

G.O.A.L.

Rethinking the Urban Family Formation Environment

A First-Principles Framework for Strengthening the Conditions for Family Formation

*by Mika Kunne
Founder of G.O.A.L.*



August 2026

V1.0
Whitepaper 010

Executive Summary

Family formation is one of the most significant decisions individuals make throughout their lives. Yet the conditions under which people choose to build long-term relationships and raise children are shaped continuously by the cities in which they live. Housing, mobility, employment, public space, education, healthcare, community and countless other urban systems collectively influence whether family life appears achievable, sustainable and desirable. Despite this, urban planning has traditionally approached these systems as separate policy domains rather than recognising their combined influence on family formation.

This whitepaper introduces the concept of the **Urban Family Formation Environment**: the complete and interconnected system of urban conditions within which family formation takes place. Rather than examining individual urban policies in isolation, it argues that family formation should be understood as an outcome emerging from the interaction of multiple urban systems that together shape the lived experience of individuals and families.

Building upon this first-principles perspective, the whitepaper identifies the five fundamental conditions required for family formation and introduces the **G.O.A.L. Urban Family Formation Matrix**, a human-centred analytical framework that combines these conditions with G.O.A.L.'s Five Pillars of Health. Together, they provide municipalities with a systematic methodology for understanding how urban environments strengthen or weaken the conditions upon which family formation depends.

The framework is subsequently translated into urban design principles, illustrated through lessons drawn from leading cities around the world and synthesised into a set of strategic recommendations for municipalities. Throughout the whitepaper, the emphasis is not on replicating individual cities or policies, but on understanding the underlying principles that consistently strengthen the Urban Family Formation Environment across different urban contexts.

Ultimately, this whitepaper argues that family formation should no longer be viewed solely as the responsibility of social, economic or demographic policy. It should also be recognised as an urban challenge. By intentionally strengthening the Urban Family Formation Environment, municipalities can create cities that better support partnership formation, long-term stability, practical family life, community support and lifelong wellbeing. In doing so, they establish a new perspective through which urban planning can actively contribute to long-term population renewal.

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. First Principles	2
3. The Five Pillar Perspective.....	4
4. Strengthening the Urban Family Formation Environment	6
5. Learning from Leading Cities	9
6. Strategic Recommendations	10
7. Data Sources & References	11
8. About G.O.A.L.	12

1. Introduction

Cities have always shaped the way people live. They influence where people work, how they travel, where they meet others, how they access essential services and how they experience everyday life. As the majority of the world's population now lives in urban areas, these environments have become increasingly important in shaping many of the decisions individuals make throughout their lives, including whether, when and under what conditions they choose to form families.

At the same time, many countries are experiencing sustained declines in fertility, population ageing and growing concerns over long-term demographic resilience. These challenges are often approached through economic policy, social policy or family policy, while the role of the urban environment has received comparatively limited attention. Although cities continuously influence the conditions within which family formation occurs, urban planning has traditionally focused on objectives such as housing delivery, mobility, economic development, sustainability and public health rather than explicitly strengthening the conditions that enable long-term population renewal.

This whitepaper argues that cities should also be understood through a different perspective: as environments that continuously shape the conditions for family formation. Rather than viewing housing, transport, education, healthcare, public space and community as separate policy domains, it proposes that they collectively form a single Urban Family Formation Environment experienced by individuals and families throughout everyday life. Understanding this environment as an integrated system provides a new way of examining how urban planning contributes to one of society's most significant long-term challenges.

To support this perspective, the whitepaper develops a first-principles understanding of the Urban Family Formation Environment before introducing the G.O.A.L. Urban Family Formation Matrix: a human-centred analytical framework that combines the Five Pillars of Health with the fundamental conditions required for family formation. Building upon this framework, it identifies the urban design principles that strengthen these conditions, examines how they can be observed in leading cities around the world and concludes with a strategic framework for municipalities seeking to intentionally strengthen the Urban Family Formation Environment.

The objective of this whitepaper is not to present a universal model for population renewal or prescribe individual urban policies. Instead, it seeks to provide municipalities, governments and urban practitioners with a new conceptual framework for understanding how cities influence family formation and how urban design can intentionally contribute to creating environments in which families are more likely to flourish.

