

Ethical AI in Youth Information Work

Ethical Landscape and Survey Findings



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01

About YouthInfo.AI

YouthInfo.AI is an international cooperation project that examines how artificial intelligence (AI) is being used, and can be responsibly used, in youth information work across Europe. The project is co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme as a Cooperation Partnership in the youth field.

The project combines desk research on the European ethical and regulatory landscape with practitioner-level research, capacity-building activities and the development of practical guidance for the sector. This publication presents the first consolidated research output of the project.

Consortium

The YouthInfo.AI consortium brings together seven partner organisations from across Europe:

- Agence Européenne pour l'Information et le Conseil des Jeunes (ERYICA), Luxembourg — coordinator
- Bundesnetzwerk Österreichische Jugendinfos Verein (BÖJI), Austria
- Fundatia Nationala Pentru Tineret (National Youth Foundation, FNT), Romania
- Eurodesk Italy, Italy
- Narodny Institut Vzdelavania a Mladeze (National Institute for Education and Youth, NIVAM), Slovakia
- Centar Društvenih Inovacija (Centre for Social Innovation, CDI), Croatia
- Jugendagentur zur Förderung der Jugend gGmbH, Germany

Promo Cymru (Wales) supports specific project tasks as an external expert organisation, including language review and proofreading.

02

Executive Summary

This publication consolidates the first wave of research within the YouthInfo.AI project. It combines a desk-research overview of the European ethical and regulatory landscape for artificial intelligence with an analytical reading of a sector survey based on 195 valid responses from professionals working in, or connected to, youth information and youth work, collected across seven language versions. The aim is to provide an evidence base for the development of practical guidelines for the responsible use of AI in youth information work.

195

valid survey responses

89.1%

see a risk of incorrect
decisions

7

language versions

Key findings

- Within the surveyed networks, AI is already in use, particularly for writing, adapting, drafting, translating and structuring information.
- The dominant pattern is staff-facing AI use rather than fully youth-facing automation. Chatbots are present in the sector but remain emerging; human interaction continues to be central.
- The main gap is responsible organisational integration: informal individual use is more common than regulated or strategic use of AI.
- Respondents indicated high awareness of AI limitations and ethical risks, but limited trust in transparency, responsible data handling, intellectual property compliance and fairness.

- Reported capacity-building needs cluster around ethical, legal and data protection aspects, critical thinking, and practical, responsible use of AI in daily youth information work.
- The findings point to the need for practical, sector-specific guidance combining AI literacy, organisational governance, verification practices, human oversight and clear escalation routes.

CORE MESSAGE

Within the surveyed networks, AI is already a part of day-to-day youth information work. The main question is no longer whether AI is used, but how it is governed, made transparent, verified and aligned with youth information values.

03

Introduction and Purpose

Artificial intelligence is increasingly a part of day-to-day youth information work. Youth information workers and organisations are already using AI tools to support writing, translation, content adaptation, communication, accessibility and the structuring of information. At the same time, the use of AI raises important questions about trust, transparency, data protection, professional judgement, fairness and the quality of information provided to young people.

This publication brings together two complementary strands of research. The first is a desk-research overview of the European ethical and regulatory landscape relevant to AI use in youth information work, including key European frameworks, data protection principles and youth-specific safeguards. The second is the analysis of a sector survey completed by practitioners across consortium networks.

The purpose of the research is not to determine whether AI tools are being used in youth information work — they clearly already are — but to understand how they are being used, in which organisational contexts, and under which ethical, professional and practical conditions. The publication therefore looks beyond individual tools and focuses on the wider question of the responsible integration of AI into youth information services.

Findings are organised around six analytical dimensions: cases of AI use, organisational practices, trust and transparency, data protection and privacy, ethical and societal risks, and capacity-building needs. These dimensions connect the desk research with the survey results and form a coherent basis for the practical guidelines that will follow this research.

04 | Methodology and Limitations

4.1 Survey design

The survey was designed as a multi-dimensional instrument linking operational AI use with organisational governance, trust, data protection, ethical risks and capacity-building needs. It was administered online via SurveyMonkey. The responses included in the final analytical dataset were recorded between 11 March and 17 April 2026. The final analytical dataset includes seven language versions: English, German, French, Italian, Romanian, Slovak and Croatian. The English master version was professionally proofread, and consortium partners translated the questionnaire into their respective national languages before dissemination.

Note. SurveyMonkey collector metadata is available for four of the seven language versions (German, French, Italian and Slovak) and records those collectors as created on 11 March 2026. Collector closing dates are not available in the export.

4.2 Dissemination

The questionnaire was disseminated through ERYICA, consortium partner channels and wider youth information networks, including Eurodesk Italy and Eurodesk Croatia. Partners were also invited to share the survey through their national and organisational communication channels, direct email invitations and social media. The primary target group included youth information workers, counsellors, trainers, coordinators and managers working in or with youth information organisations and related youth work structures.

4.3 Participation and consent

Participation was voluntary and self-selecting. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the survey and how the results would be used at the beginning of the questionnaire. Where applicable, respondents were given an option to be contacted for follow-up consultation activities supporting the development of practical guidelines.

