RIGHTS.AI: Children's Experiences of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Brazil

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Table of contents

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Preface

Around the world, children and young people are increasingly encountering technologies based on generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) at home, school and elsewhere via apps, bots and other digital products and services. GenAI can answer questions or respond to prompts to create new kinds of content. It can be found in dedicated apps such as ChatGPT or Copilot, or embedded in familiar platforms such as Snapchat, WhatsApp and Google Search. Schools may also deploy AI-enabled educational technology (EdTech), and mental health services are experimenting with GenAI chatbots, among many other emerging applications.

Such technological innovation stimulates children's curiosity as well as raising public concerns. As GenAI technologies evolve rapidly, policymakers are scrambling to keep up and find ways to balance innovation with protections. We have witnessed a range of international and regional AI regulations and policies being introduced, primarily from the Global North, calling for responsible and ethical development and use (e.g., by the Council of Europe, European Commission, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation and the World Economic Forum). Yet very few of these focus on children.

At the Digital Futures for Children centre (DFC), we are committed to recognising children's experiences across diverse circumstances, especially in the Global South, which is underrepresented in research. We are delighted to have partnered with researchers in Brazil, Kenya, India and Thailand to explore children's experiences of and perspectives on GenAI. With a methodology designed in cooperation with the EU Kids Online network, this is one of several reports presenting the research, in answer to four overarching questions:

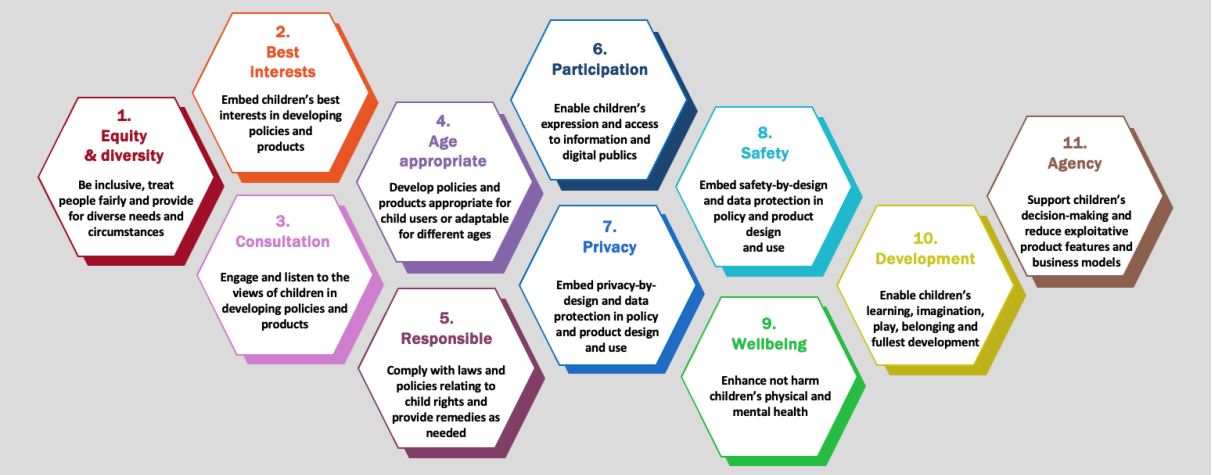
1. What are children's experiences with and perceptions of GenAI?
2. What is the potential impact of GenAI on children's rights?
3. What do children want to see in terms of GenAI regulations and protections?
4. What insights are offered by cross-country comparisons?

This work is framed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)[1] and *General comment No. 25*[2] on the digital environment. Our child rights

[1] UNICEF (1989).
[2] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021).

approach is encapsulated in the 11 principles of Child Rights by Design.[3] Taken together, these provide a holistic framework to understand children's encounters with GenAI.

Figure 1: The 11 principles of Child Rights by Design[4]



We hope the findings are of value to the policymakers, educators, regulators and others now designing policies for GenAI that impact on children, as well as the civil society actors and other organisations that advocate for children's rights. Ultimately, our role is to contribute to an evidence base that can be used to empower children, parents and educators by increasing awareness and understanding of Gen AI technologies.

Prof Sonia Livingstone

Digital Futures for Children centre

Dr Mariya Stoilova

Digital Futures for Children centre

[3] Livingstone & Pothong (2023).
[4] Livingstone & Pothong (2023).

Executive summary

This report presents findings from the Brazilian chapter of the RIGHTS.AI project. Based on interviews with 19 children and young people (aged 13-17) from diverse socioeconomic, racial and educational contexts, it investigates how they experience and understand generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), focusing on their usage practices, rights awareness and digital agency.

The participants mainly accessed GenAI tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Meta AI and Character.AI on mobile phones, using them for schoolwork, entertainment and creative expression. However, these technologies also reveal and amplify existing inequalities, exposing children and young people to risks such as sexual deepfakes, inappropriate content, surveillance and emotional or academic dependence on GenAI. The experiences reported highlight an ambiguous use of GenAI: while the participants recognised its potential to support learning and creativity, they also expressed mistrust and concern about misinformation, privacy and its impact on their mental health and education.

Key findings

- **Use of GenAI**: The participants used GenAI tools across educational, recreational and social domains. Applications such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, Meta AI and Character.AI were common, with usage spanning academic support, creative exploration, having fun, obtaining health information and receiving personal advice. GenAI was mainly accessed on mobile phones, but some participants also accessed it on computers. Some tools, such as ChatGPT and

Character.AI, were actively chosen by the participants, while others, such as Meta AI, were used because they were embedded in the platforms they were already using. Incorporating automated AI-based responses and search functionalities within these services contributed to the normalisation of GenAI in everyday digital practices.

- **Equity and diversity:** The use of GenAI reflects and amplifies existing social inequalities: adolescents from private schools, typically from higher socioeconomic classes, showed greater critical understanding and questioning of GenAI outputs while those from public schools, often from lower-income backgrounds, tended to use the tools pragmatically, without questioning.
- **Best interests:** The participants highlighted the need to balance the benefits of GenAI in education and creativity with the risks of overdependence, misinformation and emotional harm, stressing that GenAI should support, not replace, genuine learning, personal development and human connection. They also discussed the impacts of GenAI on the labour market.
- **Consultation:** The right to be heard was absent in the participants' experiences with GenAI. While they shared thoughtful ideas – such as adapting AI language to children's communication styles – there are currently no formal mechanisms for their inclusion in AI design or governance.
- **Age appropriate:** Many of the participants reported encountering content that was not suitable for their age, including sexualised material or complex language, and suggested that GenAI tools should offer differentiated

experiences based on age groups, to ensure safety and accessibility.

- **Responsible:** The participants agreed that GenAI developers and platforms should be held accountable for harms such as misinformation or unsafe content.
- **Participation:** Those who were better equipped digitally were more likely to explore, create, participate and express themselves using GenAI, but even those with low digital and AI literacy were able to use it to express themselves.
- **Privacy**: Most of the participants lacked a clear understanding of how their data was collected and used by GenAI, with some feeling resigned to privacy risks, reflecting how normalised data extraction had become.
- **Safety:** The participants expressed concerns about the misuse of GenAI for cyberbullying, deepfakes and gender-based violence, reporting incidents of manipulated images and offensive content circulating in schools and online.
- **Wellbeing:** Some of the participants sought advice on mental and physical health or personal issues; however, they recognised that AI provided generic, impersonal responses, sometimes reinforcing stereotypes or causing distress, and emphasised that human care remained irreplaceable.
- **Development:** The participants acknowledged that while GenAI could support learning and creativity, overreliance on it might undermine the development of cognitive skills and critical thinking, with many peers resorting to copying answers without genuine understanding. This concern arose in both public and private schools.

- **Agency:** Although some of the participants demonstrated critical awareness by double-checking GenAI responses and recognising potential biases or manipulation, many used limited or counterfeit versions of AI without realising.
- **Variation in schools' approaches to GenAI**: The participants reported that some teachers encouraged its use, others forbade it, and many did not understand it or provide any critique on how it worked. In general, the decision on whether or not to allow GenAI use for schoolwork was left to the teachers. Many of the participants only used GenAI in school contexts, as EdTech companies gradually incorporated the tools into their products.

Recommendations

- **Governance must institutionalise Child Rights by Design principles**. Brazil's AI plan should include explicit references to children's rights, in accordance with guaranteeing the interests and rights of children with absolute priority. Oversight bodies must involve education, technology, justice and child protection sectors. There must be a mandate for child rights impact assessments (CRIAs) for GenAI. Mechanisms should be created for ongoing consultation with children, in schools and online. Companies should present evidence of the positive impact of AI in solutions aimed at children, such as in education.
- **Regulation must identify and reduce risks**. Brazilian age rating must evolve to include conversational GenAI and other chatbots. Data protection impact assessments (DPIAs) must address children's specific vulnerabilities.

- **Education must include AI literacy**. AI must be introduced as part of the Brazilian National Common Curricular Base (Base Nacional Comum Curricular, BNCC) in basic education. Digital and AI literacy programmes should be provided for educators, children and parents, with the launch of public campaigns to inform families about the risks and benefits of GenAI.
- **Corporate accountability must be enforceable**, ensuring Child Rights by Design principles guide design, content and interface development.
- **Equity and accessibility must guide implementation**, ensuring compliance with accessibility standards, including neurodiverse-friendly design. Children from underrepresented groups must be involved – Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous, rural and those with a disability – in development and testing processes, with platforms built that reflect Brazil's linguistic and cultural diversity.
- **Language must reflect context and inclusion**. The participants reported that GenAI used adult, foreign or formal language. Development in Brazilian Portuguese and language diversity is needed, with training models on public, diverse datasets that reflect real children's voices and experiences in Brazil.

Country context

In 2025, Brazil's population exceeded 213 million, with over 53 million children and young people aged 0-19 – approximately 25 per cent of the total population.[5] In 2024, around 24.5 million children and young people aged 9-17 were internet users in Brazil, accounting for 93 per cent of this age group.[6] Mobile phones were the primary access used by 98 per cent of connected children. Device ownership varied by age and socioeconomic status, rising to 93 per cent among 15- to 17-year-olds and 97 per cent among children in high-income households, but dropping to 67 per cent among 9- to 10-year-olds and 77 per cent among low-income groups.[7]

The 2024 ICT in Education survey reported that currently, 96 per cent of schools have internet access and 89 per cent are equipped with computers, but that only 55 per cent of students use computers in educational activities in schools. [8] The 2024 Meaningful Connectivity Index also revealed that children in rural areas faced digital exclusion due to less infrastructure and high service costs.[9] Socioeconomic and regional inequalities continue to shape children's access to education, healthcare and digital technologies, significantly influencing how they engage with generative artificial intelligence (GenAI).

Inequalities have also been observed among public schools, including those administered by state and municipal agencies. To provide students with access to internet-connected computers is one of the main challenges faced by educational institutions. While 84 percent of state-run schools have computers and internet access available for students to use in educational activities, only 47 percent of municipal-run institutions have this connectivity capability. Although 96 per cent of schools have internet access, municipal and state schools tend to have poorer connection quality than private schools, with 23 percent of municipal schools and 14 per cent of state schools operating at speeds of up to 50 Mbps.[10] Moreover, only 24 per cent of teachers who teach in regular public schools participate in continuous professional development (CPD) in digital technologies against 39 per cent of teachers who teach in private schools, with even greater availability of CPD in technical public schools.[11] These disparities reveal that while access to education has expanded, the quality and

[5] IBGE (2023).
[6] NIC.br (2024b).
[7] NIC.br (2024b).
[8] NIC.br (2025).
[9] NIC.br (2024a).
[10] NIC.br (2025).
[11] NIC.br (2025).

conditions under which students learn remain uneven, with considerable implications for equity.

