



CHILDLIGHT UPDATE 2024

TO ILLUMINATE AND ELIMINATE CHILD
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

established by

**HUMAN
DIGNITY
FOUNDATION**

hosted by



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Foreword



Paul Stanfield

Childlight
Executive Director

When Childlight launched little more than a year ago, we promised to keep shining a light on child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) until we knew the world had become a much safer place for children.

Our vision was to establish a world-leading, independent data institute, gathering and visualising data on the prevalence and nature of this global public health emergency in order to inform policy and drive sustainable, coordinated action. In other words, we illuminate to eliminate.

The scale of the challenge remains enormous, with efforts severely hampered by a lack of data, measurement, transparency and coordination. However, Childlight with our global partners are already making a difference with the release of [Into The Light](#), the world's first global estimate of the scale of online CSEA – and by acting as a catalyst of enduring change across the child protection system.

Our estimate of more than 300 million children being affected annually caught the attention of the world's media as well as policy makers, global institutions and NGOs. Our data is being cited by law enforcement, parliamentarians and regulators to help drive evidence-based action to protect children.

Whilst many data gaps and inconsistencies remain, this prevalence baseline, by which we can measure the sector's progress, is crucial to understanding and tackling a pandemic that has remained hidden in the shadows for too long. We are determined to build on this pioneering work – independently

audited by senior statistician Sir Bernard Silverman – to provide more reliable, country-by-country estimates and expand into other areas of child sexual exploitation and abuse, both online and offline.

This drive for data, shared with all who can use it to protect children, complements our first [Searchlight](#) flagship report, a compendium of research shining a light on the nature of CSEA. That report highlighted CSEA as it affects children in their early years and young people with disabilities, in addition to emerging threats, including in virtual environments and with AI-generated material.

In this endeavour we are indebted to the Human Dignity Foundation in establishing Childlight at The University of Edinburgh and recently signing a ten-year funding agreement. This has allowed us to move at pace and benefit from the support of world-leading researchers and experts across the field to undertake this complex challenge.

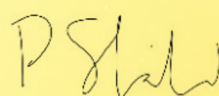
As well as collecting and translating data to understand the scale and drivers of CSEA, we offer a helping hand to turn data into action through our Childlight Technical Advisory Programme [C-TAP] because children can't wait. This support helps frontline responders around

the world to better connect to and act upon data, including tens of millions of pieces of intelligence on child exploitation and abuse, to apprehend perpetrators and safeguard children. It is also another pathway to obtaining further data to better understand and combat CSEA globally.

Our efforts are augmented by our hubs in Edinburgh and Sydney, covering the European and East Asia & Pacific regions, to enhance our networks, our knowledge and to catalyse change as we work with many others to access and share invaluable data.

Meanwhile, our Global Data Fellows programme harnesses the skills and commitment of some of the brightest minds in the world tackling the horror of CSEA. While a new Masters degree course we will host at The University of Edinburgh will help equip others to be agents of change.

No child should have to live in the darkness of sexual exploitation and abuse – and our light is growing brighter.



Paul Stanfield
September 2024

About Childlight

Data sits at our core and is the thread that joins Childlight's activities together. Everything that Childlight does is data driven – whether that is creating or collating data, turning that data into insight, building data standards, or getting that data turned into action to better prevent and protect children from CSEA.

Importantly, however, we start with “impact”, as often data alone is not enough to catalyse change. We assess what gaps exist in current data or knowledge and how we can fill these, but also understand what is most important for our partners across the ecosystem to know so that they can better effect change. As well as looking to the past and what data tells us about historic trends and behaviours, we also look to the future and identify upcoming trends that require a proactive response. This means that we focus our efforts on areas that are of importance to others, rather than just of interest.

The main vehicle that brings all of Childlight's activities together is our Into the Light global index, which measures the prevalence and incidence of child sexual exploitation and abuse around the world. Through this index, we aim to provide high-quality, trusted data to catalyse policy makers and framers, governments, NGOs and public services to build better policies, legislation, funding, and capabilities.

Childlight has different strands of activity that therefore contribute to not just building and assuring the index itself, but to proactively get the index data to those who can use it:

Research and analysis drives Childlight by both bringing together data sources to improve our understanding of the risk factors and drivers of

CSEA, and also undertaking new research where data or knowledge doesn't exist. Our research directly feeds prevalence and incidence data into the Into the Light global index across a number of indicators each year, as well as contributing to our compendium of research, our Searchlight report and dashboard.

