CHILDLIGHT
Global Child Safety Institute

2026
INTO THE LIGHT
Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Technical note



HUMAN DIGNITY FOUNDATION

THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

UNSW SYDNEY

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Get help

Behind every number is a child. If you or someone you know needs support for child sexual exploitation and abuse, or if you are concerned that you might hurt a child, please visit Child Helpline International, Brave Movement or Stop it Now. If you see harmful imagery or content online concerning a child, please report it to NCMEC, INHOPE, IWF or Canadian Center for Child Protection (C3P).

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2026
INTO THE LIGHT

Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Technical Note

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Introduction

About Childlight – Global Child Safety Institute

Childlight – Global Child Safety Institute is an independent, data-driven organisation dedicated to preventing and responding to child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) worldwide. Founded by Human Dignity Foundation and hosted by the University of Edinburgh and the University of New South Wales, alongside a range of data partners, we bring together world-class expertise in epidemiology, data science, public health and child protection to create a robust evidence base for action. Our mission is clear: to use data to protect children and to work alongside frontline practitioners and key stakeholders to ensure that evidence is translated into meaningful change. Our role as a global data institute is to generate and share high-quality data on the prevalence and nature of CSEA and to support others in using it effectively within their own contexts. We believe that credible and actionable data is one of the most powerful tools for safeguarding children.

About the Into the Light Index

The aim of the ITL Index is to provide the most up-to-date estimates on the prevalence and nature of CSEA globally.

The index started in 2024 with a focus on technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse (TF-CSEA) and has since expanded to cover both online and offline forms of abuse and now includes data that covers countries accounting for approximately 63% of the world's children.

In 2025, Childlight broadened the scope of the ITL Index to address offline CSEA including rape and sexual assault of a child using data from population surveys alongside the prevalence estimates for TF-CSEA. The ITL Index also focused on new data sources from frontline data in the form of publicly available policing crime statistics and child helpline data. Childlight conducted a deep dive of policing crime statistics across nine countries and a pioneering partnership with Child Helpline International (CHI), ensured that helpline data was also included in our index for the first time. Also in 2025, Childlight produced country-level indicators and estimates for the first time focusing on countries in Western Europe and South Asia as defined in UNICEF's regional classification (UNICEF 2023b). These two regions were chosen to start the country-level focus because they were both identified in ITL Index 2024 as having a high prevalence of TF-CSEA across indicators. This country-level approach provides governments, civil society and other actors with tailored, context-specific evidence.

The ITL 2026 Index

For our 2026 index, Childlight is continuing our expansion of data sources and countries. For the first time, the index includes non-contact offline estimates from population survey data, an expansion of frontline data beyond just policing data to cover other

sector data including health, social care, and education in a similar deep-dive. The ITL 2026 Index includes a new indicator area on system strengthening which focuses on sector efforts to move data to action. This indicator focuses on global TF-CSEA and law enforcement as a key initial sector and will expand beyond this in the coming years.

The ITL Index 2026 continues our focus on providing country and regional data across three key regions according to UNICEF classification: East Asia and Pacific, North America and Latin America and Caribbean.

Childlight has continued with the Index Impact and Communications Working Groups, which bring together CSEA data experts and regional actors from nearly every country in focus, ensuring that findings are translated into concrete safeguarding and prevention actions. Our Index Technical Subcommittee continues to guide the ITL Index with world-leading expert advice and guidance in prevalence estimation, frontline data and big data analysis. A Supplemental Thematic Analysis Report synthesises results across all indicators to identify trends, patterns and actionable insights. Finally, we are the first global violence prevention data institute which has received Enhancing Quality in Preclinical Data (EQIPD) accreditation, embedding rigorous, clinically informed data-handling and quality assurance standards into every stage of our index work.

What the Technical Note covers

This Technical Note provides all the detailed methodological information for readers seeking to understand how the ITL 2026 was developed including details on the data sources, analytical strategies, computational and coding frameworks as well as limitations from the data.

This Technical Note is structured according to the indicator areas of the ITL 2026, matching the order found on our online Interactive Index Dashboard:

1. CSAM Data
2. Victimisation Data - Offline
3. Victimisation Data - Online
4. Public Sector Frontline Data
5. Child Helpline Data
6. System Strengthening Data

The detailed technical information for each of these areas is presented within these chapters. This Technical Note is intended to maximise the accessibility, accountability, usability, reproducibility and ultimately the impact of ITL Index 2026, giving users the tools they need to turn evidence into action. We encourage you to build on our work using this information and the accompanying datasets. If you do use our datasets or find this information useful for studies you are conducting, please do let us know (childlight@ed.ac.uk). We are happy to support others in the journey to enhancing the data foundations and evidence to improve safeguarding, because children can't wait.

The Global Scale and Nature of Child Sexual Abuse Material Online

Stevenson, J., Moore, C., Li, S., Martellozzo, E., Fry, D.

Introduction

Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) refers to images of minors being sexually abused or displayed for purposes of sexual gratification. This includes sexual images made by adults as part of their sexual abuse of a child or children, non-consensually taken sexual images by peers or sexual images taken by young people and non-consensually shared by adults or peers. It can include fabricated images made for purposes of extortion or denigration. It can be photos or videos. Other terms used to apply to these materials are child sexual abuse images (CSAI), child sexual exploitation material (CSEM), child abuse material (CAM), child exploitation material (CEM) and Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA).

Research has shown that CSAM is a distinct and particularly harmful form of technology facilitated abuse (Owens et al., 2016; Levine et al., 2020). The public exposure and possible longevity of its availability are elements believed to contribute to its harm. In the recent NCMEC Annual Report there was an evidenced and increasing link between CSAM and sex trafficking of children (NCMEC, 2026).

By investigating nature and scale of CSAM online, the index can provide a clearer picture of the long-term harms faced by victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. The CSAM Indicator should be seen as complementing the data found in the other two indicator areas by unveiling the true scale of sexual harms against children globally.

Research questions

Using data from the organisations mentioned above, we aim to deepen our understanding of CSAM, clarify what can and cannot be inferred from the available datasets and support improvements in how this data is collected, presented and interpreted.

Such data can offer an understanding into the nature and characteristics of child sexual abuse material, particularly by highlighting shifts in online perpetrator behaviour and variations in how CSAM is addressed across jurisdictions and electronic service providers.

Do we currently have sufficient access to data on the popularity of specific series to explore patterns of recidivism?

Hypotheses

Collated data will identify common patterns in technology sector responses and file

hosting locations.

The characteristics of CSAM, including victim demographics and severity of the content, are likely to vary across organisations due to differences in mission and methodology.

Items of severe and deviant CSAM will be more highly traded than those with less severe content.

AI-Gen CSAM will grow between 2023 and 2024 data.

Datasets using web crawlers and analyst-initiated queries will be more likely to locate new and previously unidentified CSAM.

Due to the recognised methods of CSAM analysis which prioritises the grading of the youngest child and the most severe form of abuse portrayed, CSAM data will be biased in favour of younger victims

Purpose

The following details the decision-making and contextual information required to understand the data presented in the Into the Light Index 2026. This indicator measures perpetrator behaviour in the form of upload and ongoing demand for CSAM. The technical note includes information concerning data collection processes with details addressing inclusion and exclusion criteria. There is also a detailed explanation of the CSAM data practices for each source organisation which helps to explain how the data was originally collated and for what purpose. Finally, the document explains the process of data harmonisation and analysis that produced the final data.

Data collection

The data collection process for the CSAM indicator area began with an online scoping of organisations committed to the analysis and receipt of reports of CSAM from around the world. Based on this review, six organisations were identified as in range for the Index, based on their mission, scope and data availability since the publication of the first Into the Light Index. This benchmark was based on both inclusionary and exclusionary criteria.

Inclusion/exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria

1. Publicly available dataset/results relevant to CSAM uploads, hosting or downloads

2. Privately held data from organisations known to assess and analyse CSAM globally

3. Published at least annually/since 2023
4. Made available by organisation with the necessary mandate to analyse CSAM
5. Present CSAM data on a global scale

Exclusion criteria

1. Not specific to CSAM uploads, hosting, or downloads
2. Not published at least annually/not published since 2023

These organisations had all published public reports on the availability and distribution of material in the years following the 2024 Into the Light report, which allowed for a comparative analysis of the data for the years 2023, 2024 and 2025. They are also some of the only organisations who are able to provide evidence-based analyses of the sensitive content, owing to their permissions and mandates in their jurisdictions. The data reports which they produce are impacted by the responsibility of these organisations to ensure the safety of the victims and survivors portrayed in the abuse material in addition to other privacy considerations (legislation, regulation etc.). Only limited information is shared publicly about CSAM content so as to avoid any concerns of identification of the material or victims within the produced reports. This information concerns non-identifiable traits of children and offenders as well as limited information concerning the nature of the abuse and exploitation depicted.

Of the chosen organisations, three have a longer history of publishing annual reports with relevant CSAM data: the INHOPE and the CyberTip programme and their Project Arachnid software. Finally, data on global availability of CSAM was sourced from the privately held dataset owned by Child Rescue Coalition (CRC).

Data from 2023 through 2025 was extracted from the included published reports. NCMEC provide additional CSAM characteristics in their annual report in a supplemental technical report for the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs first made available in 2023, based on additional information provided by United States law enforcement. This data was used to supplement and add more granular detail to the figures reported in the annual NCMEC report.

While there is a unified goal across all organisations to safeguard children, identify victims and remove content, organisational and methodological differences and focus led to variation in the content of their reports. These differences should not be seen as any indication of inadequacy or inaccuracy in any of the reports; rather, they are illustrative of varied organisational missions and approaches, all of which make a distinctive contribution to our understanding of the problem (see table: CSAM Data Organisational Differences Table). The data differences may also point to an inherent bias in data collection by the included CSAM data sources linked to various mandates and organisational focus. INHOPE, IWF and C3P receive reports from the general public and to a lesser extent from technology companies. Public reports relate to the presence of what is believed to be CSAM as well as incidents of grooming or sexual extortion of a

known minor. This is also the case for NCMEC, however the majority of their reports come from technology companies who, in the US, are mandated to report all online child sexual exploitation and abuse on their platforms. THORN, IWF and C3P also use web-based software to proactively detect CSAM on areas of the open/clear web known to be used to host and distribute CSAM. This actively produces the largest amount of confirmed/identified CSAM in their reports. This data reflects CSAM through the online exploitation of minors identified in cross-platform sharing of intelligence about suspicious signals and behavioural patterns that violate company policies. These organisations all play a role in safeguarding children online and advocating for the removal of CSAM. Together they identify a significant portion of the image-based abuse of children and youth online. Due to the independent nature of these organisations, there is potential overlap between the reported content, though the degree to which this occurs has not been assessed. The data contained within the reports is complex as it represents a variety of sources coming from the public, technology companies and specially developed tools to seek out CSAM. Through all these sources, the organisations provide the public with information concerning the nature and volume of CSAM and related exploitative activities. Over time, reporting of this data has become more developed and granular. Many organisations now include new metrics to better identify gaps or areas for increased monitoring. Please see below for a table comparing the organisations.

Data organisation overview

Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)

The Internet Watch Foundation acts as the hotline (a reporting body usually affiliated with government for responding to public concerns) for child sexual abuse and exploitation in the United Kingdom. The IWF acts as an active member of INHOPE thus contributing analysis to their reporting portal. They have powers provided by the Safety Net Foundation which tasked IWF with the severity rating, reporting and responsibility of attending to child sexual abuse material online. Since its inception, the IWF has continued to receive reports from the public and industry on CSAM located online. It has also developed web crawlers (software that automatically detects, analyses and collects information online), domain blocking (webpages that are blocked due to harmful or illegal content) and other technologies which assist in the identification and location of known CSAM online. Once located, the IWF sends removal notices if the hosting provider is based in the UK. If hosted outside the United Kingdom, the content is sent to INHOPE for the swift removal by the member hotlines in different countries through similar notices.

Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P)

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection operates several victim-centred services which aim to support those impacted by technology-facilitated child sexual abuse. C3P operates Cybertip.ca, Canada's national tipline for the reporting of online child sexual

abuse and exploitation, as well as a support service which provides short-term aid to survivors of online child sexual exploitation and/or abuse called NeedHelpNow.ca. C3P also operates Project Arachnid, its own web crawler that uses both perceptual (matching images which are visually similar) and exact hash matching (images which match based on alphanumeric identifiers assigned to all files) to flag images for analyst review, a process which uses digital identifiers to flag known images of CSAM. C3P also manages a domain blocking list for Canadian web service providers. Using Project Arachnid and manual notices, C3P works toward the removal of all classified sexual imagery of children, legal but harmful content and illegal content. It ensures every report is forwarded to law enforcement, including to local law enforcement in Canada or via the International Policing Body which forwards all international reports outside of Canada.

National Center of Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)

NCMEC is the mandated receiving body for reporting of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in the United States. While the largest number of NCMEC reports come from technology companies, they also come from the general public. Reports are prioritised by NCMEC analysts based on the available information concerning location, illegality, recency and identifiable content and, if thought to be actionable, sent to law enforcement in the United States. Where location is outside the United States, an automated report is sent to country-specific law enforcement agencies.

INHOPE

INHOPE act as the collective body for many of the international hotlines for reporting child sexual exploitation and abuse. These hotlines process public reporting of suspected instances of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in their jurisdiction. INHOPE represents a total of 54 hotlines covering 50 countries worldwide who provide/report CSAM analysis data. As such, the reporting ability and responsibilities differ between the various hotlines. INHOPE works with all hotlines to process reports and analyse CSAM in a comparable way using software called ICCAM ('I 'see' Child Abuse Material') which was developed to provide a central system for all member hotlines. INHOPE then issues notice and takedown orders based on the hosting country and forwards information to the local law enforcement agencies. IWF is a part of the INHOPE network and as such its data are also included in the total figures presented in the INHOPE annual report.

Thorn

Thorn is a non-profit technology company which, in partnership with NCMEC and other organisations, operate a number of technological solutions to address online safety and prevention of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. Thorn licenses and develops content identification software called Safer. Safer finds exact matches with cryptographic hashes and slightly altered images and is a proprietary perceptual

hashing technology. The material is then forwarded through reporting processes to NCMEC for further review and processing according to NCMEC's own mandates.

Child Rescue Coalition (CRC)

Child Rescue Coalition is a non-profit organisation which monitors file sharing networks to locate and identify users sharing child sexual abuse material. It works with international law enforcement to help flag and investigate the content. Once this is completed law enforcement can proceed with any criminal charges against those who are sharing it on their network. By necessity, users on a file sharing network are in possession of child sexual abuse material and may also be contributing to its distribution. Filesharing networks differ from other interactions in that the collective possession and sharing of a file increases the speed with which it can be transferred to other users in the network. Therefore, it is in the best interests of the network that users both possess and make visible all files that they have on their personal devices (laptops, servers, phones or memory drives).

Data analysis

Childlight accessed the reports using the websites for each organisation, where the information was typically published in a downloadable format. The researchers read through each report, extracting numerical data on the sharing, detection and characteristics of CSAM in each dataset. The researchers also gathered data concerning the information sources and outputs for each organisation to help understand similarities and differences across data sources. Where necessary, Childlight converted reported counts into percentages of CSAM and assessed variables within CSAM to two decimal points, see Appendix 2. These calculations were double-checked by two members of the Childlight research team and are detailed in Appendices 1-4. Any other numbers or percentages included in the Index were taken directly from the source reports unless otherwise noted.

All of the organisations measure their CSAM data in different ways, for example, as report volume, sightings of reported content online or the amount of times content had been shared by offenders, etc. Due to this variance, it was not appropriate to simply compare the volume of material or the sum of individual data points. Rather, Childlight chose to provide percentages for each of the common characteristics based on that organisation's total dataset, as it provided a more unified analysis of the numbers and in part accounted for the differences in processing and collection of information. It was thought that comparison among characteristics might shed light on the kinds of material represented in different data sets. Where any trend information is available, fluctuations up or down may not reflect real changes in the quantities of material being circulated or accessed. Changes may result from new technologies being applied for detection, more organisations committing to the reporting system or changes in organisational capacities to process reports.

Country/regional analysis

Childlight gathered data from each report on the countries/jurisdictions where the reports/notices regarding CSAM were sent. Often this information was based on the assessed internet host country location, which may be different from where the abuse was recorded. In certain cases, reports may be sent based on the assessed location where the content was uploaded or where the abuse is suspected to have occurred, which was the case specifically for NCMEC. In other cases, the reports were sent to the hosting location for electronic service providers and or internet service providers. Matters like the placement of servers or platforms may influence the assignment of country. So, it may be mistaken to infer that one country has a bigger problem than another country solely on the basis of quantity of CSAM.

The reports frequently calculated their own percentages, which were specifically available in the IWF and INHOPE reports alongside volume per country of reports/notices in the reporting period. In order to be able to compare percentages, Childlight calculated the percentages for NCEMC's country level data as well as CRC's country level data which were reported as the total number of reports or IPs. The calculation formula is detailed in Appendix 2.

Childlight then organised the countries by World Regions, according to UNICEF's Regional Office Classification. Following this approach, Childlight calculated the percentages of reports and or notices sent to each region based on the countries included in each of the reports. This calculation with the list of included countries can be found in Appendix 4. A further calculation of CSAM hosting rate was provided through a division of the aforementioned percentages of CSAM report/notices per region by the calculated percentages of world population for the UNICEF worlds regions and countries.

To estimate a CSAM population rate report per region, Childlight conducted a series of calculations. The first was to use United Nations population data accessed each year from 2023 through 2025 from the UN Data Portal concerning country-level population estimates, which were grouped and added together by UNICEF region. The regional population totals were then divided by 10,000 to achieve a rate of reports/notices received per 10,000 people. This was then divided by the previously calculated total number of CSAM reports/notices for the same regions. Where viable, what resulted was a table that compared total volume of CSAM reports/notices accounting for population. In addition to the calculated CSAM rate and regional proportions, Childlight included the range of report/notice volume for the region as well as the number of countries covered. See Appendix 4.

Childlight continued to use the consolidated terminology across the six data sources found in the Into the Light Index 2024 which created greater harmony among the sources and enabled comparison. This also helped in understanding the genuine differences between them.

Victim demographic analysis

Age categories were determined by the data sources and grouped according to the age ranges available and definitions provided for each categorical label found in the reports. The first category 'Infants and Toddlers' was present in two of the data sources and includes children below the age of three years old. This data required some harmonisation as IWF reported the figure in terms of age ranges rather than labels and as such the data found for children appearing to be zero to two years old was labelled 'Infants and Toddlers'. The next category 'Prepubescent' was present in three of the four groups. This category also required harmonisation as a definition of prepubescent was not provided in any of the reports. Based on the data located in IWF's report and definitions found in academic publications, the associated age range was provided as children up to the age of 13 years old. The remaining children were categorised as either 'Pubescent' or in some circumstances 'Post Pubescent' in the reports produced by NCMEC and INHOPE. IWF's data which provided specific age ranges was grouped by the categories for 14- and 15-year-olds as well as 16- and 17-year-olds.

Relation of offender to victim

Relational data, which is the documented connection/relation between the victim and their abuser, was taken from the NCMEC report for the Office Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). This data pertains to the person who sexually abused and photographed the child or arranged for the sexual abuse of the child. The data for this can be found in their original format in the original report listed below. Childlight chose to present these data using a previously established format set by NCMEC and Thorn in a report from 2019. This report included a table which provided categories for the data presented in the U.S. OJJDP report. The categories were Nuclear Family, Extended Family, Close Proximity and Unknown to Victim. Please see Table: NCMEC Identified Victim Relation Data Table for a full breakdown of the relationships included in each. Childlight chose to convert the volumes presented in the NCMEC report into a proportional measure to match the data presentation for the other indicators for CSAM.

Content analysis

Content removal times were included in three of the sources: INHOPE, IWF and NCMEC. This was in line with the function of these organisations, which is in part to locate and remove CSAM as well as report its detection to law enforcement.

Reported content removal times are influenced by multiple factors which can increase the amount of time it takes for the offending content to be removed from where it was located. Connecting with the correct electronic service provider can take multiple attempts at outreach and can involve correspondence with said electronic service provider (ESP) in order to ensure the validity of the request. It remains important to note that these challenges are faced by both the reporting organisation and the company that receives the notice and cooperation between the two entities is needed.

Childlight sought to assess the platform level location of the reports/notices sent each year. For the breakdown of reports/notices by site type, Childlight used the template

and categories set by INHOPE and IWF in their Annual Reports. In order to be able to categorise the NCMEC reports by electronic service providers (ESP) in a similar manner, Childlight obtained the typological definitions for the site types used by IWF and INHOPE. These definitions were then applied to ESP's listed in NCMEC's annual report. Due to the confidentiality of the definitions these are not shared publicly.

Severity analysis

Another area which demonstrates a variation in terminology and definition across data sources concerns the severity of acts shown in detected CSAM. Organisations either reported information based solely on what they determined to be illegal CSAM, or on the total number of images processed. From the total numbers, there appeared to be a distinction between content depicting sexually abusive CSAM which met the international illegal standard and the content that depicted child sexual exploitation material, which may also include sexually abusive material but did not meet the international criminal standard.

To harmonise definitions and categorisations across reports, terminology from the Lanzarote Convention (2007) and the Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2025) were used, see Table 1. According to these documents, CSAM involves the real or simulated sexually explicit conduct involving a child or the depiction of a child's sexual organs for a sexual purpose. Based upon this definition, CSAM from each of the data sources would include all material classified by the various organisations to include penetrative child sexual abuse or a focus on a child's sexual organs. The table below shows which of each organisation's severity measures fall under the CSAM category as defined above, based largely on a global illegal threshold and that which fell outside of this in the CSEM, harmful and exploitative category. In future iterations of the Index, Childlight will explore these classifications in more depth with all the data owners to improve harmonisation strategies and reflect the nuances derived from each organisation's image analysis.

CSAM tag analysis

Childlight was provided private access to a separate dataset from INHOPE. For data on tags of 'commercial' CSAM, 'virtual' CSAM and 'self-generated' CSAM, Childlight received access to 2023-2025 data from the ICCAM ('I see Child Abuse Material') database. This database receives contributions from many of the INHOPE member hotlines who all submit their analysed CSAM information into a central dataset. This makes the dataset unique as it brings together cumulative knowledge of analysts of CSAM from around the world. Data concerning the tagged elements of CSAM were calculated as proportions of the total images input into the ICCAM service in each calendar year. Proportions were calculated for all available classifications, which are 'True', 'False' and 'Not Determined'. When 'True', the data were meant to mean 'Is either virtual or self-generated or commercial' for each year and category. When 'False', the data were meant to mean 'Is not either virtual or self-generated or commercial' for each year and category. This data was calculated and used in part in the Into the Light Index 2026.

All calculations and data entry were reviewed and verified by two members of the

research team following initial input. The calculations were then reviewed by a member of the research team external to the CSAM focus group. This was to ensure accuracy and understanding of all the included data concerning the scale and nature of CSAM globally.

Detailed categorical information for each organisation is available in Appendix 3.

Table 1: CSAM Severity Classifications by Organisation

Organisation	Internationally Illegal CSAM	CSEM and CSAM National
IWF	IWF Intelligrade (Non-Penetrative Sexual Act, Penetration, Sexual Posing w nudity, Masturbation, Sadism and Bestiality)	IWF Intelligrade (Sexual display of the pubic region no nudity, inappropriate touching, adult sexual arousal)
NCMEC	CSAM	Exploitative
InHope	Illegal CSAM	N/A

Data quality and limitations

All the data were published primarily in English and from organisations in Western Europe and North America. As a result, data may be skewed to represent primarily high-income countries and populations due to the reporting sources and responsibilities of the various organisations. INHOPE data represents a culmination of analyses from around the world and helps to combat this limitation. It may also be the case that CSAM distribution in middle- and low-income countries is occurring via other means, such as via phone messages or email, that are less visible to reporting agencies.

The findings and data analysis were presented to each organisation for input concerning the representation of their data to ensure accuracy. Comments from the data owners were recorded and included where appropriate. Data owners were consulted on how they wished Childlight to reference their reports in the index. Each of these organisations was invited to join a core Impact and Communications working group for the Index and work towards future iterations of this indicator and new indicators that delve deeper into understanding the magnitude and nature of CSAM globally.

Overall volume of CSAM detected can be misleading in many ways because it is highly sensitive to a large range of factors including the mission of an organisation, which parts of the online space they cover (Electronic Service Providers, Peer2Peer, dark web), what

they count (for example, sightings which could be one image of a zip file with many images of a film etc) as well as their detection methods (crawler, targeted searches, reports from the public, or ESPs), etc. Thus, a drop in CSAM can actually be a negative indicator, because it may reflect new encryption technology whereas an increase might be positive because it may suggest better detection and awareness. To minimise this bias, we show percentage breakdowns of detected CSAM rather than count only data to understand what we can learn about victims and the abuse they suffer from the nature of the abuse depicted.

The source of information for each organisation also influenced the data that the organisations presented. Each organisation collected reports of CSAM in a different manner, whether it was through public reporting, reports by electronic service providers (ESP) or data obtained by web crawlers or policing information. Whether an organisation received reports about CSAM from the public, from ESPs or law enforcement, the source influenced the amount and type of CSAM assessed. Due to the varying mandates for each organisation, their recorded and calculated data was different, as some were focused on content removal, while others have law enforcement responsibilities.

The data sources were not interrogated or researched beyond the published numbers. This posed a challenge when attempting to harmonise country level data as the organisations used various geopolitical boundaries. For the purpose of harmonisation across Childlight reports, the United Nations geopolitical definitions were used and where necessary certain jurisdictions were merged to comply with this understanding. Additionally, to provide greater context to the regional and country level statistics, Childlight has provided information concerning World Bank classification of country wealth, regional population estimates (UN, 2022) and the Internet World Stats (2023) data on Internet users and their usage. This was in an effort to combat some of the limitations/bias presented by the regional level data, which may unfairly misrepresent countries as having greater or lesser amounts of CSAM. The intent is that the additional sources of information will help to address differences in country/regional levels of internet capacity/use, infrastructure and means of addressing these crimes.

Beyond the aforementioned sources, Childlight did not use other references addressing data definitions or data collection methods.

In certain circumstances, smaller samples of data were used for analysis to represent the organisations' larger data sets. For example, NCMEC analysed a sample of 3,857 CSAM files in 2025 picturing identified victims for their U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) report.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval has been granted by the Childlight Research Ethics Sub-Committee (CRESC). References CSAMGI-JST-171224CL, CATTU-JST-0060424CL, and UTGNO-AMF-0050424CL.

AI use disclaimer

No AI tools were used in the course of this indicator area work.

Conflict of interest disclaimer

There are no conflicts of interest to disclose pertaining to this research or study.