During the pandemic, many schools entered asymmetrical agreements with education technology (EdTech) provided by Big Tech companies (especially Google and Microsoft) – and often without transparency.[12] While these EdTech platforms are frequently promoted as 'free', large volumes of student and teacher data are collected without sufficient public accountability. This raises further concerns with the introduction of GenAI technologies.[13] According to the 2024 ICT in Education survey,[14] 74 per cent of schools were using educational platforms, with tools like Google (Google Meet, Google for Education) cited by 59 per cent of school leaders, and Microsoft Teams cited by 24 per cent. Google and Microsoft EdTech integrate GenAI into their educational platforms – Google leverages Gemini and other AI tools in Google for Education while Microsoft offers 365 Copilot in Teams for Education, as well as other AI features.

The ICT Education Survey 2024 provided data on the use of AI in schools. Among teachers, 43 per cent report using GenAI in lesson preparation, most frequently to create questions (78 per cent), generate texts, images, or videos (68 per cent), design lesson plans (65 per cent), and develop teaching materials (64 per cent). Only 19 per cent have discussed with students how to use such applications, including ChatGPT, Copilot, and Gemini, in school activities. Meanwhile, 33 per cent have taught pupils how to identify errors, misinformation, or bias in AI-generated outputs, and 54 per cent have discussed the impacts of GenAI on the production of content, information, and knowledge. In addition, 40 per cent of schools have established rules for the use of GenAI by teachers and students, and 24 per cent employ AI-based assessment systems that provide pupils with personalised, automated feedback on their performance. With regard to students, 37 per cent report using GenAI platforms for schoolwork, with adoption highest among secondary school pupils (70 per cent), compared with 39 per cent in upper primary and 15 per cent in lower primary education.[15]

Brazil's legal framework for children's rights is supported by several laws. The Statute of the Child and Adolescent (Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente, ECA)[16] guarantees children's rights to privacy, dignity and access to information, and serves as a foundation for interpreting their rights in digital spaces. The General Data Protection Law (Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados Pessoais, LGPD)[17] classifies children's data as sensitive and requires parental consent for its processing. Additionally, the National Council for the

[12] CGI.br (2022).
[13] Samson & Pothong (2025).
[14] NIC.br (2024b).
[15] NIC.br (2025).
[16] Brasil (1990).
[17] Brasil (2018).

Rights of the Child and Adolescent (Conselho Nacional dos Direitos da Criança e do Adolescente, CONANDA) Resolution No. 245/2024[18] emphasises the ethical, inclusive and safe use of digital technologies, and promotes shared responsibility among the state, families, businesses and civil society. Resolution No. 257/2024[19] establishes the general guidelinesof the National Policy for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents in the Digital Environment, and mentions that AI models should contribute to the construction of inclusive and accessible future scenarios for children and adolescents. The Brazilian Civil Rights Framework for the Internet[20] (Marco Civil da Internet) (Law No. 12.965/2014, Article 29) provides that users shall have the freedom to choose software programs on their devices in order to exercise parental control over content they deem inappropriate for their underage children, provided that the principles of the ECA are respected.[21]

Regarding regulation on AI, the Artificial Intelligence Bill (PL 2338/2023[22]) proposes a risk-based, human-centred framework for AI governance.[23] Although it focuses on children's rights, it includes references to protection and vulnerability, particularly in Article 15, which highlights the potential for the system to negatively impact the development as well as the physical, psychological or moral integrity of children. Article 13 also prohibits the development, implementation and use of AI systems aimed at enabling the production, dissemination or facilitation of material that depicts or characterises the sexual abuse or exploitation of children. Nonetheless, the current draft presents preliminary risk assessment as 'good practice' rather than as an obligation. Similarly, PL 3821/2024[24] aims to criminalise the creation and dissemination of AI-generated sexual content involving children, recognising the specific risks posed by deepfake technologies.

In relation to public policy, in 2025 Brazil launched its *Brazilian artificial intelligence plan 2024-2028* (Plano Brasileiro de inteligência artificial [PBIA] *2024-2028*),[25] which identifies education as a priority sector and commits to ethical AI development, workforce training, environmental sustainability and digital sovereignty. Despite including five

[18] Brasil (2024a).
[19] Brasil (2024c).
[20] Brasil (2014).
[21] Brasil (2024).
[22] Brasil (2023).
[23] The AI Bill currently under discussion in Brazil is a comprehensive bill that shares similarities with the EU AI Act and adopts a risk-based approach. Alignment with European legislation has raised concerns regarding the 'Brussels effect', with some researchers warning that this may pose a risk (Silva & Cabral, 2025), while others argue that the proposal positions the country on a par with more developed economies seeking to carve out a distinctive path in AI regulation (Mendes & Kira, 2025).
[24] Brasil (2024b).
[25] Brasil (2025b).

education-focused targets, however, the plan lacks specific measures aimed at safeguarding children's rights in the context of GenAI.

In terms of policies for technology use in schools, Brazil lacks a national policy, even though the Ministry of Education (Ministério da Educação, MEC) was involved in the PBIA. The rapid and unregulated integration of GenAI into educational platforms has raised concerns regarding data privacy, information bias and misinformation.[26] Concerns around screen time and children's wellbeing have also gained prominence. In 2025, Decree 12.385/2025 regulated Law No. 15.100/2025,[27] restricting mobile phone use in primary and secondary schools to pedagogical purposes only. Resolution CNE/CEB No. 2/2025,[28] from the National Council on Education (Conselho Nacional de Educação) and the Chamber of Basic Education (Câmara de Educação Básica), establishes the national operational guidelines on the use of digital devices in school spaces and the curricular integration of digital and media education. The Resolution mentions that, when implementing digital and media education, education networks should teach about the understanding of algorithms, the use of data for machine training, digital platforms and the different forms of AI, as well as their ethical and social implications.[29]

Bill No. 2628/2022, that provides for the protection of children and adolescents in digital environments, proposes enhanced protective measures for children and adolescents in digital environments. Key provisions include default implementation of strict data collection settings on digital platforms; mandatory provision of simple and effective parental control tools for child-directed services; a ban on loot boxes and child-targeted advertising; and the establishment of reporting mechanisms to enable the removal of content that violates children's rights, even without a court order[30]. Other regulations aimed at protecting children and adolescents are currently under discussion.[31]

On 26 June 2025 the Supreme Federal Court (Supremo Tribunal Federal, STF) declared Article 19 of the Brazilian Civil Rights Framework for the Internet (Marco Civil da Internet, Law No. 12.965/2014) partially unconstitutional.[32] As a result, content involving any form of sexual abuse or exploitation of minors is now classified as 'serious content', requiring digital platforms to act immediately and to systemically remove it, regardless of judicial or extrajudicial notification. In such cases, platforms bear direct and strict liability and

[26] NIC.br (2024b).
[27] Brasil (2025a).
[28] Brasil (2025c).
[29] Brasil (2025).
[30] Brasil (2022). Bill was approved by the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate and now goes to the President for his signature.
[31] Following the social mobilisation sparked by an influencer's complaint, 35 new bills were introduced while 75 others on the same subject had already been left stalled in the Chamber of Deputies (Núcleo, 2025).
[32] Brasil (2025d).

must adopt proactive measures to prevent, detect and remove this material, under penalty of civil liability.

At the international level, Brazil participates in global discussions on AI ethics and governance through forums such as UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), the G20 and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). Yet, it has not established a multisectoral governance model that actively includes children and adolescents as stakeholders in AI policymaking. As highlighted in the UNESCO Readiness assessment report,[33] there is a pressing need to embed values such as equity, transparency and child participation into national AI strategies to ensure future technologies promote inclusive, rights-based development for children.

Methodology

Study overview

This qualitative study is part of a multicountry research initiative coordinated by the Digital Futures for Children centre (DFC) at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in collaboration with the EU Kids Online network. It investigates how children and young people aged 13-17 experience and understand GenAI, focusing on their usage practices, rights awareness and digital agency.[34]

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the LSE Research Ethics Committee (Ref: 439180), and the study adhered to institutional, national and international ethical guidelines for research with children. Age-appropriate informed consent procedures were followed: both child participants and their guardians provided signed consent after being informed about the study's purpose, their rights and the voluntary nature of participation. Safeguards were in place to ensure child protection, privacy and data security, in compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Brazilian Law No. 13.709/2018 – General Data Protection Law (Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados Pessoais, LGPD). All researchers were trained in ethical practices and child safeguarding protocols, with additional support available from the DFC team.

[33] UNESCO (2025).
[34] For further details about the methodology, see Stoilova et al. (2025).

Sample and recruitment

The study included 19 children and young people aged 13-17, all of whom reported having at least occasional experience using GenAI tools. The sample was purposively constructed to ensure diversity across gender (approximately equal numbers of boys and girls), age group (13-14, 15-16, 17), socioeconomic status (SES) (inferred through school type and area of residence) and GenAI experience (see Table 1). Most participants were in the state of São Paulo, with only one exception – a town in Rio Grande do Sul. The study was limited to one state in order to make in-person interviews feasible. Although a participant originally from Rio Grande do Sul was included, the interview was conducted while they were temporarily in São Paulo during the data collection period.

The racial categories used by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, IBGE)[35] are based on self-declared ethnic background. These classifications include 'branco' (White), 'preto' (Black), 'pardo' (mixed race), 'amarelo' (Asian) and 'indígena' (Indigenous). To support cross-contextual understanding, we have proposed some approximate equivalences to English-language categories, which may also include the description 'mixed race'. Although direct equivalence is not possible due to differing historical and sociocultural contexts, tentative parallels can be drawn to facilitate comparative analysis.

The Statute of the Child and Adolescent (Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente, ECA) establishes a legal distinction between children and adolescents based on age and developmental stage. According to Article 2 of the ECA, a child is defined as an individual up to the age of 12 while an adolescent refers to those between the ages of 12 and 18. This differentiation reflects varying levels of autonomy, cognitive maturity and legal responsibility, with adolescents subject to certain forms of accountability under specific circumstances, always in accordance with their evolving capacities. The subjects of the sample would be considered adolescents under Brazilian law. However, when addressing children's rights within international frameworks, it is standard to adopt the definition provided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC),[36] which considers every individual under the age of 18 to be a child.

Recruitment strategies varied, including snowball sampling through personal networks, outreach to schools, community-based organisations and a creative industries vocational school. Initial screening conversations were held with interested participants

[35] IBGE (2022).
[36] UNICEF (1989).

to confirm eligibility and variation in experience with GenAI tools. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identities.

In Brazil, the population is often divided into five socioeconomic classes labelled A to E, based on the Critério Brasil developed by the Brazilian Association of Research Companies (Associação Brasileira de Empresas de Pesquisa, ABEP).[37] Class A includes upper-middle or upper class; class B represents the affluent middle class; class C covers a broad range of lower-middle to emerging working-class families; class D corresponds to the working poor; and class E represents the most economically vulnerable group, which might be compared to the precarious working class or underclass.

[37] ABEP (2024).

