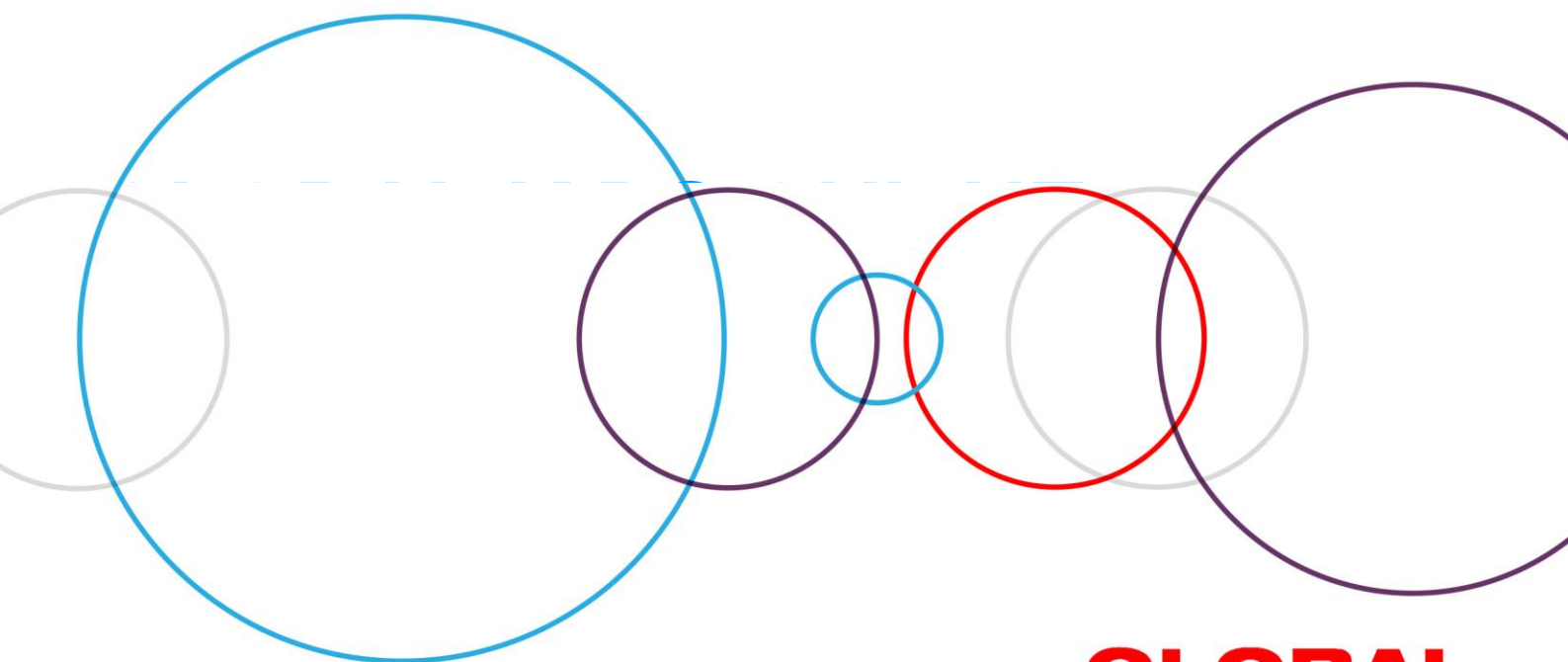# GLOBAL KIDS ONLINE RESEARCH TOOLKIT

Getting started

with the Global Kids Online Research toolkit

GLOBAL KIDS ONLINE

November 2016

Contents

USING THE GLOBAL KIDS ONLINE RESEARCH TOOLKIT

Welcome to the Global Kids Online research toolkit. These tools have been developed to enable academics, government, civil society and other actors to carry out reliable and standardized national research with children and their parents/carers on the opportunities, risks and protective factors of children's internet use.

