

Safe Digital Futures: Data for Change 2024 Briefing Note



Setting the stage for change

The Data for Change initiative

The Data for Change initiative, launched in November 2022, unites experts from government, industry, civil society, and academia to strengthen the global data ecosystem on online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA) and broader online safety for children. It aims to create a more coherent data ecosystem including through mapping data gaps and good practices, addressing barriers to data sharing, and building robust systems to inform policies, advocacy, and interventions fostering safer digital spaces for children worldwide. Read more about the Data for Change journey <u>here</u>.

Progress in 2024

In 2024, the Data for Change initiative held two pivotal events to advance its mission of creating a stronger, more coherent global data ecosystem on online CSEA and child online safety:

- **1. London Technical Workshop:** This inperson workshop focused on how data is collected, used, shared, and translated into action within the online CSEA ecosystem, aided by the online CSEA data ecosystem map that Safe Online commissioned. The community identified critical gaps, barriers, and opportunities to improve data flows and infrastructure, while sharing best practices from the online CSEA ecosystem and related fields.
- 2. Virtual Convening: This online event brought together stakeholders from diverse geographies and perspectives to engage with the findings from the London workshop. Participants contributed to the ongoing refinement of the ecosystem map and collaborated on innovative solutions for protecting children in the digital world.

This briefing note integrates the key inputs and messages from both events, highlighting the insights, strategies, and calls to action that emerged.



Online (SEA data ecosystem mapping

The visual ecosystem mapping of the online CSEA data ecosystem, commissioned by Safe Online, captures the full spectrum of complexities within the ecosystem and illustrates its ideal state. The community reviewed this mapping during the events, examining key stages of the data lifecyclegovernance, collection, storage and processing, sharing, and use—to identify where critical gaps persisted and what was working well (summarized in the table below). This collaborative effort provided a comprehensive understanding of the ecosystem's strengths and areas for improvement, laying the groundwork for actionable strategies to address these challenges.

Ecosystem map



See here ecosystem map



Children's voices: Voices and perspectives of perpetrators (such as children as perpetrators or peer-to-peer violence) and parents are not adequately considered.

Feel safe: Some children struggle to identify when they are unsafe, and unsafe online environments often reflect unsafe offline environments. This is reflected differently across country contexts.

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Performance: Criteria to evaluate AI and other tech tools lack granularity.

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Best practice: Global North-South knowledge exchange is inadequate, limiting the contextualization of tools for the Global South.

Accountability: Lack of accountability with regards to significant disparities in investments and responses to online safety issues between the Global North and Global South, particularly due to stricter laws in the Global North.

Data Ethics: A good practice example highlighted – Childlight has developed a bespoke ethics process across a university, one of the first of its kind.

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Terminology: A good practice example highlighted - The Luxembourg Guidelines has allowed harmonization of terminologies.



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Rights respecting: The perceived trade off between automation in data collection and protecting individual rights remains a challenge.

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Targeted: Ensuring data collection efforts are proportionate to the level of threat/relevance is difficult.

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Global view: Data collection efforts are hindered by a lack of electronic systems and repositories particularly in resource-limited settings.

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Agile: Datasets often take too long to compile, limiting their utility and relevance for timely decision-making.

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Meets Needs: Challenges in identifying the most critical data to collect (prioritization) and designing tools to streamline the process.

Informed collection: There is a strong appetite to collect more data and gain a deeper understanding of the landscape.

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Targeted: Large-scale survivor surveys are being conducted, providing critical insights.

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Global view: The availability of comparable national data is expanding, enhancing cross-country analysis and understanding.

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Ecosystem access: A wide variety of stakeholders are actively collecting relevant, diverse, and complementary data.



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Automation: Automated content moderation systems lack adequate support for outsourced moderators, especially those based locally, who face unique challenges.

Controlled access: Access to specific, localized datasets is limited and often relationshipdependent. Historically, datasets have been primarily available only from EU survivors, limiting broader insights.

Processing power: Computational resources remain heavily concentrated among major tech companies, creating significant inequalities in data processing capacity.



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Standardisation: A good practice example highlighted - INHOPE's Universal Classification Schema is an effort to harmonise terminology on OCSEA and CSAM.

Bias recognition: A good practice example highlighted - Rigr AI trains AI specifically on bias, and has an intentional approach on understanding and communicating the limitations of AI, particularly around working with under represented groups.