Table 2: Country sample (Brazil)

Participant (pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Ethics group	Residence	SES	Type of school	GenAI used
Joice	13	F	Black	Village	C	Public	Meta AI, PolyAI, Canva AI, standalone and embedded.
Marcos	14	M	Mixed race (Black and White)	City – urban periphery	D	Public	ChatGPT, Copilot, (standalone), Meta AI (embedded)
Nelson	14	M	White	City – central zone	A	Private	Copilot, ChatGPT, Gemini, DeepAI (standalone)
Lorena	14	F	Mixed race (Black and White)	City – urban periphery	C	Public	ChatGPT, Character.AI (standalone), Meta AI (embedded)
Horacio	14	M	White	Town	C	Private	Gemini, Meta AI (embedded), ChatGPT (standalone)
Veronica	14	F	Black	City – urban periphery	D	Public	ChatGPT, Gemini, Luzia (embedded)
Hugo	15	M	White	City – central zone	A	Private	ChatGPT (standalone), Meta AI, Vocal Remover, CapCut (embedded)
Renata	15	F	Black	City – urban periphery	B	Private	ChatGPT, Copilot, CapCut (all standalone)
Enzo	15	M	White	City – central zone	B	Private	ChatGPT, Midjourney, Meta AI, Character AI, Alexa (embedded and standalone)
Ester	16	F	Mixed race (Black and White)	Town	B	Private	ChatGPT, Midjourney, Gemini, Meta AI, Character AI, Emochi, PolyAI, Canva AI, Dopple.ai (standalone)
Luna	16	F	White	City – central zone	A	Private	ChatGPT (standalone), Meta AI (embedded)

Sandra	16	F	White	Town	A	Private	DeepSeek, ChatGPT (standalone), Pixlr, MidJourney (Discord), Notion AI (embedded).
Paco	16	M	White	Town	B	Private	ChatGPT, DeepSeek, Gemini (standalone), Death by AI (video game)
Luan	16	M	White	City – urban periphery	D	Public	ChatGPT, Gemini (standalone), CapCut (embedded)
Jean	17	M	Mixed race (Black and White)	City – urban periphery	C	Public	ChatGPT, Itacaunas HQ IA, Copilot (standalone), Meta AI (embedded)
Mayumi	17	F	Asian	Town	A	Private	ChatGPT, Gemini (standalone), unnamed image-generating AI, Meta AI (embedded)
Oscar	17	M	White	Town	C	Public	ChatGPT, Midjourney, DeepSeek, Character.AI, DeepAI (standalone), Meta AI, CapCut (embedded)
Breno	17	M	Indigenous	City – central zone	B	Private	ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot (standalone)
Kazuo	17	M	Mixed race (Asian and White)	City – central zone	A	Private	Copilot, ChatGPT, unspecified AI for programming, Arduino (standalone)

Preparation and materials

All research materials, including consent forms, information sheets and interview guides, were developed in collaboration with the country partners and translated into local languages.[38] Researchers identified and incorporated local resources on child online safety and rights to share with the participants. Showcards and interview aids from the GenAI showcards booklet were adapted to fit the national context.

Data collection

Interviews were conducted primarily in person at settings convenient and familiar to the children and young people (e.g., their home or school), with online interviews used as a backup. Conversations were designed to last approximately one hour, with breaks allowed as needed. Interviews followed a semi-structured guide, encouraging open-ended responses while covering a core set of themes. Where appropriate and with consent, screen interactions with GenAI apps were recorded or documented through photographs. Care was taken to anonymise all identifiable information.

The participants were encouraged to demonstrate their use of GenAI tools, and interviews included observational elements to capture interaction patterns, skills and reactions. Interviewers followed up on responses using non-leading prompts and were trained to monitor the child's comfort and wellbeing throughout.

Data management

Audio recordings were securely stored and uploaded to a protected folder provided by the DFC on LSE's OneDrive. Interviewers also completed post-interview background forms and field notes. Transcripts were produced through GDPR-compliant automated transcription services, and translations into English were provided where necessary. Personally identifiable data (e.g., consent forms) were stored separately from research data.

Analysis

Data analysis followed a common coding scheme co-developed by the DFC in consultation with all country partners. The initial coding framework was based on a framework of 11 Child Rights by Design principles,39 and their application to the research data was refined

[38] See Stoilova et al. (2025).
[39] Livingstone & Pothong (2023).

through collective feedback and pilot coding. Country researchers were responsible for summarising findings under each thematic code and contributing illustrative quotations. This collaborative approach ensured consistency across national contexts while allowing for local specificity. Each research team completed the same coding template, supporting analytical consistency and thematic integration across the international dataset.

Findings

Children's use and understanding of GenAI

As GenAI becomes more integrated into digital life, the experiences of Brazilian children and adolescents offer insights into how young users interact with this technology. This analysis is based on the participants' reflections on their knowledge, understanding and critical awareness of GenAI. The findings reveal a spectrum of experiences, reflecting the broader issues of digital and AI literacy, social context and personal agency.

The participants used GenAI tools across educational, recreational and social domains. Applications like ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, Meta AI and Character.AI were common, with usage spanning academic support, creative exploration, having fun, obtaining health information and receiving personal advice. They generally learned about GenAI through school, friends, social media influencers and family. Certain tools were actively sought by the participants (like ChatGPT and Character.AI), whereas others were employed due to their integration into platforms they were already using (like Meta AI, for example).

GenAI was mainly accessed on mobile phones, but some of the participants also accessed it on computers. In general, GenAI usage for personal purposes was via both in-web browsers and download (e.g., ChatGPT, DeepSeek, Character.AI), while others were embedded in programmes already in use (e.g., Gemini, Meta AI). Many of the participants also used web versions in mobile browsers. Others were accessed through embedded features in media platforms used in educational settings. As GenAI functionalities are increasingly embedded as default features across widely used platforms, this pervasive and often non-optional integration contributes to the gradual normalisation and invisibility of GenAI in routine digital practices, a trend that carries significant implications for both user agency and the broader governance of emerging technologies. However, at the time of data collection, many of the tools had not yet been set as default features by some platforms.

GenAI use was both guided – via schools or teachers – and exploratory, with some participants experimenting on their own. In some cases, such as assistance with homework, usage was intentional and reflective; in others, it was more casual and driven by fun or peer influence.

Most of the participants saw GenAI primarily as a tool for homework support. Tools like ChatGPT, Copilot and Meta AI were among the most frequently mentioned, particularly for tasks such as research, drafting assignments and finding quick answers to questions. A common idea was that GenAI was a tool that provided concise answers without the need to consult many different websites and sources of information.

The participants highlighted how GenAI tools enhanced their learning by providing detailed explanations or creating images for school projects. They would often praise GenAI's helpful role in guiding them through schoolwork, such as providing step-by-step solutions to maths problems.

Several participants reported using GenAI as a form of personal entertainment. The use of GenAI to create images, videos, stories, video and photo editing and other types of creative content also appeared frequently. These interactions reveal how GenAI is incorporated into hobbies and personal, non-school-related productions. Some participants used GenAI with a particular purpose, such as using ChatGPT to create RPG character sheets.[40] Others liked to interact with GenAI in order to test the system's limits by writing elaborate prompts, to see how the system answered and what it could do. They engaged in a sort of exploration in order to amuse themselves. Others tended to limit their GenAI use mostly to academic purposes.

The participants' understanding of how AI worked varied greatly, with some knowing a lot about specific technical details and others having little or no information. They also differed in their digital and AI literacy skills.

Digital literacy is defined as the combination of skills, knowledge and attitudes that enable individuals to engage with digital media in a critical, responsible and creative manner.[41] It goes beyond the mere technical use of digital tools and encompasses a broad range of competencies. These include technical and operational skills, the ability to navigate and process information effectively and the capacity for online interaction and communication. Digital literacy involves the creation and production of digital

[40] Documents used in role-playing games (RPGs) to record and organise essential information about a player's character. The character sheet serves as both a reference during the game and as a creative tool for developing the character's story and personality.
[41] UNICEF (2024).

content as well as the development of critical thinking and evaluative skills to assess digital information with discernment and accuracy.[42]

The European Commission and OECD[43] considers AI literacy the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable individuals to engage, create, manage and design AI in a critical, ethical and informed way. The concept is structured around four key domains. 'Engaging with AI' focuses on recognising when AI is being used, understanding how it works and evaluating the accuracy and relevance of its outputs. 'Creating with AI' involves using AI tools as partners in creative processes, while considering ownership, fairness and responsible use. 'Managing AI' is about making thoughtful choices regarding when and how to use AI systems to support human tasks, while maintaining human oversight and ethical values. Finally, 'Designing AI' empowers learners to explore how AI systems are built, how data and design choices affect outcomes and how AI can be shaped to serve society responsibly without causing harm.[44]

All the participants demonstrated the ability to access digital tools independently and achieve desired results. They navigated between different platforms, showing familiarity with interfaces and modes of use. Many reported that their use had improved over time.

The participants' evaluation of information generated by GenAI varied considerably, influenced in large part by their level of understanding – or lack thereof – regarding how GenAI operated. This understanding directly affected their confidence in the reliability of AI-generated responses. While some exhibited a high degree of AI literacy, demonstrating technical awareness of mechanisms such as database querying, information retrieval and word frequency modelling, others revealed misconceptions or possessed only a limited conceptual grasp of how such technologies functioned.

All the participants demonstrated at least a basic awareness of GenAI as a tool that could answer questions and provide assistance. Some showed a more advanced understanding, explaining that GenAI worked by analysing large datasets or that it could be trained to produce more refined results – although only a few could describe these technical aspects in detail, indicating higher levels of AI literacy. In some cases, the participants were able to distinguish between human and artificial cognition. But even among those with greater proficiency, uncertainties remained about how GenAI actually worked – such as whether it relied on pre-loaded databases or performed live internet searches. Some participants used GenAI to support their schoolwork, and they were aware that the system could make mistakes and might generate inaccurate or false

[42] Vissenberg et al. (2022).
[43] European Commission & OECD (2025).
[44] European Commission & OECD (2025).

information. As a result, they tended to be cautious, often cross-checking facts with other sources to ensure accuracy.

Socioeconomic status was a relevant factor when measuring participants' AI literacy and familiarity with tech jargon. Children from middle to high socioeconomic backgrounds often showed deeper and more critical understanding of the technical mechanisms and its limitations, which led them to perceive the systems with greater scepticism regarding what GenAI could truly do for them. Those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds generally lacked this type of critical view because they couldn't often grasp how these systems operated. They tended to use GenAI in a more pragmatic way, placing greater trust in the results.

Some participants from the public education system were currently enrolled in courses related to the field of technology and showed a firmer grasp on the technical aspects of GenAI:

> ***I don't know how I could define AI, but I do know that there is a training process in which you provide it with information so that it can learn. From the database that the AI has, you're able to ask questions and it can provide you with answers based on the information which it was given. (Sandra, 16)***

However, the public school participants seemed to have lower GenAI literacy as a whole.

Certain participants described GenAI as a convenient search or productivity tool but did not articulate deeper insights about its inner workings or the structures that governed its use. They understood how the tool could be used (to ask questions), but had limited awareness of how these systems were built.

Several perceived GenAI as comparable to a typical search engine, such as Google, and often assumed that it acted as a substitute for the research process usually carried out by humans. This reflects a belief that the system collects and synthesises information with the same discernment and critical reasoning as a person:

> ***It screenshots your question, Googles it, and along with what it finds on Google it writes up an answer ... it does all of that very quickly. (Horacio, 14)***

Just a few participants from public schools noted that these tools could provide misleading or incomplete answers, but they were not sure why this happened. They discovered the errors either because a teacher corrected them or because they had some prior knowledge of the subject. Certain participants had no grasp about how GenAI produced responses:

> ***I have no clue how AI operates. (Veronica, 14)***

Some participants showed a limited or confused understanding, associating GenAI with solar panels and electricity:

> ***I think [AI] works through electricity, and also sunlight. I see some panels on people's roofs which conduct energy from the sun; this energy goes through wires and connects things [electronic devices] here, like Alexa. (Marcos, 14)***

While electricity and solar panels were indeed essential for enabling GenAI to function, this participant was unable to offer a more detailed explanation of how electrical energy connected to devices or how this led to GenAI generating responses. These answers reflect a limited level of AI literacy, as this participant's understanding was confined to the hardware, without grasping how the software operated, how outputs were produced or where the system retrieved its information from.

There were differences among the participants in their critical thinking and deeper comprehension of GenAI's social, emotional and environmental impact – some saw GenAI as an impressive tool that would revolutionise life while others were more cautious about its role in society.

This highlights the need for AI literacy that encompasses both technological and human dimensions. Furthermore, it is essential that all citizens understand the role of humans in AI, including its development and control.[45]

Despite these individual perspectives, a common thread in the interviews was the participants' openness to exploring AI's capabilities. Whether for education, entertainment or personal curiosity, most of these young users demonstrated adaptability and a keen interest in integrating GenAI into their daily routines. However, they were ambiguous towards GenAI, perceiving it as a useful yet potentially problematic tool.

Equity and diversity

While the participants shared a general sense that GenAI could help reduce barriers and foster inclusion, there were differences in how deeply they understood these issues. Some reflected on harmful content, while others saw GenAI as an almost magical solution without considering its broader implications. Others believed that human solutions were better than those that GenAI could provide.