4.4 Dataset

After data cleaning, the analysis is based on 195 valid responses across seven language versions and multiple country/location entries. Findings are indicative of practitioners reached through European youth information and consortium partner

networks rather than a statistically representative sample of the wider youth information workforce.

Data cleaning and the analytical dataset. Of the 198 responses received, three were identified as test submissions and removed before analysis; the canonical analytical dataset therefore comprises 195 genuine respondents. All 198 original records are preserved unchanged in the raw archive. Eight respondents completed only the demographic section; they are retained as genuine respondents and reported as non-response on the questions they did not reach. Three reporting conventions are used. The demographic distributions in Tables 1 and 2 are shares of all 195 respondents, because every respondent answered those questions. Table 9 is also reported on the full base of 195, with non-response shown as its own row, so that chatbot adoption can be read directly against the whole analytical sample. Every other table reports shares of the respondents who answered the question concerned, and that valid N is stated in the caption.

4.5 Limitations

LIMITATIONS

This survey provides an exploratory and practice-oriented overview, not a statistically representative measurement of the European youth information sector. The sample is self-selected and unevenly distributed across language versions and countries, with stronger participation in some national networks than others. Country and location entries were free text and were normalised with a fixed, reproducible rule that matches country names in any language and inflected form, assigns a region or city only where the name uniquely identifies one country, accepts an abbreviation only as an unambiguous ISO 3166-1 alpha-2 code, and never treats the questionnaire language version as evidence of the respondent country; entries that cannot be assigned on this basis are reported as “unclear or uninterpretable entries”. Smaller national subsamples should be interpreted with caution and should not be used to draw strong country-by-country comparisons. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns, needs and risk areas that can inform practical guidance for the sector.

4.6 Language and country distribution

Tables 1 and 2 summarise the distribution of responses by language version and by country or location entry after data cleaning.

Table 1. Responses by language version (n = 195)

LANGUAGE VERSION	RESPONSES	SHARE
German	65	33.3%
French	38	19.5%
Romanian	35	17.9%
Italian	24	12.3%
English	13	6.7%
Croatian	10	5.1%
Slovak	10	5.1%

Table 2. Responses by country or location after data cleaning (n = 195)

COUNTRY / LOCATION	RESPONSES	SHARE
Austria	48	24.6%
Romania	37	19.0%
France	36	18.5%
Italy	25	12.8%
Slovakia	10	5.1%
Croatia	9	4.6%
Germany	8	4.1%
Belgium	5	2.6%
Liechtenstein	2	1.0%
Portugal	2	1.0%
Wales	2	1.0%
Cyprus	1	0.5%
Luxembourg	1	0.5%
Malta	1	0.5%
Spain	1	0.5%
Unclear or uninterpretable entries	7	3.6%
Total	195	100.0%

Note. Country and location entries were free text. They were normalised with a fixed, reproducible rule applied to the canonical analytical dataset: country names in any language, including inflected forms, are matched case- and accent-insensitively; a region or city is assigned to a country only where the name uniquely identifies one country; an abbreviation is accepted only as an unambiguous ISO 3166-1 alpha-2 code; entries naming more than one country, non-geographic entries and uninterpretable entries are reported as unclear. The questionnaire language version is never used as evidence of the respondent country. Percentages are shares of the 195 respondents.

05

Ethical and Regulatory Landscape

This section synthesises the desk research on the European ethical and regulatory landscape relevant to the use of AI in youth information work. The purpose is to provide the policy-mapping basis against which the survey findings should be interpreted. This section does not constitute legal advice; organisations should assess their specific processing activities and applicable legal obligations.

5.1 Regulatory context

Several European instruments shape the environment in which youth information services use AI. Table 3 summarises what matters most for youth information practice in each framework.

Table 3. Selected European frameworks relevant to AI use in youth information services

FRAMEWORK	WHAT MATTERS FOR YOUTH INFORMATION WORK
EU AI Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689)	Risk-based obligations. The Regulation establishes transparency duties for AI systems intended to interact directly with natural persons, which is particularly relevant to chatbot-based services. It also sets out provider and deployer duties, with stronger requirements for specified high-risk applications, including certain uses in education and vocational training, employment, and access to essential services, depending on the system's intended purpose. General-purpose AI models are subject to documentation and transparency obligations.
General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)	AI use does not remove data protection duties. Key issues include establishing a lawful basis, data minimisation, transparency, profiling and inference risks, and the safeguards in Article 22 that may become relevant where AI-supported systems are used for solely automated decisions that produce legal or similarly significant effects.
Digital Services Act (DSA)	Even where youth information organisations are not online platforms themselves, the DSA shapes the wider online information environment, including protection of minors, restrictions on targeted advertising to children, transparency of recommender systems, and content moderation duties.

