YouthProAktiv

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Empowering youth work through Artificial Intelligence: Policy pathways for quality and inclusion

YouthProAktiv is a coalition of young people committed to fostering a culture of proactivity in education and policy and to empowering young people, youth leaders and youth workers to participate actively in society and democracy. The organisation places particular emphasis on the professionalisation of youth work and on strengthening the role of youth workers in supporting young people, with particular attention to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Through its policy briefings, YouthProAktiv seeks to present research findings and policy recommendations in an accessible format that enables youth organisations and young people to better understand emerging issues and make informed decisions.

This policy briefing examines how artificial intelligence can support the **quality, inclusion and accessibility** of youth work while preserving the **human relationships, professional judgement and participatory values** on which the sector is based. Youth work provides non-formal learning environments grounded in trust, relational practice and voluntary engagement, while also reaching young people who may be underrepresented in formal education and other institutional settings. As AI becomes increasingly present in young people's learning, communication and decision-making, youth workers are expected to help them **understand, contextualise and critically assess** these technologies.

The briefing explores where AI can add value to youth work through administration, communication, accessibility, personalised support, educational resources and outreach. It also considers the risks associated **with bias, misinformation, privacy, unequal access** and the **inappropriate automation of tasks** in which empathy, contextual judgement or safeguarding are essential. Its purpose is to identify the conditions under which AI can **complement rather than replace** the uniquely human role of youth workers.

Summary of key messages and policy recommendations:

Artificial intelligence is increasingly influencing how youth organisations plan activities, communicate, provide information and support learning. It can reduce repetitive workloads, improve accessibility, facilitate multilingual engagement and help youth workers adapt resources to different needs. However, its use may also weaken youth work when it replaces human relationships, reduces professional judgement or introduces risks related to **misinformation, bias, privacy and safeguarding**.

The briefing highlights that **AI should support rather than define youth work**. Functions based on trust, empathy, confidential dialogue, crisis response and decisions affecting a young person's welfare must remain human-led. AI can contribute to inclusion, but only when access to devices, connectivity, training and accessible tools is equitable, non-digital alternatives remain available and young people are involved in decisions about its use.

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The policy recommendations call for a European framework for **proportionate AI use**, **practical and ethical AI training** for youth workers**, protection of human-led responsibilities**, **risk and impact assessments** before adoption, **inclusive access** and **non-digital alternatives**, and **meaningful youth participation and accountability**. Together, these measures can help ensure that AI strengthens the quality, accessibility and reach of youth work without replacing the human relationships and professional responsibility at its core.

1. Where AI can add value to youth work

Artificial intelligence can support youth work by **improving the efficiency, accessibility and adaptability** of activities addressed to young people. Youth workers can use AI across professional engagement, resource management, communication, training and learning, assessment, inclusion and the development of young people's AI competences. These applications can enhance the **quality, attractiveness and effectiveness** of youth work when they are connected to clear professional and educational objectives.[i]

One of the most immediate areas of application is **administration and project management**. AI-enabled project-management tools can assist youth organisations with scheduling, performance tracking, financial planning, resource allocation and the management of digital materials.[ii] Youth workers who participated in the EU-funded AI4YouthWork project[iii] also identified practical uses such as responding to repetitive emails, creating daily or monthly schedules and supporting clearer task distribution within teams. AI can additionally assist with organising reports and analysing data, helping organisations structure information and derive insights that can inform their activities and decisions.[iv]

The automation of **repetitive support tasks** can reduce the operational burden on youth workers and allow them to devote more time to direct work with young people. Low-risk applications identified in youth-work practice include drafting general outreach messages, summarising non-identifiable notes, compiling publicly available referral resources and brainstorming activities for workshops. In service contexts, AI may also support administration, psychoeducation and navigation through available services, potentially helping staff manage workloads and improve access to information.[v]

AI can strengthen **communication and outreach** by helping youth workers create, schedule and adapt written or multimedia content.[vi] Practical applications include producing social-media posts, posters, invitations, images and videos for organisational websites and public campaigns.[vii] AI-driven communication strategies can also combine personalised messages, automated responses and data analysis to support engagement with young people and other stakeholders.[viii]

Translation and language support offer particular value in international and multicultural youth-work settings.[ix] AI tools can provide automatic translation, transcription, voice-to-text functions and multilingual communication in real time.[x] These functions can help youth workers communicate with non-native speakers and reduce language barriers within international projects and diverse local

