

# **BUILDING CHILD-FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURHOODS: EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES WITH DATA-DRIVEN ACTION**

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**CHILD WELL-BEING POLICY PAPER**



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## Child Well-being Policy Papers

This paper summarises practical considerations for national and local policy makers and other stakeholders involved in place-based policy making to build child-friendly neighbourhoods. It highlights under which circumstances and how policy solutions that are tailored to the specific local context hold greater promise to mitigate the locational disadvantage that some children experience. Moreover, it emphasises the need for more rigorous policy implementation and evaluations in order to increase policies' effectiveness and to gain a more complete understanding of the potential of place-based policies to build stronger neighbourhoods for children's well-being and development. Both local adaptation and sound implementation and evaluation rely on the availability of local data, and the paper offers guidance to decision makers in collecting and gathering relevant data cost-efficiently. Throughout the paper, policy-relevant conclusions are illustrated by a diverse array of practical examples from across OECD countries.

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# Abstract

The local environment in which children grow up matters significantly for their well-being and development, and some children face multiple forms of disadvantage based on their neighbourhood. Place-based policies that are adapted to the specific local context have the potential to level the playing field and allow all children to grow up in a thriving community. This paper provides practical guidance and summarises key considerations for national and local policy makers and other stakeholders involved in place-based policy making to build child-friendly neighbourhoods. It details circumstances under which locally adapted place-based policies can be effective tools and stresses the need for sound policy implementation and evaluations to maximise their impact and deepen the understanding of their potential. Special attention is given to cost-efficient collections and uses of local data, which help identify geographical areas and policy domains requiring intervention, justify resource allocation, and strengthen policy design, implementation, and evaluation. Where possible, the paper references attempts to tackle place-based inequalities among children from practices across OECD countries.

# Résumé

Le cadre de vie dans lequel les enfants grandissent joue un rôle important dans leur bien-être et dans leur développement, et certains enfants sont confrontés à de multiples formes de désavantages liés à leur quartier. Les politiques adaptées au lieu ont le potentiel de compenser ces manques et de permettre à tous les enfants de grandir dans une communauté prospère. Ce document fournit des conseils pratiques et résume les principales considérations pour les décideurs politiques nationaux et locaux ainsi que pour les autres acteurs impliqués dans l'élaboration de politiques adaptées au lieu visant à créer des quartiers accueillants pour les enfants. Il détaille les circonstances dans lesquelles des politiques adaptées au contexte local peuvent constituer un levier efficace et souligne la nécessité d'une mise en œuvre et d'évaluations rigoureuses pour maximiser leur impact et mieux cerner leur potentiel. Une attention particulière est accordée à la collecte et à l'exploitation des données locales, qui facilitent l'identification des zones géographiques et des domaines d'intervention prioritaires ou spécifiques, et servent à justifier l'allocation de ressources, et à concevoir, mettre en œuvre et évaluer les politiques en question. Dans la mesure du possible, ce document présente des tentatives de réduction des inégalités de quartier chez les enfants dans les pays de l'OCDE.

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# 1. The vital role of local actors in improving children's neighbourhoods

Children's local environments can enhance or hamper children's well-being and development (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014<sup>[1]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[2]</sup>). Some neighbourhoods<sup>1</sup> are good places to grow up in, being characterised, for instance, by high quality health care and education facilities, good-quality housing, an active and supportive community, and safe and green outdoor spaces for children to play and meet friends. In other areas, structural and intergenerational disadvantage prevail, and families may be exposed to risk factors such as high concentrations of poverty, crime, pollution, or streets and public transport that are dangerous for children to navigate. Moreover, the quality of neighbourhoods influences the experiences women make during pregnancy, and more generally, impacts the well-being of and the supports available to children's caregivers. This has further, indirect effects on child outcomes, including through family stress levels and parenting methods (Masarik and Conger, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). Child-friendly neighbourhoods set children up to thrive today and throughout their lives by providing the necessary resources and protection from harm to them and their families (see Figure 1 below for an overview of relevant neighbourhood aspects). Improving children's neighbourhoods also benefits society more widely as these measures simultaneously enhance the inclusiveness of urban spaces for older people and other vulnerable groups (OECD, forthcoming<sup>[4]</sup>).

Many of the decisions and actions that determine the quality of children's neighbourhoods are taken at the local level, within municipalities or by other local stakeholders. Choices related to urban planning, e.g. the overall spatial configuration and land use, the child-friendliness of streets and public transport, the location and quality of housing, and the design of parks and other open public spaces, can make a large difference to the well-being of children and their families. Local actors further shape the social fabric and the degree of community cohesion of neighbourhoods, with weak local ties and social infrastructure contributing to issues such as violence, crime, intergenerational poverty, and harmful social norms. Other local decisions that matter for children centre on the accessibility of high-quality services such as education, health, and child and family support services (Almeida et al., 2024<sup>[5]</sup>). In addition, local actors can contribute to ensuring policy relevance, acceptance and uptake by encouraging community engagement and co-designing interventions with children and caregivers (OECD, forthcoming<sup>[4]</sup>).

Although children are, relative to adults, thought to be more affected by the quality of their local environment (Wallerich et al., 2023<sup>[7]</sup>), they have not always been at the heart of neighbourhood design, in part due to the limited space children tend to have to voice their concerns and to participate in decisions (OECD, 2021<sup>[2]</sup>; Wood, 2015<sup>[8]</sup>). However, policy makers, civil society organisations and communities increasingly aim to integrate children's and caregivers' needs and perspectives in decisions concerning their local environments. The growing global interest in building child-friendly neighbourhoods is reflected

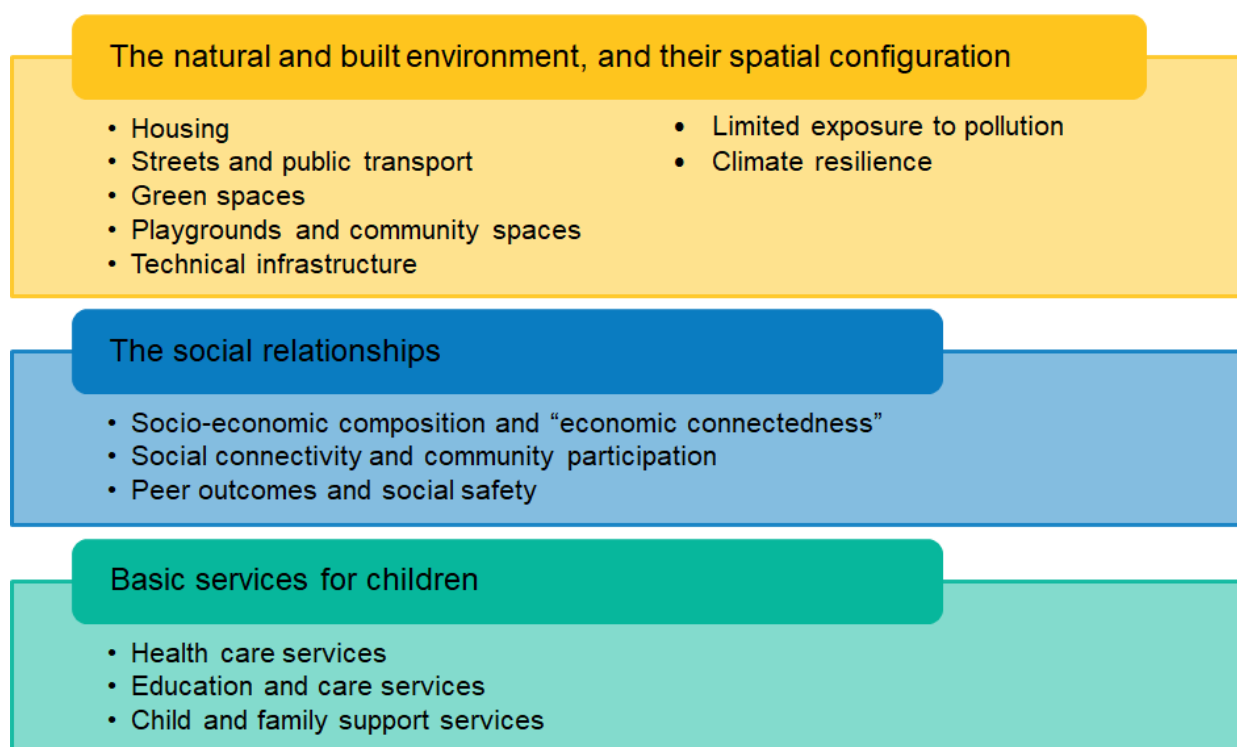
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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'neighbourhoods' and 'local environments' are used interchangeably in this paper and refer to the geographical space in which children and their caregivers spend their daily lives rather than fixed, administrative delineations.

by initiatives that promote and support local efforts, such as UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities Initiative and the Start with Children initiative for creating better cities for children (Start with Children Initiative, 2024<sup>[9]</sup>).

### Figure 1. A conceptual framework of neighbourhood aspects that impact child well-being

Neighbourhood aspects that have consistently been found to be important for children's well-being



Note: This framework aims to capture neighbourhood elements with a clear and demonstrated impact on children. It excludes children's or caregivers' individual behaviours as well as elements with ambiguous effects on children's well-being, such as access to supermarkets.

Source: OECD (2025<sup>[6]</sup>), “The importance of monitoring neighbourhood conditions for children's well-being and development”, *OECD Papers on Well-being and Inequalities*, No. 34, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/143ae959-en>.

This paper aims to support child policies or interventions that seek to improve outcomes for children in targeted geographical areas or communities (“place-based policies”), by considering the multiple and interrelated environmental factors that shape children's neighbourhood, especially in areas where different types of disadvantage concentrate. This paper draws out important considerations for national and local policy makers, community leaders and other relevant stakeholders who lead, support, or wish to undertake such initiatives, provides practical guidance and highlights relevant examples from practice. The structure of this paper is as follows: The next section (Section 2) reviews motivations to employ a place-based lens to child policy making and to adapt policies to the specific local context, the broad range of existing approaches for locally adapted place-based policies that aim to make neighbourhoods more child-friendly, and common challenges and successful features to overcome them. Section 3 centres on the role of data collection at the local level to support locally adapted place-based child policies and provides guidance on what data initiatives may want to collect and how. Section 4 discusses the analysis and integration of local data in place-based policy making for the purposes of early warning and prevention, intervention design, implementation and evaluation, and in the dialogues between communities and policy makers. Section 5 concludes with policy recommendations for local and national governments who wish to build child-friendly neighbourhoods. Annex A provides an index of the place-based policy initiatives that are featured as examples in this paper.

The key findings of this paper are:

- **Place-based policies can provide support to disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the children and families living there.** They can complement person-based supports like child and family benefits by addressing issues that go beyond individual-specific behaviours and outcomes, such as high levels of crime or air pollution. Place-based policies can be resource-efficient policy options as they focus on the specific and acute needs of children in a few disadvantaged areas and/or communities rather than the whole city, region, or territory. For example, they may offer additional educational, recreational and health-oriented supports that meet the needs of children and their caregivers from diverse backgrounds, achieve higher levels of acceptability, and help children in high-poverty neighbourhoods develop healthily and strengthen their social connections. Place-based policies also have the potential to better align and integrate services, spaces and resources that benefit children and their caregivers with the built environment and local urban development strategies.

Place-based policies also strengthen local structures by engaging disadvantaged populations, fostering community support, and creating infrastructure for sustained impact. Evidence from impact assessments shows that key success factors include local adaptation, robust implementation plans, cross-sector partnerships, effective communication, long-term commitment, and reliable outcome tracking systems.

- **Place-based policies must be suitable for the unique characteristics of each locality to be effective and to avoid unintended negative consequences.** For example, factors such as the community's population size, demographic trends (e.g., migration patterns, age distribution), and the age dependency ratio (the proportion of children and elderly to the working-age population) when designing policy interventions related to housing, urban planning, transportation, and public services, to ensure they align with the needs of the population living in the area<sup>2</sup>. Without careful consideration of the local context, place-based policies can fail to benefit (some of) the targeted children and their families or possibly even impact them negatively. Urban regeneration initiatives, for instance, may increase the attractiveness of a neighbourhood to new, more affluent families and force the local population to relocate to other, more affordable areas, causing displacement. Place-based policies may also stigmatise certain local communities when they become associated with the disadvantage they experience (Burgalassi and Matsumoto, 2024<sup>[10]</sup>).
- **Engaging local actors and communities in the design and implementation of policy initiatives can strengthen place-based interventions.** Local actors, including children themselves and their caregivers, are particularly well-placed to identify the underlying local causes of children's outcomes and policy needs and thereby, can enhance interventions' relevance and effectiveness. Moreover, the community's knowledge of local structures, organisations, groups, and other informal relationships can help to avoid the duplication of existing efforts, foster cross-sectoral collaboration, utilise local assets and build on community strengths. Further, engaging local stakeholders can help build the trust of local residents, which facilitates participation and take-up of provided supports, while also reducing the risk of stigmatising certain groups. Similarly, local

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<sup>2</sup> Population growth or decline influences housing demand, requiring either new developments or revitalisation efforts, while age distribution determines the need for family housing or senior accommodations. Urban planning must align with demographic needs, providing schools and recreational spaces for younger populations or accessible infrastructure for aging communities. Similarly, transportation policies must accommodate commuting patterns, ensuring efficient public transit for children and families, working-age residents and accessibility for the elderly. Public services must also reflect demographic composition, with investments in education and childcare for younger populations and healthcare and eldercare programmes for aging ones. Considering migration trends further ensures that policies remain responsive to shifting population dynamics, promoting sustainable and inclusive communities.

actors and expertise are invaluable to develop outreach activities to targeted communities and children when they are isolated or marginalised, for example children experiencing homelessness.