FRAMEWORK	WHAT MATTERS FOR YOUTH INFORMATION WORK
Child and youth protection	Children and minors receive enhanced protection under several European frameworks. Youth-facing services should also apply a heightened duty-of-care approach where users may be vulnerable or where information affects rights, health, safety, or access to essential services. In practice, this includes privacy by design, avoidance of manipulative engagement patterns, safety escalation for sensitive issues, and age-appropriate communication so that users can distinguish AI from human support.

5.2 Common ethical principles

Across the European and international ethical frameworks consulted, five principles consistently appear. For youth information services, these should be interpreted through a trust and duty-of-care lens.

- **Human agency and oversight:** AI should support, not replace, professional judgement in sensitive youth-facing contexts.
- **Transparency and explainability:** Users and staff should understand when AI is used and its limitations.
- **Fairness and non-discrimination:** AI outputs should be reviewed for bias, exclusion, and unequal impact.
- **Privacy and data governance:** Organisations need clear rules on data, prompts, retention, vendors, and access control.
- **Safety, robustness and accountability:** Responsibilities, escalation routes, and incident handling must be defined.

5.3 Key risks identified through desk research

Table 4 consolidates the principal risk areas identified in the desk research and their practical meaning for youth information services.

Table 4. Risk areas and their practical meaning for youth information services

RISK AREA	PRACTICAL MEANING FOR YOUTH INFORMATION SERVICES
Quality risk	Hallucinations and confident errors can mislead users about rights, deadlines, eligibility, or safety advice. Multilingual translation errors can alter meaning in legal or administrative information.
Integrity risk	Generative AI lowers the cost of producing persuasive misinformation and impersonation. Synthetic content can undermine trust in legitimate youth information providers.
Rights risk	Personal data in prompts, unclear vendor retention policies, re-identification risks and inference of sensitive attributes are particularly serious in services that work with vulnerable groups.

RISK AREA	PRACTICAL MEANING FOR YOUTH INFORMATION SERVICES
Trust risk	Users may mistake AI output for human advice. Opaque recommendations are difficult to correct or contest, and staff may not always be aware of tool limitations or system changes.
Professional judgement risk	Over-reliance and automation bias may reduce verification and critical thinking. There is a deskilling risk, and AI may miss red flags unless workflows define clear escalation rules.
Equity risk	Premium tools, connectivity gaps and uneven language or disability accessibility can widen inequalities. Reliance on platform feeds can affect the visibility of reliable information.
Organisational risk	Incorrect guidance can trigger complaints or liability. Non-compliance risks include AI Act transparency duties, GDPR breaches, and vendor contract gaps. Trust erosion is costly to repair.

WHAT THIS MEANS

For youth information services, AI is not only a question of tools. It is a governance, trust and duty-of-care question.

5.4 Chatbots in youth information work: ethical considerations

Chatbots represent a specific deployment of AI in youth information work where ethical considerations are particularly visible, because they involve direct AI-to-young-person interaction. The desk research and the survey converge on a clear picture: chatbot adoption is still emerging in the sector, but the ethical implications must be anticipated rather than addressed only after deployment.

Transparency and disclosure. The EU AI Act establishes transparency duties for AI systems intended to interact directly with natural persons, which is directly relevant to chatbot-based services. Users should be informed when they are interacting with an AI system, and AI-generated or manipulated content should be clearly identified where it could be perceived as human-produced. For youth information services, transparency is more than a compliance step: undisclosed chatbot use risks eroding the trust relationship that is central to the work.

Human oversight and escalation. Chatbots in youth-facing roles should include explicit human escalation routes for sensitive topics such as self-harm and mental health, crisis situations, legal certainty, medical questions, and any information affecting rights or access to essential services. Escalation rules should be defined in advance, tested with realistic prompts, and documented. The ethical principles outlined above converge on the idea that AI should support, not replace, professional judgement; for chatbots, this means designing for hand-offs, not full autonomy.

Data protection. GDPR Article 22 may become relevant where AI-supported systems are used for solely automated decisions that produce legal or similarly significant effects. Even where a chatbot only provides information or guidance, strong safeguards remain necessary, including data minimisation, clear privacy information, appropriate human review, and escalation routes for sensitive cases. Organisations should distinguish informational chatbot use from profiling and automated decision-making, and should assess their specific processing activities and applicable legal obligations.

Quality, accuracy and accountability. Chatbots are particularly exposed to hallucinations, biased outputs, multilingual translation errors, and prompt-injection from external sources. Operational controls — verification routines, source attribution where possible, lists of topics outside the chatbot's remit, periodic accuracy testing across all supported languages, and clear accountability for chatbot-generated guidance — should be in place before deployment, not after.

06 Analytical Framework

The desk research and the survey are aligned around six analytical dimensions. These dimensions form the basis for the survey findings presented in the next section and for the cross-analysis between adoption and readiness later in this publication.

Table 5. Analytical framework

DIMENSION	ANALYTICAL FOCUS
1. Use cases	How AI is used in everyday youth information work.
2. Organisational practices	Whether AI use is informal, encouraged, integrated into workflows, or part of an organisational strategy.
3. Trust and transparency	How respondents assess AI accuracy, explainability, and limitations.
4. Data protection and privacy	Awareness, comfort, and trust regarding AI-related data handling.
5. Ethical and societal risks	Professional autonomy, bias, human contact, incorrect decisions, the digital divide, and dependency.
6. Capacity-building needs	Training priorities and preferred learning formats.