2. First Principles

What is the Urban Family Formation Environment?

Family formation is not a single event, but a process through which individuals form enduring family units. While the pathway differs between individuals, cultures and societies, it generally encompasses the formation of long-term partnerships and the transition into parenthood. Every stage of this process unfolds within a broader context that continuously shapes the decisions individuals make.

In urban areas, this context extends far beyond the physical built environment. Housing, transport, employment, public space, education, healthcare, safety and community are often planned, managed and evaluated as separate policy domains. From the perspective of an individual, however, they are not experienced separately. They collectively shape the lived experience of urban life and, in doing so, influence the environment within which family formation takes place.

This whitepaper therefore introduces the concept of the **Urban Family Formation Environment**: the complete and interconnected system of urban conditions within which the process of family formation occurs. Rather than viewing cities as a collection of independent sectors, the Urban Family Formation Environment recognises that family formation emerges from the interaction between many interconnected conditions that together shape the urban experience.

Understanding this environment as a single integrated system forms the foundation of this whitepaper. Before identifying which urban conditions matter most, it is first necessary to recognise that they do not operate independently, they function as one environment.

Deconstructing the Urban Family Formation Environment

To understand how cities influence family formation, it is first necessary to identify the fundamental conditions upon which family formation depends. Rather than viewing family formation as the outcome of individual policies or isolated urban characteristics, this whitepaper approaches it from first principles. By repeatedly asking *why* certain urban conditions matter, many commonly discussed topics—such as housing, transport, childcare, public space and employment—can be reduced to a smaller number of fundamental human requirements.

From this perspective, the Urban Family Formation Environment can be understood through five fundamental questions that will generally need to be able to answer positively before family formation becomes likely.

These five questions represent the fundamental conditions of the Urban Family Formation Environment. They do not describe individual policies or urban interventions, but rather the deeper human requirements that those interventions seek to influence. Every aspect of urban design discussed throughout this whitepaper ultimately contributes to strengthening or weakening one or more of these five conditions.

The Five Fundamental Conditions of the Urban Family Formation Environment



1 Can I find someone?

The environment must create opportunities for individuals to meet, interact and develop meaningful long-term relationships. Without the opportunity to form a compatible partnership, family formation cannot begin.



2 Can we build a stable future together?

Individuals must have sufficient confidence in their future to make one of life's most significant long-term commitments. Stability and security—whether economic, residential or personal—provide the foundation upon which families are built.



3 Can we make family life work?

The transition into parenthood must appear practically achievable. Daily life, available resources and the organisation of the city should make family life manageable rather than unnecessarily difficult.



4 Will we be supported?

Family formation does not occur in isolation. Communities, social networks and the wider urban environment can either strengthen or weaken the support available to individuals and families throughout this transition.



5 Can we sustain family life?

The urban environment should enable individuals and families to maintain their physical and mental wellbeing throughout family life. A city that continuously generates stress, exhaustion or poor health ultimately undermines its own capacity to support long-term family formation.



Every aspect of urban design ultimately contributes to strengthening or weakening one or more of these five fundamental conditions.

The System

The five fundamental questions identified in the previous section should not be understood as five independent conditions. Together, they form an integrated system in which each condition influences, reinforces and, in some cases, constrains the others. The Urban Family Formation Environment is therefore not a checklist of favourable characteristics, but a dynamic system whose overall performance depends on the interaction between its individual components.

The system is also not symmetrical. Partnership Opportunity functions as an entry condition: without the opportunity to establish a meaningful long-term relationship, family formation cannot begin. Once a partnership exists, however, the remaining conditions continuously interact. Greater stability and security can improve the practical feasibility of family life, stronger social support can reduce daily pressures, and better health and wellbeing can strengthen relationships and increase resilience. Conversely, weaknesses in one condition can negatively influence several others, creating reinforcing cycles that either support or undermine family formation.

Importantly, this does not imply that the Urban Family Formation Environment operates as a simple weakest-link system. Cities are complex, and strengths in one condition can partially compensate for weaknesses in another. Strong social support may reduce the burden of limited financial resources, while high-quality childcare can improve the practical feasibility of family life despite demanding work schedules. Nevertheless, every condition must remain above a sufficient threshold. Severe weaknesses can become bottlenecks that prevent the system from functioning effectively, regardless of how well other conditions perform.

