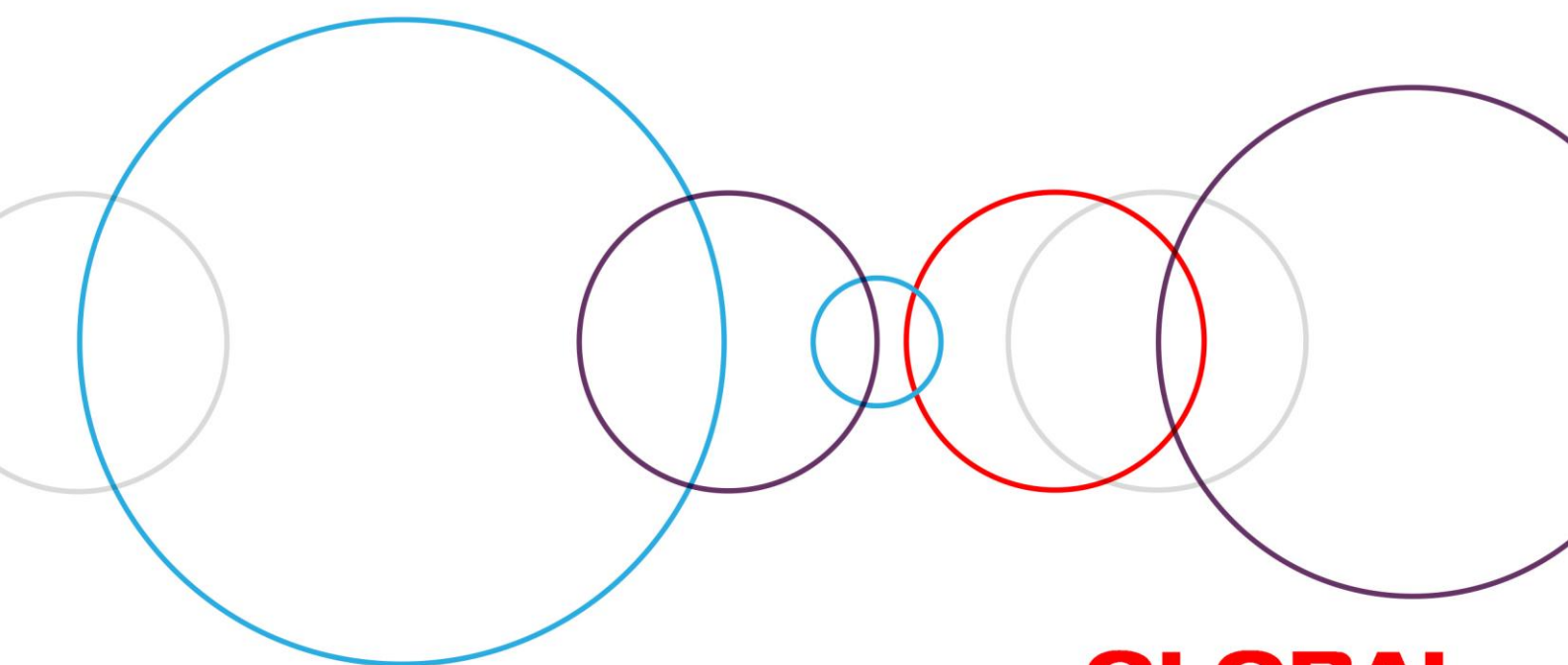


# GLOBAL KIDS ONLINE RESEARCH TOOLKIT

## Qualitative guide



**GLOBAL  
KIDS  
ONLINE**





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Welcome to the Global Kids Online qualitative guide. This outlines the parameters of qualitative research with children and offers practical guidance on conducting the research.