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communities. AI-powered language applications can also provide young people with real-time feedback on pronunciation, comprehension and fluency in both formal and non-formal learning settings.[xi]

AI can also make youth work **more accessible to young people with different communication, learning and physical needs**.[xii] Voice recognition, text-to-speech, closed captioning and customisable display settings can support young people with speech, hearing, visual or physical access needs.[xiii] Inclusive AI systems may provide **multilingual support, accessibility settings and adaptive content** that youth workers can incorporate into existing programmes and activities.[xiv] These technologies can present educational material in different visual, auditory and interactive formats, allowing youth workers to respond to a wider range of learning preferences and abilities.[xv]

Within non-formal education, AI can assist youth workers in **developing learning resources, designing programmes and facilitating educational activities**.[xvi] AI-supported tools can generate quizzes, exercises and other learning materials based on existing content, reducing the time required to prepare assessment and training resources.[xvii] The Training Toolkit developed by the AI4YouthWork Consortium demonstrates how AI-related non-formal education can be organised through participatory workshops addressing bias, fact-checking, translation, prompting, trust and ethical reflection. Such activities can help young people understand how AI functions, recognise its **opportunities and limitations** and make more informed choices when using it.[xviii]

AI can further support **personalised learning and individual development**. Adaptive systems can adjust the format, pace and level of difficulty of content according to a learner's previous performance, preferences and identified needs. They can also provide individualised instruction and feedback, identify gaps in learning and recommend activities suited to a young person's progress and interests.[xix] The youth-worker competence framework therefore includes the ability to create personalised youth-development experiences and adapt content and pacing to the needs and interests of individual young people.[xx]

AI can also support **collaboration and participation** in educational settings. AI-supported collaborative-learning systems can use information about learners' working styles and performance to help form balanced groups and suggest improvements in group dynamics.[xxi] Other tools can assist youth workers in collecting and analysing feedback from participants, enabling them to adapt future activities and educational practices in response to young people's experiences.[xxii]

The practical value of AI in youth work therefore lies in its **capacity to support, not define**, the work of youth professionals.[xxiii] It can help youth workers organise resources, communicate with broader audiences, reduce language and accessibility barriers, develop educational materials and adapt learning experiences to different needs. Its contribution is most concrete when the selected tool directly supports the purpose of a youth-work activity and responds to the needs of the young people involved.

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2. Where AI can weaken quality in youth work

Youth work is grounded in care, trust, inclusion, empowerment and the safeguarding of young people's autonomy. For this reason, the use of AI becomes problematic when it **replaces functions** that depend on human empathy, contextual understanding or professional responsibility.[xxiv] The central issue is not whether AI can generate a response, recommendation or decision, but **whether delegating that task weakens the relational and rights-based foundations of youth work**.[xxv]

Human relationships are one of the clearest limits to automation. Eurodesk stresses that **human empathy, critical thinking and broad contextual reasoning** cannot be replaced by AI and remain essential for tailoring information and support to each young person's specific needs and interests.[xxvi] Research on adolescent use of generative AI similarly notes that AI can imitate empathy but cannot reproduce the **physical presence, negotiation, disagreement and mutual adjustment** that form part of authentic human relationships. Conversations with AI may therefore **displace** rather than strengthen human connection when they become a substitute for direct support.[xxvii]

This limitation is particularly important in youth work because communication is not only the transfer of information. Youth workers interpret tone, context, behaviour and individual circumstances while building relationships based on voluntary engagement and trust.[xxviii] AI-generated responses may appear supportive or emotionally aware, but systems produce these responses **by identifying patterns rather than by experiencing empathy** or understanding the young person's situation. Overestimating these capabilities may lead young people or professionals to treat an apparently empathetic response as equivalent to human care.[xxix]

Overreliance on automated outputs can also **weaken professional judgement**. AI-generated content may be biased, incomplete or inaccurate, which means that **outputs require careful human review** before they are used or shared.[xxx] The Map of Trustworthy AI-Powered Solutions for Youth Work, developed by Mangiullo et al., likewise emphasises that assessment tools can support informed choices, but the final decision must remain with the youth professional's judgement and experience.[xxxi] Youth organisations should therefore avoid arrangements in which AI makes final decisions or produces recommendations that are implemented without meaningful human intervention.[xxxii]

The risk is not limited to technical error. AI systems may also **encourage automation bias**, in which users give excessive weight to an automated answer because it appears confident, rapid or technically sophisticated. When youth workers accept outputs without sufficient reflection, they may overlook relevant personal, cultural or social circumstances that the system cannot adequately interpret. This can reduce the role of professional discretion and weaken the individualised approach required to ensure that support remains relevant and empowering.[xxxiii]