The Urban Family Formation Environment should therefore be understood as an interdependent system characterised by reinforcing conditions and potential bottlenecks. Rather than attempting to optimise individual policy domains in isolation, municipalities should recognise that urban interventions ultimately influence a shared environment in which the five fundamental questions are continuously shaped. Housing, mobility, public space, employment, healthcare, education and countless other urban systems all contribute to this environment, not independently, but through their combined influence on people's ability to answer these questions positively.

Finally, the relationship between cities and family formation is not one-directional. Urban environments shape family formation, but family formation also reshapes cities. As families are formed, they influence housing demand, mobility patterns, public services, neighbourhood composition and the future development of the urban environment itself. The Urban Family Formation Environment should therefore be viewed not as a static framework, but as a dynamic system characterised by continuous interaction and feedback between people and the cities in which they live.

3. The Five Pillar Perspective

The Urban Family Formation Environment cannot be fully understood by examining individual policy sectors in isolation. Housing, transport, education, healthcare, public space and employment are often planned, managed and evaluated as separate domains, each with its own objectives, responsibilities and measures of success. While this sector-based approach is essential for governing cities, it provides only a partial understanding of how people actually experience them. Human outcomes are rarely the product of a single policy domain. Instead, they emerge from the combined influence of multiple urban systems interacting throughout everyday life.

This distinction is particularly important when examining family formation. The decision to form a family is not determined solely by housing affordability, transport accessibility, healthcare quality or any other individual factor. Rather, it reflects the cumulative experience of living within a city where countless conditions continuously interact. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the Urban Family Formation Environment functions as an integrated system, meaning that analysing its individual components in isolation inevitably overlooks the relationships between them.

Understanding this environment therefore requires a different perspective. Rather than organising analysis around the institutions responsible for delivering urban policy, this whitepaper adopts G.O.A.L.'s Five Pillars of Health as its primary analytical lens. **Nutrition, Movement, Knowledge, Mindset and Environment** do not represent government departments or independent policy objectives. Instead, they represent five complementary perspectives through which the same urban environment can be understood from the standpoint of human experience.

This distinction fundamentally changes the way urban systems are analysed. A housing development, for example, is not simply a housing intervention. It may simultaneously influence access to healthy food, opportunities for daily movement, educational accessibility, psychological wellbeing and the quality of the surrounding environment. Likewise, improvements in public transport, neighbourhood design or public space often extend far beyond their immediate policy objectives, producing effects across multiple dimensions of human health and everyday life. By examining these interactions through the Five Pillars, seemingly separate urban interventions can be understood as interconnected contributors to a shared human outcome.

Importantly, the Five Pillars are not intended to replace traditional policy sectors. Cities will always require specialised departments responsible for housing,

mobility, healthcare, education and countless other services. The purpose of the Five Pillars is different. They provide a common analytical language through which the combined human impact of these sectors can be understood. Rather than asking how individual departments perform independently, the Five Pillars ask how their collective interaction shapes the Urban Family Formation Environment experienced by individuals and families.

In essence, urban policy determines how cities function, while the Five Pillars reveal how cities are experienced. This perspective provides the methodological foundation of this whitepaper.

The G.O.A.L. Urban Family Formation Matrix

The Five Pillars Perspective introduced in the previous section provides a human-centred lens through which the Urban Family Formation Environment can be analysed. To apply this perspective consistently, this whitepaper combines the Five Pillars with the five fundamental questions established in Chapter 2, creating the G.O.A.L. Urban Family Formation Matrix.

The matrix does not evaluate individual policy sectors, nor does it prescribe specific urban interventions. Instead, it provides a systematic framework for understanding how different aspects of the urban environment contribute to the conditions required for family formation. Every urban intervention can be examined through the Five Pillars, while simultaneously considering how it strengthens or weakens each of the five fundamental questions.

Importantly, the matrix should not be interpreted as a scoring model or a collection of independent relationships. The intersections represent analytical pathways rather than isolated causal effects. A single intervention may influence multiple pillars and multiple questions simultaneously, reflecting the interconnected nature of urban systems. The purpose of the matrix is therefore not to simplify complexity, but to organise it into a coherent and consistent analytical methodology.