Before using this you should consult *Getting started with the Global Kids Online research toolkit* ([www.globalkidsonline.net/tools](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/tools)), which introduces you to the purpose and approach of Global Kids Online, and explains the range of qualitative and quantitative research resources freely available to you at [www.globalkidsonline.net](http://www.globalkidsonline.net)

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

## Why conduct the Global Kids Online qualitative research

There are particular merits of conducting qualitative research related to:

- Allowing children to voice their experiences in ways meaningful to them and that can potentially be heard and responded to within wider policy frameworks regarding internet and digital media provision.
- Qualitative research can be conducted before survey research, to permit children's experiences to inform the survey design or, alternatively, following the survey to resolve puzzles emerging from the quantitative findings.
- Gaining an in-depth knowledge of children's online experiences so as to understand their meanings, motives, practices and concerns.

- Understanding the specific contexts of childhood so as to respond to children's needs and develop culturally appropriate resources or interventions.

See *Method guide 8: Participatory methods* at [www.globalkidsonline.net/participatory-research](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/participatory-research)

## What can you find in the qualitative research toolkit?

This toolkit comprises the research instruments that will help you design, carry out and analyse the qualitative research on children's online risks and opportunities. These are designed in a way that allows the key topics identified by Global Kids Online to be covered, as well as remaining flexible and following up on issues that the children raise. In addition to this guide, the toolkit includes:

- **Topic guides (with core and optional questions) for individual interviews and focus groups with children.**
- **Guidance on data analysis.**
- **Fieldwork preparation documents (letters of invitation to participate, consent forms, example project leaflets, etc.).**

All elements of the qualitative toolkit can be accessed at [www.globalkidsonline.net/qualitative](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/qualitative)

## How to select key issues for the research

The qualitative research (individual interviews and focus groups) is organised according to the elements of the model, exploring key issues related to children's experiences of the online environment.

For the Global Kids Online model and framework see *Method guide 1: Research framework* at [www.globalkidsonline.net/framework](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/framework)

The topics covered have been identified based on a combination of international literature reviews, the work of the EU Kids Online network, and the Global

Kids Online pilot research in Argentina, South Africa, Serbia and the Philippines.

See more information about the work of EU Kids Online at [www.eukidsonline.net](http://www.eukidsonline.net). The model is summarised in Livingstone, Mascheroni & Staksrud (2015, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/64470/>) and European findings are presented in Livingstone et al. (2012, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/44761/>).

The topic guides cover:

- **Access:** how children access and use internet-enabled devices in their everyday lives.
- **Practices and skills:** what children do online and how, what they can/can't do or what they do/don't know.
- **Opportunities:** what activities children pursue online, why, and what benefits they report and how they respond to them.
- **Risks:** what problems or challenges children encounter online, and what harms they report and how they respond to them.
- **Well-being and rights:** how using the internet contributes to or undermines children's well-being, and their rights to provision, protection and participation.
- **Social factors:** in using the internet, how children are helped or hindered by family, educators, peers or the community.
- **Digital ecology:** what digital sites and services are available to children and how they engage with their specific features.

These elements in the model represent the **core** topics (or blocks of questions) in the individual interview and focus group topic guides.

The topic guides are loosely structured, freeing the research teams to determine what will work optimally in their country and which topics might be of most interest. Researchers are invited to draft their own questions based loosely on the topics provided. The length of each core topic can vary depending on the researcher's or the children's interests. It is important that all **core** themes are covered to some extent, but it is ambitious to cover all topics in great depth. Under each of the core

themes, the topic guides indicate a range of **optional** questions that could also be covered.

It is left to the discretion of the researchers working in particular contexts or with particular groups of children to decide which themes to pursue in more depth and which to cover more superficially. The aim is to allow children's own voices, experiences and preferred forms of expression to direct the discussion, and the topic guides may be used flexibly to allow this. Researchers might decide to reorder the topics (to make children feel more comfortable or to follow the flow of the discussion), as well as to change under which topics certain questions appear.

The topic guides also include suggestions and prompts about how to develop **additional** questions to address local, national or other cultural considerations as appropriate to the research context. When adapting the topic guides, consider changing the language used in the questions so that it is appropriate to the children's age, level of understanding, and sensitive to their native/main language, cultural and socio-economic background.