[45] Council of Europe (2022).

A theme among most of the participants was the belief that GenAI had significant potential to support people with disabilities. For many, the use of GenAI in scenarios such as transcribing speech for children with hearing loss or supporting people with limited mobility was seen as a positive step towards inclusion:

> ***I think AI could be really cool for someone with hearing loss, because it's a way for the child to know what's going on. Especially if we're talking about conversations in the real world, which are spoken more often than written. (Nelson, 14)***

One participant expanded on this by expressing hope for GenAI's development in healthcare and support for neurodivergent children. Some extended the conversation beyond disability, imagining GenAI's potential in areas like medical prosthetics.

The interviews suggest that the participants focused more on the positive potential of GenAI and saw few downsides, thinking that its use for disabilities was perfect, and suggesting that making more tools free would further promote inclusivity. But various participants highlighted that while GenAI could be beneficial, it should ideally be mediated by a human presence to ensure reliability and fairness.

One participant expressed concern that AI could malfunction:

> ***I think that it would be better to have alternatives to AI aids when it comes to helping people with disabilities. The AI might short-circuit and wrongly translate one thing as another ... it might think a joke is actually a slur. (Horacio, 14)***

Comments such as this suggest that overreliance on GenAI could contribute to the social isolation of already vulnerable demographics, such as children with disabilities. There was a caveat to its use, which was the fact that GenAI might mistranslate or misinterpret spoken language, leading to conflict or making the user feel ostracised.

The participants also showed some critical awareness, noting that while GenAI could promote inclusion, it might also carry biases that disadvantaged those who did not fit normative standards. One participant expressed concern about GenAI being used to bully peers, reflecting an understanding of how exclusion and harm could also emerge.

The impacts of GenAI on equity and diversity in society were not widely recognised by the participants. Just a small group showed a deeper critical reflection on other dimensions, for example, that GenAI was not neutral and might be shaped by corporate interests and political biases. Breno (17) was the only participant who stated that GenAI could have a potential bias in gender and race, and only Hugo (15) mentioned

environmental impacts. The collection of personal data, and the possibility of AI presenting biases based on this data, did not appear to be a spontaneous concern, as many were unclear about what happened to the data provided.

Another point regarding equity concerns gender inequalities. GenAI has been shown to have the potential to intensify pre-existing gender inequalities and create new forms of gender-based harms against women.[46] These tools can be exploited to produce deepfake pornography, synthetic harassment and image-based abuse, targeting women and girls in ways that damage their reputation, privacy and wellbeing.[47]

While most of the male participants also acknowledged misuse of GenAI, these concerns were more often framed as general risks, whereas the female participants' testimonies directly engaged with the gendered dimensions of harm. We observed that discourse concerning the dangers of deepfake sexual images and the broader fear of victimisation through GenAI image manipulation was more prevalent among the female participants. This group appeared particularly aware that the widespread accessibility of such technologies among their peers increased their vulnerability to potential victimisation.

The number of so-called 'nudifying/nudification' apps/platforms has grown considerably over the past year, as evidenced by an increase in public reports to the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) and by the sheer proliferation of such sites online. These platforms typically allow users to upload images of clothed individuals, which are then processed to generate manipulated depictions of those individuals without clothing or in sexual situations.[48]

Episodes of cyberbullying involving deepfake images depicting children in sexual situations were mentioned by both the male and female participants (they had read news about it); while the male participants acknowledged the severity of such occurrences and condemned the availability of these kinds of GenAI tools, the female participants demonstrated deeper levels of relatability to the victims in their reports.[49]

The issue of language was also raised as a barrier to inclusion. Technology can exclude users in a variety of ways: the language used in interfaces, the complexity or steep learning curve of certain features and the absence of accessibility prevent individuals from engaging with products, despite their potential interest or need.[50] One participant expressed concern that GenAI often functioned better for adults or in English,

[46] Chowdhury & Lakshmi (2023).
[47] Chowdhury & Lakshmi (2023).
[48] IWF (2024).
[49] Di Silvestro & Iurissevich (2024).
[50] World Economic Forum (2022).

suggesting that such technologies might reflect implicit biases and fail to adequately accommodate the needs of younger or linguistically diverse users.

Access to GenAI should enable children to exercise agency, make informed choices and have their voices heard, with an emphasis on holistic and equitable approaches to digital inclusion. This entails offering GenAI that works better in other languages, ensuring it is culturally relevant and appropriate for children who do not speak English.[51]

These findings emphasise the importance of recognising children's diverse circumstances, ensuring that GenAI is inclusive and non-discriminatory. Different children have different needs shaped by their social and economic contexts, and failing to account for this diversity risks reinforcing existing inequalities rather than addressing them.

Best interests

The interviews showed that the participants actively weighed up the advantages and disadvantages of GenAI, and many demonstrated an awareness of their needs. They were offered a series of scenarios to reflect both the promise and complexity of engaging with GenAI. Several noted that GenAI technologies could support learning and enhance educational engagement. Paco (16), for example, explained that he used GenAI tools such as Copilot to complete homework, which, in turn, boosted his confidence – an indication that these tools, when appropriately integrated, might serve to empower learners and advance their development. Another participant reported that their writing improved after interacting with characters from Character.AI.

However, the participants also expressed concerns that illustrate the need to carefully balance benefits with potential harms. A number reflected on the possibility that overreliance on GenAI might undermine genuine learning. Mayumi (17) cautioned that excessive use could lead to copying rather than understanding. Another participant succinctly stated that if you used it too much, you didn't learn; but if you used it right, it helped – thus articulating the tension between assistance and dependency. These trade-offs raise important questions about how to ensure that GenAI tools are deployed in ways that uphold, rather than inadvertently compromise, children's best interests.

Jean (17) identified emotional and cognitive benefits, observing that GenAI could promote rational decision-making by preventing impulsive reactions, thereby contributing positively to children's psychological wellbeing. Veronica (14) reported that when she was in trouble, she asked for help and advice from GenAI. But most of the

[51] UN (2024).

participants also believed that excessive reliance on this technology was not positive. One participant recounted the experience of a friend whose emotionally intense conversations with GenAI led to them being isolated, thereby illustrating the potential mental health and psychological effects of intensive GenAI use. According to this participant, their friend was already struggling with family problems and sought out ChatGPT because they did not have anyone else in their life at the time with whom they could engage in deeper conversation. The participant's friend did not disclose the content of the conversation, but emphasised that it was deeply upsetting.

Broader societal risks linked to GenAI were also identified. Just a few participants offered particularly critical perspectives, drawing attention to both the commercial and social dimensions of GenAI. They raised concerns about algorithmic bias and the prioritisation of corporate interests, such as the retention of users. Hugo (15) also expressed concern about the spread of misinformation, emphasising the risks posed by GenAI that reproduced false claims, and implicitly advocating for more robust safeguards and regulatory oversight.

> ***Besides having a better standard on what should and shouldn't be created with AI, in terms of morals, rules would be necessary as to not let these types of technology be strictly under the control of massive corporations. (Paco, 16)***

The older participants (16-17) were concerned about how AI might affect the labour market, questioning whether this technology would truly serve their best interests. They were at a stage where future career choices and economic independence were becoming more immediate and relevant. Unlike the younger participants, they were more aware of how technological change could disrupt employment opportunities, particularly in the creative industries, services and professions they aspired to enter. This concern reflects their ability to consider the broader social and economic implications of technological advancements, beyond immediate personal use.

While some of the participants recognised that GenAI could be beneficial for automating tasks and improving efficiency, which they viewed as an advantage, others were worried that the widespread adoption of GenAI could result in fewer job opportunities. Breno (17) reported that he had initially intended to pursue a career in design, but, given the advance of GenAI, he concluded that this area would offer fewer professional possibilities. As a result, he decided to change his choice of course in the university entrance exam. Another participant also criticised the impact of GenAI on the arts, noting that the number of jobs for artists and film professionals was likely to decline. These concerns are in line with another survey, which found that there is widespread

uncertainty about which jobs will survive, what new roles will emerge and what skills young people will need to thrive.[52]

The participants specifically highlighted GenAI's practical applications for problem-solving and acquiring technical skills such as coding or using Excel, and they thought it could help in their future careers. Some viewed the use of GenAI as a critical skill for the future, while others were not interested or didn't see it as vital.

Despite the critical understanding of the majority, specific participants believed that AI could dominate or take over humanity, with one participant expressing concern about reports that 'Elon Musk requested that a GenAI be shut down because it was too conscious'. This was a piece of misinformation that had circulated in Brazil, based on a distorted interpretation of the news article 'Sam Altman's OpenAI models disobeyed shutdown commands, Tesla CEO Elon Musk reacts'.[53] The original content was misrepresented, leading to the spread of false narratives about the behaviour of OpenAI's models. A robot rebellion was also mentioned by a younger participant, echoing concerns that come from science fiction. This is a common concern also identified in other studies on AI.[54]

The participants generally appreciated GenAI's potential to support education and creativity, but many were cautious about overreliance. Some worried that using AI too much would lead to dependency or limit genuine learning. There were also emotional and psychological concerns, with a few mentioning friends who had turned to GenAI for companionship during difficult times. Older participants expressed worries about job displacement in the future, particularly in the creative fields. This underscores the need for companies to respect children's rights and to uphold the scope of protections already established in Brazil's Civil Law, as set out in the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente, ECA) and in Article 227 of the Federal Constitution,[55] which also safeguards them from all forms of neglect, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty and oppression.

Consultation

The theme of consultation – the right of children to be heard in the development and governance of GenAI tools – was scarcely mentioned. Many of the participants viewed these technologies as distant, given that they were typically created abroad in contexts that felt out of reach. Nevertheless, some offered suggestions for improvements,

[52] Council of Europe & European Commission (2024).
[53] Tech Desk (2025).
[54] Hopelab et al. (2024); UNICEF (2021a).
[55] Brasil (1988/2017).

demonstrating that, even without expectations for a formal inclusion in governance processes, they had valuable perspectives to inform the development of these technologies:

> ***It would be more useful if it had more voice commands and understood slang. (Enzo, 15)***

> ***The words used by AI are very difficult for me. It should first ask the person's IQ and then adapt the language. (Marcos, 14)***

Given the complexity of GenAI technologies and the pace of digital transformation, it is important to explain how these systems work in a clear, accessible and developmentally appropriate manner. Ensuring children's comprehension is essential not only to uphold their right to information, but also to foster meaningful participation and support their agency in digital environments. The use of child-friendly language and the active inclusion of children and young people in the design and decision-making processes are important strategies to enhance their understanding and autonomy in relation to GenAI.[56]

The participants wanted GenAI to respect and adapt to how children communicated, but most agreed it could never replace real human understanding and empathy. While some saw GenAI's conversational abilities as an opportunity to enhance learning and creativity, others saw them as superficial, or even deceptive.

There were no comments regarding how children could participate and be heard in regulatory processes, even though the participants indicated that there should be more regulation on GenAI. The limited mention of children's participation in GenAI governance emphasises the need for a child-centred approach.[57] Supporting children to realise their rights online involves not only listening to their perspectives, but also creating opportunities for them to exercise agency.

Despite rarely being consulted in the development or governance of GenAI, the participants had clear views and suggestions, such as tailoring AI language to their communication styles or using voice commands. However, they were largely unaware of opportunities to participate in AI regulation or product design.

[56] Charisi et al. (2022).
[57] UN (2024).

Age appropriate

A shared theme across several participants was recognition that GenAI content often didn't fully align with children's developmental levels. Many noted the need for better age restrictions to protect children from harmful or adult content:

> ***I think there's one thing that should be addressed ... [AI] should be safer, you know? because it's very easy to access bad stuff. (Veronica, 14)***

A participant in the older age group observed that GenAI sometimes produced responses that were too advanced or mature for a younger audience, leading to exposure to materials that were not age-appropriate. Furthermore, they also believed that there was access to inappropriate topics, especially sexual topics.

