

Forum: Special Conference on sustainable cities

Issue: Improving safety of children in cities

Student Officer: Andrikopoulou Konstantina

Position: Deputy President

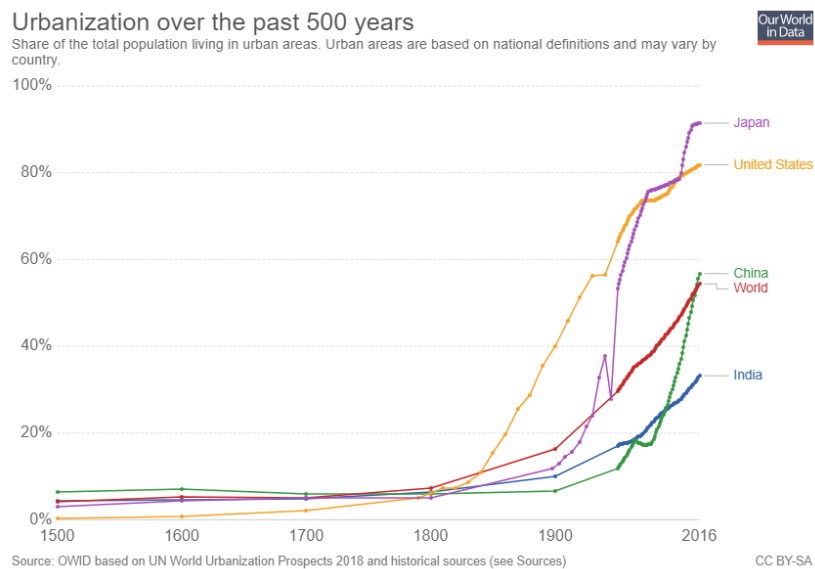
INTRODUCTION

With one third of the 4 billion people currently living in urban areas being children, the debate of safety in cities has always been a heated one, let alone when it concerns the wellbeing of children. Designing safer cities for children is certainly an expensive and strenuous affair, especially when there is a conflict of interests among different authorities and government departments, such as municipal and national decision makers, which find this issue rather challenging or even impossible to cope with.

Children, by nature, are more active than adults and for that reason they use streets and pavements for a number of activities, such as biking, running, playing, travelling in vehicles and walking. Consequently, they are more susceptible to accidents and it is stated by all parts how critical it is to ameliorate the infrastructure of the urban areas.

According to a 2018 World Health Organization (WHO) report, the number of annual road traffic deaths had reached 1.35 million, resulting in considering road traffic injuries as the leading killer of children and young people aged 5-29 years.

URBANIZATION OVER THE PAST 500 YEARS, GRAPH¹



¹ “Habitat at a Glance.” UN, <https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization>.

Designing a city for children should definitely include safety-oriented policies, such as buffer zones around playgrounds, schools and parks, in addition to wider pavements and more responsible supervising by parents, teachers and authorities. Although several countries, like Holland, Sweden, South Korea, and the United States of America (USA), have paved the way for better conditions concerning the child safety, there is a lot to be done.

The safety of children living in urban areas does not only depend on the infrastructure of roads and highways, but it also includes an angle of crime prevention, even if a number of different factors should be stated. According to the United Nations (UN) Habitat III's "Safer Cities Programme", a structured dialogue is promoted as far as the crime prevention is concerned. Feeling secure is a motive to engage in outdoor activities so as to improve physical stamina.

Planning child-friendly cities includes two major themes: safety and access. According to experts, the ultimate priority should be placed on designing safer sidewalks and crosswalks. Also, detailed instructions to improve transportation accessibility and safety for children have been encompassed in the Sustainable Transportation's report on Child- and Youth-friendly land-use and transport planning guidelines.

Last but not least, it is imperative for the communities to be designed to offer better walking conditions and reduce traffic congestion. This will absolutely promote the mental, physical, and social health of both children and youth.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Child-friendly city

A child-friendly city (CFC) is a city, or any system of local governance, that aims at the improvement of children's lives by ensuring the protection of their rights, as stated in the UN convention on the Rights of the Child. A child-friendly city provides opportunities and 'urban invitations' to young people and focuses on their safety. In such cities, the rights, the needs and the protection of children are an irreplaceable part of public policies and they are regarded as an utmost priority.