07 | Survey Findings

7.1 AI use in practice

AI use is already present in everyday youth information work within the surveyed networks. The strongest use cases relate to content preparation, text adaptation, communication support, translation, and the structuring of information.

READING THE TABLES

Percentages in the tables below refer to the share of valid respondents to the relevant question, and that valid N is stated in each caption; multiple-response questions can therefore exceed 100% in total. Table 9 is the exception: its percentages are shares of the full analytical base (N = 195) and include the eight respondents recorded as non-response.

Table 6. Content creation and preparation (n = 187 valid responses)

USE CASE	RESPONSES	% VALID
Writing or adapting texts	158	84.5%
Drafting concepts or reports	97	51.9%
Quizzes or interactive formats	91	48.7%
Summarising documents or videos	73	39.0%
Other	28	15.0%
None	9	4.8%

Table 7. Communication and counselling support (n = 187 valid responses)

USE CASE	RESPONSES	% VALID
Communication, social media, or PR support	109	58.3%
Information or counselling support	95	50.8%
None	34	18.2%
Other	6	3.2%

Table 8. Translation and accessibility (n = 187 valid responses)

USE CASE	RESPONSES	% VALID
Plain or easy language	95	50.8%
Translation to other languages	77	41.2%
Accessibility improvement	69	36.9%
Transcription / image-to-text tools (French version only)	4	2.1%
None	42	22.5%
Other	4	2.1%

Note. The French version of the questionnaire contained one additional response option in this question (transcription and image-to-text tools), selected by four respondents. It is reported as a separate row and is not included in "Other". Percentages are calculated on all 187 valid respondents to the question, of whom 36 were shown the French version.

INTERPRETATION

Within this sample, AI is mainly used as a staff-support tool for writing, translating, and structuring information, rather than replacing direct contact with young people. Accessibility and multilingual support are clear added-value areas.

7.2 Chatbots: emerging, but not yet mainstream

Chatbot use remains limited compared with broader AI use. Two thirds of respondents do not currently use chatbots for youth information services. Around one in eight already use them and a further one in six plan to introduce them, so just under a third of the analytical sample is either using or preparing to use a chatbot.

Table 9. Chatbot use in youth information services (n = 195)

CHATBOT STATUS	RESPONSES	SHARE OF TOTAL
No	129	66.2%
Planned	32	16.4%
Yes	26	13.3%
No response	8	4.1%

Note. These figures were corrected after a re-check against the raw survey exports. The values published in the review version of this report (117 / 36 / 37) could not be reproduced from the underlying data and have been replaced. Percentages are shares of all 195 respondents in the analytical dataset; the eight respondents who did not reach this question are shown as a separate row.

INTERPRETATION

Within this sample, the AI landscape in youth information services is primarily staff-facing and content-oriented. Chatbots are an emerging use case rather than the dominant form of AI adoption.

Table 9b. Reported or planned purposes of chatbot use (n = 59 respondents who answered this multiple-response question)

PURPOSE	RESPONSES	% OF VALID RESPONSES
Conversational chatbot on the website	28	47.5%
Website or platform navigation / AI-powered search	23	39.0%
Support during live counselling	13	22.0%
Other contexts	4	6.8%
Not applicable / I do not use chatbots	16	27.1%

Note. The 59 respondents are those who answered this question; they are not 59 chatbot users. Of them, 26 currently use a chatbot, 32 plan to introduce one, and one reported no chatbot use. Multiple responses were possible, so the percentages do not sum to 100%.

7.3 Organisational integration and maturity

The organisational maturity question distinguishes individual experimentation from formal integration into workflows or strategy.

Table 10. Level of organisational integration of AI use (n = 183 valid responses; 12 of 195 respondents did not answer this question)

LEVEL OF ORGANISATIONAL INTEGRATION	RESPONSES	% OF VALID RESPONSES
Informal individual use	68	37.2%
Encouraged but not regulated	41	22.4%
Integrated into workflows or services	28	15.3%
Part of strategy or digital transformation	25	13.7%
Not sure	18	9.8%
Not allowed or discouraged	3	1.6%

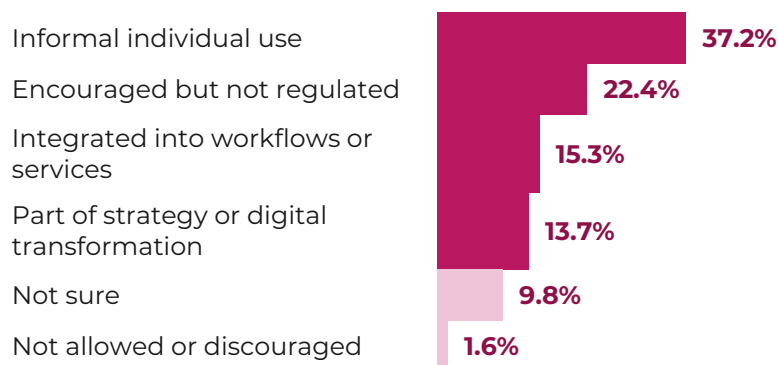


Figure 1. Level of organisational integration of AI use (n = 183 valid responses, share of valid responses; based on Table 10)

INTERPRETATION

The data indicates a clear gap between operational adoption and formal organisational governance. Informal individual use remains the largest category, while structured AI strategies or digital transformation approaches are less common.

