Urban95 Academy Working Paper

Early Childhood Development and Cities

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Abstract

This working paper focuses on how the built environment and policy decisions of cities can support or hinder healthy early childhood development (ECD) and what city officials say are the biggest challenges they face. Through the exploration of the connection between ECD and urban design focusing on babies, toddlers, young children and their caregivers, the paper aims to situate city-specific challenges within the broader academic discourse on ECD, urban policy, and inclusive city design. The research analyses real world challenges reported by 358 city teams from 75 countries who have applied to participate in the Urban95 Academy programme between 2021 and 2024. The Urban95 Academy is a fully-funded executive education programme for municipal leaders to gain tools and develop strategies to make cities better for babies, toddlers and their caregivers. Despite regional and contextual differences, city teams across the globe report physical space, mobility, policy/governance and inequality as the top four challenges they are contending with regarding children 0-5 years old and their caregivers in cities. By presenting existing data collected through the Urban95 Academy and bringing attention to these issues the paper aims to help urbanists, urban researchers and municipal leaders in conceptualising how cities can engage with children and caregivers and ensure that urban policies and designs prioritise child-friendly environments. Further, it aims to contribute to a broader understanding of cities' needs in developing approaches to become more child-friendly and supportive of ECD in planning and policy.

Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

When young children are considered in urban planning and policy, it is often in the realms of health and education. Further, early childhood interventions and policies are often siloed or conceived of with a narrow focus, rather than thinking wholistically about the city. The Urban95 Initiative developed by the Van Leer Foundation, asks urban planners and policy makers to think beyond those sectors and to think collaboratively. The approach invites municipal leaders to consider cities from 95cm, the height of a healthy three-year-old and from that vantage point, to see how the whole city could change to better support young children and their caregivers. By exploring urban design and planning through the lens of early childhood development (ECD) one must consider children, and caregiver needs across all aspects of urban life.

The Urban95 Academy originated from the Urban95 Initiative and is a joint collaboration from the Van Leer Foundation and LSE Cities, providing training to municipal leaders worldwide to gain tools to develop strategies to design and deliver better cities for babies, toddlers and their caregivers. (Urban95 Academy, 2025)

There is ample evidence that young children and their caregivers interact with the built environment in particular ways. For example, people who care for young children use public transport and other non-motorised transport modes at higher rates than those who don't have caregiving responsibilities (Kurshitashvili et al. 2022). Public spaces often fail to meet the needs of young children, with many urban environments lacking accessible, child-friendly areas that are necessary to promote exploration, play, and learning. Inadequate or lack of access to green spaces and parks limit opportunities for physical activity, which is crucial for children's health and cognitive development (González et al., 2010).

Despite their reliance on public space and infrastructure for healthy development, the voices and experiences of young children and those who care for them are seldom considered in urban planning and design. This lack of recognition can lead to negative outcomes, such as inadequate access to safe places to play and socialise, or insufficient transportation options tailored to young children and their caregivers. These deficiencies not only affect children's healthy development and wellbeing but also create challenges for caregivers, often leading to heightened stress, limited mobility, and barriers to full participation in urban life.

While specific needs of young children and their caregivers are not routinely prioritised in mainstream urban planning and policy, the idea is gaining traction among some urban leaders and thinkers. The term "Child-Friendly City" is widely understood to have been introduced in 1996 during the United Nations Habitat II Conference held in Istanbul and has gained traction in the intervening years advocating for fostering children's development, ensuring the protection of their fundamental rights, and enhancing their subjective wellbeing by improving the quality of urban environments. (Sapsağlam & Eryılmaz, 2024)

A deeper understanding from municipal leaders of how where a child grows up impacts their wellbeing and life outcomes is necessary to build capacity within local government to deliver urban spaces that support healthy brain development in the early years of life. The starting point of this initiative is an understanding that investment in high-quality early childhood interventions has a profound impact not only on children's life outcomes but also on broader urban outcomes, influencing social, economic, and environmental conditions.

The importance of these interventions is supported by evidence from studies which highlight how ECD programmes can positively affect cognitive, emotional, and social outcomes for children, leading to greater success later in life and a more equitable society (Heckman, 2011; Marmot, 2010). Therefore, the role of cities is crucial, as urban environments shape the formative experiences of young children, from physical spaces to social dynamics.

Recognising these limitations, this working paper makes use of data gathered from surveys given to city teams applying to the first seven cohorts of the Urban95 Academy. The 358 city teams reflected in this paper applied to the programme between 2021 – 2024 and shared specific, real-world challenges they are facing in their municipalities related to young children and their caregivers. City teams included in the data sample did not necessarily participate or complete the programme, but they answered specific survey questions regarding the sectors of local government engaging with young children and caregivers in their cities and the specific challenges they are facing.

One of the unique aspects of this research lies in its geographical breadth. With data collected from city teams representing 75 countries, it offers a rare and comprehensive snapshot of how urban policies and infrastructure currently support, or

fail to support, young children and their caregivers. The findings underscore significant regional differences, yet they also highlight universal issues, such as inadequate public spaces for children, insufficient child and caregiver-oriented services, high levels of particulate matter in the air children breathe and the general lack of integration of ECD considerations into urban planning.