Anyone may use these resources and contribute to our aims. This guide introduces you to the purpose and approach of Global Kids Online and to the research tools that we developed. It explains what resources are available, how to use the research tools, and how this can help in improving children's well-being and rights in the digital age.

Why did we initiate Global Kids Online?

The many stakeholders responsible for children's safe and positive use of the internet (governments, civil society and the private sector alike) have an important task to formulate policies that are inclusive, balanced and based on solid evidence. But at present, the evidence on which such policies can rely is very scarce, especially in the global South. At the global level, such evidence is needed to help build a consensus among international actors on international standards, agreements, protocols and investments in order to make the internet a safer and better place for children.

Responding to evidence gaps, the Global Kids Online project (www.globalkidsonline.net) was developed as a collaborative initiative between the

UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, the London School of Economics and Political Science, and the EU Kids Online network.

Our aims and approach

Global Kids Online (GKO) project aims to gather rigorous cross-national evidence that:

- Will advance understanding of whether and how the internet amplifies the risks of harm to children and how to optimise digital opportunities that contribute to children's well-being.
- Follows a child rights framework, as this offers a unifying approach to children's everyday experiences online, as well as offline, while also recognising the diverse contexts in which children live.
- Connects evidence with the ongoing international dialogue regarding policy and practical solutions to children's well-being and rights in the digital age, especially in countries where the internet only recently reaching the mass market.

> Read more about the research framework and its child rights approach in Method guide 1: Research framework for online risks and opportunities at:
> www.globalkidsonline.net/framework.

How was the Global Kids Online research toolkit created?

The Global Kids Online toolkit was designed during 2015-2016. It works through a partnership approach between UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti and the London School of Economics and Political Science as global coordinators and research teams

from four countries piloting and adapting the toolkit.

Both qualitative and quantitative tools were initially based on the combination of international literature reviews and the work of the EU Kids Online network, which developed and fielded a cross-national survey and individual/focus group interviews on children's internet use in a European context from 2010-2014 (see www.eukidsonline.net). As part of the Global Kids Online project, the research toolkit was further developed and pilot tested in four diverse national contexts: Argentina, Serbia, South Africa, and the Philippines.

The toolkit was continuously adapted and revised via a sustained dialogue with and across research teams in the pilot countries before, during and after the research process (the country findings and research synthesis reports are available at: www.globalkidsonline.net).

You can read more about how the research toolkit was developed and tested in the research synthesis report at: www.globalkidsonline.net/synthesis.

Who can use the toolkit?

- The Global Kids Online research toolkit is intended for researchers worldwide, including both experienced and junior researchers, as well as those who contract and manage research, such as international agencies and non-government organizations.
- **Anyone may use the resources under the Attributive Non-Commercial Creative Commons License (CC BY-NC) crediting Global Kids Online as the source.** For information on how to become a member of Global Kids Online, visit www.globalkidsonline.net/join
- In addition to this introduction, there are detailed guides on how to use the qualitative and quantitative research tools.

What can you find in the research toolkit?

The global research toolkit consists of qualitative and quantitative tools designed for children and parents/carers. It contains four main complementary elements:

(1) Qualitative toolkit

The qualitative toolkit comprises tools to help you design, carry out, and analyse qualitative research on children's online risks and opportunities. It is designed to cover the key topics prioritised by Global Kids Online, while being flexible enough to follow up on the issues that children themselves raise. It includes:

- **A qualitative guide with the framing and parameters of qualitative research with children, and guidance on research planning, ethics, sampling and administration, and how to adapt the tools in different contexts.**
- **Topic guides (with core and optional questions) for individual interviews and focus group with children.**
- **Guidance on data analysis.**
- **Fieldwork preparation documents (letters of invitation to participate, consent forms, example project leaflets, etc.).**

The qualitative toolkit can be accessed at: www.globalkidsonline.net/qualitative.