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Misinformation is another major limitation. Generative AI produces responses **by predicting patterns in data** rather than by verifying that every statement is factually correct.[xxxiv] As a result, outputs can contain inaccurate information, invented references or misleading explanations while still appearing coherent and credible. In youth information and educational activities, unverified AI-generated material may therefore **expose young people to false or incomplete information**.[xxxv]

Bias can further **weaken the quality and fairness** of youth work. Bias may be introduced through unrepresentative training data, limited diversity in system design and testing, or wider social inequalities reflected in the information used to train AI models. Generative AI outputs may reproduce **gender stereotypes, discriminatory assumptions or harmful representations of racialised, Indigenous and other marginalised young people**.[xxxvi] The Council of Europe has consequently emphasised that AI policies and practices must address non-discrimination and ensure that marginalised and vulnerable groups are not disproportionately affected.[xxxvii]

Privacy and data protection present especially serious concerns because youth work may involve personal, sensitive or confidential information. Consumer AI systems may **record prompts and use submitted information for system improvement** unless their policies clearly state otherwise.[xxxviii] Entering information about a young person's health, family circumstances, migration status, behaviour or support needs into an unapproved AI tool may therefore create risks of **unintended storage, secondary use or data exposure**. AI systems can also process large datasets in ways that increase the risks of surveillance, profiling, re-identification and unauthorised access.[xxxix]

These risks require particular caution when working with minors or vulnerable young people. Youth workers should avoid entering identifiable or sensitive information into non-approved tools and should minimise, de-identify and protect any data used in AI-supported activities.[xl] **Transparency** is also necessary to maintain trust, as young people should be informed when AI has contributed to content, advice or services that affect them.[xli]

Safeguarding and risk assessment should not be delegated to AI. Evidence on youth services indicates that generative AI is most defensible when it is used for low-risk support functions rather than tasks in which empathy, judgement and crisis management are central. AI may **assist** with general information, service navigation or administrative preparation, but **decision-making and relational support should remain human-led**.[xlii]

The limits are particularly clear in **emotional and mental-health support**. Some adolescents already use AI for emotional or mental-health support, yet therapy and counselling depend on human interaction and connection. AI chatbots may fail to respond constructively to serious disclosures and can provide **unsafe or harmful responses** to young people experiencing distress. For this reason, crisis response, counselling, safeguarding decisions and the assessment of a young person's immediate safety should remain under qualified human responsibility.[xliii]

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AI can also weaken youth work when it is introduced **without sufficient professional preparation**. Youth workers across several European countries have reported interest in AI alongside uncertainty, low confidence and concern about misusing systems they do not fully understand. Without practical training, ethical guidance and organisational procedures, individual experimentation may result in **inconsistent standards** and inappropriate uses of AI.[xliv]

The elements of youth work that should not be delegated to AI are therefore those requiring empathy, trust, confidential dialogue, contextual interpretation, safeguarding, crisis management and final professional judgement. AI may assist with preparation or low-risk support, but **it should not determine what a young person needs, make decisions affecting their welfare or replace the human relationship** through which quality youth work is delivered.[xlv]

3. Inclusion, inequality, and youth participation in AI-supported youth work

Artificial intelligence can contribute to more inclusive youth work by supporting personalised learning, accessibility and access to services for young people who face barriers within conventional educational or institutional settings.[xlvi] However, these benefits are not distributed automatically or equally, as access to AI-supported opportunities depends on infrastructure, digital skills, organisational resources and the capacity of youth workers to use the technology effectively.[xlvii] Inclusion must therefore be considered not only in terms of what AI tools can offer, but also in terms of **who can access those benefits**, **who may be disadvantaged by their use** and **who participates in decisions about their adoption**.