Registered Protocol: https://osf.io/xwzhk/

Data Availability

The aggregated data frames used for the project *the Global Scale and Nature of Child Sexual Abuse Material Online* are available as open access in the Childlight DataShare repository, within the wider *2026 Into the Light Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*: https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8210

Suggested citation

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Supplementary material

Table 2: Data Organisation Table

CSAM Data Organisational Differences Table

Source	NCMEC	IWF	INHOPE	Thorn	C3P	CRC
Hash-matching	Yes- Exact Matching	Yes- Exact Matching working on perceptual	Yes- Exact Matching Only	Yes- Safer Perceptual	Yes- Project Arachnid	Yes – Exact Matching
Public Reporting	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Industry Reporting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Automated detection software	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Web crawler	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Geographic responsibility	U.S. and International	U.K. and International	Global Hotline Network (50 Countries)	U.S.	Canada and International	Global

Upload Location reported	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Server location reported	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Takedown efforts	Yes	Limited	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Platforms as reporting source	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Limited	No
Victim request for takedown	Yes- Take it Down	Yes- Report Remove	No	No	Yes – Need Help Now	No
Reporting to LEA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Publicly Available Data	Yes	Yes	Yes	Limited	Limited	No
Annual Report	Yes	Yes	Yes	TBD	TBD	No
Founded	1984	1996	1999	2012	1985	2013

(date)						
Funding source(s)	Major platforms, government, third sector, private individuals.	Major platforms, ISPs, government, third sector, private individuals.	NGOs, Law Enforcement Agencies, tech companies, and corporate partners.	Major platforms, government, third sector, private individuals.	NGOs, Law Enforcement Agencies, tech companies, and corporate partners.	Tech companies, Law enforcement agencies, NGOs
Legislative mandates	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

Table 3: Table of Included Data

CSAM Data Indicator Presence by Organisation

Source	NCMEC	IWF	INHOPE	Thorn	CRC	C3P
Estimated Age of Victim	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Assessed Sex of Victim	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Assessed Severity Measure	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Hosting Location	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Assessed Upload Location	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Report Removal Response	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Offender Proximity to Victim	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
AI-Gen CSAM	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
New vs Known	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Victim Reported Content	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No

Table 4: NCMEC Identified Victim Relation Data Table

Relationship Category	
Nuclear Family	Mother Father Brother Sister Half-Sibling
Extended Family	Step-Mother Step-Father Aunt Uncle Grandmother Grandfather Step-Grandfather Brother-in-law Cousin Legal Guardian Other relative
Close Proximity	Babysitter/mentor/coach/teacher Boyfriend Guardian's partner Neighbour/family friend
Unknown to Victim	No relationship Online enticement/Self & Perp produced Photographer Sex-trafficker Stranger Unknown

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Calculations per Data Source

Percentages rounded to one decimal point

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)

Severity calculation:

Source: 2025 Total Notifications sent by NCMEC to Responsive Electronic Service Providers (ESP) & 2025 Total Notifications sent by NCMEC to Unresponsive Electronic Service Providers (ESP)

Total Material Assessed = [Total Responsive ESPs (CSAM + Exploitative) + Total Unresponsive ESPs (CSAM + Exploitative)}= 172032

Illegal & Abusive Sexual Activity CSAM Total = {CSAM Responsive ESPs + CSAM Non-Responsive ESPs} = 167270

Severity Harmful Total= [Exploitative Responsive ESPs + Exploitative Non-Responsive ESPs}= 4762

CSAM Internationally Illegal% = (Illegal & Abusive Sexual Activity CSAM Total / Total Material Assessed) * 100 applied: 167270/ 172032*100 = 97% (rounded to 1 decimal)

Severity Harmful % = Severity Harmful Total / Total Material Assessed) * 100 applied: 4762/172032*100= 3% (rounded to 1 decimal)

Victim Age:

Source: Office of Justice Programs U.S. Department of Justice CY 2025 Report to the Committees on Appropriations National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) Transparency

Infant Toddler % = (Infant/Toddler Male Victims + Infant/Toddler Female Victims) / Grand Total * 100 applied: 107/3857*100= 2.8% (rounded to 1 decimal)

Prepubescent % = (Prepubescent Male Victims + Prepubescent Female Victims) / Grand Total * 100 applied: 1336/3857*100=34.6% (rounded to 1 decimal)

Pubescent % = (Pubescent Male Victims + Pubescent Female Victims / Grand Total* 100 applied: 2414/3857*100=62.6% (rounded to 1 decimal)

Victim Gender

Source: Office of Justice Programs U.S. Department of Justice CY 2023 Report to the Committees on Appropriations National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) Transparency

Female % = (Female Infant/Toddler Victims + Female Prepubescent Victims + Female Pubescent Victims / Grand Total * 100 applied: 2705/3857*100=70.1% (rounded to 1 decimal)

Male % = (Male Infant/Toddler Victims + Male Prepubescent Victims + Male Pubescent Victims /Grand Total)* 100 applied:1152/3857*100=29.9% (rounded to 1 decimal)

New/Novel vs. Known/Hashed

Source: Office of Justice Programs U.S. Department of Justice CY 2025 Report to the Committees on Appropriations National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) Transparency

Exact Match:

New/Novel % = CY 2023- Unique Images and Videos Determined by MD5 Hashing/ Total CY 2023 Image and Videos Files Uploaded with Cybertipline reports by ESPs

15116254/21351493 * 100 =

Known/Hashed % = (Total CY 2023 Image and Videos Files Uploaded with Cybertipline reports by ESPs - CY 2023- Unique Images and Videos Determined by MD5 Hashing)/ CY 2023 Image and Videos Files Uploaded with Cybertipline reports by ESPs

(21351493-15116254)/21351493* 100 =

Perceptual Match

New/Novel % = CY 2023- Unique Images and Videos Determined by PhotoDNA and Videntifier Hashing/ Total CY 2023 Image and Videos Files Uploaded with Cybertipline reports by ESPs

12780577/21351493 * 100 =

Known/Hashed % = (Total CY 2023 Image and Videos Files Uploaded with Cybertipline reports by ESPs - CY 2023- Unique Images and Videos Determined by PhotoDNA and Videntifier)/ CY 2023 Image and Videos Files Uploaded with Cybertipline reports by ESPs

(21351493-12780577)/ 21351493 * 100 =

Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)

Severity calculation:

Source: Analysis of IntelliGrade hashes; sexual activity metadata

Illegal & Abusive Sexual Activity CSAM % = ([Intelligrade 2025 Volume (Non-penetrative sexual activity, Penetration, Sexual Posing with Nudity, Masturbation, Sadism or

degradation and Bestiality) – Intelligrade 2024 Volume (Non-penetrative sexual activity, Penetration, Sexual Posing with Nudity, Masturbation, Sadism or degradation and Bestiality)]/ (Intelligrade 2025 Volume - Intelligrade 2024 Volume) * 100

2025 numbers: 291239/(3224085-2883015)*100=96.2% (rounded to 1 decimal)

CSEM, Harmful and Other%= ([Intelligrade 2025 Volume (Sexual Display of Pubic Region, Inappropriate touching and Adult Sexual Arousal) – Intelligrade 2024 Volume ((Sexual Display of Pubic Region, Inappropriate touching and Adult Sexual Arousal)]/ (Intelligrade 2025 Volume - Intelligrade 2024 Volume) * 100

2025 numbers: 49831/(3224085-2883015)*100= 3.8% (rounded to 1 decimal)

Thorn

New/Novel % = (2025 suspected CSAM/2025 Total CSAM found)*100

3844868/5303413*100= 72.5%

Known/hashed % = (2025 CSAM matched/2025 Total CSAM found)*100

1458545/5303413 * 100 = 27.5%

Appendix 2: Country Proportion Formula

NCMEC

Country Report % = (Country report # / Total # of reports to NCMEC (21, 351, 493)) * 100

CRC

Country Report %= (# of CSAM IPs as of 31.12.24 / Total # of CSAM IPs on P2P for 31.12.24)

INHOPE

Country Report % = (Country report # / Total # of reports to INHOPE (4781125)) * 100

Appendix 3: CSAM Categorisation per Organisation

INHOPE

CSAM: all media that meets the international criteria of illegal child sexual abuse material. Does not include material hosted on the TOR/dark net.

NCMEC

CSAM: Content that meets the legal threshold for child sexual abuse material

Exploitative: Content that does not meet the legal definition of CSAM but

depicts identified child victims

Tech Coalition Industry Classification

A&B1: Content that includes a sex act is designated '1'.

A&B2: Content that meets the federal definition of 'child pornography' but does not depict a sex act (known as 'lascivious exhibition') is designated '2'

IWF

IntelliGrade Analysis

Penetration

Sexual posing with nudity

Masturbation

Sadism or degradation

Bestiality

Sexual display of the pubic region

Inappropriate touching

Adult sexual arousal

Appendix 4: Regional Percentage Calculations 2025

INHOPE

East and South Africa % = (Sum of reports for South Africa + Seychelles + Mauritius / Total Number of Reports) * 100

East Asia and Pacific % = (Sum of reports for Peoples Republic of China + Hong Kong+ Macao + Taiwan + Thailand+ Malaysia+ Singapore + Indonesia+ South Korea+ Laos+ Japan+ Australia + Vanuatu / Total number of Reports) * 100

Eastern Europe and Central Asia % = (Sum of reports for Albania + Armenia + Belarus + Bosnia and Herzegovina + Georgia + Macedonia + Russia + Serbia + Bulgaria + Romania + Kazakhstan + Kyrgyzstan + Moldova + Azerbaijan + Turkey + Montenegro + Ukraine + Cyprus + Georgia / Total number of reports) * 100

Latin America and Caribbean % = (Sum of reports for Argentina+ British Virgin Islands + Chile + Columbia + Mexico+ Panama + Belize + Peru + Uruguay+ Brazil/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

Middle East and North Africa% = (Iran/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

Middle East and North Africa% = (Iran + Israel + Iraq+ United Arab Emirates / Total Number of Reports) * 100

North America % = (Sum of reports for United States + Canada/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

South Asia %= India + Bangladesh/ Total number of Reports * 100

West and Central Africa %= (Sum of reports for Nigeria + Mauritania/ Total number of reports)*100

Western Europe % = (Sum of reports for Netherlands+ France + Germany + Romania + Slovakia+ Slovenia + Latvia + Iceland + Sweden + United Kingdom+ Italy + Luxembourg + Hungary + Ireland + Austria + Poland + Turkey + Norway + Portugal + Spain + Lithuania + Estonia + Czechia+ Denmark + Finland + Andorra + Switzerland + Gibraltar/Total number of reports) *100

IWF

East and South Africa % = (Sum of reports for South Africa + Seychelles + Mauritius / Total Number of Reports) * 100

East Asia and Pacific % = (Sum of reports for Peoples Republic of China +Hong Kong+ Macao+ Taiwan + Thailand+ Malaysia+ Singapore + Indonesia+ South Korea+ Vietnam+ Japan+ Cambodia + Australia + New Zealand/ Total number of Reports) * 100

Eastern Europe and Central Asia % = (Sum of reports for Armenia + Albania + Bosnia and

Herzegovina + Serbia + Russia + Bulgaria + Romania + Kazakhstan + Moldova + Azerbaijan + Turkey + Montenegro + Ukraine+ Cyprus + Croatia/ Total number of reports) * 100

South Asia %= India + Bangladesh / Total number of Reports * 100

Western Europe % = (Sum of reports for Netherlands+ France + Germany + Romania + Slovakia+ Latvia + Iceland + Sweden + United Kingdom+ Italy + Luxembourg + Hungary + Ireland + Austria + Poland + Turkey + Norway + Portugal + Spain + Lithuania + Estonia + Czechia+ Denmark + Finland + Switzerland + Gibraltar + Andorra /Total number of reports) *100

West and Central Africa % = (Sum of reports for Nigeria/Total number of reports)* 100

North America % = (Sum of reports for United States + Canada/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

Latin America and Caribbean % = (Sum of reports for Panama + Brazil + Chile + Mexico + Belize + Uruguay/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

Middle East and North Africa% = (Iran+ Israel + Iraq + United Arab Emirates / Total Number of Reports) * 100

NCMEC

East and South Africa % = (Sum of reports for South Africa + Seychelles + Mauritius + Angola + Botswana + Burundi + Cape Verde Islands + Comoros + Djibouti + Eretria + Ethiopia + Kenya + Lesotho + Madagascar + Malawi + Mozambique + Namibia + Rwanda + Sao Tome and Principe + South Sudan + Sudan + Swaziland/Eswatini + Tanzania + Uganda + Zambia + Zimbabwe / Total Number of Reports) * 100

East Asia and Pacific % = (Sum of reports for Peoples Republic of China (including Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) + Thailand+ Malaysia+ Singapore + Indonesia+ South Korea+ Laos+ Vietnam+ Japan+ Cambodia + Australia + New Zealand + Brunei + Cook Islands + Federated States of Micronesia + Fiji + Guam + Kiribati + Marshall Islands + Mongolia + Myanmar + Nauru + North Korea + Palau + Papua New Guinea + Samoa + Philippines + Timor-Leste + Tokelau + Tonga + Tuvalu + Vanuatu / Total number of Reports) * 100

Eastern Europe and Central Asia % = (Sum of reports for Russia + Bulgaria + Romania + Kazakhstan + Moldova + Estonia + Azerbaijan + Turkey + Montenegro + Ukraine + Albania + Armenia + Belarus + Bosnia and Herzegovina + Croatia + Cyprus + Georgia + Kosovo + Kyrgyzstan + Macedonia + Serbia + Tajikistan + Turkmenistan + Uzbekistan / Total number of reports) * 100

South Asia %= (India + Bhutan + Afghanistan + Bangladesh + Maldives + Nepal + Pakistan + Sri Lanka/ Total number of Reports) * 100

Western Europe % = (Sum of reports for Netherlands+ France + Germany + Romania + Slovakia+ Latvia + Iceland + Sweden + United Kingdom+ Italy + Luxembourg + Hungary +

Ireland + Austria + Poland + Turkey + Norway + Portugal + Spain + Lithuania + Czechia+ Greece + Malta + Denmark + Finland + Switzerland + Andorra + Aland Islands + Estonia + Faroe Islands + Gibraltar + Greenland + Jersey + Liechtenstein + Monaco + San Marino + Slovenia /Total number of reports) *100

North America % = (Sum of reports for United States + Canada/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

Latin America and Caribbean % = (Sum of reports for Panama + Belize + Uruguay + Chile + Brazil + Anguilla + Antigua and Barbuda + Argentina + Aruba + Bahamas + Barbados + Bermuda + Bolivia + British Virgin Islands + Colombia + Costa Rica + Cuba + Dominica + Dominican Republic + Ecuador + El Salvador + Falkland Islands + Grenada + Guatemala + Guyana + Haiti + Honduras + Jamaica + Martinique + Mexico + Monserrat + Nicaragua + Paraguay + Peru + Puerto Rico + Saint Kitts and Nevis + Saint Lucia + Saint Vincent and Grenadines + Suriname + Trinidad and Tobago + Turks and Calcos Islands + Venezuela/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

Middle East and North Africa% = (Algeria + Bahrein + Egypt + Iran + Iraq + Israel + Jordan + Kuwait + Lebanon + Libya + Morocco + Oman + Palestinian Territory + Qatar + Saudi Arabia + Syria + Tunisia + United Arab Emirates + Yemen Arab Republic/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

West And Central Africa%= (Benin + Burkina Faso + Cameroon + Central African Republic + Chad + Congo + Cote d'Ivoire + Democratic Republic of Congo + Equatorial Guinea + Gabon + Ghana + Guinea + Guinea-Bissau + Liberia + Mali + Mauritania + Niger + Nigeria + Senegal + Sierra Leone + Togo/ Total Number of Reports) * 100

Appendix 5: UNICEF Region CSAM Rate Calculation

(Sum of reports from INHOPE and NCMEC)/ (Regional Population/10000)

1. East Asia and Pacific: (341271+3422437)/ (2377269207/10000)=
2. Eastern Europe and Central Asia: (1025433+1188569)/(430974861.5 /10000)
3. Eastern and Southern Africa: (381+385554)/(638284439/10000)
4. Latin America and Caribbean: (96362+2964787)/(713058673.5/10000)
5. Middle East and North Africa: (45503+2031876)/(524541187.5/10000)
6. North America: (382120+2190649)/(387402530.5/10000)
7. South Asia: (4769+3728730)/(1992790036/10000)
8. Western and Central Africa: (7+1006224)/(646845964/10000)
9. Western Europe: (2803193+1437634)/(503141345 /10000)

Appendix 6: Country CSAM Rate Formula for 2026 Regional Focus

(Sum of reports from INHOPE and NCMEC)/ (Country Population/10000)

East Asia and Pacific

Australia; Brunei Darussalam; China*; Cook Islands; Fiji; Indonesia; Japan; Cambodia; Kiribati; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Marshall Islands; Micronesia (Federated States of); Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Myanmar; Nauru; Mongolia; New Zealand; Niue; Palau; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Samoa; Papua New Guinea; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tokelau; Tonga; Tuvalu; Vanuatu; Viet Nam

*Data for China was disaggregated by Special Administrative Regions but included in East Asia and Pacific calculations as these areas are included under the auspice of greater China

Latin America and Caribbean

Anguilla; Antigua and Barbuda; Argentina; Bahamas; Barbados; Belize; Bolivia (Plurinational State of); Brazil; British Virgin Islands; Chile; Colombia; Costa Rica; Cuba; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; El Salvador; Guyana; Grenada; Guatemala; Honduras; Haiti; Jamaica; Mexico; Montserrat; Nicaragua; Panama; Paraguay; Peru; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Suriname; Trinidad and Tobago; Turks and Caicos Islands; Uruguay; Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

North America

Canada; United States

Overseas Territories

Christmas Islands, Aruba, Guadeloupe, Bouvet Islands, Dominica, Falkland Islands, Puerto Rico, Curacao, U.S Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Sint Martin, Saint Marteen, Ascension, French Guiana, Bonaire/Saba/Saint Eustatius, Martinique, Niue, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, American Samoa, Guam

Appendix 7: Electronic Service Providers Type Explanation

Image Host: A website where users are able to upload images as the primary purpose. Each image is provided a separate URL.

File Hosting: A website where users store files and can share secure links so that others are able to upload or download images.

Website: A website is when the domain part of the URL remains constant even as links are accessed.

Forum: Online portals where users can register in order comment on and discuss specific topics. Typically have one or more forum moderators who monitor for content focus and legality.

Banner: A website which contains images, videos or text advertising for a specific product/service. When clicked the banner will often redirect to a main webpage for the advertised company.

Video Host: A website where users are able to upload videos as the primary purpose. Each video is provided a separate URL.

Blog: A webpage controlled by one or a small group of individuals that publish a series of contained posts a particular topic or theme. Typically, engagement is limited to comments on posts.

Web Archive: A website dedicated to archiving historic content online

Search Provider: A website that allows users to query results for information based on prompts. Examples include Google, Yahoo, Bing etc.

Redirector: A URL which when queried or loaded will automatically change and redirect to another URL which differs from the one initially requested.

Social Networking: A platform or website which looks to build a community or network of connected users where individuals can share a multitude of content pertaining to their interests or life. The interests are not focused as with a forum.

The Prevalence of Offline Child Sexual Victimisation

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Introduction

Offline child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) refers to sexually exploitative or abusive behaviours against children that occur in physical, non-digital contexts. Accurately estimating the scale and nature of offline CSEA remains a critical challenge due to the sensitive and hidden nature of the abuse, stigma surrounding disclosure and variation in data collection across countries and regions. The following systematic review and meta-analysis aimed to address the current gap in our understanding of the prevalence of offline CSEA in global and regional, especially in North America, East Asia and Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean regions, following UNICEF regional classifications (UNICEF, 2023a).

Geographic focus: global and regional

Although several studies have attempted to estimate the global prevalence of offline CSEA, important limitations remain (Fang et al., 2026). Previous meta-analyses relied on earlier body of literature, focused on CSEA among females only, included a limited number of studies or did not account for methodological and definitional differences across studies (Qu et al., 2022). In many cases, prevalence estimates based on different perpetrator types, abuse definitions and survey methods were combined without harmonisation, potentially reducing comparability across estimates (Cagney et al., 2025). To address these gaps, definitional and methodological variations across studies are taken into account, and a Bayesian multilevel framework capable of accommodating sparse and unbalanced data is applied. By generating harmonised global and regional estimates of both contact and overall CSEA (including contact and non-contact forms but excluding technology-facilitated CSEA [TF-CSEA]), this study provides more robust and comparable evidence.

This year, descriptive country-level estimates of the prevalence of offline CSEA across North America, East Asia and Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean are provided. Where sufficient evidence was available, additional meta-analyses were undertaken to generate pooled prevalence estimates. In North America, where population-based surveys and nationally representative studies are relatively well established, a structured synthesis of available estimates allowed for more robust comparison of existing evidence. In contrast, East Asia and Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean are characterised by more limited and fragmented data. For these regions, available sources (including subnational studies and grey literature), were systematically identified and documented, definitional and measurement inconsistencies highlighted, and key evidence gaps identified. This approach not only summarises what is currently available but also clarifies where data infrastructure and methodological development are most urgently needed.

Perpetrator focus

Due to the lack of evidence on perpetration type in offline CSEA, most research has typically focused on capturing the prevalence estimates of survivors of offline CSEA and their characteristics (Mathews & Berry, 2024). Understanding the types of perpetrators in child sexual abuse – whether familial, peer or stranger – is crucial for targeted interventions as each perpetrator category presents unique challenges and requires different approaches for effective prevention and treatment (Mathews et al, 2024).

The variations of offline CSEA perpetrators highlight the importance of disaggregating data by perpetrator type to inform more effective policy and intervention efforts. As such, the systematic review's specific focus includes offline CSEA by perpetrator type, including peer and family, where data are available at the country level. These findings aim to improve understanding of the diverse nature of offline CSEA and support the development of more nuanced and effective responses to offline CSEA.

Subtype focus

Offline CSEA comprises a range of abusive experiences that vary in nature and severity (UNICEF, 2023b). Previous prevalence studies have often combined different forms of abuse into broad measurements, limiting understanding of the burden associated with specific subtypes (UNICEF, 2024). Moreover, several recent global and regional estimates have focused primarily on contact forms of sexual abuse, with comparatively limited attention given to non-contact abuse and overall offline CSEA (including both contact and non-contact forms) (Piolanti et al., 2025; Cagney et al., 2025). Distinguishing between subtypes is important because they may differ in prevalence, reporting patterns, health consequences and implications for prevention and intervention.

Where data are available in country level, this review reports country prevalence estimates for specific forms of offline CSEA, including contact CSEA, non-contact CSEA and overall offline CSEA (excluding TF-CSEA). By examining these subtypes separately, the review aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and distribution of offline CSEA and to support the development of more targeted policies, prevention strategies and service responses.

Research question

- What is the prevalence of offline CSEA victimisation globally and across UNICEF regions based on data published between 01 January 2010 and 01 August 2024?
- What evidence is available at the country level in North America, East Asia and Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean based on data published between 01 January 2010 and 31 December 2025?

Importance of the current review

By analysing and synthesising existing literature, this systematic review and meta-analysis

provides crucial evidence that could inform policy making and practice regarding the prevention of and response to offline CSEA. The findings of this review are of great significance to policymakers, practitioners, advocates and researchers, as they can use the findings to make informed decisions about allocating resources and designing effective prevention and response programmes. Moreover, the review contributes to the advancement of knowledge on offline CSEA prevalence, sheds light on perpetration, and thus, assists in the development of future research in this field. Additionally, this year's review set the benchmark to be replicated for other regions in subsequent years. Ultimately, the findings from this systematic review and meta-analysis have the potential to inform efforts to reduce offline CSEA by improving estimations of its prevalence, distribution and key evidence gaps. This evidence can support more targeted prevention strategies, policy responses and interventions to protect children and promote their health and wellbeing.

This technical note outlines the methodology and analytical framework used to develop global estimates of offline CSEA. It provides a summary of the methods used for data collection, data cleaning procedures, risk of bias assessment and statistical analysis.

Data collection

Data were collected through two systematic literature searches. The evidence base for the global and regional offline CSEA estimates included studies published between 1 January 2010 and 1 August 2024 (Fang et al., 2026). A separate update was conducted for North America, East Asia and Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Building on previous reviews covering studies published up to 31 December 2024 (Fry et al., 2025; Fry et al., 2024), this search was updated to include studies published during 2025. All the reviews searched both academic and grey literature to identify studies that had published prevalence estimates on any type of offline CSEA aligned with UNICEF's International Classification of Violence Against Children (ICVAC), including rape, sexual assault, non-contact sexual violence and sexual exploitation occurring in physical (non-digital) contexts (see Conceptual Framework for more information) (UNICEF, 2023).For the updated review, a consultation with regional experts was conducted to enrich the data collection process. Experts from government, academia, civil society and frontline practice across North America, East Asia and Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean were invited to participate. The responding experts provided both country-specific and regional perspectives on the availability of offline CSEA prevalence data and helped identify additional published and grey literature sources.

Search strategy

The review updated a previous systematic effort that had identified relevant studies published between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2024. The current update covered the period from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025 and included both peer-reviewed publications and grey literature. The research team searched the following academic databases for journal articles/reports that met the inclusion criteria:

1. PubMed/Medline (Ovid)
2. Global Health (Ovid)
3. PsycINFO (Ovid)
4. EMBASE (Ovid)
5. Social science citation index (Web of Science)
6. Sociological abstracts (ProQuest)
7. CINAHL (EBSCOhost)
8. ERIC (EBSCOhost)
9. Criminal Justice Abstract (EBSCOhost)
10. Google Scholar
11. Scopus
12. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global

In addition, using the same search terms, relevant articles were selected from the following journals that are key in the field of child protection: *Child Abuse and Neglect*, *Child Maltreatment*, *Child Abuse Review* and *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. Relevant systematic review bibliographies were also searched. The DistillerSR systematic review software (Version 2.35., DistillerSR Inc.; 2023; https://www.distillersr.com/) was used to compile relevant peer-reviewed sources. Duplicate entries were removed.

Grey literature was searched through the university library databases, specifically designed to identify unpublished or non-standard academic literature. Key grey literature sources included research by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), UN agencies and community-based organisations (CBOs), as well as research reports from national government sources. A thorough scan of key websites that publish CSEA studies was completed. This scan helped identify both grey literature and organisations/individuals that might have links to grey literature. The following is a sample of the types of websites that were included:

1. www.crin.org (and www.crin.org/bcn)
2. www.endcorporalpunishment.org
3. www.unicef-irc.org and other UNICEF websites, such as https://www.unicef.org/rosa/reports/gendered-analysis-child-protection-systems-responses-covid-19-programming-south-asia
4. Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) search by region: https://www.svri.org/
5. World Health Organization (WHO), WHO's own violence prevention publications (specifically the bibliographies/cited interventions: https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/violence/en/ and WHO's V-Info website search under countries: https://apps.who.int/violence-info/countries
6. Digital Repository Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean (CEPAL): https://repositorio.cepal.org/
7. Save the Children
8. Together for Girls
9. ECPAT International
10. The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children's Knowledge Platform: https://www.end-violence.org/knowledge

11. EU Horizon Portal (https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home)
12. UNICEF Regional Offices: search bars on the following websites
    - Middle East and North Africa (MENA): https://www.unicef.org/mena/
    - Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO): https://www.unicef.org/lac/en
    - West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO): https://www.unicef.org/topics/wcaro
    - East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO): https://www.unicef.org/topics/esaro
    - East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO): https://www.unicef.org/eap/
    - Regional Office of South Asia (ROSA): https://www.unicef.org/rosa/
    - Europe and Central Asia (ECA): https://www.unicef.org/eca/

In addition, the research team searched for comparable data on the prevalence of offline CSEA published in:

1. Demographic Health Surveys (DHS)
2. Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS)
3. Global School-Based Health Surveys (GSHS)
4. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study (HBSC)
5. Disrupting Harm (DH)
6. Violence Against Children Survey (VACS)

Searches were conducted using English-language search terms without language restrictions. Eligible studies were published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Chinese, Japanese, Korean or Thai, reflecting the most prevalent languages used across North America, East Asia and Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Search terms

The search strategy was designed to capture studies reporting on a broad range of child sexual victimisation to ensure no relevant data on offline CSEA were missed. This inclusive approach enabled the identification of studies that may not have focused exclusively on offline CSEA but nonetheless reported prevalence estimates for relevant subtypes. This strategy was used to maximise efficiency and minimise omission errors in the context of a large and complex global review. Search terms specifically targeting offline CSEA were informed by the research team's experience conducting previous systematic and scoping reviews in this area. A structured search strategy was applied for published literature. For grey literature, more general terms such as violence, abuse and violence against children were used. In addition, a comprehensive scan of relevant websites and organisations with known data was conducted to support identification of additional sources. A full list of search terms used is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Full list of search terms used in the review

Line	Search terms

1		child* OR adolescen* OR infant* OR young* OR youth* OR teen* OR juvenile* OR minor* OR toddler* OR student* OR pre-pubert* OR prepubescen* OR newborn* OR baby OR babies OR preschool* OR kid* OR puberty OR minors* OR underag* OR preadolesc* OR preteen* OR 'pre-teen' OR boy* OR girl*
2	AND	Rape OR 'vaginal penetration' OR 'anal penetration' OR 'object penetration' OR 'physically forced rape' OR 'pressured rape' OR 'coerced rape' OR 'drug-facilitated rape' OR 'alcohol-facilitated rape' OR 'non-consensual sex* penetration' OR 'gang-perpetrated rape' OR 'attempted rape' OR molest* OR incest OR 'unwanted touching' OR 'unwanted sex*' OR 'sexual coerc*' OR 'pressured sex' OR 'sexual intimate partner violence' OR 'sexual gender-based violence' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'harmful sexual behavio*' OR grooming OR 'revenge porn*' OR 'child porn*' OR 'non-consensual porn*' OR 'sexual assault' OR 'sex* talk*' OR solicitation OR sextortion OR 'sex* extortion' OR 'sex* blackmail' OR 'sex* act*' OR 'sex* stalking' OR 'sexual exploitation' OR 'sexual offense*' OR 'sexual violence' OR 'sexual abuse' OR 'sexual aggression' OR 'sexual maltreatment' OR 'sexual trauma' OR 'sexual crime' OR 'forced sex*' OR 'commercial sex* exploit*' OR CSE OR CSEC OR PAPS OR 'peer sex* abuse' OR 'domestic sex* traffick*' OR 'sex* exploit*' OR 'sex* traffick*' OR 'sexual bullying' OR 'unwanted sex* taunts' OR 'unwanted sex* comments' OR 'sex* exposure' OR 'sex* organ exposure' OR 'unwanted groping' OR 'unwanted fondling' OR 'sex* stalking'
3	AND	epidemiolog* OR prevalence OR proportion OR rate OR incidence OR occur* OR magnitude OR scale OR percent* OR count OR frequen* OR degree OR measure* OR 'network scale-up' OR nsum OR 'household survey*' OR 'prevalence estimate*' OR 'respondent-driven sampling*' OR rds OR 'link tracing sampling' OR 'time location sampling' OR tls OR 'time space sampling' OR 'venue based sampling' OR 'multiple systems estimation' OR mse OR 'capture recapture' OR 'petersen-lincoln*' OR crt OR m-nsum OR g-nsum OR s-pps OR 'sampling proportionate to size'
4		1 AND 2 AND 3

The search terms were developed following a scoping review and a series of pilot searches. Piloting of the search strategy helped refine and identify the combinations of terms that returned the most relevant studies related to offline CSEA. In addition, literature on offline CSEA was reviewed to examine the terminology most used by researchers and practitioners in the field. The final list of search terms was deliberately broad and inclusive, reflecting the wide range of terms used across studies and the ongoing lack of consensus in the conceptualisation and typology of offline CSEA. This inclusive approach was necessary to capture the diversity of definitions and behavioural indicators used in existing prevalence research.