The G.O.A.L. Urban Family Formation Matrix forms the analytical foundation for every subsequent chapter of this whitepaper. From this point forward, the urban design principles, global best practices and strategic recommendations presented throughout this whitepaper are all examined through this shared framework.

The Matrix should not be interpreted as implying that every relationship is equally influential. Rather, it provides a structured framework for analysing how different dimensions of human health may contribute to the conditions for family formation.

The Matrix

A Human-Centred Framework for Analysing
the Urban Family Formation Environment

 FIVE PILLARS  Can I find someone?  Can we build a stable future together?  Can we make family life work?  Will we be supported?  Can we sustain family life?	FIVE FUNDAMENTAL CONDITIONS
 Nutrition Creates opportunities for social connection through shared food environments and healthy community life. Supports long-term stability by strengthening household food security and reducing nutritional vulnerability. Enables healthy and practical family living through accessible, affordable and nutritious food systems. Strengthens community and family relationships through shared food experiences and supportive food environments. Maintains the physical health and biological resilience required for long-term family wellbeing.	
 Movement Creates opportunities for interaction by improving accessibility, public life and spontaneous encounters. Supports long-term stability through reliable access to employment, housing and essential services. Enables everyday family life by reducing time burdens and improving accessibility to daily destinations. Strengthens social and family networks by making people, places and communities more accessible. Maintains physical and mental wellbeing through active, healthy and accessible urban mobility.	
 Knowledge Supports relationship formation by expanding opportunities for learning, communication and social development. Strengthens long-term planning through education, information and informed decision-making. Enables confident family decisions through knowledge, health literacy and awareness of available resources. Connects individuals to formal and informal support systems through information and understanding. Empowers families to maintain long-term wellbeing through knowledge, learning and informed choices.	
 Mindset Strengthens the confidence, openness and psychological capacity required to build lasting relationships. Builds trust, optimism and the confidence needed to make long-term commitments. Supports family formation by increasing resilience, self-efficacy and perceived achievability. Fosters belonging, trust and social cohesion that strengthen support networks. Maintains psychological resilience and emotional wellbeing throughout family life.	
 Environment Creates welcoming, safe and attractive places where relationships can naturally develop. Provides the structural conditions upon which long-term family security depends. Enables practical family life through housing, services, accessibility and supportive urban design. Strengthens communities through inclusive neighbourhoods, social infrastructure and shared public spaces. Provides healthy, safe and resilient environments that support lifelong family wellbeing.	
 Every aspect of urban design ultimately contributes to strengthening or weakening one or more of these five fundamental conditions.	

4. Strengthening the Urban Family Formation Environment

The previous chapters established the Urban Family Formation Environment as an integrated system and introduced the G.O.A.L. Urban Family Formation Matrix as the framework through which that system can be understood. Together, they answer two fundamental questions: what conditions shape family formation, and how should those conditions be analysed?

The next question is equally important:

How can municipalities intentionally strengthen those conditions?

Cities cannot determine whether individuals choose to form families, nor can they guarantee particular demographic outcomes. They can, however, shape the urban environments within which those decisions are made. Every decision relating to housing, mobility, public space, education, childcare and community infrastructure contributes to the broader Urban Family Formation Environment, either strengthening or weakening the conditions upon which family formation depends.

This chapter identifies the core design principles that municipalities can use to strengthen each of the five fundamental conditions introduced in Chapter 2. Rather than prescribing individual interventions, it focuses on the underlying principles that should guide urban development. These principles provide the foundation for the global case studies examined in the following chapter.

1. Strengthening Opportunities for Partnership.

Partnership formation depends on opportunities for people to meet, interact and gradually develop meaningful long-term relationships. While municipalities cannot create relationships, they can shape the urban environments within which those relationships are most likely to emerge.

The objective is not simply to create places where people can meet, but to create environments that generate repeated interaction. Walkable neighbourhoods, mixed-use development, accessible public transport, active public life and high-quality third places all increase the frequency of everyday encounters, allowing relationships to develop naturally over time. Equally important are safe, welcoming and inclusive public environments that encourage people to participate in urban life rather than withdraw from it.