Buffer zone

A designed area of land that separates two different areas with the aim to protect unattended citizens, especially the most vulnerable and weakest ones, such as children. A zone that lessens a shock and protects citizens against any danger.



SAFETY BARS, SANTIAGO, CHILE²

Urban invitations

The efforts that a city should make so as to “invite” the citizens to participate in the urban lifestyle. This can only be achieved by reassuring them that all types of infrastructure are well built, constantly monitored and continuously maintained.

Urban privilege

The ability that an urban zone offers to the citizens by offering easier and quicker access to a city’s infrastructure, such as hospitals, universities, public services, parks, schools and kindergartens.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Cities in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs)

It is well known that slums are a dangerous environment for children, as they are usually described as informal settlements within cities with inadequate housing and deplorable living conditions, with people crammed into extremely small living spaces. These settlements lack basic services, such as water, sanitation, street lighting, paved sidewalks and roads, with no easy access to schools, hospitals or other public

² Mimi Kirk @msmimikirk Feed Mimi Kirk, and CityLab. “What Does a Child-Friendly City Look Like?” *CityLab*, 2 Feb. 2018, <https://www.citylab.com/design/2018/02/how-to-design-cities-for-children/552086/>

places. It has already been estimated that by the year 2050 the vast majority (70%) of the world's children will live in urban zones, especially in slums.³

Living in a Less Economically Developed Country's (LEDC's) city presents more opportunities for a fruitful life than living in rural areas. Still, the innovation and diversity of a LEDC city is inevitably connected with a high rate of criminality and fatal accidents because of the poor infrastructure. Poverty, overcrowding and general inequalities prevent children from having access to basic medical services with irreversible results.



SLUM IN BRAZIL⁴

Additionally, a more meticulous look at the situation proves the above. The lack of appropriate infrastructure and transportation, especially in slums, worsens the situation as there is no urban planning or adherence to zoning regulations and, as a result, many social indicators are on a downward slide.

The New Urban Agenda (Quito, Ecuador), launched at the Habitat III conference in October 2016, has set out the background when it comes to citizens' collective responsibilities and those of their leaders, concerning the safety and the challenges of urban areas, where children should live and thrive.

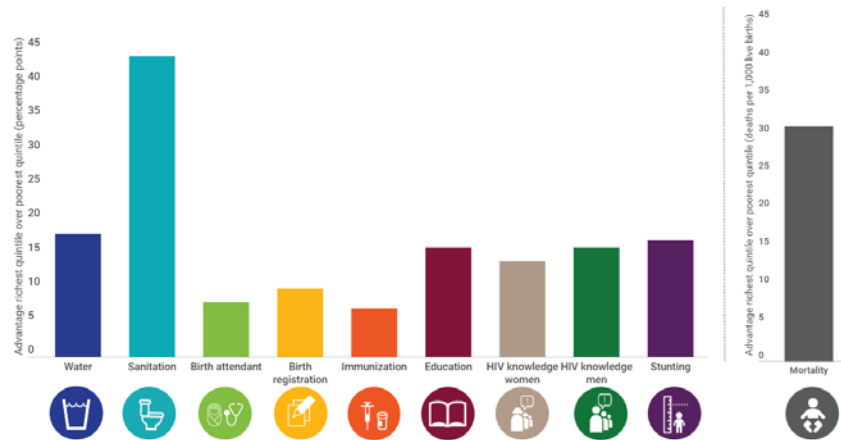
Cities in More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs)

³ "Growing Cities." *Child Friendly Cities Initiative*, <https://childfriendlycities.org/growing-cities>.

⁴ Rodrigues, Gabriela P. "The Truth About Brazilian Slums." *Epoch Magazine*, Epoch Magazine, 26 Oct. 2016, <https://epochmagonline.com/the-truth-about-brazilian-slums-1e8fc508ce3a>.

Living in More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs), such as European countries or in the United States of America (USA), presents a number of advantages when it comes to child safety in urban areas. Whilst authorities reassure parents on the safety of playgrounds, parks, schools and roads, accidents continue occurring. As a result, a question associated with the so-called “urban privilege” rises.

