Growing Up In Digital Europe (GUIDE) will be Europe’s first comparative birth cohort study of children’s and young people’s wellbeing. The aim of the GUIDE study is to track children’s personal wellbeing and development, in combination with key indicators of children’s homes, neighbourhoods, and schools, across Europe. GUIDE will be an accelerated cohort survey including a sample of infants as well as a sample of school age children. One of the principal tasks in the preparatory stage of the survey has been to implement the GUIDE Pilot Survey, a large-scale cohort pilot survey using a harmonised instrument and research design in five European countries: Croatia, Finland, France, Ireland and Slovenia. Three groups of respondents were interviewed, with a separate questionnaire for each group: 1) 8-year-old children, 2) parents of 8-year olds, 3) parents of newborn children. There were around 750 respondents per country, that is 250 respondents for each questionnaire in each country. Survey agencies used a variety of sampling and recruitment strategies. Whereas in Finland the survey took place in the CAVI (Computer-Assisted Voice Interviewing) mode, face-to-face interviews were implemented in the other four countries. The surveys took place between spring and early autumn 2023. The surveys have been successfully implemented in all five countries. An examination of survey responses, evaluation questions, and insights from survey agencies collectively assures us that the questionnaire content is mainly adequate and serves as a very good basis in the preparations of Wave 1 of the GUIDE survey. However, the insights obtained from our five pilot surveys offer valuable reflections on potential improvements for the design of forthcoming national surveys. The pilots shed light on the impact of recruitment methods, revealing increased complexity in survey implementation in settings where recruitment transpires in public spaces. Also, the positive influence of financial incentives on response rates and respondent satisfaction, crucial in the longitudinal context of our project, emerged as a noteworthy finding. The consideration of Computer-Assisted Voice Interviewing (CAVI) as a viable alternative to Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI), particularly for hard-to-reach populations, deserves serious attention. Finally, the pilot experience emphasizes the importance of providing interviewers with enhanced training, especially when engaging with child respondents. The lessons drawn from our pilot surveys also extend to considerations regarding the content of our questionnaires. While the fundamental structure of the questionnaire will not undergo substantial changes, thoughtful modifications are to be considered. A notable aspect pertains to the use of 5-scale answers in child questionnaires, where indications suggest potential challenges for some children. Also related to children's comprehension of questions, a discussion is needed around the inclusion of the so-called existential questions (such as those probing the meaning of life or optimism) when interviewing 8-year-olds, prompting reflection on whether these questions are best reserved for an older age group.

Keywords: well-being, child well-being, birth cohort, survey, pilot survey