Data is nothing without people, so we also operate a **Global Data Fellows Programme**. This is a selected cohort of people working with CSEA data as academics, practitioners or in industry across sectors. We support our Global Data Fellows with new skills and methods, building global networks and solving their own data challenges. The learning from our Global Data Fellows, and access to their data, informs and strengthens the Into the Light index.

We also care strongly about the professionalisation of data within the wider child protection system and the role Childlight plays in building the data capabilities of tomorrow. We host a Masters of Science programme at The University of Edinburgh on **Child Protection Data Futures**, to bring academic and practice worlds together to better understand and exploit the data that they hold.

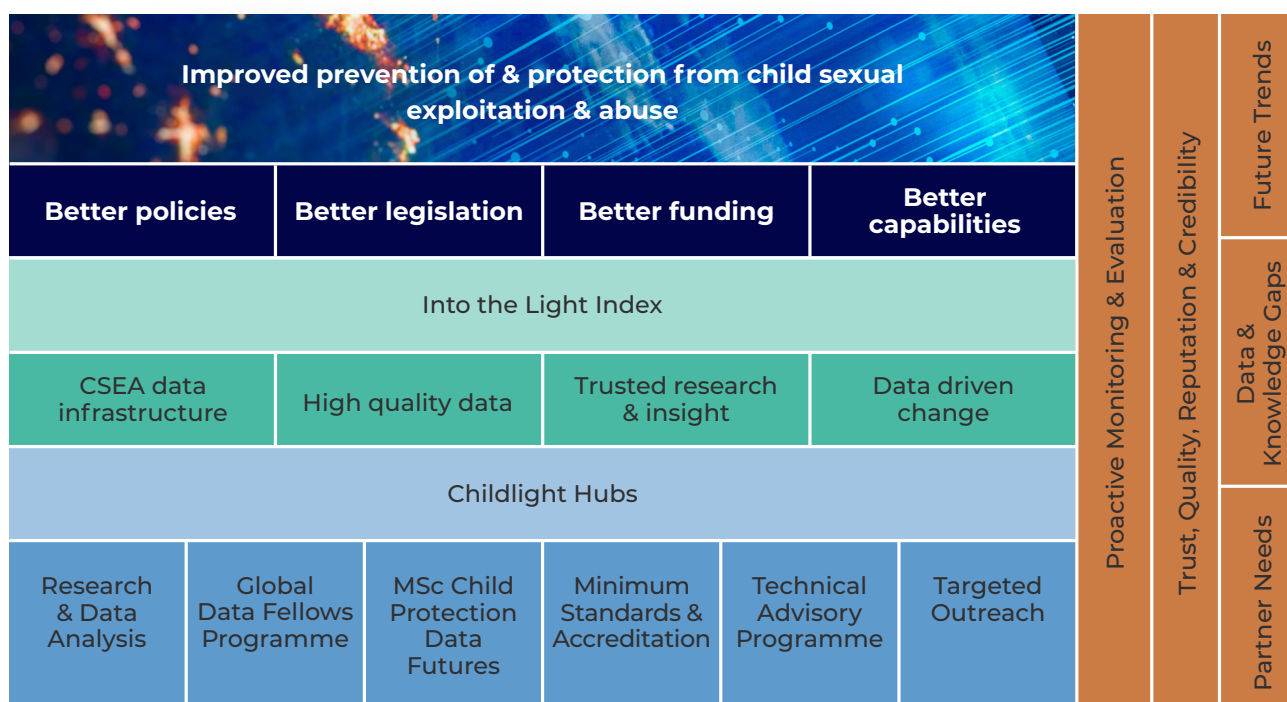
Because we have a strong grounding in research rigour and data quality, we also understand the importance of building consistent ways of collecting, analysing and using CSEA data around the world and across sectors. We identify where gaps exist or data activity is fragmented and develop **minimum standards** to guide individuals and organisations. We work with others to build this connectivity through the data so that the sector can better interoperate and learn more from each other.

Sometimes the problem isn't a lack of data but not being able to use the data that is already available. We work with frontline practitioners and data owners across the world through our **Childlight Technical Advisory Programme** [C-TAP] to connect up what data already exists so that they can themselves become data-driven. We provide on-the-ground support to not just understand data access and use challenges but practically work together and across our networks to solve systemic problems.