Interoperability: Lack of coherence and interoperability of APIs hinders seamless data sharing. Discrepancies in definitions and systems within sectors lead to misalignment and inefficiencies.

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Common legal basis: Differences in data protection laws and penal codes across jurisdictions create significant barriers to effective data sharing.

Trusted relationships: Limited clarity on what happens after data is shared, pointing to the need for transparency reporting frameworks.



Legal barriers: Mechanisms such as vetting through partnerships (eg. using third party intermediaries) currently exists to expand data sharing offerings and ensure legal compliance. These approaches can serve as blueprints for future data-sharing initiatives.



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Data literacy: The absence of robust criteria for research standards and lack of understanding in discerning scientific-rigour of research results in low-quality data being used, even in significant policy outputs.

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Child-friendly: Limited capacity to effectively extract insights and communicate them to key groups such as activists and survivors, with a need for strategic communication skills, storytelling, and data visualization.

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Verifiable insights: Need for greater transparency. Insufficient clarity on the limitations of current tools, including the contexts in which they are not fit for deployment, especially as tools often fail to analyze all groups equally.

Future-proofed: While generative or nonacademic research can be faster in uncovering new insights, quality assurance mechanisms, such as a data transparency checklist or evaluating bodies, are crucial to ensure reliability and relevance.

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Actionable: There has been progress in regulation with some governments such as the UK and Australia demonstrating increased political will for data-driven decision making for this issue.

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Child-friendly: Data is being used to inform and evaluate effective education programs for youth and caregiver audiences in various global contexts, specifically by local CSOs.

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Root causes: A shift has been made recently across the ecosystem to acknowledge the necessity of upstream interventions and public health approaches to more comprehensively address ending online CSEA.

Breaking down barriers and challenges

Participants also explored the Political, Economic, Societal, Technological, Legal, and Environmental (PESTLE) barriers that affect the online CSEA data ecosystem. This session encouraged reflection on how these barriers impede progress and included the use of an effort-impact matrix to prioritize challenges based on their complexity and the feasibility of addressing them. Additionally, the community engaged in a discussion around perceived versus actual barriers, delving into misaligned perceptions that may hinder progress and identifying areas where efforts could be redirected for maximum impact.

This structured approach marks a step toward concentrating collective efforts where they can be most effective, fostering collaboration and driving progress within the ecosystem. The barriers are listed below, with those most strongly emphasized by the community highlighted in bold.

Political

- Lack of assimilation of accepted universal terminology into national legislation and policies.
- High variance in government regulations on internet safety.
- High variance in national initiatives for digital education.
- Low political attention and exceptional policy making.
- Political agenda shifts and changes in government leadership.

- Concerns about reputational risks hindering transparency and action.
- Difficulty prioritizing critical data amidst extensive data collection efforts.
- Regulatory frameworks failing to keep pace with technological advancements.

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Economic

- Funding priorities are short-term, siloed, and often reactive.
- Funding is rarely allocated specifically for statistics and data collection, due to perception of the issue as a cost rather than an investment.
- Reputational risk from participating in OCSEA-response initiatives.
- High resource cost associated with processes for online CSEA data processing.
- Limited availability of funding relative to the scale of harm.
- Funding is frequently inaccessible due to high capacity requirements.



Societal

- Cultural taboos with sexuality leading to underreporting.
- Inconsistent, damaging, and victim-blaming terminology used in reporting products or the media.
- Data gaps within the system from children about their experiences.
- High variance in the methodologies applied to measure OCSEA.
- Lack of recognition of data bias, e.g. data focusing primarily on detected offenders.
- Inequity in data landscape across geographies, groups, and characteristics.

- Legal complexity and ambiguity create a tension between data privacy and sharing.
- Lack of positive outcome reporting.
- Lack of feedback of outcomes to data owners.
- Rapid evolution of terminology, creating challenges in public discourse.
- Limited trust in institutions and systems, particularly where general legal and protective support mechanisms are weak.

Technological

- Rapid evolution of technology reduces resilience to new offending techniques.
- Increasing data volumes resulting in unsustainable demand on resources.
- Inconsistent data storage standards across stakeholders and countries.
- Inefficiency (inc. duplication) in technical activity across datasets and stakeholders.

- Inconsistent classification and data attribution between datasets.
- Limited interoperability between online platform datasets and data infrastructure.
- Access restrictions for more granular, disaggregated data.