(2) Quantitative toolkit

The quantitative toolkit comprises tools to help you design, carry out, and analyse quantitative survey research. It includes:

- **A quantitative guide explaining the survey design, sampling procedures, cognitive testing and piloting, data cleaning and preparation, weighting and quality control.**
- **A modular survey questionnaire, including core, optional and adaptable questions, for parents/carers and children.**

- **A data dictionary and an SPSS syntax file enabling consistency and quick transformations on the data.**
- **A list of key indicators.**

The quantitative toolkit can be accessed at: www.globalkidsonline.net/survey.

(3) Method guides

These guides examine key methodological issues related to researching children's online risks and opportunities. Taken together, they will guide researchers through the research process. Written by experts in the field, they give practical advice to researchers, with case studies, best practice examples, and useful links and checklists.

The guides cover the following topics:

- **Research framework for online risks and opportunities;**

- **Ethical considerations for research with children;**

- **Survey sampling and administration;**

- **Adopting and adapting a standardised modular survey;**

- **Conducting qualitative and quantitative research with children of different ages;**

- **Researching the global opportunities for children online;**

- **The challenges of researching online child sexual exploitation and abuse;**

- **Participatory methods: engaging children's voices and experiences in research;**

- **Global and regional comparative analysis of children's internet use;**

- **Global research on children's online experiences: addressing diversities and inequalities;**

- **Using research findings for policy-making.**

The method guides can be accessed at: www.globalkidsonline.net/guides.

(4) Tool adaptation

This part of the toolkit is intended to assist researchers in deciding how best to adapt the tools provided to their unique environments and particular research agendas. It includes guidance on the best approaches and practical examples of how the Global Kids Online toolkit has already been adapted by our research partners and the lessons learned, along with some resources in a range of languages.

Further information about adapting the toolkit: www.globalkidsonline.net/adapting.

Things to consider when deciding to use the toolkit?

It is important that the toolkit continues to evolve as it is adapted and used in new countries around the world. It is important that each research team can develop their own questions and include topics of interest to them. Equally, it is important that the toolkit remains constant to enable comparisons across countries and over time, so as to build the global knowledge

To produce meaningful comparisons on a global level, Global Kids Online has developed a methodology that is standardized enough to allow for cross-national comparison of data, yet flexible enough to account for local and contextual variations.

When deciding whether to use and adapt the GKO research toolkit to local contexts or topics, we suggest the principles outlined below.

Addressing opportunities and risks together

- There is considerable public and policy anxiety about the risks children encounter online. This creates the danger of emphasising child protection while overlooking children's rights to

provision and participation in the online environment. Global Kids Online offers a more balanced way of addressing opportunities alongside risks. By gathering evidence about both opportunities and risks together, we can ensure that the evidence can be used both to manage risks and to enhance opportunities, thus addressing the breadth of children's rights in the digital age.

- By focusing on children's views and experiences, the research thereby includes their voices in evidence-based policy, as well as recognising that children may perceive online experiences and outcomes differently from what might be expected.
- Our approach recognises the possible connections between opportunities and risks, and between online and offline experiences. For example, Global Kids Online looks at the extent to which children engage in or experience hurtful behaviour, whether online or face-to-face, in order to understand whether use of digital technology might facilitate such hurtful exchanges.
- Finally, our research toolkit aims to evaluate rather than assume that children experience harm by distinguishing encounters with online risk from the experience of harm as a result (for example being bothered or upset, feeling uncomfortable or scared by something they saw online). Access, skills, risks and opportunities are all part of the overall picture of children's well-being and rights in the digital age and should all, therefore, be kept in mind when developing research and policy.

On online risks, see Method Guide 7: Researching online child sexual abuse at www.globalkidsonline.net/sexual-exploitation.

Children as holders of rights

- The Global Kids Online toolkit invites

researchers and research users to adopt a child-centred approach which sees children as rights-holders and citizens, able to actively shape the online domain and able to exercise agency in the digital environment.