Median wealth advantage for selected indicators in the urban population across countries and areas (2011-2016)



MEDIAN WEALTH ADVANTAGE FOR SELECTED INDICATORS IN THE URBAN POPULATION ACROSS COUNTRIES AND AREAS (2011-2016)⁵

It is reported that urban households benefit from better infrastructure or higher incomes. Yet, the urban privilege is not fairly shared to all parts, segregating the children deriving from more affluent urban families from those of less privileged urban families. The latter ones suffer from lower standards of education and practically no access to immediate medical care, so their safety is not a priority. In contrast, living in a wealthier environment entails more opportunities, easier access to basic services and, as a result, more safety.

Moreover, the state itself seems quite vulnerable and unadept to meet the citizens' expectations. Unfortunately, the overcrowded urban district, the high admission tickets, the inadequate infrastructure, the poor state funding and the subjective prioritization debilitate the urban safety net. To make matters worse, lower awareness and poorer alert might end up in more child accidents in cities, as insufficient decision making takes its toll on child road fatalities.

⁵ “Advantage or Paradox: The Challenge for Children and Young People of Growing up Urban.” *UNICEF DATA*, 19 Mar. 2019, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/urban-paradox-report>.

Child-friendly Cities

Broadly speaking, a resilient, safe, and sustainable city is a child-friendly one. The existence of places, where children can make friends, play and enjoy themselves is imperative and invaluable. When their families have the opportunity to participate in community and social life, the children thrive. Above all, the ultimate priority is for children to have access to quality social services. To acquire this, it is definitely a challenge, as the rapid pace of urbanization has removed away two significant pillars of the urban structure, safety and sustainability.

What is more, authorities should definitely focus on cooperation and commitment of all parts. In everyday life, children should be protected from incidents of violence, road accidents and all kinds of abuse.

It is undoubtable that not only children but also society benefits from actions and policies that focus on the safety and well-being of children. It is the local governments' and organizations' obligation to aim at the creation of child-friendly cities so as to increase independence and improve the quality of life. When living in such cities, children are able to voice their opinions about issues that affect them, such as education and public health, and, therefore, policies that benefit them are adopted.

Promoting children's safe living in cities worldwide

A further point to be considered is that the safer you feel the more open and active you become—a chain effect that cannot be omitted. It is the cities' responsibility to invite children to a wider circle of social and public life by ensuring their safety. Cities should provide their citizens, especially the children, with “urban invitations”. Consequently, a healthy and active lifestyle will be promoted. This challenge is both demanding and time-consuming, as it concerns various sectors and domains. Therefore, a more strategic planning for the cities is required.

The abovementioned “urban invitations” are profoundly and inevitably connected to the reassurance of children's safety leading to a balanced interaction between their built environments and themselves, because in reality children are relying on adults for the care and guidance they need, so both caregivers and society should play this role. The city is definitely part of the society and, as such, it ought to be safe and easily accessible by children. It is estimated that creating safe cities is an intriguing challenge, especially when underfunding and short-sighted policies fail to take children into account having a disastrous impact on their future.

Therefore, the creation of 'urban invitations' encourages the residents' active living, while the responsible monitoring of public spaces, like playgrounds and parks, where the presence of children is common, enhances both the promotion of their safety and the incorporation of an active living approach into the city's plan.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

South Korea

Several Korean cities made a successful attempt to design a city, which repeatedly focuses on children's safety. No wonder, we can definitely speak for the Korean miracle as they managed to reduce the traffic-related fatalities among children by 95% from 1988 to 2012. This extraordinary outcome was accomplished through the School Zone Improvement Project, successfully implemented throughout the Korean cities. It aimed to materialize the safe route from children's homes to schools and childcare facilities. The installation of speed bumps, which had as a result the reduction of the speed limit, in combination with clear distinctions between sidewalks and roads, protected children from traffic hazards. The result was once again surprising as roughly 32% fewer traffic accidents involved children yearly. To conclude, this safety-oriented policy led to the reduction of child traffic fatalities by 95% in less than two decades.

Sweden

Sweden has proudly shown its consistent and assiduous adherence to the concept of keeping children safe in urban areas. Sweden has specified multiple targets for road safety since the 1980s. The results were miraculous as it experienced a considerable traffic death reduction. This outcome was mainly based on the human and ethical values leaving aside the economic analyses and the cost-benefit policies. The shift was both outstanding and surprising, as the campaign of "Vision Zero" was also included and it was agreed by all sides involved that safety and health were of paramount importance.

Fortunately, the acceptance was broad and the idea spread to every citizen and organization related to safety. In reality, the message was clear and direct: "You are citizens with rights and it is your right to be safe". The numbers speak for themselves, as between 1990 and 2014 the road fatalities decreased by more than 65% and the injury crashes by 22%.