- High costs associated with legal work.
- High variance in legal standards across jurisdictions.

Ambiguity in data privacy and protection laws rely on organizational interpretation.

(ommunity tools & resources

Developed with the support of PA Consulting and grounded in community insights, these tools are designed to help members better understand the online CSEA data ecosystem and address its key challenges. We encourage you to explore and use them to drive impactful solutions and foster collaboration.

Online CSEA Data Ecosystem Map

A visualization of the ideal state of the online CSEA data ecosystem, encompassing the data lifecycle.

Challenges and Barriers of the Online CSEA Data Ecosystem

An overview of systemic obstacles that impede efforts for a strong online CSEA data ecosystem, analysed through the PESTLE (Political, Economic, Societal, Technical, Legal and Environmental) framework.

Good Practices Bank

A collection of successful approaches, good practices and insights for strengthening the online CSEA data ecosystem, drawn from other fields such as cybersecurity, the financial sector, global health and others.

See more here

Solutions for a stronger data ecosystem

Based on the insights from the effortimpact matrix, the community identified six promising pilot projects aimed at addressing crucial challenges within the online CSEA data ecosystem. These projects represent actionable solutions with the potential to drive meaningful change and strengthen the ecosystem's capacity to protect children online. Below, we outline these initiatives and highlight key considerations based on discussions during the convenings.

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This pilot aims to develop a repository or knowledge hub to centralize existing online CSEA case studies, research reports, and data. A key focus is to translate these resources into accessible and digestible formats tailored to the needs of different stakeholders. This involves summarizing key findings, simplifying complex language, and presenting information in visually engaging ways (e.g., infographics, short briefs).

Principles:

- Prioritize Global South data: The repository should emphasize the inclusion of research and data from the Global South, recognizing the diverse experiences and contexts related to online CSEA.
- Openness to various methodologies: The project should accommodate research conducted using a range of methodologies, reflecting the breadth of approaches used in studying online CSEA.
- Intentional data gathering and use: The repository should be developed with a clear understanding of who needs the data, for what purpose, and how it will be used to inform action and create positive change.

Key considerations:

- Accessibility and digestibility: How can research findings be effectively translated into accessible and user-friendly formats for different audiences (e.g., policymakers, practitioners, law enforcement, the general public)?
- Resource maintenance: How will the repository be maintained and updated to ensure the information remains current and relevant?
- Vetting processes: What mechanisms will be put in place to vet the quality and reliability of resources included in the repository?
- Determining relevance and usefulness: How will the project assess which resources are most useful for specific purposes and target audiences?
- Managing access: What access controls and permissions will be implemented to ensure openness as well as appropriate use of the repository and its contents?



This pilot aims to create a global mapping of hotlines and helplines dedicated to addressing online CSEA, which will be hosted on a living repository. The map would include quality indicators about data practices.

Pilot goals:

- Understand the different capacities of hotlines and helplines around the world and their data practices; what data is being processed where, what methodologies and classifications are used, to what degree of sophistication and granularity.
- Identify where resources need to be directed to even out data flows.
- Establish a system for real-time, multilingual threat detection.
- Facilitate the identification of international trends in online CSEA.
- Promote a clear understanding of data limits.
- Expand harmonization and standardization of data practices across hotlines to promote interoperability.

Key considerations:

- Data quality and classification standards: Deciding which data quality and classification standards to include is crucial for ensuring consistency and comparability across different hotlines.
- Global North/South discrepancy: Addressing the digital divide and capacity discrepancies between the Global North and South is essential for ensuring equitable participation and data representation.
- Capacity building: The project should consider how to leverage resources to equalize capacity among participating hotlines, particularly those in the Global South.

Ongoing initiatives:

- CESAGRAM Knowledge Hub: This existing knowledge hub can provide a valuable foundation for the living repository, offering resources and insights related to online CSEA.
- NCMEC Global Policy Platform: The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's (NCMEC) global policy platform can contribute to the project by providing information on relevant policies and legislation.
- Save the Children Internal Overviews: Save the Children's internal overviews of hotlines and their data practices can offer insights and inform the development of the living repository.





This pilot focuses on designing inclusive knowledge exchange opportunities specifically for hotlines and helplines working to address online CSEA.

Pilot goals:

- Facilitate the sharing of methodologies and expertise among hotlines and helplines.
- Promote the replication of successful tools and approaches.
- Encourage collaboration between hotlines and helplines at the national level.
- Enhance service delivery by streamlining communication and coordination between hotlines and helplines.