The topic guides and all other elements of the qualitative toolkit can be accessed at [www.globalkidsonline.net/qualitative](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/qualitative)

## How to conduct the Global Kids Online qualitative research

- When conducting focus groups or individual interviews with children, aim to cover all core elements of the topic guide, unless sufficient qualitative research has recently been published in the country and further qualitative work is considered unnecessary.
- The topic guides are intended to be used for children aged 9–17 who are internet users and who have used the internet at least once in the past three months.

### Diversity and 'hard-to-reach' groups

- When conducting the focus groups and interviews it is important to remain sensitive to the considerable diversity in children's lives and

the inequalities some of them might face, for example, based on gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity/cast, socio-economic status, language, disability and confidence levels.

- The selection process should aim for diversity among children to reflect the reality of a particular culture or country (e.g., in terms of ethnicity, spoken languages, school enrolment, rural/urban areas, particularly vulnerable or excluded groups), where possible.
- It is important to include socially vulnerable and underprivileged children when researching children's online experiences. This should be done in a way that feels comfortable and inclusive for the children.
- Doing research with children from less privileged background requires that researchers are reflective about their own social position and how this affects the research process.

See *Method guide 10: Addressing diversities and inequalities* at [www.globalkidsonline.net/inequalities](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/inequalities)

### Piloting and full study

- When using the Global Kids Online qualitative toolkit in a new country, language, cultural context or for a unresearched cohort or topic, it is important to pilot test and adapt the tools as appropriate.
- Piloting the qualitative tools will allow the researchers to decide (i) whether focus groups or individual interviews or both are preferable for a full-scale research project, (ii) how the topic guides may need to be adapted (e.g., question order to put the children at their ease, terms to use to refer to digital activities or devices) and (iii) how they could usefully be extended (e.g., additional topics to cover), as well as (iv) testing any materials as desired (e.g., images or games for younger children).
- For a small number of participants when piloting the research, it is best to conduct the focus groups and interviews with children aged 9–10 and 13–14. For larger samples, it is desirable to include children from several age bands (9–10,

11–12, 13–14 and 15–17). The pilot sampling should also aim for some diversity to reflect the country or research context.

- For focus groups with a broader age range (e.g., 9–17), it is best that children of similar ages (e.g., 9–10, 11–12, 13–14, etc.) are in the same groups. However, as this project includes sensitive topics such as online risky experiences, boys and girls should be in separate focus groups.
- An equal distribution of boys and girls in the overall sample and in each of the age bands (but not mixed within any one focus group) is recommended.
- A minimum of four individual interviews and four focus groups (ideally more) for a pilot study and 20–40 of each (interviews, focus groups) for a full study is recommended.
- Based on the preferences of each research team, the qualitative research can also involve additional elements, such as interviews and focus groups with parents, teachers, policy-makers and stakeholders.
- As part of the qualitative research, the researcher (or research team) should write field notes (preferably immediately after the focus group and interview) to record the nature of the setting (time, place, conditions), the group dynamics/the mood of the interview, and how the children responded, what parts went well or less well, whether other adults were present and whether they interrupted or disrupted the atmosphere, whether the child/children were excited or upset or reluctant to speak about anything, and so forth, and whether any follow-up protective actions were required.
- The field notes should also include some additional information about the participants, if not recorded elsewhere, including age, gender, ethnicity, disability and rural/urban area.
- The individual/focus group interviews should end with children (and possibly parents and teachers) being given some information about how to contact the researcher and, especially, sources of reliable (ideally confidential) guidance or help regarding online and child welfare

matters.

See *Method guide 2: Ethical research with children* at [www.globalkidsonline.net/ethics](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/ethics)

## Asking about the internet and digital skills

- It is important to recognise contextually specific meanings of identity, privacy, agency and harm, among other key concepts, notably 'child', 'parent', 'education' and indeed, 'internet'. Note that children tend to name services by brand name (e.g., Facebook) rather than type (e.g., social networking site), and may not know 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.
- Similar awareness is necessary in relation to the diversity of digital devices, sites and services used by children, to be able to ask questions in a way that makes sense to them.
- Skills are characterised by different dimensions and can be broadly divided into: *operational skills* (the ability to use computer technology and the internet, e.g., being able to install programs and click the right buttons); *browsing or information skills* (these contain, on the one hand, formal internet skills or the competency to navigate on the web and, on the other, informational or evaluation skills, the ability to evaluate the reliability of information found on websites and to cross-reference to information correctly); *social skills* (the skills needed for online communication, such as adding and deleting contacts and being able to decide what to share and not to share online); *creative skills* (ability to create inline content, such as videos or web content); and *mobile skills* (competency to use a mobile phone, e.g., installing apps and monitoring in-app purchases).
- It is important to have a balanced representation of both the risks and opportunities in the discussions with children in order to cover the full range of their experiences.