Viewed from this perspective, cafés, parks, libraries, sports facilities, neighbourhood centres and community organisations are more than urban amenities. Together, they form the city's **social infrastructure**: the places where social interaction, community participation and ultimately partnership formation become possible.

Municipalities cannot design relationships, but they can intentionally design cities that maximise opportunities for people to find one another.

Key Design Principles

- Design for repeated rather than isolated social interaction.
- Treat third places as essential social infrastructure.
- Prioritise walkability, accessibility and active public life.
- Create mixed-use neighbourhoods that increase everyday interaction.
- Invest in social infrastructure alongside physical infrastructure.
- Foster safe, welcoming and inclusive public environments.
- Reduce unnecessary time burdens that limit participation in urban life.

2 Strengthening Long-Term Stability

Long-term family formation depends upon confidence in the future. Before individuals decide to build a family together, they must believe that they can establish and maintain a stable life. While municipalities cannot create personal certainty, they can shape the urban conditions that either reduce or amplify the structural uncertainty surrounding everyday life.

The objective is therefore not simply to provide housing, employment or public services individually, but to create an urban environment that enables people to confidently imagine a long-term future. Accessible and affordable housing, reliable mobility, proximity to employment, high-quality public services and safe neighbourhoods all contribute to this objective by reducing uncertainty across the major domains of daily life. When these conditions are absent, long-term planning becomes significantly more difficult.

Importantly, stability extends beyond economic security alone. People also seek confidence that the city can continue to support them as their lives evolve. Neighbourhood continuity, adaptable housing, access to essential services and the ability to remain within the same community throughout different stages of life all strengthen the perception that family life can be built on a stable foundation.

Municipalities cannot guarantee the future, but they can intentionally create cities that make the future feel more predictable. By reducing structural uncertainty and enabling long-term planning, cities strengthen one of the most fundamental conditions of the Urban Family Formation Environment: the confidence to build a future together.

Key Design Principles

- Reduce structural uncertainty wherever possible.
- Improve access to affordable, high-quality housing.
- Strengthen access to employment and essential services.
- Minimise unnecessary commuting and daily instability.
- Create neighbourhoods that support long-term residential continuity.
- Invest in safe, reliable and predictable urban environments.
- Enable people to build their future within the same community.

3 Strengthening Practical Feasibility

The decision to start a family depends not only on opportunity or confidence in the future, but also on whether family life appears practically achievable. Municipalities cannot determine personal circumstances, but they can shape urban environments that either reduce or increase the everyday friction associated with raising a family.

The objective is therefore not simply to provide individual services, but to create cities that make family life manageable. Accessible childcare, nearby schools, reliable public transport, mixed-use neighbourhoods and well-connected essential services reduce the time, effort and complexity required to navigate everyday life. When these elements work together, they allow families to spend less time overcoming practical obstacles and more time living their lives.

Practical feasibility also depends on proximity. Cities that bring housing, education, healthcare, recreation and daily services closer together reduce unnecessary travel and simplify everyday routines. By organising urban environments around the realities of daily family life, municipalities create conditions that make parenthood feel more achievable rather than more burdensome.

Municipalities cannot remove every challenge associated with raising a family, but they can intentionally design cities that reduce unnecessary friction. By making everyday life simpler, more accessible and more efficient, cities strengthen one of the fundamental conditions of the Urban Family Formation Environment: the practical feasibility of family life.

Key Design Principles

- Reduce unnecessary friction in everyday family life.
- Prioritise proximity between housing, services and daily destinations.
- Ensure accessible, affordable and high-quality childcare.
- Integrate education, healthcare and essential services into neighbourhoods.
- Design transport systems around daily family routines.
- Minimise unnecessary travel time and logistical complexity.
- Create urban environments that make family life manageable rather than burdensome.

4 Strengthening Support

Family formation does not occur in isolation. Individuals and families rely on a combination of personal relationships, community networks and public institutions throughout different stages of life. While municipalities cannot create support networks themselves, they can shape urban environments that make those networks easier to build, maintain and access.

