



► ILO Brief

September 2026

AI adoption and preparedness among employer and business membership organizations: Global findings

Key points

- **AI use is now widespread at the level of experimentation, but institutional adoption remains shallow.** Among 111 representatives of EBMO across 82 countries, individual experimentation dominates, while only 5 per cent report AI integrated into day-to-day workflows or strategic planning and decision-making.
- **Adoption varies across regions and organizations, but there is no simple relationship between geography, size and AI maturity.** Larger secretariats are somewhat more likely to have progressed beyond individual experimentation and established AI governance, but smaller EBMOs also report advanced use and substantial benefits. Scale affects implementation capacity, while data, governance and digital capability remain important determinants of maturity.
- **AI is augmenting work far more than it is automating it.** Among AI users, 51 per cent report that AI mostly assists staff and 37 per cent report a mix of augmentation and automation; only 5 per cent say AI is used mainly to automate tasks.
- **Tangible benefits are emerging well before mature AI integration.** Among AI users, 93 per cent report time savings, 71 per cent improved staff productivity, 64 per cent better access to information and 60 per cent better quality of work. AI's immediate value is therefore primarily efficiency and augmentation.
- **Governance is not keeping pace with experimentation.** More than half of the respondents report none of the listed formal AI governance
- arrangements. Only 6 per cent have an organizational AI policy, 17 per cent provide staff guidance on responsible AI use and 14 per cent have approved AI tools or platforms.
- **Data readiness could constrain the transition from experimentation to more sophisticated AI use.** Although 56 per cent say decision-making relies heavily or entirely on data, 69 per cent identify data collection tools as a constraint, 57 per cent data management or analytical tools, and 55 per cent staff skills and expertise.
- **EBMOs overwhelmingly see AI as an opportunity, but expectations to demonstrate results are rising quickly.** Four in five respondents view AI as a major opportunity or more of an opportunity than a risk, while 88 per cent face moderate or great expectations to demonstrate tangible AI benefits within the next 12–18 months.
- **EBMOs are looking for practical support to move from experimentation to implementation.** Priorities include staff training (60 per cent), guidance on selecting AI tools (47 per cent), funding or financial assistance (41 per cent), hands-on implementation support (35 per cent) and technical integration support (32 per cent).
- **The next opportunity is to translate internal efficiency into greater membership value.** Only 27 per cent of current AI users report using AI in membership services today, but 68 per cent identify this as a future opportunity, pointing to a shift towards more responsive and relevant services to members

Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence (AI) is moving rapidly from a general-purpose technology discussed by employers to a practical set of operational tools being tested and used inside employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs). Against this backdrop, the ILO has undertaken a new global study to examine how EBMOs are engaging with AI, how prepared they are to move beyond experimentation towards more systematic adoption, the benefits and opportunities they see, and the support they need to do so effectively.

The findings reveal a **clear gap between experimentation and institutional adoption**. AI use is becoming widespread, but it remains largely informal and staff-led. Forty-four per cent report individual staff experimentation, 20 per cent use by some teams and 21 per cent use across multiple functions. By contrast, only 5 per cent have integrated AI into day-to-day workflows or strategic planning and decision-making while 9 per cent report no AI use at all. The findings therefore reveal distinct levels of AI adoption: many EBMOs are experimenting with or using AI in some parts of their organization, but very few have yet embedded it institutionally.

These findings echo some of the patterns identified in earlier ILO studies on AI use by EBMOs in Small Island Developing States¹ and nine countries in Asia and the Pacific², particularly the concentration of AI use in relatively accessible applications and the limited extent of systematic organizational integration³. Direct comparisons of adoption rates should, however, be treated cautiously because the studies used different survey questions, response categories, samples and denominators. The global research extends this earlier evidence by examining more deeply the organizational conditions that may enable - or constrain - the transition from experimentation to systematic organizational use.

Despite this early stage of adoption, **AI is already delivering tangible benefits**. Among EBMOs reporting use of AI, 93 per cent report time savings, 71 per cent report improved staff productivity, 64 per cent report better access to information and 60 per cent report improvements in the quality of work. AI is also being used predominantly to support people rather than replace their work: 51 per cent report that AI mostly assists staff,

compared with only 5 per cent reporting that it mainly automates tasks. The immediate value of AI for EBMOs is therefore emerging primarily through the augmentation of existing work and greater organizational efficiency.