7.4 Trust, accuracy, transparency, and data protection

Respondents indicated awareness of AI limitations, but trust in transparency, accuracy, and responsible data handling remains cautious. Data protection appears as one of the central trust barriers to responsible AI adoption.

Table 11. Trust, accuracy, transparency, and data protection (means on a 1–5 scale)

ITEM	N	MEAN	AGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL
Trust AI results	179	2.98	26.8%	27.4%	45.8%
AI content generally accurate	180	2.92	29.4%	32.2%	38.3%
Aware of AI limitations	180	4.32	86.7%	4.4%	8.9%
AI sufficiently transparent	178	2.54	19.1%	52.8%	28.1%
Aware how AI tools process data	183	3.57	59.6%	21.9%	18.6%
Comfortable sharing data with AI tools	181	2.66	26.5%	46.4%	27.1%
AI handles user data responsibly	175	2.33	12.0%	57.7%	30.3%

KEY MESSAGE

Respondents in this sample do not appear naive about AI. They are aware of its limitations and express clear reservations about transparency and responsible data handling. This combination of awareness and cautious trust provides a stable basis on which to build practical guidance.

7.5 Ethical, professional, and societal risks

The strongest warning signal in this sample is the perceived risk of incorrect decisions. This reinforces the importance of human oversight, verification practices, and escalation rules in youth information contexts.

Table 12. Ethical, professional, and societal risk indicators (means on a 1–5 scale)

RISK-RELATED ITEM	N	MEAN	AGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL
Familiar with ethical risks of AI	175	3.81	72.6%	10.9%	16.6%
Over-reliance may reduce autonomy	176	4.04	75.0%	5.7%	19.3%
AI could weaken professional competencies	176	3.59	55.1%	16.5%	28.4%
AI may reinforce bias or discrimination	176	3.60	56.2%	13.6%	30.1%
AI may reduce human interaction	174	3.35	42.5%	23.0%	34.5%
AI may lead to incorrect decisions	175	4.40	89.1%	3.4%	7.4%
AI may contribute to digital divide	175	3.46	46.3%	16.6%	37.1%
Young people or citizens may become overly dependent	176	4.15	80.1%	4.5%	15.3%

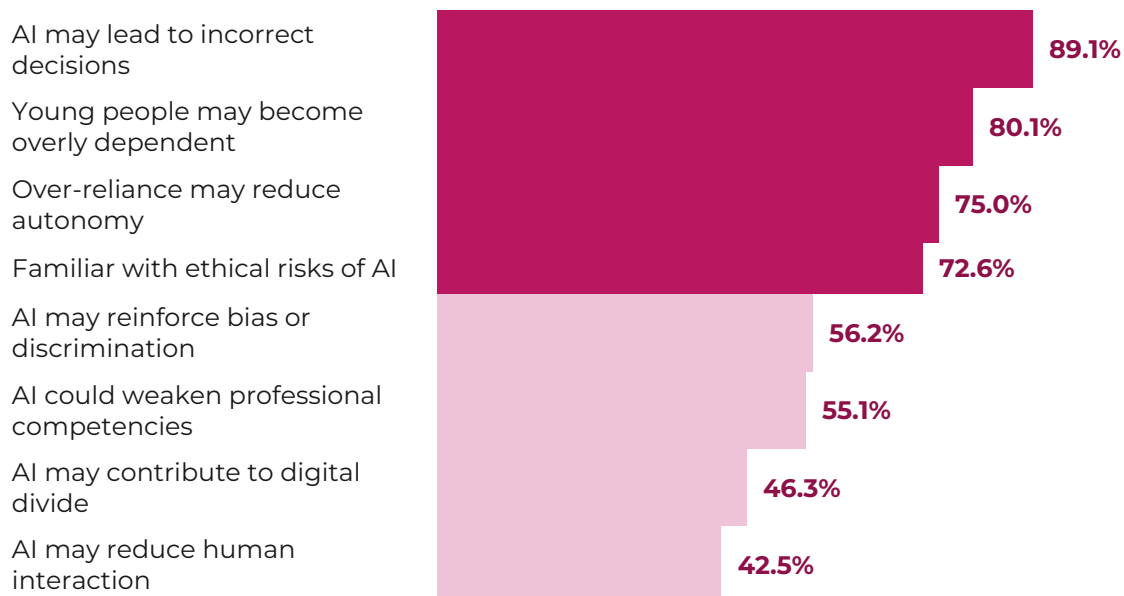


Figure 2. Share of respondents agreeing with each risk statement (based on Table 12)

7.6 Training and capacity-building needs

Reported training needs are not limited to tool use. Respondents prioritise ethical, legal, and data protection aspects alongside critical thinking and practical, responsible everyday use.

