

DATA STRATEGY

February 2023

CHILDLIGHT

Global Child Safety Institute

CREATING A
BRIGHTER PATH
FOR CHILDREN



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

HUMAN
DIGNITY
FOUNDATION

childlight.org

THE CHALLENGE

Data matters because it forms the foundation of a robust child protection sector – without which we cannot keep children safe or prevent violence from occurring in the first instance. Yet this sector is characterised by multiple data sources, differing definitions and lack of data access, especially relating to child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA).

This is a major inhibitor to developing more effective and evidence driven prevention and response strategies and policies. Without data and analysis, programmes are more difficult to design, deliver and evaluate; evidence is difficult to generate and credibly defend; narratives and definitions that frame the issue are difficult to construct; policy is difficult to advocate for and funding is difficult to access. Without high-quality data that can guide policy and programmes, children continue to be at risk for child sexual exploitation and abuse and perpetrators have impunity.

THE RESPONSE

Childlight will enhance the knowledge and understanding of the prevalence and nature of CSEA globally, providing policy makers and practitioners with reliable, relevant, and current data by which to make better informed and focused decisions to safeguard children.

This challenge led to the establishment of Childlight, a fully resourced global data institute anchored in academia at the University of Edinburgh. Childlight will enhance the knowledge and understanding of the prevalence and nature of CSEA globally, providing policy makers and practitioners with reliable, relevant, and current data by which to make better informed and focused decisions to safeguard children.

Childlight will prioritise gathering and synthesising prevalence and nature data related to CSEA with annual flagship data reports, a global index, and data dashboard. While prevalence data will answer the questions around the magnitude of the problem, nature data will help us understand the who,

what, when, where, why and how around child sexual exploitation and abuse. Data insights will be informed by young people and adults with lived experience – so that we keep the child at the centre of all data and system improvement efforts.

Childlight will work with partners across the sector to build on the good work that exists through enhancing and analysing current data to developing innovative data strategies for the child protection needs of the future. It brings together the best of academia (research, rigour, independence) with the best of the child protection sector through law enforcement and other high-value administrative data. Childlight will also contribute to data improvement across a range of methodologies from population-based survey efforts to unlocking the potential of administrative data.

Better use of data can help organisations aimed at safeguarding children and preventing violence succeed – across the public, private and third sectors. It can support the delivery of existing child protection services, from policing to social work, and it can be used to create entirely new services. It is a driver of scientific and technological innovation, and central to safeguarding children and preventing violence against new emerging threats.

However, data use is limited by barriers to its access – such as when data is not collected, shared, when access rights are overly complex or when organisations do not have the capacity to use the data they already have. These barriers undermine the performance of public services, risking poorer outcomes for children. We will ensure that data can be leveraged to deliver new and innovative services to safeguard children, promote stronger prevention programming to stop

violence before it ever starts, and contribute to framing debates for better policies. We will drive an approach to data that holds that all children can benefit when data is used responsibly.

Within the last decade, we have seen huge technological changes, and child protection systems need to respond accordingly. We need a data strategy that reflects the opportunities and challenges of our new hyper-digital world and ensures we keep children's safety and rights front and centre.

But we have a duty to do more – especially with the data that the child protection sector itself holds, which can be used and shared for the benefit of all children. High-value data held by law enforcement can help us understand offender trajectories, case management data from social services can help us further understand risk factors, child helpline data can help us understand child protection concerns from children's perspectives. All these data sources provide additional insights not captured in traditional survey techniques – they tell us about violence affecting younger children, children from different population groups not normally included in research and give us data trends over time.

This strategy looks at how we can leverage existing child protection sector data strengths to boost the better use of data across government, civil society, academia, and private industry. As an autonomous data institute, we can maximise those strengths and position ourselves internationally to influence the global approach to data sharing as well as use and report data without fear or favour. We will act ambitiously, aligning our robustness of problem-solving with complex data with our values of timely data access – because **children can't wait.**

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THIS STRATEGY

This Data Strategy highlights our work across several pillars and workstreams. During the first year of the data institute, we will undertake a global scoping exercise to understand what data exists on the prevalence and nature of CSEA and where are the gaps. This will inform subsequent research agenda setting.

THE PILLARS

The Global Data Fellows Programme will engage researchers, practitioners, and policymakers around the world to enhance research and leadership skills addressing existing global inequities around research production, documentation, dissemination and use in the field of CSEA.

Several interconnected issues currently prevent the best use of data in relation to preventing and responding to child sexual exploitation and abuse globally. These are reflected in the core pillars of this strategy:

Data Foundations: To organise as a sector, we need common definitions around types of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Currently the sector is communicating at cross purposes – with definitional and organisational silos around online vs offline abuse, age and gender, and global vs national. The true value of data can only be fully realised when it is well defined, fit for purpose, recorded and held in a condition that means it is findable, accessible, and reusable. By improving the quality of the data –the very foundations of our work– we can use it more effectively and drive better policies and programmes from its use. We recognise a lot of our partners are working in this space, and alongside other pillars, our work will seek to enhance and not duplicate the work across the sector.

Our data strategy will be nationally and globally responsive, building on and responding to high-impact opportunities to use data in real-time to improve real-time outcomes for children.

Data Skills: To make the best use of data, those working in the child protection sector – from researchers to police analysts to advocates and policymakers – must have a wealth of data skills to utilise. The Global Data Fellows Programme will engage researchers, practitioners, and policymakers around the world to enhance research and leadership skills addressing existing global

inequities around research production, documentation, dissemination and use in the field of CSEA. Through partnerships between academia and organisations working to protect children, we will seek to develop a comprehensive package of learning opportunities for the sector.