The objective is therefore not simply to provide public services, but to reduce social isolation. Community facilities, neighbourhood centres, public spaces, local organisations and accessible public institutions all create opportunities for people to participate in community life and develop supportive relationships. Cities that encourage interaction and belonging strengthen the informal support systems upon which families often depend.

Support also depends on accessibility. Childcare, healthcare, education, community services and social organisations should be easy to reach and integrated into everyday neighbourhood life. When support is visible, accessible and embedded within the community, individuals are more likely to seek help when it is needed and less likely to experience family life in isolation.

Municipalities cannot provide every form of support, but they can intentionally create cities that make support easier to find, easier to access and easier to sustain. By reducing social isolation and strengthening community connection, cities reinforce one of the fundamental conditions of the Urban Family Formation Environment: the confidence that families will not face life's challenges alone.

Key Design Principles

- Reduce social isolation through community-centred urban design.
- Strengthen neighbourhood identity and social cohesion.
- Treat community facilities as essential social infrastructure.
- Integrate childcare, healthcare and community services into neighbourhoods.
- Ensure support services are visible, accessible and easy to navigate.
- Create inclusive public spaces that encourage participation and belonging.
- Design cities that strengthen both formal and informal support networks.

5 Strengthening Long-Term Wellbeing

Long-term family formation depends not only on whether families can be formed, but also on whether they can thrive over time. Municipalities cannot determine individual health outcomes, but they can shape urban environments that either strengthen or undermine the physical, mental and social wellbeing upon which family life depends.

The objective is therefore not simply to improve health, but to create cities that sustain human capacity throughout everyday life. Access to green space, opportunities for physical activity, clean air, low noise levels, safe public environments and healthy food systems all contribute to environments that support long-term wellbeing. When these conditions are absent, cities gradually increase the physical and mental burdens placed upon individuals and families.

Wellbeing should also be understood as a cumulative outcome rather than an isolated policy objective. Housing quality, mobility, public space, environmental quality and access to essential services continuously interact to shape how people experience urban life. Cities that integrate these elements create environments that strengthen resilience, reduce chronic stress and enable families to flourish over the long term.

Municipalities cannot guarantee lifelong wellbeing, but they can intentionally create cities that continuously support it. By designing urban environments that sustain human capacity across every stage of life, cities strengthen one of the fundamental conditions of the Urban Family Formation Environment: the ability to maintain healthy, resilient and flourishing families.

Key Design Principles

- Design cities that sustain human capacity over the long term.
- Prioritise healthy, safe and resilient living environments.
- Integrate nature, green space and opportunities for daily movement.
- Improve environmental quality through clean air, reduced noise and climate resilience.
- Promote healthy food environments and everyday wellbeing.
- Reduce chronic physical and mental stress through thoughtful urban design.
- Create urban environments that enable families to flourish throughout life.

5. Learning from Leading Cities

The previous chapter identified the urban design principles that strengthen the Urban Family Formation Environment. This chapter examines how those principles can be observed in practice. Rather than identifying the “best” cities, this chapter analyses cities that demonstrate outstanding approaches to strengthening specific conditions of the Urban Family Formation Environment.

By comparing these examples, recurring patterns emerge that reinforce the design principles developed throughout this whitepaper

The objective is not to replicate individual cities, but to understand the underlying principles that contribute to their success. These insights provide practical evidence that the Urban Family Formation Environment can be intentionally strengthened through urban design and form the foundation for the strategic recommendations presented in the final chapter.