- In relation to this child-centred approach, we aim to explore children's ability to seek and offer support, create coping strategies and build resilience and even act as agents in their families or communities by introducing online activities or helping their families and peers.

See Method Guide 8: Participatory methods at www.globalkidsonline.net/participatory-research.

Focus on child well-being

- Research on the outcomes of children's internet use needs a clear focus on child well-being and to investigate the circumstances under which use of the internet is beneficial for children, but also when and for whom it might increase the risk of harm.
  It is particularly likely that the factors that support children's vulnerability or resilience may vary across contexts. Influential factors usually act in combination, and diversity in children's circumstances is likely to make for complex and contingent findings.

Considering diversity and inequalities

- It is important to develop measures and techniques that recognize the considerable diversity and inequalities in children's lives. These relate to their living conditions in general (necessitating measures such as access to education, material deprivation, discrimination, family composition, community satisfaction, family relationships and teacher or peer support) and to internet and mobile access in particular (necessitating measures such as the nature and consistency of connectivity).[1]

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[1] For example, when developing the Global Kids Online survey it should be taken into account that the primary mode of internet access for children in global South might be through mobile phones rather than computers. As a consequence, only asking questions about internet as used on a computer might fail to capture common online practices, content and experiences that children in developing countries enjoy.

- Each of these factors can be used to differentiate among children within and across countries and, thereby, to determine which variables matter in differentiating their online experiences and its outcomes. It is important to pay special attention to those who may be of greater vulnerability, such as indigenous or ethnic minority children, migrants, children in poor or rural settings or disabled children.

See Method Guide 10: Addressing diversities and inequalities at: www.globalkidsonline.net/inequalities.

What is available to children?

- Recognition of the diversity of digital devices, sites and services used by children. Combined with the simple fact that children tend to name services by brand name (e.g. Facebook) rather than type (e.g. social network site), or to be unclear whether a service is online or not (especially for messaging and for gaming), identifying how children use the internet is a complex task requiring on-site interviewer explanation or translation as appropriate.[2]

See Method Guide 5: Research with young children at www.globalkidsonline.net/young-children.

Sensitivity to cultural norms and practices

- Adjustment to the cultural norms in different societies demands attention – for example in relation to children's chance of answering questions privately, unobserved by parents/carers or in asking children about sensitive or intimate matters such as sexual content, risky online activities, or experiences regarded as transgressive. Related challenges

arise from possible disconnections between adult assumptions and children's lived experiences. Navigating cultural, individual and political sensitivities related to the issues under study (especially when risk-related) is important when conducting research and when reporting the results.

See Method Guide 2: Ethical research with children at: www.globalkidsonline.net/ethics.

How to ensure comparability of data?

Qualitative methods can be relatively forgiving, permitting the researcher to judge the situation of data collection in a flexible way and still draw comparable conclusions across children or contexts or even countries. There is more pressure on the conduct of a survey questionnaire, as this both carries the main burden of delivering cross-nationally standardised and reliable data while also leaving little flexibility to the process of survey administration or contextualisation. In terms of research topics, too, the tension between standardisation and contextualisation is difficult. It is possible to address these challenges as outlined below.

The survey

In designing the Global Kids Online questionnaire, we created a modular survey with Core, Optional, and Adaptable questions:

- **Core** questions are comparatively few and must be included in the survey in any country. They cover all the elements of the Global Kids Online research framework and they balance research on opportunities and risks. While they may be changed as the research progresses and children's digital environments change, the core

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[2] For example, the pilot process discovered that children and parents/carers in different countries refer to what we know as 'the internet' in a variety of ways – if at all. Some children do not distinguish clearly between being online and offline, as they feel constantly connected through their cell phones. In several cases during pilot testing, parents/carers did not at first understand what our study was about, when presented as a 'study of how

children use the internet'. In some cases, interviewers had to explain that by 'the internet' they meant applications like Facebook and WhatsApp, and only then did it become clear to the participants what the survey was about. See also Research synthesis report at: www.globalkidsonline.net/synthesis.

questions are expected to remain fairly stable to retain comparability over time as the project moves forward and the Global Kids Online network grows.