Exploring the data provided in this sample is an opportunity to examine regional and global trends, as well as universal and context-specific challenges. Situating current, real-world urban challenges within the broader academic discourse on ECD, urban policy, and inclusive city design, the paper seeks to demonstrate the demand from cities across the globe for more research, practical guidelines, and innovative solutions to address the needs of young children and their caregivers living in urban environments. By bringing attention to these issues, the paper's aim is to contribute to a broader understanding of how cities can become more child-friendly and supportive of ECD in their planning and policies.

This analysis highlights the key areas of urban design and planning that city teams report present the most significant challenges to them in supporting the healthy development of children. By focusing on these aspects that reach beyond health and education, and that emphasise a more cross departmental collaborative approach to urban design, the goal is to uncover how further academic investigation can support cities around the world to create environments conducive to the wellbeing of children and their caregivers.

The working paper first explores existing literature dealing with ECD in urban design and planning and then moves into the methodology used in collecting data before delving into the initial findings of our study. The finding section is broken down into 4 sections: 1. Geographical Representation, which explains which regions are represented in the sample. 2. Departmental Representation, outlining which governmental sectors and departments are represented in the sample. 3. Key Challenges, which explores the main themes that emerged as posing the most pressing challenges related to young children and caregivers in each city. The key challenges were analysed by region and the data was also further examined to look specifically at a smaller portion of the sample which isolated city teams that had representation from a mayor or deputy mayor. The last section concludes the findings and looks ahead to next steps in the existing dataset analysis.

2 Literature review

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of ECD within urban planning and design, highlighting the role of the built environment in shaping young children's developmental outcomes. Despite this increased attention, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how urban environments influence ECD, particularly in terms of identifying actionable urban policy and planning strategies that cater to the needs of young children and their caregivers.

The built environment is a key factor in physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development (Weinstein & David, 1987) and there is no universal guideline for creating child-friendly cities but rather a need for principles and adaptable ideas to inform urban design (Vincelot, 2018). Building on this notion, Villanueva et al. (2022) detect that while neighbourhood-built environment characteristics are linked to various health and wellbeing outcomes across the life course, the evidence specific to early childhood outcomes is still emerging. This underscores the lack of targeted research on the intersection of urban policy and planning strategies and ECD, leaving urban professionals and municipal leaders with insufficient guidance on how to create environments conducive to young children's development.

Environmental exposure also plays a critical role in shaping developmental outcomes of young children. Highlighting the potential benefits of mitigating negative environmental factors, Islam et al. (2020) emphasise that green space exposure has positive effects in promoting children's health and wellbeing in urban contexts despite limited research available on this topic, particularly studies that explore the mechanisms linking urban green spaces to specific ECD outcomes.

Prado-Galbarro et al. (2021) emphasise that the contexts in which children live can significantly influence their development by either facilitating or restricting opportunities for learning, play, and social interaction. They argue that urban interventions, such as investment in child-oriented resources like libraries and daycare centres, have the potential to enhance socio-emotional development and literacy, ultimately fostering ECD. However, much of the research to date focuses on isolated interventions rather than comprehensive urban design strategies that integrate such resources into the broader cityscape.

Neighbourhood conditions also have a direct impact on young children's emotional and behavioural outcomes. Francesconi et al. (2022) found associations between neighbourhood disorder and emotional symptoms in children as young as three years old, stressing the importance of directly observing neighbourhood conditions to better understand these dynamics.

Despite the growing recognition of these connections, Villanueva et al. (2016) observe that child development research has largely overlooked the influence of the neighbourhood context, even as it garners increasing policy interest. They stress the importance of understanding how neighbourhood design and access to amenities influence child development, observing the potential for urban design to have a significant public policy impact. Exploring these relationships, they argue, is a critical first step toward creating urban environments that support positive developmental outcomes for children and their observation reinforces the significant research gap in exploring how urban planning and design can be tailored to address the specific needs of young children, beyond general health and wellbeing outcomes.

While much of the literature focuses on health outcomes, Kodali et al. (2023) welcome a growing attention of research focusing on quality of life of children as a critical health and policy endpoint to highlight the broader impacts of the built environment on ECD. From enhancing socio-emotional and cognitive development through well-designed amenities to addressing the quality of life and environmental exposures, these insights are pivotal for informing child-focused urban planning and creating environments that support the wellbeing and potential of young children. The emerging literature emphasises the multifaceted ways in which urban design and neighbourhood environments influence young children, but it also reveals the gap of data and research around the relationship between urban environments and ECD.

Sapsağlam and Eryılmaz (2024) address this gap with the Child-Friendly City Scale, a tool to assess how cities support children's growth, safety, and wellbeing. By identifying eight dimensions of child-friendliness, their work highlights the need to align urban design with children's developmental needs and rights. While tailored for older children, this tool provides a foundation for developing similar frameworks focused on ECD.