The challenge is that **organizational preparedness is not keeping pace with use**. More than half of respondents report none of the listed formal AI governance arrangements, while limitations in data collection, data-management and analytical tools, and staff capabilities could constrain more sophisticated applications. The survey also finds that neither geography nor organizational size alone determines how far an EBMO has progressed. Larger secretariats have some advantages in formalizing governance and integrating AI, but smaller EBMOs are also reporting advanced uses and substantial benefits. Regional differences are similarly evident, but significant variation exists within regions.

At the same time, **EBMOs are looking beyond internal efficiency towards greater value for members**. 68 per cent identify membership services as an area of future AI opportunity, compared with only 27 per cent of current AI users reporting use in this area today. The relevant measure of progress, however, is not how extensively an EBMO uses AI, but whether its use contributes to better organizational and member outcomes - for example, more responsive services, stronger research and representation, better information and advice, and greater capacity to support the competitiveness of member enterprises. Achieving these outcomes requires more than adopting AI tools. It depends on EBMOs addressing the organizational foundations that enable technology to create value, including staff capability, business processes, data, governance and clear organizational priorities.

The findings suggest that **the challenge extends beyond deciding which AI tools to use or building staff capability to use them. Widespread experimentation, combined with limited institutional integration and gaps in data readiness and governance, points to the importance of connecting AI adoption more clearly to organizational priorities and intended outcomes**. Moving towards purposeful adoption therefore requires EBMOs to identify where AI can create organizational or membership value and then develop the technology,

¹ ILO, [The impact of artificial intelligence on employer and business membership organizations in Small Island Developing States \(2025\)](#)

² ILO, [AI adoption among employer and business member organizations in Asia and the Pacific \(2026\)](#)

³ Comparisons with earlier ILO research are used to identify common themes and patterns rather than changes over time. The studies involved different samples, survey instruments, questions and response categories and should not be interpreted as directly comparable measures of AI adoption.

skills, data, governance and organizational processes needed to support those uses.

These findings connect with wider work done by the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) on digital transformation and data as a strategic asset⁴, reinforcing that **successful AI adoption is likely to depend less on the particular technology chosen than on an EBMO's ability to create the organizational conditions for using it effectively**. These include clear understanding of the organizational problems, priorities or member needs to be addressed and the outcomes sought, strong data management and governance, effective leadership, an organizational culture open to experimentation and change, appropriate processes, and staff with the skills and confidence to use AI effectively. The global findings reinforce these earlier lessons and demonstrate their relevance to AI adoption across a much broader range of EBMOs.

The implications for support are practical. EBMOs overwhelmingly view AI as an opportunity and face growing expectations to demonstrate tangible benefits, but they are asking for help to turn experimentation into implementation. Support should therefore combine common guidance and tools with assistance responsive to regional context, organizational scale and AI maturity, with the objective of helping EBMOs translate experimentation into responsible institutional use and greater membership value.

Evidence base

The primary evidence for this brief comes from the 2026 global survey of EBMOs. The analysis also draws on earlier ILO and ACT/EMP research to provide context and identify common or contrasting patterns, including the May 2025 Asia-Pacific survey, the December 2025 SIDS study and the January 2026 study covering nine countries in Asia and the Pacific. These studies involved different samples, questions and methodologies and are therefore used as complementary evidence rather than as directly comparable measures of AI adoption.

The global survey recorded 111 responses across all five ILO regions: Asia and the Pacific (29), the Americas (27), Africa (23), Europe and Central Asia (25), and the Arab States (7). The sample spans 82 countries and territories

and provides a broad global snapshot of EBMO experiences and perspectives.

Response numbers vary across questions because not all respondents answered every question; percentages are calculated using the number of valid responses to each question unless otherwise stated.

Responding EBMOs vary considerably in scale. 33 per cent represent fewer than 500 members, 28 per cent represent 1,001–5,000 members and 23 per cent more than 5,000 members. Secretariat capacity also varies considerably: 39 per cent employ more than 25 permanent full-time staff, while 37 per cent have ten or fewer. Respondents were predominantly senior decision-makers: 45 per cent were CEOs or Secretaries General and 22 per cent senior managers. This gives particular relevance to the findings on strategic expectations, organizational preparedness and support needs.

The global survey results reported in this brief reflect responses collected from 24 July to 31 August 2026⁵. While this dataset has been closed for the purposes of the published analysis, the survey will remain open to support ongoing evidence collection. Additional responses will inform the development of a forthcoming compendium of AI tools, applications and practices for EBMOs and will not alter the results reported here.