See *Method guide 6: Researching opportunities* at [www.globalkidsonline.net/opportunities](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/opportunities)

## Minimum requirements

The research should meet the Global Kids Online research criteria identified in the joining criteria.

Information about the joining criteria can be found at [www.globalkidsonline.net/join](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/join)

## Focus groups or individual interviews?

The balance between focus groups and individual interviews is flexible and may depend on the research context. Focus groups can be prioritised when the aim is to allow the exploration of a range of children's views and experiences. Individual interviews with children should be conducted to explore sensitive and risk-related questions or where the cultural preferences are for one-to-one research settings. Where possible, the research design should include both.

## Focus groups

- Focus groups are preferred when you want to consider not only the children's own accounts of their online experiences but also how they negotiate these accounts with others and the ways in which divergence or convergence between different views occurs. For example, from the dynamics of the group one can get a sense of what these children consider 'normal' or 'commonplace' and what seems 'unusual' or 'exceptional' or 'problematic' to them.
- Focus groups can be used to examine children's online practices, perceptions and beliefs in the context of their peer-related activities. They can uncover shared meanings, diversity of feelings, behaviours and activities. Focus groups can also identify key issues related to online behaviour that children of the same age talk about and may reveal how they communicate about their online experiences.
- The organisation of the focus group should put

the emphasis on the social interaction between the participants. The role of the researcher is to facilitate, encourage and observe discussions between the children.

- A focus group of 4–5 children is usually best. Separating boys and girls, especially for older children, is also important.

#### *Helping children feel at ease*

- Specify some ground rules at the beginning and consider structured warm-up activities.
- Set the scene in a way that encourages informal discussion and spontaneous participation, creating a trusting atmosphere between the participants themselves and between them and the facilitator.
- Children should feel that they are the experts and that what they have to say is valuable.
- Consider using pen-and-paper exercises (e.g., drawing or producing a shared image) or role-playing scenarios to engage children.
- Remember to observe the group dynamics, tensions and sensitive moments in focus groups. Intervene to moderate when necessary.
- Materials provided for discussion should also match the children's cognitive abilities.

#### *Facilitating responses*

- In focus groups it is important to moderate the conversation to avoid any particular children dominating the discussion, while the researchers should also hold back as far as possible to allow the participants to talk freely. Aim to achieve a balance in the contributions from different children.
- Consider breaking up the session, varying the activities and re-arranging the space to maintain children's concentration.

#### *Focus group activities*

- For children, an activity where they each create their own name tag and say something about themselves could be useful to establish a warm atmosphere and a sense of trust of the researcher and of the rest of the group.

## **Individual interviews**

- Individual interviews are preferred when you are interested in pursuing children's individual experience, perceptions or feelings. They are particularly suitable when investigating in more depth sensitive issues such as risky online experiences or reactions to risk and harm.
- Ideally, to understand how children use the internet at home, both the children and their parents would be interviewed. Children should be reassured that parents will not see or hear their responses.
- Good practice in interviewing children applies to everyone, including adults. But since children are generally interviewed by adults, and since they may not find it so easy to express themselves, a range of additional strategies may help children when they are interviewed.
- The order of the questions asked is significant. The topic guide for Global Kids Online begins with easy questions about children's online preferences and discusses risk later on during the interview, but not at the very end. It is left to the judgement of the researcher how much a particular theme in the topic guide, or particular responses from the child, are followed up within the interview to ensure that a thorough understanding of their circumstances is obtained.