- **National governments can enhance the success of place-based policies by delegating sufficient authority and funding to the local level, providing technical expertise and assistance, and facilitating local capacity building** (e.g., skills training in spatial planning, street design, data analysis, co-planning, cross-sector collaboration) for context-specific adaptations. A decentralised approach also facilitates timely feedback from children, families, and programme administrators, allowing for greater flexibility in adjusting and improving ongoing interventions to meet the needs of local children and their caregivers. The optimal level of local adaptation - ranging from independent local initiatives to minor, area-specific adjustments within national programmes - depends on the context and nature of the intervention.
- Locally adapted place-based policies tend to follow two broad strategies, depending on the policy objectives, the sphere of influence of those leading the intervention, and the broader administrative structures in place. Many initiatives take an **urban planning approach** to create a physical environment that better meets children's needs. This includes, for instance, limiting children's exposure to air pollution and other environmental hazards, providing access to green spaces and playgrounds near their homes, and developing safe street designs along with well-functioning public transport systems. Other local initiatives focus on improving the **socio-economic environment and local services provision** for marginalised groups or places with complex social problems. Interventions may operate through improving local resources in education, leisure, nutrition, housing, and physical and mental health, for example. These latter policy interventions require extensive cross-sectoral collaboration and funding, which makes them particularly salient when local authorities have significant decision-making power and resources.
- **Systematic monitoring and evaluation of the impact of place-based policies on child outcomes are needed to further our understanding of the drivers of and obstacles to effective place-based interventions for children.** Among the place-based child policy initiatives that do evaluate their impact, some programmes offer promising results, suggesting that place-based child policies can be impactful to meet certain policy objectives under specific conditions. However, numerous interventions do not yield the expected positive effects on children's well-being due to inherent implementation and measurement challenges that require a better evidence base. **National governments play a key role in promoting systematic impact evaluations**, including through local capacity building and guidance for establishing and adhering to robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks from the policy design phase, identification of relevant assessment metrics (that are comparable across programmes), the provision of local data and/or guidance for local data collection, and sustained political and financial support over time and well beyond a policy intervention when policies are expected to impact children's outcomes later in life.
- **High-quality data on the characteristics of children's neighbourhoods at granular scale are crucial for impactful place-based child policies** as they support:
  - **Early warning and prevention tools.** Monitoring systems help identify communities and areas in need of additional supports and highlight neighbourhoods where children's conditions are starting to deteriorate. Early interventions and prevention protect children and are typically less costly to society than providing supports once various forms of neighbourhood disadvantage have accumulated in a place. Where regularly updated, specific data on children's local environments are not readily available, monitoring data can be reduced to a few indicators that effectively signal overall neighbourhood changes. For example, stark increases in neighbourhood housing vacancy rates may be a first indication that the quality of children's neighbourhood is declining. National governments are well-placed to produce and disseminate a small number of core local monitoring indicators and encourage their use in policy making as

centralisation may yield economies of scale and harmonised local metrics can guide investment decisions at both local and country level.

- **The design, implementation, and evaluation of place-based policies that are tailored to children's specific neighbourhood context.** The use of local data in the planning process paves the way for successful initiatives through alignment of policy objectives and design with children's and community needs, and for effective implementation through the promotion of a shared understanding and coordination between actors from the start. Locally relevant performance metrics that represent meaningful and sustainable change allow to track the progress made across sectors, and to adjust the implementation approach if necessary. Finally, continuous and final evaluations of the intervention process and impact rely on local data. These assessments are crucial to build a better evidence base of what place-based child policies are effective in which contexts. Across the different stages, national authorities can support local stakeholders through guidance and local capacity building.
- **The dialogue between communities and policy makers.** Providing local stakeholders, including local governments and civil society organisations, with pertinent local data can empower communities to raise awareness of a concentration of children's needs in one place and mobilise action and political support. These data tend to be particularly valuable when they can be tied to harmonised indicators that allow for comparisons with other geographical areas. For example, local policy makers may use high school dropout rates in their area compared to similar places in negotiations with regional or national governments for additional supports. Sharing local data also strengthens communication in the other direction. Public decision makers may rely on them to enhance transparency and legitimise the use of public resources for planned and past policy interventions, generate support to continue or expand an intervention in a neighbourhood, and justify the replication and scaling of a successful approach in similar other contexts.
- **Due to the substantial cost of collecting data, policy interventions should explore:**
  - **Access to existing data before collecting new series of local data.** Relevant existing data on children's local conditions may come from different sectors within municipalities, from higher levels of government and international organisations, or from local third parties. The possibility to modify or add to existing data collection processes should be considered to minimise costs, especially when data collection is expected to be repeated. Within the existing accessible data, when the desired indicators do not exist, local decision makers should consider the use of cost-efficient data, such as available proxies or behavioural indicators. For example, information on how many children use an existing playground may offer some information about its accessibility and quality without the need for detailed measurements such as available structures for play, protection from the sun and rain, benches to sit, or playground size.
  - **Innovative and cost-efficient data collection methods.** Local data needs for policy interventions can be very specific and are typically not fully covered by existing available data. In these cases, local indicators may be collected through observations of people's behaviour or of neighbourhood features and objects. Technology-based tools in the form of sensors, phone data or drone imagery, for example, can offer valuable information on people's movements and the built environment, and are often more resource-efficient and faster than manual data collection. Besides observational data, neighbourhood information may be solicited through participatory processes, including workshops, interviews, and surveys of local residents. Here too, technology can support data collection through digital surveys or apps. **Consultation processes should include children and caregivers and be age appropriate so that their voices are heard in efforts aiming to improve their neighbourhood conditions.**

- **National and local governments should systematically gather, integrate and share relevant local data** to support the design, implementation and evaluation of place-based child policies. More relevant local data can be gathered through new data collections but also by adding geospatial references to **existing** ones, even when they serve a different primary purpose, such that information may be broken down by neighbourhoods or higher geographical regions. Integrating data from various policy areas (e.g., infrastructure, education, health) into a single platform allows for a comprehensive analysis of children's local environments and promotes cross-sectoral collaboration. National- and regional-level agencies are well placed to merge local data from different higher-level sources and disseminate them to local authorities who may lack the resources or expertise to integrate and interpret the data independently. More generally, data on children's neighbourhoods should be made accessible to relevant services, the public, and third parties as far as data confidentiality permits.

## 2. Navigating place-based child policies: opportunities and challenges

Inequities in the quality of children's neighbourhoods can be attenuated with place-based policies. Since children's neighbourhood conditions go beyond individual behaviours and outcomes, person-based policies alone are insufficient to address certain aspects of geographical inequalities. Indeed, while regional and national supports targeting individuals, such as child and family benefits, play an important role in combatting childhood disadvantage, their impact may be limited if children grow up in an environment that perpetuates social issues or hinders their opportunities. Additionally, person-based transfers to individuals or households can leave some children behind, for example when they are in non-standard family arrangements or in precarious immigration situations that disqualify them from child and family benefits. These children may rely particularly on positive neighbourhood environments and on resources outside their family unit, which place-based policies can foster.

Place-based interventions tend to direct supports to selected areas or communities that are considered most in need or well-suited for intervention instead of rolling out an intervention across the whole territory to spend resources where they are expected to have the biggest impact. For example, [Para Los Niños](#) (PLN), an organisation based in Los Angeles, United States, focusses on supporting children, youth, and their families in communities with the highest levels of food insecurity and overall homelessness in LA County. Around 90% of their over 10 000 beneficiaries live in areas of concentrated poverty and over 80% identify as Latinx/Hispanic (Para Los Niños, 2021<sup>[11]</sup>). According to PLN's self-reported impact evaluation, their integrated interventions across food access, education, and diverse socio-emotional supports led to improvements in local child and youth outcomes, such as increases in academic performance (18.5% average growth in supported students meeting or exceeding state science standards over the last two years) and mental health services uptake (24% increase in the number of mental health services clients, across both children and adults) (Para los Niños, 2024<sup>[12]</sup>).

While examples like Para Los Niños encourage the use of place-based child policies, other programmes fail to show significant results and overall, the evidence base is mixed and our understanding of the drivers of and obstacles to effective place-based interventions is still limited (Burgemeister et al., 2021<sup>[13]</sup>; Glover et al., 2021<sup>[14]</sup>). Nevertheless, the existing evidence suggests that, if implemented and assessed well, place-based child policies that consider the local context in their design and implementation tend to be more impactful (Burgemeister et al., 2021<sup>[13]</sup>; Hoang et al., 2024<sup>[15]</sup>). This section reviews key potential benefits of local adaptation before characterising different types of locally adapted place-based child policies. Finally, it lays out ways to overcome challenges in local implementation and evaluation to build a stronger evidence base and develop more impactful policies.

### 2.1 Benefits of adapting place-based policies to the local context of children

Place-based policies can either rely on a common one-size-fits-all solution or offer varying degrees of local adaptation. In the former case, the approach is to identify a policy issue and then implement a standardised

intervention in all areas that meet eligibility criteria (e.g., for all areas in which children's average test score falls below a certain threshold, areas with high population growth, or where unemployment rates are particularly high). This approach can contribute to improving outcomes for children, provided that settings are carefully selected and exhibit similar challenges (Haltiwanger et al., 2024<sup>[16]</sup>). For example, the [HOPE VI Program](#) in the United States provided revitalisation grants to particularly disadvantaged neighbourhoods to demolish and revitalise public housing and to encourage the formation of mixed income communities (Congressional Research Service, 2012<sup>[17]</sup>). In this context, this approach was shown to reduce poverty rates in targeted neighbourhoods and to make them more appealing environments for residents, as well as to improve children's later-life earnings and labour market outcomes, mainly by improving job accessibility locally and by encouraging relocation to areas with more employment opportunities (Haltiwanger et al., 2024<sup>[16]</sup>; Staiger, Palloni and Voorheis, 2024<sup>[18]</sup>).

The second approach, locally adapted place-based child policies, initiatives may first pinpoint disadvantaged areas based on set criteria, and then develop individual intervention strategies for each area based on the specific and acute needs of the local community. Or they may feature a mixed approach, for example when national policies aimed to tackle a specific policy challenge (e.g., school dropouts, low childhood immunization rates) in affected areas allow for local adaptation in the implementation.

Adapting initiatives to the local context and paying better attention to local variability were overall found to contribute to better child outcomes than standardised, one-size-fits-all policy measures (Burgemeister et al., 2021<sup>[13]</sup>; Hoang et al., 2024<sup>[15]</sup>). In many cases, community needs differ across neighbourhoods, including when they face comparable levels of disadvantage. The consideration of local priorities ensures that policy solutions target neighbourhood improvements that are meaningful for the local children and wider community. Moreover, policies can yield a greater impact on child outcomes when they maximise alignment between the intervention design and implementation, and existing local structures and norms. The remainder of this section highlights four key benefits of local adapting the design and implementation of place-based policies to the localities and communities they are intended to serve.

***Locally adapted place-based policies can tackle the underlying causes of children's outcomes by integrating local knowledge from stakeholders, practitioners, and residents***

Incorporating local knowledge from stakeholders, practitioners, and residents (including children and their caregivers), who are familiar with the specific and acute challenges faced at the local level, is often critical to enhance relevance and effectiveness of place-based child policies. It allows to better identify the underlying causes of geographical child inequalities and to plan, adapt and implement interventions accordingly. For example, to address certain child outcomes, it may be particularly critical to provide sustained support throughout childhood and adolescence rather than focusing exclusively on their early years. Or, in many cases, it may be beneficial to address the local needs and barriers faced by caregivers in addition to those of children. A good understanding of community needs and local culture can also facilitate implementation, for instance to help tailor the delivery of supports to traditionally hard-to-reach children and families, such as those experiencing homelessness.

Local knowledge thus allows to design more holistic supports for children and, where relevant, to implement multiple, concurrent interventions that specifically address the local determinants of childhood disadvantage. This approach is particularly valuable for more complex or "wicked" social issues, for which the multiple and inter-related causes are difficult to solve and require cross-sector solutions. Examples of complex social issues include deeply rooted neighbourhood poverty, which is multifaceted and often intertwined with social, psychological, and health challenges affecting children or parents. It may also be linked to issues of violence and crime, necessitating coordinated action from multiple government agencies and locally based stakeholders. Multiple sources of childhood disadvantage tend to concentrate in specific localities as they are deeply entrenched in social relations and norms. Person-based support and single

interventions (such as focusing on education or health alone) usually fail to provide the broad strategic supports that are necessary to achieve systemic change (Kaplan, 2023<sup>[19]</sup>; Abadie, 2019<sup>[20]</sup>).

For instance, in the United States, the community initiative [Mission Promise Neighbourhoods](#) in San Francisco's Mission District recognises that unequal outcomes in children's educational achievement are rooted in complex and inter-related factors such as access to healthcare, early literacy, family engagement, mental health, and families' financial resources (Mission Promise Neighbourhood, 2024<sup>[21]</sup>). The initiative thus works to provide multi-dimensional educational support (e.g., quality childcare, digital literacy and improved reading programmes for children, adult mentoring), and also provides robust non-educational support to communities such as access to low-cost internet, adequate housing, and parental employment to help families develop positive conditions for children's learning. The development of a nested civic infrastructure is seen as a fundamental element to improve educational outcomes for children.