Inclusion/exclusion criteria

Studies identified through the database searches and grey literature sources were

assessed using the same predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria

- The study is published in English and any additional languages spoken in North America, East Asia and Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean (specified above) between 1 January 2025, and 31 December 2025
- The study reports the prevalence of offline CSEA or is an article that includes prevalence data on offline CSEA
- The data are based on general population, which refers to samples that are representative at the national or sub-national level
- The study includes prevalence estimates collected using traditional sampling and survey methods (for example, cohort, cross-sectional, and random, stratified and cluster methods)
- Only acts-based measures of offline CSEA are included. This systematic review categorises offline CSEA acts according to UNICEF's definition and uses the authors' definitions when extracting other unspecified acts, which were then mapped to the closest corresponding UNICEF classification where possible. Specific focus to behaviour's related to contact, non-contact, contact and non-contact overall sexual violence as listed in UNICEF's International Classification of Violence Against Children (ICVAC).
- Offline CSEA must have occurred in childhood (under 18 years old). It could be self-reported either by a child/an adult or others in a position of responsibility (for example, teachers, medical doctors, social workers).
- The total study sample size needs to be at least 100 respondents

Exclusion criteria

- CSEA not occurring in childhood, for example, abuse of older people, sexual violence against pregnant women
- Estimates from particular sub-populations that might not generalise to the population, for example, children with disabilities; individuals with a history of criminal behaviour, offenders, or those currently incarcerated; studies exclusively focusing on sexual and gender minority populations (for example, LGBT children and adolescents); children who are refugees or migrants; homeless or street children; children living in foster homes, group homes, or other forms of substitute care; denominator is victims of CSEA (prevalence = 100%); children in monasteries or wartime settings
- Studies with limited sample size/selected samples, for example, sample size <100, case studies, control studies/randomised control trials, studies using convenience or snowball sampling, or qualitative studies
- Duplicate samples: studies based on the same sample were excluded. Where multiple publications report on the same dataset, only one was included, prioritising the original study, the highest methodological quality and the most detailed disaggregation of findings.
- Other types of violence: intimate partner violence (IPV) between adults, physical violence, emotional violence, and neglect

- Administrative data and partner perpetrators

Data screening and selection

The screening process was conducted in two stages using DistillerSR. First, titles and abstracts identified through the search strategy were screened by a human reviewer and using DistillerSR AI classifier model. A classifier model was developed to function as a second reviewer, using previous human reviewer decisions as the training data. Before being used in this role, the model's performance was assessed and validated against human screening decisions. The human reviewer made the final inclusion or exclusion decision for each record and studies considered potentially relevant proceeded to the full-text screening stage.

In the second stage, full texts of potentially eligible studies were independently assessed by two reviewers using DistillerSR to determine whether they meet the predefined inclusion criteria. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion and consensus and, if necessary, a third reviewer was consulted. Duplicate records were removed prior to screening using automated deduplication tools within DistillerSR and reference management software.

Data extraction

The research team developed a structured data extraction form in DistillerSR based on key publication and study characteristics. The preliminary extraction form was refined and updated throughout the data extraction process as needed. To improve the extraction tool, the team conducted a pilot test using previously identified sources to ensure that the specificities of the data and methodologies were effectively captured. Variables were also clearly defined in separate spreadsheet tabs. One reviewer extracted data from the included sources with assistance from AI tools, specifically smart evidence extraction, while a second reviewer independently double-checked the extracted information. If consensus could not be reached, a third team member made the final decision.

A master MS-Excel file was created of all the studies and including key information:

- Study Identifier (for example, author, publication year, title)
- Sample Population (for example, general or special)
- Representativeness (for example, national representative, subnational representative, city-level representative)
- Country(ies)
- Study Design (for example, cohort, longitudinal, cross-sectional)
- Urbanicity Type (for example, urban, rural, suburban, peri-urban, mixed)
- Sampling Method
- Survey Site (for example, community-based, school-based, university-based, hospital or clinic-based, web-based)
- Sample Details & Data Collection Year
- Perpetrator Information (for example, perpetrator type with specific focus to peer,

familial and stranger, perpetrator age, perpetrator sex)
- Types of CSEA: contact, non-contact, contact and non-contact overall, and sexual exploitation.
- Frequency of the CSEA & Level of CSEA
- Sex of Sample & Sample Size & Response Rate
- Prevalence (%) for each type and subtype of CSEA & Number of Cases for each type and subtype of CSEA
- Weighted or Unweighted Prevalence
- Variance & Standard Error & Confidence Interval (CI) of Prevalence
- Location of where CSEA took place (for example, home, community, hospital, school, other)
- Respondent Type (for example, children, parents report, adults recall) & Respondent Age
- Time Period for CSEA Measurement (for example, past-year, lifetime)
- Age of CSEA experiences & Age of Onset for CSEA
- Instrument administration (for example, self-administered, interview-administered)
- Measurement Instrument & Number of questions asked specifically related to CSEA
- Type of Publication

Risk of bias assessment

The Hoy et al. (2012) checklist for assessing risk of bias in prevalence studies was adopted. This checklist has nine questions with two standard answer options (high/low risk of bias):

1. External validity:
    a. Was the study's target population a close representation of the national population in relation to relevant variables?
    b. Was the sampling frame a true or close representation of the target population?
    c. Was some form of random selection used to select the sample, or was a census undertaken?
    d. Was the likelihood of nonresponse bias minimal?
2. Internal validity:
    a. Were data collected directly from the subjects (as opposed to a proxy)?
    b. Was an acceptable case definition used in the study?
    c. Was the study instrument that measured the parameter of interest shown to have validity, reliability, and cultural sensitivity?
    d. Was the same mode of data collection used for all subjects?
    e. Were the numerator(s) and denominator(s) for the parameter of interest appropriate?

Each item was rated either as 'low risk' (score 0) or 'high risk' (score 1), with total scores classifying studies as low (0–3), moderate (4–6) or high risk (7–9) (Hoy et al., 2012).

The study methods and findings from the systematic review were reported in line with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA; Page et al., 2021).

The protocol is available via the Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/c76bp/overview.

Data preparation and conceptual framework

This section explains how the systematic review data were organised and categorised for the victimisation indicators.

Data cleaning

Before analyses, data quality checks and cleaning were conducted to identify potential errors or incorrect figures entered during data collation, to validate and standardise key variables needed for analysis, to exclude any duplicated studies and to remove any studies which did not meet the final inclusion criteria. Data collected during this review were combined with records from previous systematic efforts to produce updated and current victimisation indicators. All these records were combined in one file for further checks and for the data cleaning process.

The data cleaning process was conducted in R (version 4.5.0) Studio (R Core Team, 2025). The following steps were undertaken to prepare the data for meta-analysis:

1. Filtering the extracted records by outcomes reported. At this stage, data for all subtypes of offline CSEA were included in the dataset.
2. Removing studies and research reports that used non-representative samples, or representativeness could not be verified.
3. Identifying research that does not meet the inclusion criteria (for example, control study/randomised control trials, non-disaggregated data for mixed samples of respondents; perpetrator-centric, data disaggregated by gender identity or sexual orientation and no overall prevalence for the full sample provided, no country-level or region-level breakdown, samples exclusively comprised of victims/survivors of CSEA).
4. Removing studies/reports that use the same sample/data published in other sources included in the review.
5. Studies were grouped by two recall periods: a) past-year experience (for example, 30 days, 3 months, 6 months, and 12 months); and b) lifetime experience (for example, before 18, before 15-17, before 10-14, before 0-9 years of age).

Conceptual framework

For the global and regional prevalence estimates, the lifetime prevalence of offline CSEA is defined as the proportion of adults aged 18 years or older who reported experiencing contact or non-contact CSEA at any point before reaching 18 years of age. The past-year prevalence is defined as the proportion of children under 18 years who experienced

contact or non-contact CSEA within the previous 12 months. In both measures, consistent with the UNICEF ICVAC definition, individuals are counted as experiencing offline CSEA if they were subjected to at least one act of sexual violence perpetrated by anyone, regardless of the relationship of the individual who perpetrated violence to the child. For this estimation, two offline CSEA metrics were examined: contact CSEA (rape and sexual assault) and the broader category of overall CSEA, which includes both contact and non-contact forms, excluding TF-CSEA (Table 2).

Table 2: Offline CSEA subtypes

Term	Definition
Overall CSEA	Offline CSEA refers to any deliberate, unwanted and non-essential sexual act, whether completed or attempted, involving either contact or non-contact, that is perpetrated against a child. This definition excludes acts of sexual exploitation and those occurring in an online context.
Contact CSEA	Contact CSEA includes rape and sexual assault. Rape refers to vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a sexual nature of a child's body with any bodily part or object, with or without the use of force, and without consent because the child is too young to consent or consent is not given. Examples include physically forced rape, pressured or coerced rape, drug- and/or alcohol-facilitated rape, non-consensual sexual penetration without physical force or threat, incest involving a child, rape in the context of armed conflict and gang-perpetrated rape. Sexual assault refers to touching a child's private parts or making a child touch someone else's private parts (excluding penetration), with or without the use of force, and without consent because the child is too young to consent or consent is not given. This primarily includes unwanted groping, fondling or other forms of touching; sexual acts (other than penetration) obtained through threats of physical violence; sexual acts (other than penetration) obtained through threats to the well-being of family members; the use of force or coercion to obtain unwanted sexual acts or any sexual activity that the child finds degrading or humiliating; and pulling a child's clothing up or down to reveal intimate areas.
Non-contact CSEA	Non-contact CSEA refers to any form of verbal or non-verbal non-physical conduct, whether isolated or persistent, that involves unwanted references to the body, sexual organs or sexuality of the child, excluding acts occurring in an online

	context. This includes, but is not limited to, sexual harassment, sexual threats, exposure of a child to sexual abuse and pornography, sexual bullying and/or unwanted sexual jokes, taunts or comments, exposing sexual organs, trapping a child and subjecting him/her to sexual advances, subjecting a child to sexual rumours, persistent leering looks, sexual stalking, sexual extortion, coercion and blackmailing a child for sexual purposes, and non-consensual image-taking of the sexual organs or sexual activities involving a child.

The review also included the sexual exploitation of children, adopting the United Nations' definition of sexual exploitation. While this definition is not exclusively related to children, it is outlined as follows: 'Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another'.

For North America, East Asia and Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, country-level prevalence estimates are presented as descriptive summaries of the available evidence. Where sufficient evidence was available, additional random-effects meta-analyses were undertaken for outcomes supported by at least four studies.

Data analysis

Previous studies have observed variations in the prevalence of violence against children, influenced by several methodological factors. These factors include the year of the survey, generational cohorts covered by the data, the method of data collection, sample type (household versus school), sample site, national or subnational survey, respondent type (parent, adult recall, young adult recall, child), sample size, response rate, self-administered surveys, use of standard definitions for violent behaviours, number of screen questions, specificity of terminology around offline CSEA categories, length of questionnaire, questions about other violence exposure and the definition of childhood (Haugaard & Emery, 1989; Wynkoop, Capps, & Priest, 1995; Bolen & Scannapieco, 1999; Andrews et al., 2004; Finkelhor et al., 2005; Zolotor et al., 2009; Barth et al., 2012; Fang et al., 2015; Greijer et al., 2016; Fry et al., 2024).

Global and regional prevalence estimates in the 2026 Index were derived from a global dataset (updated to August 2024). The synthesis analysis employed a Bayesian multilevel model to pool the past-year or lifetime prevalence data from various sources (Gelman et al., 2007; Finucane et al., 2014; Sardinha et al., 2022). This approach allowed for the borrowing of strength across units, enhancing the accuracy and precision of prevalence estimates. For example, if a country has only one small sub-national survey, the accuracy and precision of that country's estimate can be enhanced by considering data from countries within the same region. The degree of pooling, determining how much information is shared between observations, is empirically determined by the data,

avoiding arbitrary user decisions (Gelman et al., 2007; Sardinha et al., 2022). UNICEF's classification was adopted as the baseline for regional estimates (UNICEF, 2023a).

Our model is formulated within a generalised linear modelling (GLM) framework, specifying a binomial likelihood with a logit link function, where the outcome represents the number of observed offline CSEA cases relative to the total sample size (McCullagh, 2019). The hierarchical structure comprises four nested levels: countries, subregions, super-regions and the global level. Super-regions and subregions follow the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) classification used for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) monitoring and reporting (UNSD, 2024). The model incorporates both fixed and random effects to integrate information from diverse data sources while capturing heterogeneity across geographic and demographic levels. The meta-regression model includes fixed effects for violence type (contact versus non-contact) and recall period (past-year versus lifetime) across the UNICEF regions. To account for substantial sex and/or gender-related differences in SVAC prevalence across settings, sex and/or gender-related is also included as a main effect and modelled as a multiplicative interaction with the 20 SDG subregions. This interaction structure allows the model to capture regional heterogeneity in sex-specific prevalence patterns, avoiding the assumption that differences between males and females are constant across all regions.

Non-linear effects of age and study end year were modelled using natural splines with three degrees of freedom, with two knots placed evenly across their observed ranges. Fixed effects were included for key study characteristics, including relationship to the perpetrator (for example, any/parents/partner/peers), frequency of violence (for example, at least once vs. at least twice), recall period (for example, before age 18, before age 15, past 12 months, past 3 months), subtype of violence, sampling site and survey question format (behaviourally specific vs. non-specific). These adjustments help account for methodological differences across studies and improve comparability of estimates.

Nested random effects were applied across the geographic hierarchy, assuming that countries are more similar to others within the same region than to those outside it. This structure allows borrowing strength within regions to improve estimation stability (Finucane et al., 2014; Sardinha et al., 2022). Lower weights were also assigned to sub-national studies by modelling them as having greater variability than nationally representative data (Gelman et al., 2007).

The Bayesian model used weakly informative priors, including normal priors for regression coefficients and half-t priors for standard deviations of random effects, providing regularisation and improving model stability (Gelman et al., 2007). Key hyperparameters (for example, spline knots and prior specifications) were selected using the Widely Applicable Information Criterion (WAIC) (Finucane et al., 2014; Sardinha et al., 2022).

Posterior distributions were estimated using Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) with 10,000 iterations and 5,000 burn-in samples, implemented with parallel chains for efficiency. Convergence was assessed using Gelman–Rubin diagnostics, and model fit was evaluated through posterior predictive checks and in-sample and out-of-sample

validation (including median error, median absolute error and interval coverage) (Finucane et al., 2014; Sardinha et al., 2022). The final model generated country-level prevalence estimates with 95% uncertainty intervals, which were then aggregated to UNICEF regions and global levels using 2024 population denominators from the World Population Prospects (2024 revision) (UND, 2024).

At the country level, prevalence estimates were summarised based on an updated systematic review of available evidence through the end of 2025 for North America, East Asia and Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean. While Bayesian modelling is used for global and broader regional estimates, its application at the country level would require more complete and consistently updated global data coverage. Given that only three regions were updated in the current cycle and data availability remains limited and unbalanced, the evidence base is not yet sufficient to support fully model-based pooled country estimates. Country-level findings are therefore presented using descriptive summaries of the available evidence. Where at least four studies were available for a given outcome, additional random-effects meta-analyses were undertaken. Where data permitted, findings were further stratified by perpetrator type (for example, peer and family member) and offline CSEA subtype (for example, rape, sexual assault, contact CSEA, and non-contact CSEA). For the additional random-effects meta-analyses, prevalence estimates were logit-transformed prior to analysis to stabilise variances and improve the normality of the sampling distribution and were back-transformed for interpretation. Random-effects models were used to account for between-study heterogeneity arising from differences in study populations, sampling strategies, settings, and measurement approaches. Given the anticipated heterogeneity across studies, pooled estimates should be interpreted as average prevalence estimates while allowing for genuine study-level variation. Statistical heterogeneity was assessed using the I^2 statistic, between-study variance (τ^2), and visual inspection of Forest plots. Sensitivity analyses were conducted using the original (untransformed) prevalence values to assess the robustness of the pooled estimates.

Statistical implementation

All analyses were performed in R (version 4.5.0) and the model was fitted primarily using the 'brms' package (R Core Team, 2025; Bürkner, P.-C, 2017). For country-level descriptive analyses, Stata 18 was used (StataCorp, 2023). For country-level random-effects meta-analyses, R (version 4.5.0) and 'metafor' package were used (R Core Team, 2025).

Data quality and limitations

This review of the population-based data has several limitations. In terms of interpretation of country-level prevalence estimates, they should not be considered as directly comparable with regional estimates, as they were based on different evidence bases, statistical approaches and covered different offline CSEA subtypes and perpetrator categories. Country-level estimates were not adjusted for study level differences in definitions across studies, including perpetrator categories or age thresholds. Therefore, some estimates do not fully capture all offline CSEA occurring before the age of 18 which

may underestimate prevalence.

Furthermore, the evidence was from general population-based surveys, which may limit the ability to capture experiences of difficult-to-access and more vulnerable populations. Of note, there are fewer population-based surveys in the region of Latin America and Caribbean relative to North America. Surveys may not fully reflect the scale, types and risks of exposure to offline CSEA among specific populations of children, including those with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as children from minoritised populations, children with disabilities, children in street situations in care or institutionalised, and many other under-represented populations of children.

In terms of data availability, the data sources on prevalence of offline CSEA remain limited across regions and countries, including evidence disaggregated by perpetrator type and on specific offline CSEA subtypes, particularly non-contact forms of CSEA. Estimates of these forms of victimisation should therefore be interpreted with appropriate caution.

Finally, survey-based estimates of CSEA are subject to recall bias and non-disclosure, particularly when experiences are reported retrospectively, which may result in underestimation. Inconsistencies in definitions and measurement across surveys further limit comparability and the accurate estimation of offline CSEA prevalence.

Summary

Despite these limitations, the current review represents the most comprehensive synthesis to date of offline CSEA victimisation prevalence at global and regional levels. Drawing on a wide range of representative quantitative sources, the review integrated evidence from academic databases, grey literature repositories and government and NGO reports. In addition, the use of Bayesian estimation methods for global and regional modelling allows for more robust and comparable prevalence estimates by accounting for key sources of methodological and definitional heterogeneity across studies. The geographic focus on North America, East Asia and Pacific and Latin America and Caribbean further strengthens the analysis by providing updated regional coverage and improving the granularity of evidence in these settings.

Ethical considerations

This study used publicly available published and grey literature and did not involve direct contact with human participants. Therefore, ethical approval was not required.

AI-usage disclaimer

In accordance with Childlight's Generative AI policy, AI-based tools, including large language models, were used in a limited and supportive manner during the conduct of this review. Their use was restricted to tasks intended to enhance efficiency and accessibility and did not replace researcher judgement or decision-making at any stage of

the review process. Specifically, AI tools were used to support:

1. translation of non-English language studies identified through the search process
2. language editing to improve clarity and readability of draft text without altering substantive meaning
3. DistillerSR's AI-assisted screening features may be used to support screening efficiency, including the potential for automated exclusion of records deemed low relevance once the model has been sufficiently trained, all final inclusion decisions and oversight remained the responsibility of the review team.

All outputs generated with AI assistance were independently reviewed and verified by the research team prior to use. Final decisions regarding study inclusion, data interpretation, synthesis and reporting were made solely by the authors, who take full responsibility for the integrity, accuracy and conclusions of the review.

Conflict of interest disclaimer

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could appear to influence the planned research.

Registered Protocol: https://osf.io/c76bp/

Data Availability

The aggregated data frames used for the project the *Prevalence of Offline Child Sexual Victimisation* are available as open access in the Childlight DataShare repository, within the wider *2026 Into the Light Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*: https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8210

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Data frame of global, regional and country-level prevalence estimates of offline CSEA

The data frame underlying the graphics are publicly available in tabular format on DataShare: https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8210

Appendix 2: Data source of global and regional prevalence estimates of offline CSEA

Fang, X., Ren, J., Kang, J., Ligiéro, D., Fry, D., Annor, F. B., ... & Vermeulen, I. (2026). A systematic review of the global and regional estimates of the prevalence of sexual violence against children. Supplementary information. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-026-02436-1

Appendix 3: Dataset and analysis code of global and regional prevalence estimates of offline CSEA

Dataset and analysis code is publicly available to ensure reproducibility: https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/EG8TN.

Appendix 4: Data source of country-level prevalence estimates of offline CSEA

Due to space constraints, country-specific bibliographic lists are available in the README file of the data frame via DataShare: https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8210

Appendix 5: Dataset and analysis code of country-level prevalence estimates of offline CSEA

Dataset and analysis code is publicly available to ensure reproducibility: https://osf.io/vfj5a/.

The Prevalence of Technology-Facilitated Child Sexual Victimisation

Krzeczkowska, A., Anderson, N., Fry, D., Lamond, M., Lu, M., Villaveces, A., & Ren, J.

Introduction

This indicator area shows the regional prevalence estimates of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse (TF-CSEA). More specifically, it provides estimates for the number of victims under the age of 18 on the regional scale who have experienced different forms of TF-CSEA.

Although a growing body of evidence on both offline and online child abuse and exploitation is published and widely disseminated, estimating the full extent of these crimes remains extremely challenging due to their 'hidden' nature and the fragmentation of the associated data. To better understand the risks that children face online, the scale of victimisation and to estimate the prevalence more accurately, it is crucial to establish a more precise and uniform typology and collect more evidence on the incidence and nature of TF-CSEA.

This review aims to update the recent systematic review on global prevalence of TF-CSEA (Fry et al., 2024, 2025) and contribute to filling the gap in our understanding of the prevalence and nature of TF-CSEA at the regional- and country-level for East Asia and Pacific, North America and Latin America and the Caribbean. The Childlight Global Index (Fry et al., 2024) highlights that TF-CSEA is prevalent in every country where it is measured and that many data gaps still exist. Based on the representative survey data, all three regions are relatively well covered by data sources, and report some of the highest prevalence estimates of non-consensual taking, sharing and exposure to sexual images and videos and online solicitation in children for past-year recall (Fry et al., 2024). Regarding other types of TF-CSEA, there is still limited evidence on online sexual exploitation and sexual extortion in Latin America and the Caribbean and North America, however, the recent findings show that this is an area of increased research efforts. Conversely, the East Asia and Pacific region is relatively well represented by data, mainly thanks to the significant data collection effort from the Disrupting Harm initiative (UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, 2022).

By analysing and synthesising the existing literature on TF-CSEA, this comprehensive systematic review provides crucial evidence that can complement the current knowledge of technology-facilitated victimisation by highlighting what is and what is not currently known and inform policymaking and practice regarding the prevention and intervention of TF-CSEA. The findings of this systematic review will be of great significance to policymakers, practitioners, advocates and researchers as they can use the evidence to make informed decisions about allocating resources and designing effective prevention and response programmes. Moreover, the systematic review will contribute to the more general advancement of knowledge on TF-CSEA prevalence and its measurement, and

thus, assist in the development of future research in this field. Ultimately, the findings from this review have the potential to make a significant impact in reducing the incidence of TF-CSEA and promoting the health and wellbeing of children globally.

This review forms part of a broader programme of work examining both technology-facilitated and offline CSEA and is intended to complement other data activities undertaken for the Childlight Global Index, including analyses of administrative data related to CSEA and child sexual abuse material (CSAM). The TF-CSEA prevalence estimates published in 2024 (Fry et al., 2024), were updated with new data sources and new subtypes introduced in the 2025 edition of the Into the Light report (Fry et al., 2025).

The main purpose of systematic reviews and meta-analyses is to synthesise the existing evidence and keep the readers up to date. Therefore, this indicator area is not to assess changes in data points over time or identify annual trends in prevalence across different subtypes and geographies. Our aim is to produce an updated prevalence analysis of TF-CSEA, including the most recently published sources for explanatory and exploratory purposes. The annual updates can help identify emerging subtypes of TF-CSEA, monitor recurring behaviours and inform about the existing and new methodologies employed in this research area.

Research questions

- What are the prevalence estimates of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse (TF-CSEA) globally and across UNICEF regions?
- What evidence on TF-CSEA is available at the country level in North America, East Asia and Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean based on data published between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2025?

The Technical Note explains in more detail how the data for the indicator area was collected and analysed, as well as reflections on data quality and limitations of the methods applied.

Data collection

Comprehensive searches were conducted using search terms in English without language restrictions, covering publications from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025. Reviewed studies were published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Chinese, Japanese, Korean or Thai (reflecting the primary languages used across North America, East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean). This review screened the academic and grey literature to identify studies that had published prevalence estimates on any type of TF-CSEA to update the recent systematic reviews on TF-CSEA (Childlight, 2025; Fry et al., 2024). The search results were supplemented by sources published in individual countries, provided by the members of Childlight's Impact and Communication Working Group based in those locations. In addition, the inclusion of the prevalence estimates was facilitated by country-level members of this advisory group.

Search strategy

The research team searched the following electronic databases for journal articles/reports that met the inclusion criteria:

1. PubMed/Medline (Ovid)
2. Global Health (Ovid)
3. PsycINFO (Ovid)
4. EMBASE (Ovid)
5. Social science citation index (Web of Science)
6. Sociological abstracts (ProQuest)
7. CINAHL (EBSCOhost)
8. ERIC (EBSCOhost)
9. Google Scholar
10. Google Scholar
11. Scopus
12. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global

In addition, using the same search terms, relevant articles were selected from the following journals that are key in the field of child protection: 'Trauma, Violence & Abuse', 'Child Abuse and Neglect', 'Child Maltreatment', 'Child Abuse Review' and 'Journal of Interpersonal Violence'. Relevant systematic review bibliographies were also searched.

The search terms were further used in Google Scholar and Google Search to identify previous reviews.

Grey literature was searched through the university library databases, specifically designed to identify unpublished or non-standard academic literature. Key grey literature sources included research by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and UN agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs), as well as research reports from national government sources. A thorough scan of key websites that publish TF-CSEA studies was completed. This scan helped identify both grey literature and organisations/individuals that might have links to grey literature. These websites included but were not limited to:

- www.crin.org (and www.crin.org/bcnhttps://www.crin.org/bcn)
- Child Rescue Coalition (CRC)
- Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P)
- Thorn v. International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
- Save the Children-Resource Centre
- Protect Children (suojellaanlapsia.fi)
- Empowering Children Foundation (fdds.pl)
- The Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation (https://hintalovon.hu/en/home/)
- Children Online Protection Lab Centre (https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/digital-diplomacy/the-children-online-protection-lab/)
- Center for Sexual Health and Interventions at the National Institute of Mental Health (NUDZ)

- The Italian Network of Agencies against Child Abuse (CISMAI)
- EU Horizon Portal (https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/projects-results)
- www.unicef-irc.org and other UNICEF websites, such as www.unicef.org/rosa/reports/gendered-analysis-child-protection-systems-responses-covid-19-programming-south-asia
- International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN)
- National Center of Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
- International Centre of Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC)
- WeProtect Global Alliance
- Child Protection Monitoring and Evaluation
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection
- Terre des Hommes
- Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)
- INHOPE
- End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT)
- National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)
- Technology Coalition
- Missing Children Europe (MCE)
- eSafety Commission
- NetSafe
- Get Safe Online
- Lucy Faithfull
- Oak foundation
- http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org
- http://www.unicef-irc.org and other UNICEF websites
- Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) search by region: https://www.svri.org/
- World Health Organization (WHO), WHO's own violence prevention publications: https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/violence/en/ and the WHO's V-Info website search under countries: https://apps.who.int/violence-info/countries
- Together for Girls
- The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children's Knowledge Platform: https://www.end-violence.org/knowledge
- UNICEF Regional Offices: search bars on the following websites
    - Middle East and North Africa (MENA): https://www.unicef.org/mena/
    - Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO): https://www.unicef.org/lac/en
    - West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO): https://www.unicef.org/topics/wcaro
    - East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO): https://www.unicef.org/topics/esaro
    - East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO): https://www.unicef.org/eap/
    - Regional Office of South Asia (ROSA): https://www.unicef.org/rosa/
    - Europe and Central Asia (ECA): https://www.unicef.org/eca/

In addition, the research team searched for comparable data on the prevalence of TF-CSEA published in:

7. Demographic Health Surveys (DHS)
8. Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS)
9. Global School-Based Health Surveys (GSHS)
10. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study (HBSC)
11. Disrupting Harm (DH)
12. Global Kids Online (GKO)
13. Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys (VACS)
14. ISRD (https://isrdstudy.org)

Search terms

In this systematic review, the specific search strategy included the intersection of terms indicating both offline and online sexual victimisation in order to capture studies that were wider than just TF-CSEA but that may have asked questions and produced prevalence estimates for subtypes of TF-CSEA. This approach was applied to maximise efficiency and minimise error when conducting this large review. Search terms specifically focused on TF-CSEA were also included based on the team's experience of conducting previous systematic and scoping reviews in this area. Table 1 presents all the search terms used.