Data Availability: For data to have the most effective impact, it needs to be appropriately accessible and reusable. That means encouraging better coordination, management of, access to and sharing of data of appropriate quality between organisations in the child protection system and ensuring appropriate protections for the flow of data. As we seek to drive increased use of data, we must also ensure that it is used responsibly, in a way that is lawful, secure, fair, ethical, and sustainable, while also supporting timely innovation and research. The data institute will be a leader in working through the complex challenges around data availability, transparency, and access through developing a data safe haven, protocols, and best practices for translating administrative data for scientific use, innovations in data sharing and transparent analysis and robust ethical data principles and practices.

Data for Impact: Data should be used to have impact – to better safeguard children now and prevent violence in the future. Our data strategy will be nationally and globally responsive, building on and responding to high-impact opportunities to use data in real-time to improve real-time outcomes for children. We will work with several deep-dive and partner

DATA STRATEGY PILLARS AND WORKSTREAMS

PILLAR 1
DATA FOUNDATIONS

WORKSTREAM
Definitions, Typologies And Data Quality

PILLAR 2
DATA SKILLS

WORKSTREAM
Global Data Fellows Programme

PILLAR 3
DATA AVAILABILITY

WORKSTREAM
Global Insights on CSEA

WORKSTREAM
Administrative Data

PILLAR 4
DATA FOR IMPACT

WORKSTREAM
Partner Country Data Packages

Underpinned by: A) continual monitoring, evaluation and learning informed by frontline practitioners, CYP, and adults with lived experiences, B) data governance, C) data ethics, D) data communication in useful formats for decision-makers and framers and C) data made accessible through dashboard and index.

insight countries to develop innovative data solutions to respond to policy and programmatic needs. We will also be responsive to data needs, at local, national, or international levels, that can immediately contribute to safeguarding children.

THE WORKSTREAMS

While data is most actionable at local and national levels, to better understand where gaps, challenges and opportunities lie requires a global picture.

From these pillars, we have identified five priority workstreams. These workstreams address where we feel we can make a significant impact on CSEA data globally.

DEFINITIONS, TYPOLOGIES AND DATA QUALITY

This workstream will aim to contribute to continually updating definitions and typologies with the latest evidence, seek to improve prevalence measurement, and to work with partners to set the correct conditions to make data usable, accessible, comparable (where appropriate) and available across countries ensuring the highest levels of ethics and integrity.

GLOBAL INSIGHTS ON CSEA

While data is most actionable at local and national levels, to better understand where gaps, challenges and opportunities lie requires a global picture. We will work across data sources globally, using and creating new and innovative advancements in data documentation, capture, synthesis, coverage, and analysis to present the global picture. This will culminate in a series of annual global data reports, an interactive dashboard and a global index compiled of key indicators around the scale and nature of CSEA. We will work with the sector to enhance data capabilities to ensure we are able to disaggregate data in meaningful ways through our data products for those working to protect children.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Administrative data refers to any information that is created when people interact with public services – in this case child protection system actors such as health, education, police, criminal justice, court, child helplines and other sources of data. There is massive untapped potential in the way government and public services use and share data to help and protect children who have experienced CSEA. This data is largely untapped due to the challenges in data access, managing the large amounts of data and in converting administrative data for scientific use. Through this work package and engaging in the latest administrative data scientific advancements, Childlight will aim to drive major improvements in the way information is efficiently documented, managed, used, accessed, and shared both within and across child protection system actors. We will pioneer ways that administrative data can be used to enhance population-based surveys (e.g., missing data) and where population-based surveys can enhance administrative data (e.g., population estimates) to ensure a much fuller picture of CSEA data globally. We also need to build the right skills and leadership within the public sector to understand and unlock the potential of CSEA data.

PARTNER COUNTRY DATA PACKAGES

This workstream would entail working with a small number of deep dive countries (Brazil, India, Kenya, Philippines, and the UK) and a larger number of Insight Partner countries, selected through agreed inclusion criteria, around country specific CSEA data needs. Indicative activities could include:

- Mapping of the child protection system and existing service level/ agency entry points for CSEA data access and safeguarding,
- Conducting a data diagnostics analysis – identifying what data is available, the quality of the data, the key data stakeholders, and governing bodies, and
- Developing a country specific data strategy that will incorporate both a standard data package but will address their specific CSEA needs

through a phased approach that prioritises both rapid and impactful strategic assessments and longer-term data systems improvement for CSEA as an entry point into larger child protection system strengthening.

GLOBAL DATA FELLOWS PROGRAMME

Our vision is to build the data and advocacy skills of both the future and current generation of academics, policymakers and practitioners that are using data to help safeguard children now and prevent violence from occurring in the future. Our innovative Global Data Fellows programme will work with partners across the globe to provide research capacity, training, data to impact skill building and concrete opportunities to make a change in children's lives.

CREATING BRIGHTER FUTURES AND SAFER PATHS FOR CHILDREN

Through the illuminating power of global data, insight and partnerships, we're tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse head on, creating brighter futures and safer paths for all children - everywhere. Together, the steps identified in this strategy build on Childlight, University of Edinburgh and the wider sector's data strengths to drive better use of data – data use that is more accurate, secure, accessible, timely, innovative, contextually specific, and directly linked to impact. Better use of data will drive investment in the sector, shape better use of public services for safeguarding, as well as drive more insights for targeted prevention. We have an obligation to realise this ambition because children can't wait.

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Join us, to illuminate the darkness and safeguard children, everywhere.