For the purposes of the global survey, AI was understood broadly to include generative AI tools as well as other AI-enabled applications. The survey did not systematically distinguish between different types of AI when asking respondents about their use. The global survey findings should therefore be interpreted as reflecting AI engagement broadly, rather than adoption of any specific category of AI technology.

Data readiness: a foundation for AI adoption

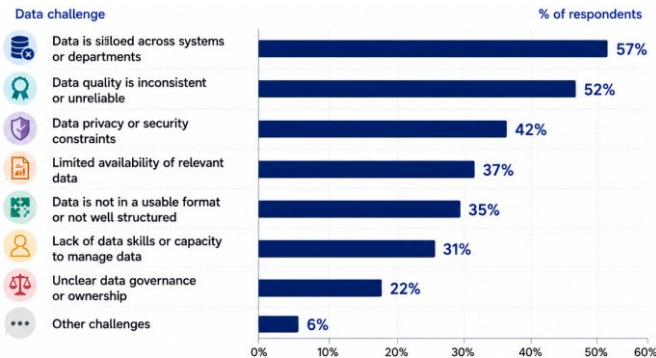
The global survey highlights data readiness as an important part of EBMO preparedness for AI. 56 per cent report that organizational decision-making relies heavily or entirely on data. However, EBMOs also identify significant constraints on their ability to analyse and use data effectively. Sixty-nine per cent identify data collection tools as a constraint, 57 per cent data-management or analytical tools, 55 per cent staff skills and expertise, 53

⁴ ILO, [Towards using data as a strategic asset: A study of current data management practices, challenges, and opportunities for employer and business membership organizations](#) (2021)

⁵ The International Organisation of Employers (IOE) supported outreach for the survey by encouraging its member organizations to participate.

per cent financial resources and 51 per cent the willingness of members to share data.

► **Figure 1. Key constraints on EBMOs' ability to analyse and use data**



These findings give new significance to a longer-standing organizational challenge identified in ACT/EMP's 2021 Data as a Strategic Asset study⁶. That research found that, while EBMOs held considerable information, its completeness and systematic use - particularly for strategic decision-making - were often limited. It also identified fragmented data practices, underuse of existing data and constraints related to staff capacity, financial resources and time. What was previously identified primarily as a challenge for evidence-based management, organizational efficiency and membership services is now also emerging as an important foundation for effective AI adoption.

This matters because moving beyond general-purpose AI tools towards more sophisticated applications increasingly depends on the quality, accessibility and management of organizational data. Applications such as personalized membership services, organizational knowledge retrieval, analytics and decision support require more than access to AI technology: they require reliable and usable data, appropriate systems and governance, and staff with the capability to work with them. **In this sense, AI is not creating an entirely new data challenge for EBMOs; it is increasing the importance of addressing data capabilities that earlier ACT/EMP research had already identified.**

This adds an important dimension to the earlier AI research. The SIDS study highlighted infrastructure and technical capacity as enabling conditions for adoption, while the Asia-Pacific research emphasized internal expertise and risk management. The global findings show

that preparedness also has a strong organizational data dimension. **Successful AI adoption is therefore likely to depend less on access to, or selection of, particular AI tools than on whether EBMOs have the organizational foundations needed to use them effectively - including data, skills, governance and appropriate processes.**

The practical implication is that data readiness should be assessed alongside AI literacy when supporting EBMOs. This is also consistent with recent ILO-supported work with EBMO in Latin America⁷, which recommends assessing technological resources, data infrastructure, information systems and staff capabilities as part of the pathway towards more sophisticated AI implementation. Support should therefore address different starting points: for some EBMOs, improving the collection, management and use of organizational data - including building member's willingness to share data - may be as important to advancing AI adoption as training staff to use AI tools.

Experimentation is widespread, integration is not

AI use is now widespread among surveyed EBMOs, but it remains concentrated at the experimentation stage. Forty-four per cent report individual staff experimenting with AI, 20 per cent report use by some teams and 21 per cent use across multiple functions. By contrast, only 3 per cent report AI integrated into day-to-day workflows and 2 per cent embedded in strategic planning and decision-making. Nine per cent report no AI use.