In Australia, the “[Every Child, Every Chance](#)” initiative by Go Goldfields in Central Victoria tackles the entrenched socio-economic disadvantage experienced by the local community by improving outcomes for children 0 to 8. To do so, priority actions are defined, with two of the five priority areas focused on supporting parents and caregivers and ensuring healthy pregnancies. This includes working in partnership with local maternity services or the Australian Breastfeeding Association and providing services such as a drop-in parenting space or a peer-to-peer parenting programme facilitated by trained professionals (Go Goldfields Central Victoria, 2024<sup>[22]</sup>).

### ***Locally adapted place-based policies can enhance local governance on child well-being policies***

When place-based child policies build on existing local structures and seek to deliver joint interventions across different policy areas, for instance to address linkages between the built environment and children's health outcomes, they have the potential to strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration and existing local service delivery. Developing and coordinating these policy measures at the local level can foster the effectiveness of local governance through knowledge sharing, coherence of actions and, more broadly, synergies in the provision of child and family services (Riding et al., 2021<sup>[23]</sup>; Dirwan and Thévenon, 2023<sup>[24]</sup>). A beneficial effect of interventions may thus be a strengthening of local governance on child well-being policies, which offers gains for the community beyond the initial policy intervention.

In June 2015, the City of Ghent in Belgium committed to a [child and youth-friendly city action plan](#) to tackle child poverty in response to rising demographic and social challenges such as impoverishment, public health, and environmental burden (City of Ghent, 2015<sup>[25]</sup>). The city emphasised the importance of working across departments to bring child-friendliness to all policy areas, including education, mobility, urban planning, and health. Accordingly, multiple actors were involved in implementing child-friendly measures. The school system and family support teams, for example, proved particularly useful to improve outreach capacities of services to isolated families. Integrated teams from municipal healthcare, childcare, and social services provided walk-in counselling and free activities for vulnerable families with young children (Eurocities, 2021<sup>[26]</sup>). This cross-sector strategy is an effort to diversify support streams for families through client-centred support, but also to create synergies that strengthen each intervention pathway through sustained collaboration, resource sharing, and knowledge exchange.

### ***Local adaptation of place-based child policies can ensure sustainability by strengthening local networks and capacities***

Involving non-public local actors and networks in the design and delivery of place-based interventions has several benefits. Relying on existing structures avoids the duplication of efforts, may draw in additional community expertise, assets and resources, and can build up community strengths. For example, the [Neighborhood Matching Fund programme](#) in Seattle, United States matches funds of local

organisations or neighbourhood groups aiming to build stronger community connections since 1988. Awarded projects include a programme to support African American youth through a combination of basketball training, mentoring and educational workshops, an initiative to develop a youth-centred creative space with the local community for exhibits, performances, and youth arts programs, as well as programmes striving to improve the physical environment. Correlational evidence indicates that areas benefitting from the programme have seen significant reductions in violent crime, including in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Importantly, researchers suggest that the programme also raised private mortgage investments, and that these further reduced crime (Shrider and Ramey, 2018<sup>[27]</sup>). Engaging the community not only makes policy measures more impactful, it also increases the probability that interventions trigger system changes that yield lasting results beyond the project life span, and it makes communities more prepared for other challenges they may face (Batty et al., 2010<sup>[28]</sup>).

To build effective local partnerships, locally adapted policies may rely on residents who can identify suitable existing local structures, organisations, groups, and other informal relationships, as well as on key actors like community leaders (Lankelly Chase, 2017<sup>[29]</sup>). Success factors of such policies include strong pre-existing structures that facilitate collaboration, trust, and a shared vision between those leading policy implementation and local partners. This is exemplified by the intervention programme [Together for Childhood](#), an initiative developed by the UK charity organisation National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to protect children from adverse situations such as domestic abuse and mental health problems. The initiative is a ten-year commitment to invest consistently in four localities, operating local teams in Glasgow, Grimsby, Plymouth and Stoke-on-Trent. All four teams identified local organisations to connect to and partner with such as social care services, schools, community groups, and the police. Together for Childhood also provides additional resources to local practitioners to strengthen their capacities. For instance, in Stoke, staff assisted four local schools in the implementation of programmes to educate children on sexual abuse. Support included help with designing a survey to collect views from children and families on the subject, comparing national literature with local knowledge, and upskilling and empowering teaching staff in delivering such lessons to children (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2023<sup>[30]</sup>).

### ***Local adaptation of child policies can foster social innovation***

Place-based policies that set locally adapted expectations and goals allow involved actors to be more flexible in their assessment of performance and open to trial and error (Kaplan, 2023<sup>[19]</sup>). This provides opportunities to develop grassroots solutions that have not been tried or evidenced elsewhere. Small-scale trials can be led by urban entrepreneurs and other stakeholders to experiment new approaches and to assess their impact on children's well-being. While neighbourhoods benefit from customised policy design and implementation, these experimental approaches can be cost-efficient ways to spur social innovation in the search of underlying principles and successful strategies that may be scaled up to benefit children in similar neighbourhoods.

The urban development and placemaking organisation STIPO in Rotterdam, Netherlands promotes social innovation through their programme [The City at Eye Level for Kids](#). It is integrated into a wider open-source learning platform that offers theoretical knowledge and practical advice to urban planners and local decision makers with the aim to scale successful small-scale approaches internationally. Based on a diverse set of context-specific experimentations, The City at Eye Level for Kids develops broadly applicable recommendations (36 “lessons”) to build better cities for children. A particular focus is put on young children aged 0 to 3, caregivers, and pregnant women (Danenbergh, Doumpa and Karssenberg, 2018<sup>[31]</sup>).

## 2.2 Common strategies for locally adapted place-based child policies

Existing place-based policies that rely on local solutions to improve children's environments can be categorised along two dimensions. First, their thematic scope typically falls within two common overall approaches: interventions tend to focus on urban planning, or on the socio-economic environment and local services provision. Second, strategies may be led by various actors (e.g., governments, non-profit organisations, community-leaders) at the international, national, or local level. These different institutional arrangements shape the mandate, approach, format, and resources of initiatives. In practice, both the thematic scope and the institutional arrangement are often not specifically chosen but rather a result of the policy objective, the sphere of influence of those leading the intervention, as well as the broader administrative structures in place.

### *Locally designed interventions follow two main thematic strategies*

Place-based child policies address a variety of issues, which can be categorised along two main themes. The first common focus is on **child-friendly urban planning**, where initiatives aim to build a physical environment that best responds to children's needs, for instance, by limiting children's exposure to air pollution and other environmental hazards, providing access to green spaces and playgrounds near children's homes, or developing safe street designs and well-functioning public transport systems. City planners, developers and local authorities are typically well placed to integrate more child-friendly urban designs into their existing professional responsibilities, and local residents and the wider community may advocate for and advice on the implementation of specific projects. Creating physical environments that are inclusive for children often carries positive externalities for other vulnerable groups (e.g., old people, people with reduced mobility), who have similar needs for safe and accessible spaces for instance. Child-friendly urban planning can therefore contribute to reducing wider social, economic, and environmental costs (OECD, forthcoming<sup>[41]</sup>).

One approach to child-friendly urban planning is to establish a city-wide strategy to improve a city's overall child-friendliness. This involves jointly addressing multiple determinants of child well-being in the built environment. While resource-intensive, the benefit of such integrated strategies is their ability to mobilise resources and insights from across sectors and services, creating new synergies and acknowledging the urban environment as a system with interconnected issues to be addressed jointly (Danenberg, Doumpa and Karssenberg, 2018<sup>[31]</sup>). For example, the **Child Friendly Rotterdam initiative** was led by the city of Rotterdam, Netherlands from 2007 to 2018 as a response to the city being perceived as uninviting for children and families, in large part due to its car-centric urban design, a large number of children living in deprived neighbourhoods, and lack of safety (Lefaivre, 2007<sup>[32]</sup>). Family-friendly housing, public spaces, facilities such as shops and schools, and safe traffic routes were identified as the four "building blocks" of the initiative. Outputs included a set of city-wide standards for child-friendly urban design, ranging from green play areas to safer liminal spaces (City of Rotterdam, 2010<sup>[33]</sup>).

Child-friendly urban planning programmes can also have a narrower scope, focusing on improving specific public spaces that are particularly used by children, such as parks or schoolyards. For example, the [Green Community Schoolyards](#) in New York City, United States aims to transform asphalt schoolyards into park-like green spaces that are safe and stimulating for children, and accessible for the larger community (Shin and Kustar, 2024<sup>[34]</sup>). With a focus on disadvantaged neighbourhoods, these park-like spaces were created to strengthen communities and to provide climate resilient spaces. The design of these spaces actively involved children and other community groups, such as local senior groups, sports clubs, and cultural clubs, to ensure their needs could be met and maximise their impact on children.

When conducted at a smaller scale and with more limited resources, improving children's physical environment can also consist in responding to specific and timely needs at the neighbourhood level. [SplashJAM](#) was an initiative developed in 2015 in the city of Lexington, United States by the Bluegrass

Community Foundation and the Gehl Institute to provide pedestrian safety improvements, park amenities, and a temporary splash pad (Gehl Services, 2018<sup>[35]</sup>). SplashJAM was directly inspired by the results of a survey of residents conducted by the Gehl Institute to identify local communities' needs. The survey results pointed to the demand for a safe and accessible water-play area. Residents reported that the lack of such infrastructure encouraged children to play in unsafe and prohibited water fountains. The SplashJAM play area successfully diverted children from this practice and provided a safe alternative for residents. Additionally, SplashJAM was strategically built at the intersection of otherwise isolated neighbourhoods to encourage exchanges between communities.

The second main thematic strategy is to address children's **socio-economic environment**, often through the provision of improved or additional services, reflecting common priorities for place-based policies such as family well-being, community strengthening, employment, and social inclusion and exclusion (Hoang et al., 2024<sup>[15]</sup>). Locally adapted place-based policies typically focus on the challenges of marginalised groups or places with complex social problems. Targeted places tend to face multiple forms of disadvantage such as poverty, cultural and racial discrimination, and social exclusion. This approach aims to holistically address community needs beyond their interaction with public spaces. Interventions may operate through improving local resources in education, leisure, nutrition, housing, and physical and mental health, for example (Faragau, 2020<sup>[36]</sup>).

This strategy is taken by [Children's Ground](#), a non-profit organisation working across Australia to improve health, education and economic outcomes for First Nations children while uplifting First Nations culture, history, and knowledge. Children's Ground adapts to the special needs of First Nations children by recognising their disproportionate exposure to economic, social, and cultural inequalities. It delivers support to local communities in the areas of early learning, health, economic development, creative and cultural development, community development, and well-being while ensuring a community-led approach that is respectful of First Nations knowledge, governance, and self-determination.

### ***Locally adapted place-based child policies have different governance structures***

At the international level, **worldwide municipal partnerships** are led by international or non-profit organisations to bring a global focus on child-friendliness and support local capacity building. These partnerships bring together local governments, stakeholders, and children themselves in the elaboration of locally adapted place-based policies, while providing resources, strategic foundations, and a platform for knowledge sharing. The global evidence on successful practices provided by these initiatives can help set international norms as well as local agendas and priorities by encouraging municipalities to engage in child-friendly transformation.

An example of such a global initiative is [UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities Initiative](#) (CFCI), which formally partners with cities in over 40 countries to create communities with shared priorities guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Partnerships are directed by local development plans that ensure that common strategies are adopted in areas such as data collection and monitoring, and child and youth participation. In addition to improving governance at the local level, the CFCI also acts as a network and can provide cross-cultural evidence to advocate for more municipalities to recognise the importance of building child-friendly environments.

**National flagship programmes or networks** are developed by governments or non-profit organisations to reduce inequalities at the national level by acting in places where disadvantage is the most persistent. While they usually involve top-down guidance and articulate models and priorities for local partnerships, they can vary in the level of flexibility given to local decision makers to adapt approaches.

For example, **Sure Start Children's Centres** were established by the UK Department for Education in 1999 to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities at the national level in child development, parenting aspirations and skills, and child and family health outcomes. Implemented locally, Sure Start Children

Centres are managed by or alongside local authorities to provide integrated and locally adapted health, education and social services for children and their families, with a focus on disadvantaged communities. Sure Start Children's Centres involve families, communities, and local organisations in the elaboration of their services (Education, 2013<sup>[37]</sup>). An impact evaluation shows that, on average, children who lived close to a Sure Start's Children's Centre between the ages of 0 and 5 experienced significantly improved educational outcomes at least until age 16. The largest benefits were documented for children from poor and from non-white families. Overall, the programme is estimated to have generated £1.09 for every £1 spent by the government through improved school outcomes of attending children and resulting higher lifetime earnings (Carneiro, Cattán and Ridpath, 2024<sup>[38]</sup>). Building on the impact of Sure Start, the [Start for Life programme](#) was established in 2022 with Family Hubs created in 75 eligible localities across the UK to expand support to children aged 0 to 19, or 25 for young people with special needs.

In 2019, the Australian national government created [Stronger Places, Stronger People](#) in partnership with state and territory governments to build better futures for children and their families in disadvantaged areas characterised by high rates of poverty. A total of ten partner communities were selected based on data on the existing degree of disadvantage in these areas. National policy makers have earmarked nearly AUD 100 million for a period of ten years in addition to investments from state and territory governments and philanthropic organisations. The initiative seeks to build collective impact and interventions are led by the local communities to develop evidence-driven solutions that are tailored to the local community. For example, in Logan, Queensland, the Logan Children's Charter was developed with local children to engage businesses and community in building child-friendly neighbourhoods. Similarly, the 1 000 voices project collected views from community members on how to improve outcomes for Logan's children, which informed intervention priorities and markers of success. Stronger Places, Stronger People places great value on data collection and impact evaluation as part of the interventions in order to share learnings and maximise impact to achieve system changes at scale.