#### *Helping the child feel at ease*

- To help the child feel at ease, you could assign them an 'expert role' – for example, let them know that they are the expert on their own media use, and explain that you would like to understand better what the child already knows.
- Some children may feel uneasy or afraid of making a mistake. Encourage the child and make him/her feel comfortable in answering despite what the answer may be.
- Try to use the child's language, glossary and expressions. Adjust the research situation to fit each individual child, making sure they feel comfortable.
- Pay careful attention to the dynamics of the situation, including such practicalities as making

sure you sit at the same height as the child.

- Do not forget to remind the child that the research is anonymous and confidential and that they can stop at any time. This might make them feel more relaxed.

### Facilitating responses

- Try to break up the interview into subsections, each with short introduction.
- Never give a child the impression there is a right answer, and avoid leading questions at all times (e.g., not 'Why do you like the internet' but 'Do you like the internet? Why do you say that?').
- Without making the child uncomfortable, address any inconsistencies and contradictions in what children might say – check for misunderstandings, verify interpretations and explore contradictions in what children say.
- Plan different prompts and probes in advance, to gain further details and richer material.
- Children may find it hard to sit still, and so try to give them reasons to move about if the interview is lengthy. Alternatively, try changing your body position.
- Where relevant (and if appropriate) ask the child to show you what they are referring to (e.g., 'Can I see your favourite website? Can you show me how your phone does that? Can I see the story you wrote?').
- Towards the end of the interview, it is good practice to feed back to the child(ren) the understanding you have gained, and ask them if it's right or if they wish to correct or add anything.

### Interview activities

- Mix one-to-one interviews with other kinds of tasks (drawing a picture, role-play games, pen-and-paper exercises).
- Timelines – children draw or are given a timeline and are asked to mark the ups and downs of an activity, overall internet experiences, a period of time, their own lives, etc. These could also take the form of 'confidence lines' that show how their confidence has changed with respect to some activity or how they can do something now that

they could not do before.

- Ranking exercises: children may be given a set of cards or photographs of activities or issues to rank in order of importance.
- Use cards with images or words on them (e.g., pictures of internet devices, online activities) and ask the child to sort them into meaningful groups and explain their classification. Include some blank cards in case they want to add something.
- Ask them to draw a picture related to an event or topic and then to tell a story to go with this. The researcher and the child may play turn-taking games, switching the roles of teller and told.
- Draw a mind map, using a large piece of paper, and invite the child to call out ideas or examples linked to the central topic (e.g., online risks or opportunities).

See *Method guide 5: Research with children* at [www.globalkidsonline.net/young-children](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/young-children) and *Method guide 8: Participatory methods* at [www.globalkidsonline.net/participatory-research](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/participatory-research)

## Analysis of the qualitative data

- Usually interviews and focus groups are audio-recorded and then transcribed (and anonymised). Transcripts of interviews and focus groups are the basis for textual analysis.
- A common way to approach the qualitative data analysis is the construction of themes. These might be decided when designing the study (i.e., include themes that defined the topic guide and are part of the overall research model).
- Themes might also emerge during the fieldwork or the analysis of the data, and it is a particular strength of qualitative research that new themes can arise from what children or others say, often reflecting their particular contexts or experiences.
- Similar themes, ideas or concepts that have been discovered are then brought together and grouped into categories (a process known as 'coding').
- The presentation of qualitative data usually involves the selection of (anonymous) quotations



from children to illustrate and support the presentation of the findings.

- Qualitative analysis is also a prime field for participatory research: you can invite the children to review their own transcripts and comment on them (also using those comments as part of the research material), or help researcher select meaningful areas of analysis and concern; this will aid the researchers' accountability.

See *Method guide 8: Participatory methods*, at [www.globalkidsonline.net/participatory-research](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/participatory-research)

- The individual concepts and themes should be put together to build an integrated explanation of children's online experiences, which can then be interpreted in the light of the prior empirical, theoretical and policy-related literatures.

