

Sustainable cities: The importance of child-friendly urban design

When young children are considered in urban planning policy, it is often in the realms of health or education, but the built environment of cities can support or hinder healthy early childhood development. The needs of children and their caregivers should be considered across all aspects of urban life.



250 million children under 5 – across almost every country in the world – do not receive the care they need to reach their full potential.



New parents are sleep-deprived, stressed, and time-poor. Transitioning to parenthood can be a struggle.



Better urban environments allow us to build strong, healthy connections at every level.



Over 90% of brain development occurs before age 5.



The biggest reported challenges for babies, toddlers and caregivers in your city

Research by Katie Beck and Marie Kaune (Urban Academy, LSE Cities) analysed real-world challenges reported by 358 city teams from 75 countries.

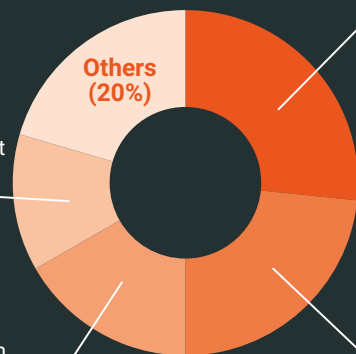
URBAN95 ACADEMY

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. The Academy is a joint collaboration from the Van Leer Foundation and LSE Cities.



Inequality (13%)

- Poverty and informality
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of access to education
- Barriers to women's employment



Physical environment (27%)

- Lack of adequate inclusive and green public space with play areas
- Lack of consideration for children's needs in public space
- Rapid urban expansion



Policy and governance (17%)

- 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

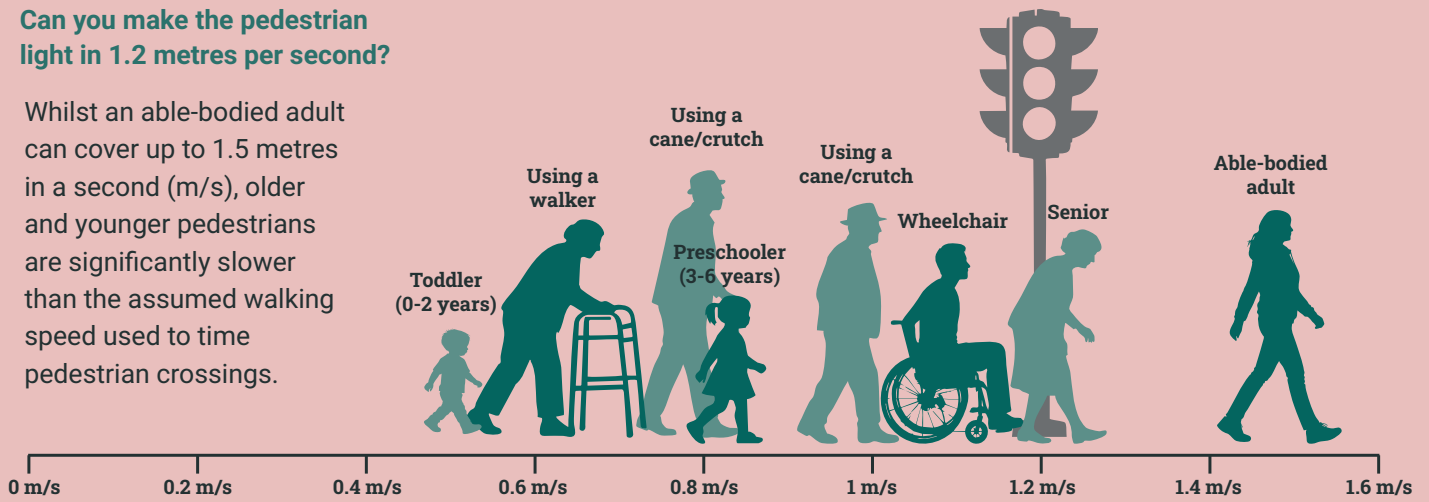
Mobility (23%)

- Lack of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure
- Car-centric planning and car dependence
- Traffic and safety concerns on streets
- Poor quality or inaccessible pavements



Can you make the pedestrian light in 1.2 metres per second?

Whilst an able-bodied adult can cover up to 1.5 metres in a second (m/s), older and younger pedestrians are significantly slower than the assumed walking speed used to time pedestrian crossings.



How could we address these challenges?

Child-friendly urban design is:

- Care-centred, based on lived experience and inclusive
- Connected, close to services and public space
- With reliable, affordable, safe and accessible transport and stable, quality, safe and affordable housing



Istanbul, Turkey

The Zümrütevler Square was transformed to create a public space where the neighbourhood can spend time and children can play. Roads were painted to encourage traffic calming; sitting areas and low-cost play elements were designed where children and their caregivers could spend their time comfortably.



Rotterdam, Netherlands

Nature-based play and parks offer children a greater range of possibilities for imaginative and autonomous play, exploring and creating – as well as spending time in nature, which evidence increasingly shows is critical for mental health and wellbeing.



Udaipur, India

Traffic-calming intervention in front of the Vidya Bhawan pre-primary school in Udaipur to encourage drivers to slow down and make it easier for children to cross the road. The intersection was painted in vibrant colours, with creative designs to make it safer for young children and everyone to cross.