At the local level, **place-specific initiatives** are led directly by municipalities or by communities to tackle a specific issue for children (e.g., unsafe roads, lack of accessible playgrounds), or to establish a cross-cutting strategy to make neighbourhoods more child-friendly. Place-based policies originating at the local level can provide more space for flexible and nuanced solutions as they usually arise as a response to locally identified issues and determine their own goals and strategies.

The [East Harlem Action Collaborative \(EHAC\)](#) is a caregiver-led advocacy group aiming to improve outcomes for children living in East Harlem, United States. Supported by the New York Academy of Medicine, it provides a space for local caregivers to voice their priorities and hopes for their children through regular meetings and advocacy to local and national governments. The group developed the Resident-led Research Policy and Power Framework to guide conversations and uplift the community's voice and vision. EHAC brings together caregivers with a focus on inclusion and adapts to specific local challenges. For example, interpretation is provided at all meetings to overcome local language barriers between English and Latino communities in the neighbourhood.

## 2.3 Inherent challenges of place-based child policies and attenuating factors

Despite the continued investment in place-based child policies, their expected benefits to children's well-being and evidence of successful initiatives, many programmes have failed to show the expected results (Burgemeister et al., 2021<sup>[13]</sup>). As place-based child policies are highly heterogeneous and exhibit strong variability in the outcomes they intend to shape, it can be expected that their impact differs according to policy goals, target populations, environmental factors, and implementation methods. Knowledge of the influence of these elements on successful place-based interventions is essential to guide policy making and investment decisions, yet many programmes are not systematically evaluated. Box 2.1 highlights intervention areas and implementation strategies for which promising results have been documented. It is

necessary to invest in high-quality impact assessments to further our understanding of the circumstances under which place-based child policies can be an effective policy tool, and how they should be implemented.

### **Box 2.1. Existing evidence on the effectiveness of place-based policies**

While the evidence on the impact of place-based policies on children remains incomplete, studies with more resources and robust evaluations have shown positive impacts across a number of child well-being domains, including for children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Glover et al., 2021<sup>[14]</sup>; O'Dwyer et al., 2007<sup>[39]</sup>). Positive impacts were documented, albeit not systematically, in areas such as children's early development, child behaviour, care services, physical health, social emotional development, academic performance, and parenting and parental well-being (Hoang et al., 2024<sup>[15]</sup>; Glover et al., 2021<sup>[14]</sup>; Crew, 2020<sup>[40]</sup>).

Strategies that have shown positive results included encouraging and engaging children in physical activity during recess or creating safe public spaces for children to play to improve their physical health outcomes, after-school and community programmes, literacy promotion, and additional educational supports to enhance children's literacy and academic and cognitive skills, as well as parenting courses, spaces for social interactions for caregivers and wider family support services to promote parental well-being and children's socio-emotional development (Hoang et al., 2024<sup>[15]</sup>).

Place-based policies were also found to be effective in strengthening local structures, by engaging disadvantaged people in programmes and services, building supportive communities, and building an infrastructure and creating the conditions for impact (National Literacy Trust, 2019<sup>[41]</sup>). Finally, evidence also exists on the success factors of place-based policies. It points to the importance of local adaptation, but also of sound implementation and evaluation practices, such as a well-designed implementation plan and shared vision, cross-sector partnerships, communication between partners, medium- to long-term planning and commitment, and a reliable outcome tracking system or shared measurement system (Hoang et al., 2024<sup>[15]</sup>; National Literacy Trust, 2019<sup>[41]</sup>).

However, building a robust evidence base of the potential of place-based child policies is complicated by barriers to successful implementation and evaluation, which can undermine interventions' effectiveness or bias the measured impact, respectively. Overcoming these hurdles is resource and skill intensive, and requires funding and sustained support from national and local policy makers (National Literacy Trust, 2020<sup>[42]</sup>; Centre for Community Child Health, 2011<sup>[43]</sup>; Batty et al., 2010<sup>[28]</sup>). The remainder of this section describes common implementation and evaluation challenges, as well as strategies to attenuate these, in order to support actions that enhance our knowledge of the drivers of and obstacles to effective place-based interventions for children.

### ***Structural challenges of implementing place-based child policies***

Implementing impactful place-based policies has inherent challenges related to reaching targeted children and families. First, individuals and places are heterogenous, and it can be difficult to impact certain communities and individuals, particularly those that are isolated or marginalised. Second, communities' spatial understanding and use of space may diverge from administrative neighbourhood boundaries. In these cases, the implementation of policies that target communities residing in more than one administrative zone typically requires coordination and agreement across relevant public services, for which additional efforts need to be made. Third, acceptance and participation or take-up of supports by

the local population are not guaranteed. Successful initiatives often involve winning the local community's trust and support to be able to design and deliver supports to them.

More broadly, problems can arise from the need to manage a wide range of different interests for the design and implementation of place-based child policies. When important stakeholders have conflicting perceptions, needs and objectives, it makes it difficult to agree on shared priorities, and on the implementation methods and timeline to achieve these. Yet, uniting diverse actors behind a shared goal is crucial to success as most initiatives require significant cross-sectoral collaboration between public officials, community leaders and the wider community. Additional coordination is required where needs of the target population or key actors evolve over time. When expectations about methods, timelines and outcomes are not well communicated or met, it can engender the disengagement of key actors, jeopardising the intervention's success.

The design of place-based policies can also pose obstacles to successful implementation. A common pitfall is the tendency of policy objectives to overreach or to be inconsistent with local resources, limiting their effectiveness (Batty et al., 2010<sup>[44]</sup>). Moreover, when intervention timeframes are not sufficiently long, interventions can fail to achieve systemic changes, making any impact short-lived. This is particularly the case where the design of policies does not connect to higher level systems or wider resources able to sustain efforts across space and over time (Lankelly Chase, 2017<sup>[29]</sup>).

Additional structural challenges relate to unintended adverse effects. Urban regeneration initiatives, for example, typically increase the attractiveness of a neighbourhood, which may cause an influx of new, more affluent residents. This phenomenon, called gentrification, is associated with a displacement of the targeted, local population to other areas because they can no longer afford to live in the neighbourhood.

Moreover, place-based interventions can stigmatise targeted neighbourhoods and bring unwanted attention to communities, who may become associated with the forms of disadvantage they experience, even when those originate from broader issues. For instance, communities with high rates of unemployment can be blamed for lacking the skills or the will to reintegrate the workforce, even when the structural causes are found in labour market failures at the regional or national levels (Moore, 2011<sup>[45]</sup>). Similarly, neighbourhoods eligible for additional support based on identified challenges such as low-quality services or below average academic performance can acquire a bad reputation. This reduces the utility residents derive from the policy and encourages both residents and outsiders to avoid local services or the area itself. Thereby, stigmatisation further adds to the original disadvantage of a place and of the children living there (Koster and van Ommeren, 2022<sup>[46]</sup>; Garrouste and Lafourcade, 2023<sup>[47]</sup>).

Lastly, the welfare losses of place-based policies for non-targeted populations should also be considered. Spatial targeting of communities can cause resentment in non-targeted populations, that may perceive themselves to be equally worthy of support (Baker, Barrow and Shiels, 2009<sup>[48]</sup>). Further, interventions might displace social issues to other localities. For example, the amelioration of a neighbourhood previously characterised by high rates crime may displace criminal activity to surrounding areas, with unintended consequences for the population there.

Many of these structural challenges can be attenuated by adapting place-based child policies to the local level in collaboration with residents, a process that tends to be resource and skill intensive (National Literacy Trust, 2020<sup>[42]</sup>; Centre for Community Child Health, 2011<sup>[43]</sup>; Batty et al., 2010<sup>[28]</sup>). For example, soliciting a wide range of perspectives and concerns, including from children and other residents, helps to identify strategies to engage hard-to-reach populations, to create trust and acceptance among locals, and to carefully map possible unintended consequences of policies. Moreover, community knowledge is crucial for the identification of relevant and representative partners that should be involved and other local assets that can be built on, in order to define shared goals and effective ways to achieve them collectively. Engaging the local community can draw in additional resources and expertise and generate more lasting effects of interventions by building local capacities. Emphasizing communities' strengths rather than framing policies as addressing existing problems can reduce potential stigmatisation, increase acceptance

for such policies and sustain efforts over time. Lastly, long-term political support, setting realistic targets, timeframes and expectations, clear and consistent messaging, and well-defined roles and responsibilities aid the effectiveness of interventions. Well-articulated and measurable outcomes and continuous evaluations of progress can further help identify and overcome structural challenges (Hoang et al., 2024<sup>[15]</sup>).

### ***The challenge of building a robust evidence base***

Currently, many place-based child policies are not designed and implemented with data evaluation in mind, despite the important role that integrated monitoring and evaluation processes play in strengthening the evidence base of their effectiveness. This is largely because monitoring and evaluation activities can be resource- and skill-intensive. Local initiatives are often constrained in their resources and may be inclined to prioritise spending funds on the programme itself rather than on its evaluation. Additionally, local actors often face significant barriers when monitoring and evaluating place-based interventions, such as differences in data systems across services, the absence of platforms to consistently share data, insufficient funding to support data collection and sharing, and a lack of local staff and skills to adequately collect, analyse, and translate data into policy (Villanueva et al., 2024<sup>[49]</sup>). Finally, designing effective monitoring and evaluation strategies requires expertise. They are most useful when they serve a clear policy purpose, align with policy objectives, are set out from the policy design phase, and consider how policymakers can engage with the results (OECD, 2024<sup>[50]</sup>). Robust assessment plans are carefully designed and should address challenges that may arise from modelling intervention pathways, measuring relevant factors and outcomes, and evolving implementation and local conditions.

The assessment of place-based policies is further complexified by several factors tied to their design, implementation, and expected outcomes. Policies that promote children's well-being may operate in ways that are not clearly understood. When the effects of policy interventions are not modelled accurately and comprehensively, evaluations may underestimate their positive impact on children, particularly those that accrue over the long term. For instance, it may be difficult to capture the various channels through which ameliorated community social cohesion benefits children, or data drawn from general population samples may hide stronger effects experienced by specific subgroups of children. Similarly, short-run evaluations of place-based child policies are inaccurate if the whole range of long-term benefits from investing in child development does not become apparent until children have reached adulthood. In these cases, long-term evaluations, conducted several years after the operational start of an initiative, may show greater impact (Burgemeister et al., 2021<sup>[13]</sup>). An additional confounding factor is that place-based policies tend to consist of multiple, concurrent interventions, which makes it difficult to attribute impact to a single intervention pathway. Finally, children may be impacted differently according to their age, gender, and individual context, which needs to be taken into account to evaluate place-based child policies accurately (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2024<sup>[51]</sup>).

Quantifying the impact of place-based policy interventions on children can yield additional obstacles. Many expected policy outcomes are inherently difficult or costly to measure at scale, such as relationship building or wider benefits on families' well-being. In addition, when place-based policies aim to address 'hidden problems' like domestic violence and child abuse, they face limitations in obtaining accurate data as these phenomena tend to be underreported due to societal taboos (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2010<sup>[52]</sup>). Moreover, measuring effects on community members is a challenge when there is residential mobility and information on the outcomes of these individuals can no longer be collected (Crew, 2020<sup>[40]</sup>).

Evolving implementation methods and local conditions over time further complexify place-based policy evaluation. Initiatives may themselves adapt and shift their objectives as local needs evolve and based on continuous learning. While this may be an efficient use of resources, it impedes the impact analysis of an intervention, especially for outcomes that take a long time to materialise. Political turnover and resulting changes in funding priorities or other changing external conditions can additionally hinder long-run

evaluations (Burgemeister et al., 2021<sup>[13]</sup>). Sustained political and financial support for data collection and analysis is particularly important when place-based policy interventions target complex social issues, since these can only be addressed over long time periods.

National governments play a key role in helping local actors conduct more systematic monitoring and evaluation to build a better evidence base and thereby, improve the delivery of policy interventions. They can promote standardised outcome frameworks to ensure the comparability of child outcome indicators across similar policy initiatives (Hoang et al., 2024<sup>[15]</sup>; Glover et al., 2021<sup>[14]</sup>). Common measures across interventions enhance our understanding of the impact and efficiency of different policy initiatives, their scope for local adaptation as well as the potential of successful local approaches to be scaled across other places. National policy makers can further support local impact assessment through capacity building, direct funding and data collection and analysis as local data collection and analysis can be inherently difficult to sustain over time because they provide less room for economies of scale (Hoang et al., 2024<sup>[15]</sup>).

## 2.4 How policy makers can support the success of place-based child policies

Inequities in the quality of children's neighbourhoods contribute significantly to childhood disadvantage. Since neighbourhood conditions are beyond families' control, individual- or family-specific supports are insufficient to mitigate this form of disadvantage. Place-based policies can be valuable, complementary policy tools to address structural geographical childhood inequalities. However, implementing impactful place-based policies and demonstrating their effectiveness remains challenging.

Two main ways in which policy makers can facilitate successful place-based policy interventions can be highlighted:

- **Delegate sufficient authority and funding to and support capacity building at the local level for place-based child policies.** Local adaptation increases interventions' likelihood of lasting success for several reasons. Considering the local context allows to identify complex underlying causes of children's outcomes and to develop effective, holistic interventions. Moreover, by taking communities' priorities and norms into account when defining specific policy goals and choosing suitable metrics, local adaptation increases programme relevance and ensures that developed solutions address real needs of local children and are meaningful for the wider community. In addition, locally adapted interventions can design policy measures based on existing cross-sectoral structures, community strengths and key relationships.