Table 1: The list of search terms used in the review

Line		Search terms
1		child* OR adolescen* OR infant* OR young* OR youth* OR teen* OR juvenile* OR minor* OR toddler* OR boy* OR girl* OR pre-pubert* OR pre-pubescen* OR prepubert* OR prepubescen* OR newborn* OR new-born OR baby* OR babies OR preschool* OR kid* OR puberty OR pubescen* OR minors* OR 'underage' OR underag* OR preadolesc* OR preteen* OR 'pre-teen*'
2	AND	'online sexual harassment' OR 'online child sex* abuse' OR 'online solicitation' OR 'sex* cyber solicitation' OR 'online child abuse image*' OR 'online child abuse' OR 'online sex* abuse' OR 'online sex* violence' OR 'technology-facilitated sex* abuse' OR 'technology-enabled sex* abuse' OR 'unwanted online sexual exposure' OR 'harmful sexual behavior*' OR 'unwanted online sex*' OR 'online grooming' OR 'internet grooming' OR 'revenge porn*' OR 'child porn*' OR 'nonconsensual porn*' OR 'non-consensual porn*' OR 'porn exposure' OR 'online sex* exploit*' OR 'online sex* offen*' OR 'online sex* violen*' OR 'online sex* abus*' OR 'online sex* aggression' OR

		'online sex* victim*' OR ' online sex* survivor*' OR 'online sex* crime' OR cybersex OR 'attempted sex*' OR csam OR csai OR csea OR ocsea OR iioc OR osec OR sextort* OR paedophil* OR pedophil* OR 'indecent image*' OR porn* OR 'sex* extortion*' OR 'online sex* blackmail*' OR 'sex* video*' OR 'sex* image*' OR 'sex* material*' OR 'online sex* harm*' OR cyberflash OR 'sex* predator*' OR 'sex* trafficking' OR 'image-based sex* abuse' OR 'technology-assisted sexual violence' OR tasv OR ta-sv OR livestream* OR 'sexual exploitation' OR 'sexual offen*' OR 'sexual violence' OR 'rape' OR 'sexual abuse' OR 'sexual aggression' OR 'sexual maltreatment' OR 'sexual coerc*'
3	AND	epidemiolog* OR prevalence OR proportion OR rate OR incidence OR occur* OR magnitude OR scale OR percent* OR count OR frequen* OR degree OR measure* OR 'network scale-up' OR nsum OR 'household survey*' OR 'prevalence estimate*' OR 'respondent-driven sampling*' OR rds OR 'link tracing sampling' OR 'time location sampling' OR tls OR 'time space sampling' OR 'venue based sampling' OR 'multiple systems estimation' OR mse OR 'capture recapture' OR 'petersen-lincoln*' OR crt OR m-nsum OR g-nsum OR s-pps OR 'sampling proportionate to size'
4		1 AND 2 AND 3

These search terms were decided upon after conducting a scoping review and pilot searches for the previous systematic review on global prevalence and nature of TF-CSEA (Fry et al., 2024). Piloting of the search strategies allowed to modify and identify the terms which produced the most relevant results. Moreover, articles on TF-CSEA were read to determine which terms were being used by academics and researchers in the field. The search terms are extensive due to the myriads of terms and the lack of consensus on the TF-CSEA conceptualisation and typology.

Inclusion/exclusion criteria

Several inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to select relevant evidence:

Inclusion criteria

1. The study was published in English or any language relevant to this edition (languages spoken in North America, East Asia and Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean) between 1 January 2025, and 31 December 2025.
2. The study reported the prevalence of TF-CSEA or was an article that includes

prevalence data on TF-CSEA.
3. The data were based on general population samples, which means samples are representative at the national or sub-national level.
4. The study included a measure of TF-CSEA.
5. The study included prevalence estimates collected using traditional sampling and survey methods (for example, random, stratified, cluster), or other methodological approaches of prevalence estimation (for example, Multiple Systems Estimation, respondent-driven sampling, time and location sampling, network scale up method, hybrid approaches).
6. TF-CSEA needed to occur in childhood (under 18 years old), it could be self-reported either as a child or an adult or could be reported by parents or others in a position of responsibility (for example, teachers, medical doctors, social workers).
7. The sample size needed to be at least 100.

Exclusion criteria

1. Although the study might report abuse as TF-CSEA, if the incident did not occur in childhood, it was not TF-CSEA, and these studies were excluded.
2. The study had non-disaggregated data for children or adult experiences as children (thereby making it impossible to determine findings specific to children under 18 years of age).
3. Estimates from particular sub-populations that might not generalise to the population, for example, patients with psychosis, psychiatric disorders, depression, autism spectrum disorder or HIV/AIDS; samples consisting of individuals with disabilities; military or veterans; individuals with a history of criminal behaviour, offenders, or those currently incarcerated; samples consisting of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender individuals, or those within the LGBT community; samples of children living in foster homes, group homes, or other forms of substitute care; samples exclusively comprised of victims/survivors of TF-CSEA (100% prevalence) as examples. Although these studies were excluded for this systematic review, they do hold value, and thus there is the possibility of including them in future research.
4. Research with limited sample size/selected samples, for example, sample size <100, case study, control study/randomised control trial or qualitative studies.
5. Other types of violence, for example, child-to-parent violence, intimate partner violence between adults or theft/robbery where no TF-CSEA estimate was present.

Data screening and selection

The screening results were stored in SharePoint (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, Washington, USA). The DistillerSR systematic review software (Version 2.35, DistillerSR Inc.; 2023; https://www.distillersr.com/) was used to compile relevant peer-reviewed sources. Duplicate records were removed prior to screening using automated deduplication tools within DistillerSR and reference management software. The screening process was conducted in two stages. First, titles and abstracts identified through the search strategy were screened by a human reviewer and using DistillerSR AI classifier model. A classifier model was developed to function as a second reviewer, using previous human reviewer decisions as the training data. Before being used in this role, the model's

performance was assessed and validated against human screening decisions. The human reviewer made the final inclusion or exclusion decision for each record that was considered as potentially relevant. Following the initial screening selection, two reviewers thoroughly assessed the full texts of peer-reviewed articles and grey literature on TF-CSEA to determine their alignment with the inclusion criteria for the review. Any sources that failed to meet the inclusion criteria were excluded, and the reasons for exclusions were documented and recorded in DistillerSR. In the event of disagreements among team members, efforts were made to reach a resolution through discussion. However, if consensus could not be achieved, an additional team member was brought in for consultation. The search strategy along with the selection processes was documented and reported in the final systematic review.

Data extraction

The research team developed a structured data extraction form in DistillerSR based on key publication and study characteristics. The preliminary extraction form was refined and updated throughout the data extraction process as needed. To improve the extraction tool, the team conducted a pilot test using previously identified sources to ensure that the specificities of the data and methodologies were effectively captured. Variables were also clearly defined in separate spreadsheet tabs. One reviewer extracted data from the included sources with assistance from AI tools, specifically smart evidence extraction, while a second reviewer independently double-checked the extracted information. If consensus could not be reached, a third team member made the final decision.

A master MS-Excel file, that was developed for the previous systematic review on global prevalence of TF-CSEA (Fry et al., 2024), was used to compile the newly extracted data alongside the existing dataset.

The key information extracted from the studies included:

- authors and year and title
- sample population (for example, general or special)
- national representative or not (for example, national representative, subnational representative, non-representative)
- country(ies)
- study type (for example, cohort, longitudinal, cross-sectional)
- urbanicity type (for example, urban, rural, suburban, peri-urban, mixed)
- sampling method
- survey site (for example, community-based, school-based, university-based, hospital or clinic-based, web-based)
- sample details and data collection year
- perpetrator type and perpetrator age and perpetrator sex
- subtypes of TF-CSEA (for example, unwanted sexting, sexual extortion, online solicitation, online sexual exploitation)
- frequency of the TF-CSEA and level of TF-CSEA
- sex of sample and sample size and response rate

- prevalence (%) for each subtype of TF-CSEA and number of cases for each type and subtype of TF-CSEA
- weighted or unweighted prevalence
- variance and standard error and confidence interval (CI) of prevalence
- location of TF-CSEA event (for example, home, community, hospital, online, other)
- respondent type (for example, children, parents report, adults recall) and respondent age
- time period for TF-CSEA measurement (for example, past-year, lifetime)
- age of TF-CSEA experiences and age of onset for CSEA (Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse)
- self-administered or not (for example, self-administered online, self-facilitated Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interviews (ACASI), interview-facilitated ACASI, interview-administered questionnaire)
- measurement instrument and number of questions asked
- type of publication

For the development of the indicator area, this information was used and extracted further into data frames to inform design of the global map and graphics used as part of the visualisation of the Index. These data frames have been made publicly available on the Index dashboard in tabular format and the dataset for this Indicator area is also available as part of our transparency, quality and reproducibility approach to data at the Childlight DataShare repository: https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8210.

Risk of bias assessment

The Hoy et al. (2012) checklist for assessing risk of bias in prevalence studies was used, a framework previously utilised for other global systematic reviews. This checklist has nine questions with two standard answer options (high/low risk of bias):

1. External validity:

    a. Was the study's target population a close representation of the national population in relation to relevant variables?
    b. Was the sampling frame a true or close representation of the target population?
    c. Was some form of random selection used to select the sample, or was a census undertaken?
    d. Was the likelihood of nonresponse bias minimal?

2. Internal validity:

    e. Were data collected directly from the subjects (as opposed to a proxy)?
    f. Was an acceptable case definition used in the study?
    g. Was the study instrument that measured the parameter of interest shown to have validity, reliability and cultural sensitivity?
    h. Was the same mode of data collection used for all subjects?
    i. Were the numerator(s) and denominator(s) for the parameter of interest

appropriate?

The final overall appraisal considers the answers to the above checklist questions answered based on rater judgment. Each item was rated as 'low risk' (score 0) or 'high risk' (score 1), with total scores classifying studies as either low (0–3), moderate (4–6) or high risk (7–9) (Hoy et al., 2012).

The study methods and findings from the systematic review were reported in line with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA; Page et al., 2021). The protocol is available via the Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/ryu9p/overview.

Data preparation and conceptual framework

This section explains how the systematic review data was organised and categorised for the TF-CSEA indicators.

Data cleaning

When conducting large systematic reviews and meta-analyses, it is crucial to perform data cleaning to ensure that the dataset is accurate, consistent and can be converted into a uniform format. This process also serves as an additional check of identified sources and to exclude duplicates and studies that do not meet the inclusion criteria.

All these records were combined in one file for further checks and the data cleaning process. Several steps were undertaken in this research to prepare the data for meta-analysis and included:

1. Filtering the extracted records by outcomes reported. At this stage, only data for subtypes of technology-facilitated victimisation was included in the dataset
2. Removing studies and research reports that used a non-representative sample, or representativeness could not be verified
3. Selecting TF-CSEA subtype prevalence estimates for the full sample rather than breakdowns by different age-ranges or by perpetrator characteristics
4. Identifying research that did not meet the inclusion criteria (for example, control study/randomised control trials; non-disaggregated data for mixed samples of respondents; perpetrator-centric; data disaggregated by gender identity or sexual orientation and no overall prevalence for the full sample provided; no country-level breakdown; samples exclusively comprised of victims/survivors of TF-CSEA)
5. Removing studies that were already included in the previous systematic review (Fry et al., 2024)
6. Removing studies/reports that used the same sample/data published in other sources included in the review
7. Excluding studies that did not provide prevalence estimates
8. Overall TF-CSEA scores for each subtype were calculated by the analyst where data were provided by gender breakdown only (provided the numbers of cases were reported)
9. Studies were grouped by two recall periods: a) past-year experience including 30

days, 3 months, 6 months, 12 months (preceding the data collection), and COVID-19 period (December 2019- August 2023) combined; and b) lifetime experience (ever, before, pre-18, pre-16 categories combined)

Conceptual framework

For the analysis, results were grouped according to the measured outcome. Table 2 presents five main subtypes of TF-CSEA that were used in this review. The initial framework developed for the previous edition of the Index (Fry et al., 2024) was carefully revised and new categorisation proposed. Framework was developed both by examining all the classifications of types of TF-CSEA, as identified in the studies and drawing from the existing literature and conceptual models (E-Safety Commissioner, 2021; Finkelhor et al., 2022; ECPAT International, 2025; Laird et al., 2022). Several iterations of the conceptual framework were developed. The final broad subtypes listed below were included as all the studies could fit into one or more of these subtypes and aligned with the existing evidence-base.

Table 2: Five broad subgroups of TF-CSEA

Aggregated subgroup	Examples of composite TF-CSEA subtypes	Description
Online solicitation	Online grooming, online solicitation, online sexual harassment, unwanted sexual talk, pressure to obtain images, unwanted/non-consensual/pressured sexting (sending and receiving sexual messages, images, and videos), unwanted sexual talk and sexual activities on webcam (subtype informed by Finkelhor et al., 2022; ECPAT International, 2025).	This subtype covers a range of unwanted/pressured sexual interactions. Those may include casual sexual inquiries via mobile phone or Internet, as well as long-lasting sexual conversations that can lead to exchange of sexual pictures/videos, or exposure of intimate body parts/engaging in cybersex (no money exchange or threats involved). It is important to note, that all different types of online solicitation often come from peers as well as adult perpetrators. This subgroup includes receiving unwanted sexually explicit text messages, emails, photos and videos, sent by peers or adults.
Child sexual abuse material	Non-consensual images or videos taking and	Non-consensual image or video taking refers to having

(CSAM)/Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA)	distributing by an adult or another child (subtype informed by ECPAT International, 2025; E-Safety Commissioner, 2021; European Commission, 2024)	sexual images taken when a child was unconscious, intoxicated, distracted, or unable to consent. This subtype also includes non-consensual sharing of images/videos of a child via mobile phone or Internet. It could also include so-called deepfake images in which a child's face or likeness was imposed on a sexual image of someone else, as well as AI-generated images.
Exposure to unwanted sexual content	Forced/unwanted exposure to pornographic content (adult content or CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Material)) (subtype informed by E-Safety Commissioner, 2021)	This subgroup includes an unwanted exposure of a child to pornographic materials (for example, forcing a child to watch nude videos or pictures or sending a child a link to pornographic websites). Please note that unwanted exposure to sexual content occurs frequently while surfing or scrolling through social media. This type of exposure may not be precursors to a request for reciprocity.
Online sexual exploitation	Commercial sexual talk, commercial sexual images, or other commercial sexual activity (subtype informed by Laird et al., 2022, Finkelhor et al., 2022, and ECPAT International, 2025)	Sex acts are exchanged for the provision of monetary or non-monetary resources (for example, food, clothes, shelter, affection, protection, belonging, gifts and/or anything else of perceived value to the young person or child) on or offline.
Sexual extortion	sextortion, sexual extortion, sexual	Sexual extortion is a form of blackmail that involves threatening to share an

	blackmail, sexual coercion (subtype informed by E-Safety Commissioner, 2021; ECPAT International, 2025)	individual's intimate image or video online (including spam/phishing) unless they comply with certain demands such as to obtain money or gift cards/other items of monetary worth, additional pictures or other sexual activities. This subtype also includes sexual acts on webcam coerced by perpetrator.

Data analysis

Strategy for data synthesis and production of regional estimates

Previous studies have observed variations in the prevalence of violence against children, influenced by several methodological factors. These factors included the method of data collection, sample type (household versus school), sample site, national or subnational survey, respondent type (parent, adult recall, young adult recall, child), sample size, response rate, self-administered surveys, use of standard definitions for violent behaviours and the definition of childhood (Andrews et al., 2004; Barth et al., 2012; Bolen & Scannapieco, 1999; Fang et al., 2015; Haugaard & Emery, 1989; Wynkoop, Capps, & Priest, 1995).

Similar variability in prevalence was also observed in the previous systematic review (Fry et al., 2024) which is updated by this review. Despite significant efforts to use standardised definitions (ECPAT International, 2016; Finkelhor et al., 2022; Livingstone & Stoilova, 2021; Stoilova et al., 2021) and instruments (Finkelhor et al., 2005; Gámez-Guadix et al., 2018; Zolotor et al., 2009) to capture the broad spectrum of TF-CSEA, the evolving nature of online victimisation led many researchers in the field to develop their own outcome measures and use ‘umbrella’ terms from previous research or even create their own categorisations. Those efforts demonstrate that existing TF-CSEA typology and methodologies do not adequately reflect the complexity of emergent abusive behaviours and/or that researchers are not using previously developed questions in their research. The conceptual and typological inconsistencies and ambiguities constitute a challenge in terms of comparability and prevalence estimation across the existing literature.

Furthermore, the majority of studies included in this analysis were focused on investigating one specific type of harm, and only a limited number of records covered a wide range of TF-CSEA types. This variability in terms of selected outcomes and their observed prevalence estimates carried through a huge variation of the number of studies conducted across the regions.

To ensure some degree of consistency and uniformity, this research proposed five broader terms that clustered a range of TF-CSEA types. Composites of these new groupings are often presented as individual outcomes in previous research, therefore results for these subgroups of TF-CSEA should be interpreted with caution. To ensure the findings are not overinterpreted, the number of sources for each outcome and country was provided to reflect the amount of contribution of the research towards the prevalence estimates within each region. Additionally, 95% confidence intervals are presented for all estimates.

Another challenge that was identified while conducting the initial analyses related to the number of questions used to investigate conceptually similar forms of harms that were coded as separate items. In the absence of additional information about the research, it was not possible to establish how many individual children reported one or more types of abuse included in the measure. To address this issue, the maximum of the various individual prevalence estimates was used for each subtype of TF-CSEA in each study. Thus, a single maximum prevalence was applied to stand in for an estimate of the number of unique children involved in reporting events of a specific type.

To account for potential impact of recall period, separate analyses were conducted for past-year and lifetime experiences. This recall-based breakdown was used to produce a prevalence estimate for the total sample, as well as for males and females. Finally, for regional prevalence estimates, the UNICEF classification (2023; https://data.unicef.org/regionalclassifications/) by nine regions was used. UNICEF regions were used instead of WHO or World Bank regions to highlight the significant amount of child protection programming done by UNICEF and the subsequent potential pathways to impact in these regional groupings. Childlight hopes, in future iterations of the index, to provide multiple country-level breakdowns for the indicators. To combine prevalence estimates between countries within a region, defined by each of the nine region classifications, each country estimate in that region was synthesised into an average. Those were further synthesised into an average for a region.

Meta-analysis and statistical issues

Analyses were carried out using the RStudio (version 4.2.2; packages: tidyverse_2.0.0, meta_7.0-0, readxl_1.4.2, Hmisc_5.0-1; R Core Team, 2018). Separate analyses were run for each subtype, disaggregated by the recall period in all three regions, where the threshold of four studies was met (see Appendix 1 for the analytical code). Additionally, for studies that reported sex and/or gender related breakdown and sufficient data (≥4 studies) to conduct the analysis, results for each subtype, recall period, region (East Asia and Pacific, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean) and country (where possible) were also provided. For the full list of studies included in the current analyses, see Appendix 2.

Country-level prevalence estimates were produced for countries with at least four prevalence studies. A minimum threshold of four studies was adopted to ensure a basic level of statistical stability in pooled prevalence estimates and to allow meaningful estimation of between-study heterogeneity. Meta-analyses based on fewer studies are

highly sensitive to individual estimates and provide limited information on variance components, particularly in the context of substantial methodological heterogeneity. This threshold is consistent with common practice in prevalence meta-analyses and reflects a pragmatic balance between maximising data inclusion and ensuring interpretability of pooled estimates.

The pooled prevalence estimates were determined using a random effects model. The estimates reflect the mean of the assumed underlying prevalence distribution, rather than an estimate of a single unknown population prevalence, as would be the case with a fixed effects model. Heterogeneity across studies in each analysis were also assessed.

The level of heterogeneity (that is, observed variability between individual study estimates for a single analysis) identified in the current analyses was extremely high. Therefore, a random effects model was used to function to some extent as a summary measure of the average prevalence. However, caution is required in interpretation of the results, given the wide variation in individual study estimates. These should not be interpreted as estimates of the overall prevalence of a specific TF-CSEA type within the defined geographical regions (East Asia and Pacific, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean).

Analyses were performed by the first author and cross-checked by the research team.

Data quality and limitations

The systematic review used to collect the data for the TF-CSEA indicator area drew predominantly from a variety of surveys reporting estimates at the regional, national or sub-national level. Although the traditional survey methods appear to be the most common means of prevalence estimation in online child sexual victimisation, they also have limitations when attempting to measure the prevalence of 'hidden' victims.

Child sexual exploitation and abuse is often reported retrospectively, months or years after it occurred, therefore most survey research relies on recollection and is prone to recall bias. This, and respondents' non-disclosure, may lead to underestimating the prevalence rates. Prevalence estimation techniques, such as the network scale-up method (NSUM) or multiple systems estimation (MSE), may also include hidden victims. However, these non-traditional methods are not widely applied in the research on child sexual victimisation at present, but they may hold promise.

A wide range of emerging technological modalities of abuse are captured by the literature included in this comprehensive review and meta-analysis. However, the diversity of offences that have been labelled with various terms and often assembled into distinct conceptual categories, also reveal the need to refine and standardise the classification and typology of TF-CSEA. Inconsistencies in definitions and measurements used, constitute a challenge in terms of comparability and estimating the overall TF-CSEA prevalence.

The data availability on TF-CSEA remains limited across regions and countries, including

evidence disaggregated by perpetrator type and on specific TF-CSEA subtypes, specifically sexual extortion and online sexual exploitation. Estimates of these forms of victimisation should therefore be interpreted with appropriate caution.

In terms of regional TF-CSEA estimates, they reflect the evidence available across included countries and should not be interpreted as population-weighted estimates. Countries with more available studies may contribute more information to the pooled estimates than countries with fewer studies, irrespective of their population size.

Differences in the populations included across studies should also be considered when interpreting TF-CSEA estimates. Some studies reported prevalence among children who use the internet, while others included the broader population of children within the relevant age group. These differences were not adjusted in the analysis and may affect comparability across studies and countries, particularly where levels of internet access vary.

The available evidence on TF-CSEA is predominantly based on older children and adolescents, with many studies focusing on participants aged 13-17 years and relatively limited representation of children under the age of 10. The reported prevalence estimates should therefore be interpreted as reflecting the age groups represented in the underlying studies and may not be directly generalisable to all children under 18. Experiences of TF-CSEA, opportunities for online exposure, and the recognition and reporting of these experiences may vary by developmental stage and age. The limited evidence available for younger children means that it is currently unclear whether applying estimates derived predominantly from older children and adolescents would overestimate or underestimate prevalence among younger age groups. Further age-disaggregated research, particularly among younger children, is needed to understand how TF-CSEA prevalence varies across childhood.

Finally, a limited number of studies reported disaggregated data for non-binary self-identified genders. Therefore, we could not produce prevalence estimates for these populations. Given the specific risks across sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions, the scale and nature of their exposure to TF-CSEA are crucial to be considered in future research.

As part of Childlight's commitment to transparency, reproducibility and quality, the dataset for this indicator area has been made open access so that researchers can review, test, challenge and further build upon the work.

Summary

Despite the limitations, the indicator area provides regional estimates of child sexual victimisation in North America, East Asia and Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean

based on a comprehensive synthesis of available representative quantitative data sources. The sources were identified using several academic search platforms and databases, in conjunction with expert recommendations as well as searches of the references in prior reviews and eligible studies. This variety ensured (as far as was possible) that all relevant data have been included.

The scope of this research was not restricted by the type of study context or specific TF-CSEA characteristics. This allowed the appraisal of a diverse range of TF-CSEA typologies and summaries of evidence from a range of victim-centric investigations. In addition, the searches were not restricted to the English language, which mitigated language bias and allowed the identification of additional records to extend the analysis on the reginal and country-level prevalence of TF-CSEA. Those comprehensive searches also improve the validity of the meta-analysis and enhance the precision of the evidence provided by this analytical method.

Finally, combining a systematic review with a meta-analysis offers a more objective appraisal of the available data compared to the traditional narrative reviews. Although potential bias cannot be completely prevented, it can be minimised by using meta-analytic methods for examining independent studies for the purpose of integrating their findings. However, prevalence data on TF-CSEA victimisation presented in this report should be considered with extreme caution. The random effects should be interpreted as summary estimates of average prevalence in the presence of very high variability distributions of individual published prevalence estimates, and therefore they are not necessarily an accurate guide to some notional overall prevalence of a specific event type either worldwide or within defined geographical regions.

Ethical considerations

This study used publicly available data sources and did not involve direct contact with human participants. Therefore, ethical approval was not required.

AI-usage disclaimer

In accordance with Childlight's Generative AI policy, AI-based tools, including large language models, were used in a limited and supportive manner during the conduct of this review. Their use was restricted to tasks intended to enhance efficiency and accessibility and did not replace researcher judgement or decision-making at any stage of the review process. Specifically, AI tools were used to support:

- translation of non-English language studies identified through the search process
- language editing to improve clarity and readability of draft text without altering substantive meaning
- DistillerSR's AI-assisted screening features were used to support screening efficiency, including the potential for automated exclusion of records deemed to have low relevance once the model has been sufficiently trained; all final inclusion decisions and oversight remained the responsibility of the review team.

All outputs generated with AI assistance were independently reviewed and verified by the research team prior to use. Final decisions regarding study inclusion, data interpretation, synthesis and reporting were made solely by the authors, who take full responsibility for the integrity, accuracy and conclusions of the review.

Conflict of interest disclaimer

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could appear to influence the planned research.

Registered Protocol: https://osf.io/ryu9p/

Data Availability

The aggregated data frames used for the project *the Prevalence of Technology-Facilitated Child Sexual Victimisation a*re available as open access in the Childlight DataShare repository, within the wider *2026 Into the Light Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*: https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8210

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Supplementary material

Additional materials that support the key findings outlined in this report can be accessed directly or provided on request.