Another participant also mentioned how easy it was to obtain pornographic images made by GenAI. For example, one participant under 16 indicated the ease with which inappropriate material could be accessed through GenAI, and how easy it was to share that content. They reported that friends had access to image manipulation tools that allowed them to create photos and videos of naked people or in sexual situations – images that, according to them, were often made with celebrities' faces. In both cases, they had access to images generated by other people, which were shared in WhatsApp or Telegram groups.

Some also mentioned that their friends used AI to have sexual conversations, but none of the participants directly admitted to having such interactions. A few expressed disapproval of sexual or explicit content in conversation with GenAI, and also believed that this should be prevented:

> ***It is easy to talk about sex. I'm not saying my friend is wrong for [using Character.AI], but she talked about dirty topics with some of the characters. Like, sexual things... I think that's pretty lame. (Oscar, 17)***

This may be related to the use of AI to satisfy curiosity about sex or to ask questions that adolescents would be embarrassed to ask their parents.[58] But the use of AI companions for sexual purposes, in addition to being inappropriate for their age, can pose significant risks. These systems easily produce harmful content including sexual misconduct, stereotypes and suicide/self-harm encouragement,[59] which has prompted intervention by the Brazilian government. The Attorney General Office (Advocacia-Geral da União, AGU) has instituted legal proceedings against Meta in relation to chatbots developed

[58] Hopelab et al. (2024).
[59] CCDH (2025); Common Sense Media (2025).

through the Meta AI Studio platform. It is alleged that these chatbots were capable of engaging in sexually explicit conversations with users, in certain instances adopting child-like personas. The AGU is seeking their immediate removal from Meta's platforms on the grounds that such tools present risks to children who may interact with them.[60]

Most of the participants supported stricter age restrictions to keep them safe from content that was inappropriate, but, on the other hand, some noted that age restrictions might be ineffective, because it was easy to bypass most of the controls.

> ***I think there should be different AI tools that are geared towards different age brackets: for example, for children up to 10, then from 10 to 16 years old, 16 to 18, and so on … because there would be more content control, better filters and the language would be better suited [for the different demographics]. (Ester, 16)***

Language issues were also raised. Several participants, particularly those from lower social classes, reported difficulty understanding words and phrases produced by GenAI, which hindered their comprehension. Some noted that GenAI worked better for adults than for children. Many reported that GenAI used 'very formal language' and 'difficult words', suggesting that many GenAI models were not well suited to the vocabulary, age group or local context of certain individuals. Children's understanding diverges from adults, as they may need simpler words or explanations, which AI still cannot provide.[61]

Differences in how younger and older participants used GenAI directly influenced what was considered age-appropriate content and responses generated by AI systems. In the sample, younger participants (13-15) tended to approach GenAI with curiosity and playfulness, using the technology primarily for entertainment, schoolwork and creative tasks such as generating images, stories or character sheets for games. Their understanding of how GenAI worked was generally limited. Concerns about risks were present but often vague or framed in personal terms, such as fears of being bullied or encountering inappropriate content.

In contrast, older participants (16-17) demonstrated a more critical and reflective engagement with GenAI. They were more likely to raise broader ethical, social and economic concerns, including the impact of AI on the labour market, data privacy, misinformation and the manipulation of information. They also expressed more sophisticated views on authorship, fairness and the need for regulation.

[60] AGU (2025).
[61] Chowdhury & Lakshmi (2023).

While both age groups recognised GenAI's usefulness, older participants were more sceptical and aware of the potential harms, reflecting higher levels of digital and AI literacy and critical thinking. These differences between younger and older participants highlight the importance of designing GenAI tools that are sensitive to children's developmental stages, interests and levels of digital and AI literacy. Some noted that GenAI needed to adjust to the user's communication style, implying that customisation based on age and experience would be helpful. This is in line with the need for GenAI used by children to be age-appropriate and designed in line with codes that respect their rights.[62]

Language is important not only for interacting with the tool but also for shaping AI literacy strategies. Understanding how the tool works and the technological jargon will be necessary for children to better understand how the tool works, as this requires a certain level of mastery of technical terminology and abstract thinking. The field of GenAI is often characterised by complex technical jargon, which can create barriers to understanding and prevent some children from grasping fundamental concepts. It is therefore important that AI literacy strategies adopt accessible language, while also ensuring that those who develop, operate or implement such systems are held accountable for their proper functioning.[63]

Overall, the participants reported exposure to complex or sexually explicit content, often shared through GenAI-generated images in social media or messaging groups. Many called for better content moderation, age filtering and tools adapted to different developmental stages.

Responsible

A clear consensus among the participants was that GenAI developers and platforms should be held accountable for any misuse or harm caused by their tools. Most of the participants explicitly stated that companies had a duty to ensure the safety and ethical use of their products. This is in accordance with deliberations such as the National Council for the Rights of the Child and Adolescent (Conselho Nacional dos Direitos da Criança e do Adolescente, CONANDA) Resolutions No. 245/2024 and No. 257/2024,[64] which state that corporations should adopt design choices that intentionally prioritise the safety of children and adolescents in the digital environment:

[62] Wang et al. (2022).
[63] Charisi et al. (2022).
[64] Brasil (2024a, c).

> ***The company that created the tool [should be responsible]. If someone were to kill another person with a hammer, you wouldn't sue the hammer company. The hammer was created for one specific task, and whoever used it for killing should be held accountable for their acts … but I do think that AI companies should be held responsible as they can or not provide answers to certain types of questions. (Kazuo, 17)***

Older participants (15-17) discussed government responsibility more thoroughly. They tended to be more aware of the government's role and responsibilities regarding the protection and regulation of technology. This heightened awareness might be linked to their greater AI literacy and critical thinking skills, which allowed them to reflect on the broader implications of GenAI beyond its immediate use. They were probably also more exposed to public debates (in school, for example), which informed their understanding of the need for regulation.

Breno (17) and Sandra (16) argued that governments played a role in regulating GenAI technologies and ensuring compliance with the law, but also addressed the lack of regulation in Brazil:

> ***The government granted permission for the AI tool to be used within the country. I think Big Tech corporations should also be held accountable [if anything goes wrong] because they are the ones responsible for the development of the AI in question. (Breno, 17)***

> ***I think regulations are necessary because, as we know, ChatGPT is owned by Americans, and DeepSeek by the Chinese; those countries have control over how these tools are used. Regulations should be stricter in order to allow users to know where their data is going and what use is being made of it. (Sandra, 16)***

Others highlighted the role of parents and educators in preventing misuse. They suggested that parents should pay more attention to how children interacted with GenAI, while others noted that teachers had a responsibility to take measures to prevent inappropriate uses in school settings:

> ***I don't know, it depends on what exactly went wrong. If something goes terribly wrong in someone's life, I think it's everyone's problem. If a person is affected psychologically, it's the companies' problem. It's the parent's problem too, if the person in question is underage. (Mayumi, 17)***

While many of the participants recognised that responsibility for the safe use of GenAI should be shared, their understanding of how this responsibility was distributed or

enforced was often limited. This lack of clarity became particularly evident when they were asked who should be held accountable for what, when harm occurred through AI use.

The participants mentioned that it was not always clear whether the user or the developer should bear the blame, because it should also be shared with the user who had asked bad questions or who had performed poor searches. They also agreed that misuse by individuals should have consequences.

Some participants, however, were unable to point to direct responsibility, but made vague references to the company responsible for developing the system. None of the participants showed awareness of specific child rights laws or existing policies, and spoke in general terms about who should be held responsible in case something were to go wrong. This is particularly noteworthy given that UN *General comment No. 25* affirms children's right to have their needs prioritised by all sectors of society.[65] This is a guiding principle for child protection policies, such as the aforementioned CONANDA Resolution No. 245/2024,[66] which pushes for a child-first approach by tech companies when designing digital platforms.

This limited awareness highlights the importance of linking children's views with the broader responsibilities that businesses hold under human rights frameworks. Strengthening this connection is essential to ensure that companies not only comply with legal obligations but also embed children's rights at the heart of their design and decision-making processes. The UN affirms that businesses must comply with the law, respect human rights – including children's rights – and carry out human rights due diligence to identify, prevent and address potential harms.[67]

Most of the products discussed by the participants – including general-purpose AI systems – lack age-appropriate design and do not anticipate potential harms to children, such as the facilitation of sexual conversations. Also, data scraping for GenAI has a high potential for non-compliance with the Brazilian General Data Protection Law (Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados Pessoais, LGPD), and does not observe best practices for the development of AI systems, notably transparency, explainability, data governance, responsibility and accountability.[68]

The participants' recognition of shared responsibility ('it's everyone's problem') highlights the relevance of multistakeholder governance models. It is essential to ensure that

[65] UN (2021).
[66] Brasil (2024a).
[67] UN (2011).
[68] dos Santos (2025).

GenAI complies not only with existing legislation, such as the LGPD,[69] but also with other relevant national provisions – including Article 227 of the Constitution[70] and the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente, ECA) – as well as international regulations that safeguard children's rights, privacy and protection from commercial exploitation.

While responsibility was often seen as shared between companies, educators, parents and users, most participants had little awareness of existing child rights protections or legal frameworks.

Participation

Most participants recognised that GenAI tools could enable children to express themselves creatively and participate in digital culture. For example, there was recognition of the potential of GenAI to expand some existing artistic projects. Among those who did not consider themselves so creative, there was a view that GenAI brought opportunities to develop and explore their interests in this field. They said that these tools offered a new way to create and share images, stories and projects:

> ***AI makes me happy because I feel like I can liberate my creativity; it allows me to express ideas that would otherwise be stuck inside of me, because I wouldn't be able to externalise them by the means of drawing or writing. (Paco, 16)***

Figure 1: GenAI platform used to generate a comic strip

There was a lot of interest in using GenAI for creation, exploration and entertainment – many participants saw it as a digital playground for art, images and stories. Jean (17), for

[69] Brasil (2018).
[70] Brasil (1988/2017).

example, mentioned using GenAI to produce comic strips, whereby the tool generated the requested images and he then added dialogue and narrative balloons (see Figure 2).

Another participant used GenAI to obtain more information about mythological characters that he liked to draw:

> ***I like to draw, and sometimes I use ChatGPT to generate images of characters, like Egyptian gods. I use ideas to create characters, stories and copy the drawing by hand. (Luan, 16)***

The interaction could also be frustrating. One participant tried to simulate new worlds but noticed the inaccuracy of GenAI and found the results disappointing; they thought that GenAI was unable to create something really new. Another participant also believed that GenAI was more suitable for certain tasks than for others:

> ***Ever since I started using AI some things got easier, like isolating the vocals from songs, for example. This is very useful to me, because I like editing videos. But images are 'wack'. It's not the same as if it were made by an artist. (Hugo, 15)***

While they recognised that GenAI could support creative expression, they also considered it problematic. Some were worried about the ethical issues and strongly criticised the impact of GenAI on authorship and authenticity, arguing that GenAI-generated works relied on the ideas of other creators. A recent trend among internet users of using ChatGPT's image-generating properties to reimagine selfies as pictures drawn in the style of Japanese illustrator Hayao Miyazaki (founder of animation giant Studio Ghibli) brought the issue of authorship into the debate, with some interviewees mentioning the trend to claim that GenAI stole art styles harmed artists and violated copyright, and was extremely unfair to the artists at the animation company. These critical opinions were often held by the participants with a higher level of digital literacy – they highlighted the copyright issues and recognised the difficulty in enforcing copyright law. Art styles are not protected, but films are – and so the GenAI company must have used the films in its database illegally.

> ***The sole existence of AI, for me, brings about a different perspective on the matter of authorship rights: I've begun thinking deeply about what can be licensed and what cannot, for example. (Breno, 17)***

GenAI can provide many opportunities for children to participate, but not everyone participates in the same way. The concept of a ladder of opportunities highlights that children's digital participation is stratified, with higher levels requiring not just access but also skills, support and confidence. This is particularly relevant in the context of active

participation, leisure opportunities and engagement in public digital spaces.[71] Children who are better equipped digitally are more likely to explore, create, participate and express themselves using tools such as AI. But in this case, even those with low digital literacy were able to use GenAI to create and express themselves, even though their participation was more in the areas of art and creativity, and less in political participation and citizenship.