► **Figure 2. Current level of AI adoption**



The contrast suggests that access to AI tools is translating into experimentation much faster than into systematic organizational adoption. This is consistent with the ILO's broader assessment of digital transformation. The 2020 ILO article *Thriving in the digital*

⁶ ILO, [Towards using data as a strategic asset: A study of current data management practices, challenges, and opportunities for employer and business membership organizations](#) (2021)

⁷ ILO/Union Industrial Argentina, <https://www.ilo.org/es/resource/otros/inteligencia-artificial-desafios-y-oportunidades-para-organizaciones> (2025)

*economy: Opportunities for EBMOs*⁸ emphasized that effective digital transformation requires more than introducing new technologies or periodically upgrading skills; it also requires the broader organizational capabilities to adapt how work is done. The global findings add further evidence to this assessment: **individuals and teams can begin using widely available AI tools relatively quickly, but embedding AI into organizational workflows and decision-making requires broader capabilities in areas such as data, governance, skills and organizational processes.**

Organizational scale appears to be associated with this capacity, but does not determine it. Among EBMOs with ten or fewer staff, 42 per cent report AI use at team level or beyond, compared with 51 per cent of those with more than 25 staff. This suggests some capacity advantage for larger secretariats, while the presence of more advanced adoption among smaller EBMOs shows that size is not a proxy for AI maturity. Membership size shows an even less consistent relationship with adoption.

Regional patterns

Regional results show differences in the extent to which EBMOs have moved beyond individual experimentation. These findings are descriptive rather than representative of EBMOs within each region, and differences in regional sample sizes mean that comparisons should be interpreted cautiously. Individual experimentation is particularly prominent among respondents in Africa (14 of 22) and the Arab States (4 of 5). Europe and Central Asia shows greater concentration at function level, with 10 of 19 respondents reporting AI use across multiple functions. Asia and the Pacific has the largest number reporting team-level use (10 of 28) and, together with the Americas, includes the only respondents reporting workflow or strategic integration. The Americas shows a more mixed pattern across individual, team and function-level use.

These differences reinforce an important lesson from the earlier research: regional averages can mask considerable variation within regions. The SIDS study, for example, found different levels of adoption among Caribbean and Pacific EBMOs, while the nine-country Asia-Pacific study also identified uneven adoption. Across the global sample, however, a common pattern is evident: experimentation has progressed considerably further than institutional integration.

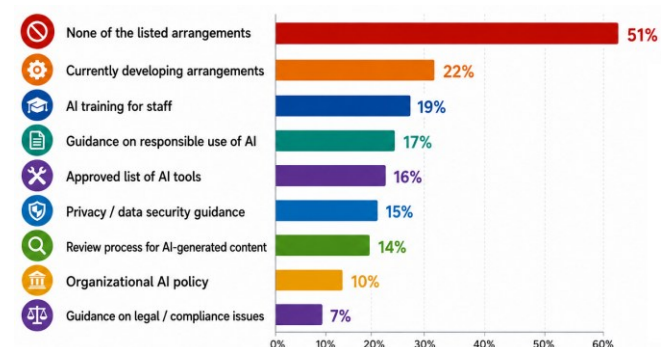
The results show EBMOs at different levels of AI adoption, ranging from individual experimentation and team- or

function-level use to, in a small number of cases, integration into workflows and strategic decision-making. These levels describe the different forms of adoption observed at the time of the survey and should not be interpreted as a sequence through which EBMOs necessarily progress. Geography alone does not explain these differences. National and regional enabling conditions- including connectivity, digital infrastructure, skills availability, regulatory certainty and access to technology and implementation partners - may affect the feasibility and cost of adoption, while organizational capabilities such as data readiness, governance, staff capacity and the ability to implement change may also be associated with different levels of adoption. Further regional and longitudinal research would help test these relationships and provide a more robust picture of how AI adoption develops over time.

Governance is not keeping pace with use

The clearest preparedness gap concerns formal governance. More than half of EBMOs (51 per cent) report having none of the listed AI policies or governance arrangements, while almost a quarter (23 per cent) say one or more arrangements are currently being developed. Existing measures remain relatively limited: 20 per cent report AI training for staff, 17 per cent guidance on responsible AI use and 14 per cent approved AI tools or platforms. Fewer than one in ten report AI-specific privacy or security guidance (9 per cent), procedures for reviewing AI-generated content (8 per cent), an organizational AI policy (6 per cent), or guidance on compliance with data-protection requirements (5 per cent).