Locally adapted place-based policies can take various forms and the required degree of local adaptation will depend on the specific intervention. It includes completely independent local initiatives as well as slight, area-specific adaptation as part of national programmes. For example, when place-based policies aim to tackle complex social problems such as neighbourhood crime and poverty, place-based policies will need substantial degrees of authority and funding at the local level. In other cases, more planning and implementation decisions may be taken at higher levels of governance.

Authority and funding need to be accompanied by capacity building for local actors and institutions. Designing, implementing and evaluating successful place-based policies is complex and typically requires considerable staff availability and a wide range of technical expertise and skills, such as data analysis or stakeholder engagement. In turn, strengthened local capacities may yield durable change in local practices, improve the resilience of local structures, and ensure the sustainability of such initiatives beyond the timeline of a specific intervention or support.

- **Promote impact evaluation of interventions and the sharing of evaluations across localities.** Countries should encourage research on the impact of place-based policies and the conditions under which they may be most effective to improve implementation and to address the current lack

of evidence. Strengthening the evidence base on the potential of place-based child policies requires overcoming both implementation and measurement challenges. Evaluations across countries are desirable to gain a better understanding of programmes' sensitivities to different cultural and policy contexts. Where possible, data collections should be harmonised with other place-based policies to increase comparability of different approaches. For example, in the United States, federal programmes that support expectant parents, children aged 0 to 8 and their families are asked to track a common set of family and child outcomes to facilitate evaluation (Kirby et al., 2022<sup>[53]</sup>).

National policy makers should provide long-term financial and technical support to local data collections and evaluations such that local capacity and resource constraints do not jeopardise high-quality impact assessments of programmes. Adequate support for local evaluation is invaluable to identify new, successful grassroots approaches that may be scaled to other places (with sufficient flexibility for local adaptation). National authorities can further contribute to a better evidence base by promoting good practices for monitoring and evaluation (e.g., via standardised frameworks, toolkits, case studies) and by sharing evaluations across localities and facilitating knowledge exchanges (OECD, forthcoming<sup>[4]</sup>).

Impact evaluations demand careful reflection on their scope. Complex or promising novel policy measures require comprehensive data collection and analysis to build sufficient evidence of their impact and intervention pathways. On the other hand, where initiatives replicate relatively straightforward, well-documented, successful policies from places with similar contexts, they may not need to collect the same amount of detailed data that was necessary to first establish the effectiveness of these policies. This relates to some urban planning policies, for example: certain principles of playground or street design, once demonstrated to be beneficial for children, could be applied to other places where lighter impact assessments may then suffice. Moreover, where funding for evaluation is limited, priority could be given to assessments of policies with greater expected impacts on child outcomes, higher costs and where the current evidence base is particularly scarce.

### 3. Local data collection to build child-friendly neighbourhoods: features and collection methods

Evidence on children's neighbourhood conditions is essential to guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of locally adapted place-based child policies. Figure 1 (see Section 1) lists neighbourhood characteristics that matter for child well-being and that policy makers may therefore wish to measure. Analysing various neighbourhood aspects jointly acknowledges their interconnectedness and makes it possible to study the effect of these linkages on children's well-being and development. Detailed data available at the local scale on all these elements yield a comprehensive and nuanced picture of children's specific neighbourhood context.

While many data at neighbourhood level may be provided by international, national, and regional sources, additional local data collection is often needed to meet specific information requirements of locally adapted policy interventions. These data may not be provided by higher-level institutions for several reasons. Firstly, even when the data cover the same thematic scope, the type of data that is collected for national or regional purposes may not always suit local needs for policy design and implementation. Secondly, many detailed data on specific neighbourhood aspects are only relevant to some places, which makes them too costly to be included in higher-level data collections across neighbourhoods. In addition, international and national data on children across domains tend to be collected and stored in disjointed datasets, which inhibits the geospatial analysis of relationships across domains (OECD, 2021<sup>[2]</sup>) and hence prevents the study of children exposed to multiple forms of neighbourhood disadvantage. Finally, sample sizes of vulnerable groups of children (e.g., young children, children with disabilities, children in the juvenile justice system, children with a migration background) may suffice for analysis at higher geographical levels but be insufficient at the local level, which prevents the detailed study of their specific needs in a given neighbourhood. Therefore, additional data collection may be necessary to illicit the information required to improve children's neighbourhoods.

#### 3.1 Identifying existing and missing local data on child-friendly neighbourhoods

Local policy makers and communities are well placed to identify information needs to tackle local challenges and improve children's environments. Once the relevant thematic domains are identified, decisions need to be taken on what indicators are required and whether additional primary data collection is needed. This subsection presents two guiding principles that decision makers may wish to consider when deciding whether to collect additional data locally.

**Make use of existing data collection.** Collecting data is resource-intensive, which is why the use of existing data should be considered first. Official data on local characteristics are becoming increasingly available to the public, or they can often be accessed on request. These data sources comprise higher

level data collections as well as local-level government data, ranging from population census data and ministerial records on public service provisions to information on child and population outcomes and local programme delivery data. Official data may provide insights on numerous neighbourhood aspects, including local infrastructure, take-up of social security provisions, socio-economic composition, public safety, population health, developmental health screening data, and school data on enrolments, dropouts, and test outcomes (UNICEF, 2018<sup>[54]</sup>; Equity for Children, 2017<sup>[55]</sup>). Relying on local information from data collection at higher level has the additional benefit that it increases comparability with other places, which can provide important context when analysing local outcomes. In addition, data may be accessed from local third parties, such as community centres and civil society organisations, or past or ongoing local research studies (Equity for Children, 2017<sup>[55]</sup>). Market data such as information on average house prices or size, and geospatial big data, e.g., on local climate-resilience and travelling distances to points of interest within a neighbourhood, may be additional resources that local initiatives wish to exploit.

Where existing data do not provide sufficient information to meet local needs, the possibility of adding to or modifying existing data collections should be explored to create synergies and save costs. This may be feasible for existing local data collections. Integrating additional data collection into broader processes helps generate political support since data collection then satisfies multiple purposes. While making use of existing data is often cheaper than collecting new data, it should be noted that access to high-quality and consistent information involves time and relationships. Data that are not freely available typically require data-sharing agreements among public agencies.

**Identify cost-efficient information.** Gathering existing data from different sources and analysing and monitoring data points is time intensive. Local decision makers should thus carefully select the data they require. Reducing the number of data points to be collected is especially feasible when data is used to monitor changes or to identify areas that deserve greater attention. In these cases, some easily accessible data may serve as suitable proxies for more detailed information that would be more costly to obtain. For instance, the share of children that are fully immunised could be a proxy for the quality of local health services for children. Other indicators may serve as “metadata points” that efficiently identify disadvantaged areas in need of additional supports without necessarily having any causal link with the child-friendliness of neighbourhoods. For example, housing market indicators or investments streams in business and infrastructure can identify unattractive neighbourhoods, which often coincide with low-quality environments for children, without providing further information on specific neighbourhood characteristics (Kaplan, 2023<sup>[19]</sup>). Moreover, behavioural indicators on the use of places or services are often cost-efficient ways to illicit some first information on quality and whether these spaces and services meet children’s and caregivers’ needs. Fewer data points and aggregated information may also have the additional benefit of reducing possible data protection issues that come with the handling of data on identifiable individuals.

Despite the various opportunities to make use of existing data collections, local decision makers may have unique data needs that require additional, primary data collection or qualitative research (Villanueva et al., 2016<sup>[56]</sup>). In such cases, the selection of additional data to be collected should be guided by a balance of insights and cost-efficiency. Using data economically is especially important when data collections are to be repeated over time, for example for monitoring or policy evaluation purposes. On the other hand, it may be most suitable to collect many data points in one-off data collections, for instance to study causal relationships between specific neighbourhood features and child well-being, or to identify best practices that can then be scaled up.

### 3.2 Local data collection requirements to build child-friendly neighbourhoods

While similar in their thematic coverage (see Figure 1), local data needs for place-based policies differ from those of higher-level policy makers and stakeholders in the type of data they require for the purposes and kinds of decisions made at their respective levels. For instance, national policy makers may use high-

level data as a basis for funding allocation mechanisms. In turn, data at the local level often inform concrete and practical implementation choices, which require detailed, qualitative, and subjective data. Local indicators may combine two or all of these data characteristics.

**Local level decisions often require detailed information on children's environments**, both in terms of geographical granularity and detailed information on specific features. While higher level data collection may group information by larger geographical areas such as regions, cities or neighbourhood blocks, local decisions often concern the choice of a specific intervention site and the design of a particular place or street, thus requiring additional geographical granularity. Data can be collected by local stakeholders for that purpose. For example, when roads in Lambeth, London, United Kingdom were found to exceed the European legal limit for air pollution in 2019, the [Thrive Zones](#) initiative was put into place to improve air quality in places that mattered most for vulnerable populations, including small children. Intervention sites were selected based on geospatial data on public life and children's use of public spaces as well as pollution levels in order to i) divert children and caregivers away from high-pollution areas and make public spaces with low levels of air pollution more inviting to them, and ii) reduce pollution levels in highly frequented areas and places where children engage in physical activity since exercise amplifies the damaging effects of air pollution on their health. At those sites, additional data were then collected to monitor the effect of interventions, including through the installation of air pollution sensors at 0.95 m height to reflect children's lived experience (Gehl, 2020<sup>[57]</sup>).

In addition to greater spatial granularity, locally collected data can provide contextualised and in-depth understanding of neighbourhood features, which can be particularly helpful to support urban planning. The [Somerville's Parks Evaluation](#) exemplifies this. The Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities of the City of Somerville, Massachusetts, United States conducted a parks evaluation in 2021 and 2022 to better understand the use of the city's parks, with the goal of promoting equity in access. For this, it gathered data on park users' profile (e.g., age, gender), their activity levels, and what park features promote activity. The results were summarised as policy recommendations to improve park design, including for children (Robinson and Ebel, n.d.<sup>[58]</sup>).

[Born Thriving](#) is a children-focused urban change effort led by the NGO Qendra Marrëdhënie in 55 neighbourhoods in Tirana, Albania to adapt neighbourhoods to the needs of infants, toddlers, and their caregivers. To remedy the lack of sufficient and accessible neighbourhood-level data, the initiative conducted a large data collection along 40 indicators in 2019 to create a baseline of the child-friendliness of Tirana's neighbourhoods. Indicators included detailed information on street design and infrastructure by collecting data on the presence of "physical traffic calming measures", "controlled street crossing elements", "street attractions that are mentally stimulating for babies and toddlers", and on "accessibility of adequately sized green space". The full list of indicators and a dashboard of the quality of each neighbourhood are summarised in a report (Qendra Marrëdhënie, 2019<sup>[59]</sup>). This initial evaluation of the child-friendliness of Tirana's neighbourhoods guided the choice of intervention sites and type of interventions.

**Qualitative data support local decision making.** While quantitative information serves to measure the existence of neighbourhood features or their performance (e.g., distance to and size of green spaces, levels of pollution and contamination, numbers of traffic road injuries, commuting times), qualitative data provide additional insights on the overall experience and the value of neighbourhood characteristics to residents, such as housing, public services or relationships within the community. National data collections tend to contain quantitative measures and local decision makers may invest in complementing this information with qualitative data on children's and caregivers' individual lived experiences with different neighbourhood elements to better understand how these impact communities (UNICEF, 2018<sup>[54]</sup>). However, while being a crucial piece of information in the identification of effective initiatives, obtaining qualitative data tends to be more resource intensive. They may thus be particularly suitable for one-off data collections that aim to analyse what neighbourhood features add value to children and how.

**Subjective data from residents help determine the suitability of neighbourhood conditions to the local population, including local children.** Different communities may have different needs with consequences for what they perceive a high-quality and child-friendly neighbourhood to be. Subjective data help tailor implementation to the specific context of a place and the children who live there. Moreover, when subjective data cover satisfaction with the overall quality of a neighbourhood feature, they may be a cost-efficient substitute for more detailed, objective data that would otherwise be required to describe the quality of that feature, and which can be costly to obtain. A drawback of subjective data is that people's perceptions may not always align with objective measures (Koohsari et al., 2014<sup>[60]</sup>). When subjective measures yield negative outcomes, place-based policies should thus identify whether there is a discrepancy with objective data and if so, direct efforts towards modifying residents' perceptions, and not only the environment itself.

### 3.3 An overview of data collection methods at the local level to support child-friendly neighbourhoods

Given the unique data requirements of individual neighbourhoods, additional local data collection is often necessary, and can be obtained through two main types of primary data collection and qualitative research. Local actors may engage in collecting observational data that describes people's behaviour or neighbourhood objects, or they may employ participatory processes that solicit responses from the local community, specifically children, their caregivers, and relevant practitioners.

**Observational data** have the advantage that they are sometimes perceived as more objective and thus more easily trusted. In addition, they do not require residents' willingness and availability to offer information and can therefore be collected relatively flexibly (compared to participatory processes, see below). For example, the [Playful Learning Landscape metrics framework](#) recommends the use of observational data on child and caregiver interaction to design everyday places such as bus stops, parks and supermarkets in a way that stimulates early child development. Their metrics comprise the observation of conversational turns between the caregiver and child and/or between children in intervention sites (Hadani et al., 2021<sup>[61]</sup>).