Unequal access to devices, connectivity and AI systems remains a significant barrier. Limited access to information and communication technologies reduces people's opportunities to use AI, understand its potential and develop the skills required to evaluate it critically. The digital divide also includes **inequalities in expertise and competence**, meaning that physical access to a tool does not necessarily provide the knowledge needed to use it effectively or ethically.[xlviii] Young people whose access to AI education is informal or dependent on personal interest may consequently have fewer opportunities to develop **structured AI literacy** than those supported through well-resourced institutions.[xlix]

Inequalities are also present within the youth-work sector itself. AI-related training opportunities for youth workers frequently depend on **short-term projects, local networks, geographical location or individual initiative** rather than systematic public provision. Youth workers in organisations with stronger financial, technical and institutional capacity are therefore more likely to access training and experiment with AI than those working in less-resourced settings. This uneven preparedness may reproduce territorial and socioeconomic inequalities, as the quality of AI-related support available to young people becomes **dependent on the resources** of the organisation or community serving them.[l]

The **cost and availability** of AI services may create additional forms of exclusion. Generative AI tools increasingly offer advanced features through paid versions, restricting access for youth workers and youth organisations that cannot afford

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subscriptions or updated equipment. Without intentional measures to include underserved groups, access to more capable systems and higher-quality AI guidance may remain concentrated among those who already possess greater educational and economic resources.[li] AI-supported youth work should therefore be assessed not only according to whether a tool is technically available, but also whether youth workers and organisations can access it under **equitable and sustainable conditions**.

Differences in representation can also affect who benefits from AI. AI systems are shaped by human design decisions and the data on which they are trained, which may reproduce **historical inequalities and discriminatory patterns**. In areas including education, recruitment, welfare services and public decision-making, AI systems have demonstrated the potential to **reinforce existing biases** rather than reduce them.[lii] These effects may fall disproportionately on young people from racialised, Indigenous, migrant or otherwise marginalised communities when the systems used do not adequately represent their experiences, languages or social contexts.[liii]

Linguistic and cultural inclusion requires more than the automatic translation of content. AI systems may reproduce dominant assumptions or fail to account for cultural context, local expressions and the different meanings attached to language within particular communities.[liv] Youth workers must therefore consider whether AI-generated resources are **culturally appropriate** and whether they accurately reflect the experiences of the young people for whom they are intended. The AI Competence Framework for Youth Workers identifies **context-sensitive, inclusive and ethical practice** as part of the competences needed to integrate AI responsibly into youth work.[lv]

AI-supported services may extend the reach of youth work, but they should **not make participation dependent exclusively on digital tools**. Digital inequalities affect young people's ability to access online opportunities and may be linked to geography, socioeconomic circumstances and differing levels of digital readiness. Youth work that relies only on digital or AI-mediated channels risks excluding those without reliable connectivity, suitable devices or the confidence to engage through those formats. The expansion of digital provision should therefore complement rather than remove face-to-face and human-led opportunities through which young people can access information, learning and support.[lvi]

Inclusion is also determined by **who has the power to decide how AI is introduced**. Despite the growing impact of AI on young people's education, public services, civic participation and everyday lives, young people and civil society remain underrepresented in AI governance processes. Young people are often positioned as **users or recipients** of AI systems rather than as participants in determining their design, deployment and evaluation. This imbalance is particularly relevant in youth work, a field that is itself based on participation, empowerment and the recognition of young people as active contributors to decisions affecting them.[lvii]

Meaningful participation requires involving young people **before** an AI system is selected or introduced, rather than consulting them only after decisions have already been made. The Council of Europe roadmap calls for diverse young people and youth

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workers to **participate in the development and review of AI frameworks** and for structured dialogue between young people, policymakers and private-sector actors throughout the AI lifecycle. It also proposes recurring consultations among young people, youth organisations and policymakers to strengthen knowledge exchange and ensure that youth perspectives inform policy development.[lviii]

Within youth organisations, this participation can include identifying whether an AI tool responds to a genuine need, assessing potential barriers and risks, testing its accessibility and evaluating its effects on young people's experience. The youth-work sector's participatory approach provides a strong foundation for **ensuring that AI adoption is informed by young people's perspectives** rather than imposed solely through organisational or technological priorities. The Council of Europe identifies youth participation and co-creation as a cross-cutting principle for AI policy, requiring young people from diverse backgrounds to participate actively in the development, implementation and review of AI policies and technologies.[lix]

AI can therefore support more inclusive youth work only when **access to its benefits does not depend on geography, income, organisational capacity or prior digital expertise**.[lx] It must also be evaluated according to how different communities are represented and whether marginalised young people can report concerns and challenge harmful outcomes.[lxi] Most importantly, young people must be recognised not only as beneficiaries of AI-supported youth work, but as **participants with a meaningful role in deciding where, why and how AI is used**.

4. Policy pathways for responsible AI in youth work

Artificial intelligence can strengthen youth work by improving efficiency, accessibility, communication and learning opportunities, but its use can weaken quality when it replaces human judgement, reinforces inequalities or introduces risks that organisations are not equipped to manage.