Cunningham et al. (2017) and Miranda et al. (2012) extend the discussion by highlighting the intersection of urban design, social inequality, and health disparities. Their research demonstrates how poor-quality urban environments exacerbate adverse outcomes, such as low birth weights and preterm births, particularly among marginalized populations. These findings reveal the urgent need for equity-focused urban planning that addresses systemic inequities and demonstrate the limited exploration of how such approaches can be adapted to support ECD.

While existing research highlights the broad connections between urban environments and life outcomes, there is a clear and pressing need for more targeted studies exploring the relationship between urban environments and ECD in differing geographic contexts. Although there is existing research on links between education and health with ECD, the current literature lacks robust evidence on how specific urban interventions influence ECD outcomes leaving a research gap that limits the development of comprehensive, child-focused urban policy and planning strategies. Addressing this research gap is essential for creating equitable, sustainable, and inclusive urban environments that foster the wellbeing and potential of young children and their caregivers.

3 Methodology and findings

This section sets out the empirical methods used to examine the submitted application surveys from 2021 – 2024 which include information on the departmental makeup of city teams and identified key challenges pertaining to babies, toddlers, young children and their caregivers as reported by each city team.

Showing the findings of the analysis of city team specific responses, this section presents which governmental sectors are most represented in the sample and identify possible reasons for gaps in representation. Further, drawing on real world challenges, the research categorises the types of challenges reported by theme and breaks down the data looking at the most prevalent challenges, disaggregating them by region.

The cities included in the research sample encompass 358 city teams from 75 countries that applied to the Urban95 Academy between 2021 and 2024. The data is taken from the programme application form. In order to apply to the programme city teams were asked to fill out an application survey including questions pertaining to the position and department of each team member, the specific urban challenges each city faces related to young children and caregivers as well as an official support letter from the mayor.

Because the Urban95 Academy is offered in English requiring at least part of each city team to have a good level of English, there is some built-in bias to cities represented in the sample. There is another element of self-selection in the data represented here in that there may be a proportion of city leaders that are already engaging with ideas around care-centred and child-friendly design and planning who choose to apply to the Urban95 Academy. This is not a requirement to apply however, and there is range of pre-engagement with these topics in city teams that apply. There is also a strong representation of cities from Brazil and India in particular because of the regional work the Van Leer Foundation does in those countries.

3.1 Geographical representation

Geographic information was examined to map what regions represented in the data sample. Municipalities from 75 countries are represented in the dataset as shown in green on the world map in Figure 2. The 358 city teams reflected in the data represent 7 geographic regions: 36% (130) are from Latin America, 19% (68) are from Africa, 18% (63) are from Europe, 14% (50) are from Asia, 9% (32) are from the Middle East, 2% (8) are from North America and 2% (7) are from Oceania. The chart and map in Figure 1 illustrate the geographical patterns of the 358 applications to the Urban95 Academy.