► Figure 3. AI governance arrangements



Governance arrangements are more common where AI use is more embedded. Among EBMOs where AI use remains at the level of individual staff experimentation, 67

⁸ <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/thriving-digital-economy-opportunities-ebmos>

per cent report none of the listed governance measures. By contrast, all EBMOs reporting workflow or strategic integration have at least one governance arrangement in place. **This points to an important challenge: experimentation can spread quickly among staff, while the organizational rules and safeguards needed to manage that use may take longer to develop. As a result, many EBMOs are using AI before clear guidance on approved tools, data protection, verification and accountability is in place.**

Organizational capacity appears to play a role, although size alone does not determine preparedness.

Among EBMOs with ten or fewer staff, 55 per cent report none of the listed governance arrangements, compared with 38 per cent of those with more than 25 staff. Larger secretariats may therefore have greater capacity to formalize policies, training and approved tools, but the absence of governance arrangements among almost two in five larger EBMOs shows that this is not simply a question of organizational scale.

The governance gap is also evident across regions, suggesting that it is a broader institutional challenge rather than one confined to particular geographic contexts. This adds an organizational dimension to the earlier ILO research: the SIDS study highlighted uncertainty in the national regulatory environment, while the Asia-Pacific research identified IT and cybersecurity risks. The global findings show that EBMOs also need governance at the organizational level - translating responsible AI principles into practical decisions about tools, data, confidentiality, verification and accountability.

This is consistent with recent ILO-supported work with EBMO in Latin America, which emphasizes that governance, data protection, transparency and ethical safeguards should be incorporated into organizational planning and maintained throughout implementation as AI is adopted, rather than introduced only after AI tools are already in use. **The global findings reinforce the practical relevance of this approach: governance needs to develop alongside experimentation if EBMOs are to move towards more systematic and responsible AI adoption.**

Communications and research lead the way

Among respondents reporting current AI use, communications is the most frequently selected area in which AI is being used (80 per cent), followed by research and analysis (71 per cent), advocacy (55 per cent) and administration (53 per cent). Governance and advisory

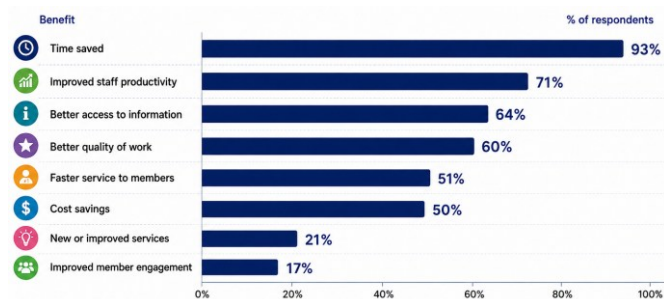
services are each selected by 44 per cent, while membership services (27 per cent), training (26 per cent), knowledge management (24 per cent), finance (14 per cent) and human resource management (13 per cent) are less frequently reported. Respondents could select multiple areas. Importantly, these results identify the organizational functions in which some AI use is occurring; they do not indicate the frequency, intensity or degree of integration of that use. For example, reported use in communications could range from an individual occasionally using AI to draft content to more systematic use within a communications workflow.

This pattern is broadly consistent with the earlier ILO research. Content creation and research and data analysis were among the leading uses identified in the SIDS study, while research, data analysis and knowledge management featured prominently in the Asia-Pacific study. The global findings suggest that this is not simply a regional pattern: **AI is being adopted first in areas where it can support existing knowledge and administrative work without requiring major changes to organizational systems or workflows.**

AI is augmenting work - and already delivering benefits

The global findings provide a clear picture of how AI is perceived to be affecting work within EBMOs. More than half (51 per cent) report that AI mainly assists staff, while 37 per cent report a mix of assistance and automation. Only 5 per cent say AI mainly automates tasks, while 7 per cent are unsure. The dominant pattern appears one of augmentation rather than automation, reinforcing the earlier SIDS and Asia-Pacific findings that the near-term impact of AI is more likely to involve changes in tasks and skills than widespread job replacement.

Importantly, these relatively early stages of adoption are already associated with widely reported benefits. Among AI-using EBMOs, 93 per cent report time savings, 71 per cent improved staff productivity, 64 per cent better access to information and 60 per cent better quality of work. Around half report faster service to members (51 per cent) and cost savings (50 per cent). More transformational benefits are less common: 21 per cent report new or improved services and 17 per cent improved membership engagement.