Appendices

Appendix 1: R code used for the analyses in the current study

```
ind1dataL<-ind1dataL %>%
 select(`Study`,`Analytical sample size`,`Geographical location of the
study_Country`,`Geographical location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`,`Initial
grouping_4_subtypes (online solicitation, image and video based SA, sexual extortion,
online sexual exploitation)`,`Number of cases`,`Prevalence of OCSV (%)`) %>%
 mutate(`Geographical location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`=factor(`Geographical
location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`),
   Outcome=factor(`Initial grouping_4_subtypes (online solicitation, image and video based
SA, sexual extortion, online sexual exploitation)`),
   NumCases=floor(Prevalence of OCSV (%)*`Analytical sample size`/100))


#Lifetime exposure data set
summary(ind1dataL)

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
ind1dataPY<-ind1dataPY %>%
 select(`Study`,`Analytical sample size`,`Geographical location of the
study_Country`,`Geographical location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`,`Initial
grouping_4_subtypes (online solicitation, image and video based SA, sexual extortion,
online sexual exploitation)`,`Number of cases`,`Prevalence of OCSV (%)`) %>%
 mutate(`Geographical location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`=factor(`Geographical
location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`),
   Outcome=factor(`Initial grouping_4_subtypes (online solicitation, image and video based
SA, sexual extortion, online sexual exploitation)`),
   NumCases=floor(Prevalence of OCSV (%)`Analytical sample size`/100))


#Previous year exposure data set
summary(ind1dataPY)
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

#Gender-stratified data set
ind1dataGender<-ind1dataGender %>%
 select(`Study`,`Analytical sample size`, `Gender_victims`,`Geographical location of the
study_Country`,`Geographical location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`,`Recall Period`,`Final
categorisation`,`Number of cases`,`Prevalence of OCSV (%)`) %>%
 mutate(Gender=factor(`Gender_victims`),
   `Geographical location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`=factor(`Geographical location of
the study_Region (UNICEF)`),
   RecallP=factor(`Recall Period`),
   Outcome=factor(`Final categorisation`),
```

```
  NumCases=floor(Prevalence of OCSV (%)*`Analytical sample size`/100)
  )

#Lifetime exposure data set
summary(ind1dataGender)

### Lifetime experience, both sexes

{r osLife, fig.height=12, fig.width=10}

lifedata<- ind1dataL %>%
 filter(Outcome=="outcome name") %>%
 drop_na(NumCases)

maLife<-metaprop(event=NumCases,
  n=`Analytical sample size`,
  studlab=`Study`,
  data = lifedata,
  method="GLMM",
  sm="PLOGIT",
  common = F,
  random = T,
  prediction=T,
  title="Lifetime experience, outcome name, both sexes")
maLife
forest(maLife,sortvar = maLife$TE)

maLife<-metaprop(event=NumCases,
  n=`Analytical sample size`,
  studlab=`Study`,
  subgroup=`Geographical location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`,
  data = lifedata,
  method="GLMM",
  sm="PLOGIT",
  common = F,
  random = T,
  prediction=T,
  title="Lifetime experience, outcome name, both sexes, by UNICEF region")
maLife
forest(maLife,sortvar = maLife$TE)


### Lifetime exposure, male

```{r osemale, fig.height=10, fig.width=10}
lifedataM<- ind1dataGender %>%
```
```

```
 filter(Outcome=="outcome name") %>%
 filter(RecallP=='Lifetime_ever'|RecallP=='Lifetime_before'|RecallP=='Lifetime_before
18') %>%
 filter(Gender=='Male') %>%
 drop_na(NumCases)

maLife<-metaprop(event=NumCases,
  n=`Analytical sample size`,
  studlab=`Study`,
  data = lifedataM,
  method="GLMM",
  sm="PLOGIT",
  common = F,
  random = T,
  prediction=T,
  title="Lifetime experience, outcome name, Male")
maLife
forest(maLife,sortvar = maLife$TE)


maLife<-metaprop(event=NumCases,
  n=`Analytical sample size`,
  studlab=`Study`,
  subgroup=`Geographical location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`,
  data = lifedataM,
  method="GLMM",
  sm="PLOGIT",
  common = F,
  random = T,
  prediction=T,
  title="Lifetime experience, outcome name, Male, by UNICEF region")
maLife
forest(maLife,sortvar = maLife$TE)


### Lifetime exposure, female

{r osefemale, fig.height=10, fig.width=10}
lifedataF<- ind1dataGender %>%
 filter(Outcome=="outcome name") %>%
 filter(RecallP=='Lifetime_ever'|RecallP=='Lifetime_before'|RecallP=='Lifetime_before
18') %>%
 filter(Gender=='Female') %>%
 drop_na(NumCases)

maLife<-metaprop(event=NumCases,
```

```
  n=`Analytical sample size`,
  studlab=`Study`,
  data = lifedataF,
  method="GLMM",
  sm="PLOGIT",
  common = F,
  random = T,
  prediction=T,
  title="Lifetime experience, outcome name, Female")
maLife
forest(maLife,sortvar = maLife$TE)


maLife<-metaprop(event=NumCases,
  n=`Analytical sample size`,
  studlab=`Study`,
  subgroup=`Geographical location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`,
  data = lifedataF,
  method="GLMM",
  sm="PLOGIT",
  common = F,
  random = T,
  prediction=T,
  title="Lifetime experience, outcome name, Female, by UNICEF region")
maLife
forest(maLife,sortvar = maLife$TE)


### Past year, both sexes

{r oseYear, fig.height=12, fig.width=10}

yeardata<- ind1dataPY %>%
 filter(Outcome=="outcome name") %>%
 drop_na(NumCases)

maYear<-metaprop(event=NumCases,
  n=`Analytical sample size`,
  studlab=`Study`,
  data = yeardata,
  method="GLMM",
  sm="PLOGIT",
  common = F,
  random = T,
  prediction=T,
  title="Experience within last year, outcome name, both sexes")
```

```
maYear
forest(maYear,sortvar = maYear$TE)


{r oseyear2, fig.height=12, fig.width=10}
# Geographical split
maYear<-metaprop(event=NumCases,
  n=`Analytical sample size`,
  studlab=`Study`,
  subgroup=`Geographical location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`,
  data = yeardata,
  method="GLMM",
  sm="PLOGIT",
  common = F,
  random = T,
  prediction=T,
  title="Experience within last year, outcome name, both sexes, by UNICEF region")
maYear
forest(maYear,sortvar = maYear$TE)


### Past year, Male

{r pymale, fig.height=10, fig.width=10}
PYdataM<- ind1dataGender %>%
 filter(Outcome=="outcome name") %>%
 filter(RecallP=='during the COVID-19 outbreak'|RecallP=='Past 3 months'|RecallP=='Past
30 days'|RecallP=='Past 6 months'|RecallP=='Past year (12 months)') %>%
 filter(Gender=='Male') %>%
 drop_na(NumCases)

maLife<-metaprop(event=NumCases,
  n=`Analytical sample size`,
  studlab=`Study`,
  data = PYdataM,
  method="GLMM",
  sm="PLOGIT",
  common = F,
  random = T,
  prediction=T,
  title="Previous year experience, outcome name, Male")
maLife
forest(maLife,sortvar = maLife$TE)


maLife<-metaprop(event=NumCases,
```

```
  n=`Analytical sample size`,
  studlab=`Study`,
  subgroup=`Geographical location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`,
  data = PYdataM,
  method="GLMM",
  sm="PLOGIT",
  common = F,
  random = T,
  prediction=T,
  title="Previous year experience, outcome name, Male, by UNICEF region")
maLife
forest(maLife,sortvar = maLife$TE)


### Past year, Female

{r pyfemale, fig.height=10, fig.width=10}
PYdataF<- ind1dataGender %>%
 filter(Outcome=="outcome name") %>%
 filter(RecallP=='during the COVID-19 outbreak'|RecallP=='Past 3 months'|RecallP=='Past
30 days'|RecallP=='Past 6 months'|RecallP=='Past year (12 months)') %>%
 filter(Gender=='Female') %>%
 drop_na(NumCases)

maLife<-metaprop(event=NumCases,
  n=`Analytical sample size`,
  studlab=`Study`,
  data = PYdataF,
  method="GLMM",
  sm="PLOGIT",
  common = F,
  random = T,
  prediction=T,
  title="Previous year experience, outcome name, Female")
maLife
forest(maLife,sortvar = maLife$TE)


maLife<-metaprop(event=NumCases,
  n=`Analytical sample size`,
  studlab=`Study`,
  subgroup=`Geographical location of the study_Region (UNICEF)`,
  data = PYdataF,
  method="GLMM",
  sm="PLOGIT",
  common = F,
```

```
  random = T,
  prediction=T,
  title="Previous year experience, outcome name, Female, by UNICEF region")
maLife
forest(maLife,sortvar = maLife$TE)
```

Appendix 2: Studies included in the systematic review and meta-analysis

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The Scale of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Public Sector Frontline Data

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Introduction

Public sector frontline services such as policing, health, education and social services play an important role in detecting and investigating child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) cases as well as supporting victims/survivors. Often the delivery of these services requires the recording of information about cases and, depending on national policy, legislation and practice. Some of this information is published in official statistics or made accessible for research purposes.

These data provide an alternative source of information about CSEA that complement other sources, including population-based surveys, in many ways (Graeff and Baur, 2020; Figlio, 2017). Running large-scale surveys is time-consuming and costly, and such surveys are often not designed to capture detailed information on CSEA, or they focus on populations and data collection methods that may not reliably identify or elicit disclosure of CSEA experiences. Consequently, survey data on CSEA remain limited in many settings. Even when surveys are specifically designed to measure CSEA using appropriate ethical and methodological safeguards, they are typically cross-sectional, conducted infrequently and may not provide timely information to support responses to emerging issues.

Conversely, public sector frontline data are routinely collected as part of service delivery. In these settings, identifying and responding to safeguarding concerns is a core function, and no additional data collection from participants is required. However, unlike population-based surveys, frontline data do not provide prevalence estimations since not all CSEA cases will come to the attention of these services (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015; Office for National Statistics, 2020; Karsna and Kelly, 2021). In addition, different recording policies and practices influence what is captured in different administrative datasets, limiting their comparability across agencies. For example, a social worker might not be entirely confident as to whether a case is an actual CSEA case and record the disclosure under neglect instead. Police records, on the other hand, might be influenced by time pressure and whether officers decide to use pre-set categories for classifying events only or add additional flags to better classify cases (Roberts, 2020; Karsna and Kelly, 2021). Nevertheless, frontline data provide valuable and more detailed insights into the cases identified and responded to by services, the victims/survivors they support and the contexts of events, as well as data on alleged or confirmed perpetrators. Moreover, these data are collected in real time and can provide timely information on CSEA cases as they are disclosed to or identified by public services. Where such data are retained, they can enable monitoring of public services' response over time.

The public sector frontline data work strand for the Into the Light (ITL) Index 2026 has developed indicators using public sector frontline data that complement survey-based

indicators, with a particular focus on countries that have very little survey data as well as countries that have exemplary public sector frontline information that may serve as good practice examples.

Research questions

- What public sector frontline data on CSEA are publicly available in selected countries, and which services publish these data (for example, police, child protection, health, education, courts)?
- In countries with limited or no population-based survey data, what insights can public sector frontline data provide about detected CSEA cases, including case characteristics, victim/survivors, alleged perpetrators and service responses?
- What indicators can be developed from public sector frontline data to measure recorded CSEA cases, system responses and patterns of detection across countries and sectors?
- How do patterns in recorded CSEA cases differ across public sector services within the countries, and what do these differences reveal about pathways of detection, reporting and institutional responses to CSEA?
- What factors influence the availability, quality and interpretation of public sector frontline data on CSEA across countries?

Data collection

Selection of countries

In line with the longer-term strategy for the ITL Index, the public sector frontline data work strand for 2026 has focused on countries in the UNICEF regions of North America, East Asia and Pacific and Latin America and Caribbean (UNICEF, 2023), with later iterations intended to expand to other regions in subsequent years and contribute to a more global picture of country-level data.

A decision was made to focus primarily on providing detailed country profiles based on public sector frontline data, including information on victims/survivors, perpetrators and case characteristics, for selected countries where survey data are lacking, rather than covering all countries in the relevant regions, in order to maximise the geographic coverage of the index while keeping this component of the work feasible within the available timeframe and capacity.

Countries prioritised for the first group were those with less than four surveys available (therefore not meeting criteria for meta-analytical methods applied to surveys). The main limitation encountered with this selection was the lack of open-access public sector frontline data capturing CSEA. Additionally, 38 qualifying countries did not publish such data and hence could not be included.

A second group of countries was then selected for inclusion, independent of the amount of survey data available, because these countries were deemed to provide innovative

open-access public sector frontline data reflecting good practice (see table 1 below for the final selection of countries).

Selection of data sources

Open access public sector frontline data containing information about CSEA cases were identified as the primary data source for CSEA indicators in each country. The aim was to include data from as many sectors as possible. Some countries only had open access police-recorded CSEA crime data available while others had data from a wider range of sectors, including social, health and education. The focus was on open access data, often in the form of aggregate official statistics, in order to comply with ethical and legal regulations that are often in place for accessing more detailed, highly sensitive case-level data (Goerge, 2017; Goroff et al., 2017; Woollard, 2014).

An initial list of data sources for each country was identified through online searches and a review of related data guides and reports. Each data source was then screened for suitability. The selection of data sources for each country was subsequently reviewed by members of Index Impact and Communications Working Group for the Into the Light (ITL) 2026 with country expertise. A list of included data sources can be found in Appendix 1, and more details can be found in the open access country data workbooks on Childlight's DataShare repository: https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8210. Table 1 shows the final selection of countries for which public sector frontline data indicators were produced including the reason for inclusion and the sectors covered.

Table 1: Overview of countries with frontline data indicators in ITL 2026

Country	UNICEF region	Inclusion reason	Sectors with CSEA data for indicators			
			Police	Social	Health	Education
Chile	LAC	Good practice	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Brazil	LAC	Good practice	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Mongolia	EAP	Survey data gap	Yes	No	No	No
Timor-Leste	EAP	Survey data gap	Yes	No	No	No
Philippines	EAP	Survey data gap	No	Yes	Yes	No
Fiji	EAP	Survey data gap	Yes	Yes	No	No

Japan	EAP	Good practice	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Australia	EAP	Good practice	Yes	Yes	No	No
United States	NA	Good practice	Yes	Yes	No	No

Supplementary information was also collected to better understand the public sector frontline information and the systems within which it is embedded. This included data recording practices and other factors influencing the statistics, such as evidential thresholds for recording victimisation cases, variation in the CSEA definitions used by different agencies, data collection methodologies, reporting and referral pathways, recording and coding practices and changes in policies, legislations and administrative procedures over time. Desk-based research was further undertaken to identify relevant data documentation and guidance, reports, policy papers and academic literature referring to these sources.

In addition, ten semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted with country data experts in six countries to gather information on recording practices and counting rules, as well as broader factors affecting recorded CSEA statistics and data quality. These factors included changes in legal definitions, reporting thresholds, data-sharing practices, resource and capacity constraints within agencies and levels of underreporting and public awareness of CSEA. No key informant interviews were conducted in the United States and the Philippines because the local teams that produced the indicators included country data experts who were able to provide the key information that would otherwise have been collected through interviews. In Timor-Leste, no interviewees could be recruited within the available time frame (see Appendix 2 for an overview of conducted interviews). Informed consent was obtained prior to interviews, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data capture

The data points to produce indicators as well as all additional information including data sources, identified data quality considerations, key information from interviews and literature, methodological details and relevant legislation were captured in a data workbook piloted for the ITL Index 2025. One workbook per country and sector was typically produced. All workbooks are open access and available via DataShare: https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8210.

Data analysis

Indicator definitions

After detailed screening of data sources, 11 core indicators were defined for use across countries and sectors. These indicators cover aspects of recorded CSEA cases, as well as victim/survivor and perpetrator characteristics. The selection was based on relevance to the ITL Index aims, as well as availability across a range of countries and sectors. The 11 core indicators include:

Case indicators

1. Annual number of recorded CSEA cases
2. Annual rate of recorded CSEA cases per 10,000 children
3. Annual percentage breakdown of recorded CSEA cases by type of abuse
4. Annual percentage breakdown of recorded CSEA cases by location of abuse

Victim indicators

5. Annual percentage breakdown of recorded CSEA cases by victim sex/gender
6. Annual percentage breakdown of recorded CSEA cases by victim age
7. Annual percentage breakdown of recorded CSEA cases by victim ethnicity
8. Annual percentage breakdown of recorded CSEA cases by victim disability status and type

Perpetrator indicators

9. Annual percentage breakdown of recorded CSEA cases by victim-perpetrator relationship
10. Annual percentage breakdown of recorded CSEA cases by perpetrator sex/gender
11. Annual percentage breakdown of recorded CSEA cases by perpetrator age

Where possible, indicator values over the most recent 10-year period were included; in the United States, Chile, and Mongolia, a longer follow up period was available for many indicators. Appendix 3 shows the availability of the 11 core indicators across countries and sectors.

The neutral term 'cases' was used to define indicators instead of such terms as 'offences' or 'crimes' because definitions for these can vary with national legislation.

Where possible, the international definition of 'child' as every person under the age of 18 (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) was used. However, some countries with a national age of consent below 18 only record cases as CSEA-related if the victim/survivor was under the age of consent.

Deriving CSEA case numbers

To derive case numbers, recorded cases in categories that fall under the international

definition of CSEA (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT) International and ECPAT Luxembourg, 2016) were identified in each country and sector, and case numbers were added across all relevant categories for each year. For details regarding the case categories included for each country and sector as well as how they are defined, see the open access data workbooks for each country and sector in the Childlight DataShare repository: https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8210.

In Australia, the age of consent varies slightly across states and territories. However, case numbers are derived from police recorded victim data published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and include individuals aged 0-17 years.

For social services data in Brazil, case numbers are derived from Brazil's Dial 100 Human Rights Hotline. The unit of observation is the report, with each record representing an allegation received by the system. Three counting approaches are possible: (a) administrative record counts, reflecting the total number of administrative records in the dataset, where multiple records may be generated from a single report when it involves multiple victims, perpetrators or type of abuse; (b) unique report counts using deduplicated identifiers; and (c) victim-based counts, aggregating the number of victims recorded within each report. For the CSEA case numbers, the victim-based approach was used as it best reflects the number of individuals affected. However, because victim identifiers are not available, the same individual may be reported in multiple records and counted more than once.

In Japan, police recorded case data are derived from the Japan National Police Agency (NPA) and include victims aged 18 and 19 years. These ages are reported within an aggregated 13-19-year age group and cannot be disaggregated.

In Chile, case numbers from police data produced by Fiscalía are derived from the Sistema de Apoyo a los Fiscales (SAF). Counting rules within SAF affect how case numbers are constructed and interpreted. Individuals are recorded based on a combination of identifiers, including the case identifier (RUC), the unique identifier assigned to the accused individual and the identifier of the associated offence. Within a given case (defined by a single RUC), an accused person is counted once even if multiple relationships or offences are recorded. However, if the same individual is involved in multiple complaints, they may be assigned different subject identifiers across cases and therefore counted multiple times. As a result, aggregated case numbers reflect the total number of recorded entries rather than a count of unique individuals.

In Timor-Leste, police data on case numbers include cases that were reported and investigated, rather than recorded cases. This reflects how the system functions in practice, where case identification extends beyond recorded figures.

In the Philippines, annual case counts represent the number of new case presentations recorded within each reporting year. This includes both first-time patients and individuals presenting with re-abuse or repeated victimisation, where these are recorded as new cases. Follow-up visits associated with previously recorded cases are excluded from the counts. The data should therefore be interpreted as reflecting the number of patients

managed by WCPUs within a given year, rather than as a true measure of incident victimisation.

Deriving CSEA case rates

To calculate rates per 10,000 children, available estimates of the size of the population under the age of 18 or the age of consent in each country were used, prioritising the highest quality estimates for a country. The estimates used can be found in the open access data workbooks for each country and sector. Where demographic breakdowns of case data were available, rates were further stratified using corresponding population estimates for the relevant subgroup. For example, sex-specific rates were calculated using male and female population estimates where sex-disaggregated case data and population denominators were available. Similar approaches were applied to other demographic characteristics, such as age and ethnicity, where suitable population data existed. Details of the population estimates and denominators used for each country and sector are provided in the open access data workbooks via DataShare: https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8210.

For the case rate using police data for the United States, the population estimate was adjusted each year to reflect the percentage of the population covered by the data. Reporting numbers into National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) is not mandatory, and participation by law enforcement agencies, and hence data coverage across the country, can fluctuate. The population estimate was therefore adjusted to account for the percentage of the population represented by participating law enforcement agencies.

For the case rate using education data for Japan, the number of educational personnel was used as the denominator, as case numbers refer to school educational personnel disciplined for CSEA-related conduct rather than children. For case rates using police data for Japan, two different population denominators were used to align with the age coverage of each dataset. Police-recorded case statistics include victims aged 0-19 years; therefore, population estimates for individuals under 20 years are used as the denominator. Police cleared statistics cover victims aged 0-17 years; therefore, population estimates for individuals under 18 years are used as the denominator. This ensures consistency between the numerator and denominator, given the differing age ranges across the two datasets.

In the Philippines, the definition of a child follows Republic Act No. 7610 (1992), which identifies a child as a person below 18 years of age. A policy change introduced under Republic Act No. 11648 in 2022 raised the age of sexual consent from 12 to 16 years. To support interpretation of trends in the context of this legislative shift, CSEA case rate was constructed for children aged under 18 and under 16 years.

Deriving percentage breakdowns

Percentage breakdowns were generally derived using the total number of cases and the number of cases in each sub-category of interest. Depending on national systems,

decisions had to be made about which categories of cases to include in the total number of cases.

For percentage breakdowns of perpetrator and victim characteristics in Japan police cleared statistics, denominators are based on the total number of cleared persons and victims respectively, as a single case may involve multiple victims and/or perpetrators.

For variables where categories are not mutually exclusive (for example, multiple forms of abuse or multiple victim-perpetrator relationships within a single case), results are presented as case counts only. Percentage distributions are not reported for these variables, as totals may exceed 100% due to multiple responses within individual records.

For some variables, the category counts may not add up exactly to the total number of cases. This may be because some information is missing or inconsistent, or because small numbers have been changed or suppressed to protect confidentiality. As a result, the category totals may not always match the overall case total, and percentages are not reported where they could be misleading.

Analysis of supplementary data

To support interpretation of indicator data, supplementary data from desk research and interviews were analysed using a framework-based qualitative content analysis, drawing on the framework approach developed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994).

An initial analytic framework was developed based on key domains relevant to the study, including category definitions, counting rules, recording practices and data quality considerations. This framework was applied systematically to enable structured comparison across countries.

Note that the aim of this analysis was not to generate themes representing participant perspectives, but to identify and validate information about factors relevant for the production and interpretation of public sector frontline data. Hence, findings were integrated into the production of indicator data and information rather than presented as standalone results.

Data validation

Validation of indicator data was undertaken at several stages of the indicator development process. Data sources used for the public sector frontline data indicators were assessed by members of the Index Impact and Communications Working Group for the ITL 2026 with relevant country expertise.

Once the indicator data and all supporting information for a country had been produced, data quality checks were conducted by an independent reviewer using a predefined checklist. These checks included comparing extracted values against the original data sources, verifying the accuracy of any recorded calculations and outputs, assessing the completeness and clarity of accompanying notes, confirming the functionality of

embedded links and identifying typographical or transcription errors. Any issues identified were discussed between the reviewer and the original data collector and were resolved by agreement, with reference to the original sources.

As a subsequent step, country representatives on the Index Impact and Communications Working Group for the ITL 2026 were invited to validate indicator data.

Finally, all indicator data and supplementary materials were reviewed externally by members of Childlight's Technical Advisory Committee.

Data quality and limitations

Public sector frontline data are not collected for research purposes, and several limitations need to be considered.

Firstly, countries vary widely in the extent to which public sector frontline data that capture CSEA cases are publicly accessible, as well as in the level of detail and supporting information available. This affects the availability, consistency and quality of indicators derived from these data.

Secondly, public sector data are deeply embedded within the systems, policies and practices through which they are generated. Recording practices, counting rules, case definitions, category definitions and policy developments vary across countries and sectors. As a result, indicator numbers should be interpreted with caution and are typically not directly comparable across countries.

Thirdly, most countries report concerns regarding the quality and reliability of some of their data. For example, there can be differences across police forces within the same country in terms of recording practices, reporting procedures and the consistency of case classification.

In addition to these general limitations, the data in each country and sector have more specific limitations, which are discussed in the relevant country-specific sections below. For example, some countries may have limited information on perpetrator characteristics, while others may have changes in legal definitions or recording systems that affect the interpretation over time.

United States – Police and social services data

For the United States, the police data derived from the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) does not represent the entire population. Reporting into NIBRS is not mandatory for law enforcement agencies and while the number of participating agencies has increased, the coverage is still not 100%. Furthermore, fluctuating participation over time makes it difficult to compare data across years.

In addition, social services data for the United States derived from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) does not cover all cases reported to services.

Reporting into NCANDS is voluntary and the volume and quality of reporting can vary by state. Furthermore, the majority of abuse cases reported to NCANDS are cases that have been recorded as substantiated after investigation; cases where less evidence was found can therefore be missing from the data.

Brazil – Health data

For Brazil, health data were from notifications of interpersonal and self-inflicted violence recorded through the Violence and Accident Surveillance System (VIVA) within the Notifiable Health Conditions Information System (SINAN). As a routine administrative surveillance system, SINAN is subject to underreporting, data entry errors, incomplete records and variation in notification practices across jurisdictions and over time.

Using the municipality of notification variable (ID_MUNICIP) and cross-referencing it with the official IBGE registry of 5,571 municipalities, we find that only 4,568 municipalities (82.0%) recorded at least one notification of CSEA involving children under 18 years of age during 2016-2025, leaving 1,003 municipalities (18.0%) with no recorded CSEA notification during the period. This gap appears to be specific to child victims rather than reflecting an absence of SINAN reporting system generally. Across all age groups, municipalities with at least one sexual violence notification account for 86.8% of municipalities, while notifications for any form of violence cover 97.8% (5,449 municipalities). This pattern suggests that municipalities missing CSEA notifications are generally present in the SINAN system but may not be reporting cases involving child victims. Coverage is also highly dynamic and geographically uneven. The share of municipalities with at least one CSEA notification increased from 29.4% in 2016 to 82.0% in 2025. However, substantial differences remain across states, ranging from 100% of municipalities in Espírito Santo to 42.9% in Piauí.

During data validation, 424 records (0.08% of notifications) were identified in which the main sexual violence indicator (VIOL_SEXU) was coded as “No” while one or more sexual violence subtype variables were coded as “Yes”. Because the subtype variables indicated that sexual violence had occurred, these records were retained in the analysis. Age information was required to identify cases involving with children and assign them to age groups. Records with missing age values were therefore excluded. Across 2016-2025, 362 notifications (0.07%) were excluded for this reason. Other variables, including ethnicity, disability status and type, perpetrator characteristics and contextual information rely on information provided by victims, caregivers, accompanying persons or health professionals and may be affected by reporting inaccuracies, incomplete ascertainment or variation in interpretation. Ethnicity categories follow the self-identification standard established by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Ministério da Saúde, 2016). In addition, 32,372 notifications (8.4%) were classified as “Other sexual violence” and included free-text descriptions. Some of these descriptions were similar to predefined categories such as rape or sexual harassment. However, we did not reclassify these cases to preserve the original classifications and avoid subjective interpretation. Consequently, some cases may have been classified differently from how they might otherwise have been categorised.

Perpetrator age refers to the principal aggressor and does not capture the characteristics of additional perpetrators when multiple offenders were involved. Perpetrator sex is recorded using four categories: male, female, both sexes and unknown. Where a case involves multiple perpetrators of different sexes, the sex variable is coded as “both sexes” rather than being assigned based only on the principal aggressor's sex (Ministério da Saúde, 2016).

Brazil - Social services data

Social services data in Brazil represent reports received through Brazil’s Dial 100 Human Rights Hotline and refer to allegations rather than verified or substantiated cases. A single report may include multiple victims and perpetrators. Indicators should be interpreted as counts of reported victims and events, rather than incidence (Ouvidoria Nacional de Direitos Humanos, n.d.).

The dataset structure is broadly consistent over time, however, minor changes in variable definitions and classification systems occur across years. Sexual violence categories were not consistently disaggregated prior to 2021; the analyses are therefore restricted to 2021 onwards to ensure comparability across years.

Data preparation involved harmonisation of variable names, standardisation of categorical fields and grouping detailed classifications into broader analytical groups (see CSEA_categories for definitions in the open access workbook). Due to changes in reporting structures and variable availability in 2022, trend analyses spanning this period should be interpreted with caution. A small proportion of reports (0.33%) included victims spanning multiple age groups or with incomplete age allocation. Because the exact number of victims in each group was not recorded, the reported victims were distributed equally across the reported age groups for analytical purposes. For example, if a report included three victims across two age groups, “5-9” and “10-13”, 1.5 victims were allocated to each age group. Disability status was excluded due to substantial missingness, with 93.6% of records classified as ‘not reported’ and only 0.4% indicating a disability.

In addition, the “intrafamilial mother” and “intrafamilial father” categories were combined due to inconsistencies between relationship labels and perpetrator sex fields, which showed no clear superiority in reliability across key variables.

Brazil – Police data

Police data were derived from the Brazilian Yearbook of Public Security (2019-2025), an annual statistical compilation produced by the Brazilian Public Security Forum (FBSP) using administrative records from state public security secretariats, civil and military police forces, the Federal Police and other official public security institutions. Data on CSEA are based on police-recorded incidents and victims reported at national and state levels. Although the FBSP harmonises data across states to improve comparability, differences in reporting practices, crime classification and data quality persist and limit comparability across jurisdictions and over time.

The police recorded cases cover 2019-2025 because information on sexual offences by victim age is available from 2019 onwards. The availability of data varies across type of abuse. Separate counts for rape of vulnerable persons involving children aged 0-17 years are available from 2019, while counts for child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and commercial sexual exploitation involving children aged 0-17 are available from 2021, and counts for grooming involving children aged 0-17 are available from 2024. As a result, trends cannot be fully comparable across all types of abuse over the full study period.

Information about victims, perpetrators, and case characteristics is available only for specific years and age groups. For example, victim sex and ethnicity data are available for cases of rape of vulnerable persons involving children aged 0-13 in 2023. While victim age data are available for all four types of abuse involving children aged 0-17 in 2025, location of abuse and victim-perpetrator relationships data are available for rape of vulnerable persons involving children aged 0-13 in 2025. Information on perpetrator sex and age is available for CSAM cases involving children aged 0-17 in 2025.

Japan – Police data

The police data were derived from data published by the National Police Agency of Japan. Changes in Japanese legislation have substantially affected the visibility and classification of CSEA-related offences over time. For example, reforms to the Penal Code in 2017 expanded the scope of non-consensual indecent acts, while reforms in 2023 revised the definitions of non-consensual sexual intercourse and non-consensual indecent acts and introduced new offences, including Requesting Meetings with a Person Under 16 and offences under the *Act on Punishment of Non-consensual Shooting of Sexual Acts/Images* (Ministry of Justice, 2023). Consequently, trends before and after 2023 are not fully comparable and may reflect changes in legal definitions and recording practices in addition to changes in offending patterns.

The police recorded cases use two distinct police datasets: police registered cases and police cleared cases. These datasets measure different stages of the criminal justice process and are not directly comparable. Police registered cases capture incidents reported to and recorded by the police, whereas police cleared cases are based on offences resulting in police action. Police-registered cases cover victims aged 0-19 years and exclude some offences under special laws and prefectural ordinances. In incidents involving multiple victims, only the primary victim is counted.

On the other hand, police cleared cases cover victims aged 0-17 years and include several offence categories not available in police registered case statistics. These include offences related to child prostitution and child pornography offences under the *Act on Punishment of Activities Relating to Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and the Protection of Children* (1999), offences under *Article 34 of the Child Welfare Act* (1947) and offences under prefectural juvenile protection ordinances. However, the availability of disaggregated information varies by offence type. Victim age, victim sex, perpetrator age and location data are available only for selected offences. Distributions of victim and perpetrator characteristics should be interpreted as distributions within the available victim or perpetrator data rather than as proportions of total cleared CSEA cases.

