

Opportunities and Challenges of AI Chatbots for Digital Youth Information, Advice, and Counselling Services in Europe



JUST SIX
QUESTIONS
RESEARCH
SUMMARY

“The incorporation of a chatbot has to be a complement and not a replacement of a service, in order to ensure that all people can access services both online and offline” (p. 149).

1. WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

Chatbots powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI) are increasingly being integrated into online youth services to provide immediate, anonymous, and accessible support, particularly for information, advice, and counselling. Chatbots here are defined as “a conversational agent that uses natural language to dialogue with its user (either in text or speech form)” (Council of Europe, as cited on p. 139).¹ While these tools offer new opportunities, they also raise concerns related to privacy, trust, bias, and the potential loss of human connection.

This research explores how chatbots are being used in youth services and examines both the benefits and risks of their integration, with the goal of understanding how they can support youth while protecting their rights and wellbeing.

2. WHERE DID THE RESEARCH TAKE PLACE?

The research focuses on youth services across Europe, including organizations operating at local, national, and European levels.

The scope helps capture a range of perspectives on how digital tools are being used in youth work across different contexts.

3. WHO IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

The research focused on youth service organizations and youth representative bodies operating at regional, national, European, and international levels across Europe.

Interview participants included department heads, decision-makers responsible for integrating chatbots into services, and youth workers involved in teaching or supporting young people in the use of these technologies. While young people are the intended beneficiaries of these services, youth themselves were not directly interviewed, which the authors note as a limitation. The findings therefore reflect organizational and practitioner perspectives, rather than direct youth experiences with these tools.

4. HOW WAS THE RESEARCH DONE?

This study used a **qualitative** approach (focusing on describing qualities, characteristics, processes, or experiences) by combining a **literature review** with **semi-structured interviews** with representatives from eight youth organizations across Europe.

The interviews explored:

- how chatbots are currently used;
- perceived benefits and risks of using chatbots; and
- challenges in implementation.

The researchers then analyzed responses to **identify common themes and patterns**. This approach was selected because it allowed the researchers to capture real-world experiences and practical insights from organizations working directly with youth.

¹ The literature review and interview findings presented in this article suggest that, at the time of publication, there was still no universally shared understanding among youth organizations and practitioners regarding what constitutes a ‘chatbot’ versus broader artificial intelligence systems, reflecting the rapidly evolving nature of these technologies within youth services.

5. WHAT ARE THE KEY FINDINGS?

Six key findings emerged:

- i. **Chatbots can improve access** to youth services. They provide 24/7 access to information, help youth navigate services more easily, and can support anonymity, which may encourage more youth to seek help.
- ii. Chatbots **reduce administrative burden**. They can be useful in handling repetitive or logistical tasks, which can free up time for youth workers to focus on more meaningful, relational, in-person work.
- iii. Chatbots have **potential to increase inclusion**. They can be designed to operate in multiple languages, support accessibility needs, and may reach youth who experience barriers to traditional services. For example, one interview participant referenced a chatbot capable of providing information in sign language, as well as the ability to convert written text to speech for visually impaired youth.
- iv. **Trust** is a major factor when considering the effectiveness of chatbots. Youth are more likely to trust chatbots when they are connected to known organizations and when there is clear human oversight of the tool.
- v. Significant **risks and challenges** remain, including:
 - Privacy and data collection concerns (about how youth data is collected, stored, and used).
 - Bias and misinformation (chatbots may provide inaccurate or biased information).
 - Lack of youth-centered design (many tools are not designed with youth input, so their language and tone may not resonate with young users).
 - Loss of human connection (chatbots **cannot replicate empathy or nuanced understanding** and there could be a risk of over-reliance, especially in a mental health context).

- Resource constraints (organizations may lack time, funding or technical expertise to implement chatbots effectively).
- vi. **Chatbots should complement, NOT replace**, human services. This is particularly important in sensitive uses, such as around mental health and counselling.

6. WHY DOES THIS RESEARCH MATTER FOR YOUTH WORK?

This research highlights that while AI chatbots can expand access and efficiency in youth services, **their effectiveness depends on how they are designed, implemented, and monitored**. Chatbots can be useful for information sharing, service navigation, and administrative support, but they **must not replace human relationships**, especially in providing mental health supports. Youth workers and youth organizations need to ensure **human oversight** over chatbots and **be transparent** about who is behind the chatbot and how data is being used.

Young people should be involved in the design, testing, and evaluation of chatbots if they are the primary users. With the rise of technology, investments in **digital literacy and critical thinking skills** for youth using these tools are important. Regular reviews and updates to the chatbots are also needed to ensure accuracy and relevance. AI chatbots can strengthen youth services, but only when they are used **ethically, transparently, and in partnership with young people**, and when they **complement, rather than replace, human support**.

- 🔍 Escamilla, A., & Gonzalo, P. (2024). [Opportunities and challenges of AI chatbots for digital youth information, advice, and counselling services in Europe](#). *Deusto Journal of Human Rights*, 14, 127–154.