And finally, data and insights aren't useful if nobody knows about them or understands what

they mean. We use a range of proactive, targeted **communications and outreach** methods to ensure that our data and insights get to the people who can use them.

We know that we need to think global but act local. We have **Childlight Hubs** in Edinburgh and Sydney that cover European and East Asia & Pacific Regions respectively. Over the coming years, we intend to develop further regional Childlight Hubs to act as centres of data excellence and also better catalyse action within a regional or country context.



REVIEW

Into The Light

Our **Global index**, led by Director of Data Professor Debi Fry, produced the first estimate of the global scale of online CSEA. It was the result of original research and an analysis of 125 studies and over 36 million reports to the five main watchdog and policing organisations, it found the problem existed in every country where it is measured.

Among its key findings were:



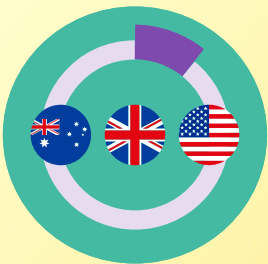
300 million+ children under 18 affected by online CSEA in the last 12 months



1 in 8 children subjected to online solicitation in the last 12 months



1 in 8 children experienced non-consensual taking, sharing and/or exposure to sexual images and videos in the last 12 months



11%

of men in the United States, 7% of men in the UK and 7.5% of men in Australia self-reported engaging in online child sexual exploitation or abuse. This equates to enough US men to fill a Super Bowl stadium 200 times over



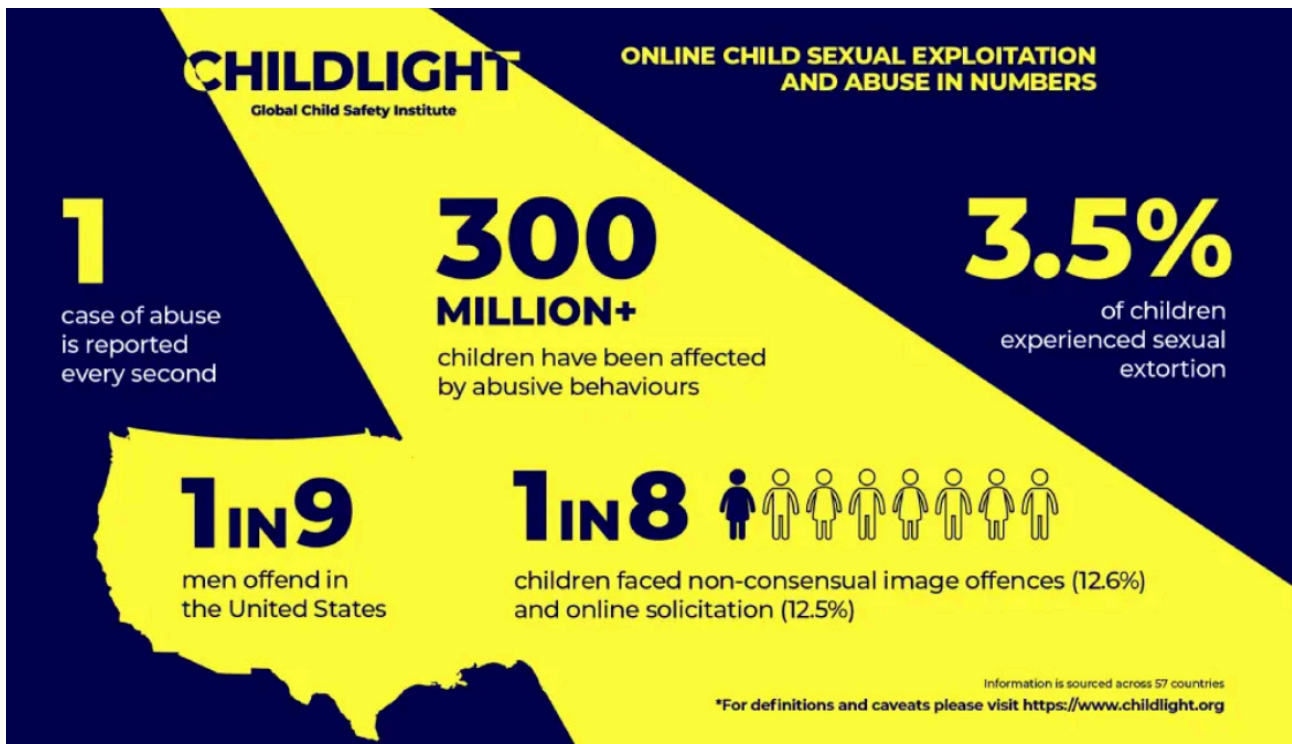
Files containing sexual images of children reported once every second

The scale of the problem, which was widely reported by media around the world, led us to conclude that CSEA should be treated like a global pandemic. We see the change that can be made quickly, and how countries and

organisations can come together, when there is a worldwide health emergency such as AIDS or COVID-19. A public health approach, not just responding to but also preventing CSEA, is required; we owe it to our children.