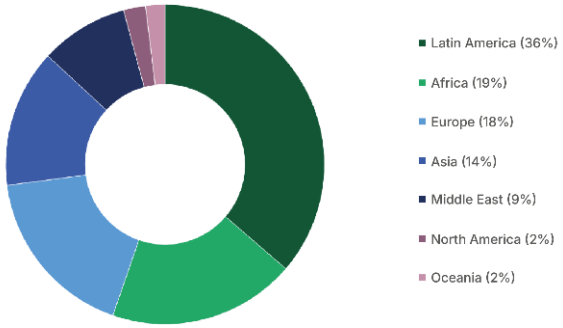


Figure 1 Urban95 Academy application shares by region

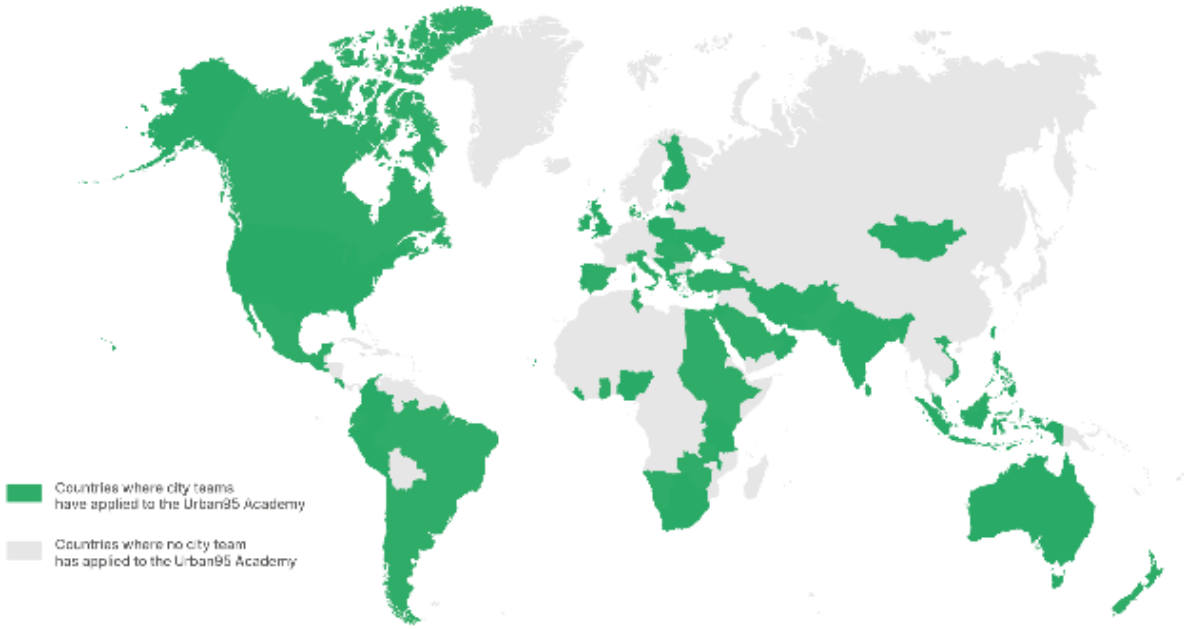


Figure 2 Geographical patterns of applications to the Urban95 Academy.

3.2 Departmental representation

Secondly, participant details were considered to analyse what type of municipal officials are applying to the course. City teams applying to the Urban95 Academy must meet specified requirements in order to be eligible for participation in the programme. Teams must be made up of three municipal officials, one of whom has at least 10 years of experience. Applicants are encouraged to include a mix of departmental representation, seniority, and significant decision-making capability in their team makeup.

Within the 358 city teams applying to the Urban95 Academy, there were 1074 municipal officials represented from 15 distinct governmental departments or sectors. As a result of the team selection criteria there is some bias in the types of officials reflected in the sample. For example, a

high level of seniority and decision-making power is encouraged to form a strong team which results in the highest proportion of team members, 276, coming from the mayor's office (26 %).

The second largest group, made up of 261 individuals came from Urban Planning, Urban Design or Regeneration departments (24%). The third largest group with 132 individuals were from Development or Innovation departments (12%), and the fourth largest share of officials with 108 city officials, came from Mobility, Transport and Infrastructure departments (10%).

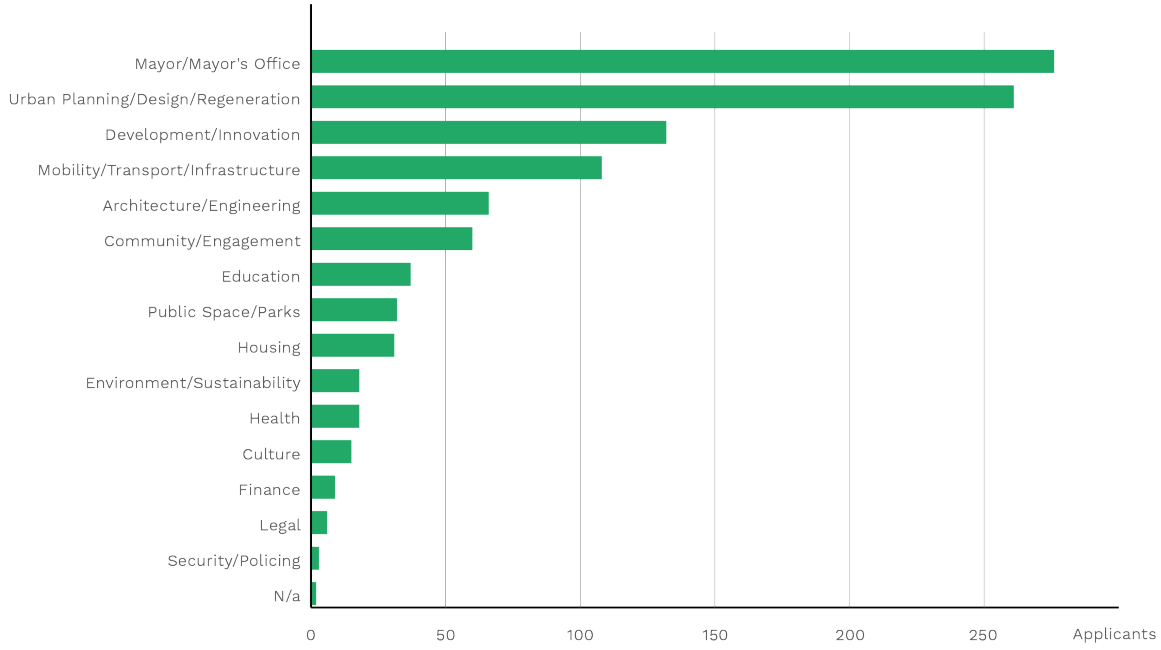


Figure 3 Departmental representations of applicants to the Urban95 Academy.

In some ways the heavy representation of politically elected and appointed officials, and of representatives from Urban Planning, Design and Regeneration, Development and Innovation and Mobility, Transport and Infrastructure departments is at odds with the conventions highlighted in the literature review pointing to a majority of thinking around young children in cities taking place in city Education and Health departments. While those sectors are represented in this sample (the 7th and 11th most represented sectors respectively) there is more representation from a variety of other sectors.