See Method Guide 1: Research framework at: www.globalkidsonline.net/framework and Method Guide 6: Researching opportunities at: www.globalkidsonline.net/opportunities.

- **Optional** questions are more numerous, covering the elements of the framework in more depth, or adding new topics entirely, and are available for use as appropriate to the research context or as determined by national researchers.[3] As an example of a full optional topic, we developed a set of questions to measure forms of online sexual risks.

See Method Guide 7: Researching online child sexual abuse at: www.globalkidsonline.net/sexual-exploitation.

- **Adaptable** questions invite individual countries to add questions or response options of particular relevance to them. This was important for current partners but also for future – and unknown – partners, to provide a mechanism for future flexibility depending on specific national, cultural or digital contexts. Once piloted and evaluated, these questions could become optional questions in a future revision of the questionnaire.

In effect, this allows the Global Kids Online survey to provide all partners – current and future – the chance to contribute to the questionnaire design with their own questions through an iterative approach to survey development. Over time, the number of questions will increase as a result and the questionnaire will remain up to date and able to provide a comprehensive range of questions of interest to stakeholders on a local, regional and

global scale. Our method thus takes full advantage of a partnership approach to developing the questionnaire, making the process dynamic, inclusive and continuous.

The qualitative research

Broadly, the design of the qualitative interview protocols follow the same model as the survey development process. A set of topics are provided in the toolkit but the protocols are loosely structured, freeing research teams to determine what will work optimally in their country and which topics might be of most interest.

In the pilot research, focus group moderators were trained by national researchers and were invited to draft their own sets of questions based loosely on the topics provided. The purpose of the qualitative research was also left flexible. In countries where prior qualitative research already existed, it might best be used after the survey, to follow up on puzzles or deepen interpretation.

For further information about the pilot research, see Research Synthesis report at: www.globalkidsonline.net/synthesis.

See Method Guide 8: Participatory method at www.globalkidsonline.net/participatory-research and Method Guide 3: Survey sampling and administration at: www.globalkidsonline.net/sampling.

While similar implementation across all countries would strengthen the comparative aspect, a key purpose of this pilot process was to assess different types of data collection and evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of each. It would be unrealistic to assume that all countries can collect data through identical methods, and so an understanding of the relative advantages and disadvantages of data collection methods is invaluable. In some countries certain options will be more feasible or beneficial than others.

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[3] The intention was to include as wide a selection of variables as possible and trust the research teams to include those that are important in their context, effectively relying on our partners to

each develop a contextually relevant survey, a task that is otherwise difficult to accomplish from a centralized perspective with limited insight into the country contexts.

Qualitative and quantitative research?

It is expected that the Global Kids Online research in each country will include both qualitative and quantitative methods. The parameters and purpose of the qualitative and quantitative strands can be decided by each research team based on what is feasible within existing timelines, budget and research interests.

The Global Kids Online qualitative research involves individual and focus group interviews with children and, optionally, parents/carers. Asking children about their experiences of the internet and the contexts and consequence of their use is an important means of data collection for research purposes and an important means of consulting children. Through qualitative research, children can voice their experiences in ways meaningful to them and potentially heard, understood and acted upon by adults. It also allows the researchers to identify new and emerging topics, and to grasp how the research questions relate to the wider contexts of children's lives.

The Global Kids Online quantitative research involves a nationally representative survey to children and, optionally, parents/carers. Through quantitative research, children can also describe their experiences, this time in ways that permit estimation of both common and rare experiences. Importantly, survey research permits the generation of evidence that supports generalisations to children in the country. The data can be analysed statistically to reveal the effects of demographic or other influences (age, gender, etc.) and to show comparisons over time or across contexts.