The data can be examined through a series of interactive maps and charts in a special [microsite](#) and considered in much more detail in our companion [report](#) and accompanying technical notes. We have briefed the findings to more than 170 organisations involved in combatting CSEA and will continue to share them around the world with people who can use them to protect and safeguard children.

If you have data, knowledge or insight that can improve our collective understanding, please [contact us](#), and if you are in a position to set or influence legislation, safeguarding, prevention, policy or funding, please use this data to inform your plans and recommendations.



“ Childlight’s work in producing its Into the Light Index has been carried out to a high professional standard and is to be commended ”



Sir Bernard Silverman chairs the Childlight Technical Sub-Committee and independently audited the global index

Searchlight

Childlight's flagship report represented the first of its kind in understanding the nature of CSEA globally. A compendium of nine reports, presented in an accessible dashboard format, it laid the groundwork for us to understand who benefits from CSEA as well as the burden it places on society.

Among the findings are that a majority of abused children are first abused before their 13th birthday, and there is a growing trend of trading child sexual exploitation and abuse material involving infants and toddlers. Searchlight also shone a light on the abuse of disabled children. Our hope is that by shining a light on the nature of CSEA we can help governments, businesses, law enforcement and anyone working with children understand what steps must be taken to keep children safe.

Regional Hubs

In addition to our headquarters based in Edinburgh, Childlight aims to establish a number of regional Childlight "hubs" to provide research, insight and data into core Childlight Global Index and Searchlight products, as well as supporting

the implementation of Childlight's global strategy to turn that data and research into impact to better safeguard children against child sexual abuse and exploitation. The first hub is based at University of New South Wales, Sydney to focus on the response to and prevention of CSEA across the East Asia & Pacific region.

The new hub, led by Professor Michael Salter, will have a thematic research focus on technology-enabled child sexual abuse, perpetrator prevalence, and survivor experience research. It intends to use this research to influence and shape CSEA prevention and response policy, legislation and funding with the East Asia and Pacific region and globally – and to accelerate the pace of change in the region by leveraging existing partnerships and influence.

Australia with its strong network of CSEA prevention and response allies leading the global field is a natural choice to host the hub as a regional leader with extensive networks and leverage across the Asia Pacific region, representing an opportunity to influence and accelerate the pace of change. We have selected UNSW Sydney because they share our values and intent, placing the needs of children at the heart of decision-making, with a shared commitment to turn research and insight into practice, for tangible impact.



Representatives of Childlight and UNSW Sydney met to discuss the new Childlight East Asia & Pacific Hub. They are, from left to right, Professor Jan Breckenridge, UNSW Head of School of Social Sciences and Co-Convener of the UNSW Gendered Violence Research Network; Childlight COO Zoe Lambourne, Childlight East Asia & Pacific Hub Director Professor Michael Salter; Professor Verity Firth, UNSW Vice-President Societal Impact, Equity and Engagement and Childlight CEO Paul Stanfield

Funding Agreement

The worldwide battle against the sexual exploitation and abuse of children received an enormous boost with a £20 million ten-year funding agreement reached between Childlight and the Human Dignity Foundation (HDF). Our CEO Paul Stanfield said he was “deeply grateful” to HDF for playing a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability of its efforts to combat CSEA. He said its support would “supercharge” Childlight’s

work to make a rapid difference for vulnerable children.

Dr John Climax, HDF chair and founder, said: “Childlight’s work in shining a light on this crisis is of vital importance because this is a serious global health emergency and must be treated as such. As with all pandemics, such as COVID-19 and AIDS, the world must come together and provide an immediate and comprehensive public health response. Children can’t wait.”