3.3 Key challenges

This section describes the challenges drawn from 358 city-specific responses to the question:

"What do you think the biggest challenge for babies, toddlers and caregivers is in your city? How would you like to address it? You may also provide examples of how your city has invested in programmes that support young children. (Please provide 150-300 words statement)"

Because the sample is drawn from city teams that have applied to the Urban95 Academy, there is a level of particularity to the data. The survey questions are asking city officials to share the biggest challenges they face regarding young children and caregivers, so the answers to the questions are most often from a local policy approach. City leaders are often conveying challenges they see in the urban realm that local government would have some scope to impact. Therefore, the areas of possible intervention often sit in sectors that local authorities hold budgets or decision-making power for.

Despite these particularities of the data sample, the insights into global trends are still useful and this research aims to provide a starting point for a deeper and wider investigation into the current challenges facing cities from all over the world regarding young children and caregivers.

The challenges faced by cities in different regions are influenced by local political, economic, and cultural factors. However, when analysing the survey responses, clear cluster categories also emerge, providing a basis for comparative analysis.

The responses from cities are then analysed against 8 main challenge categories: Physical

Environment, Mobility, Policy and Governance, Inequality, Health and Wellbeing, Behaviour, Safety, and Climate, which are further divided into sub-categories outlined below.

Physical Environment

- Public space
- Green space
- Parks/Playgrounds
- Outdoor space
- Playable space
- Solid waste

Mobility

- Street design
- Roads and traffic
- Parking
- Pedestrian and cycling infrastructure
- Public transportation
- Sidewalks and pavement
- Accessibility

Policy and Governance

- Inclusive policy
- Consideration of children and care reflected in policy
- Functioning democracy
- Interdepartmental collaboration

Inequality

- Poverty
- Unequal access to space and services
- Unequal care burden
- Gentrification

Health and Wellbeing

- Physical health
- Emotional health
- Social opportunity
- Healthy development
- Access to nutrition and health services
- Air pollution
- Food insecurity

Behaviour

- Understanding of importance of ECD in health development
- Car centric culture
- Gender norms driving division of care work
- Lack of education or information around healthy practises
- Public resistance to change

Safety

- Crime
- Violence
- Motorised vehicle danger

Climate

- Extreme weather
- Global warming
- Natural disasters

Key challenges by category

Overall, the four urban challenges that were most reported by city teams are: **Physical Environment** (27%), **Mobility** (23%), **Policy and Governance** (17%) and **Inequality** (13%) (see Figure 4 below).

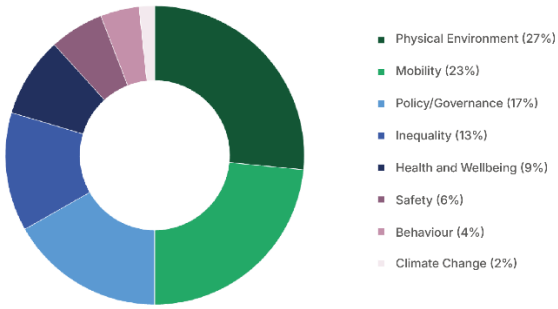


Figure 4 Urban95 Academy application shares by challenge.

Across most regions, challenges pertaining to Physical Environment ranked as the top first or second key challenges. Europe and North America were exceptions to this trend citing Mobility and Inequality as their top two challenges respectively.

City teams citing **Physical Environment** as their most pressing challenges often referenced lack of adequate public space, lack of access to public space, lack of play spaces, Lack of green space, lack of consideration for children's needs in public space, rapid urban expansion and lack of inclusive public space.

City teams citing **Mobility** as a top challenge included specifics such as; car-centric planning, car dependence, traffic and safety concerns on streets, lack of pedestrian infrastructure, lack of cycling infrastructure, lack of walkable play spaces, poor quality or inaccessible sidewalks.

City teams citing **Policy and Governance** as a top challenge most referenced: A lack of visibility or consideration of children in urban planning, lack of provision, accessibility and regulation of early

childhood education and development services, siloed thinking about children and caregivers across government.

City teams citing **Inequality** as their top challenge most referenced poverty, informality, lack of access to education, lack of affordable housing, barriers to women's employment.

Looking at the types of government departments represented can in part explain the bias towards physical environment, mobility, policy and governance with officials from those sectors heavily represented in the sample. It is also clear that the city officials engaging with the idea of child-friendly design and planning are expressing that the challenges they face extend into all aspects of urban life from the physical to the political to the social and behavioural.