Key considerations:

- Targeted support: Adopting a needs-based approach to knowledge exchange allows helplines and hotlines to request specific assistance and guidance from others, ensuring that the exchange is tailored to their unique challenges.
- Problem-solving and innovation: Success involves not only sharing ideas and tools, but also identifying existing gaps in knowledge and practice as well as developing and implementing solutions to address those gaps.
- Measurable change: The impact of the knowledge exchange should be evident through tangible improvements in the functioning of helplines and hotlines.
- Creating safe spaces: This involves carefully considering who should be involved, the topics to be included, prioritization of topics, access requirements, vetting mechanisms, and strategies for promoting South-South exchange.

Ongoing initiatives:

- INHOPE: This organization already provides some funding for hotlines to visit other hotlines and share best practices. They also facilitate data sharing between hotlines and produce an annual report discussing observed trends, which serves as a valuable knowledge exchange platform.
- Child Helpline International (CHI): CHI takes a regional approach to knowledge exchange, supporting helplines in visiting and learning from each other.
- IWF: In the UK, hotlines and helplines already work closely together, with helplines offering emotional support as part of a coordinated response system. IWF often shares knowledge as well as support for capacity building with other hotlines globally



Data narratives

This pilot centers on promoting responsible data use for diverse applications, emphasizing the importance of clear and accurate communication in conveying information about online CSEA data. The pilot recognizes the power of language in shaping perceptions and aims to develop survivor-centered narratives that avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Pilot goals:

- Develop a shared understanding of the importance of responsible data use across various applications.
- Establish a set of clear and consistent terms for discussing online CSEA in different languages, ensuring cultural sensitivity and accuracy.
- Develop survivor-centered narratives that challenge harmful stereotypes and promote a nuanced understanding of the issue.
- Create communication materials tailored to diverse audiences, effectively conveying key messages about online CSEA and its impact.
- Widespread adoption of agreed-upon terminology within the online CSEA field.

Key considerations:

- Audience-specific communication: The pilot should develop tailored communication strategies for different audiences, recognizing the unique needs and perspectives of each group.
- Contextualization and localization of narratives: Adapting narratives to specific cultural contexts and languages is essential for ensuring relevance and avoiding misinterpretations.
- Alignment with related fields and global digital agendas: The pilot should consider how to align its efforts with initiatives in related fields, such as child protection and digital rights, as well as broader global digital agendas like the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (WSIS).
- Intercultural and intersectionality approach: Developing narratives that are inclusive and sensitive to the diverse experiences of children and survivors.
- Children and survivor involvement: Ensuring that their voices and experiences are central to the messaging.
- Specific aims: Consider strategic goals of narratives and the design of narratives for targeted outcomes such as increasing political will or generating financing for the ecosystem.

Ongoing initiatives:

 Luxembourg Guidelines: These guidelines, which focus on terminology related to child sexual abuse material, provide a foundation for developing consistent language and messaging. The pilot could leverage these guidelines and explore ways to make them more accessible to diverse stakeholders, such as through the creation of concise summaries for different audiences.

Common data infrastructure

This pilot project aims to create a centralized repository of measurement tools relevant to online CSEA. The goal is to improve methodological standards and data comparability across the field.

Pilot goals:

- Centralized repository: Offer researchers and practitioners easy access to various measurement tools for online CSEA research.
- Improved methodological rigor: Promote the use of standardized tools and methods to enhance data quality and consistency in online CSEA research.
- Data comparability: Increase the comparability of data from different organizations and researchers, allowing for more robust analysis and insights.
- Facilitate connections: Connect stakeholders to people with direct experience of developing and using measurement tools, including challenges, failures and lessons learned.

Key considerations

- Emerging technology integration: Consider how emerging technologies, such as AI and machine learning, could be integrated into the infrastructure to enhance data collection, analysis, and sharing.
- Scientific rigor: Prioritize scientific rigor in all aspects, from tool selection to data analysis and interpretation.
- Quality assurance of tools: Establish robust mechanisms to vet the quality and relevance of tools included in the repository. This should involve developing criteria to assess validity, reliability, and cultural appropriateness. Additionally, it should promote transparency about limitations and challenges of the tools.
 - Consider utilizing benchmark datasets—protected datasets held by organizations with authorized access to such data (e.g., INHOPE, IWF)—to evaluate the performance of tools effectively.
- Addressing data gaps: Prioritize addressing key data gaps in online CSEA research where standardized tools and methodologies are most needed.
- User experience: Prioritize the searchability and UI/UX design of the repository to promote its use.