The ten-year Childlight funding agreement was signed at the Playfair Library, The University of Edinburgh by (left to right) Childlight CEO Paul Stanfield, Dr John Climax, chair and founder of the Human Dignity Foundation (HDF) and Professor Kim Graham, Provost of University of Edinburgh. Standing behind are L to R: Professor Sarah Prescott Vice-Principal and Head of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences University of Edinburgh and Dr Samantha Fawkner interim head of school, University of Edinburgh

MSc Child Protection Data Futures Programme

Childlight is developing the first global Master of Science in Child Protection Data Futures, which will bring in evidence-based teaching based on the learning from our global index Into The Light and other studies. Aiming to uplift the skills of those currently working with child protection data or planning to, it will join the suite of

masters degrees in the Edinburgh Futures Institute – an innovative University of Edinburgh programme that brings people, data and diverse disciplines together in their open, “what-if?” environment to spark the unexpected and create new ideas.

Childlight Technical Advisory Programme (C-TAP)

We recognise that it will take some time for governments to resolve to treat CSEA as a global health pandemic and that children can't wait. Therefore, we work with partners to protect children from immediate and ongoing harm today.

As we shine a light on how countries manage CSEA, we follow the data, identifying gaps and opportunities and seek to strengthen the ecosystem where possible. In the process we have discovered that most countries cannot effectively receive, analyse and translate millions of intelligence tips they receive each year about CSEA. This means millions of opportunities to safeguard vulnerable children are missed, which is unacceptable.

Our technical advisors act as catalysts for enduring change by engaging with relevant authorities, including police, to ensure data is received and acted upon, by providing them with initial support including training, capacity building and mentoring in partnership with others. To ensure sustainability and best use of

finite resources, it is important that countries themselves take the lead in these areas.

To professionalise the way data is managed, we will introduce minimum standards, accreditation and standard operating procedures and support partners undertaking 'Victim ID' operations to identify perpetrators and safeguard at risk children.

Global Data Fellows

Childlight aims to train the next generation of CSEA researchers at various levels to build the skills of researchers, practitioners and policymakers on using data to safeguard children globally. The Global Data Fellows Programme engages researchers around the world, building research and leadership skills to address existing global inequities around knowledge in the field of CSEA. Earlier this year 12 Global Data Fellows, including from Colombia, the Philippines and Kenya, joined us in Edinburgh for a successful residency to exchange learnings, which included sessions on humanitarian crises, terminology guidelines, our data strategy, future research plans and media training.



Some of our Global Data Fellows bonding at Rosslyn Chapel

LOOKING AHEAD

The past year has seen Childlight establish itself and its data products in the wider child protection ecosystem, highlighting both what is known but also where there are data gaps. Looking ahead, our focus is on deepening our

research and insight, strengthening how data is accessed, analysed and used around the world, and sharing our knowledge and learning to help others accelerate their own impact.

Deepening our research and insight

- **Updating Into the Light:** We will update the *Into the Light* global index to provide new prevalence and incidence estimates. We will also deepen the index to include more country level data, building it region by region. We will widen the index by including other forms of child sexual violence, to expand beyond just online or technology-facilitated abuse and exploitation.
- **Closing data gaps:** We will test new methods and potential new indicators to highlight prevalence of CSEA in hidden populations, such as children in the early years (i.e. under the age of 5).
- **Strengthening our index data:** We will expand our data pools to include administrative data from across child protection systems, such as social welfare and law enforcement. We will use this administrative data to enhance our index, but also map out where data exists and who holds it, so that we can share this mapping with others.
- **Sharing our 2025 Searchlight report and dashboard:** We will release our compendium of research on the theme of “*who gains from CSEA*”. This will include our research on monetary and non-monetary gain, as well as direct and indirect benefit.
- **Listening to others:** We will proactively seek the authentic input and guidance of those with lived experience, whether as victim-survivors, or as young people. We will hold ourselves to account so that our research is useful and impactful, not just interesting.

Building data infrastructure

- **Growing our Childlight Technical Advisory Programme:** We will build our C-TAP presence and support to frontline child protection system actors, to get existing data flowing and help frontline agencies to identify children that are being abused and exploited right now.
- **Embedding data essentials:** As we're working with partners on the ground, we will start to map to what extent each country has the essentials in place to access, receive and use CSEA data – across processes, technology, legislation, capabilities and partnerships.
- **Developing minimum standards:** As we scope and map where CSEA data resides within countries, we will develop a set of minimum standards, to set priority and consistency across the global CSEA data system. Where a country does not meet the minimum standards, we will provide support where we can or bring others in to help close any gaps.
- **Applying standard terminology:** We will continue to support updates to standardised CSEA terminology and apply these across our own research and activity, including the revised Luxembourg Terminology Guidelines and adoption of the INHOPE Universal Classification Schema.