Key challenges by region

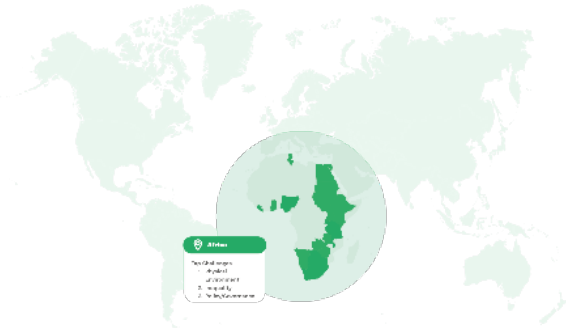
The following table summarises the top three challenge categories reported by region, giving some specific examples of challenges described in each theme. It is worth noting that there is significant variation in the overall representation by region. 130 Latin American cities are represented in the dataset compared to just 7 from Oceania.

Latin America (130 applications, 36%)

City teams from Latin America reported their top three challenges to be related to: Physical Environment (36%), Mobility (28%) and Policy and Governance (25%). Some of the specific challenges they reported facing, include lack of access to adequate public and play space, unsafe roads and road traffic incidents involving children resulting in death, and lack of proximity to public services.

Figure 5 Top 3 Urban95 Academy application challenges from Latin America.

Africa (68 applications, 19%)



City teams from Africa reported their top challenges to be related to: Physical environment (25%), Inequality (19%) and Policy and Governance (15%). Some of the specific challenges reported include lack of access to basic necessities, high levels of poverty, lack of access to healthcare and childcare, malnutrition, and lack of adequate infrastructure for young children.

Figure 6 Top 3 Urban95 Academy application challenges from Africa.

Europe (63 applications, 18%)

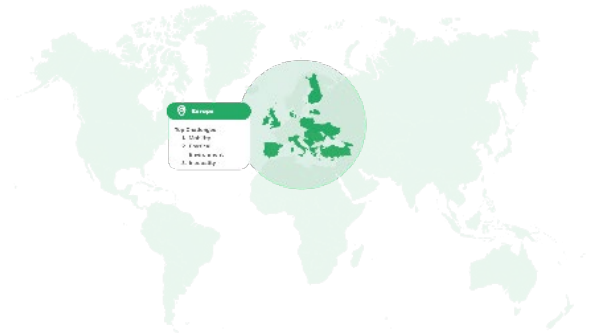


Figure 7 Top 3 Urban95 Academy application challenges from Europe.

Europe city teams reported their top three challenges related to: Mobility (38%), Physical Environment (19%), Inequality (16%). Some of the specific challenges they reported facing include car dominated infrastructure, lack of connected pedestrian infrastructure, unsafe roads and traffic accidents, lack of access to public and green space, poverty and social inequality.

Asia (50 applications, 14%)

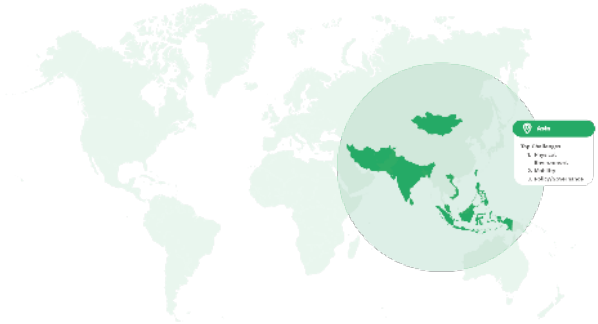


Figure 8 Top 3 Urban95 Academy application challenges from Asia.

Asia city teams reported their top three challenges related to: Physical Environment (32%), Mobility (22%), Policy and Governance (18%). Some of the specific challenges they reported facing include exclusion of children's needs and voices in urban planning, lack of access to public space, lack of safe and inclusive public space.

Middle East (32 applications, 9%)

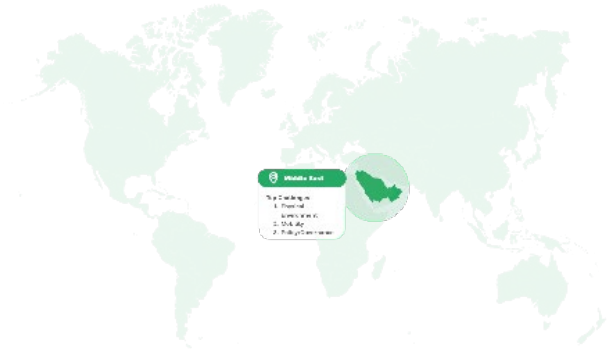


Figure 9 Top 3 Urban95 Academy application challenges from the Middle East.

Middle East city teams reported their top three challenges related to: Physical environment (34%), Mobility (22%), Policy and Governance (19%). Some of the specific challenges they reported include car dominance, lack of pedestrian infrastructure, extreme heat, rapid urban expansion.

North America (8 applications, 2%)

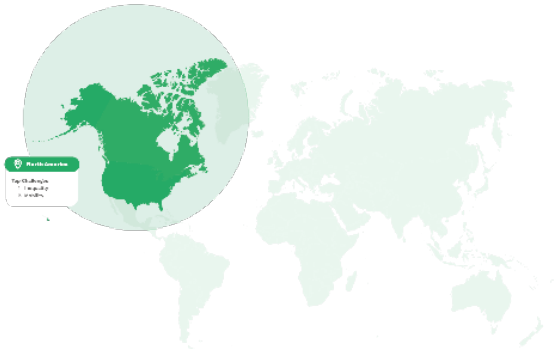


Figure 10 Top 3 Urban95 Academy application challenges from North America.