Responsible adoption therefore requires more than individual caution or voluntary good practice. Youth organisations need **clear standards, practical training, sustainable resources and accountability mechanisms** that allow them to assess when AI is useful, when stronger safeguards are necessary and when it should not be used at all.

The following recommendations propose a policy approach centred on proportionality, professional responsibility, inclusion and meaningful youth participation. Their purpose is not to promote the widest possible use of AI, but to ensure that **any use within youth work supports its educational, relational and democratic mission**.

A. Establish a European framework for proportionate AI use in youth work

We recommend that the European Union and Member States develop a common framework for the responsible and proportionate use of AI in youth work.

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The framework should translate broader European principles on **human rights, transparency, fairness, accountability and data protection** into practical guidance adapted to non-formal education, youth information, outreach, participation and support services.

Not all uses of AI present the same level of risk. The framework should therefore distinguish between **low-risk applications**, such as drafting generic communication materials or supporting administrative planning, and **higher-risk uses** involving personal data, profiling, emotional support, safeguarding or decisions affecting a young person's welfare.

Youth organisations should receive clear guidance on **when AI can be used**, **which safeguards are required** and **which functions should remain entirely human-led**. The framework should also include practical examples, model organisational policies and youth-friendly explanations that can be adapted to different national and local contexts.

A proportionate approach would allow youth organisations to benefit from useful technologies without treating every application in the same way or encouraging the uncritical adoption of AI across all areas of youth work.

B. Train youth workers in practical and ethical AI literacy

We urge the European Union and Member States to recognise AI literacy as an essential component of youth-worker education and continuous professional development.

Training should not be limited to learning how to operate specific tools. Youth workers need to understand **how AI systems generate outputs**, **where their limitations lie** and **how their use may affect young people's rights, opportunities and participation**.

Professional-development programmes should combine **practical, critical and ethical competences**. They should help youth workers select appropriate tools, verify information, identify bias, protect personal data, recognise inappropriate uses and maintain professional judgement when AI contributes to an activity or service.

Training should be connected to realistic youth-work situations, including project management, communication, non-formal education, multilingual activities, accessibility and support for young people. It should also prepare youth workers to explain AI in accessible language and facilitate critical discussion with young people.

The EU should support multilingual and adaptable training modules, practical toolkits, peer-learning networks and shared libraries of youth-work resources. These opportunities should be **accessible to small and under-resourced organisations** and **should not depend only on short-term projects or individual initiative**.

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C. Protect human-led functions and professional responsibility

We call on European institutions, national authorities and youth organisations to define clearly which youth-work functions must remain under human responsibility.

AI should not replace the relationships through which youth workers build trust, interpret individual circumstances and respond to young people's emotional, social and developmental needs. **Safeguarding, counselling, crisis response, conflict mediation and decisions affecting a young person's safety or access to support should remain human-led**.

AI may assist with preparation, general information and low-risk administrative tasks, but it should not make final decisions about what a young person needs or how a sensitive situation should be handled.

Whenever AI contributes to an assessment, recommendation or service, a clearly identified professional should remain responsible for reviewing the output and determining the appropriate response. Youth workers should retain the authority to disregard automated recommendations and intervene whenever a system produces incomplete, inappropriate or potentially harmful results.

Young people should also be **informed when they are interacting with an automated system or receiving content substantially generated by AI**. They should always have the possibility of contacting a human professional and requesting human review.

D. Require risk and impact assessments before adoption

We recommend that youth organisations assess AI systems before introducing them into programmes, communication channels, educational activities or support services.

The assessment should begin by identifying the problem the organisation is trying to solve and determining **whether AI is necessary**. Organisations should also consider whether a simpler, non-AI or human-led alternative could achieve the same objective more safely and effectively.

Before adoption, youth organisations should examine **what data the tool collects**, **how that information is stored or shared**, **whether sensitive or identifiable data may be processed** and **what consequences could follow from inaccurate or biased outputs**.

The assessment should also consider accessibility, cultural and linguistic suitability, environmental impact, financial sustainability and the ability of young people to **understand and challenge** the system's use.

Higher-risk applications should require **stronger safeguards**, **documented human oversight** and **clear procedures for responding to errors or harm**. Tools used only for low-risk administrative support may require a simpler assessment, but they should still be reviewed for privacy, security and reliability.

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Risk assessment should continue after adoption. Youth organisations should monitor how the system performs in practice, document problems, collect feedback from young people and discontinue tools when their risks can no longer be managed adequately.