Figure 4. Benefits reported by EBMOs currently using AI

Benefits are evident across organizations of different sizes. All AI-using EBMOs with ten or fewer staff report time savings, compared with 84 per cent of those with more than 25 staff. Smaller EBMOs also frequently report improvements in the quality of work, while larger secretariats more often report improved staff productivity. Although these differences should be interpreted cautiously, they suggest that **AI can be particularly valuable to smaller EBMOs by helping limited staff capacity go further, even where resources for formal integration and governance are more constrained.**

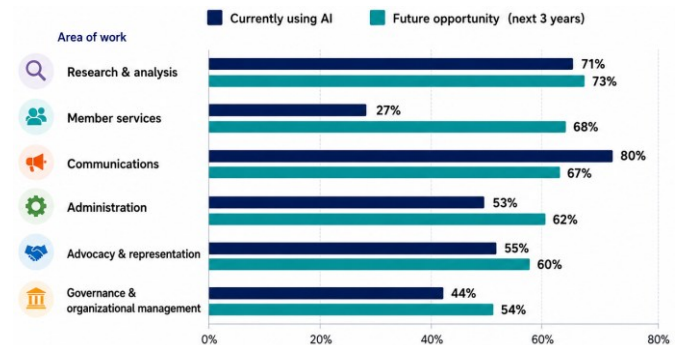
The predominance of augmentation is also evident across all five regions, although regional subsamples are small. While the balance between assistance and automation varies, **only 5 per cent of AI-using EBMOs report that AI mainly automates tasks.** The survey therefore does not provide evidence of widespread job substitution within the EBMOs covered. Rather, respondents indicate that AI is currently being used primarily to assist staff or through a combination of assistance and automation.

The benefit profile also points to the next challenge for adoption. AI is currently creating value mainly through time savings, productivity and better knowledge work, while benefits associated with new services and membership engagement remain much less common. The next stage will therefore be less about demonstrating that AI can improve internal efficiency and more about **converting those gains into greater membership value - through faster services, stronger advice and advocacy, and new or improved services.**

Future opportunity: moving from internal efficiency to member value

EBMOs see significant potential to expand AI use across their operations. The most frequently identified opportunities over the next three years are research and analysis (73 per cent), member services (68 per cent), communications (67 per cent), administration (62 per cent)

and advocacy (60 per cent). Governance (54 per cent) and advisory services (50 per cent) also feature prominently.

Figure 5. Current AI use and future opportunity, by area of EBMO work

The contrast between current use and future opportunity is particularly striking for membership services. While only 27 per cent of current AI users report using AI in this area today, 68 per cent of respondents identify membership services as a future opportunity. This suggests an important potential shift: from using AI primarily to help staff work more efficiently towards using it to strengthen the services and value EBMOs provide to members.

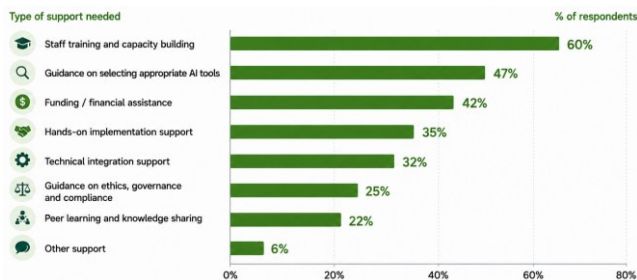
Wider ACT/EMP work helps illustrate what this could mean in practice. Recent ILO-supported work with EBMOs in Latin America identifies opportunities to use AI and organizational data to better understand emerging member needs and sectoral trends, provide more targeted support, anticipate training needs and respond more effectively to member queries. It also highlights a broader ecosystem-facing role for EBMOs: supporting SMEs in assessing their readiness, connecting companies with technology providers, start-ups, universities and public institutions, facilitating peer learning, and bringing evidence from the productive sector into AI-related policy and regulatory discussions. This also connects with earlier ACT/EMP work on data and digital transformation, which emphasized using organizational and member data not only to respond to current needs, but to anticipate them and develop more relevant services.

The opportunity is therefore not simply to use more AI, but to use it in ways that strengthen the EBMO value proposition. The survey shows that EBMOs are optimistic about this potential: four in five respondents view AI as either a major opportunity or more of an opportunity than a risk. The challenge will be converting that optimism—and the efficiency gains already being realized—into more responsive services, stronger advice and advocacy, and new forms of membership value.

What support do EBMOs need?