North America city teams reported their top three challenges to be related to: Inequality (38%), Mobility (24%) with Health and Wellbeing, Physical environment and Policy and Governance tied for the third biggest challenge at (13%). Some specific challenges they reported include lack of access to affordable childcare, lack of affordable housing, car-centric infrastructure.

Oceania (7 applications, 2%)

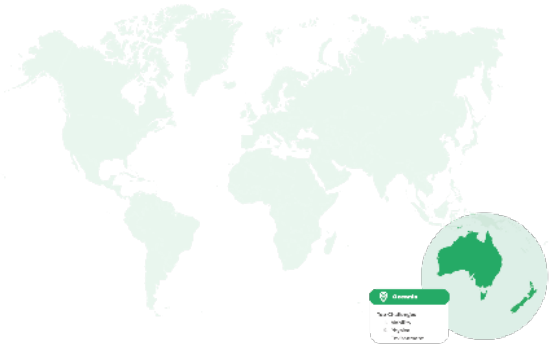


Figure 11 Top 3 Urban95 Academy application challenges from Oceania.

Oceania city teams reported their top three challenges to be: Mobility (43%), Physical Environment (29%) with Safety and Health and Wellbeing tied for the third most prevalent challenges at (14%). Some specific challenges they reported include lack of pedestrian infrastructure, lack of consideration for children in public space design.

3.4 Mayoral data

To further the analysis, a focused sample of city team responses was considered including 90 applications only from city teams that involved a mayor or deputy mayor as one of their team members.

Geographic representation

The highest share of applications including mayors or deputy mayors as one of the team members comes from city teams from Latin American (25 applications; 28%), followed by Europe (22 applications; 24%), Africa (21 applications; 23%) and Asia (11 applications; 12%). City teams from the Middle East (8 applications; 9%) and Oceania (3 applications; 3%) have lower shares of city teams applying with mayoral participation while North American city teams have none.

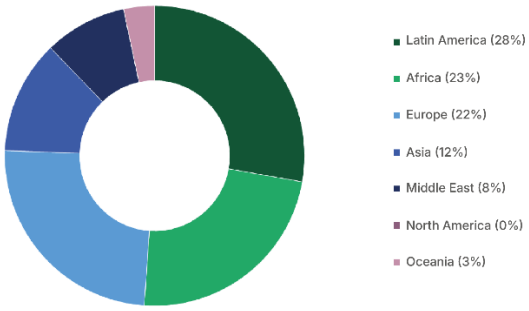


Figure 12 Urban95 Academy application shares by region from city teams with mayoral representation.

Departmental representation

As this sample focuses on 90 city teams that involved a mayor or deputy mayor as one of their team members when applying to the Urban95 Academy, the departmental representation (Figure 13) of the 270 team members shows the majority representing the Mayor's Office (132 team members, 49%).

The second largest share, including 51 team members represents Urban Planning, Urban Design or Regeneration departments (19%), followed by 26 team members from Development or Innovation departments (10%) and 15 team members from Mobility, Transport and Infrastructure departments (6%). Legal and Finance departments are not represented in this sample.