City	Urban Example	Demonstrated Principle	Primary Conditions	GOAL Lesson
 Tokyo	Rail-integrated mixed-use neighbourhoods (e.g. Shimokitazawa, Sangenjaya)	Design for repeated everyday interaction	- Partnership Opportunity - Practical Feasibility	Social opportunity becomes part of everyday life when housing, commerce, mobility and public life are integrated rather than separated.
 Barcelona	Superblocks	Design public space around people	- Partnership Opportunity - Long-Term Wellbeing	Public space creates its greatest value when it enables people to stay, interact and build community rather than simply move through it.
 Vienna	Municipal & social housing system	Reduce structural uncertainty	Long-Term Stability	Family formation is strengthened when cities provide long-term residential security rather than simply increasing housing supply.
 Singapore	Integrated HDB neighbourhoods (e.g. Punggol)	Reduce everyday friction through integrated neighbourhoods	- Long-Term Stability - Practical Feasibility - Support	Family life becomes more achievable when housing, education, healthcare, mobility and public space are planned as one integrated neighbourhood system.
 Copenhagen	Citywide cycling & human-scale public realm	Sustain human capacity through everyday mobility	Long-Term Wellbeing	Healthy cities are those in which healthy behaviour becomes the easiest behaviour.
 Utrecht	Healthy Urban Living / 10-minute city strategy	Design for proximity	- Practical Feasibility - Long-Term Wellbeing	Everyday life becomes more manageable when essential destinations are organised around proximity rather than distance.
 Seoul	Human-centred regeneration (e.g. Seoulo 7017 & the 2040 locality strategy)	Transform existing cities around people	- Partnership Opportunity - Support	Cities do not need to be designed correctly from the beginning; existing urban environments can be intentionally transformed to better support human life.



GOAL Insight

Despite their different histories, cultures and governance models, the world’s leading cities consistently strengthen the Urban Family Formation Environment through remarkably similar design principles. It is these underlying principles—not the cities themselves—that municipalities should adapt when designing for long-term population renewal.

6. Strategic Recommendations

The previous chapters established the Urban Family Formation Environment as a systems-based framework for understanding how cities influence family formation. They identified the fundamental conditions upon which family formation depends, introduced the G.O.A.L. Urban Family Formation Matrix as an analytical methodology, identified the urban design principles that strengthen these conditions and demonstrated how those principles can be observed in leading cities around the world.

The remaining question is not whether municipalities can influence family formation, but how they should rethink urban planning in light of these insights.

The following strategic recommendations do not prescribe individual policies or urban interventions. Instead, they propose five strategic shifts that municipalities can make to intentionally strengthen the Urban Family Formation Environment through long-term planning, governance and urban design.

1. Shift from Sector-Based Planning to Systems Thinking

Family formation is not the responsibility of housing, mobility, healthcare or education alone. It emerges from the interaction between numerous urban systems that collectively shape the Urban Family Formation Environment. Municipalities should therefore move beyond planning individual policy sectors in isolation and recognise family formation as a systems outcome influenced by the combined performance of the city.

2. Shift from Measuring Outputs to Measuring Human Outcomes

Urban success is often measured through sector-specific outputs such as housing units delivered, kilometres of cycling infrastructure constructed or public transport usage. While these indicators remain important, they reveal little about how people actually experience the city. Municipalities should increasingly evaluate whether urban interventions strengthen the five fundamental conditions of the Urban Family Formation Environment and improve people's ability to build and sustain family life.

3. Shift from Designing Infrastructure to Designing Everyday Life

Urban planning should begin with the realities of everyday life rather than individual infrastructure projects. Housing, mobility, education, childcare, healthcare, public space and community infrastructure should be planned as interconnected components of a single urban environment that reduces unnecessary friction, strengthens stability, supports wellbeing and enables families to thrive throughout different stages of life.

4. Shift from Copying Policies to Understanding Principles

No city provides a universal model for population renewal. The examples presented throughout this whitepaper demonstrate that successful cities often achieve similar outcomes through different policies, governance structures and cultural contexts. Municipalities should therefore seek to understand the underlying principles that contribute to successful urban environments and adapt those principles to their own local circumstances rather than attempting to replicate individual projects or policies.

5. Shift from Responding to Demographic Decline to Designing for Population Renewal

Population renewal should no longer be viewed solely as a demographic or social policy challenge addressed after decline has occurred. It should become a long-term objective of urban development itself. By intentionally strengthening the Urban Family Formation Environment, municipalities can create cities that better support partnership formation, long-term stability, practical family life, community support and lifelong wellbeing. In doing so, they strengthen not only the conditions for family formation, but also the long-term resilience, prosperity and sustainability of the city.

Closing Reflection

Cities have long been designed to move people, house people and support economic activity. Yet the twenty-first century presents a broader challenge. Cities must also become places where people are able to build families and sustain them over time.