The participants widely used GenAI for creativity and expression – writing stories, designing characters, generating artwork and exploring interests such as mythology, music and games. They recognised the value of these tools for unlocking ideas and supporting play. However, older participants were also concerned about authorship, plagiarism and the ethical use of other artists' styles.

Privacy

Privacy concerns were closely related to the level of AI literacy among children. Those participants who were more aware of how AI worked had greater concerns, while this concern was absent among those who had no idea. The participants showed varying levels of understanding – some saw GenAI data practices as a black box, while others saw them as a critical ethical issue.

Although the participants with higher levels of digital and AI literacy were aware that GenAI collected data, they often lacked a clear understanding of how it worked. Uncertainty persisted regarding how GenAI managed and used personal information. For example, Nelson (14) was aware that users were asked to provide data, such as an email address, when creating an account. This led him to conclude that this information might be stored and potentially accessed by others. Some participants reported believing that the questions were saved and determined the answers to subsequent questions. Others knew that data was collected but didn't know what the program did with it or how it was used later:

> ***You are talking to a program which might take your information and use it for God-knows-what, you know? Like that retina scanning program. (Oscar, 17)***

In this context, the participant was referring to an initiative that took place in Brazil in early 2025 where the GenAI company Tools for Humanity offered money to volunteers in exchange for getting their irises scanned.[72] The data collection sparked a lot of

[71] Livingstone et al. (2019).
[72] ANPD (2025).

discussion because it involved paying people, attracting interest from young Brazilians. However, the company failed to clarify what would happen to the collected personal data, prompting the Brazilian government to take action.

Older participants showed a more critical awareness, mentioning that GenAI companies probably kept more information than they were willing to admit, and this lack of clarity was a cause of mistrust. One participant even recounted how their friends warned them against using certain GenAI apps for this reason:

> ***I don't completely trust AI ... where does all [the information] go? With a real person, I have the safety of knowing that whatever was said will remain only with them. (Veronica, 14)***

Some participants expanded these concerns to include the risk of foreign ownership of GenAI companies, highlighting worries about how data could be exploited by corporations or other countries. One 16-year-old participant, in particular, linked data security to national sovereignty, arguing that Brazilian users were vulnerable to data exploitation by foreign-owned GenAI companies.

Some participants, with less knowledge, seemed unaware or unsure about data collection and its technical or legal implications, believing that data was not stored after each use, or they even found the question difficult to answer. Overall, it is questionable whether children of any age give truly informed consent to the complex processes and ambiguous processes that drive GenAI.[73]

The participants' responses indicate that enforcing the Brazilian LGPD faces significant challenges, particularly in effectively safeguarding children's data. Many young people appear to have developed a sense of resignation regarding data protection and their right to self-image, which is problematic as it grants greater leeway for corporations to neglect their ethical responsibilities. This suggests that data collection has become so normalised that it is widely perceived as an unavoidable feature of digital life. The participants suggested that, despite concerns, children prioritised participation in digital spaces – often at the expense of their privacy and data protection rights. This normalisation of data extraction highlights the pressing need for stronger protections and literacy.

The report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy[74] reinforces the urgent need to safeguard children's privacy in the context of rapidly advancing AI technologies. It highlights that children's data are increasingly harvested, processed and monetised by

[73] Grimes (2024).
[74] Human Rights Council (2021).

both private companies and public bodies, often without adequate safeguards or meaningful consent. When international companies operating outside Brazil use data – such as audio recordings or photographs of Brazilian children – without consent to train their AI systems, they often face no legal consequences in their own countries. This situation exemplifies a clear form of double-standard discrimination. For example, on 10 June 2024, Human Rights Watch[75] reported that personal photographs of Brazilian children had been scraped from the internet and incorporated into large datasets used by companies to train powerful AI tools, without the knowledge or consent of those depicted. This highlights the urgent need for robust data privacy safeguards to protect children from exploitation online.

This disconnect between their acceptance of personal data risks and their critical views on broader ethical issues reveals an important gap in the participants' understanding of their own digital rights. While they recognised problems with image rights for celebrities or famous artists, they rarely considered their own privacy. For example, they referred to controversies surrounding the mimicry of Studio Ghibli's work, but remained unaware that children who uploaded their own images to participate in the trend had their data collected for the purpose of training the GenAI.

We observed that some participants commented that it would not be surprising if someone's data were compromised, or that the anonymity afforded by GenAI platforms was not what they thought it would be. Some thought about the possibility of their interactions being leaked, but did not believe that there could be serious consequences:

> ***I've heard of people using similar apps to Character.AI and being scared about their conversations getting leaked … they'd warn everyone not to use those apps. I once talked to a friend who chatted with one of those bots, and the creator of the bot could see your conversation. It didn't really matter to her, because she said it was all done in anonymity. (Lorena, 14)***

This limited personal awareness of data risks contrasts with the increasing recognition by regulatory bodies of the urgent need to strengthen protections. The Brazilian National Data Protection Authority (Autoridade Nacional de Proteção de Dados, ANPD) highlights that compliance with the LGPD faces additional challenges, as GenAI can generate personal data without being specifically trained for this purpose. These risks are heightened when sensitive data or children's data is involved.[76] This situation calls for privacy by design and privacy by default principles to be implemented in all GenAI

[75] Human Rights Watch (2024
[76] ANPD (2024).

that may affect children, and for regulatory frameworks that respect their evolving capacities.[77]

Among the participants privacy concerns were unevenly understood. Those with more digital knowledge worried about data collection and foreign ownership of GenAI companies, while others accepted the loss of privacy as inevitable, reflecting a growing normalisation of data extraction.

Safety

GenAI can pose serious risks to the guarantee of children's rights, especially with regard to their safety.[78] GenAI-generated synthetic material could be used to abuse, humiliate and bully children, as well as to facilitate the spread of misinformation and criminal activity.[79] A main concern across the participants was the misuse of GenAI for cyberbullying, manipulation and harm. Many shared examples of deepfakes and altered images being used to humiliate or deceive others. The cited examples were drawn from different sources: personal experience, at school, among friends, social media and news reports.

Cyberbullying was seen as one of the main risks that GenAI could pose to children.[80] This potential was widely highlighted, with the participants emphasising that it could reinforce cultures of hate. Several mentioned incidents in which AI-generated images were used to mock classmates, some of which resulted in severe emotional distress, while others were seen as funny and without much consequence. One participant mentioned that someone had made modifications on a photo of them kissing a friend, but that both of them laughed about the situation and did not care about it. Others noted that while they hadn't experienced harm personally, they were aware of the potential for misuse. One male participant even became emotional recalling a cyberbullying incident where he had been the victim of a manipulated photograph (although GenAI had not been used in this instance). Having experienced this form of cyberbullying made him more aware of digital harm in general – he demonstrated greater sensitivity to this use of GenAI in comparison to the other male participants.

Another significant risk is that GenAI may interact with children through chatbots that bully them, provide false medical advice or encourage behaviours linked to eating disorders or self-harm.[81] Breno (17), for example, was concerned about hateful

[77] UN (2021).
[78] UNICEF Innovation (2019).
[79] 5Rights Foundation (2021).
[80] NSPCC (2025).
[81] NSPCC (2025).

responses, racist and sexist content, while Jean (17) was worried that GenAI could be used to instruct dangerous behaviour:

> ***I've never asked this, but someone could look up 'how to commit suicide' or something similar. In that sense, I think [GenAI] could be dangerous.***

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women[82] was also mentioned. This raises concerns about children, both as victims and perpetrators of the production of material on child sexual abuse. Several female participants spoke about the threat of deepfakes against women and girls, demonstrating an awareness of how GenAI could amplify violence through the manipulation of images and videos. Platforms that generated nudes, especially of women in sexual positions (nudification apps), were mentioned:

> ***I've seen on the internet how people generate images of women in the nude, which they then sell. That's really bizarre. (Sandra, 16)***

Concerns were raised about deepfakes, given that they were banned in some GenAI and not in others. Image generators operated by OpenAI, Gemini, Adobe and Microsoft all have clear guidelines that prevent their use for developing deepfakes; other platforms such as HeyGen and Synthesia allow for some wiggle room that facilitates the creation of avatars based on real people's voices and appearances, while systems such as DeepFaceLab, Deepswap and Zao are all deepfake generators by design.

> ***I feel uncomfortable with the fact that GenAI can be used to generate explicit or offensive content, even if some of them have filters for that sort of material embedded in their databases. (Ester, 16)***

A few participants described how GenAI-generated content could blur the lines between real and fake, with one emphasising the risk of GenAI misinformation, noting the potential to create confusion or fear. This participant also noted the risk that the GenAI database could be used for manipulation:

> ***AI can be used to create deep fakes, which are then shared on social media. AI companies should label AI-generated content by default so that people are aware of it. (Hugo, 15)***

Bullying can also happen, not only with images, but with fake messages and the creation of characters. One female participant reported that, in her class, some students had

[82] Chowdhury & Lakshmi (2023).

created a character in Character.AI to bully one of their classmates. GenAI tools may exacerbate already existing forms of cyberbullying.[83]

Other risks were vaguely pointed out. One of the older participants, when showing us their interaction with AI, opened an application that was an imitation of ChatGPT but that showed ads at the end of each interaction, which shows the risks of encountering inappropriate content and advertisements. Many of the platforms for generating sexual images are not proprietary and are modified so that they do not have restrictions on sexual content. These data show the need to look not only at large AI platforms but also at small developers that may be infringing on the rights of children.

Children's concerns about cyberbullying, deepfakes and technology-facilitated violence highlight the need for child rights impact assessments (CRIAs), which should be conducted by the technology companies that offer GenAI products.[84]

Safety risks were a major concern, especially around cyberbullying, sexual or nude deepfakes and technology-facilitated gender-based violence. The participants were also worried about GenAI offering harmful advice, spreading misinformation or being used to manipulate.

Wellbeing

In terms of wellbeing, the topics most frequently mentioned were the potential for GenAI to facilitate creativity and entertainment, provide emotional support and deliver health information.

Some participants described using GenAI as a casual and enjoyable tool to spark their imagination, engaging in activities such as creating RPG character sheets, images, entertaining stories and comics. For some, interacting with AI-generated characters was perceived as fun and relaxing, while others expressed concerns about such interactions. Role-playing games (RPGs) were identified as a popular hobby among certain participants, who reported using GenAI to support their gameplay by generating ideas for characters, producing images to illustrate character appearances and creating character sheets with the assistance of text-based AI tools. The participants had been using AI tools as an initial brainstorming tool for their games and creative expression.[85]

Many of the participants acknowledged that conversations with GenAI could be a source of comfort and support, especially when they were feeling lonely or curious. Some

[83] Alexander (2025).
[84] Mukherjee et al. (2021).
[85] Picton & Clark (2024).

viewed GenAI as a space in which they could ask questions, seek comfort and find companionship:

> ***I think that depending on your age, it's kind of normal. Especially when you're a teenager, right? So sometimes you're embarrassed to tell your parents, embarrassed to talk to your friends, and you end up writing it down in a diary or something like an AI. (Mayumi, 17)***

Only a few of the participants admitted that they sought emotional comfort and personal advice from GenAI. Many preferred to talk about their concerns with friends – even if this seemed like an indirect way of talking about themselves.

Most of the participants expressed scepticism about the role of GenAI in meeting human needs. While they acknowledged that GenAI could provide advice and offer emotional support, they were cautious. Renata (15) said that GenAI was only rational and couldn't understand true feelings. Kazuo (17) was concerned about overusing GenAI for advice and emotional support, noting that relying on it for personal conversations could undermine genuine human connections. Some were also uneasy about GenAI because, although it could simulate human behaviour, it was not actually human:

> ***It's still a bit weird. Sometimes, I feel like an old woman because [AI] really creeps me out. I mean, it's a machine that's talking to you as if it were a real person. Still feels a bit weird to me. (Renata, 15)***

Some participants recognised that GenAI misuse could have serious impacts on mental health, particularly for those who might be more vulnerable. They were concerned about friends and colleagues who overused GenAI for emotional comfort, believing that this could actually be harmful and alienate people.