Table 13. Reported training priorities (n = 177 valid responses; see note)

TRAINING AREA	RESPONSES	% VALID
Ethical, legal, and data protection	105	59.3%
Critical thinking and AI	99	60.0%
Daily practical use	94	53.1%
Responsible and practical use	93	52.5%
Introduction and theory	78	44.1%
Creative and audiovisual AI	76	42.9%
Chatbots and counselling roles	59	33.3%
Chatbots in youth information	57	32.2%
AI-driven search and optimisation	54	30.5%
No training needed	12	6.8%
Other	5	2.8%

Note. The option "Critical thinking and AI" was not included in the English version of the questionnaire. The share for this item is therefore calculated on the 165 respondents to whom it was offered, rather than on all 177 respondents to the question. All other rows are calculated on 177.

INTERPRETATION

The sector appears to be in a transition phase. Respondents reported moderate confidence when using AI tools (mean 5.69 out of 10; median 6.0; n = 177). Capacity-building should combine practical AI skills with critical thinking, ethics, legal awareness, data protection, and youth work values.

08

Qualitative Themes

The survey collected a substantial number of open responses. An initial thematic synthesis identified five recurring themes. These themes are presented as a preliminary qualitative synthesis and should be read as indicative rather than as the output of a full, formal coding procedure.

Table 14. Recurring themes in open responses (initial synthesis)

THEME	WHAT RESPONDENTS ARE POINTING TO
Timesaving and efficiency	AI helps with first drafts, structuring information, administration, and repetitive tasks, freeing time for direct work with young people.
Accessibility and inclusion	Respondents value AI for translation, plain and easy language, multilingual communication, and the adaptation of content for different audiences.
Data protection and reliability concerns	GDPR concerns, privacy, accuracy, copyright, and unauthorised “shadow” AI use appear as recurring concerns.
Human contact remains essential	Respondents indicated that AI should not replace counselling, trust-based relationships, or professional judgement.
Need for peer learning and examples	Respondents asked for practical guidance, real cases, templates, and exchanges of good practice rather than abstract principles only.

09

Cross-Analysis: Adoption and Readiness

The analytical value of the survey lies in connecting use patterns with organisational maturity, trust, data protection, and capacity needs. The interpretation below should be read alongside the methodological caveats in Section 4.

- High AI use does not automatically mean high organisational readiness.
- Informal individual use should be treated as a risk factor when not accompanied by internal guidance, data protection awareness, and verification procedures.
- Training needs should be segmented by organisational maturity: organisations experimenting informally require different support from organisations already integrating AI into workflows.
- Chatbot-related findings should be interpreted separately from general AI use, because chatbot adoption is still comparatively limited.

Table 15. Mean scores by level of organisational integration

Organisational integration	n	Trust results	Data responsibility	Incorrect decisions	Youth dependency	Confidence /10
Informal individual use	68	3.00	2.18	4.29	4.03	5.02
Encouraged but not regulated	41	2.90	2.40	4.49	4.10	5.97
Integrated into workflows or services	28	3.12	2.44	4.39	4.14	5.96
Part of strategy or digital transformation	25	3.20	2.78	4.58	4.46	7.79
Not sure	18	2.81	2.06	4.44	4.31	4.65

Note: The “Not allowed or discouraged” category was excluded because of its very small group size (n = 3), and cases with missing organisational-integration data were omitted. Means are based on available responses for each item and may therefore use slightly different valid-response totals. No statistical significance testing was conducted.

CENTRAL ANALYTICAL FINDING

The survey suggests a structural gap between everyday AI adoption and organisational readiness. Within this sample, reported confidence tends to be higher among respondents from organisations with more formal AI integration, while concern about incorrect decisions and youth dependency remains high across all groups. This exploratory pattern should be interpreted cautiously: group sizes are uneven, some item-level responses are missing, and no statistical significance testing was conducted. The results indicate an association, not a causal relationship. Closing the gap between adoption and responsible integration should be a central focus of practical guidance for the sector.

10

Validation through Focus Groups

10.1 Purpose and scope

Following completion of the survey analysis, four validation focus groups were convened by ERYICA, Eurodesk Italy, FNT Romania and CDI Croatia. Together, they involved 25 participants: 5 in the ERYICA group, 8 in the Eurodesk Italy group, 6 in the FNT Romania group and 6 in the CDI Croatia group. Participants included youth information workers, youth workers, project and network managers, municipal officers, NGO practitioners, trainers, researchers and university professors.

4

qualitative validation focus
groups

25

participants in total

4

partner organisations
convening

STATUS OF THIS EVIDENCE

The focus groups were designed as a qualitative validation layer. They were not a new survey and are not statistically representative of youth information services in Europe. Their purpose was to test whether the patterns identified in D4.1 were recognisable in professional practice, identify qualifications or missing perspectives, and inform the practical guidance developed in the next project phase.