This whitepaper has argued that family formation should not be understood as the outcome of isolated policies, but as the product of an interconnected urban environment. By adopting a systems perspective, focusing on human outcomes and applying the principles presented throughout this framework, municipalities gain a new way of understanding one of the defining challenges of our time.

Population renewal is therefore not simply a demographic issue to be measured after it occurs. It is an urban condition that can be intentionally strengthened through the way cities are planned, designed and experienced. The future of population renewal will not be determined by a single policy or intervention, but by the environments within which millions of everyday decisions are made. Designing those environments may become one of the defining responsibilities of twenty-first-century urban planning—and one of the greatest opportunities for strengthening long-term societal resilience.

7. Data Sources & References

The Urban Family Formation Environment and the G.O.A.L. Urban Family Formation Matrix presented throughout this whitepaper are original conceptual frameworks developed by G.O.A.L. Their development has been informed by an interdisciplinary body of academic literature, government publications, international organisations, urban planning research, public health evidence and municipal best practices.

Rather than presenting a comprehensive literature review, this publication synthesises insights from multiple disciplines into a single human-centred analytical framework for understanding how urban environments influence family formation. The references below represent a selection of foundational organisations, publications and authors that informed the broader context of this research and provide further reading for readers wishing to explore these topics in greater depth.

Methodological Note

This whitepaper presents a conceptual and strategic framework rather than a causal or predictive model. The Urban Family Formation Environment and the G.O.A.L. Urban Family Formation Matrix synthesise insights from urban planning, public health, demography and related disciplines into a common analytical methodology. While the framework identifies recurring relationships observed across the literature and international practice, its application should always be interpreted within the specific social, cultural and institutional context of each city.

Selected References & Further Reading

Demography & Population Renewal

- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). *Society at a Glance* (various editions).
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). OECD Housing Database.
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). *World Population Prospects*.
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Publications on fertility, reproductive health and demographic change.

Urban Planning & Urban Design

- Jan Gehl. *Cities for People*.
- Jeff Speck. *Walkable City*.

- Peter Calthorpe. *Urbanism in the Age of Climate Change*.
- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). Publications on sustainable urban development.

Public Health & Healthy Cities

- World Health Organization (WHO). Healthy Cities Programme.
- World Health Organization (WHO). Urban Health publications.
- The Lancet Commission publications relating to healthy and sustainable cities.

Social Infrastructure & Community

- Eric Klinenberg. *Palaces for the People*.
- Ray Oldenburg. *The Great Good Place*.

Housing, Liveability & Urban Systems

- Richard Florida. *The New Urban Crisis*.
- Housing Europe publications.
- World Bank publications on urban development and liveability.

Municipal Case Studies

- Housing & Development Board (Singapore)
- City of Barcelona – Superblocks Programme
- City of Vienna – Municipal Housing Strategy
- City of Copenhagen – Cycling Strategy
- Municipality of Utrecht – Healthy Urban Living Programme
- Tokyo Metropolitan Government – Urban Development
- Seoul Metropolitan Government – Seoulo 7017 & 2040 Seoul Plan

Whitepaper Series

This publication forms part of G.O.A.L.'s Whitepaper Series, an ongoing body of interdisciplinary research exploring the relationship between human health, urban systems and long-term societal resilience. Together, these publications aim to develop practical frameworks that support better decision-making across governments, municipalities and organisations.

8. About G.O.A.L.

G.O.A.L. is an independent research initiative dedicated to understanding how human health, urban systems and long-term societal resilience interact. Through interdisciplinary research, G.O.A.L. develops conceptual frameworks, strategic methodologies and practical insights that help governments, municipalities and organisations address complex societal challenges from a systems perspective.

Rather than focusing on individual policy sectors, G.O.A.L. approaches cities and societies as interconnected human systems. Its work is grounded in the Five Pillars of Health—Nutrition, Movement, Knowledge, Mindset and Environment—which together provide a human-centred framework for analysing and improving the conditions that shape everyday life.

The organisation's research spans healthy urban development, demographic resilience, population renewal, urban artificial intelligence, public health, systems thinking and the future of cities. Through its growing whitepaper series, G.O.A.L. seeks to translate complex interdisciplinary knowledge into practical frameworks that support long-term strategic decision-making.

Learn more

www.global-goal.org