Japan – Education data

The education data for Japan are based on disciplinary actions involving educational personnel employed in public schools and published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Personnel working in private schools are not included in the source data. According to MEXT (2025), public schools account for more than 70% of all schools in Japan, providing substantial coverage of the education sector. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting patterns within the public education system and may not be representative of national educational institutions.

While data on disciplinary actions involving educational personnel have been published since 2015, information identifying cases involving victims under 18 years of age became available only from 2019 onwards. The availability of contextual and demographic information varies across reporting years. Several indicators are available only for selected years, limiting the ability to assess trends over time. In particular, breakdowns by type of abuse are available only for 2022 and 2024, location information is available only for 2022 and perpetrator sex and age breakdowns are available from 2022 to 2024.

Information on the relationship between the educational personnel and the victim is not included in the analysis because the published data combine incidents involving children and adults, making it impossible to isolate relationships specific to CSEA cases involving victims under 18 years of age.

Japan – Social services data

In Japan, social services data are derived from administrative records collected by Child Guidance Centres (CGC). These systems are designed to respond to a broad range of child welfare concerns, including child abuse, neglect, family and household difficulties and challenges related to childcare and parenting. Consequently, CSEA-related cases represent only a subset of all consultations recorded within the system. A key limitation is that the child abuse classification framework used by CGC is based on the definition of child abuse under the *Child Abuse Prevention Act* (2000), which defines child abuse as acts committed by a guardian or other person responsible for the child's care against a child under their care. As a result, extrafamilial CSEA cases involving perpetrators who do not fall within this definition may not always be captured or classified as child sexual abuse within these administrative records. As with all administrative data, the figures reflect cases that come to the attention of authorities and are influenced by reporting practices, service accessibility, professional awareness and recording procedures. They should therefore not be interpreted as a measure of the true prevalence of CSEA.

To ensure consistency over time, consultation data for 2015 and earlier years were excluded from the analysis because reporting formats and available disaggregation were not comparable with those used from 2016 onwards. Several indicators are based on multiple-response categories. Relationship-to-perpetrator categories may exceed the total number of consultations because multiple perpetrators can be recorded within a single case. These distributions should therefore be interpreted as frequencies of recorded

characteristics rather than mutually exclusive case categories.

Consultations recorded by Child Guidance Centres are generally counted at the child level. As a result, incidents involving multiple children, such as siblings, are recorded as separate consultation cases (Childlight, 2026). Conversely, out-of-home care staff-perpetrated CSEA cases are recorded at the incident level. Where multiple forms of abuse occur within a single incident, only the primary abuse type is recorded. In addition, incidents involving multiple victims are counted as a single case if they occur within the same event or occasion. Differences in counting rules should be considered when comparing across data sources.

Finally, information on victim characteristics, perpetrator characteristics and incident circumstances for out-of-home care staff- and caregiver-perpetrated abuse is reported in aggregated form alongside other categories of child abuse. As a result, CSEA-specific cases cannot be isolated for detailed analysis of these characteristics.

Australia – Police data

Police data are derived from police administrative records compiled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and reflect incidents reported to, or detected by, police and subsequently recorded under the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS). Although the NCRS promotes consistency in crime recording across Australia, differences in legislation, police recording systems, operational practices and reporting behaviours between states and territories may affect comparability across jurisdictions and over time (ABS, 2024). However, breakdowns by type of abuse are not available in a standardised form across states and territories under the NCRS framework and were therefore not included in the analysis. Location data are not published with age-specific breakdowns and are therefore excluded from the analysis. Victim-perpetrator relationship data for Western Australia and the Northern Territory are unavailable for 2023-2024.

In addition, victim counts are incident-based rather than person-based. A child may be counted more than once if they are recorded as a victim in multiple incidents or offence categories during the same year. Consequently, the statistics reflect recorded victimisation incidents rather than the number of unique children affected (ABS, 2024).

Finally, the ABS applies confidentiality adjustments (perturbation) to published statistics. As a result, component totals may not exactly sum to published totals and percentages may not equal 100 per cent. These adjustments generally have minimal impact on overall trends but may have a greater proportional effect on small counts (ABS, 2024).

Australia – Social services data

Social services data for Australia are derived from the Australian Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) published by Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and relate to children aged 0-17 years who were the subjects of substantiated child protection notifications in which sexual abuse was recorded. As with all child protection administrative data, the figures reflect cases that come to the attention of child protection

authorities and meet jurisdictional substantiation thresholds.

The data are reported on a child basis rather than a notification or incident basis. Each child is counted only once within a reporting year, regardless of the number of substantiated notifications recorded for that child. Where multiple substantiated notifications exist, characteristics reported in the dataset are derived from the first substantiated notification during the reporting period. Consequently, the statistics represent the number of unique children with at least one substantiated notification involving sexual abuse rather than the total number of notifications or incidents (AIHW, 2024). Differences in child protection legislation, policies, recording practices, investigation procedures and substantiation thresholds may influence the number and characteristics of cases recorded by child protection agencies.

The dip in 2018 is attributable to the unavailability of substantiation data for New South Wales in 2017-2018. Substantiation data for this period should therefore not be compared with substantiation data from periods before or after 2018 (AIHW, 2019).

There are also some inconsistencies in the breakdowns by victim sex and ethnicity. For 2021-22, the recorded number of female children (4,531) exceeds the reported total (4,005), while the recorded male and female counts together (5,626) exceed the total by 1,621 cases.

For victim ethnicity, the reported categories do not sum to the total in some years. In 2019-20, the categories sum to 4,482, leaving 29 cases without an attributed Indigenous-status category. In 2023-24, the categories sum to 3,825, leaving 731 cases without an attributed category. As a result, percentage breakdowns would not sum to 100% in these years. Percentages are therefore not presented for these breakdowns; only absolute counts are shown.

Finally, the data are reported by financial year ending 30 June rather than calendar year. This should be considered when comparing trends with data sources that use calendar-year reporting periods.

Fiji – Police data

Police data for Fiji are derived from administrative crime data published by the Fiji Police Force. Comparisons over time should be interpreted with caution because offence classifications changed in 2021. Several offence categories previously included in the published sexual offence classification were removed, while new categories were introduced. These changes may affect the comparability of long-term trends.

The data do not represent a count of unique victims. Victim counts are offence-based, meaning that an individual may be counted multiple times if they experienced more than one offence during the reporting period. Consequently, the statistics should be interpreted as recorded victimisation events rather than the number of distinct children affected.

Some indicators are subject to limitations in coverage and classification. Perpetrator age data are not reported consistently across years, with different age-band structures used over time. As a result, information on perpetrator age is shown only for 2020-2022, when the data are comparable. In addition, information on perpetrator sex and age is not disaggregated specifically for child sexual abuse offences. Analyses of perpetrator characteristics therefore rely on a subset of offence categories that specifically involve child victims and should be interpreted as indicative rather than comprehensive.

The scope of offences included in this report reflects the classifications used by the Fiji Police Force. This includes some offences that do not necessarily require a child victim under the *Crimes Act 2009* (2009) but are reported within the police child sexual abuse framework (e.g., unnatural offence with animals). Conversely, some forms of CSEA identified in legislation, including child sexual abuse material offences, are not consistently reported as standalone categories within the main sexual offence statistics. As a result, the reported figures may not capture the full range of CSEA-related offending.

Finally, case rates were calculated using estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's International Database due to the limited availability of recent age-disaggregated population data from national sources. While these estimates provide a consistent basis for rate calculations, they may differ from official national population estimates.

Fiji – Social services data

Social services data for Fiji derived from Child sexual abuse reporting in the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation administrative data. There are notable gaps in coverage, including a missing reporting year (2017) and several years in which no disaggregation by abuse type was provided (for example, 2016 and 2020). In addition, some sub-categories, such as incest and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), are only intermittently reported (for example, in 2014, 2015 and 2019), limiting the ability to produce continuous time series for specific forms of abuse. These inconsistencies in availability and classification reduce the comparability of subtype trends over time, although aggregate sexual abuse counts remain broadly continuous across the reporting period.

The dataset does not include any demographic characteristics of children or perpetrators, such as age, sex or ethnicity. This substantially limits the scope for disaggregated analysis and prevents examination of risk patterns across population subgroups. In addition, formal definitions of abuse categories are not consistently provided in the source reports. This limits interpretability and may affect consistency in how cases are defined and recorded over time.

Finally, case rates were calculated using the U.S. Census Bureau International Database estimates, which may differ from official national population estimates.

Mongolia – Police data

For Mongolia, police data derived from the National Statistics Office (NSO) of Mongolia

database on recorded crime reflect only victims recorded by authorised investigative bodies during the reporting period. As such, these data represent victims/survivors rather than unique incidents or perpetrators and may not capture the full extent of CSEA.

There is no standalone statistical category explicitly labelled as CSEA in the published data. Instead, CSEA is approximated using the broader category of 'crimes against human sexual freedom and immunity,' which includes a range of offences such as rape, sexual exploitation and unlawful sexual acts with minors under 16. While this approach allows for analysis, it reduces conceptual clarity and may mask important differences between distinct forms of abuse. Furthermore, certain offences such as rape are also reported separately, creating potential risks of overlap or misinterpretation when aggregating data.

Limited disaggregation, particularly by type of offence, sex of victims and perpetrator characteristics, restricts the ability to fully understand patterns, risk factors and outcomes. Additionally, the absence of linked data on prosecutions and case outcomes limits insight into the effectiveness of the criminal justice response.

Timor-Leste – Police data

For Timor-Leste, police data published by the National Institute of Statistics Timor Leste (INETL) reflect offences reported and investigated by authorised bodies, specifically those reported to the Scientific Police for Criminal Investigation. As such, these data represent incidents rather than unique victims or perpetrators and capture only a subset of cases within a particular investigative jurisdiction, rather than all cases reported nationwide.

There is no explicitly defined statistical category for CSEA. Instead, a proxy measure is constructed using selected offences under the Penal Code, primarily 'sexual abuse of a minor' and 'sexual acts with adolescents.' The classification of cases by age is aligned with national legal distinctions, differentiating between minors (under 14 years) and adolescents (14–17 years). While this reflects the structure of the legal framework, it may limit analytical flexibility and restrict the ability to conduct more granular age-based analysis.

More broadly, limited disaggregation by age, gender and perpetrator characteristics, alongside variations in data reporting across years, constrains deeper analysis and reduces the ability to assess patterns and criminal justice outcomes.

Chile – Police data

In Chile, multiple data sources are available from the police sector, each reflecting different points along the reporting chain. An important source is the National Institute of Statistics (INE), which compiles police-recorded data submitted by Carabineros de Chile (CCH) and the Policía de Investigaciones (PDI). INE data capture earlier stages of reporting, including complaints and initial police records, and therefore provide useful contextual information on reported crime. However, differences in institutional reporting processes, recording practices and classification systems across police bodies, together with the potential for duplication of cases reported to multiple institutions, limit the coherence of

these data. For this reason, INE data was not used for the construction of indicators in this analysis. Instead, the analysis relies on prosecutorial data from the Fiscalía to ensure greater consistency in case definition and processing stage. A third relevant source is the Centro de Estudios y Análisis del Delito (CEAD), which produces detailed crime statistics in Chile and represents a valuable resource for further analysis, however, these data have not been incorporated into the present analysis due to time and capacity constraints.

For the ITL 2026 Index, Police data in Chile are derived from the Fiscalía through the Sistema de Apoyo a los Fiscales (SAF), which records cases entering the prosecutorial system. These data capture reported and processed cases rather than the full scope of incidents, as they exclude offences that are not reported to authorities.

The PPO dataset reflects cases under investigation or prosecution rather than finalised outcomes. As a result, perpetrators recorded in the system refer to accused or suspected individuals (imputados), rather than confirmed or convicted offenders, which should be considered when interpreting perpetrator statistics.

While the SAF system provides a centralised and standardised administrative dataset, it remains subject to limitations inherent to administrative crime data. Inconsistent classification of sexual abuse subcategories may affect the comparability of offences across cases. Missing information on victim-suspect relationship limits the ability to examine perpetrator characteristics and victimisation contexts. In addition, incidents involving repeated abuse over time may be recorded as a single offence, potentially underrepresenting the frequency and complexity of victimisation experiences. As with all administrative crime data, the dataset is also limited to incidents reported to authorities and therefore does not capture the full extent of CSEA.

Chile – Education data

Education sector data from the Ministry of Education capture incidents classified as having ‘sexual connotation’ within school settings. This category encompasses a wide spectrum of behaviours, ranging from inappropriate conduct to actions that may meet the legal definition of sexual offences, thereby reducing conceptual specificity and limiting the extent to which the data accurately reflect CSEA as a distinct phenomenon.

The population covered by the dataset is defined by participation in the formal education system. It includes children and adolescents enrolled in preschool, basic and secondary education (approximately aged 0–17 years), with educational stages structured by age group.

Mandatory reporting obligations play a central role in shaping the data. Under Article 175 of the Criminal Procedure Code (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2000), school personnel are required to report suspected criminal offences affecting students within a specified timeframe of 24 hours, which strengthens detection and documentation within educational settings. However, not all recorded incidents correspond to criminal offences under the legal framework. In particular, cases involving children below the age of criminal responsibility (under 14 years) are typically addressed through school or child

protection mechanisms rather than the criminal justice system (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2023), which limits alignment with prosecutorial data and affects the interpretation of trends across sectors.

The definition of 'sexual connotation' used in school safeguarding protocols is intentionally broad. It includes verbal, non-verbal and behavioural acts of a sexual nature that may cause harm or discomfort, including behaviours that do not involve physical contact, thereby supporting early identification but also introducing variability in how incidents are classified and recorded (Colegio CSS, 2025).

Temporal analysis is influenced by the structure of the academic calendar. Data are organised around school trimesters, which provides a useful framework for identifying seasonal patterns, although the presence of an undefined fourth category in the dataset introduces ambiguity and should be interpreted with caution.

Finally, limitations in data disaggregation constrain analytical depth. In particular, limited availability of detailed breakdowns by age, sex and incident characteristics restricts the ability to conduct more granular analysis of patterns, risk factors and outcomes associated with CSEA in educational settings. Additionally, although this data source was publicly available and accessible when the country workbook was originally created, the data portal is no longer accessible from the UK, limiting the ability to verify, and update the data directly.

Chile – Social services data

Data produced by the Servicio Nacional de Protección Especializada a la Niñez y Adolescencia are based on administrative records collected through the child protection system. As the public institution responsible for providing specialised protection services to children, adolescents and young people whose rights have been seriously threatened or violated, the Service plays a central role in documenting service provision and protection interventions. Information is entered directly by programme staff working in Service-operated projects and accredited collaborating organisations, positioning the dataset as an administrative source generated through routine case management activities. As a result, these data reflect children, adolescents and young people who have entered specialised protection services and whose circumstances have been recorded within the administrative system. Specifically, the data capture individuals receiving support through the protection system and exclude children who experience abuse or exploitation but are not referred to, admitted to, or engaged with specialised services. Consequently, the statistics should not be interpreted as estimates of the total prevalence of CSEA in the population.

Because only one primary admission reason is recorded for each admission, children experiencing multiple forms of victimisation may be classified under another category, potentially leading to the underrepresentation of some experiences of abuse. Furthermore, the annual statistics on children attended reflect individuals who were active in services during the reporting period and do not distinguish between newly admitted cases and those continuing from previous years. Differences in programme

practices, case recording procedures and the assignment of admission causes may also affect the consistency and comparability of data across service providers and over time.

Finally, limitations in methodological transparency and data disaggregation constrain analytical depth. In particular, the availability of detailed breakdowns by demographic characteristics, abuse characteristics and service trajectories are limited in published outputs, reducing the ability to conduct more granular analysis of patterns, risk factors and outcomes related to CSEA. In addition, the published statistics are primarily designed for operational monitoring and service management purposes rather than research, which may further restrict the scope for detailed analytical interpretation.

The Philippines – health data

For the Philippines, data on reported CSEA are derived from administrative records compiled by the Child Protection Network (CPN), based on submissions from participating Women and Children Protection Units (WCPUs). Not all WCPUs are able to submit data due to logistical, technical, and operational constraints. WCPUs are not present in all provinces in the Philippines (currently around 70 of 82), meaning the dataset does not capture all geographic areas of the country. Furthermore, the data only include children who were referred to or consulted at a WCPU and exclude cases handled exclusively by other agencies, facilities, or reporting mechanisms, which may further contribute to underestimation of the overall burden of CSEA. As a result, the dataset represents only reported CSEA cases that were seen by participating WCPUs, recorded in WCPU administrative systems, and subsequently submitted to the CPN. Thus, the dataset represents reported cases from participating WCPUs and may underestimate the total number of CSEA cases in the Philippines. Changes in reported case counts over time should also be interpreted with caution, as the WCPU network and reporting system have expanded over the study period. Increases in the number of recorded cases may reflect broader facility participation, strengthened detection and referral systems, improved reporting practices, and increased awareness of CSEA, rather than a true increase in the occurrence of CSEA.

Annual case counts capture new patients seen within the reporting year and exclude follow-up visits; however, they include individuals presenting with re-abuse or repeated victimisation. As a result, annual case rates derived from these data may overestimate the incidence of first-time victimisation.

Reported CSEA cases are not fully comparable across the study period due to changes in classification and reporting practices. From 2016 to 2020, the electronic database used by the Child Protection Network (CPN) only allowed cases to be recorded under a general category of sexual abuse, which included both offline and online forms of abuse. Although cases of online CSEA were already being handled during this period, they could not be identified separately in the data. Beginning in 2021, the database was expanded to allow more detailed classification, enabling cases to be recorded under specific categories such as online child sexual abuse, online child sexual exploitation and sexual extortion (Child Protection Network, 2021). As a result, new categories appear from 2021 onward,

limiting comparability with earlier years. Other forms of abuse, such as child marriage and child trafficking, were excluded from the indicator because reported data for these categories may include cases not involving sexual abuse (Child Protection Network, personal communication, May 1, 2026).

While age-disaggregated data are available in annual reports, limitations in joint age-sex disaggregation, geographic breakdowns, and detailed case and perpetrator characteristics constrain more granular analysis.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Childlight Research Ethics Sub-Committee (CRESC), University of Edinburgh. Reference SII-LD-291024CL.

The study was conducted in accordance with the University's ethical principles and procedures for research involving human participants. Interview participation was voluntary, and all data were collected, stored, and analysed in line with applicable data protection and confidentiality requirements.

AI use disclaimer

In accordance with Childlight's Generative AI policy, AI tools were used during the initial screening phase as a supplementary search method to help identify publicly available public sector frontline datasets and relevant documentation. AI-generated outputs were not used as primary evidence. All information retrieved through AI-assisted searches was independently verified against original sources or established secondary sources prior to inclusion in the analysis.

Conflict of interest disclaimer

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could appear to influence the planned research.

Registered Protocol: https://osf.io/x5jus/

Data Availability

The aggregated data frames used for the project the *Scale of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Public Sector Frontline Data* are available as open access in the Childlight DataShare repository, within the wider *2026 Into the Light Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*: https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8210

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Included data sources by country

United States

- National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), Child Level Data, 1990 - 2024
- National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): Victim segment, 2015-2024

Brazil

- Sistema de Informação de Agravos de Notificação, Sistema de Vigilância de Violências e Acidentes (Notifiable Health Conditions Information System, Violence and Accident Surveillance System), 2016-2025
- Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública (The Brazilian Yearbook of Public Security), 2019-2025
- Ouvidoria Nacional de Direitos Humanos – Disque 100 (National Human Rights Ombudsman's Office – Dial 100), 2021-2025

Japan

- 年間の犯罪統計書, 罪種別認知件数 (Annual Crime Statistics Report: Number of reported cases by offence type), 2015-2024
- 犯罪統計, 少年非行及び子供の性被害 (Crime Statistics, Juvenile delinquency and child sexual victimisation), 2015-2025
- 公立学校教職員の人事行政の状況調査, 性犯罪・性暴力等に係る懲戒処分等の状況, 教育職員 (The Survey on the Personnel Administration Status of Public School Teachers), 2019-2024
- 福祉行政報告例, 児童相談所における児童虐待相談の対応件数 (The Welfare Administration Report Examples, child abuse consultation cases handled by Child Guidance Centres), 2016-2024
- 施設職員等による被措置児童等性的虐待件数 (Notification of Abuse of a Child Placed in Care), 2014-2023

Australia

- Australian Bureau of Statistics: Recorded Crime – Victims, 2014-2024
- The Child Protection National Minimum Data Set, 2015-2025

Fiji

- Crime Statistics Annual Report, 2012-2022
- Annual Report, Child Welfare Act National Database, 2014-2023

Chile

- Denuncias de Abuso Sexual en Establecimientos Educacionales (Complaints of Sexual Abuse in Educational Settings), 2014-2025
- Servicio Nacional de Protección Especializada a la Niñez y Adolescencia Statistical Yearbooks, 2021-2023
- Boletín Estadístico Anual (Annual Statistical Bulletin – Public Prosecutor's Office), 2020-2025

Mongolia

- Хохирогчид: хүйс, насны бүлэг, гэмт хэргийн төрлөөр – PxWeb, Үндэсний Статистикийн Хороо (Victims by Sex, Age Group, and Type of Crime Dataset), 2014-2025

The Philippines

- Child Protection Network – Annual reports, 2016-2025

Timor-Leste

- Estatistika Kriminal Timor-Leste, 2016-2024

Appendix 2: Key informant interviews conducted across countries and sectors

Country	Sector	Interviews
Brazil	Health	N***
Brazil	Police	N**
Brazil	Hotline	Y
Chile	Education	N**
Chile	Police	Y
Chile	Social	N**
Mongolia	Police	Y
Japan	Police	Y
Japan	Social	Y
Japan	Education	Y
The Philippines	Health	N*
Fiji	Police	Y
Fiji	Social	Y
Australia	Police	N*
Australia	Social	Y
Timor-Leste	Police	N**
United States	Social	N*
United States	Police	N*

* Supplementary information obtained from experts within the country-based teams who produced the indicator data

** No suitable interviewee could be recruited within time frame

*** Detailed supplementary information could be obtained from publicly available methodology reports

Appendix 3: Availability of the 11 core indicators for ITL 2026 across countries and sectors

Country	Sector	Nr of cases	Case rate per 10'000 children	% by CSEA types	% by location of abuse	% by sex/gender of victim	% by age of victim	% by ethnicity of victim	% by disability status of victim	% by perpetrator relationship to victim	% by sex/gender of perpetrator	% by age of perpetrator
Brazil	Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brazil	Police	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brazil	Social	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No*	Yes	Yes	Yes
Chile	Education	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Chile	Police	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Chile	Social	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Mongolia	Police	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Japan	Police	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes

Japan	Social	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Japan	Education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
The Philippines	Health	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Fiji	Police	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Fiji	Social	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Australia	Police	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Australia	Social	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Timor-Leste	Police	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
United States	Social	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
United States	Police	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Victim disability data are available but are show as "No" due to data quality concerns. 93.6% of records were "Not reported" and only 0.4% indicated a disability status.

Child Helpline Administrative Data

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Background and rationale

Child abuse is regarded as a global public health epidemic which is associated with severe negative health effects (Hoft & Haddad, 2017; Undie & Mak'anyengo, 2022). Administrative data are an 'untapped, but information-rich, resource', they are a by-product of administrative systems and government services primarily used for operative functions, rather than being created for research purposes. Nevertheless, they provide potent insights (ADRUK, 2025) into societal problems, such as child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA).

Child helplines are important for victim reporting and support as they are a 'low-threshold, child-friendly, confidential and safe service for children to build trust in the system and eventually disclose sexual abuse and exploitation, making further action and support possible' (Child Helpline International, 2022c). The partnership between Childlight and Child Helpline International (CHI) is a step towards strengthening the data system and the evidence-base around the scale and nature of abuse by including child helpline data with existing survey and frontline data and by drawing attention to data gaps, for example, where no helplines exist.

The uncertain scale and nature of CSEA complicates the design and execution of a successful public health strategy due to under-reporting in government data systems (Soneson et al., 2023). Karsna and Kelly note that the majority of child sex abuse is 'neither reported nor identified during childhood and thus will not appear in official agency data' (2021, p. 76). Regarding law enforcement, not all cases of CSEA will reach the reporting stage and therefore may not be captured through law enforcement data (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015; Office for National Statistics, 2020; Karsna and Kelly, 2021; Wolak et al., 2018).

Administrative data from child helplines are a useful resource to understand the scale and nature of CSEA because the data capture instances of abuse that have not been disclosed to or discovered by the police, social work authorities or health providers. However, not all victims of CSEA will report to helplines (Shuster, 2025) or other websites (Patchin & Hinduja., 2018). Although helpline data do not provide a direct measure of prevalence and instead reflect patterns of help-seeking behaviour rather than population-level victimisation, they offer an important complementary source of evidence that can be triangulated with survey, police health and social care data to strengthen understanding of the scale and nature of CSEA.

Additionally, child helplines gather data from individuals who may never partake in surveys. Helpline data are therefore a valuable piece of the puzzle in generating a reliable figure of CSEA. Moreover, helpline data remove the need to directly involve

victims/survivors in research. This avoids the risk of re-traumatisation whilst still representing those who have sought help. Child helpline data give information both directly from victims/survivors contacting child helplines regarding abuse they personally experienced and indirectly from others contacting the child helpline to report on the behalf of others.

In order to understand the landscape of maltreatment, this study takes a multi-pronged approach. First, a desk review of the literature on helplines to provide cultural and legal context. Second, a scoping review of the current data on CSEA from helplines. Third, an analysis of quantitative help-seeking administrative data from CHI for the years 2023 to 2024 to understand the scale of CSEA. Finally, qualitative interviews with helplines to understand their cultural and socio-political context, data collection processes and harmonisation. The helplines will be located in countries within the UN regions East Asia and Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean and North America.

History of Child Helpline International

CHI was formed in 2003, when 49 child helplines came together to form a global network with members providing support to each other. CHI 'is a collective impact organisation with roughly 190 members from worldwide. In 2024, the 84 child helplines active within the CHI network provided more than 6.1 million counselling sessions to children and young people across the world. CHI coordinates information, viewpoints, knowledge and data from their child helpline members, partners and external sources. This exceptional resource is used to support child protection systems globally, regionally and nationally, and to help our members advocate for the rights of children and amplify their voices' (Child Helpline International, 2022a). To be a member of CHI, organisations must offer counselling and listening services to children (18 years and under) and/or young people (25 years and under) (Child Helpline International, 2025b).

CHI is formally established as a *stichting* (foundation) under Dutch law and operates in full compliance with the statutory provisions governing foundations in the Netherlands. CHI's members are independent organisations, whose operations are legally and administratively separate from CHI. Full members actively operate a child helpline and are required to submit information on the data regarding communications received from individuals (either children or young people contacting the helpline on their own behalf or individuals contacting on behalf of children and/or young people), as well as pay an annual membership fee and self-assess their operation against the Core Quality Standards for Child Helplines. Provisional members are organisations that have the ambition to start a child helpline or have recently started a child helpline.

These child helplines provide help, support and counselling services to children and young people under 25 years old. Counselling contacts/communications are those whereby the child helpline was able to provide assistance to the caller. This includes, but is not limited to, contacts/communications where child helpline counsellors and staff listened, advised or supported the caller. These are different to non-counselling contacts/communications, where the child helpline did not provide direct assistance to a child or young person because of the nature of the contact, which include silent, abusive

and missed contacts. The data that were provided to Childlight included the number of times that counsellors tagged a call, text, email, etc. under a specific category and were disaggregated by gender/sex (the gender/sex of the child/young person who is the subject of the contact).

Child helplines base their work on the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere have: the right to survival; to develop to their fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The UNCRC also specifically gives children the right to be heard and to express their views without fear of harm or reprisal (UNICEF UK). Child helplines help to ensure that all children have the opportunity to be heard. Often, child helplines are a child or young person's first point of contact with child protection services, and the most trusted and accessible gateway for them to find much needed further support (Child Helpline International, 2022b).

Aims

This research uses CHI's administrative data to assess whether evidence from child helplines can support the development of victimisation indicators. It will also examine the recording practices of child helplines. Together, these analyses will strengthen the evidence base for the Index and support efforts to improve child safeguarding globally.

For the 2026 Index, this research has four aims:

- To use 2023 and 2024 CHI administrative data as an indication of CSEA in the 2026 Index countries (East Asia and Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean and North America).
- To understand the data collection, reporting, harmonisation and analysis of data by child helplines.
- To understand the nature of child helplines.
- To understand the data landscape of technology facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse (TF-CSEA) through child helplines.

Objectives

This project seeks to enhance the knowledge of CSEA worldwide; specifically in the understanding of the magnitude of CSEA and the helpline recording practices in East Asia and Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean and North America using helpline data.