10.2 Findings confirmed across the groups

VALIDATED

What participants confirmed

Across all four discussions, participants broadly confirmed the direction of D4.1. The groups consistently described AI as already embedded in professional practice, particularly for staff-facing tasks such as drafting, editing, translation, reporting, summarisation, research, brainstorming and structuring information. Direct youth-facing deployment was much less common, reinforcing the distinction between widespread individual use of general-purpose AI tools and the more limited organisational adoption of dedicated chatbots.

Participants also confirmed that organisational governance often lags behind everyday use. AI adoption frequently depends on individual initiative, while approved tools, internal policies, responsibility for outputs and consistent quality-assurance procedures remain underdeveloped. This gap was linked to a strong need for practical AI literacy and training for both professionals and young people. Training should cover not only tool operation and prompting, but also limitations, hallucinations, bias, source checking, data protection and the critical evaluation of outputs.

Human oversight emerged as a non-negotiable principle. Participants agreed that organisations and professionals remain responsible for final outputs and decisions. AI-assisted public information, formal communications and guidance should be verified before use, while decisions affecting a young person's rights, wellbeing or access to opportunities should never be made by AI alone.

10.3 Findings nuanced and extended

NUANCED

What participants refined

The discussions did not overturn the survey findings, but they added important nuance. ERYICA participants highlighted psychological and developmental concerns, including dependence, skill loss, over-humanised systems and the risks posed by flattering or overly agreeable outputs, especially for younger users. Eurodesk Italy participants stressed the difference between secure enterprise solutions and public tools, raised sustainability concerns, and distinguished routine administrative automation from personalised youth information and guidance.

FNT Romania added examples of young people using AI-generated arguments in interactions with youth workers, AI-mediated applications reducing perceived authenticity, and transparency labels sometimes lowering rather than increasing trust among AI-sceptical users.

EXPANDED

New perspectives

These perspectives reinforce the need for contextual rather than purely technical safeguards. Transparency should be clear and meaningful at the point of use: users should know when they are interacting with AI, understand its limits and be able to reach a real person.

Data protection requires simple operational rules, including avoiding the entry of personal or sensitive data into public AI systems, assessing providers and data storage, and using secure organisational solutions where available.

10.4 Chatbots and the human relationship

The groups saw potential for chatbots in routine, standardised and administrative information: opening hours, bookings, procedures, frequently asked questions, basic service navigation and first-line information outside normal working hours. This potential was conditional on reliable and regularly updated source material, clear organisational ownership, transparent identification of the chatbot, defined limits, regular human auditing and a visible route to human support.

Personalised guidance, counselling and sensitive topics should remain human-led. Legal, medical, psychological, crisis-related, discriminatory or emotionally complex situations require professional judgement and empathy. In such cases, a chatbot should refuse or limit its response and provide immediate escalation or hand-off to a qualified person. Used within these boundaries, chatbots may strengthen rather than weaken the human relationship by reducing repetitive enquiries and freeing staff time for meaningful support.



“AI should support, not replace, professional judgement.”

RECURRING PRINCIPLE ACROSS THE FOUR VALIDATION FOCUS GROUPS

10.5 Croatian/CDI perspective

The CDI focus group brought a complementary academic and civil-society perspective. Its six participants included four university professors who are also active in the NGO sector and two youth information workers. The group supported the responsible use of AI tools in education and youth information work, while emphasising that professors, students, young people and practitioners must first understand how these systems work, what their limitations are and why outputs must be verified.

Participants viewed AI literacy as a continuing competence rather than a one-off technical skill. Their input reinforced the importance of human oversight and

professional responsibility: AI can support research, drafting, learning and administrative work, but it should complement rather than replace the educator or youth information worker.

An illustrative analogy raised during the CDI discussion compared current concerns about AI with earlier reactions to books as a new learning technology: the point was not offered as a historical claim, but as a way of expressing how a technology initially perceived as a possible substitute for teachers can instead become a tool that supports learning. In the same spirit, participants argued that the relevant question is not whether AI replaces expertise, but how informed users can employ it critically while preserving human judgement and relationships.

10.6 Overall validation

Taken together, the four focus groups endorse the central direction of D4.1 while sharpening its practical implications. They confirm the adoption-readiness gap and the value of staff-facing AI support, but place stronger emphasis on AI literacy, formal organisational responsibility, verification, data protection, transparent communication, human-only zones for sensitive matters and dependable hand-off from automated services to people. Because the groups were qualitative and purposively convened, these insights should be read as expert and practitioner validation rather than estimates of prevalence.

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Implications for Youth Information Services

- AI is already a part of everyday youth information work within the surveyed networks. The validation focus groups confirmed this direction and reinforced that the relevant question is no longer whether AI is used, but how responsibly it is integrated.
- The sector needs practical governance tools: approved use cases, restricted use cases, no-go areas, human review rules, data protection instructions, and escalation routes.
- Transparency must become a standard practice. Users should understand when AI is used in a service they interact with, as well as its limitations.
- Data protection is central to trust. Guidelines should translate data protection requirements into simple, operational rules for staff.
- Capacity-building should combine practical AI skills with critical thinking, ethics, legal awareness, and youth work values.

