



Child
Friendly
Cities
Initiative

unicef 
for every child



11 JUNE 2026

International Day of Play

A guide for cities
and municipalities



www.InternationalDayofPlay.org

“Every child has the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities”

- Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Play is essential to healthy childhood development and well-being.¹ It supports children in building social and emotional skills, strengthening creativity and problem solving, developing resilience and forming meaningful connections.

However, children today are experiencing a growing play deficit. Globally, time and access to play are shrinking due to increased scheduling pressures, reduced safe public space, economic strain on families, and evolving social and digital environments.

Despite its importance, many of our public environments are not designed to support free and unstructured play. This limits opportunities for children to explore, connect and grow in ways that shape lifelong well-being.

¹ LEGO Foundation, Learning through Play report, 2020
https://cms.learningthroughplay.com/media/wmtlmbe0/learning-through-play_web.pdf

International Day of Play

In response to this growing challenge, the United Nations established International Day of Play, celebrated annually on 11 June.²

This global observance recognizes the critical role of play in supporting children's health, learning and development, and calls on governments, institutions and communities to prioritize play in everyday life.

International Day of Play has the potential to be a powerful and unique moment to advance Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ensure every child enjoys their right to play.



The international day can make a difference by galvanizing national and local governments, the private sector and global civil society annually. It creates a unifying moment to elevate the importance of play as central to children's learning and contributing to the well-being and positive mental health of parents, caregivers and children. A moment for all of us to celebrate play and to call on governments and other stakeholders to ensure that every child can enjoy their right to play.

The global play movement

A network of organizations – including UN agencies, NGOs and the private sector – committed to driving a global play movement for children everywhere for generations to come. This movement has developed **three accelerators for play**:

1. Universal access to evidence-based parenting programs from childhood to early adolescence (playful parenting)
2. Universal access to early childhood education (learning through play)
3. Safe and environmentally healthy play spaces for every child and early adolescent (space to play).

All three outcomes are universal – applicable from humanitarian settings to high-income country contexts – do-able, evidence-backed and aim to be the most impactful ways to advance the right to play for every child. They are linked to the Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and are inclusive of all children

² United Nations General Assembly resolution on International Day of Play
<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4043249>

who experience barriers to play through discrimination and exclusion, including girls and children with disabilities. Based on these three accelerators, the global call to action for national and local governments, businesses and other stakeholders is:

1. Scale up services, including parenting programmes, that promote play and attachment
2. Enable access to pre-school and learning through play for every 3- to 6-year-old
3. Ensure every child has access to safe, inclusive, and well-maintained play areas.

This global call to action is supported by a growing list of organizations from around the world.³

Why cities matter

Cities shape the spaces, policies and programmes that influence how families live, gather and play every day.

Urban environments increasingly present barriers to play: Traffic hazards, air pollution, the privatization of public space and the densification of cities have all contributed to a significant reduction in children's access to free, unstructured play. Cities are uniquely placed to reverse this trend, and to create environments where children can thrive.



Municipal leadership has the power to:

- Strengthen family-centered community design
- Expand access to safe and inclusive play spaces
- Support holistic child well-being
- Engage children and youth as partners in shaping play initiatives, not only beneficiaries
- Elevate play as a shared community value

Many cities are already investing in play through parks, playgrounds, early childhood programmes and public space design. In particular, cities participating in the UNICEF-led Child Friendly Cities Initiative, active in around 35 countries, can have a driving role in promoting the right to play nationally and globally, ensuring all children in their cities can enjoy their right to play.

³ List of supporting organizations can be found on www.internationaldayofplay.org

The International Day of Play is an opportunity to build on, connect and elevate these existing efforts – and to make them visible.

Promoting the right to play in 2026

To promote the right to play for all children, cities and municipalities worldwide are encouraged to celebrate the International Day of Play and champion playful experiences as central to community well-being.

The theme for 2026 is **“Protect play, protect childhood”**. It is a reminder for all of us – governments, businesses, schools and families – that happy and healthy childhoods are built on play.