The objectives are the follows:

1. Quantitative data collection and analysis
    - Analyse CHI quantitative administrative data for the 2026 Index countries (2023–2024) using Excel, Python or other statistical software
    - Unlock additional quantitative data through interviews with helplines that have

reported unsatisfactorily
    - Unlock additional data from CHI-affiliated helplines that have not yet provided data
2. Qualitative data collection and analysis
    - Conduct interviews with representatives from child helplines
    - Thematically analyse the qualitative interview data using NVivo
3. Evidence synthesis and knowledge review
    - Conducting a desk review on existing child helpline data, focusing on the 2026 Index countries
    - Synthesise findings from the quantitative analysis, qualitative interviews, and desk reviews into a thematic report for the 2026 Index
4. Outputs, standards, and dissemination
    - Report the research findings in the Into the Light Index 2026
    - Develop a minimum standards document for child helplines covering data collection, reporting, recording, and analysis

Design and methodology

Design

This research uses a mixed methods approach, combining:

- desk review
- quantitative analysis of administrative helpline data from CHI (and potentially CHI member helplines which have not reported data to CHI)
- qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews.

The desk reviews provide an important contextual element by bringing together legislative information and rigorous, replicable evidence on helpline data.

The quantitative analysis of CHI administrative data provide insight on the scale of CSEA in help-seeking data. The qualitative interviews complement this in two ways. First, they describe how individual helplines collect, manage, classify, harmonise, report and analyse their data. Second, they provide a contextual information needed to interpret the quantitative findings.

Sampling

Quantitative helpline data sampling

Quantitative data for 2023 and 2024 were provided by CHI for the countries listed in Table 1. Not all countries provided data for both years.

CHI data were not available for every country included in the 2026 Index. There are three possible reasons: member child helplines in some countries did not submit data for 2023 or 2024; some countries have child helplines that are not CHI members; and some

countries have no child helpline at all. Countries reporting fewer than 20 tags were excluded from the analysis to avoid interpreting changes based on very small numbers.

Table 1: Provision of country-level CHI data

North America	Countries	Year 2023	Year 2024	Qualitative interview
1	Canada	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	United States	Yes	Yes	No
Latin America and Caribbean	Countries	Year 2023	Year 2024	Qualitative interview
1	Brazil	Yes	Yes	No
2	Chile	Yes	Yes	No
3	Colombia	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Costa Rica	Yes	No	No
5	Jamaica	Yes	Yes	No
6	Trinidad and Tobago	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Uruguay	Yes	No	Yes
Asia Pacific	Countries	Year 2023	Year 2024	Qualitative interview
1	Australia	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Cambodia	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Japan	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Mongolia	No	Yes	Yes
5	New Zealand	Yes (only counselling contacts)	Yes	No
6	Papua New Guinea	Yes	No	No
7	Thailand	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	The Philippines	Yes	Yes	Yes

Qualitative interview sampling

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of a purposive sample of child helplines operating in countries within the 2026 Index regions. Recruitment was facilitated through Childlight's partnership with CHI. Childlight invited CHI member helplines to take part where CHI was able to provide an established contact; where no such contact existed, member helplines were approached through the Childlight network. Participation was voluntary, and the final sample comprised the helplines that agreed to take part (Table 1).

Helplines in countries and territories without a CHI member helpline were not approached, as no established contact was available through either route (for example,

Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Cuba, Belize, El Salvador, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Guyana, Falklands, Malaysia, Myanmar, Tonga etc.).

Data collection

Desk reviews

A systematic desk review was conducted across the websites of all CHI member countries for the 2026 Index regions. Child helplines in each country were identified and selected based on the website information provided on the official CHI website. This review aimed to compile and document key service-level information that was not consistently available through quantitative raw data. Information extracted included the target age groups served, service availability and operating hours, communication channels, accessibility features, and other relevant characteristics of child helpline provision.

Quantitative CHI data

For the CHI quantitative administrative data, the data were transferred from CHI to Childlight.

CHI is the umbrella organisation of member helplines. Every year, CHI receives data on the volume and characteristics of contacts/communications (for example, calls, webchat, email, text) that helpline counsellors log and tag. Member helplines record the issues raised (for example, abuse-related categories) and selected background characteristics of the child or young person concerned (including gender and/or sex, among other variables). The unit analysed in this study is counsellor 'tags' (that is, the number of times a category is applied in helpline recording systems) rather than unique individuals or unique contacts.

Within CHI's framework, the violence category is made up of the number of counsellor tags referring to emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse. The sub-category of violence is the CSEA category, which is the combination of the categories: commercial sexual exploitation (offline), TF-CSEA and sexual violence (offline) (please see Appendix 1 for category definitions).

It is important to note that the number of tags in categories does not necessarily correlate with the number of times that the child helplines were contacted or the number of individuals contacting the child helpline in relation to violence and CSEA (see Appendix 2).

Data are captured by counsellors as part of routine helpline operations, typically during or immediately after a contact. Raw data are stored and managed by each helpline.

Member helplines submit aggregated figures to CHI once per year via an online Qualtrics survey covering the previous calendar year. The survey follows CHI's harmonised data framework (co-developed with members in 2019), which collects information on: (i) background characteristics of the contact/child (for example, age, gender/sex, living situation), (ii) reason for contact (for example, type of abuse), and (iii) actions taken (for example, referrals). Data are generally reported as counts, including disaggregation by

gender/sex where available.

All elements in the data framework are provided with gender and/or sex disaggregation, using four gender and/or sex modalities – boys, girls, non-binary and unknown. Even when a caller is 18-24 and therefore an adult, the gender disaggregation is still labelled 'boys' and 'girls' in the data that are collected by CHI. There are instances where only the variable 'unknown' has data, this may be where the helpline did not collect gender/sex, or multiple children/young people were reported in one call.

CHI undertakes standardisation and validation internally before transferring the data to Childlight. For the research conducted by Childlight, the terms male, female, non-binary and unknown are used (please see Appendix 1 for definitions).

Data-sharing

A formal data-sharing agreement was signed between CHI and Childlight. This joint research project analyses secondary, quantitative, administrative data in order to understand the scale of CSEA from how counsellors tag contacts/communications regarding violence and CSEA. The data that were provided to Childlight were the number of times that counsellors tagged a call, text, email etc. under a specific category disaggregated by gender and/or sex (the gender and sex either of the child/young person contacting or the gender and/or sex of the child/ young person about whom the call is about).

Childlight received an anonymised Excel file from CHI containing country-level data. CHI shared aggregate, redacted, quantitative data for 2023 and 2024 with no identifiable information in order to protect anonymity. Some countries, such as the USA, have more than one CHI member. In these cases, the data is aggregated across all members to present a country-level measure. The data was disaggregated on the levels of region and country where the contact/communication was made and the number of times that a counsellor tagged a contact/communication in a specific category (or categories), disaggregated by gender/sex. Although CHI collects data on multiple types of violence against children and young people, the data that were provided for this study was restricted to violence, sexual violence (offline), commercial sexual exploitation (offline) and TF-CSEA. The CSEA category is a combination of the categories sexual violence (offline), commercial sexual exploitation (offline) and TF-CSEA.

Therefore, the number of contacts/communications does not correspond directly to the number of individual persons who have contacted the helpline, that is, the same person may contact multiple times, and this will be recorded each time. However, the data used for analysis, is the number of times that categories were tagged (disaggregated by gender and/or sex) by counsellors, not the number of contacts/communications or the number of callers.

Data analysis

CHI shared 2023 and 2024 data from the countries for the 2026 Index which can be seen in Table 1.

An example of the data analysis data frame is as follows:

Country	Region	Commercial Sexual Exploitation (Offline)				TF-CSEA				Sexual Violence (Offline)			
		M	F	NB	NK	M	F	NB	NK	M	F	NB	NK

M = male, F = female, NB = non-binary, NK = unknown

To get a total of violence-related tags CHI summarised all tags that fall under the Violence category please see Appendix 1 for definitions. This includes emotional, physical, sexual, neglect, bullying and child labour, amongst others. This total is useful as a baseline when comparing specific types of violence, such as CSEA, as it can be expressed as a fraction of all violence-related tags, bypassing differences in population sizes across countries and the reach of each child helpline. For each country, numbers of Violence and CSEA tags were provided and the percentage of CSEA in the Violence category was calculated. This was repeated for all the countries combined to give an overall total percentage of CSEA in the Violence category.

The list below demonstrates the calculations which were performed on the data:

1. Number of tags for violence in 2023 and 2024 (per country)
2. Number of tags for CSEA in 2023 and 2024 (per country)
3. Percentage of tags for CSEA (in violence) 2023 and 2024 (per country)
4. Number and percentage of tags for sexual violence per country 2023 and 2024
5. Number and percentage of tags for commercial sexual exploitation per country 2023 and 2024
6. Number and percentage of tags for TF-CSEA per country 2023 and 2024
7. Number and percentage of tags for gender/sex in CSEA per country 2023 and 2024
8. Number of contacts and percentage of sexual violence per gender/sex per country 2023 and 2024
9. Number and percentage of tags for commercial sexual exploitation per gender/sex per country 2023 and 2024
10. Number and percentage of tags for TF-CSEA per gender/sex per country 2023 and 2024

The calculations were made using Excel.

Data limitations

The awareness and use of child helplines vary significantly between countries. This means

that national differences in the data may reflect disparities in awareness and access to these services, rather than the actual scale of child abuse. However, when looking at national data, the proportion of tags related to CSEA may still provide some insight into country-specific differences. That said, these proportions can also be influenced by how each helpline is marketed and communicated to children.

The conflation of the gender/sex of children and young people (up to age 24), the fact that helplines cater for individuals under the age of 25, and the fact that the number of times that counsellors tag contacts/communications under specific categories does not directly tally with the number of children/young people who have been affected by CSEA are all important limitations of the data. This means that the data are not a perfect representation of the scale and nature of CSEA in the selected countries. However, these data are a valuable source of information regarding CSEA as helplines are a vital part of the child protection landscape – they are often the first port of call for children experiencing CSEA.

Although chi-square tests were initially considered to examine associations between variables, the assumptions required for the test were not met because several expected cell frequencies were too low. Consequently, the chi-square results were not reported, as they would not provide reliable or interpretable statistical inferences. Future analyses with larger sample sizes may allow more robust statistical comparisons.

Qualitative Data

The purpose of the interviews was to gain understanding of how helplines collect, categorise, report, analyse, harmonise and manage their data pertaining to CSEA. It is important to understand how cases are counted, since helpline data cannot currently be used to estimate prevalence despite being such a valuable source of data due to the underreporting of CSEA to statutory bodies such as the police (Patchin & Hinduja, 2018). Moreover, there is an issue of disharmony as helplines and countries define categories differently due to different cultural understandings, laws and languages. This hinders the calculation of CSEA as a global public health issue. The main themes of the interviews were helpline background; CSEA trends (such as gender of victims/survivors and perpetrators, evolution of types of CSEA and intrafamilial abuse); data recording, categorisation, analysis and reporting; safeguarding, confidentiality, anonymity and legal context; and engagement with statutory bodies such as police, child protection, education and health.

One person per helpline was recruited to be interviewed, with a specific focus on members of staff working in data management. The interviews were semi-structured with a set list of questions which allowed the researcher to adapt questions to the situation and explore unexpected topics whilst maintaining consistency without stifling unpredicted insights.

Interviews lasted for one and a half hours and were conducted in either English, Spanish or Japanese (and other languages in line with Childlight staff and Global Data Fellow language capabilities – for example, Filipino). Training in qualitative interviewing was provided to staff and/or Fellows (by Dr Ashleigh McFeeters and Prof Elena Martellozzo)

where needed. The PIS and consent forms could be translated into the necessary language by the ELM and were checked for accuracy by the researchers with language capacity.

Interviews were conducted by a Childlight employee, with CHI observing where interviewees had provided prior consent. The PI, Dr Ashleigh McFeeters (or other Childlight researcher) initiated the recording and transcription of the interview in Teams, meaning that the transcription and video were stored by the University of Edinburgh. CHI did not have access to the raw data, and, in instances where the interviewee had given prior agreement for their presence, were not permitted to store the transcription or recording.

As CHI was an external meeting participant, they had no automatic access to the materials generated by Teams.

The anonymised transcripts were added to NVivo 14 (2023) for thematic analysis.

Informed Consent

For the qualitative data collection, all participants received a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) detailing the purpose of the study, the interview process and data protection measures, and a consent form prior to the interview.

Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and, with participants' consent, were video-recorded and automatically transcribed. Following each interview, recordings and transcripts were downloaded and securely stored in the University's DataStore, with the original files removed from Teams, Stream, and OneDrive. Access to the data was restricted to the research team, and all data will be retained and deleted in accordance with the project's Data Management Plan. Participants were also asked not to disclose identifiable information about individual children or cases during the interviews.

Participants were provided with a copy of their transcript and given five working days to review, amend, or withdraw their contribution from the study. Following this review period, transcripts were anonymised and all identifying information, except the country of the helpline, was removed, making it no longer possible to identify individual participants or facilitate withdrawal. Participants retained the right to withdraw at any point during the interview and within the five working-day review period.

Qualitative Analysis

In an NVivo project, the first step is to create cases and classify with demographic variables (called attributes in NVivo). For example, in the case of ‘helpline worker 1’, the demographic variable of the participant was ‘country’ (no further identifiable information is required). This is created in a classification sheet (resembling an Excel spreadsheet). A coding/thematic framework was created based on themes from the literature review which was adjusted to allow themes to arise from the data itself.

The transcript was first categorically coded, for example, ‘harmonisation’, ‘data

management' etc. and these were used to categorise information. In the second round of coding, using both deductive and inductive reasoning, the data underwent interpretative coding whereby thematic codes were derived from the previous literature and codes arose from the data itself (these were added to the coding/thematic framework). Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidance on thematic analysis was followed, whereby the researcher familiarised themselves with the data, read and re-read the data, generated initial codes that evolved into themes through discussions with other team members, refined and defined the themes and wrote up the results.

Once the data went through two rounds of coding, the categorical codes were translated into variables/attributes in the classification sheet. This classification is important to allow cross-tabulation queries of codes. It also produced an exportable spreadsheet summarising the codes in a short-hand form, so that patterns could be reviewed without running individual queries; for example, to see whether helplines in particular countries mentioned certain codes. Once classification and coding were complete, the data were analysed using simple coding queries to bring up mentions of categorical codes or interpretative codes or matrix queries where codes can be compared or to see where codes overlap. Moreover, cross-tabulation queries showed how the codes differed by country. Assigning segments of text to relevant codes made it possible to conduct thematic and content analyses, identifying recurring patterns and assessing their prevalence. Word frequency queries further helped identify the most commonly used terms across the dataset.

The interview data was translated into English (if the original transcript was not in English), however, if there were words which did not have a direct translation, the original word was kept (with explanation).

The purpose of the coding is to bring together similar themes and create a comprehensible narrative about child helplines and data management, reporting, harmonisation etc. The richness of the qualitative interview data, which substantiate the quantitative data, will enable the research team to prepare two peer-reviewed publications, which we plan to submit in 2027.

Critical Realist Paradigm

The qualitative analysis of the interview data examined how helpline staff understand, manage and make decisions about issues such as data management, disclosure, caller demographics, abuse categorisation and mandatory reporting. This shifts the focus from phenomenology towards professional practice and organisational processes.

The interview component of the research concerns phenomena that exist beyond interviewees' perceptions. For example, CSEA, mandatory reporting laws and data management software exist independently to how helpline staff interpret them. At the same time, helpline staff interpret, negotiate and implement these phenomena differently. The paradigm of critical realism allows the scrutiny of structures such as law, policy, databases and safeguarding frameworks, the realities of staff working within them and the mechanisms that influence practice and decision-making.

This study adopts a critical realist paradigm (Fletcher, 2017), recognising that CSEA, reporting requirements and organisational systems exist independently of participants' perceptions whilst acknowledging that knowledge of these phenomena is mediated through the experiences and interpretations of helpline staff.

A critical realist ontology is adopted because CSEA and the systems that respond to it are complex, often hidden, and only partially observable. As participants were helpline staff, their accounts are shaped by the organisational structures, safeguarding systems and reporting frameworks within which they work. Critical realism allows these underlying structures to be examined as real influences on practice and decision-making, rather than treated solely as features of individual perception.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore staff perspectives on data management, disclosure processes, caller characteristics, abuse typologies and mandatory reporting obligations. Data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and underlying mechanisms shaping practice.

Limitations/caveats

The data from CHI describe the scale and nature of categories of sexual exploitation and abuse by gender and/or sex. As the CHI member helplines cater for individuals up to age 24, this means that the data have also captured instances of exploitation and abuse which were not experienced by children (individuals aged seventeen and younger). However, this data is still a valuable resource for estimating the magnitude of CSEA, due to the existing data landscape being fragmented.

Helpline data is only one piece of the puzzle of the scale of CSEA, as significant underreporting remains a persistent global challenge. CSEA is underreported for multiple reasons including fear, stigma and the threat of repercussions for disclosure (Wolbers et al., 2025).

The quality, completeness and disaggregation may vary significantly by country, for example, some helplines may report their data to CHI in an aggregate form, grouping all genders/sexes under the ‘unknown’ category rather than splitting by male, female or non-binary.

There may have been variation in willingness to engage in interviews across countries. This may be due to confidentiality, legal restrictions, cultural differences and/or political sensitivities.

Operational constraints, including time, may limit the number of countries included in the 2026 iteration. As a result, findings may not be fully representative of global trends but will still provide valuable region-specific insights and help refine future rounds of data collection.

This study initially aimed to include findings from a scoping review and develop minimum standards documentation for helpline data. The scoping review was launched, but its findings were not available in time to be incorporated into the 2026 Index. Minimum

standards documentation was not developed for this exercise. Given the current gaps and unevenness in available data, proposing minimum standards at this stage risked overpromising and implying a level of comparability and readiness that is not yet supported by the evidence base. Developing minimum standards is better positioned as a standalone research project once a stronger and more consistent data foundation is in place.

Despite these challenges, the study employs several mitigation strategies through a mixed-methods design and engagement with CHI to support data access and interpretation and interviewee recruitment.

Data management

The quantitative data from CHI were transferred from CHI to Childlight in an Excel file via DataSync. The data were then stored within DataStore. CHI followed Childlight and The University of Edinburgh procedures (The University of Edinburgh, 2024) for sharing and storing this data, found on the University of Edinburgh website.

The qualitative interview data was stored on encrypted, password-protected systems managed by the University of Edinburgh and Childlight-approved servers (DataStore). Access was restricted to authorised members of the research team. Contact information and audio/video recordings were deleted once the transcript had been reviewed. Participants were pseudonymised by replacing names with a country-specific role descriptor (for example, Country X Child Helpline Representative), and all other personally identifiable information was removed prior to analysis and reporting (apart from country of helpline).

Data governance

Data governance for the scoping review data was managed in accordance with the University of Edinburgh institutional research governance and data management policies. All data generated through the review process - including extracted study information and analytical outputs – were securely stored on the university-approved system (SharePoint) with access restricted to authorised members of the Childlight team directly involved in the work on the Global Index project. Data handling procedures complied with relevant legal and ethical requirements, including data protection and information security standards. As part of Childlight's commitment to transparency, reproducibility and open science, the dataset for this scoping review will be made open access enabling researchers, practitioners and policymakers to explore, test and build on the underlying data.

Data Retention

All data will be retained for a period of three years following project completion. Subject to ethical approval, anonymised data may be archived in a secure, access-controlled repository (University data vaults) to facilitate future research or secondary analysis. Any

data shared externally will be fully anonymised and stripped of all personally identifying information (apart from country of helpline).

These practices are aligned with the University of Edinburgh's data governance policies and Childlight's research ethics framework, ensuring that all data is managed with the highest standards of security, integrity and transparency.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Childlight Research Ethics Sub-Committee (CRESC), University of Edinburgh. Reference UCHAD-AMF-171224CL.

The participants were provided with a consent form and a participant information sheet (PIS) which outlined the purpose of the research, the usage of the data, confidentiality and withdrawal from the study.

Confidentiality

To protect participant privacy, all identifiable data obtained through interview were pseudonymised (apart from country of helpline), for example, each individual is known as 'helpline worker 1' etc. Data was stored securely on DataStore.

The quantitative administrative data is non-identifiable (apart from country of helpline).

Risks and mitigation

The PI is responsible for identifying and managing risks within the research project. They ensured that risks were assessed, documented and reviewed throughout the project lifecycle, and that appropriate controls were in place for mitigation. PIs are expected to work closely with colleagues to escalate significant risks and maintain alignment with Childlight's risk appetite and ethical standards.

Safeguarding and researcher wellbeing

While participants involved in the qualitative arm of the project were not interviewed about CSEA per se (rather about the data management of CSEA in child helplines) it remains a sensitive topic, discussion of which has potential to cause distress and vicarious trauma to participants. Supportive resources were therefore provided to all participants in the PIS, and the right to stop the interview or to withdraw within the five working days for the review window was made clear. A follow-up email from the researcher was sent to participants with a reminder of support resources after the interview was concluded.

All interviews and interactions with participants were conducted using trauma-informed practice based on the Trauma-informed Practice: Toolkit by the Scottish Government. For example, researchers created a safe and respectful environment, ensuring that participants felt in control of their involvement at all times. Participants were clearly

informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to pause or withdraw from the interview and/or withdraw from the study altogether within the five-day review window.

To support emotional safety, all participants received a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) that includes details of the study, their rights, and a list of available support services including national helplines and referral pathways for psychological assistance. The research team are trained to recognise signs of discomfort and to adapt their approach to ensure participant wellbeing throughout the research process.

To mitigate risks associated with the potential for vicarious trauma to researchers, staff are encouraged to avail of Childlight's comprehensive wellbeing program, which includes a range of monthly activities aimed at promoting mental health and resilience, in addition to bespoke counselling services and training from the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI): Dare to Care: Wellness, self and collective care for those working in the VAW and VAC fields - SVRI.

Dr A McFeeters, Principal Investigator (PI), has been trained in resilience training and trauma-informed research and practice by the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, these methods were utilised to deal with any indirect distress. Regular check-ins and debriefing sessions were conducted with members of the research team to monitor their emotional wellbeing. These facilitated and reflective supervision sessions were held in a safe and supportive environment where researchers could share their feelings and experiences, including any emerging needs related to burnout, secondary trauma, or emotional strain.

Safeguarding protocols and escalation

If, during the course of interviews or other interactions, any participant disclosed information that suggests a current risk of harm to a child, the researcher would have followed Childlight's Safeguarding and Escalation Procedures without delay. A designated Safeguarding Lead for the project is responsible for overseeing such disclosures, ensuring appropriate documentation and reporting any issues to the PI, the Ethics Review Committee and the Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO). The DSO at Childlight is the primary point of contact for all safeguarding concerns, disclosures or allegations involving children, young people or adults at risk in connection with Childlight's work. They are responsible for receiving and recording concerns, assessing risk, taking immediate protective actions where necessary and ensuring that cases are escalated to appropriate authorities in line with this policy and legal requirements. The DSO also oversees safeguarding training, policy implementation and periodic policy review.

These protocols ensure that the study maintains the highest ethical standards in protecting both the individuals participating in the research and the team members undertaking this important work. By embedding welfare considerations throughout the research process, the project promotes a safe, ethical and sustainable working environment for all involved.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could appear to influence the planned research.

AI-usage disclaimer

In accordance with Childlight's Generative AI policy, AI-based tools, including large language models, were used in a limited and supportive manner during the conduct of this review. Their use was restricted to tasks intended to enhance efficiency and accessibility and did not replace researcher judgement or decision-making at any stage of the review process. Specifically, AI tools were used to support:

1. Language editing to improve clarity and readability of draft text without altering substantive meaning.
2. Translation of non-English materials and scripts, where required, using the Edinburgh Language Model (ELM)
3. All outputs generated with AI assistance were independently reviewed and verified by the research team prior to use. Final decisions regarding study inclusion, data interpretation, synthesis, and reporting were made solely by the authors, who take full responsibility for the integrity, accuracy, and conclusions of the review.

Advisory committee

The study advisory committee consists of six persons from victim/survivor charities and academics working in the field of sexual abuse. The role of the advisory group was to guide indicator development, provide advice on analysis, impact curation and for communication of the findings from the Index.

More specifically, these affiliations are:

- Aarhus University
- A legal expert working at the intersection of human trafficking, child exploitation, human security and criminal law
- Survivors Trust
- Victim Support NI
- Lucy Faithfull Foundation
- London School of Economics

Meetings with the committee took place via Microsoft Teams.

Conclusion

Administrative helpline data are an important, underused resource for understanding, addressing and responding to public health concerns, such as child abuse and exploitation. This study analyses CHI administrative data alongside desk-based evidence and interviews to strengthen understanding of CSEA as reflected in help-seeking.

Current estimates of CSEA remain incomplete due to limitations in existing data sources, including survey constraints and recall bias, and because CSEA is frequently underreported to authorities. Helpline data can help address some of these gaps by capturing disclosures and concerns that may not be visible in statutory systems such as police, health, education, and social care.

This study also documents how helplines record, manage, harmonise, monitor and report CSEA-related data, identifying opportunities to strengthen data quality and improve comparability over time.

Registered Protocol: https://osf.io/gn5ru/

Data Availability

The aggregated data frames used for the project *Child Helpline Administrative Data* are available as open access in the Childlight DataShare repository, within the wider *2026 Into the Light Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*: https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8210

To protect participant confidentiality, and comply with our Data Sharing Agreements and Ethical Safeguards, all available data frames in this Index have been aggregated. Individual-level records and specific identifiers have been excluded from the DataShare repository.

Suggested citation

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Categories of data

The categories of data used by CHI are explained. These categories are also used as the conceptual framework for the scoping review.

Gender and/or sex

Irrespective of whether the contact/communication is coming directly from the victim of the abuse or another person (child/adult), the member child helplines would log the gender and/or sex of the child/young person whom the contact/ communication is about. For example, if a girl is calling a child helpline to say that her brother is being abused by their father, the contact/communication would be logged as 'boy'. Gender and/or sex are recorded by the individual child helplines, and this data are collected by CHI as girl, boy, non-binary and unknown. However, CHI have changed boy and girl to male and female; and these are the terms used by Childlight.

Some member helplines may also collect the gender and sex of the adult calling, but it is saved under a separate category, and this category was not shared with Childlight. Thus, all instances of gender and sex refer to the victim/survivor (whether the individual themselves is contacting the helpline; or someone contacting on their behalf). Childlight uses the terms male (where CHI uses boy), female (where CHI uses girl), non-binary and unknown which are derived from CHI's glossary (Child Helpline International, 2025).

Male, female, non-binary and unknown

CHI uses the terms boy, girl, non-binary and unknown to classify the gender of those who contact their helplines. As the helpline data also contains data on individuals up to the age of 24, Childlight has chosen to use the terms male, female, non-binary and unknown to refer to gender and/or sex. Male is used to refer to a children or young person who identifies as male; and female is used to refer to a child or young person who identifies as female. In CHI's glossary, their definition of non-binary is: '[t]he child or young person does not identify primarily as female or male, or identifies as non-binary'. CHI's definition of unknown is: '[t]he gender of the child or young person could not be identified for various reasons' (Child Helpline International, 2025, p. 8).

Categories of CSEA

The categories violence; commercial sexual exploitation (offline); TF-CSEA and sexual violence (offline) were shared with Childlight. The CSEA category is the combination of the data for commercial sexual exploitation (offline); TF-CSEA; and sexual violence (offline). The term CSEA is used even though the data contains adults up to age 24 as the abuse of children is being analysed, with the knowledge that adults are also included due to the nature of the data.

The violence category contains all the CSEA categories; plus, all other types of violence such as bullying, child labour, neglect, physical violence, emotional violence etc.

Violence

The term violence is specifically referring to a category from CHI that is defined as 'the maltreatment (improper and/or harmful treatment) of a child. Violence can take a number of forms, including emotional, physical, and sexual. Isolation and exclusion are also a form of violence. Violence can occur in many settings, including, but not limited to, at home, at school, in the neighbourhood, and online. The perpetrators can be members of the family, peers, other adults known to the child, or strangers. The present category also involves the presence of violence in the child's environment' (Child Helpline International, 2025, p.31). The violence category contains all the CSEA categories; plus, all other types of violence such as bullying, child labour, neglect, physical violence, emotional violence etc.

Child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA)

At Childlight, CSEA is used as an umbrella term, because it recognises that abuse and exploitation can take different forms and require different approaches to prevention, safeguarding, and data collection. The term covers situations involving child sexual abuse in which a child is involved in sexual activity that they do not understand, cannot consent to, are not developmentally ready for, or where an imbalance of power, trust, or authority is exploited. It also includes sexual exploitation when a child is manipulated, coerced, or forced into sexual activity in exchange for something, such as money, gifts, protection, or promises, which can involve situations like sex trafficking or sexual extortion. In relation to CHI data, CSEA is also a data category that encompasses the categories sexual violence (offline), commercial sexual exploitation (offline) and technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse (TF-CSEA).

Commercial sexual exploitation (offline)

This category is used by CHI to categorise their data. Their definition is as follows: 'A child performing a sexual act in exchange for (a promise of) something of value (including, but not limited to, money, objects, shelter, food, drugs, etc.). The use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of child sexual abuse material or for sexual performances. It can involve the trafficking of children for commercial sexual exploitation. It can also take place in the context of travel and/or tourism. In these cases, the offence can be committed by either foreign or domestic tourists and travellers, and long-term visitors' (Child Helpline International, 2025, p. 34).