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Recommendations for Responsible AI Use

The following seven recommendations are drawn from the desk research and survey findings and were subsequently confirmed and refined through four qualitative validation focus groups. They are intended as the basis for practical guidance to be developed for youth information services in the next phase of the project.

Table 16. Recommendations for the responsible use of AI in youth information services

01	Develop a practical AI use framework for each organisation Define approved use cases, restricted use cases, and no-go areas, with clear responsibilities.
02	Create AI transparency and disclosure guidance Support clear communication to young people when AI is used in youth-facing communication or services.
03	Provide a data protection checklist for AI use Cover personal data, prompts, retention, vendor tools, and sensitive situations in language staff can use.
04	Define human oversight and escalation rules Apply especially to legal, health, crisis, financial, and rights-related topics, with documented routes to a human professional.
05	Include intellectual property, source attribution, and reliability checks Reduce risks linked to copyright, hallucinations, and unverified AI-generated content.

06**Build training modules for staff**

Combine practical use, ethical and legal awareness, critical thinking, and organisational governance.

07**Use validation and ongoing practitioner consultation to refine the guidance**

The four focus groups confirmed the overall direction and identified practical refinements. Future testing should continue to check whether guidance remains understandable, realistic and usable across different youth information settings.

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Conclusion

The gap that needs to be closed is not a gap between the sector and AI; it is a gap between adoption and responsible integration.

The evidence presented in this publication points to a single core conclusion: artificial intelligence is already a part of everyday youth information work within the surveyed networks, but organisational governance, transparency practices, data protection safeguards, and staff capacity are not yet developing at the same pace as everyday use.

Respondents demonstrated substantial awareness of AI limitations and risks, alongside clear reservations about transparency, accuracy, data handling and fairness. At the same time, they value AI for what it can help them do well: structure information, communicate, translate, support accessibility, and free up time to work directly with young people. Human interaction, professional judgement, and the relationship of trust with young people remain at the core of their work.

Closing this gap requires practical safeguards, including approved uses, restricted uses, no-go areas, transparency and disclosure rules, a usable data protection checklist, human oversight and escalation routes. These need to be combined with capacity-building that addresses ethics, law, critical thinking, and youth work values, rather than the use of tools only.

The qualitative validation focus groups strongly confirmed this overall direction while adding practical nuance on AI literacy, chatbot boundaries, data protection, transparency and human hand-off. Their 25 participants do not constitute a statistically representative sample, but their expert and practitioner input supports the relevance of the findings and has refined the recommendations that will inform the next YouthInfo.AI outputs on responsible AI use in youth information work.

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Youth information sector

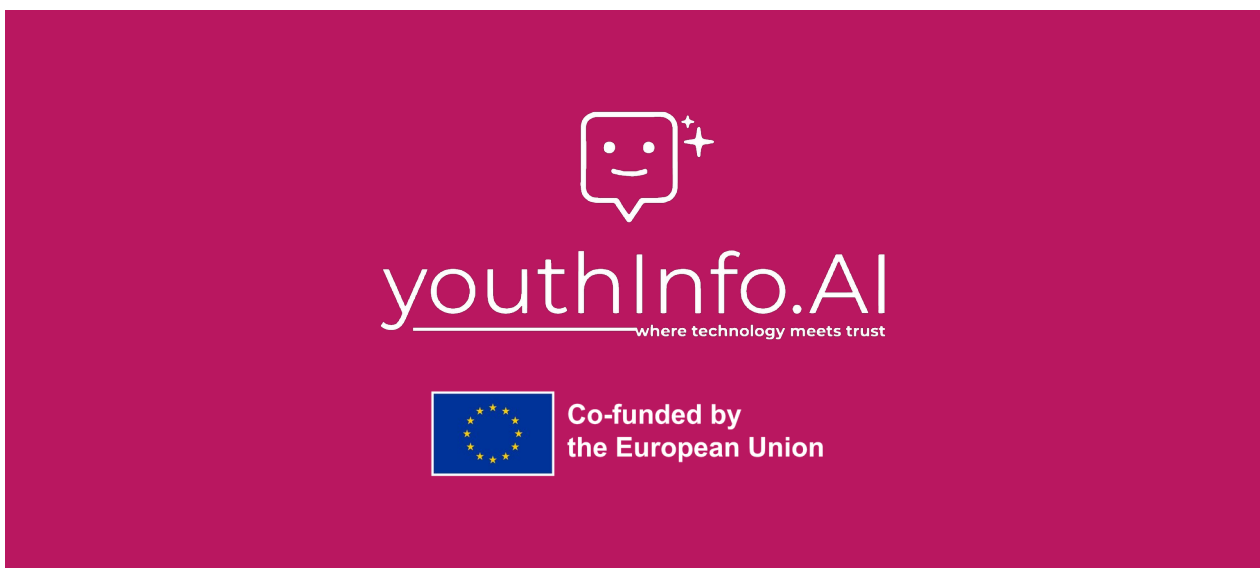
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