Further guidance on coding data can be found in the *Procedure for coding and analysis* at [www.globalkidsonline.net/qualitative](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/qualitative)

## What to do next?

There are a number of steps you could do next:

- If you have not read the *Getting started* guide on the purpose and approach of Global Kids Online, which explains which resources are available in the Global Kids Online research toolkit, please read this at [www.globalkidsonline.net/tools](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/tools)
- Guidance for future partners and minimum requirements for the Global Kids Online research are available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/join](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/join)
- Continue with the practical research instruments from the *Qualitative research toolkit* that will help you design, carry out and analyse the research.

All elements of the quantitative toolkit can be accessed at [www.globalkidsonline.net/qualitative](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/qualitative)

- Read our methodological guidance on a selection of key topics related to researching children's online risks and opportunities, giving

practical advice to researchers (with case studies, best practice examples, useful links and checklists). See below for a full list of the relevant *Method guides*.

### Method guides

Livingstone, Sonia (2016). *Method guide 1: A framework for researching Global Kids Online: Understanding children's well-being and rights in the digital age*. London: Global Kids Online. Available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/framework](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/framework)

Berman, Gabrielle (2016). *Method guide 2: Ethical considerations for research with children*. London: Global Kids Online. Available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/ethics](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/ethics)

Platt, Lucinda (2016). *Method guide 5: Conducting qualitative and quantitative research with children of different ages*. London: Global Kids Online. Available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/young-children](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/young-children)

Third, Amanda (2016). *Method guide 6: Researching the benefits and opportunities for children online*. London: Global Kids Online. Available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/opportunities](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/opportunities)

Quayle, Ethel (2016). *Method guide 7: Researching online child sexual exploitation and abuse: Are there links between online and offline vulnerabilities?* London: Global Kids Online. Available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/sexual-exploitation](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/sexual-exploitation)

Kleine, Dorothea, Pearson, Gemma, & Poveda, Sammia (2016). *Method guide 8: Participatory methods: Engaging children's voices and experiences in research*. London: Global Kids Online. Available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/participatory-research](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/participatory-research)

Hasebrink, Uwe (2016). *Method guide 9: Global and regional comparative analysis of children's internet use*. London: Global Kids Online. Available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/comparative](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/comparative)

Banaji, Shakuntala (2016). *Method guide 10: Global research on children's online experiences: Addressing diversities and inequalities*. London: Global Kids Online. Available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/inequalities](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/inequalities)

Byrne, Jasmina, Albright, Kerry, & Kardefelt-Winther, Daniel (2016). *Method guide 11: Using research findings for policy-making*. London: Global Kids Online. Available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/policy](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/policy)

A full list of the *Method guide* topics can be found at [www.globalkidsonline.net/guides](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/guides)

### Other useful resources

You can access the *Research toolkit and findings* from EU Kids Online at [www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/Home.aspx](http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/Home.aspx)

The original EU Kids Online III *Technical interviews report* is available at <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/60558/>

*Full qualitative research findings report*, available at <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/56972/>

EU Kids Online *Best practice guide*, available at <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/50437/>

Barbovschi, M., Green, L., & Vandoninck, S. (2013). *Innovative approaches to investigating how young children understand risk in new media: Dealing with methodological and ethical challenges*. London: EU Kids Online Network, LSE.

Lobe, B., Livingstone, S., & Haddon, L. (2007). *Researching children's experiences online issues and problems in methodology*. London: EU Kids Online Network, LSE.

Ólafsson, K., Livingstone, S., & Haddon, L. (2013). *Children's use of online technologies in Europe: A review of the European evidence base*. London: EU Kids Online Network, LSE.

**The Global Kids Online network 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 on and developed further in future iterations of the toolkit.**

### Other materials from the research toolkit

- ✓ Additional qualitative research toolkit resources include the focus group and individual interviews topics guides, the procedure for coding and analysis. These are available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/qualitative](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/qualitative)
- ✓ *Quantitative research toolkit*, available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/survey](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/survey)
- ✓ *Getting started with the Global Kids Online research toolkit*, available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/tools](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/tools)
- ✓ *Method guides*, available at [www.globalkidsonline.net/guides](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/guides)
- ✓ For further information on adapting the toolkit, see [www.globalkidsonline.net/adapting](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/adapting)