Sharing knowledge and learning

- **Building skills and capabilities:** We will launch the inaugural year of the Childlight-affiliated MSc programme in Child Protection Data Futures via The University of Edinburgh, that aims to uplift the skills of those currently working with child protection data (or planning to).
- **Connecting disciplines:** We will continue to approach CSEA as a public health issue that is entirely preventable. We will learn from public health methods and approaches and how we can apply these into the field of child protection research. We will strengthen our connections into public health and epidemiology by working with those who are established in the field, including The Lancet Special Commission.
- **Getting our data to those who can use it:** We will continue to publish and promote our data and insight across channels and fields, targeting specific groups that have the power to make a difference and catalyse change. We will take our data to the places and spaces where it is heard, whether online or in person, public or behind closed doors. We will continue to work with partners across the ecosystem to understand how we can empower them with data and insight.
- **Accelerating change around the world:** We will expand our Childlight footprint, allowing us to connect and think globally but turn data into action locally. We will launch a new Childlight East Asia & Pacific hub, hosted at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia.



“ As with all pandemics, such as Covid and AIDS, the world must come together and provide an immediate and comprehensive public health response. Whilst CSEA cannot be completely eradicated, it is preventable and we must act now. Children can't wait ”



Dr John Climax,
Founding member and
chair of the Human
Dignity Foundation



“ A centralised global research database is essential to safeguarding children. Narrative and knowledge are frequently weaponised by child sex offenders to groom, offend, and evade justice. Childlight will restrict their capabilities by restoring power to the rest of the community ”



