial Intelligence, when introduced into the educational context, must remain a means to support the work of teachers, trainers, academics and other education personnel, in full respect for their professional agency and academic freedom. Artificial Intelligence designed to reproduce or replace education personnel jeopardises the social and emotional teaching context and damages quality education;

15. Calls for the application of Artificial Intelligence in education often allow ed-tech companies to expand their influence in the education sector; Protecting the capacity, accountability and transparency in the governance of public education systems from the influence and reach of for-profit private commercial interests and actors is therefore of utmost importance. This includes public procurement that ensures that funds are used for the public good of education based on clear rules and legislation that affirm and require that the services contracted by the public authorities allow for social partner engagement and collective bargaining. While the race towards uncovering the potentials of Artificial Intelligence is an explicit objective for many decision-makers, Artificial Intelligence and its use in the education sector is a matter of public interest and debates around it should, as such, be fully independent of the influence of profit as a motive.

16. Supporting its member organisations and representatives in making active use of co-determination, data protection and personal rights;

17. Making sure that their members can acquire the basic skills needed to understand the functioning and use of Artificial Intelligence and can assess the risks. This professionalisation policy should be oriented towards the education institution's staff team so that the entire team is involved with respect for the different levels of AI-knowledge in the staff.

To mitigate the adverse risks of Artificial Intelligence for education personnel and students alike, ETUCE and its Member Organisations commit to:

18. Continuously expanding the knowledge of education trade unions on Artificial Intelligence applied to the education sector, and in particular when it comes to its impact on the quality and inclusiveness of education, on the safety and well-being of students and education personnel, on the personal pedagogical relationships, on democracy and participation in educational institutions and learning processes, and on the working conditions of teachers, trainers, academics and other education personnel, including in their recruitment, assessment, and career progression;

19. Pursuing research - including the transfer for teachers and students - on the impact of Artificial Intelligence technologies in education, not at least as regards inclusion and diversity in education;

20. Advocating for and seeking to contribute to the elaboration of robust legal frameworks and ethical guidelines as regards Artificial Intelligence in the education sector, as well as for strict compliance with existing regulations, such as general data protection regulations;

21. Lobbying national governments and decision-making bodies for the inclusion of education trade unions in the development of policies regarding Artificial Intelligence in the education sector, at all levels of education;

22. Raising awareness and fight against on the threat of privatisation and commercialisation in and of education from the influence and reach of private ed-tech companies providing Artificial Intelligence tools for educational purposes through outsourcing, public-private partnerships, or even through the promotion of reforms embedded in public education systems; Pursuing more public responsibility in the development of datafied and algorithmised teaching, learning and research processes, for example through stronger regulation of the influence of EdTech companies on education and research and through the promotion of publicly, democratically, pedagogically and scientifically accountable governance and activities;

23. The development of software should be done in a more open way to prevent lock-ins like vendor lock-ins. In Europe the focus should be more on open source development driven by communities where public actors like research institutes can participate alongside software developers and the private sector;

24. Continuing to advocate for respect for the professional autonomy of adequately trained teachers, trainers, academics and other education personnel regarding the impact of Artificial Intelligence tools;

25. Developing a common policy strategy at European level to address and overcome the concerns of education trade unions on Artificial Intelligence in education, both in terms of professional issues and working conditions.