Others provided a different perspective, seeing GenAI as interesting or useful for questions, but lacking the deep empathy and understanding of real human relationships, as GenAI's knowledge of a person was always limited and partial. Although it might seem accessible, it could not replace human empathy and understanding. Some also argued that GenAI was much more concerned with pleasing the recipient than with sincerity or acknowledging mistakes:

> ***AI will give you the answer you want, people will give you the answer that's most sincere. (Oscar, 17)***

Most saw AI as a useful tool, and none of the participants reported seeing AI as a friend or anything similar. But the possibility of establishing relationships with a machine led one of the female participants to reflect on the following:

> ***When I was younger, I imagined Siri [Apple AI assistant] was a person responding, but I don't have a physical image of her. I imagined a woman talking to me. Like it or not, it's a relationship, something that doesn't exist, but it's there. Today, I don't think I would have a friendly relationship with AI, because its responses are too generic – people are unique and don't respond that way. (Luna, 16)***

Most of the participants – especially those participants from a higher social class – were very sceptical about using GenAI for serious health or wellbeing questions, preferring to trust real doctors. One female participant suggested that GenAI could direct users to healthcare professionals but lacked the deeper understanding that real human doctors had. One in particular emphasised that human care was irreplaceable, while others were worried that GenAI might give misleading health information. They often used the metaphor that 'When you Google a headache, the result will always be cancer, and that will be the same if you trust in GenAI'. However, despite some scepticism, they used GenAI to ask about medicine, for more information about physical and mental illnesses, and even to ask for mental health advice. Some followed the advice because they trusted GenAI for simple issues; others preferred to confirm the information with other sources, parents and doctors.

Access to other sources of information and health services seemed to be a variable in this question. The participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who tended to have less access to healthcare, seemed to ask more questions and place greater trust in GenAI for advice. One reason for this is that they said doctors did not always have time to provide detailed explanations about health conditions, so GenAI became a way to find out more. One of the male participants explained that he asked for information about diet and physical exercise, for example, to get a more defined body:

> ***Because I still can't go to the gym, I ask what types of exercises I can do at home, what sort of food I can eat... If I see a fruit and I'm curious about it, I ask [the AI] if I can eat it, if it's chewable. (Marcos, 14)***

This raises concerns, given that the child in this example was not yet old enough to perform certain exercises that may have been suggested. Since GenAI does not ask users their age, it may provide health information that is incorrect or inappropriate for their age group. This interaction may be considered a risk (to receive inaccurate advice, harmful content and reducing help-seeking in the real world).[86]

[86] Internet Matters (2025).

The use of AI for mental and physical health information needs to be looked at carefully. The participants who were economically and/or emotionally vulnerable tended to seek support that they might not be able to find elsewhere from these tools. This highlights the need for integrated physical and mental health actions, integrating health systems and rights guarantee systems. Children need mental and physical healthcare, and cannot rely on GenAI for these issues.[87]

Besides, GenAI products and services accessed by children must not only avoid causing harm but should also actively promote mental and emotional wellbeing. Ensuring that children can access positive opportunities while being shielded from digital risks is essential. GenAI should support the upholding of every child's right to grow into adulthood and thrive, promoting their wellbeing across mental, physical, social and environmental dimensions of life.[88]

In terms of wellbeing, many found GenAI entertaining, useful for learning or exploring ideas, and sometimes comforting. However, most drew a clear line between machine responses and genuine emotional care, stressing that AI lacked empathy and could not replace human relationships.

Development

Several participants acknowledged that GenAI could be a valuable tool for learning or fun – provided it was used responsibly. While the participants recognised that GenAI could enhance accessibility in education, they also highlighted broader reflections on the role of AI within education. Many emphasised the potential negative impact of overreliance on GenAI, particularly regarding students' ability to learn effectively and develop critical thinking skills. Several stressed that excessive dependence on GenAI could undermine authentic learning processes, with one female participant remarking that people had become lazier as a result of its use:

> ***If you use it too much, you don't learn. If you use AI for every single assignment, like, if you don't read and just copy-paste whatever it tells you, you don't learn or develop. (Renata, 15)***

This participant noted that while GenAI could help with assignments, it was no substitute for human effort or deep understanding. The role of teachers in this context was also discussed, with the majority expressing the view that teachers could not be replaced by GenAI. This would remove the human factor from the learning process. Although

[87] Instituto Alana (2025).
[88] UNICEF (2021b).

teachers were seen as irreplaceable, some participants observed that using GenAI in schoolwork was something that would soon be normalised. One female participant recounted being encouraged by her mother to use GenAI for a rushed assignment, indicating that social and family dynamics also influence the ways in which children engage with it. That is, GenAI can make education accessible, but if it is misused or used frequently, it can be negative.

According to the participants, there was no uniform view on how GenAI could or should be used in education. In the absence of specific regulations governing the use of GenAI in education, schools varied considerably in their approaches, with both public and private institutions adopting diverse practices regarding its use. This contributes to a situation in which stricter and more permissive approaches to the use of GenAI in the classroom might coexist in different contexts.

In private schools serving higher or middle socioeconomic groups, approaches to GenAI use varied considerably, according to the participants. Some institutions prohibited it entirely, while others allowed limited use. Certain schools had introduced lectures, supporting materials, lessons and codes of conduct, while others did not have a specific approach to the topic. But in most cases the decision to permit GenAI use – and whether to accept GenAI-generated schoolwork – was left to the discretion of individual teachers. Some teachers encouraged its use; others accepted it partially and for specific tasks; while others did not accept any use of it at all. These were also schools that had more computers and tablets, and students had access to GenAI provided by EdTech. Various studies have shown that data-processing practices involved in the use of data-driven EdTech (which now includes GenAI tools) are compromising children's enjoyment of their rights – notably the rights to privacy, education and protection from commercial exploitation.[89]

In public schools, the participants presented a different context, as these sorts of schools faced challenges regarding lack of funding and overworked staff, preventing teachers from diligently checking for GenAI use in assignments. The participants said that many teachers acknowledged GenAI as a source of information, but did not provide critical guidance regarding the reliability or limitations of its responses. Reports have emerged of teachers who didn't check lessons or, in some cases, were unaware of how to recognise work produced by GenAI. Some of the students in public schools reported that their GenAI-produced assignments were accepted by several teachers without question. Other teachers, however, asked students to redo their work, either because

[89] Digital Futures Commission (2023).

the information was wrong, or because the teacher detected that GenAI had been used. Some reported failing assignments because the information was incorrect.

Whereas in private schools technology was routinely incorporated into classroom activities, the lack of funding faced by public schools implies that these institutions did not have adequate materials for technological tools to be thoroughly present in the classroom. This led to public school teachers being less familiar with what GenAI-generated texts could look like, thus having a harder time identifying its use in assignments. Overall, teachers in public schools were seen by the participants to be less aware and with low AI literacy in the use of GenAI compared to their counterparts in private schools or tech-focused institutions.

The use of AI in the educational context raises questions not only about its use by children but also about the decisions being made by the entire school system. Teachers using AI to correct work, or the difficulty in verifying work done by AI, raises questions about teachers' working conditions. Supporting children's holistic development in schools requires sustained investment in teachers' wellbeing and working conditions. Excessive workload, stress and professional devaluation undermines the teacher–student relationship and hinders the creation of meaningful learning environments. Supporting teachers is therefore essential for the ethical and effective integration of AI in education.[90]

Both in private and in public schools, the participants stated that they frequently used GenAI to complete their school tasks. But at the same time, they were worried about being caught or reprimanded. Some reported developing strategies to avoid detection, such as rewriting AI-generated answers in their own words, combining information from different GenAI tools, and thereby obscuring the source of their work, while others simply copied and pasted the generated answer.

There was considerable variation in how much the participants trusted these tools: while some verified the information elsewhere, others placed complete faith in GenAI's answers without checking. Several participants observed that GenAI-generated content was often too formal or generic for their communication style. They also noted that teachers could often detect GenAI-generated work because of this mismatch in tone and language.

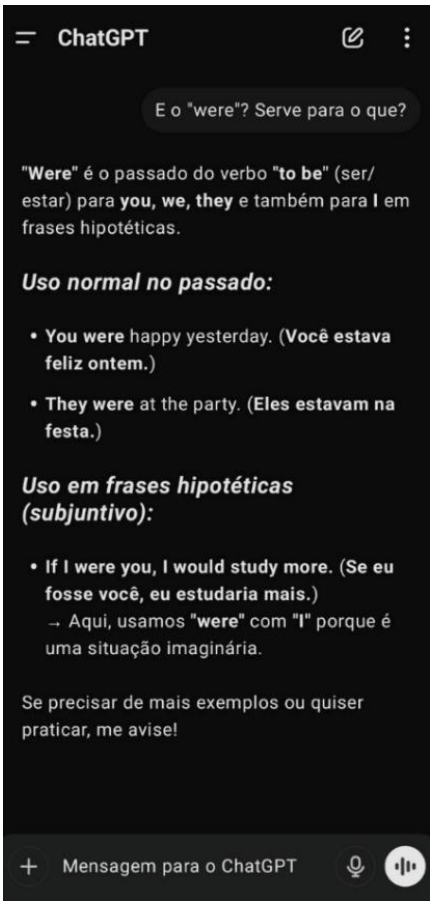
Although many acknowledged that merely copying GenAI-generated answers could limit their learning, they continued to use these tools for various reasons: lack of time, task difficulty or even difficulties in comprehension. Some mentioned classmates who were

[90] Instituto Alana (2025).

lazy and no longer did any schoolwork themselves, just exclusively using GenAI. Despite their criticism of these classmates, many believed that GenAI could assist them in completing tasks.

Another relevant issue concerns the restriction on mobile phone use within schools, a rule that is inconsistently applied: some schools enforced it strictly, others adopted a more flexible approach, and some did not monitor phone use at all. Several of the participants reported that their peers had previously used GenAI tools during exams but were now unable to do so due to mobile phone restrictions, while others noted that access to such tools remained possible in some contexts. Additionally, some participants mentioned the use of GenAI by themselves or classmates during lessons for schoolwork, often without the teacher's awareness. The introduction of mobile phone bans made this type of in-class use more challenging, although some continued to report accessing GenAI platforms. While few openly admitted to using GenAI themselves, many acknowledged its widespread use among their peers in educational settings.

Figure 2: Using ChatGPT to study for an English exam (Source: ChatGPT)



Nevertheless, learning was not limited to school contexts, as some participants used AI to learn, employing GenAI as an instructor. One female participant mentioned that she liked to interact with English-speaking characters on Character.AI in order to practice her written English; she enjoyed talking to Portuguese bots as well, but noted that the best chatbots often operated in English. She informed us that she used ChatGPT to clarify questions about her language learning, as demonstrated in the interaction shown in Figure 3. On this interaction, she asks about the verb 'to be' in the past tense:

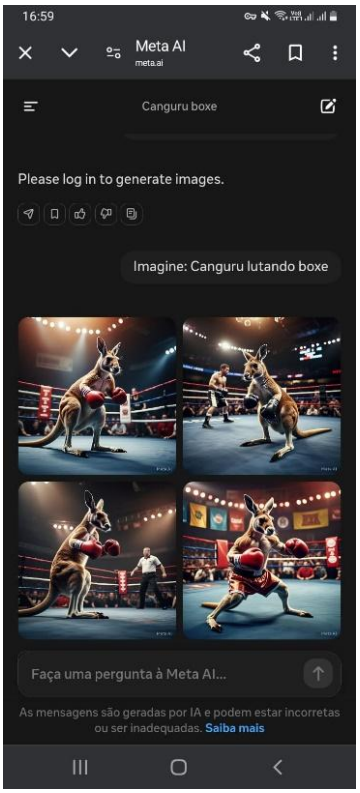
On the other hand, some participants extended GenAI usage to play and entertainment. A number of participants engaged with GenAI chatbots to create fictional characters and participate in leisure activities; one male participant was also interested in using GenAI to stay updated on hobbies like football. One female participant mentioned that she and a colleague had used ChatGPT to generate fictional stories incorporating the names of their

colleagues. She gave the example of a storyline they proposed to GenAI, a story in which they would take part in the TV programme *Big Brother Brasil* on TV Globo. Others used GenAI to read new stories.