In many instances, innovative, technology-driven data collection methods can offer more cost-efficient, faster and more reliable tools to collect observational data compared to traditional, manual practices. For example, sensors or phone data (including from social media and parenting apps) may provide insights about people's movement, and drone imagery can provide information on streets, buildings, the size of parks or other public spaces that can then be analysed on a computer, speeding up data collection and possibly saving costs compared to manual measurement.

**Participatory processes in data collection** allow to make use of the knowledge and lived experiences of children, pregnant women and caregivers, practitioners and other community members. These are valuable for the identification of local challenges and places of disadvantage as well as to recognise community preferences and strengths that may help improve the neighbourhood. Traditional, in-person data collections include interviews, surveys, focus groups or workshops. In addition, creative techniques may be used, such as photovoice or residents' audio and text narratives. All of these can be adapted to engage with children by making them more playful, interactive and stimulating (Arup and the Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2023<sup>[62]</sup>). Moreover, digital surveys and apps more generally allow to geocode the exact location that a response refers to. This enables researchers to map (un)popular public places and walking routes across a neighbourhood. For instance, the [Stanford Healthy Neighbourhood Discovery Tool](#) invites older low-income citizens to photograph and audio narrate elements of the built environment that impact their physical mobility, which are then analysed and shared with decision makers. The tool proved to provide similar results as more resource-intensive data collection methods and facilitated consensus between residents regarding their views about their neighbourhood environments (Buman et al., 2013<sup>[63]</sup>).

Such data collection techniques may also offer opportunities to gather information from caregivers and older children.

Efforts to assess subjective perceptions of the child-friendliness of a neighbourhood should include children. As outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, it is crucial to listen to children to be able to address their concerns and ensure their well-being. While it may require some additional efforts to effectively solicit children's views (OECD, 2021<sup>[2]</sup>), their voices offer highly relevant and important information. For example, evidence shows that children as young as eight years old are able to reliably report on their material and subjective well-being (Main and Bradshaw, 2012<sup>[64]</sup>). Examples of child participation in local decision making include children's parliaments and/or youth councils, age-appropriate surveys and focus groups to co-create new policy ideas, and participatory budgeting with children (Eurocities, 2020<sup>[65]</sup>). In 2023, the Child and Family Agency of Japan solicited children's and youths' views through a research project to inform the development of new official guidelines to design safe spaces for children, in both their physical and online environments ([Ibasho](#), which translates to "a place where children can be and feel belonging"). Interviews and surveys were conducted with children and youths to identify how they used their current spaces outside of their home and school, where they felt the safest, and what kinds of spaces they would like to have access to.

For toddlers and children unable to express their views, their caregivers may be best placed to express their needs. More generally, local decision makers may wish to solicit information from expecting parents and caregivers on the (lack of) supports for them, as women's exposure to stressors during pregnancy is linked to child development (Talge, Neal and Glover, 2007<sup>[66]</sup>) and caregiver well-being and resources feed back into the quality of parenting they can offer to their children, which in turn has consequences for children's well-being (Masarik and Conger, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>)<sup>3</sup>. Local data collections should also consider obtaining information from practitioners from a range of sectors that interact extensively with the local population, and especially with the local children. Teachers, social workers, or health practitioners may be able to provide valuable and timely information on children and families in need of additional support that would not show up in other data. Moreover, these practitioners may point out neighbourhood features that negatively impact children's well-being and development, and possibly what needs of local children are not being met.

### 3.4 Policies to enhance the availability of relevant local data

Local data are necessary to develop child-friendly neighbourhoods systematically and cost-effectively. Since data collections are expensive and to assure comparability of core data across places, existing data sources should be used where possible, and efforts should be made, especially by higher-level governments, to harmonise key data that are relevant across neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, additional data collections are often required at the local level as initiatives tend to require context-specific data. National governments can assist local stakeholders in identifying relevant metrics, accessing existing indicators and generating additional data by providing guidance and technical expertise and facilitating local capacity building.

Neighbourhood data can be collected in various ways. Involving children in data collection efforts increases the relevance of policy interventions to them. Policy makers at the local and higher levels of government can enhance the availability of relevant local data to build child-friendly neighbourhoods by:

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to context-specific questions, a variety of tools can help assess the general well-being of (future) parents in the community, including the Parenting Stress Index (PSI), the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC) and the Well-being in Pregnancy questionnaire, as well as more general measures such as the Cantril Ladder, the WHO-5 Mental Well-being Index, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, and the Mindful Self-Care Scale.

- **Systematically collecting data with the analysis of space in mind.** Designing relevant existing data collections (e.g., in the areas of education, health, labour, housing, infrastructure) such that they are suitable for geospatial analysis will increase the value of these data for decision makers when choosing policy intervention sites and domains to ameliorate children's neighbourhoods. For national level data collections, this can mean enabling data analysis at regional levels in a first step – or at more granular levels where feasible – whereas municipalities could ensure the possibility of disaggregation at the neighbourhood level in their data collections.
- **Integrating geospatial data collections from different sectors of government** permits a holistic analysis of children's environments and facilitates cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination to support children in disadvantaged areas. Regional- and national-level agencies can play an important role to support local governments, whose capacity to integrate data may be more limited, by merging local data from different regional or national sources. For example, the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality in the United States develops and maintains the [Social Determinants of Health Database](#) (2023<sup>[67]</sup>), which draws information from multiple sources to offer local-level (down to census tracts) information on factors impacting health outcomes (e.g., economic context, education, physical infrastructure). Clearly defining stewardship and timelines of data integration processes facilitates building such databases.
- **Including children's voices in the design of child-friendly neighbourhoods.** Children are a valuable source of information for place-based policy interventions aiming to improve their neighbourhoods to ensure that developed solutions meet their needs. Age- appropriate consultation processes include interviews and focus groups with children, surveys where content and design are adapted to children's age, creative methods that allow children to express their opinion, such as photovoice techniques, games or drawings, formal bodies like children's parliaments and/or youth councils, and participatory budgeting with children. Caregivers' views are valuable to elicit information on the demands of younger children and children who are not able to express themselves. Caregivers may further provide important feedback to ensure that neighbourhoods are designed to support the needs of families, which in turn will allow caregivers to better tend to their children.
- **Data required to build child-friendly neighbourhoods should be accessible** to relevant branches within government and public services. For instance, local data collected by higher-level governments (e.g., local employment rates or aggregated social security statistics) could be made accessible to the respective local authorities. Sharing data on children's neighbourhood conditions with the public – while maintaining appropriate levels of data confidentiality – supports community-led or third-party initiatives for whom accessing relevant data can otherwise be particularly challenging. Additionally, data should be shared in a way that is timely, easy to access and understand, for example through a regularly updated digital data hub with guidance on how to interpret the data. For a non-technical audience or the general public, data dashboards can be helpful tools to communicate neighbourhood data in an accessible format. They help raise awareness, visualise progress and increase accountability (Martinho-Truswell, 2017<sup>[68]</sup>). For example, the Urban Institute in the United States created the US-wide [Upward Mobility Data Dashboard](#), which provides 24 community-level indicators on key conditions and predictive factors of upward social mobility for every American county and in over 480 cities. The data measure performance on aspects such as employment opportunities, access to preschool, and social capital (Solari et al., 2024<sup>[69]</sup>). The dashboard is regularly updated and accompanied by recommendations to local decision makers on how to utilise these data for local change efforts, notably to set goals and to monitor progress.

## 4. Integrating local data in place-based child policies

While obtaining the necessary local data (granular data available at the local level and locally collected data) on children's neighbourhoods is important, their analysis and effective integration in policy processes is equally critical for successful place-based child policies. Where local capacity to collect and analyse data is limited, collaborations with local higher education institutions or research centres can prove beneficial. There are three broad purposes that local data can serve when building child-friendly neighbourhoods. First, these data can inform early intervention and prevention tools to identify suitable intervention sites and policy domains. Second, information on children's neighbourhoods is essential to design and implement place-based policy interventions. Continuous and final evaluations of the intervention process and impact also require local data. Finally, these data can be used to strengthen the dialogue between communities and policy makers to gain political buy-in to finance and implement new programmes, as well as to identify successful policies and generate acceptance for their wider application. In each of these use cases, local data can ease collaboration across organisations and facilitate coordinated action of all stakeholders. The remainder of this section highlights the specific functions that local data can have for each application.

### 4.1 Early warning and prevention

Neighbourhood data can be used to identify communities and areas of disadvantage in need of additional support. A regular monitoring of the quality of children's neighbourhoods can further aid in detecting deteriorating conditions early and to design preventative policy interventions before disadvantage develops. In particular, there are three social risks commonly found in children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods that warrant attention: economic vulnerability such as low family income, social difficulties such as conflict or violence in families, and educational difficulties such as dropout or exclusion (Faragau, 2020<sup>[36]</sup>). Monitoring data and early interventions can protect children and are less costly to society than addressing complex social problems that prevail once various forms of neighbourhood disadvantage have accumulated in a place. Therefore, the importance of monitoring emerging risks extends to neighbourhoods that were historically stable.

"Metadata points" effectively identify disadvantaged areas and deteriorating conditions without necessarily having direct causal links with the child-friendliness of neighbourhoods. For example, the share of single households in a neighbourhood has been used as a reliable marker of forms of locational childhood disadvantage. Other indicators to identify at-risk neighbourhoods for children could be housing cost and deprivation data or investments streams in business and infrastructure. Metadata points capture overall trends in a few data points, which makes them cost-efficient and thus particularly well-suited for the repeated data collections required for monitoring (Kaplan, 2023<sup>[19]</sup>).

Contextual knowledge including of the area's history and communities' culture, and the social and political forces is an advantage when interpreting the data. This is particularly true when the available information

is scarce and do not allow to distinguish between multiple possible causes, such as when metadata are used to monitor neighbourhood conditions. Local stakeholders may detect patterns in the data that individuals without contextual knowledge would not see. Additionally, warning signs might be observed on the ground before they appear in data trends, which underscores the importance of soliciting information from practitioners and involving them in data selection and interpretation.

For example, young people are particularly at risk of experiencing hidden homelessness, such as “couch surfing”, and therefore of not being recorded in the data (OECD, 2024<sup>[70]</sup>). Youth welfare organisations in the city of Ghent have recently reported an increase in the number of children and youths experiencing homelessness who rotate short stays with some friends or family (Eurocities, 2021<sup>[26]</sup>). Complementary data and contextual knowledge can therefore help identify at-risk youth, and survey practices developed in Australia and replicated in Belgium, Canada, England, the United Kingdom, and the United States have been successful in identifying youth at risk of homelessness (OECD, 2024<sup>[50]</sup>). The [Geelong Project](#) in Victoria, Australia is a place-based approach to early intervention which administers a survey to students to assess their risk of experiencing homelessness due to family-related conflicts. Identified youths and their families are then supported holistically to mitigate these risk factors, through counselling and parenting support. Between 2013 and 2016, the initiative was shown to be successful in significantly curbing the number of youths soliciting homelessness services in the city of Geelong (Mackenzie, 2018<sup>[71]</sup>).

Local practitioners and community members can also be well placed to identify signs of individual at-risk children thanks to their relationships and regular encounters with children and their families. For example, teachers will know which children are increasingly absent from school – an early warning sign of exclusion from their schools (Social Finance, 2020<sup>[72]</sup>) – and can alert support organisations before these children suffer the long-term consequences of exclusion. Many issues related to education, such as disengagement and dropout, are experienced by a minority of students, which means that by targeting the right groups of children, early interventions can have a significant impact on the overall prevalence in neighbourhoods. However, it should also be noted that local practitioners and other community members by themselves cannot provide systematic support to at-risk youth, and thus rely on the existence of wider, well-organised support services who can follow up with timely outreach and other risk mitigation efforts. The [West London Zone](#)<sup>4</sup>, a charity organisation in London, United Kingdom, successfully utilises teacher knowledge in their prevention efforts. The organisation provides a holistic, two-year, personalised support programme to children at risk of falling behind socially, emotionally and/or academically. To identify eligible programme participants, they use teacher judgement in addition to school data and survey responses from children (West London Zone, 2021<sup>[73]</sup>).

## 4.2 Intervention design, implementation and evaluation

Successful place-based policies often articulate a clear theory of change. This allows local governments and organisations to explain how their policies will improve neighbourhoods and to motivate their strategic choices. The theory of change defines the objectives and a consistent framework to integrate data in the evaluation and adaptation of policies to changing contexts and learnings. This conceptual foundation is particularly useful to isolate and assess the impact of individual components of complex place-based policies that combine several intervention pathways (Burgemeister et al., 2021<sup>[13]</sup>). Local data contribute to this process at three stages.

**Initial mapping and policy design.** In the initial mapping stage of a place-based policy, local data support the identification and choice of issues to be addressed and/or the intervention sites. Further, data serve to map community features, assets, and preferences, which in turn helps to define common goals and priorities, and to design corresponding intervention strategies. For example, data on local institutional

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<sup>4</sup> West London Zone relaunched under a new name and brand, AllChild, in 2024 (AllChild, 2024<sup>[77]</sup>).

capacities, existing local networks and informal relationships helps to avoid designing policy measures that would replicate existing efforts. Moreover, selecting locally relevant performance metrics and timelines clearly articulates intervention goals. In conclusion, the use of data in the planning process ensures alignment between community needs and policy responses and paves the way for successful implementation through the promotion of a shared understanding, cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination between actors from the start.