Sweden did not limit its efforts towards this direction. On the contrary, UNICEF Sweden has been piloting the Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) in five Swedish municipalities over the last two years starting in August 2017 and aiming at the integration of the child rights at all levels of the municipal sector.

India

India is a country, in which the inequity in distribution of affluence and household income could be easily observed. It is estimated that 37 percent of India's population is forced to live under the poverty line and, therefore, lacks basic public services. The aforementioned situation affects, to a greater extent, the most vulnerable citizens, children. Despite the Government's efforts to achieve inclusive progress through the growth and advances of the health and educational system, it is reported that approximately 1.83 million children die annually before completing their fifth year due to causes that could be prevented through the improvement of infrastructure, the combat against violence and the amelioration of the health system. However, over the past three decades, India has achieved a significant reduction in child death rates, specifically in the age group of 1-4 years due to the Government's focus on the reproductive health of mothers and early childhood care.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF, a UN body aiming at the protection of children's rights, has created an Initiative (CFCI) that focuses on the development of cities setting as a priority the safety of young citizens by toppling the structure inadequacies of local governments. Additionally, UNICEF offers children the opportunity to become active members of their society by creating fertile environments, where children can develop themselves to perfect individuals. The implementation of relevant laws and policies in each country depends on the local context and varies according to different socioeconomic factors. To conclude, UNICEF has achieved and continues to achieve its goal, which is the protection of children's rights, by including children in the process, which, more specifically, presupposes the adoption of an action plan and the collaboration with governments and municipalities undertaking simultaneously the responsibility and the monitoring of the implementation of the plan.

UN-Habitat

It is obvious that the past few decades there has been a groundbreaking shift to urbanization as it is estimated that almost 6 out of 10 people are expected to reside in urban areas by 2030. The early consequences of this tendency are already notable and therefore strict measures should be taken. The abovementioned phenomenon is within the domain of the UN-Habitat, which is the UN programme for human settlements. The

UN-Habitat aims at the containment of slums, the improvement of the infrastructure, the provision of public services and needs, and generally the formation of sustainable cities, always in collaboration with other bodies, such as UNICEF and the UN member states.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1989	Adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
1996	The Child-Friendly Cities Initiative was launched by UNICEF and UN-Habitat.
2004	The original Child-Friendly Cities Framework for action was launched.
2015	In September 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
2017	The launching of a campaign by the German Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Kindernothilfe concerning the awareness of children's right to live without any threat of violence and crime.

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN-CRC)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child includes 54 articles covering all aspects of a child's life and sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights that

all children are entitled to. Additionally, it offers explanations on how adults and governments should work together to ensure all children enjoy all their rights. The UN-CRC is the most widely quoted human rights treaty in the world as it is also accepted by non-state entities, such as the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). The Convention came into force in the UK in 1992.

UN's New Urban Agenda

The UN New Urban Agenda, launched at the Habitat III Conference in October 2016, aimed at the promotion of safety, accessibility and quality of public spaces. The UN New Urban Agenda agrees to enable all citizens, especially vulnerable populations like children and youth, to live an urban life without violence or intimidation.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

A previous attempt to solve the issue was the launching of the Child-friendly cities Initiative (CFCI) by UNICEF in 1996 on a resolution passed during the second United Nations' Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). The CFCI encourages local governments to take under consideration the rights of children and incorporate them in their policies. It also connects and encourages different stakeholders to build cities having as main focus the protection and safety of children. With the implementation of this Initiative, it is clear that a child-friendly environment leads to a healthy and democratic society.

Additionally, another relevant attempt was The European Child Safety Alliance, which was launched in 2000 and consists of more than 30 European countries that collaborate in order to ensure European children's well-being in a both healthy and aspiring environment. Its aim is to promote child protection by reducing the underlying causes of death and inequity in the member states.

Apart from the abovementioned actions, there are many UN member states' governments that, being in collaboration with national and international organizations, have also tried to solve the issue. For example, efforts to prevent violence in the marginalized communities of South Africa were made in the past. Unfortunately, the apartheid's legacy of inequality led to the sabotage of all related actions having as a result the worsening of life quality in several communities. Another worth mentioning example is the Netherlands. Holland's policy concerning traffic safety is called Sustainable Safety and it was first implemented in 1991 aiming at the reduction of traffic fatalities by 25-50%.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

One of the most prominent ways to solve the problem of child safety in cities is to design from scratch communities that facilitate walking, boost the issue of a healthy lifestyle and reduce traffic. Even if many modern communities have already been designed for the convenience of vehicles and pedestrians, the goal has not been achieved yet.