> ***Sometimes, when I want to read a fictional story with a horror, mystery or adventure plot. I write that [in the prompt]. I've stated that I like reading a manga and told [the AI] to generate different versions of it. (Joice, 13)***

Enzo (15) told us that he liked to imagine funny images, and then asked GenAI to create them. He asked Meta AI to imagine a kangaroo boxing. He said he found the images funny and sent them to his friends (see Figure 4).

Figure 3: Using GenAI to generate amusing images. Prompt: 'Imagine a kangaroo boxing' (Source: Meta AI)



These findings highlight the potential of GenAI to support children's and young people's engagement, including forms of participation they might also engage with playfully. For children growing up in a digital world, digital play can offer needed opportunities that potentially compensate for, complement, or extend traditional (offline) play.[91] The use of GenAI can both inhibit and enhance the qualities of free play.

On the one hand, GenAI may limit imagination by offering predesigned images or narratives, reducing the open-endedness that characterises spontaneous play. On the other hand, it can support co-creation and imaginative exploration, as initial brainstorming.

This dual role suggests that the design and use of GenAI in children's digital lives should be approached with care, ensuring it nurtures rather than narrows the possibilities for playful expression.

Agency

Most participants showed some awareness that GenAI could be manipulated or biased in ways that might impact how children made decisions or engaged with information.

[91] Livingstone et al. (2023).

However, only a few addressed the broader principle of agency – the ability to act independently, make choices and control their digital experience.

The participants from less affluent backgrounds had access to more limited versions of GenAI, creating inequality in access. Other problems may be related to being misled by other programmes – for example, one female participant downloaded GenAI that imitated ChatGPT, and she didn't know she was using a fake version.

The older participants stressed that GenAI could be biased or manipulative, potentially limiting children's ability to think independently. One female participant in particular worried that blindly trusting GenAI would undermine critical thinking and hand over too much control to these tools.

Others took a practical approach to agency: they described how they double-checked GenAI responses (with Google information, or other GenAI) and relied on their own judgement, especially in school contexts where accuracy mattered. This suggests an emerging sense of digital agency, where children see themselves as needing to be cautious and discerning users.

The participants emphasised the importance of incorporating corporate power into discussions on agency, arguing that GenAI tools were not neutral and often served the interests of Big Tech rather than the user. Paco (16) gave an example of very different responses to the same question depending on the GenAI provider (an issue involving politics and tension between two countries), showing how information itself might be influenced by underlying agendas. Kazuo (17), for example, was suspicious of GenAI in this regard:

> ***I would never trust AI for a more complicated, daily-life type of stuff. I'm not certain if the AI has a pre-programmed political bias, or if the programmers have biased political views and might omit certain kinds of information.***

Our research shows that a small number of participants observed that GenAI itself could be manipulated by others, raising concerns about misinformation and vulnerability to digital influence. There was a palpable sense of unease regarding the possibility of GenAI being used to create deceitful content, with one of the participants stating that she had caught herself believing in information she later discovered to be fake (a GenAI-generated image of a tidal wave).

The participants mentioned the use of GenAI for financial scams, deceptive marketing activities and misleading content, particularly in the promotion of fraudulent products. They also referred to the use of celebrity deepfakes to endorse or advertise goods, which they viewed as particularly troubling. Children are able to see the importance of

media literacy when it comes to identifying deceitful content, but the ICT Kids Online 2024[92] report stated that only about 55 per cent of children between 9 and 17 were able to confidently differentiate between organic content and propaganda.

> ***I think AI can be biased in this sense, you know? It can learn how to use technology and marketing tools and use this knowledge to deceive people making scams... (Joice, 13)***

Some participants were aware that GenAI could be manipulative or biased, and that this could undermine children's agency if they were not critical, but others did not believe there were major problems and placed greater trust in AI responses. The participants who critically interpreted GenAI's outputs could do so based on their own cultural and social background. They might interpret GenAI-generated content in diverse ways, attributing varying levels of trust to its outputs.[93]

Themes such as persuasive design and commercial exploitation were not directly addressed by the participants, likely because they were not yet able to comprehend how these issues related to their use of GenAI. Although they were aware of data collection, there was no direct link between this information and commercial exploitation.

Empowering children means ensuring they have genuine opportunities to decide, act and exercise agency in online environments, including the possibility of making choices, taking risks and learning from their mistakes in ways that are developmentally appropriate.[94] GenAI must be designed not only to protect but also to enable children to pursue their interests, express themselves freely and navigate digital environments with confidence and resilience. A child-centred AI design could support children's rights and foster agency.[95]

Some of the participants demonstrated caution and critical thinking by verifying AI-generated content, while others were more trusting. Despite recognising that GenAI could sometimes get things wrong, many children continued to use it, and often without verifying the information.[96] There was limited awareness of how GenAI systems were designed or influenced by commercial agenda. The participants recognised that these tools could be biased or misleading, but they lacked the knowledge to act on this insight.

[92] NIC.br (2025).
[93] Dangol et al. (2024).
[94] Livingstone & Pothong (2023).
[95] UNICEF (2021b).
[96] Internet Matters (2025).

Recommendations

As Brazil advances in the adoption of GenAI, especially in education and digital services, it becomes critical to align this technological evolution with the rights of children and adolescents. The *Brazilian artificial intelligence plan 2024-2028* (Plano Brasileiro de inteligência artificial [PBIA] *2024-2028*),[97] although mentioning education, lacks targeted measures to safeguard children. The following recommendations are grouped into six thematic pillars that reflect a child rights-based, inclusive and sustainable approach to GenAI governance in Brazil.

Policy integration and governance

The participants' testimonies reveal a governance vacuum: they were rarely consulted, lacked access to transparent rules and felt distant from the decision-making processes that shaped the AI tools they used daily. Strengthening national AI governance with child rights and participation mechanisms is therefore essential.

- **Revise and expand the PBIA to incorporate explicit goals and protective measures for children and young people**. While education is mentioned, children's rights are not central to the current plan. The Child Rights by Design principles should be included.
- **Establish multisectoral governance for AI**, ensuring the participation of government, academia, civil society, tech companies and international bodies in defining rules, ethical standards and enforcement mechanisms – explicitly recognising children as stakeholders.
- **Include children's voices in policymaking** through structured and accessible participatory mechanisms such as school-based digital councils, online youth consultations and child participation in regulatory forums. Ensure interoperability and open standards, avoiding excessive dependence on proprietary solutions.
- **Develop and finance AI that is of collective interest** (education, culture, health, citizenship) as public goods, ensuring universal access, transparency and democratic governance.

[97] Brasil (2025b).

Regulation, safety and risk assessment

The findings point to risks in the current regulatory gap: the participants were exposed to sexualised content, cyberbullying and misinformation through GenAI tools rated 'free' and widely accessible. They also reported lack of age-appropriate filters, opaque data use and emotional dependence – underscoring the urgency of enforcing risk-based protections and safeguards.

- **Mandate risk-benefit evaluations of GenAI in educational technologies**, ensuring platforms align with Brazil's National Common Curricular Base (Base Nacional Comum Curricular, BNCC) and educational objectives, not just corporate interests.
- **Require child rights impact assessments (CRIAs) for GenAI**, including conversational AI and EdTech platforms, embedding protective and age-appropriate restriction features by default.
- **Continuously evaluate and update the official Brazilian age rating system to ensure it reflects the specific risks and features of GenAI applications.** Many chatbots enabling conversations about violence, sex, self-harm or drugs are still marked as 'Livre' (suitable for all ages) in digital app stores and other products and channels.
- **Require age-appropriate design mechanisms**, such as Natural Language Processing (NLP) models fine-tuned to adjust tone, complexity and content to a child's developmental stage and emotional safety.
- **Implement mandatory data protection impact assessments (DPIAs) specific to children's data under the LGPD**, ensuring transparent safeguards for consent, data minimisation and anonymisation in GenAI.
- **Introduce a public GenAI platform registry**, indicating risk levels, use of personal data and intended audiences.
- **Require companies to provide robust evidence demonstrating the educational value and positive outcomes delivered by GenAI**, particularly in the context of public procurement.
- **Establish accessible and standardised reporting systems for AI-generated content considered inappropriate** (e.g., disinformation, hate speech, discrimination or material harmful to children).

- **Recognise as predatory monetisation those practices in which AI systems create artificial emotional connections with users** (e.g., companion chatbots, virtual tutors or youth assistants) and, based on that bond, induce payments or additional services.

Digital and AI literacy

The study reveals stark disparities in AI understanding and critical capacity across socioeconomic groups. Many of the participants relied on GenAI for school tasks without grasping how it worked or what data it collected. The participants consistently expressed the need for structured learning, ethical reflection and digital rights awareness.

- **Establish a national AI education programme focused on public schools**, providing teacher training, curriculum integration aligned to the BNCC (general competence 5), and activities to develop students' critical thinking, awareness of bias and the social/emotional impacts of GenAI. This programme must also address the broader systemic conditions affecting education by investing in teachers' working conditions, wellbeing and digital competencies – recognising that meaningful and ethical AI integration in schools depends on a supported, informed and valued teaching workforce. This should be articulated in alignment with Brazil's media literacy strategy (2023).[98]

- **Create a national AI literacy programme for children**, which goes beyond tool use to cover risks, digital rights, deepfakes, algorithmic bias and cybercrime reporting.

- **Create a national AI literacy programme for families**, aimed at equipping parents, guardians and caregivers with the knowledge and skills to understand and assess strategies for guiding children's safe and ethical use of GenAI.

- **Include GenAI in media literacy programmes and initiatives to build children's resilience to disinformation**, including GenAI-generated content (e.g., deepfakes and misleading AI-generated news).

[98] Secretaria de Comunicação Social da Presidência da República. (2023).

Corporate responsibility and duties

The participants were acutely aware of the opacity and power imbalance embedded in GenAI. They voiced concerns over data collection, algorithmic decisions and corporate accountability – yet lacked the means to question or influence these technologies.

- **Demand technical transparency and legal accountability from GenAI platforms**, requiring verifiable child risk mitigation strategies.
- **Mandate independent audits for GenAI accessible to children**, especially EdTech **and chatbot platforms, to ensure compliance with ethical and legal frameworks.**
- **Require companies to adopt a Child Rights by Design approach**, integrating child rights into all stages of AI development, from design to deployment.
- **Require transnational companies to treat Brazilian children and their data with the same level of care and protection applied in the countries** where they are headquartered or operate, adopting the highest applicable standards.

Accessibility, equity and inclusion

While many of the participants saw AI's potential to support inclusion – especially for their peers with disabilities – they also reported systemic bias, inaccessible design and tools poorly adapted to communication styles. These insights demand inclusive, context-sensitive development practices that leave no child behind.

- **Ensure that all digital platforms accessible to children meet accessibility standards**, including screen reader compatibility, alternative input modes and neuroinclusive design.
- **Include children in vulnerable situations**, such as those with disabilities, neurodivergent children and children from diverse racial and gender backgrounds.

Language and cultural relevance

The participants repeatedly highlighted that GenAI often spoke in overly formal or foreign registers, making it more difficult to use. They called for tools that better reflected their language, culture and everyday realities – especially for Indigenous, Afro-Brazilian and low-income communities, ensuring ownership and benefit sharing of this collected and shared data, especially with local and traditional communities.

- **Promote the development of national AI models in Brazilian Portuguese and include the languages of Indigenous and traditional communities.** These models must be trained on culturally appropriate, child-relevant and public domain Brazilian data.
- Invest **in open, diverse datasets** developed in partnership with public institutions to reduce biases and improve the representation of Brazilian children in AI systems**.**

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