In planning a project using the Global Kids Online toolkit, it is advisable to conduct the qualitative research before the survey research, to permit children's experiences, so that children's voices can inform the survey design. But, the reverse is also

possible, permitting children's voices to help resolve puzzles that have emerged from the survey findings. In countries where little prior research exists, especially qualitative work that engages directly with children's own voices, experiences, and preferred forms of expression, it is important that qualitative research precedes and informs the design and conduct of survey research.

How to become a Global Kids Online country partner?

We encourage researchers to communicate to us their ideas of how they might use and adapt the existing toolkit and to share the lessons learned, thus contributing to the ongoing development and improvement of the Global Kids Online initiative.

In addition to using the research toolkit, we invite researchers to join the Global Kids Online project and contribute to our aim – to learn from children's experiences and to help policy makers, educators, and governments make the internet better for children everywhere.

The Global Kids Online project has drawn on a range of methodological expertise. This included taking note of how the toolkit performs when administered through different systems of administration and locations and reflexive consideration of how the findings are useful to and used by policy-makers and practitioners. All of these insights will be drawn upon and developed further in future iterations of the toolkit.

Accessing the Research Toolkit:

- ✓ *Quantitative research toolkit* resources, available at:
  www.globalkidsonline.net/survey
- ✓ *Qualitative research toolkit*, at:
  www.globalkidsonline.net/qualitative
- ✓ *Method guides*, available at:
  www.globalkidsonline.net/guides
- ✓ Further information on adapting the toolkit:
  www.globalkidsonline.net/adapting

APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY

Term	Description
Child	We follow the UNCRC in defining 'a "child" as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger' (UN, 1989). Global Kids Online focuses on children aged 9–17, while also encouraging research on younger children and young people aged 18+. We recognise that teenagers often bear adult responsibilities and may not consider themselves children, and also that cultures and contexts matter in determining the significance of 'child' and 'childhood'.
Digital, Digital age	Digital technologies are distinctively interactive, networked, remixable and ubiquitous media (boyd, 2014). Global Kids Online specifically focuses on the internet, whether accessed via computers, mobile phones or other digital devices, also including some other uses of computing and mobile technologies. When referring to 'the digital' or 'the digital age', we do not imply that society is radically transformed by digital media, nor that digital media represent the most important change in today's society.
Global North, Global South	These terms refer in shorthand to the strong (but far from absolute) tendency for inequalities in income (and research) to map onto geography and cultures. The terms avoid the much-criticized language of 'development' (as in developing vs developed countries). Still, there are dangers in all such binaries of implying a singular, normative vision of development goals, and obscuring inequalities within countries as well as the commonalities that exist even across continents.
Parent	We use the term 'parent' synonymously with 'carer' or 'guardian' to refer to the adults most closely involved in or responsible for a child's welfare and upbringing, recognising that this may include biological parents living separately from the child or step-parents or foster parents living with the child. We make no assumptions as to the number of parents or their sexuality, and we recognise that other family members (e.g. grandparents or aunts and uncles) may care for a child (including undertaking 'parental mediation' of their internet use). On the other hand, some children receive little or no parenting, whether or not they possess biological parents.
Research	Good quality research provides evidence that is robust, ethical, stands up to scrutiny and can be used to inform policymaking. It should adhere to principles of professionalism, transparency, independence, accountability and auditability. This is generally achieved through the development of theory, the specification of a clear research question, and the deployment of established

methods of research designed to answer the question.

Rights	Included here are children's civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights, as specified in the UNCRC (UN, 1989). This conceives of children as rights-holders and has been ratified by most countries in the world.
Well-being	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2011a, p. 18) defines well-being as 'meeting various human needs, some of which are essential (e.g. being in good health), as well as the ability to pursue one's goals, to thrive and feel satisfied with their life' (see Bradshaw et al., 2011).