EBMOs are looking primarily for practical support to move from experimentation to implementation. Staff training is the most frequently identified need (60 per cent), followed by guidance on selecting appropriate AI tools (47 per cent), funding or financial assistance (41 per cent), hands-on workshops or coaching (35 per cent) and technical support to integrate AI into existing systems and workflows (32 per cent). Practical case studies are also requested by 28 per cent. Formal governance guidance (18 per cent), peer networks (17 per cent) and privacy, cybersecurity or responsible AI guidance (13 per cent) are selected less frequently, although respondents were limited to three choices.

► **Figure 6. Support EBMOs identify as important for advancing AI adoption**



The strong interest in guidance on selecting AI tools also warrants careful interpretation. Choosing appropriate tools is an important part of implementation, but the wider survey findings suggest that technology selection alone is unlikely to determine whether AI adoption succeeds. The more significant challenge may be whether EBMOs have the organizational conditions needed to use those tools effectively - including capable and confident staff, appropriate governance, usable data, leadership support and business processes that can be adapted to incorporate AI. The prominence of tool-selection guidance among current support priorities may therefore reflect the relatively early stage of adoption, when attention is understandably focused on what tools are available and what they can do. **As experience develops, EBMOs may need greater support to address the less visible organizational changes required to embed AI successfully.**

The findings therefore point beyond AI awareness and tool selection towards implementation and organizational change. This broadly reinforces recommendations from the earlier SIDS research on staff capability, practical resources and peer learning, while the global findings provide a clearer picture of the capabilities needed for more systematic adoption. Although governance, privacy, cybersecurity and responsible AI

guidance rank relatively low among the forms of assistance explicitly requested, 51 per cent of EBMOs have none of the most common AI governance arrangements in place. This suggests that governance support is needed even where it is not yet identified as an immediate priority. It should therefore be incorporated into training and implementation assistance as EBMOs move towards more systematic AI use.

These needs are likely to vary more according to an EBMO's level of AI maturity than its size alone. In this context, maturity refers to the extent to which AI use is institutionally embedded - moving beyond individual experimentation towards governed use within teams, functions, workflows and strategic decision-making - rather than simply the frequency or volume of AI use. An EBMO where use remains largely at the level of individual experimentation may need foundational training, guidance on approved tools and basic governance. An organization with more institutionalized use may instead need support with workflow redesign and integration, data readiness, more advanced governance and member-facing applications. Organizational size can influence the resources and capacity available but does not by itself determine either AI maturity or the type of support required.

This argues for a differentiated support model: common resources available to all EBMOs, combined with practical assistance tailored to AI maturity, organizational capacity and regional context. Importantly, **support should respond not only to what EBMOs currently request, but also to the underlying organizational capabilities required for successful adoption.**

Leadership expectations: optimism is high, but so are expectations for results

Senior representatives of EBMO participating in the survey are overwhelmingly positive about the potential of AI. 46 per cent describe AI as a major opportunity and 34 per cent as more of an opportunity than a risk. A further 19 per cent see opportunity and risk as broadly equal, while only 1 per cent view AI as more of a risk than an opportunity.

This optimism is accompanied by strong expectations to demonstrate results. More than half (53 per cent) report being expected "to a great extent" to demonstrate tangible AI benefits within the next 12–18 months, with a further 35 per cent expected to do so "to a moderate extent". Respondents generally express less concern

about the potential impact of AI on their own roles: 29 per cent report no concern and 34 per cent only limited concern, while 36 per cent express moderate or greater concern. **These findings reflect respondents' perceptions rather than an assessment of the potential impact of AI on their jobs. They suggest that, at the time of the survey, expectations to demonstrate organizational benefits from AI were more widely reported than personal concern about its implications for respondents' own roles.**

This creates both momentum and risk. Expectations to demonstrate results are rising at a time when governance, data readiness and institutional integration remain underdeveloped in many EBMOs. Pressure for quick results could encourage isolated pilots, fragmented tool adoption or experimentation without appropriate safeguards. **Equally, it creates an opportunity to channel leadership interest towards purposeful adoption - using clearly defined organizational needs, appropriate governance and measurable outcomes to guide where and how AI is introduced.**