Grace Tame,
Survivor and director of the
Grace Tame Foundation

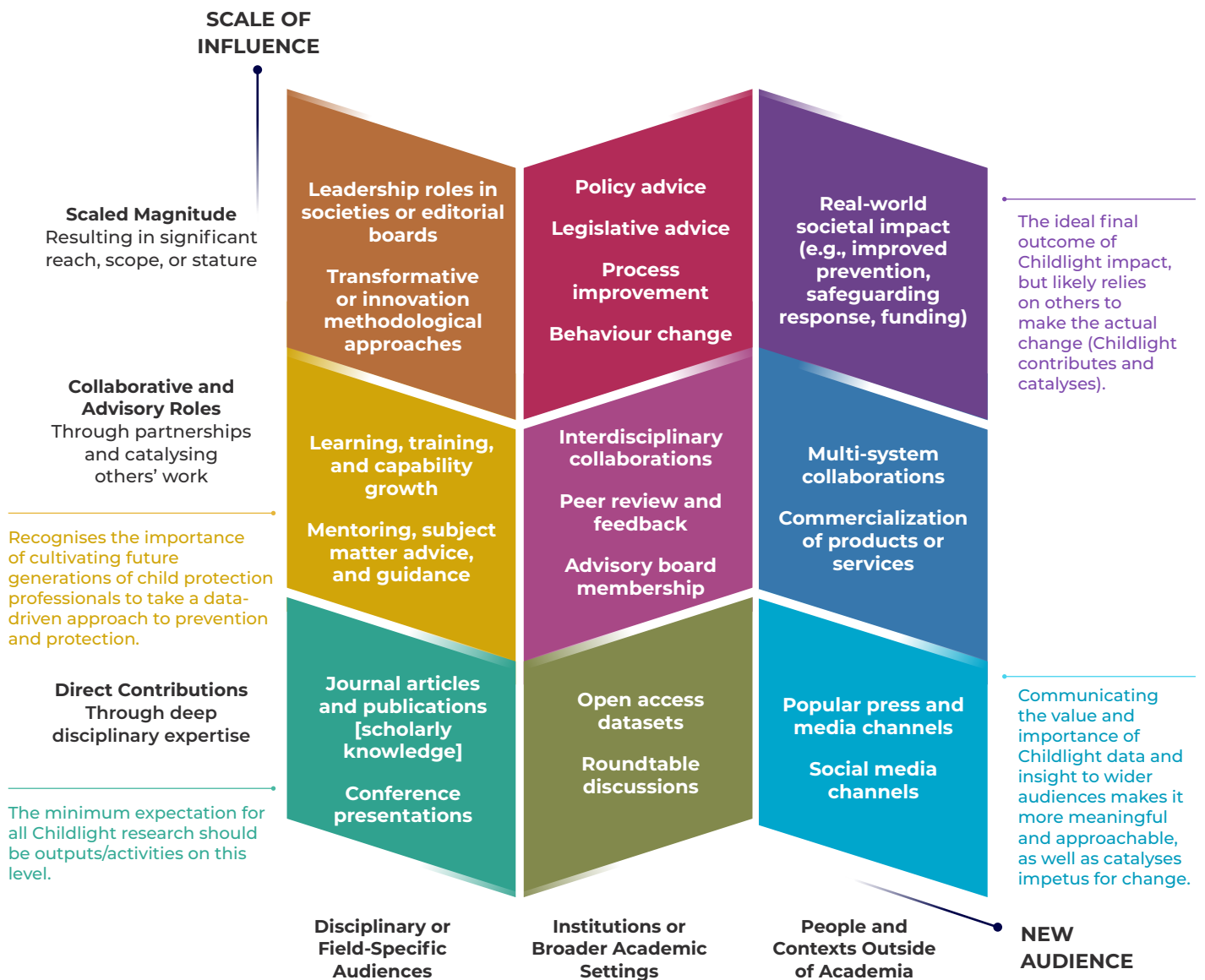


OUR IMPACT

With finite resources and a strategic focus on real world change, we prioritise our actions guided by what is most likely to deliver significant and lasting positive impact in tackling CSEA through our Pathways to Impact programme. Our data and insights are worth little if they are not shared with and used by individuals and organisations well placed to use them to effect change and we therefore work closely and collaboratively with governments, intergovernmental organisations,


civil society groups, private sector companies and leading practitioners in the field. Within the space of little more than a year, our work is already being noticed and making a difference.

Our approach can be illustrated through a Building Blocks for Impact model, and we have colour coded examples which demonstrate how these carefully fit into our strategy.




Adapted from Building Blocks for Impact Schmidt, R. (2022). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7049187>

Developed with DORA under Project TARA



Our cutting-edge approach to collating and generating data has provided a baseline for the world to better understand the prevalence of CSEA.




To date, following a carefully constructed media relations and stakeholder engagement campaign, our global prevalence index Into The Light has been mentioned in nearly 1,700 media reports in 20 languages in outlets with an audience reach of 7.9 billion people all over the world. This was supported with extensive use of Childlight's social media channels whose audience has grown by 205% since the start of 2024.



Prior to publication, we also briefed over 170 groups involved in combating CSEA in roundtable discussions.



This has helped us catch the attention of many policy makers, law enforcers and others in the field and has led to multiple opportunities for collaboration.




This and other prevalence data involving Director of Data Professor Debi Fry and her research team will be presented at the first ever global intergovernmental conference on ending child violence, to be held in Bogotá in November 2024.




We are also informing the work of the UK's online regulator Ofcom and our data has been cited by the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland with whom we are collaborating on new research and will inform the 2024 INTERPOL General Assembly.


Our research into emerging technological threats has also informed UK government policy. A fireside chat with GCHQ led to further research being undertaken with 'five eyes' countries, with the intent of spreading good practice on AI legislation globally.




Our research into the prevalence and nature of online CSEA among children living with disabilities has led to the disability theme being considered across all new Childlight research and forming part of our youth engagement strategy. Our research was also amplified in a paper for the open access international journal Disabilities, taking our findings to academics around the world.




We are bringing together key academics, professionals and survivors to make progress towards a global restitution scheme for survivors.




We have provided expert advice on the nature and extent of CSEA and recommended steps to inquiries and reviews of online safety by leading organisations, ranging from US Congress and the United Nations to the Australian Senate.




The Australian government has cited material prepared by Professor Michael Salter, Director of our new East Asia and Pacific Hub, in a strategy that led to the government investing AU \$6 million to prevent childhood trauma for boys. He has also provided training sessions on CSEA for judges at the Judicial College of Victoria, Australia.




In the UK we have informed parliamentary debates and election candidates and reached out to 103 governments, 10 intergovernmental organisations, 121 civil society groups and 76 private sector companies with communications shared by WeProtect Global Alliance.



With our reputation and reach expanding rapidly, Childlight have been invited to join and extend our influence across prominent bodies. This includes a Lancet Commission on violence against women and children due to be released in 2025/26, which has the potential to create significant international momentum around CSEA as a public health issue, impacting on the direction of groups like the World Health Organization. We have also been invited to join a UNICEF advisory group and be a project partner for Responsible AI UK.