**Policy implementation and continuous development.** While the intervention is ongoing, local data can be used to monitor progress, guide investments, and adapt approaches, and thereby offer an important feedback mechanism for involved governments, organisations, and community members. Tracking performance at different stages of implementation can inform dialogues on whether interventions are showing the expected results, whether they can be improved, and whether bottlenecks can be identified. Local data to monitor progress should focus on wider goals that represent meaningful and sustainable improvements. Otherwise, detailed, short-term indicators risk distorting incentives for actors and potentially reduce the policy's long-term impact on the neighbourhood (Kaplan, 2023<sup>[19]</sup>).

When integrating local data in monitoring and continuous evaluation frameworks, attention should be paid to avoid misinterpreting outcomes. Including different perspectives from community members, service providers and children in the data analysis can help highlight possible gaps between formal evaluation measures real changes on the ground. Some progress may take time to be reflected in the data whereas resident feedback can report perceived improvements in softer outcomes such as satisfaction with the offered support, or changes in family well-being as a result of the intervention. Where interventions involve in-person contact with the community, such as in participatory processes of local data collection or in programme delivery, informal conversations around these meetings can offer additional opportunities to hear residents' views and to gather feedback for decision makers that complement monitoring data.

**Policy evaluation.** Often conducted once the intervention is over, policy evaluation enables the overall assessment of how the intervention affected children's outcomes. The Network on Development Evaluation of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee defines six evaluation criteria that can guide the assessment of the success of place-based child policies (OECD, 2021<sup>[74]</sup>). The first criterion is *relevance*, evaluators should consider whether an intervention responds to children's needs and priorities. *Coherence* captures how well the policy initiative fits with other existing interventions, programmes, and policies. Evaluations should further measure the extent to which a programme achieves its objectives, its *effectiveness*. *Efficiency* considerations assess how economically and timely results are achieved. A policies' *impact* is captured by the magnitude of positive (or negative) change that resulted from it. Finally, evaluations may be made on the *sustainability* of interventions, the extent to which the net benefits continue beyond the intervention.

Evaluations of policy measures to build child-friendly neighbourhoods enhance our knowledge of successful place-based child policies and help decision makers choose appropriate policy tools for the local context, objectives and available resources. Evaluations of experimental, small-scale interventions provide evidence on how new approaches can change children's neighbourhoods. Successful approaches can then be scaled and applied to similar environments, whilst maintaining the necessary flexibility for local adaptation. Policy evaluations can also give ex-post legitimacy to the use of (public) funds and generate buy-in for other place-based policies (see Section 4.3 Advocacy).

An example of how local data can be integrated in initial mapping, policy monitoring and impact evaluation is provided by the [OpportUNITY Plan](#), developed by United Way of Central Iowa to reduce poverty in communities in Central Iowa. In 2014, a two-day summit with several workshops was organised to collect first insights on local poverty and community needs and strengths from over 100 community members. This initial event was followed by regular community dialogue and complemented with administrative data to assess risks, tailor strategies and build a coordinated community plan to provide cross-sector solutions to poverty. The community plan defined the overarching goal to increase the percentage of financially self-

sufficient central lowans to 75% by 2020. To do so, the plan detailed several activity steams. For example, one of the obstacles identified in the community plan was the steep eligibility threshold of Iowa's Child Care Assistance, which meant that parents lost all childcare benefits and typically incurred a net income loss when their wages passed a certain cutoff, disincentivising their search for higher-paying jobs and affecting their ability to move out of poverty. Members of OpportUNITY were able to achieve a USD 7.6 million increase to the Iowa state budget to expand assistance to working families who previously lost benefits due to a small increase in their income (United Way of Central Iowa, 2018<sup>[75]</sup>). Detailed progress evaluations have been conducted every few years and include U.S. Census data on changes in the share of county-level families who are financially self-sufficient.

### 4.3 The dialogue between communities and policy makers

Publicly available local data promote transparency and strengthen the dialogue between policy makers and communities on the allocation of resources and other political decisions aimed at building child-friendly neighbourhoods. Local data can foster communication in both directions. Communities, including civil society organisations and local governments, can rely on local data to document a need for policy action. On the other hand, local and higher-level policy makers may use these data to generate public support for interventions and justify their intended or past decisions, promoting accountability and inspiring trust. Data can strengthen the dialogue between communities and decision makers both before and after a programme is implemented.

*Before a policy intervention takes place*, local data can provide reliable evidence on both, the nature and scale of children's neighbourhood disadvantage. Descriptive data showing a concentration of identified needs in a neighbourhood, such as high school dropout rates, can be used to bring awareness on these issues and to mobilise action. These data may be employed to obtain the necessary political support, participation of key stakeholders, acceptance of residents and large and sustained sources of funding that the implementation of many place-based policies requires. Local indicators that are harmonised at higher levels offer helpful comparisons to other places, which illustrate the disadvantages children face in specific neighbourhoods. For example, evidence on local challenges and greater identified needs compared to other places can strengthen local policy makers' position when they negotiate with regional or national governments for additional supports. A slightly different strategy is for communities to use local data to directly suggest data-driven policy solutions. Such contextualised, concrete policy recommendations can be easier to navigate and support for local governments.

An example of evidence-based policy proposals is the [Citizens' Committee for Children of New York](#) 2023 report, *The Youngest New Yorkers*, which advocates for a universal early care and education (ECE) system in the city of New York, United States. The report used city-level administrative data as well as subjective data from practitioners and parents to provide a comprehensive overview of existing services and identifies barriers to access for families. Founded on these data, the Citizens' Committee for Children of New York issues contextualised and data-driven policy recommendations for city government, local organisations, and service providers. For example, a policy recommendation for the city government to improve working families' access to ECE services, namely, to facilitate information sharing and parent access to transportation subsidies, relied on data from consulted parents indicating that transportation costs were a significant barrier to accessing ECE services (Drobnjak, 2023<sup>[76]</sup>).

*Evaluations of past interventions* can legitimise ex-post the use of public resources. Here too, harmonised local data on children's outcomes that allow for comparisons across policy initiatives and places are particularly valuable as they contextualise the progress made. It is important to note that not all assessments require equally detailed information. While piloting new approaches may need many data points to establish whether and how policy interventions impact children's neighbourhoods, studying the scaling of policies that have already been shown to be successful in one place, for instance, can be

conducted with fewer data. In these latter cases, it may suffice to focus on relevant contextual information that indicates whether/how the new neighbourhoods are different to the initial pilot site and on how key outcomes change compared to the pilot as a result of the intervention. An additional benefit of communicating programme evaluation results to the public is that the information contributes to the evidence base of what works and why to build child-friendly neighbourhoods, thus feeding into the ex-ante dialogue described above: Information on successful policy practices can be used generate support to continue or expand an intervention in a neighbourhood, or to scale an approach in similar contexts.

Depending on the outreach capacity of initiatives, this knowledge sharing can go from informal discussions between community leaders to comprehensive publications with a range of clearly articulated learnings<sup>5</sup>. Data need to be integrated in a way that effectively demonstrates impact and replicability. For instance, the [Urban95 initiative](#) is an international initiative by the Van Leer Foundation to build child-friendly cities through municipal partnerships, with a focus on improving the built environment for children up to five and their caregivers. The Urban95 initiative has wide-ranging experience with conducting pilot experimental interventions at small scales and actively integrates local data into relatable learnings to maximise the number of children worldwide who benefit from these models. These learnings are shared through reports, case studies, articles, as well as a Starter Kit aimed at local governments and organisations. The Starter Kit provides evidence on the importance of early childhood development as well as on how it can be improved, by describing examples of successful practices and their impact on local outcomes such as the number of children playing outdoors or the strength of cross-sector collaboration. Case studies also show how this guidance is implemented across places.

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<sup>5</sup> Albeit not focussed on children specifically, a successful structure of cross-national knowledge sharing to improve local environments is the [OECD Champion Mayors for Inclusive Growth Initiative](#). It was launched in 2016 as a response to rising inequalities in cities to gather local leaders committed to tackling inequalities and to promoting more inclusive economic growth (OECD, n.d.[79]). This initiative promotes dialogue between local and national leaders, elevates the voice of mayors globally, and supports research, data collection, and knowledge sharing efforts aimed at reaching inclusive growth through a multidimensional approach. Notably, the initiative provides leaders with access to OECD data across over 40 indicators, produces dedicated studies in Champion Mayors' cities, and supports the analysis of challenges faced by cities in achieving inclusive growth.

## 5. Policy implications for building child-friendly neighbourhoods

A source of childhood disadvantage stems from inequities in the quality of children's neighbourhoods. The decisions that determine the quality of children's neighbourhoods are largely taken at the local level, by municipality officials and other stakeholders. For example, urban planners decide on a neighbourhood's land use, street and public transportation networks and the available green space, with consequences for children's air quality, available space to play and their overall mobility and access to essential services. Local actors also influence a neighbourhood's social fabric, for instance through the offer of community events and support organisations, which can impact a neighbourhood's level of social cohesion or distrust and crime. Place-based child policies are complementary to child- and family-specific supports and can be valuable policy tools to support children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Specifically, adapting place-based policies to the local context and collecting and making use of local data are key to improving children's neighbourhood conditions. However, implementing impactful place-based policies and demonstrating their effectiveness remains challenging and requires sustained support from policy makers.

This paper has highlighted several ways in which national and local policy makers can support communities in building child-friendly neighbourhoods:

- **Consistently gather data with a focus on spatial analysis, integrate relevant disjointed datasets across domains and geographical areas, and make them accessible to relevant government branches, services and the public.** Making existing data collections suitable for geospatial analysis supports decision makers when choosing policy domains and intervention sites for place-based child policies. Integrated data sources that offer neighbourhood information on various policy domains (e.g., in the areas of education, health, labour, housing, infrastructure) in a single place permit a holistic analysis of children's environments and foster cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination in policy interventions. Comparable data across geographical areas help contextualise disadvantage and evaluate the progress made through policy interventions in order to identify success factors and facilitate peer learning. Clearly defining ownership and timelines of data integration processes facilitates building and maintaining such databases. Data should be shared with relevant branches of public services across levels of government and policy domains and with the public in a timely and accessible manner to assist community-led efforts. Regional- and national-level agencies should lead these efforts by merging local data from different regional or national sources and supporting local governments, whose capacity to integrate data may be more limited.
- **Incorporate children's and caregivers' perspectives in the planning of child-friendly neighbourhoods.** Policy makers can promote the integration of children's and caregivers' perspectives through formal consultation bodies, including associations of parents and caregivers, children's parliaments, youth councils, and participatory budgeting with children. In addition, policy initiatives can feature age-appropriate consultation processes such as interviews and focus groups with children, surveys where content and design are adapted to children's age, and creative methods that allow children to express their opinion, such as photovoice techniques, games, or

drawings. Caregivers' views are valuable to elicit information on the demands of younger children and children who are not able to express themselves. Caregivers may further provide important feedback to ensure that neighbourhoods are designed to support the needs of families, which in turn allows them to better tend to their children.

- **Setting up monitoring systems.** Monitoring systems allow to identify areas of greater need and to pick up early signs of deteriorating neighbourhood conditions for children. Addressing emerging issues early protects children and is typically less costly than later interventions. Building and maintaining monitoring systems requires significant resources and thus, a limited number of tracked indicators should be carefully selected. Indicators suitable for these repeated data collections required for monitoring capture overall neighbourhood trends but need not be causally linked to children's well-being and development. Moreover, data should be presented at the right geographical scale to be actionable for the target audience. For local governments, this may mean that neighbourhood-level data are best. In contrast, for national policy makers, it can make sense to aggregate data to the regional level to make the information meaningful to them, for example to inform decisions on the financial support to regions.
- **Delegate sufficient authority and funding to the local level for place-based child policies and support local capacity building.** Including local stakeholders in the design, implementation and evaluation of place-based policies increases interventions' likelihood of lasting success. Knowledge of the local context aids the identification of issues, leverages community strengths and ensures that developed solutions address real needs of local children and are meaningful for the wider community. A decentralised approach also makes it easier to obtain timely feedback from targeted children, their families, and programme administrators, and offers greater flexibility to modify and refine ongoing interventions. The required degree of local flexibility, ranging from location-specific initiatives to minor, area-specific adaptations of larger programmes spanning across various sites, will depend on the specific intervention. For example, when place-based policies aim to tackle complex social problems such as neighbourhood crime and poverty, place-based policies will need substantial degrees of authority and funding at the local level to address locally specific causes and design interventions that build on and strengthen existing local structures. When national governments delegate responsibilities to the local level, this should be accompanied by guidance, technical support and training to ensure that local stakeholders have the capacity to develop and implement interventions.
- **Promote high-quality impact evaluation of interventions.** National governments should encourage the evaluation of place-based policies' impact and of the conditions under which they may be most effective to build a better evidence base and advance implementation. Exploring the potential of place-based child policies entails overcoming implementation and evaluation challenges. Adequate support should be provided by national policy makers for sound local implementation and evaluation, as local capacity and resources may be more limited despite the importance of local assessment to identify new, successful grassroots approaches that may be scaled to other places (with sufficient flexibility for local adaptation) and to improve existing interventions. Feedback mechanisms tend to be clearer at the local level and local knowledge helps interpret results and to identify groups or individuals for which an intervention may not be working. Impact evaluations can be conducted cost-effectively. For instance, where initiatives replicate well-documented, successful policies from places with similar contexts, they may not need to collect detailed data but can assess successful implementation through a few core indicators. Moreover, where resources for evaluation are especially constraint, priority could be given to evaluations of policies with greater expected impacts on child outcomes, higher costs and where the current evidence base is particularly scarce.