Sexual violence (offline)

This is a category used by CHI to categorise their data. It is defined as: '[f]orcing or coercing a child to engage in sexual activity, whether they are aware of what is happening or not, or if they are able to articulate what is unwanted or not' (Child Helpline International, 2025, p.38).

Technology-facilitated CSEA (TF-CSEA)

A range of sexually harmful behaviours that occur online or through the use of other

digital technologies and include online solicitation, non-consensual image taking and sharing, forced exposure to pornography/unwanted sexual content, and livestreaming of child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or sexual extortion.

This is also a category used by CHI to categorise their data. Their definition is: 'child sexual abuse becomes technology-facilitated child sexual abuse when it has occurred on social media or other online channels or has a direct link to the online environment...Technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation includes all acts of a sexually exploitative nature carried out against a child that is at some stage connected to the online environment. This can be distinguished from technology-facilitated sexual abuse [sic] by an underlying notion of exchange, for example, money, food, accommodation, drugs, affection, gifts, etc' (Child Helpline International, 2025, p.36). Further information on definitions can be found here.

Appendix 2: Definitions

The below definitions refer to tags and contacts:

Tags	The dataset that was provided to Childlight was counselling contacts/communications; that is, the number of times that counsellors tagged a call, text, email etc. under a specific category, disaggregated by gender/sex (the gender/sex either of the child/young person contacting; or the gender/sex of the child/young person about whom the call is about).
Contacts/ communications	These are when someone contacts the helpline. It is not possible to determine whether multiple contacts/communications come from the same person. Therefore, the number of contacts/communications does not correspond directly to the number of individual persons who have contacted the helpline, that is, the same person may contact multiple times, and this will be recorded each time. However, the data used for analysis, is the number of times that categories were tagged (disaggregated by gender/sex) by counsellors; not the number of contacts/communications; or the number of callers.

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System Strengthening

Davenport, L., Sha, R., Baksh, A., Fry, D.

Introduction

The Into the Light Index 2026 introduces a System Strengthening Indicator Area, which aims to provide a structured, evidence-informed assessment of national law enforcement capacities and capabilities in relation to child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA). This new indicator area adds a complementary aspect to the existing indicator areas by examining the systems, infrastructures, legislation and operational capabilities that shape countries' ability to process and respond to CSEA effectively.

Across the world, countries vary in the ability of their national systems to respond to CSEA. Differences in legislation, specialist workforce development, technological infrastructure, access to intelligence systems, reporting mechanisms, investigative resources and international cooperation arrangements all influence how effectively countries are able to prevent, detect, investigate and disrupt CSEA. As recognised by international initiatives such as the WeProtect Global Alliance Model National Response, effective responses to CSEA require coordinated legal, operational, technical and institutional systems that work together to protect children and support investigations (WeProtect Global Alliance, 2023). Understanding these system-level factors provides contextual evidence that contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the global response landscape surrounding CSEA.

More broadly, this work reflects Childlight's commitment to strengthening the evidence base on the systems, structures and capacities required to prevent and respond to CSEA. The findings are intended to support policy development, capacity strengthening, international collaboration and strategic investment by identifying broader patterns, strengths and gaps.

The framework is underpinned by two interconnected concepts: capacity and capability. Capacity refers to the structural foundations that support national responses to CSEA, including legislation, specialist personnel, technological infrastructure and institutional resources. Capability refers to operational functioning of systems, including referral pathways, investigative procedures and training and intelligence-sharing mechanisms. Together, these concepts provide a more comprehensive understanding of national preparedness and response than either measure alone.

To develop an understanding of these concepts, the System Strengthening Indicator Area is organised across three interconnected domains: Data Sources, Specialist Resources and Legislation. These domains were selected because they represent foundational components of effective responses to CSEA and are identified within international child protection and online safety frameworks as critical system enablers (WeProtect Global Alliance, 2023; ICMEC, 2023).

Data sources

Access to reliable intelligence, reporting and referral systems is fundamental to identifying victims, detecting offending and supporting investigations. In the context of increasingly cross-border technology-facilitated CSEA, effective information-sharing mechanisms enable law enforcement agencies to receive, process and act upon reports of abuse. Examining countries' access to and utilisation of key data sources provides insight into their ability to identify CSEA, generate investigative leads and participate in national and international response efforts (WeProtect Global Alliance, 2023).

Specialist resources

Effective responses to CSEA require specialist personnel, investigative expertise, analytical capacity and digital forensic capabilities. As offending becomes increasingly complex and technology-enabled, law enforcement agencies require dedicated resources and specialist skills to investigate cases, identify victims and support prosecutions. Assessing specialist resources provides insight into the operational capacity of countries to respond effectively to CSEA and sustain long-term investigative efforts (WeProtect Global Alliance, 2023).

Legislation

Legislation provides the legal framework that enables the investigation and prosecution of CSEA offences. Effective legal provisions are necessary to criminalise harmful behaviours and facilitate access to digital information to support the investigation of CSEA offences. Examining legislative frameworks provides insight into whether countries have established the legal foundations necessary to support effective responses to CSEA (ICMEC, 2023).

Purpose

The System Strengthening Indicator Area focused specifically on law enforcement capability and system responses to technology-facilitated CSEA (TF-CSEA). However, it should be noted that when exploring some law enforcement structures, there is often overlap in TF-CSEA and offline capability, meaning the two are not always easily distinguished when it comes to specific indicator data, so the more generalised term of CSEA is used. Law enforcement was prioritised for the initial phase of indicator development due to its foundational role in the identification, investigation, recording and disruption of CSEA offences, alongside Childlight's existing technical partnerships through the Technical Advisory Program work in this area.

The following outlines the methodological framework underpinning the development of the System Strengthening Indicator Area for the Into the Light Index 2026. It provides detailed information regarding the conceptual development of the indicators, data collection processes, data verification procedures, analytical approaches and limitations associated with national system capability assessment.

Specifically, this Technical Note:

1. describes the multi-methods research design used to develop the indicators
2. outlines the inclusion criteria and geographic scope of the study
3. details the desk review, survey and interview methodologies
4. explains the processes used for data triangulation and verification
5. presents the analytical framework used to interpret the findings
6. discusses the limitations and interpretive considerations associated with systems-level analysis

The document is intended to support methodological transparency, accountability, reproducibility and interpretability of the indicators presented within the Into the Light Index 2026. It is also designed to support policymakers, practitioners, researchers, donors and international organisations in understanding both the strengths and limitations of system capability indicators within the field of child protection and CSEA response.

Research objectives

The principal objectives of the study were to:

1. evaluate countries' ability to identify, access, process and utilise CSEA-related intelligence and referral systems
2. assess specialist workforce capacity and capability, technological capability and analytical support for responding to CSEA
3. examine the existence and scope of legislative frameworks relating to online grooming, CSAM, ISP data retention and ISP data sharing

Study design and methodology

Study design

The study adopted a multi-methods research design combining desk review, structured self-assessment surveys and semi-structured qualitative interviews. The methodological design utilised structured data triangulation, quantitative and thematic analysis. Quantitative data and findings of challenges present in indicators, and thematic findings are presented in the supplemental report.

Sampling and scope

In line with the phased regional strategy of the Into the Light Index, the System Strengthening Indicator Area for the 2026 edition focused on countries, overseas territories and special administrative regions within: East Asia and the Pacific, North America and South America and the Caribbean.

In total, 100 countries were in scope, consisting of 65 countries and 35 overseas territories (OCTs) and special administrative regions (SARs). All 100 countries/OCTs/SARs were included in a desk review and legislative analysis, 37 survey responses were received

out of the 100 and 21 follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Due to the sensitive nature of the data, countries/OCTs/SARs were grouped and presented using two approaches: UNICEF regional classifications (UNICEF, 2023) and geographic groupings aligned with other areas of the Index. OCTs and SARs were included within their geographic regions rather than being presented separately.

This approach supports more complete regional datasets and helps highlight broader patterns, system strengths and gaps. Including OCTs and SARs within regional groupings also avoids isolating them in global analysis and instead frames findings in terms of shared international responsibilities for addressing CSEA. Additionally, this approach helps maintain focus on system capacity and CSEA issues, without drawing unnecessary attention to politically sensitive classifications or sovereignty considerations.

The following tables present a summary of the number of countries included in the survey, desk review and follow-up semi-structured interviews. They have been divided into UNICEF and geographic regions.

Table 1: Countries/OCTs/SARs included in the desk review and those who completed the survey and interview classified by regions

Region	Total no. of countries/ OCTs/SARs	Countries/OCTs/SARs	Survey undertaken	Countries/OCTs/SARs	Interviews	Countries/OCTs/SARs
North America	3	Canada, St Pierre and Miquelon, United States	2	Canada, United States	1	United States
Latin America and the Caribbean	51	Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Argentina, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Bolivia, Bonaire, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Curacao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Falklands, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Montserrat, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Saba, Saint Barthelemy, Saint Eustastius, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Martin, Saint Vincent & the	24	Anguilla, Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Falklands, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Montserrat, Panama, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, Turks and Caicos Islands, Venezuela	15	Anguilla, Argentina, Bermuda, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Costa Rica, Falklands, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Montserrat, Panama, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, Turks and Caicos Islands

		Grenadines, Sint Maarten, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands , Uruguay, US Virgin Islands, Venezuela				
East Asia & Pacific	46	American Samoa, Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Christmas Islands, Cocos Islands, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Korea N, Korea S (Republic of), Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Norfolk Islands, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Pitcairn, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Taiwan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Vietnam, Wallis and Futuna	11	Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, Japan, Korea S (Republic of), Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan	5	Brunei, Japan, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore
Total	100		37		21	

Data collection

Desk Review

A systematic desk review was undertaken to complement the survey, gathering information on data sources and legislative frameworks relevant to CSEA from publicly available sources. The desk review supported data verification across the 2026 countries/OCTs/SARs in scope.

The desk review was completed at the end of April 2026. As such, all findings reflect the status for Data Sources and Legislation that were publicly available and verifiable up to the conclusion of the data collection period.

The desk review incorporated a wide range of publicly available sources, including:

- National legislation
- Policy and regulatory frameworks
- Annual policing and justice reports
- Official institutional publications
- Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and civil society reports
- International datasets

Where available, official government, institutional and legislative documents were prioritised as primary sources of evidence. Secondary sources, including publications from organisations such as the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), Child Helpline International (CHI), the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC), UNICEF, INHOPE and other established stakeholders in the field of child protection and online safety, were utilised where primary documentation was inaccessible, unavailable, incomplete or could not be independently verified.

Data sources

The desk review relating to data sources examined three key areas:

1. NCMEC referral routes
2. International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database connection
3. National hotline systems

The examination of NCMEC referral routes was conducted through a review of official NCMEC databases and resources. The findings were subsequently verified directly by NCMEC personnel. Two principal referral pathways were identified: direct and indirect routes.

Countries/OCTs/SARs were classified as having a direct route where official documentation indicated that reports were transmitted to 'at least one other criminal justice or intergovernmental agency responsible for' (NCMEC, 2026) the country/OCT/SAR concerned. This classification reflects direct receipt of CyberTipline referrals by national law enforcement.

Countries/OCTs/SARs were classified as having an indirect route where documentation indicated that reports were not sent directly to a government agency within or responsible for that country/OCT/SAR, but instead transmitted via an intermediary (NCMEC, 2026). In these cases, referrals were understood to be routed through intermediary organisations, regional bodies or external agencies prior to dissemination to national authorities.

Countries/OCTs/SARs were classified as 'not receiving' where they did not have an established mechanism for the routine receipt of NCMEC CyberTipline reports, through a formalised indirect reporting arrangement with an intermediary agency. Although higher-priority referrals may be shared through U.S. federal law enforcement liaisons, countries/OCTs/SARs on the 'not receiving' category do not regularly receive CyberTipline reports through those intermediary channels.

Data relating to ICSE database connection were identified through searches and examination of official INTERPOL publications, operational reports, press releases and verified social media communications. Countries were classified as connected to ICSE where evidence demonstrated access to the database. The data have been verified by INTERPOL personnel.

The identification and assessment of national hotline systems were conducted through a review of multiple sources, including:

- CHI reports and databases
- INHOPE reports and member directories
- UNICEF reports
- ICMEC resources
- Child Rights International Network (CRIN) resources
- official government websites and policy documents
- websites of established national hotline organisations

Countries/OCTs/SARs were classified as 'Yes' where evidence demonstrated the existence of a national reporting mechanism that received reports relating to CSEA and had established procedures for referring or disseminating information to law enforcement, child protection services or other competent authorities responsible for investigation and safeguarding. Countries/OCTs/SARs were classified as 'No' where no such reporting mechanism could be identified, where available services operated solely as counselling or support services without formal referral pathways or where insufficient evidence could be found to demonstrate a direct contribution to criminal justice or child protection responses.

Given the variation in national reporting systems and publicly available information across Countries/OCTs/SARs, multiple sources were consulted to verify findings wherever possible. This approach sought to maximise consistency and ensure that classifications reflected the operational role of hotline systems within national CSEA reporting and response frameworks.

Legislation

The focus of the legislative review covered 4 areas:

- CSAM (child sexual abuse material) production, possession, dissemination, sale
- Online grooming
- Internet Service Provider (ISP) data retention
- ISP data sharing with law enforcement

For CSAM, the researchers examined whether countries/OCTs/SARs had legislation in place which could be used in prosecution and covered perpetrators producing, possessing, disseminating and selling CSAM. In countries/OCTs/SARs that banned all forms of pornography, this was regarded as covering CSAM via non-specialised laws and these countries/OCTs/SARs were classified as having CSAM legislation.

With regards to Online Grooming, legislation was examined against the United Nations (UN) definition of online grooming (also known as enticement or solicitation of children for sexual purposes). The UN defines Online Grooming as a process in which an adult establishes contact and builds trust or a relationship with a child through online platforms or digital communication technologies with the intention of sexually exploiting or abusing the child (UNODC, 2020).

ISP data retention legislation was defined as a country/OCT/SAR having a legislative framework in place which required companies (ISPs) to retain data for a defined fixed period.

ISP data sharing legislation required countries/OCTs/SARs to have a mechanism in place for ISPs to share data with law enforcement.

Therefore, countries/OCTs/SARs whose legislative framework covered a given area of examination, as detailed above, were classified with 'Yes' for the specific legislation; countries/OCTs/SARs were classified with 'No' if they did not have the legalisation in place (or if the laws of the countries/OCTs/SARs addressed grooming, but not online grooming; or if legislation addressed making and dissemination, but not possession of CSAM). An 'Unclear' response was given to countries/OCTs/SARs where the evidence provided could not give a definitive Yes or No response for the legislation.

To conduct the legislative review of the examined countries/OCTs/SARs, an extensive Internet search was conducted to retrieve legislation on the topics of online grooming, CSAM (production, possession, dissemination, sale), ISP data retention and ISP data sharing with law enforcement. The use of AI (ChatGPT) was allowed as a starting point of engagement and retrieval of said legislation or grey literature. Therefore, AI was utilised essentially as an alternative to a more traditional search engine-based process and sources were subsequently verified manually.

The legislative research was thus based on retrieval of the original texts of the Acts, usually in English language, or relied on secondary grey literature produced by other organisations and/or stakeholders in the field of CSEA/CSAM research who have published similar pieces of work (for example, INHOPE, UNICEF, The Legal Atlas for Street Children, ICMEC, Global Platform for Child Exploitation Policy, Out of the Shadows, Enough Abuse and World Bank Group).

Survey

The survey was created by law enforcement specialists and researchers working within Childlight with external consultation with INTERPOL, EUROPOL, WeProtect and UNICEF. The survey was designed around three areas:

- CSEA data sources – From the respondents' knowledge, are countries/OCTs/SARs using CSEA data sources. This looked specifically at data sources such as NCMEC, Child Rescue Coalition (CRC), Internet Crimes Against Children Child Online Protection System (ICACCOPS), ICSE and hotlines.

- Specialist Resources - Are there specialist investigative capabilities in place within law enforcement? Have they undergone appropriate victim-focused training? Do they have the appropriate digital forensic support, as well as analytical support for the investigations?
- Legislation - Are there legislative gaps that might hinder the CSEA investigation and response. What legislation is in place to investigate CSEA? Are there legislative or other policies in place to ensure the data retention and sharing by ISPs?
- There was a final section of the survey that asked questions about the key challenges the country is facing in order to get the nuanced country context

Prior to dissemination, the survey was also externally reviewed by the Index Technical Subcommittee.

The survey was disseminated globally through INTERPOL's global country-based Crime and Intelligence Bureaus and also directly to in-country contacts held within Childlight, as well as EUROPOL. This was followed up with regular reminders over an 8-month period from April 2025 until December 2025.

The survey was accessed through a web-based survey platform using a unique survey link. Potential respondents accessed the survey by clicking the link, which directed them to an information and consent page outlining the purpose of the study, participation requirements and data protection arrangements.

Respondents were required to provide informed consent before proceeding to the structured survey questions through the online platform. Participants completed the questionnaire and submitted their responses electronically upon completion. Responses were automatically recorded and stored within the survey platform for subsequent analysis. Contact details of participants were requested so that requests for follow up interviews could be sent as required.

Survey data were collected globally but only data relevant to the Into the Light Index 2026 countries/OCTs/SARs have been included as part of this analysis.

The survey was available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic.

Interviews

Following completion of the survey, participating countries/OCTs/SARs were invited to take part in a follow-up interview to provide additional context and insight into their survey responses. Interviews were conducted only with respondents who indicated their willingness to participate and provided informed consent. These interviews were either conducted via MS-Teams or in person.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to support consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility to explore country-specific issues in greater depth. The interviews were designed to clarify survey responses, explore areas requiring further explanation and capture the contextual factors and operational nuances that could not be fully reflected through the survey alone.

To support discussion and elicit practical examples, three operational vignettes were incorporated into the interview process. These scenario-based exercises were used to explore how agencies would respond to common child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) situations in practice, providing richer insight into operational capabilities, decision-making processes and system-level strengths and challenges.

The interview process formed part of a broader verification strategy designed to strengthen data quality and reliability. Where survey responses were incomplete, contradictory or where multiple responses were received from the same country, interviews were used to seek clarification and establish the most accurate representation of national practice. A structured decision-making process was applied to document discrepancies, amendments and the rationale for any revisions to the dataset. In cases where interview findings differed from survey responses, both sources were retained within the study records, and final assessments through consensus by systems strengthening research team, based on the most credible and evidence-based information available.

Interview findings were documented and recorded for subsequent qualitative analysis. Data from the interviews were used to complement and contextualise the survey results, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of law enforcement responses across participating countries.

Survey responses and follow-up interviews for the 2026 Index closed at the end of May 2026. Data submitted after this date were not included in the 2026 Index analysis.

Data analysis

The data derived from the desk review, survey and semi-structured interviews were analysed to examine countries/OCTs/SARs' capacities and capabilities in responding to CSEA. Together, it provided a comprehensive and contextualised understanding of national systems where possible.

Table 2 provides a summary of the 15 indicators and the number of countries/OCTs/ SARs included in each indicator.

Table 2: Indicators, response options and countries in scope

	Indicator	Response options	Numbers in scope (total)	Number in scope (NA)	Number in scope (LATAM)	Number in scope (EAP)
Data sources						
1	Number of CSEA data sources being utilised	(up to 5 – NCMEC, ICSE, CRC, Hotline, ICACCOPS)	37	2	24	11
2	Utilisation of NCMEC	yes/no	37	2	24	11
3	Connection to ICSE (member countries only)	yes/no	67	2	36	29
4	Utilisation of CRC	yes/no	37	2	24	11

5	Hotline Availability	yes/no	100	3	51	46
6	Utilisation of ICACCOPs	yes/no	37	2	24	11
7	NCMEC routes	direct/indirect/not receiving	100	3	51	46
Specialist resources						
8	CSEA investigational capabilities for online CSEA	yes/no/don't know	37	2	24	11
9	Analysts for online CSEA	yes/no/don't know	37	2	24	11
10	CSEA training within specialist units	no/up to 25%/up to 50%/up to 75%/All/don't know	37	2	24	11
11	Digital forensic capability for online CSEA investigations	no or limited/up to 25%/up to 50%/up to 75%/All cases/don't know	37	2	24	11
Legislation						
12	Legislation for CSAM production, possession, distribution and sale	yes/no/unclear	100	3	51	46
13	Legislation for online grooming	yes/no/unclear	100	3	51	46
14	Legislation for ISP to retain data for a fixed period	yes/no/unclear	100	3	51	46
15	Legislation for ISP to share data with law enforcement	yes/no/unclear	100	3	51	46

**For ICSE data, only Interpol member countries were included (66 countries) with the addition of Hong Kong (SAR) which has an established ICSE connection.*

Given the substantial variation across countries/OCTs/SARs in relation to data availability, operational transparency, reporting infrastructure and accessibility of information, indicators were developed using the most appropriate and robust source of evidence available for each area of examination. Consequently, not all indicators were derived from the same methodological approach. The decision to utilise desk review, survey responses, interviews or combined methods was informed by:

- the nature of the information being measured
- the extent to which information could be independently verified
- the availability of publicly accessible evidence
- whether the indicator related to formal system availability or operational system utilisation

Indicators relating to publicly verifiable legislation, institutional arrangements, formal reporting systems or international membership structures were primarily derived

through desk review. These included indicators relating to:

- ICSE connection (indicator 3)
- national hotlines (indicator 5)
- NCMEC referral routes (indicator 7)
- legislative frameworks (indicators 12-15)

Desk review was prioritised for these indicators because the relevant information could be identified, cross-checked and verified through official legislation, institutional publications, annual reports, government documents, international databases and established organisational sources. In several instances, findings were also verified directly by partner organisations or triangulated through multiple independent sources to strengthen reliability.

By contrast, indicators relating to data sources utilisation, specialist workforce capacity and investigative resources were primarily derived through survey responses and validated through follow-up semi-structured interviews. These included indicators relating to:

- NCMEC utilisation (indicator 2)
- CRC utilisation (indicator 4)
- ICACCOPS utilisation (indicator 6)
- specialist online CSEA investigational capabilities (indicator 8)
- dedicated online CSEA analysts (indicator 9)
- specialist workforce training (indicator 10)
- digital forensic capabilities (indicator 11)

Survey and interview methods were prioritised for these indicators because such information is rarely publicly available and often relates directly to internal operational structures, staffing arrangements, institutional processes, investigative practice and technological resources that cannot be reliably assessed through desk review alone. These indicators therefore relied primarily on self-reported institutional data provided by personnel directly involved in online CSEA investigation and response.

Structured triangulation formed a central component of the analytical process. Findings from desk review, legislative review, surveys, interviews and secondary documentation were systematically compared and cross-checked to strengthen validity, improve consistency and identify contradictions, gaps or discrepancies across sources. Triangulation was particularly important in contexts where:

- survey responses were incomplete or inconsistent
- publicly available information was limited or outdated
- contradictory findings emerged across multiple sources

Where discrepancies arose between survey responses and desk review findings, additional verification was undertaken through follow-up interviews, consultation with technical partners and review of supplementary documentation. The follow-up interview findings were used to validate and contextualise desk review and survey findings. This

approach was selected in recognition of the complexity and variability of law enforcement and child protection systems internationally, as well as the limitations associated with relying solely on self-reported institutional data. This triangulation process enabled the research team to identify important gaps between formal system structures and operational realities, which emerged as a recurring theme across several jurisdictions.

To visualise each indicator, descriptive statistics consisting of percentages were used. Data were visualised using bar graphs and presented by both UNICEF and geographic regions. Descriptive statistics and visualisation were conducted using R version 4.6.0 (R Core Team, 2026).

Semi-structured interview data were analysed thematically, and qualitative findings were used to complement quantitative findings and identify examples of good practice. The analysis focused particularly on NCMEC referral routes, specialist resources (including dedicated online analysts and digital forensic capability), and examples of good practice.

The qualitative findings provide contextual insights that help to interpret and explain the quantitative data on national responses to CSEA.

Importantly, the indicators should not be interpreted as direct measures of prevalence, investigative effectiveness or overall child protection quality. Rather, they provide contextualised evidence regarding system capacity, operational capability and institutional preparedness within national responses to child sexual exploitation and abuse.

The analysis further acknowledged that stronger reporting systems, specialist investigative resources and more developed international referral pathways may increase the visibility and recording of CSEA cases, rather than necessarily indicating higher prevalence of abuse. Conversely, limited reporting infrastructure, weak operational capability or restricted access to international systems may reduce the visibility of abuse within official data systems. Consequently, the indicators should be interpreted alongside broader political, social, economic, technological and regional contexts, as well as in conjunction with qualitative findings and wider prevalence estimates presented within the Into the Light Index 2026.

Data quality and limitations

OCTs and SARs were grouped regionally based on their geographical locations, however their governance, legal systems, and operational capabilities may more closely align with their sovereign state than other countries, OCTs and SAR within its regional group. Therefore, the regional groups for OCTs and SARs should be interpreted as an analytical choice, and this may not accurately represent the culture, economy, legal systems or politics of the OCTs or SARs.

The methodological distinction between desk review and survey-based indicators reflects a broader conceptual distinction within this indicator area between system availability and system utilisation.

Desk review indicators primarily capture the formal existence of systems, legislation, reporting mechanisms, institutional membership or international partnerships. However, the existence of a formal arrangement does not necessarily indicate active operational use within national investigative systems. For example, publicly available information may demonstrate that a country has direct access to data such as NCMEC, but this alone does not establish whether referrals are routinely received, processed, investigated or operationally integrated into national responses to CSEA.

In practice, some countries/OCTs/SARs may possess formal access to international systems while making only limited or intermittent use of them. In other contexts, operational access may be concentrated within a specific agency that is not routinely engaged in online CSEA investigations. Conversely, some countries/OCTs/SARs may utilise intelligence systems, technological resources or investigative partnerships through informal operational arrangements that are not publicly documented.

This issue was particularly relevant for indicators relating to NCMEC, CRC and ICACCOPS utilisation. While publicly available reports and organisational publications may identify partnerships, referral pathways, technical assistance or training activities, they do not necessarily provide sufficient evidence regarding the extent of ongoing operational use within national law enforcement systems.

For example, NCMEC annual reports identify countries/OCTs/SARs that were sent CyberTipline referrals but cannot indicate whether those referrals are routinely accessed, triaged, investigated or actioned by national authorities. Similarly, publicly available information concerning CRC or ICACCOPS frequently documents training activities, technical partnerships or international collaboration, but often lacks sufficient operational detail to confirm active investigative utilisation.

As a result, survey respondents were asked directly whether their agencies actively utilised NCMEC referrals, CRC systems and ICACCOPS resources within their operational responses to online CSEA. Follow-up interviews were subsequently used to clarify responses and explore how these systems functioned in practice within national investigative and safeguarding contexts.

A further limitation relates to the proportion of ‘don’t know’ responses across the specialist resources indicators, including specialist online CSEA investigative capabilities (Indicator 8), dedicated online CSEA analysts (Indicator 9), specialist workforce training (Indicator 10), and digital forensic capabilities (Indicator 11). These ‘don’t know’ responses cannot be meaningfully interpreted, as there is no clear rationale explaining them. They may be due to unclear survey questions or respondents not having access to the relevant information. However, in the absence of confirmed reasons, these responses were not analysed further within the findings.

Moreover, the countries/OCTs/SARs in scope range widely in size and population so it is accepted that there will be a variability in law enforcement capacities across larger countries. Some will operate at state level with different mechanisms and policies across the country. This indicator area aimed to capture data from a national perspective,

seeking responses from those able to give a general overview of the country's approaches. However, responses would have been limited by the knowledge of the respondents.

The framework further acknowledges that not all incidents of CSEA are identified, reported, investigated or recorded within formal systems. Consequently, the indicators should not be interpreted as measures of prevalence or effectiveness alone, but rather as indicators of system capacity, operational readiness, institutional capability and infrastructure.

Finally, information was correct at the time the survey was submitted or the time the data was received. Any legislative amendments, policy reforms, institutional developments or new connections to international data sources and intelligence systems that occurred after the completion of the desk review were not incorporated into the analysis. This includes, but is not limited to, new memberships, partnerships, operational agreements, referral pathways, reporting mechanisms or legislative changes established after April 2026.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Edinburgh through the Childlight Research Ethics Sub-Committee (CRESC). Reference SSII-LD-240924CL.

The study was conducted in accordance with the University's ethical principles and procedures for research involving human participants. Participation in the survey and interviews was voluntary, and all data were collected, stored, and analysed in line with relevant data protection and confidentiality requirements.

Use of artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools, including ChatGPT, were used during the legislative review as a supplementary search and retrieval tool to assist in identifying relevant legislation, policy documents and grey literature. AI-generated outputs were not used as primary sources of evidence. All information retrieved through AI-assisted searches was independently verified against original sources, official documents or established secondary sources before inclusion in the analysis. AI tools were not used for writing this document.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest relating to the design, data collection, analysis, interpretation or reporting of the findings presented in this technical note.

Registered Protocol: https://osf.io/m6ks8/

Data Availability

The aggregated data frames used for the project *System Strengthening* are available as open access in the Childlight DataShare repository, within the wider *2026 Into the Light Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*: https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/8210

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