

# Media Update

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## UNICEF

PRESS RELEASE

### 2 in 3 infants live in countries where fathers are not entitled to a single day of paid paternity leave – UNICEF

*UNICEF calls for investment in family-friendly policies that support early childhood development including paid paternity and maternity leave, free pre-primary education, and paid breastfeeding breaks*

ISLAMABAD/NEW YORK, 14 June 2018 – Globally, more than six out of ten children, under 1 year old, do not get the ideal amount of time they need from their fathers for early development of baby brain. That is because these children – almost 90 million - live in countries where their fathers are not entitled by law to a single day of paid paternity leave, according to a new UNICEF analysis.

Ninety-two countries, including Pakistan, do not have national policies in place that ensure new fathers get adequate paid time off with their newborn babies.

“Positive and meaningful interaction with mothers *and* fathers from the very beginning helps to shape children’s brain growth and development for life, making them healthier and happier, and increasing their ability to learn. It’s all of our responsibility to enable them to fill this role,” said UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore.

Evidence suggests that when fathers bond with their babies from the beginning of life, they are more likely to play a more active role in their child’s development. Research also suggests that when children positively interact with their fathers, they have better psychological health, self-esteem and life-satisfaction in the long-term.

UNICEF urges governments to implement national family-friendly policies that support early childhood development – including paid paternity leave – to help



provide parents with the time, resources and information they need to care for their children.

Earlier this year, UNICEF modernized its approach to parental leave provisions, with up to 16 weeks of paid leave for paternity across all of its offices worldwide – the first United Nations agency to extend such leave beyond the standard four weeks.

“We cannot be ‘For Every Child,’ if we are not also ‘For Every Parent’. We have to ask more of governments and more of employers if we’re going to give fathers and mothers the time and resources they need to nurture their children, particularly during the earliest years of a child’s life,” said Fore.

Advances in neuroscience have proven that when children spend their earliest years – particularly the first 1,000 days from conception to two years old – in a nurturing, stimulating environment, new neural connections form at optimal speed. These neural connections help to determine a child’s cognitive ability, how they learn and think, their ability to deal with stress, and can even influence how much they will earn as adults.

Around the world, momentum for family-friendly policies is growing. The new analysis forms part of UNICEF’s Super Dads campaign, now in its second year, which aims to break down barriers preventing fathers from playing an active role in their young children’s development. The campaign moment celebrates Father’s Day – recognized in more than 80 countries in June – and focuses on the importance of love, play, protection and good nutrition for the healthy development of young children’s brains.

**About UNICEF :** UNICEF works in some of the world’s toughest places, to reach the world’s most disadvantaged children. Across 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone. For more information about UNICEF and its work for children, visit [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

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