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## Annex A. Index of place-based policy examples featured in this paper

Initiatives are listed by thematic area and governance structure.

### Urban planning

#### Local initiatives

| Name                                          | Country        | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Page of reference |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Child Friendly Rotterdam initiative           | Netherlands    | The city of Rotterdam, Netherlands introduced more family-friendly housing, public spaces, facilities such as shops and schools, and safe traffic routes from 2007 to 2018 as a response to the city being perceived as uninviting for children and families, in large part due to its car-centric urban design, a large number of children living in deprived neighbourhoods, and lack of safety (City of Rotterdam, 2010 <sup>[33]</sup> ).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | p. 17             |
| <a href="#">Green Community Schoolyards</a>   | United States  | The Green Community Schoolyards in New York City, United States aims to transform asphalt schoolyards into park-like green spaces that are safe and stimulating for children, and accessible for the larger community. With a focus on disadvantaged neighbourhoods, these park-like spaces were created to strengthen communities and to provide climate resilient spaces. The design of these spaces actively involved children and other community groups, such as local senior groups, sports clubs, and cultural clubs, to ensure their needs could be met, as well as to encourage community ownership and long-term stewardship (Shin and Kustar, 2024 <sup>[34]</sup> ). | p.17              |
| <a href="#">SplashJAM</a>                     | United States  | In 2015 in the city of Lexington, United States the Bluegrass Community Foundation and the Gehl Institute provided pedestrian safety improvements, park amenities, and a temporary splash pad, based on a survey of residents that identified local communities' needs (Gehl Services, 2018 <sup>[35]</sup> ).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | p.17              |
| <a href="#">Thrive Zones</a>                  | United Kingdom | In Lambeth, London, United Kingdom, street design and public places were improved to reduce levels of air pollution in places that mattered most for vulnerable populations, including small children. Interventions focused onto i) diverting children and caregivers away from high-pollution, and ii) reducing pollution levels in highly frequented areas and places where children engage in physical activity (Gehl, 2020 <sup>[57]</sup> ).                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | p.27              |
| <a href="#">Somerville's Parks Evaluation</a> | United States  | The Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities of the City of Somerville, Massachusetts, United States conducted a parks evaluation in 2021 and 2022 to better understand the use of the city's parks, with the goal of promoting equity in access. It gathered data on park users' profile (e.g., age, gender), their activity levels, and what park features promote activity, and summarized the results as policy recommendations to improve park design, including for children.                                                                                                                                                                                         | p. 27             |
| <a href="#">Born Thriving</a>                 | Albania        | In 55 neighbourhoods in Tirana, Albania the NGO Qendra Marrëdhënie leads urban change efforts in close partnership with the City of Tirana to adapt neighbourhoods to the needs of infants, toddlers, and their caregivers (Qendra Marrëdhënie, 2019 <sup>[59]</sup> ). It includes the reclaiming of streets and public spaces from cars, the renovation of parks and the installation new playgrounds and smaller, playful interventions across the city.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | p. 27             |

**Higher-level or national initiatives**

| Name                            | Country       | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Page of reference |
|---------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <a href="#">Hope VI Program</a> | United States | The HOPE VI Program in the United States provided revitalisation grants to particularly disadvantaged neighbourhoods to demolish and revitalise public housing and to encourage the formation of mixed income communities (Congressional Research Service, 2012 <sup>[17]</sup> ). In this context, this approach was shown to reduce poverty rates in targeted neighbourhoods and to make them more appealing environments for residents, as well as to improve children's later-life earnings and labour market outcomes, mainly by improving job accessibility locally and by encouraging relocation to areas with more employment opportunities (Haltiwanger et al., 2024 <sup>[18]</sup> ; Staiger, Palloni and Voorheis, 2024 <sup>[18]</sup> ). | p. 14             |

**International initiatives**

| Name                                                         | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Page of reference |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <a href="#">The City at Eye Level for Kids</a>               | STIPO in Rotterdam, Netherlands launched The City at Eye Level for Kids to integrate the perspectives of young children and their caregivers into their international, open-source learning platform on designing public spaces. The project gathered a diverse set of context-specific experimentations to draw broadly applicable recommendations (36 "lessons") to build better cities (Danenberg, Doumpa and Karssenbergh, 2018 <sup>[31]</sup> ).                                                                             | p. 16             |
| <a href="#">Playful Learning Landscape metrics framework</a> | The Playful Learning Landscapes metrics framework is a publication for urban planners and local decision makers aiming to promote healthy child development and learning through educational elements in public spaces. It suggests indicators and data collection methods to estimate the quality of public spaces intended to foster playful learning experiences (Hadani et al., 2021 <sup>[61]</sup> ).                                                                                                                        | p. 28             |
| <a href="#">Urban95 initiative</a>                           | The Bernard van Leer Foundation launched the Urban95 initiative to support city leaders, planners and urbanists in building child-friendly cities. The initiative takes an integrated approach that combines improving urban spaces and providing services and places a particular focus on children up to five and their caregivers. Urban95 includes a wide range of programmes and partnerships, including with cities, that facilitate experimental pilot interventions and international knowledge sharing on good practices. | p. 35             |

## Socio-economic environment and local service provision

### Local initiatives

| Name                                                         | Country        | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Page of reference |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <a href="#">Para Los Niños</a>                               | United States  | Para Los Niños is an organisation based in Los Angeles, United States, that focusses on supporting children, youth, and their families in communities with high rates of overall homelessness, concentrated poverty and other social determinants of health through interventions across food access, education, and diverse socio-emotional supports (Para Los Niños, 2021 <sup>[11]</sup> ).                                                                                                                                                                                  | p. 13             |
| <a href="#">Mission Promise Neighbourhoods</a>               | United States  | Mission Promise Neighbourhoods is a community initiative in San Francisco's Mission District that works to provide multi-dimensional educational support (e.g., quality childcare, digital literacy and improved reading programmes for children, adult mentoring) to close gaps in educational achievement caused by complex and inter-related factors such as access to healthcare, early literacy, family engagement, mental health, and families' financial resources (Mission Promise Neighbourhood, 2024 <sup>[21]</sup> ).                                               | p. 15             |
| <a href="#">Every Child, Every Chance</a>                    | Australia      | "Every Child, Every Chance" is an initiative by Go Goldfields in Central Victoria, Australia to tackle the entrenched socio-economic disadvantage experienced by the local community by improving outcomes for children 0 to 8. To do so, two of the five priority areas are directed at, on one hand, supporting parents and caregivers, and on the second hand, ensuring healthy pregnancies (Go Goldfields Central Victoria, 2024 <sup>[22]</sup> ).                                                                                                                         | p. 15             |
| <a href="#">Child and youth-friendly city action plan</a>    | Belgium        | The City of Ghent in Belgium committed to a child and youth-friendly city action plan to tackle child poverty in response to rising demographic and social challenges such as impoverishment, public health, and environmental burden (City of Ghent, 2015 <sup>[25]</sup> ). The city emphasised the importance of working across departments to bring child-friendliness to all policy areas, including education, mobility, urban planning, and health.                                                                                                                      | p. 15             |
| <a href="#">Neighborhood Matching Fund programme</a>         | United States  | The Neighborhood Matching Fund programme in Seattle, United States matches funds of local organisations or neighbourhood groups aiming to build stronger community connections since 1988. Awarded projects include programmes striving to improve the physical environment as well as programmes that create spaces for youth and offer mentoring (Shrider and Ramey, 2018 <sup>[27]</sup> ).                                                                                                                                                                                  | p. 15             |
| <a href="#">East Harlem Action Collaborative</a>             | United States  | The East Harlem Action Collaborative is a caregiver-led advocacy group aiming to improve outcomes for children living in East Harlem, United States. Supported by the New York Academy of Medicine, it provides a space for local caregivers to voice their priorities and hopes for their children through regular meetings and advocacy to local and national governments.                                                                                                                                                                                                    | p. 19             |
| <a href="#">Geelong project</a>                              | Australia      | The Geelong Project in Victoria, Australia is a place-based approach to early intervention which administers a survey to students to assess their risk of experiencing homelessness due to family-related conflicts. Identified youths and their families are then supported holistically to mitigate these risk factors, through counselling and parenting support. Between 2013 and 2016, the initiative was shown to be successful in significantly curbing the number of youths soliciting homelessness services in the city of Geelong (Mackenzie, 2018 <sup>[71]</sup> ). | p. 32             |
| <a href="#">West London Zone</a><br>(AllChild)               | United Kingdom | The West London Zone is a charity organisation in London, United Kingdom that provides a holistic and preventive, two-year, personalised support programme to children at risk of falling behind socially, emotionally and/or academically (West London Zone, 2021 <sup>[73]</sup> ). West London Zone relaunched under a new name and brand, AllChild, in 2024 (AllChild, 2024 <sup>[77]</sup> ).                                                                                                                                                                              | p. 32             |
| <a href="#">OpportUNITY Plan</a>                             | United States  | United Way of Central Iowa developed the OpportUNITY Plan in 2014 to reduce poverty in communities in Central Iowa through a wide range of coordinated, cross-sectoral activities. These actions address factors including food insecurity, childcare, housing, education and employment. The overarching goal is to increase the percentage of financially self-sufficient central Iowans from 65% in 2014 to 75% (United Way of Central Iowa, 2018 <sup>[75]</sup> ).                                                                                                         | p. 33             |
| <a href="#">Citizens' Committee for Children of New York</a> | United States  | The Citizens' Committee for Children of New York is an advocacy group for children and their families in the city of New York, United States that aims to promote diversity, equity, justice and inclusion. The organisation conducts research and data analysis, mobilise others to raise the visibility of their suggested solutions to systemic inequities, and advocates for them at the local and higher levels of government (Citizen's Committee for Children of New York, n.d. <sup>[78]</sup> ).                                                                       | p. 34             |

**Higher-level or national initiatives**

| Name                                                                       | Country        | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Page of reference |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <a href="#">Together for Childhood</a>                                     | United States  | Together for Childhood is an initiative developed by the UK charity organisation National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to protect children from adverse situations such as domestic abuse and mental health problems. The initiative invests consistently in four localities, where it operates local teams that connect to and partner with local organisations such as social care services, schools, community groups, and the police (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2023 <sup>[30]</sup> ).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | p. 16             |
| <a href="#">Children's Ground</a>                                          | Australia      | Children's Ground is a non-profit organisation that works across Australia to improve health, education and economic outcomes for First Nations children while uplifting First Nations culture, history, and knowledge. It delivers support to local communities in the areas of early learning, health, economic development, creative and cultural development, community development.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | p. 18             |
| Sure Start Children's Centres and <a href="#">Start for Life programme</a> | United Kingdom | The UK Department for Education launched Sure Start Children's Centres to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities at the national level in child development, parenting aspirations and skills, and child and family health outcomes. Sure Start Children Centres are managed by or alongside local authorities to provide integrated and locally adapted health, education and social services for children and their families, with a focus on disadvantaged communities and on children's early years (Education, 2013 <sup>[37]</sup> ). Building on the impact of Sure Start, the Start for Life programme was established in 2022 with Family Hubs created in 75 eligible localities across the UK to expand support to children aged 0 to 19, or 25 for young people with special needs. | p. 19             |
| <a href="#">Stronger Places, Stronger People</a>                           | Australia      | The Australian national government created Stronger Places, Stronger People in partnership with state and territory governments to build better futures for children and their families in disadvantaged areas characterised by high rates of poverty. The initiative seeks to build collective impact and interventions are led by the local communities to develop evidence-driven solutions that are tailored to the local community.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | p. 19             |
| <a href="#">Stanford Healthy Neighbourhood Discovery Tool</a>              | United States  | The Stanford Healthy Neighbourhood Discovery Tool invites citizens to photograph and audio narrate elements of the built environment that impact physical mobility, which are then analysed and shared with decision makers (Buman et al., 2013 <sup>[63]</sup> ).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | p. 28             |
| <a href="#">Ibasho initiative</a>                                          | Japan          | The Child and Family Agency of Japan published official guidelines to design children's physical and online spaces, including children's centres and other public and private facilities for children, that make children feel they belong ( <i>Ibasho</i> , which translates to "a place where you can feel like yourself").                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | p. 29             |
| <a href="#">Social Determinants of Health Database</a>                     | United States  | The Federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality in the United States develops and maintains the Social Determinants of Health Database (2023 <sup>[67]</sup> ), which draws information from multiple sources to offer local-level (down to census tracts) information on factors impacting health outcomes (e.g., economic context, education, physical infrastructure).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | p. 30             |
| <a href="#">Upward Mobility Data Dashboard</a>                             | United States  | The Urban Institute in the United States created the US-wide Upward Mobility Data Dashboard, which provides 24 community-level indicators on key conditions and predictive factors of upward social mobility for every American county and in over 480 cities. The data measure performance on aspects such as employment opportunities, access to preschool, and social capital (Solari et al., 2024 <sup>[69]</sup> ). The dashboard is regularly updated and accompanied by recommendations to local decision makers on how to utilise these data for local change efforts, notably to set goals and to monitor progress.                                                                                                                                                                     | p.30              |

**International initiatives**

| Name                                             | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Page of reference |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <a href="#">Child-Friendly Cities Initiative</a> | UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) formally partners with cities in over 40 countries to create communities with shared priorities guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Partnerships are directed by local development plans that ensure that common strategies are adopted in areas such as data collection and monitoring, and child and youth participation. In addition to improving governance at the local level, the CFCI also acts as a network and can provide cross-cultural evidence to advocate for more municipalities to recognise the importance of building child-friendly environments. | p. 18             |