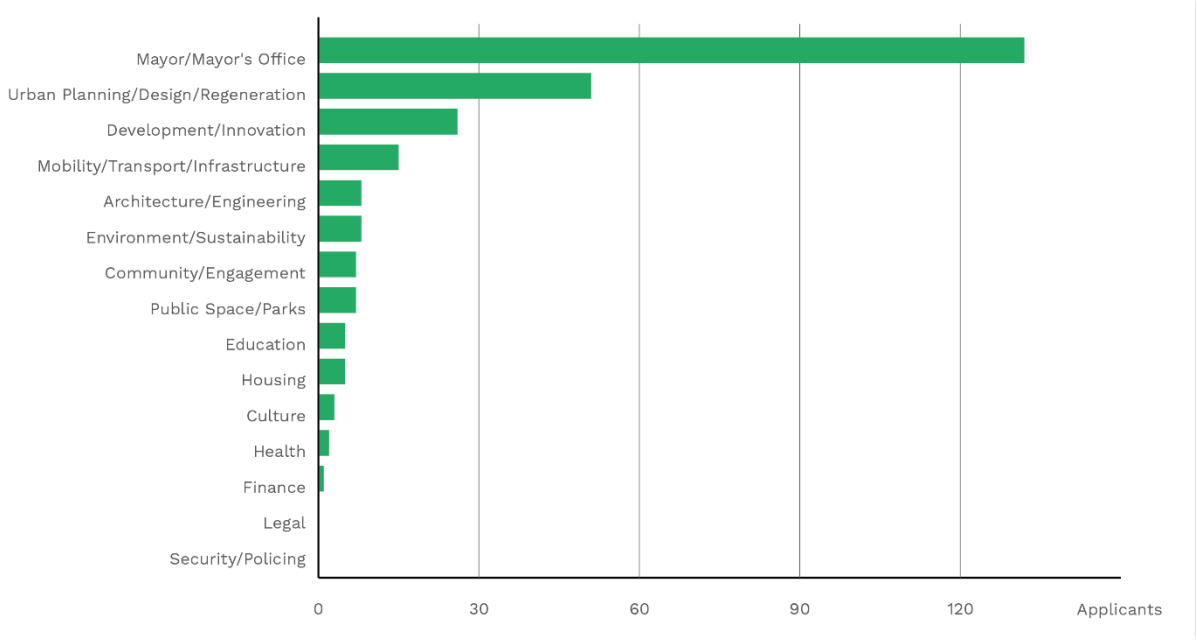


Figure 13 Departmental representations of applicants from city teams with mayoral representation.

Key challenges

There is a slight deviation in the top challenges reported by city teams with mayoral participation compared to the full sample with results from all city teams. **Mobility** (23%) represents the highest share of challenges, followed by **Physical Environment** (20%), **Inequality** (18%) and **Policy and Governance** (17%). Mobility and Physical Environment challenges swapped first and second place, while Policy/Governance challenges moved to fourth place with Inequality challenges moving up to third (see Figure 14).

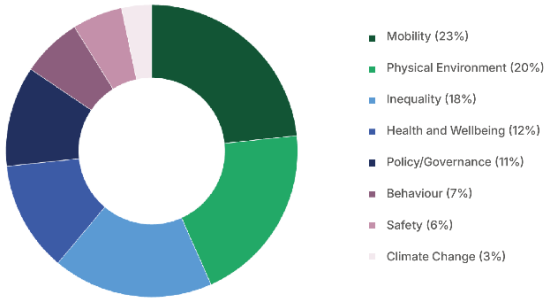


Figure 14 Urban95 Academy application shares by challenge from city teams with mayoral representation.

The top challenge for African city teams with mayoral participation is Policy and Governance (4 applications; 19% share of challenges for African city teams), Physical Environment for Asian city teams (4 applications; 36% share of challenges for Asian city teams), Mobility for Europe (11 applications; 50% share of challenges for European city teams), and Inequality for Latin America (7 applications; 28% share of challenges for Latin American city teams).

4 Conclusion

Some of the most critical areas of concern regarding young children and their caregivers in cities, as evidenced by this analysis of 358 surveys collected from three years of the Urban95 academy teams, move beyond the realms of health and education and include physical environment such as public space, streets, green spaces and parks, mobility, citing an overemphasis on car centred infrastructure, and a policy and governance with common reference to a lack of consideration for children in urban planning.

The findings reiterate Francesconi et al. (2022)'s thesis that there is a need for a deeper examination into the impacts of neighbourhood design and where a child grows up on their life outcomes. Across all cities there was an overwhelming focus on the lack of access to and quality of green and public spaces for children.

City teams also said that streets are commonly designed with a focus on vehicular movement rather than pedestrian safety or active mobility, which can undermine the physical and emotional health and development of children. Additionally, transportation systems can either facilitate or hinder proximity and access to services such as healthcare, education, and social spaces. These urban elements are often within the jurisdiction of local authorities, making them vital areas for municipal action.

Beyond the physical, there are significant social factors that influence the urban experience for young children and their caregivers. Human behaviour, shaped by cultural norms and individual attitudes, plays a critical role in shaping the social environment children experience. The findings highlight the need for a deeply embedded consideration of the needs of children in urban planning. Adoption of a comprehensive policy joining different government departments together in their work pertaining to young children would bring these needs into focus. The commonly referenced challenge of a lack of visibility and consideration of children's needs across the dataset, highlights the points made by Prado-Galbarro et al. (2021) referring to the need for urban policies to be integrated across local government and not isolated by department or intervention.

The findings from this research underscore the role urban environments play in shaping the wellbeing and life outcomes of young children and their caregivers and the potential for positive change that exists within local government. The analysis reveals that while many cities face common challenges such as inadequate public spaces, mobility issues, and policy gaps, the specific impacts and priorities vary regionally, reflecting unique local contexts. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic, multi-sectoral approach that integrates urban planning, governance, and social services.

This working paper offers a geographically wide snapshot of how municipal governments around the word are currently engaging with the particular needs of young children and caregivers. It is a jumping off point for further analysis including qualitative methods that can dig deeper into the challenges cities are navigating pertaining to how young children and caregivers are considered in the urban realm. Future analysis can widen the scope of academic research into ECD and urban design and policy, sharing information and supporting a cross sectoral discussion that can contribute to innovative policy and infrastructure interventions.

In summary, this analysis demonstrates that addressing these challenges requires a holistic, multisectoral approach that integrates urban planning, governance and social services. The insights from this study can inform future academic and practical endeavours aimed at creating child-friendly, supportive urban environments that foster healthy ECD.

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