Conclusion and next steps: from experimentation to institutional capability

Taken together, the global findings suggest that EBMOs have moved beyond awareness of AI, but most have not yet reached mature institutional integration. **The defining feature of the current moment is a gap between use and preparedness:** staff are experimenting, tangible benefits are already visible and leadership expectations are rising, while governance, data readiness and implementation capability often lag behind. **The central question is therefore shifting from "Are EBMOs using AI?" to "Do they have the organizational capabilities needed to use it systematically, responsibly and at scale?"**

The findings both reinforce and extend the earlier SIDS and Asia-Pacific research. Experimentation is now widespread across all five ILO regions, AI is being adopted first in knowledge-intensive areas of work, and its current impact is predominantly to augment rather than replace staff. The global research adds a deeper understanding of preparedness, **highlighting the importance of data, governance, staff capability and organizational processes** in determining whether experimentation can develop into more systematic use. Regional context and organizational scale matter, but neither provides a simple explanation for AI maturity: EBMOs are starting from

different positions and have different capacities to make this transition.

AI readiness should therefore be understood as an organizational transformation challenge, not primarily a technology-selection challenge. As general-purpose AI tools become increasingly accessible, successful adoption is likely to depend less on the particular technology chosen and more on whether EBMOs can create the conditions to use it effectively. Earlier ACT/EMP work on digital transformation and data as a strategic asset anticipated many of these foundations, while recent ILO-supported work in Latin America provides a practical pathway centred on institutional commitment, capability assessment, planning, partnerships, experimentation and continuous improvement. The global findings underline the relevance of these organizational foundations as EBMOs seek to move from individual experimentation towards sustained adoption.

A practical pathway for EBMOs

The findings suggest that EBMOs may benefit from treating AI adoption as **an organizational change process rather than primarily a technology-selection exercise.** The starting point should be the organizational problems, workflows and member needs where AI could create value, followed by an assessment of the data, skills, governance and process changes required. Technology choices should support these priorities rather than drive them.

- **Start with organizational needs and use cases, not AI tools.** Identify a small number of problems or workflows where AI could add clear value - for example research synthesis, member queries, communications, meeting administration or policy analysis. Define the intended outcome, consider how AI can contribute, and what changes in data, skills, governance and business processes will be required. Then establish a baseline, select and test appropriate tools, and decide whether to scale.
- **Build the organizational foundations for responsible use.** Assess the quality and accessibility of relevant data, strengthen data-management practices, define approved tools and establish proportionate rules for privacy, confidentiality, verification and responsible AI use. Governance should develop alongside experimentation rather than after AI use has become widespread.
- **Invest in people and redesign how work is done.** Combine foundational AI literacy with hands-on learning using real EBMO tasks. Staff need not only the

skills to use AI tools, but also the ability to verify outputs, handle data appropriately and adapt workflows so that AI complements rather than simply adds to existing ways of working.

► **Build partnerships to complement internal capacity.**

EBMOs do not need to develop all AI capabilities internally. Partnerships with technology providers, start-ups, universities, vocational training institutions, public agencies and peer EBMOs can provide access to expertise, infrastructure and implementation support, particularly for smaller organizations. These partnerships can also help EBMOs connect member needs with available solutions and strengthen their role within the wider innovation ecosystem.

► **Turn efficiency gains into membership value.** Use the time and capacity released through AI to improve the EBMO value proposition. Test opportunities for faster advice, more responsive and personalized communications, stronger research and knowledge products, and new or improved membership services.

► **Learn from peers and practical experience.** Capture and share evidence on what works, what does not, costs, governance choices and implementation lessons across EBMOs of different sizes, maturity levels and regions. Regional networks and the forthcoming compendium of EBMO AI tools, applications and practices can help turn individual experience into practical knowledge that others can reuse.

► **Measure outcomes and scale what works.** Track not only AI use, but whether it produces measurable

improvements in time, quality, productivity, service responsiveness, membership engagement, reach, policy influence or new services. Scale applications where evidence demonstrates value, and adapt or discontinue those that do not.

► **Match support to maturity and context.** EBMOs will start from different positions. Assess adoption stage, data readiness, governance, staff capability and implementation capacity when determining support needs, while taking account of organizational scale and regional context. This allows assistance to be targeted without assuming that organizations of a particular size or within the same region have the same needs.

AI disclaimer: During the preparation of this work, the author(s) utilized ChatGPT to support analysis, production of data visualizations, and copy editing. Following the use of this tool, the author(s) carefully reviewed and edited all content as necessary, and assumes full responsibility for the document/publication's content. No material subject to intellectual property rights, including third party material, was used without acknowledgment and permission.



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