We are sharing our data among others with Europe's MEPs and through data portals including Statista, with 72 million users.




Building on C-TAP work already carried out in Kenya, we have directly influenced the Kenyan Government and Internet Service Providers on retaining data for longer periods so data is available to law enforcement to progress CSEA investigations.

We provided technical advisory data support for a ten-country taskforce in South America on an ICMEC-led operation that saw 115 child victims and 37 offenders positively identified worldwide. Within three weeks, ICMEC reported that 18 international interventions had taken place, with 45 victims rescued and seven abusers arrested.



Our data is also being shared at the Scottish Festival of Politics and with hundreds of Scottish child care and protection practitioners.



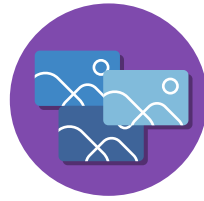
To date nearly 800 people have used our Into The Light microsite, interacting with maps, charts and tables. In addition, there have been about 650 views of global index material hosted on Childlight.org and 150 views of our index datasets.

Having established our index in 2024 and securing huge reach, our next year will focus on curating and supporting impact from this data while deepening our future iterations of the index.



40

analysts and researchers



15,000

images to analyse

During the taskforce operation, a total of 115 victims were identified worldwide

115

victims
identified
worldwide



45

victims
rescued

37

offenders identified



7

attackers arrested

Helping ICMEC and others to safeguard victims

INDEX IMPACT IN NUMBERS



7.9 billion
media audience reach



Index coverage in
20 languages



170+
groups briefed



1,700+
media reports



▲ 181%
LinkedIn following

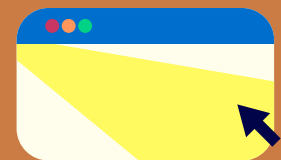


▲ 400%
X/Twitter following

▲ 250%
website traffic



27,362
Childlight.org views to date



You can scan these QR codes to visit our interactive Into The Light website and to view a short film on how Childlight's Into The Light Index set the media agenda around the world



<https://intothelight.childlight.org/>



https://www.canva.com/design/DAGIOXdeEMM/FgojUIfY_BR2YWXw6Yunog/watch?utm_content=DAGIOXdeEMM&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=editor

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

It is important to Childlight that our data is of high quality, trusted and can be built on by others. As such, we have built layers of transparency, accountability and scrutiny throughout our organisation. These include:

- Advice and guidance from an overarching Childlight steering board, with representatives from our main partner organisations
- Specific technical advice and scrutiny for our global index through a technical sub-committee, chaired by senior statistician Sir Bernard Silverman
- Deliberate reflection sought from those with lived experience, including CSEA survivors and young people
- Short life working groups with ecosystem partners, established to provide guidance on particular pieces of research
- A dedicated research ethics committee to ensure test and challenge on our methods, impact, and risk
- A research quality management system with expectations on our people, our research and Childlight as an entity - for example by applying FAIR principles to our research (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable)
- Prioritisation of impact with a dedicated Pathway to Impact capability within Childlight

GOVERNANCE

Steering board



Dr John Climax

Founding member and chair of the Human Dignity Foundation



Sir Peter Mathieson

Principal, University of Edinburgh



Sophie Otiende

Chief Executive Officer, Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (2022–2024)



Sean Litton

Executive Director, Tech Coalition



Stephen Kavanagh

Executive Director of Policing Services, INTERPOL



Sir Bernard Silverman

Chairs the Childlight Technical Sub-Committee, independently audited the global index and reports to the Steering Board



“ Although only recently celebrating its first birthday, Childlight, which has developed strong partnerships globally, is already leading in research and data governance in the field of child sexual exploitation and abuse globally, building on the University’s strengths and leadership in this area ”

 **Sir Peter Mathieson,**
Principal, University of Edinburgh



“ We must do much more together at a global level, including specialist investigator training, better data sharing and equipment to effectively fight this pandemic and the harm it inflicts on millions of young lives around the world ”

 **Stephen Kavanagh,**
Executive Director INTERPOL and
Childlight steering board member



“ This data has long been needed to start to paint a picture of the vast extent of this issue ”

 **Anna Bowden,**
CEO ICMEC Australia





CONTACT US

childlight@ed.ac.uk

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