Public authorities should provide standard assessment templates, technical assistance and legal guidance so that small organisations are not expected to carry out complex evaluations without support.

E. Guarantee inclusive access and non-digital alternatives

We call on the European Union and Member States to ensure that the adoption of AI does not deepen inequalities between young people, communities or youth organisations.

Support for AI integration should include **access to devices**, **reliable connectivity**, **accessible software**, **staff training** and the **organisational time needed to select and evaluate tools responsibly**. Funding should not focus only on purchasing technology while overlooking the human and institutional capacity required to use it well.

Targeted assistance should be available to youth organisations operating in rural and remote areas, disadvantaged communities and settings with limited financial or digital resources. Small organisations should not be excluded from beneficial tools or training because they cannot afford subscriptions, specialist staff or advanced infrastructure.

AI-supported youth-work resources should be available in **multiple languages** and **accessible formats**. Tools and activities should be tested with young people with disabilities and with groups whose cultural, linguistic or social experiences may be poorly represented in existing systems.

Digital provision should complement rather than replace face-to-face and non-digital youth work. Young people who lack connectivity, suitable devices, digital confidence or a preference for online engagement should retain equivalent access to information, education, participation and support.

Essential youth-work opportunities **should not become dependent on expensive, privately controlled or inaccessible** AI services. Where equitable access cannot be guaranteed, organisations should provide an alternative or avoid using the tool.

F. Institutionalise youth participation and accountability

We urge EU institutions, national governments, youth organisations and technology providers to involve young people meaningfully in decisions about the use of AI in youth work.

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Young people should not be treated only as users or beneficiaries of AI-supported services. They should be recognised as **stakeholders** whose rights, opportunities and relationships may be directly affected by the technologies introduced into youth-work settings.

Participation should begin before an AI tool is selected. Young people should be able to help identify the need being addressed, question whether AI is the appropriate solution and contribute to the assessment of possible risks and benefits.

They should also **participate in testing accessibility**, **evaluating relevance**, **identifying harmful or exclusionary outputs** and **reviewing whether the tool improves their experience in practice**. Their feedback should be connected to clear organisational decisions rather than collected as a symbolic exercise.

Youth participation can be supported through advisory groups, co-design workshops, consultations, pilot activities and structured dialogue between young people, youth workers, policymakers and technology providers.

These processes should be **continuous, inclusive and transparent**. Particular efforts should be made to involve young people from disadvantaged, rural, migrant, minority and disability backgrounds, whose perspectives may otherwise be absent from decisions about AI adoption.

Accountability also requires **accessible mechanisms for complaint, explanation and redress**. Young people should know whom to contact when an AI-supported process produces an inaccurate, discriminatory or harmful result, and they should be able to request human review.

By embedding youth participation and accountability throughout the AI lifecycle, policymakers and youth organisations can improve the relevance of their decisions, strengthen democratic legitimacy and ensure that artificial intelligence is shaped with young people rather than simply introduced around them.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence can strengthen youth work when it helps organisations reduce administrative burdens, improve communication, expand accessibility and create more adaptable learning opportunities. Its value, however, should not be measured only through speed, efficiency or the number of tasks it can automate.

Quality youth work depends on **trust, empathy, professional judgement, safeguarding and meaningful participation**. These functions require human responsibility and **should not be delegated to AI**. The central question is therefore not whether youth organisations should use artificial intelligence, but **where its use genuinely improves youth work** and **where it risks weakening its human, educational and democratic foundations**.

AI can also contribute to inclusion, but only when its benefits are accessible across different communities and organisational contexts. Unequal access to devices,

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connectivity, paid services, training and technical expertise may otherwise deepen existing disparities. Inclusion also requires attention to cultural and linguistic representation, accessible alternatives and the participation of young people in decisions about the technologies introduced into youth-work settings.

A responsible approach must therefore be selective, proportionate and transparent. Youth workers need **practical and ethical AI literacy, clear organisational guidance and the authority to retain control over decisions affecting young people**. AI systems should be assessed before adoption, monitored throughout their use and discontinued when their risks cannot be managed adequately.

The future of youth work should not be defined by how widely artificial intelligence is adopted, but by how responsibly it is governed. An AI-empowered youth sector will be one that knows when technology can add value, when human judgement must prevail and how young people can help shape the systems that increasingly affect their lives. By keeping quality, inclusion and participation at the centre, policymakers and youth organisations can ensure that AI supports youth work without replacing what makes it meaningful.

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[iii] For more information: https://www.ai4youthwork.eu/en/

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