At first, a lot of attention was given on the incidents of crime causing the excessive concerns of parents. Soon, it was clarified that road accidents were commoner than the crime fatalities. There has been a gap related to awareness-raising activities and this gap should be filled urgently by using better practices for children's safety.

The creation of safe places is an element that urban planning should include so that children can play, learn and develop themselves in a safe environment. Additionally, the key word is to specifically identify the risks of violence and abuse especially among children and youth. Moreover, the municipalities should play an active role implementing regulations and preventing all kinds of violence against children. Or they should act even more practically by funding the building of wider sidewalks in better lit cities and the creation of safer parks and playgrounds where the presence of children is common.

Another key issue is the instructional school programs that teach children and teens the fatal effects of drunk driving. At the same time, stricter drunk driving laws characterized by zero tolerance against offenders should be implemented.

In this path, the UN should be responsible for repetitive monitoring and controlling so as to verify if all communities comply with the safety rules concerning children's protection and well-being.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Child Friendly Cities Initiative UNICEF." *Child Friendly Cities Initiative*, <https://childfriendlycities.org/initiatives/>.

"What Works: Strategies to Reduce or Prevent Drunk Driving." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 28 Mar. 2019, www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/impaired_driving/strategies.html.

"Promoting Active Living in Healthy Cities of Europe." PubMed Central (PMC), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3764268/>.

"Growing Cities." *Child Friendly Cities Initiative*, <https://childfriendlycities.org/growing-cities/>.

"Advantage or Paradox: The Challenge for Children and Young People of Growing Up Urban." *UNICEF DATA*, 19 Mar. 2019, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/urban-paradox-report/> .

Vision Zero Homepage | Vision Zero, 23 Sept. 2019, <http://visionzero.global/>.

"Public Spaces for All – **Whd** 2015 – UN-Habitat." *Front Page | UN-Habitat*, <https://unhabitat.org/public-spaces-for-all-2/>.

"Sanity and Urbanity: Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health." *Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health*, www.urbandesignmentalhealth.com/blog.

Welcome to the United Nations, www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/urbansafetyandsecurity.pdf.

"Safer Cities for Children." *Urbanet*, 21 Feb. 2018, www.urbanet.info/safer-cities-for-children/.

The German Marshall Fund of the United States, www.gmfus.org.

"What is a Child-friendly City?" *Child Friendly Cities Initiative*, <https://childfriendlycities.org/what-is-a-child-friendly-city/> .

"Sweden." *Child Friendly Cities Initiative*, 2 Apr. 2018, <https://childfriendlycities.org/sweden/>.

"SAFETY | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." *Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus*,
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/safety>.

"BUFFER ZONE | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." *Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus*,
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/buffer-zone>.

"International Healthy Cities Conference." *WHO/Europe*, 4 Oct. 2018,
www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/events/events/2018/10/international-healthy-cities-conference.

"Designing Safer Cities for Children." *TheCityFix*, 4 Dec. 2018,
<https://thecityfix.com/blog/urban-design-street-road-safety-children-cities-claudia-adriazola-steil-wei-li-ben-welle/>.

"How to Make Cities Safer by Design." *TheCityFix*, 23 July 2015,
<https://thecityfix.com/blog/how-to-make-cities-safer-by-design-claudia-adriazola-steil/>.

"Cities." *United Nations Sustainable Development*, 7 Jan. 2015,
www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cities/.

"Guiding Principles." *Child Friendly Cities Initiative*, <https://childfriendlycities.org/guiding-principals/>.

"UNICEF Social Inclusion, Policy and Budgeting." *UNICEF*, 29 Nov. 2013,
https://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/index_71027.html.

"Habitat at a Glance." *UN*, <https://unhabitat.org/un-habitat-at-a-glance/>.

"What Is the Convention on the Rights of the Child?" *UNICEF*,
<https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/what-is-the-convention>.

“CFCI Framework.” *Child Friendly Cities Initiative*, <https://childfriendlycities.org/cfi-framework/>.