Ways your city can participate

Cities are encouraged to enable play initiatives around International Day of Play. These initiatives aim to prioritize children's play in residential streets or public spaces close to home, helping make children's right to play accessible, visible and actionable. Cities may choose one or more approaches based on local capacity and priorities:

1. Citywide celebration with local government or city leaders

Host a central public event that brings together families, community organizations and local partners. Examples include temporarily closing a main street or public square for children's play, turning a park or central plaza into a Play Zone, or hosting a high profile “International Day of Play” event with officials joining children in play activities.

2. Micro-activations across neighbourhoods

Encourage multiple small-scale play activities across parks, libraries, community centres and public spaces; Encourage local communities to reclaim the streets for play by designating a safe street or another public space for children's play on 11 June. “Play Streets” or “Play Zones” can be organized by local communities and adapted to local contexts and regulations. They are low-cost, highly visible and foster community connection around children's right to play.

Many cities already have permitting systems or community frameworks – such as block parties, neighbourhood events or public space use regulations – that can be adapted to support Play Streets. Cities are encouraged to identify and leverage these existing mechanisms to reduce barriers for local organizers.

3. School and youth engagement

Partner with schools and other youth-serving institutions to integrate play-based learning and celebration into classrooms and programmes.

4. Public awareness and storytelling

Cities can help elevate the importance of play by sharing local activities and stories through their communications channels, including social media. Highlighting how communities are celebrating can help build momentum and inspire others. Where appropriate, cities may use #InternationalDayofPlay to connect with broader efforts and amplify local impact. Cities can also choose to tag partners.

More broadly, the International Day of Play is an occasion to connect and spotlight existing play initiatives across the city, building public awareness of the breadth of the city's commitment to children's right to play.

When organizing such spaces and events, cities and municipalities should ensure that children and young people have a meaningful role in shaping how they come to life. When children help design and lead play activations, in particular in their own neighborhoods, they become agents of change – and play becomes not just an activity, but an expression of their rights and their voice in the city.

Cities and municipalities are invited to leverage their play commitments throughout the year – not only on 11 June. Play initiatives can be connected to the local development plan, other local milestones, awareness days and community events across the calendar.

By marking International Day of Play, cities:

- Demonstrate visible leadership in child well-being and community health
- Join a growing global community of cities and municipalities championing children's right to play
- Strengthen community connection and civic pride
- Elevate children's play as a model for joyful and resilient communities
- Get access to participation resources and communications support

Spotlight: International Day of Play in action

In **Boston, United States**, the city marked the inaugural International Day of Play in 2024 with a citywide celebration, engaging thousands of children through cross-sector partnerships. The day was filled with sports, biking, board games, bubbles, face painting, arts and crafts, dance and music, and many other play experiences. In 2025, neighbourhood-based activations expanded access to play across communities.

In **the Netherlands**, many of UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities celebrated International Day of Play in 2025 with an emphasis on play outdoors. In Gooise Meren, the mayor joined children for outdoor play. In Diemen, children played street football. In Eemsdelta, young children explored chalk-drawing and outdoor games in a rural courtyard. In Hellendoorn, a play kit was donated to a local school. In Den Haag, groups of children headed outside with balls and backpacks. On the island of Sint Eustatius, a play station was set up outdoors. On the island of Saba, children gathered outside kindergartens with scavenger hunt materials and bingo cards.

How to get started

Participating cities are invited to visit **www.InternationalDayofPlay.org** for more information. The landing page is available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish and includes:

- The 2026 theme and global call to action.
- Key messages about the importance of play.
- Free and fun play activities for all the family.
- Ways to get involved and support every child's right to play.
- Inspiring examples of how International Day of Play has been celebrated around the world.

Cities and municipalities that participate in the UNICEF-led Child Friendly Cities Initiative may contact their UNICEF national office for more information. If you are interested in learning more about the initiative, please visit: www.childfriendlycities.org

This guide was developed by the LEGO Group and UNICEF, 2026.
UNICEF does not endorse any company, brand, product or service.