Policy and legal participation

The pilot focuses on broadening participation within the online CSEA data ecosystem (specifically the Data for Change community), particularly by engaging government, regulatory, legal, and policy stakeholders. It highlights the importance of translating and bridging data efforts to future-proof regulations and create concrete engagement opportunities.

Pilot goals:

- Increased engagement of legal stakeholders: The pilot aims to involve more government, regulatory, legal, and policy stakeholders in the community including relevant roles within tech industry.
- · Clearer understanding of regulator needs: Improving understanding of the specific

data needs of regulators would enable more targeted and effective data collection and analysis efforts.

- Input from regulators on future directions: Obtaining input from regulators on the general direction and priorities for future policy and regulation development would ensure that data efforts align with the evolving regulatory landscape.
- Translation of data efforts into policy and regulation: The project seeks to translate and bridge data findings into actionable policy and regulatory recommendations. This includes developing a framework or checklist of principles that can guide the development of future regulations.

Key considerations:

- Diversity of legal stakeholders: The legal landscape is complex, with a wide range of actors holding different roles and responsibilities. The pilot must carefully consider the specific needs and perspectives of different legal stakeholders to ensure effective engagement.
- Early legal engagement: Fostering early and ongoing collaboration with legal experts in data efforts from the outset can help ensure alignment with legal requirements while also exploring innovative solutions within established boundaries. A more integrated approach will create opportunities for greater synergy between legal, technical, and child protection roles, enhancing both compliance and impact.
- Cross-regulatory needs: Regulations related to online CSEA often overlap with regulations in other sectors, such as data privacy and telecommunications. The pilot should consider these intersections to develop comprehensive and coherent policy recommendations.
- Political feasibility: The pilot must carefully consider the political feasibility of proposed policy and regulatory changes. Identifying areas of common ground between different political parties can increase the likelihood of successful implementation.

Ongoing initiatives:

- Existing organizational structures: Leveraging existing frameworks and organizational structures, such as those within the OECD or other government-affiliated organizations, could provide a foundation for collaboration and data sharing with legal and policy stakeholders.
- Tech Coalition: The Tech Coalition, which focuses on engaging industry representatives in online child protection efforts, could serve as a model for facilitating collaboration and engaging more legal and policy industry representatives.



Equity and representation

The community also tackled the issue of equity—asking whose voices are missing from the data ecosystem and how to ensure greater representation.

Key themes that emerged:

- Inclusion of non-English-speaking online spaces and local voices in data collection is crucial for a more representative and inclusive global picture. At the same time, there needs to be explicit recognition of the limitations faced when translating data across languages.
- Participants emphasised empowering children and young researchers to engage in data collection from the ground, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).
- There were calls for regional meetings to ensure accessibility, as well as the creation of a "People's Panel" to involve communities more directly in data equity discussions.
- There is a significant disparity in investment and response to online safety issues between the Global North and South, with stricter laws, more advanced technological solutions, and stronger formal support systems—such as legal and protection frameworks—often concentrated in the Global North. In contrast, responses in the Global South are shaped by relatively weaker formal support systems, and online safety challenges often mirror the broader safety issues present offline.
 - To bridge this gap, fostering North-South collaboration is essential through initiatives to build local capacity and empower local researchers. A more equitable distribution of funding and resources for system-wide strengthening is crucial.



Next steps

Join the Data for Change Community and share your updates through the <u>Community Updates Form</u>: Stay connected and contribute to the collective progress by filling out the community updates form. This is an opportunity to share your ongoing work, insights, and developments with the wider community, ensuring transparency, collaboration, and alignment in our efforts to strengthen the online CSEA data ecosystem. Your updates will help inform future activities and foster a stronger, more coordinated network.

Express your interest in pilot projects: If you are interested in participating in any of the pilot projects outlined above, please indicate your interest Safe to Online. Joining these initiatives provides an opportunity to directly contribute to actionable solutions, collaborate with diverse stakeholders, and help address critical challenges within the online CSEA data ecosystem. Your involvement can drive meaningful change and bring valuable perspectives to these efforts.



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Accountability

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